

## Groups

### Lib Ed groups

Leicester 0455-209029  
Bristol 0272-41380

### National Union of Students

461 Holloway Rd, London N7  
01-272 8900

### National Union of Teachers

Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.  
01-388 6191

### Woodcraft Folk

13 Ritherton Road, London SW17  
01-672 6031  
*(kind of non-sexist, non-militarist scouts and brownies)*

### Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment

18 Victoria Park Square, London E2  
01-980 8523

### Anti-Apartheid Movement

13 Mandela Street, London NW1 0DW  
01-387 7966

### Teachers for Animal Rights

c/o Wanda Dejlidko, Lynwood Rd, London SW 17

### All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism

Panther House, Room 216, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1.

### Gay Teachers Group

BM Gay Teacher, London WC1N 3XX.  
01-837 7234

### National Secular Society

702 Holloway Road, London N19.  
01-272 1266

### Education Otherwise

25 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Cambs.  
*(For everyone who practices or supports the right of children to learn without schooling)*

### Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement

BM GYM, London WC1N 3XX  
01-317 9690

### Gay Youth Help Service

37 Rosenthal House, 45 Rushey Green, London SE6 4AR  
01-698 2857

### Campaign against Military Research on Campus (CAMROC)

190 Burdett Road, London E3 4AA  
01-980 2455

### Liberation Network of People with Disabilities

c/o Townsend House, Green Lanes, Marshfield, Chippenham, Wilts.

## Resources

### Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project

Wyvil Rd. School, Wyvil Rd., London SW8.  
01-627 2662

### Advisory Centre for Education

18 Victoria Park Sq., London E2.  
01-980 4596

### Children's Legal Centre

20 Compton Terrace, London N1.  
01-359 6251

### Association for Curriculum Development

PO Box 563, London N16 8XD.  
*(An independent teachers network involved in innovative curriculum development, working to combat racism and sexism, challenge propaganda and produce learning materials which promote equality.)*

### New University

24 South Road, Hockley, Birmingham B18  
021-551 1679  
*(An alternative education project)*

### Greenpeace

36 Graham Street, London N1.  
01-251 3020

### Minority Rights Group

29 Craven St., London WC2N 5NG.  
01-930 6659

### Oxfam Youth Education Dept

274 Banbury Rd., Oxford OX2 7DZ.  
0865-56777

### Circule-Air

Agence Informations Enfance, 29 rue Davy, 75017 Paris, France.  
*(A French based alternative educational magazine and organisation.)*

## Groups - special listing

### Rowen House School

Holbrook Road, Belper, Derbyshire DE5 1PB.

### White Lion Free School

57 White Lion Street, London N1  
*(They would be grateful of any birthday presents!)*

### Post Adoption Centre

Gregory House, 48 Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1  
*(Offer counselling, advice and help to adopting parents and adopted children)*

### Scottish Civil Liberty Trust

146 Holland Street, Glasgow G2 4NG  
*(Provides legal information and has published a series of leaflets aimed at young people in Scotland)*

### Peace Education Project

Peace Pledge Union, 6 Endsleigh St., London WC1.  
01-387 5501

### Housmans Mail Order

5 Caledonian Road, London N1  
*(Suppliers of a wide range of libertarian literature by post; send for their catalogue of titles)*

### Third World Publications

151 Stratford Road, Birmingham B11 1RD.  
021-773 6572

### Letterbox Library

5 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN.  
01-254 1640  
*(Specialise in non-sexist and multicultural books for children. For details of their free catalogue, write or phone.)*

### Commonweal Collection

c/o J.B.Priestley Library, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP.  
*(A small library designed for anyone interested in libertarian, anarchist and pacifist ideas.)*

### Feminist Library

Hungerford House, Victoria Embankment, London WC2N 6PA.  
01-930 0715

### Marx Memorial Library

37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU.  
01-253 1485  
*(Comprehensive collection of materials concerning the Labour Movement.)*

### Centro Studi Libertari

via Rovetta 27, 20127 Milano, Italia.  
*(Libertarian study centre and archive, publishes the journal 'Volonta')*

### Play for Life

31b Ipswich Road, Norwich NR2 2LN  
*(Promotes and supplies life affirming toys and games. Write for catalogue enclosing £1)*

### Forest School Camps

Lorna English (Secretary), 110 Burbage Road, London SE24 9HD.  
*(A radical organisation which organises camps for children - it's very decentralised)*

### Hard Times Gallery

13 Cotswold Road, Bristol BS3 4NX

### Release

01-377 5905  
*(Advice, help and legal representation with drug problems)*

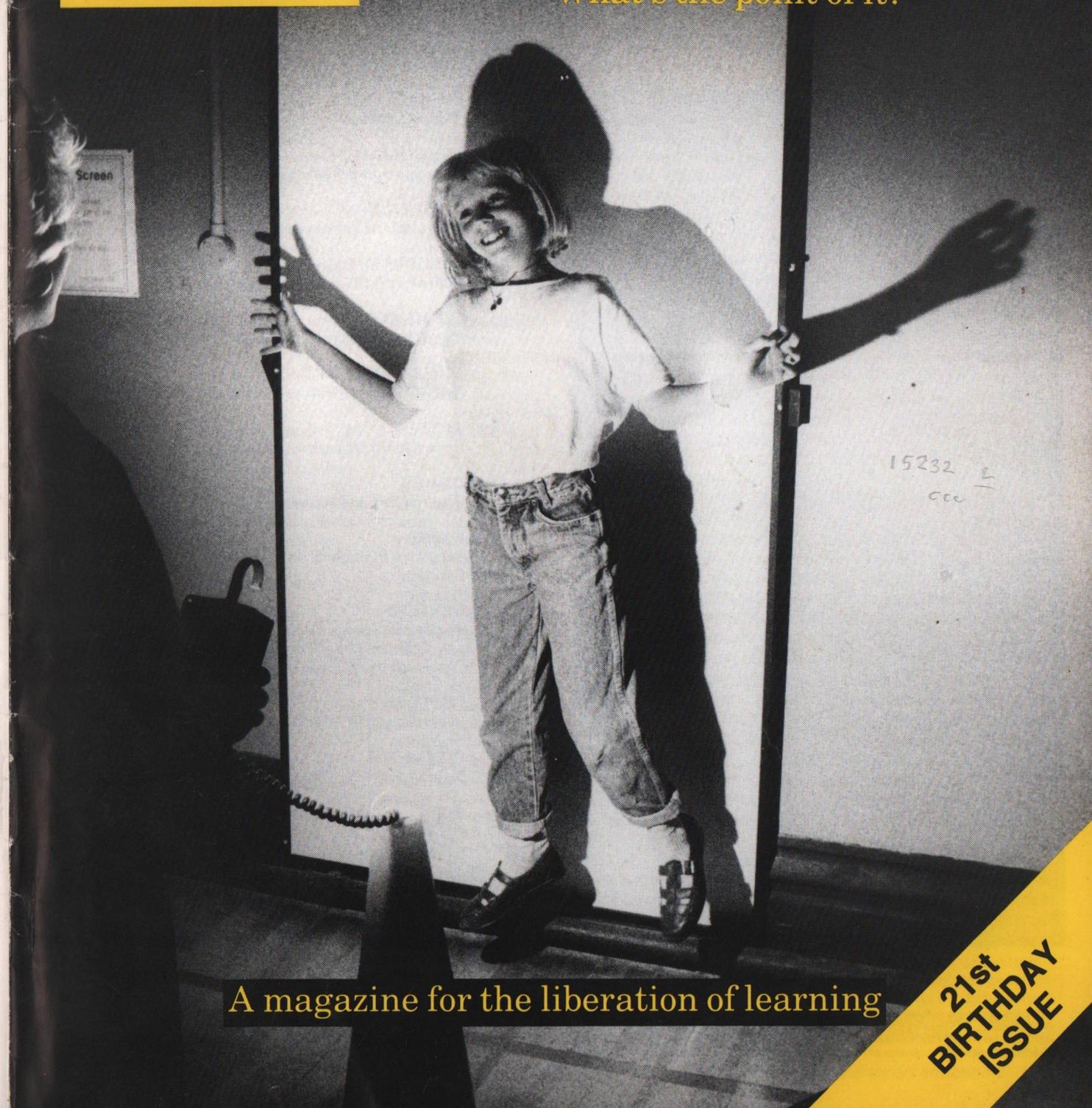
# Lib ED

Winter '87 50p

The Science Exploratory  
Where it's hands on, not hands off!

Adoption  
Why black children need black homes

Schooling  
What's the point of it?



A magazine for the liberation of learning

21st  
BIRTHDAY  
ISSUE



Exploring science. Review page 16. Photo by John Lowings.

### Lib Ed is 21!

The first bulletin of the *Libertarian Teachers Association* (a two sided sheet of contact addresses) was published in April 1966: a mere 40 copies were duplicated. The second, a real magazine called *Libertarian Teacher*, sixteen pages long, appeared the following September.

Since then the theme of the magazine has remained pretty consistent, that learning needs to be liberated from coercion. This has been reflected in theoretical articles, articles about how libertarian individuals survive in the system, and others about educational institutions which offer some hope for the liberation of learning.

*Libertarian Teacher 9* was the first one to be printed by litho - suddenly graphics and presentational features became important. From issue 10 the magazine was renamed *Libertarian Education*, since *Libertarian Teacher* was felt to be too limiting as well, perhaps, as being a contradiction in terms. This name was shortened for issue 25 and has stayed *Lib Ed* since then, in spite of the odd letter received beginning "Dear Liberal Education...".

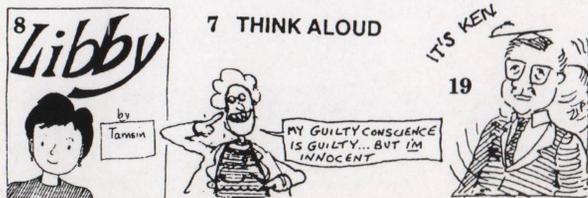
*Lib Ed* seemed to die in 1980: the editorial group was small and, to tell the truth, tired. However, from 1985 a new series has arisen, enriched by new people and enthusiasm. The editorial collective hope to keep the black flag waving in education: with your help.

And it certainly needs waving now. The present Government's intentions are clear. Through age-related testing and the imposition of a national curriculum they propose to bring the long-since discredited Black Papers out of the woodwork and right into the heart of education policy.

The 1990s will see the development of elitist city technical colleges and the emergence of a new type of grammar school which 'opts out' of local authority control. While the present school system is riddled with inequality and oppression this will only be intensified if the Tory plans are not defeated. We will carry on challenging the authoritarianism and elitism embodied in established educational ideas. And we will continue to present a positive libertarian alternative. *Lib Ed* is as relevant today as it was in 1966.

## In this issue...

- 3 **SCHOOL UNIFORM**  
A dress sentence
- 4 **SCHOOLING**  
Does this chunk of life make sense?
- 6 **ADOPTION**  
Why black children need black homes
- 7 **CITY FREE SCHOOL**  
White Lion's fifteenth birthday
- 8 **CRIME CLUB**  
One of Ken Baker's Curriculum Cops reports
- 9 **CHILDREN UNDER STRESS**  
Special four page feature on a radical experiment
- 13 **TOYS**  
From pay things back to play things!
- 14 **DRUGS**  
Glue sniffing and young people
- 15 **NEWS**  
Tara wins through / Prints with a point / Evolution v Creation
- 16 **REVIEWS**  
The Bristol Science Exploratory / Gays and Lesbians in school / Secret Club / Forest School booklet / Countesthorpe College
- 19 **LETTERS**  
Readers reply to our last issue
- 20 **CONTACTS**  
Including info on groups mentioned in the mag.



## Dress sentence

If you were to ask a representative sample of school students what they disliked most about school, it's a fair bet that school uniform would figure high on their list. With all the repression, humiliation and restrictions on freedom that children experience in school, uniform might seem a trivial item to be singled out. In fact, young people experience uniform not only as an unpleasant fact of school life, but also as strongly symbolic of wider oppression. In the 1970s abolition of school uniform was one of the main demands of the Schools Action Union.

MOST PEOPLE in this society, especially young people, use clothes, hairstyles, make-up and jewellery as an expression of their personalities. Wearing a particular type of clothes, be it pin-striped suit or black leather, makes a statement to the world about the type of person you are, or wish to appear to be. To force children to wear a school uniform is to deny them, for a large portion of their lives, the right to this form of experiment and self-expression. Some uniforms are so far from what anybody would choose to wear as to be experienced as positively humiliating. How many boys do you see at weekends in blazer and grey flannel trousers, or girls in pleated skirt, blouse and tie?

Of course, many schools have much less rigid restrictions on dress and hairstyles than was the case in the past - few schools would now attempt to force pupils to wear a hat or cap, and some require only a specified colour of clothing. The right of Moslem girls to wear trousers was not won without a battle, and many schools do not extend this right to all girls.

### Dreaded uniform

The great majority of schools, however, do still retain some form of uniform - in many areas it is not possible to find a secondary school which allows children to wear their own clothes. Uniform affects every day of a child's life; a whole day may pass without a punishment, a disappointing grade for

homework or a sarcastic remark from a teacher, but no school day passes without donning the dreaded uniform.

So what rationale is advanced by the authorities for compulsory school uniform? Apparently school uniform removes social differences - if all children in a school are dressed identically nobody can distinguish rich from poor; prevents competitiveness over dress - especially between girls; promotes pride in membership of the school, and a corporate spirit.

No explanation is given why the first two of these effects should apply only to school - if class differences and competitiveness can be so easily abolished, should we not all be wearing uniform? It is, of course, the third reason which holds the key to the wider implications of compulsory school uniform.

### Conformity

Look up "uniform" in a dictionary and you will find "dress worn by members of the same body". You will also find "conforming to the same standard or rule". This second definition clearly sums up school uniform - it is an outward manifestation of conformity to the structure and values of the school, and of the students' acceptance of their role within it. Uniform provides a refined means of control of school students. Regulation clothing may be defined in as much detail as required and policed as strictly as desired.

This explains why minor infringements of the uniform regulations may be met with major punishment; children have been sent home for appearing at school in the wrong colour shirt, or even the wrong colour socks. If, according to one head, "the wearing of the school uniform demonstrates respect for the things the school stands for", then clearly rejection of the uniform on the part of a child must be indicative of a deeper rejection of the values of the school as a whole, and must be dealt with accordingly.

### Identity with the state

Interestingly, the uniform as a symbol of membership of a particular school is a rare phenomenon throughout the world. In most countries children wear their everyday clothes to school. In some cases uniform is a sign of identity with the state rather than the individual school, for example, children throughout the Soviet Union all wear identical uniform.

Students may put a tremendous amount of effort into circumventing the clothing



restrictions - wearing an earring, or a skirt of the uniform colour, but the wrong style, or a shirt of a forbidden colour. They may break the regulations more and more until retribution occurs, and then start the whole process again.

### War of attrition

This could be considered a waste of energy on trivial matters, while more essential aspects of school are left unchallenged. Looked at more positively, if the school hierarchy considers breaking of the uniform rules to be such a threat, then surely the school students should ensure that the authorities feel threatened. Very few children are able to make a stand and simply refuse to wear the uniform in the face of the severe sanctions from school, and the number of parents prepared to back their child in making such a stand is even fewer. So what happens is that a war of attrition is carried on.

As in so many other aspects of their lives, children are subject to regulations which would be considered unacceptable if applied to adults. Children who are allowed no choice as to whether or not they attend school, or which school they go to, should at least have the right to go wearing whatever clothes suit their personalities, their mood and their interests.



# If I were an anarchist dictator...

In developing countries, schools are impossibly expensive; in 'our' countries they are losing their way. Roy Carr-Hill argues that 'appropriate' provision would imply different institutions for child-minding and collective socialisation, and for effective and efficient learning.

IN A SOCIETY with a complex, diverse system of education, it is often difficult to remember how it all came about. We worry here and in other journals about liberalisation, or even liberation, libertarian or progressive education, reforms or restructuring of the existing system, but rarely about the purpose of it all, and what this implies for the institution. Does this chunk of life make sense?

Silly questions like these hit you in Africa - I'm mostly acquainted with Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Tanzania - where a minimally adequate national educational system would cost more than the total government budget. They make you re-read Reimer, for whom the original reason for collaborating with Illich at the Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC) was not liberation for American children but to find a way out of the dilemma that children in developing countries (specifically Latin America) needed education but that those countries could not afford schools for even a majority of their children.

## Twenty years on

Fifteen, twenty years on, where are we? Latin American children might be alright (I rather doubt it) but formal experiments in schooling are stagnant in several African countries, whilst expenditure remains a substantial proportion of GNP. Why build more expensive temples when the poor worshippers are reluctant?

Up here, American youth may be liberated (again doubtful), but British kids now not only have a compulsory ten years of school, but also two years of skirmishing with 'work' via the MSC. Can we ever learn anything from reiterating their original problem.

Illich and Reimer started with the observation that the school is seen as the privileged place for the educational experience. In fact, in most countries, schooling now combines four functions: custodial care, social role selection, indoctrination and education, usually defined in terms of the development of skills and knowledge. They challenged the oppressive nature of schools mostly correctly and put forward proposals for networks of learning. They went on, again mostly correctly, to generalise that challenge to social institutions.

But the basic problems that were preoccupying the Latin American countries got lost in the romantic excitement in the North over Illich's

proposals about deschooling society: first, how do you provide some kind of basic education for all children and what is the appropriate institutional form? Second, what should be the content of that educational package?

Of the other 'functions' of school enumerated by Reimer, custodial care (=child-minding) and some aspects of indoctrination (= socialisation) cannot simply be cast aside as non-problems in developing countries with large extended families. I'm simply ignoring the function of social role selection. Not only will I have the readers' sympathy, but also such a 'function' becomes increasingly irrelevant with mass unemployment.

Child-minding is an issue for job hunting parents in an urban ghetto, and whilst only middle-aged romantics like myself can rabbit on about the joys of companionship in schools, there are clear dangers of social disintegration where children only meet their immediate neighbours. Again, not a problem in rural peasant communities, but not to be ignored in a concrete jungle.

Some institutional form is required to perform these two functions of child-minding and of collective socialisation, and the school buildings are probably as good a base as any. But there is an indecent enthusiasm among progressive volunteer groups from the 'North' to provide labour

and materials so that more of the mausoleums can be built in the 'South'. They never question the relevance of it all, but the parents and children do.

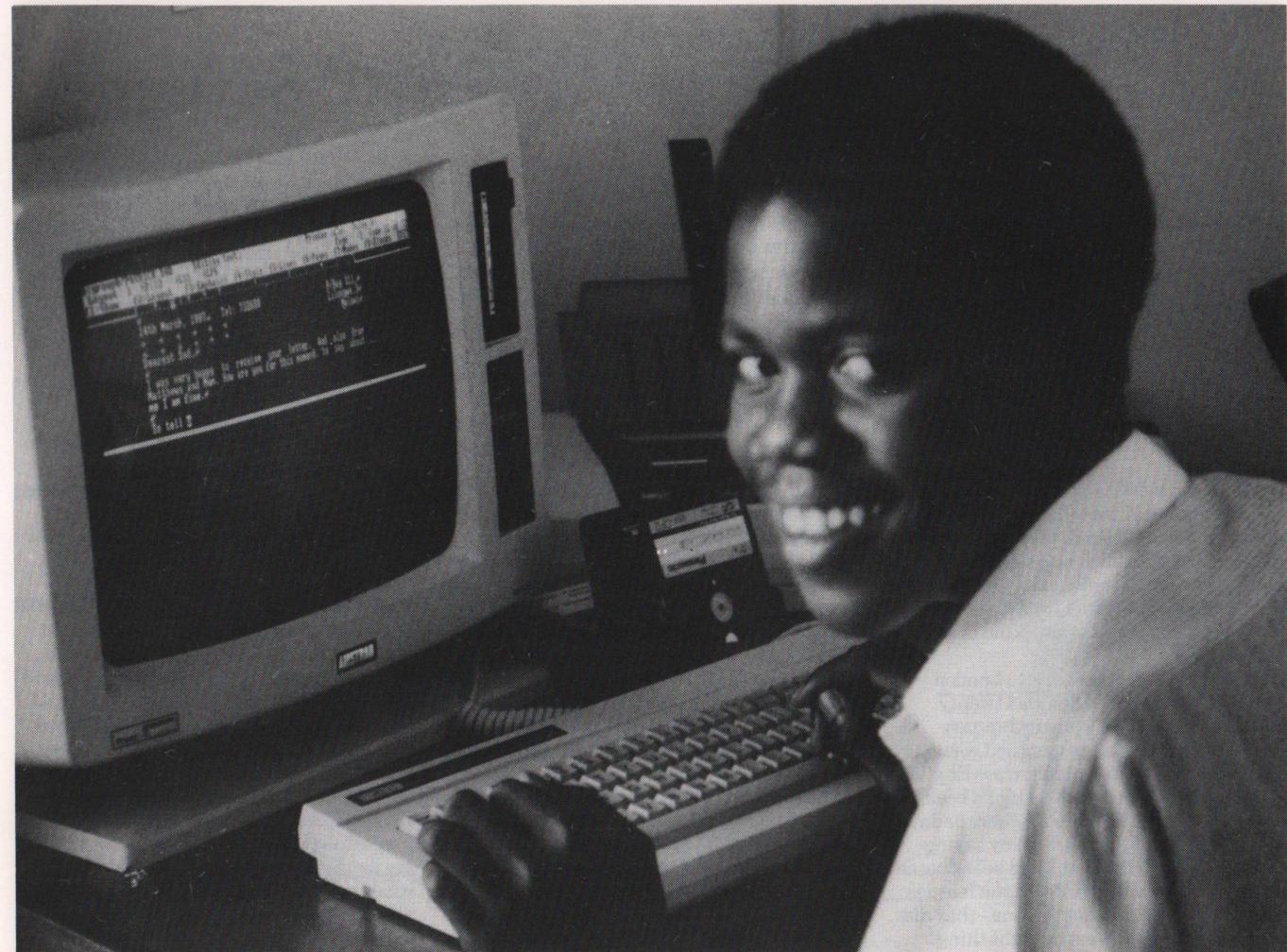
## Socialisation

Such buildings/institutions needn't, of course, be staffed by adults with any pedagogical pretensions at all; the major qualifications should be imagination, liking children and being non-exploitative. The activities of the institution would indeed be organised by children and parents in association with the paid staff without any special pleading of expertise; administration would be a matter of ensuring the presence of personnel for the sake of health and safety rather than timetabling functional periods of packaged knowledge. Such institutions would be directly accountable to the parents and the community for the happiness of the children as a group (their collective socialisation) and their individual safety (the child-minding function). They could be afforded everywhere because the present excessive costs arise through the training and support of teachers in every village.

What about the education-human development bit? - Illich and Reimer are curiously thin on that, but their message is surely correct: eight, ten or twelve years

Volume of Enrolments at First Level and Proportion of GNP to State Education

|                     | Pupils Enrolled<br>(Education at First Level) |            |            | Total Educational Expenditures<br>as % of Gross National Product |      |      |
|---------------------|---|------------|------------|--|------|------|
|                     | 1975  | 1980       | 1983       | 1975   | 1980 | 1983 |
| Botswana            | 116,293                                       | 171,914    | 198,328    | 8.5  | 7.1  | 7.2  |
| Cape Verde          | 64,794  | 57,587     | 55,751     | -  | -    | -    |
| Central African Rep | 221,432                                       | 246,174    | 291,444    | 4.9  | -    | -    |
| Congo               | 319,101                                       | 390,376    | 443,143    | 8.1  | 6.9  | -    |
| Equatorial Guinea   | 35,977  | 44,499     | 61,532     | -  | -    | -    |
| Gambia              | 24,617  | 43,432     | 60,529     | 3.2  | 3.2  | 5.0  |
| Ghana               | 1,156,758                                     | 1,416,893  | 1,653,455  | -  | -    | -    |
| Guinea              | 198,849                                       | 257,547    | 246,129    | -  | -    | -    |
| Guinea-Bissau       | 81,890  | 74,539     | 74,979     | -  | -    | -    |
| Kenya               | 2,881,155                                     | 3,930,991  | 4,323,822  | 6.3  | 6.9  | -    |
| Lesotho             | 221,922                                       | 244,838    | 289,590    | 4.2  | 5.0  | 3.9  |
| Madagascar          | 1,133,013                                     | 1,723,779  | 1,651,012  | 3.2  | 5.5  | 3.3  |
| Malawi              | 641,709                                       | 809,862    | 847,157    | 2.5  | 3.2  | 2.5  |
| Mozambique          | -   | 1,387,192  | 1,162,617  | -  | -    | -    |
| Niger               | 142,182                                       | 228,855    | 261,531    | 3.8  | 4.3  | -    |
| Nigeria             | 5,950,296                                     | 13,760,030 | 14,383,487 | -  | -    | 2.2  |
| Senegal             | 313,455                                       | 419,748    | 533,394    | -  | -    | -    |
| Swaziland           | 89,528  | 112,019    | 129,767    | 3.7  | 5.7  | -    |



Learning to word process in Malawi

compulsory attendance at school is an awfully inefficient way of producing a highly educated minority, a broad education of a sort for the majority and frustrated illiteracy or non-numeracy for the remainder. It also means that collective socialisation is corrupted. (All that assumes, of course, that they actually get to school as in the over-developed North.) It's no good programming learning at a specific stage in development, at a set time of day: people (children) learn when they want to; and when they are motivated they learn very fast.

## Networks and modules

So Illich and Reimer's network of learning makes a lot of sense - but they do rather assume that people (adults and children) know what is on offer, know how to assess the choice, know how to manipulate the system. The usual critique of parental choice or of a voucher system applies - that the well-off will do even better.

But the emphasis they put on learner motivation is important and should not be ignored: people (again adults and children) can learn to read, write and count very quickly *when they want to*; people very rapidly become 'experts' on local geography and history *when they want to*; and

scientific discovery in controlled conditions is a joy *when people want to learn*. The classroom context, with a pre-scheduled sequenced timetable for all, is artificial, expensive and unnecessary. Instead, the opportunity to learn how to read, write and count, how to explore the local geography and the local history and how things work, should be made available formally and frequently on a modular basis. Children would then attend these modules when they *wanted to*. It would be cheap and efficient because the courses would be organised for groups who want to learn rather than as purgatory for some, steps on a career ladder for others, and an appropriate educational experience for a few. Again, this could be afforded anywhere.

There must be a catch - there is, hence the title. 'Cos all this handwaving for children's choice and effective educational experience presumes that children will all *want to learn* (the elements of) this basic package. What if they don't? Would I require them to do so? Well, given a combination of a belief in the value of learning, a fear of exploitation and a residual puritanism, the short answer is... Yes!

How would it work in a developing country? Existing village school buildings could be used as basics for polyvalent

activities, with perhaps one room also used for teaching the basic skills out-of-season (to avoid the stupidity of schools trying to compete with family demands for help on the land). Other modules would be made available on perhaps a peripatetic basis with travelling educational units (nothing innovative here - they already exist). The 'enforcement' would be left to the community which, judging by the present enthusiasm for qualifications, although not for schooling in most countries, would be highly effective.

## Relevance

And what relevance does it have for us? In the middle of a teacher dispute about negotiating rights over salary and working conditions - none. When the dust has settled and we try and argue for a socialist interpretation of 'useful education' rather than Lord Young's, quite a lot. For presently we are providing illiteracy despite schooling (the lack of community or even parental participation is tragic) and the whole curriculum is seen as massively irrelevant by many learners. There has to be a way of separating the daily, potentially useful function of school (child-minding and collective socialisation) from the occasional learning experiences.

# A black fish in a white sea

Adopted children find life hard and often spend many of their teenage and adult years coming to terms with the loss of their real parents. Black children adopted by white families have additional problems: their adoptive parents are not always conscious of a black child's needs, the colour blindness of white liberal friends, and the ever present racism in our society. It is only recently that agencies have made efforts to avoid trans-racial adoptions, claiming that black families were not interested in adoption. However, now that efforts are being made to recruit black substitute families, that is seen to be false. A young black woman, Laura Fish, here describes her personal experience of being brought up in a white family which underlines the importance of black homes for black children.

I SPENT ALMOST a year abroad when I was twenty-one. I travelled through Egypt, Sudan, India and Nepal. Maintaining a relationship with such huge areas of the planet is an emotionally exhausting way to be but being so far away from home helped me to put the past into some kind of perspective.

My natural mother came to London from Guyana in 1959. She was twenty when she gave birth to me in January 1964. At the age of nine months I was adopted into a white, middle-class English family. When I used to ask why I'd been adopted and my two older brothers hadn't, my parents would comfort me by saying that I was special in that I had been chosen by them all. I won't go into all the reasons my parents give for adopting me - they did what they thought was the right thing.

My parents believe that everyone is equal and that colour doesn't matter. This was the rule at home but the moment I stepped outside the warmth of my family, colour seemed to matter terribly. In fact, to my great surprise, it was the first thing that everyone noticed about me. Occasionally the outside world penetrated into my family. Friends of my parents

**My parents believed that everyone is equal and that colour doesn't matter.**

would come and visit and I would be briefly introduced as Laura. After about an hour the visitors would invariably say, "So where's the daughter we've heard so much about?"

People used to (and still do!) pat my head, feel my hair and comment on how well I could speak English. I was continually the object of curiosity and interrogation. "Do you love your parents? They're not your real family. Do you want to find your real mother?" My adopted parents were the first thing I could remember and, with their help, I was convinced, rightly or wrongly, that I wanted, needed nothing else although my mother says that as a child I always seemed to be desperately in search of something and it worried her terribly.

I grew up in the New Forest, near to Lymington where there is a considerable number of militant, white ex-Southern Africans. I rarely met black people and was taught that they were aborigines who wore grass skirts, ate each other and beat drums all day in the sun. I knew nothing about black history and was terrified when Timmy and Tao, a Nigerian couple my father knew from when he was at university, came to stay. Tao would immediately set to work on my hair. She would grab me, hold me firmly between her knees, fill my hair with pungent creams and oils and comb it and pull it until it was finely plaited into little squares. My head hurt for days and I dreaded her return.

My school friends, like my parents, suffered from the disease of white liberals who claim to be "colour blind", although

**As a child I accepted racism quite calmly.**

many of my friends had fascist parents. The father of one of my best friends was in the NF, two good friends of mine said that their parents would not let me into their house and a boy that I had a crush on at an early age, said that although he was very fond of me he couldn't go out with me because I was black. During my late adolescence boys would ask me out all the time - I was thrilled, naturally - but found that the relationships never lasted longer than the first night in bed. One poor friend had to explain to me that they only wanted to see what black birds were like. My ignorance makes me sick to this day.

As a child I accepted racism quite calmly, I had known it from day one and nobody explained what was happening or why it happened. My elder brother is very clever and I used to watch him being teased at school for doing so well. He had no real friends and I gained strength from his weakness and resolved never to let people get me down, never to show the pain, no matter how severe. So I rarely reacted when attacked or abused. I do remember kicking a sixth form boy in the balls when I was in my first term at secondary school. He and his friends always called me nigger and although I didn't understand it, it hurt

so bad that I kicked out uncontrollably. To my bad luck the deputy headmistress saw and I was dragged into her office to explain. She shouted at me condemning me as a rebel and saying it was my fault they called me nigger. There was no one to turn to, no sympathy, no understanding and no point in reacting.

As I grew into my teens and my body began to take on some shape I found clothes didn't fit me as they did my girlfriends. Jeans didn't hug, my legs seemed too short and my bottom seemed to stick out too far. I thought I must be

**It was my fault they called me nigger.**

deformed. (That reminds me of the ballet teacher I had who continually told me to "tuck my bottom in". No matter how hard I tried it always stuck out. She said that if I couldn't keep my bottom in then I'd never be a ballerina.) My skin was always dry, itchy and flaky and my hair became the bane of my life. My girlfriends were busily saving up for the latest hair dryers, curling tongs, rollers, hair sprays and dyes while my mother and I washed my hair with washing up liquid and set to work with it with a European comb once a week. I went through a phase of always wearing a head scarf in the summer, and my coat hood up with the chin straps drawn tight to prevent over curious people from pulling it down, in the winter.

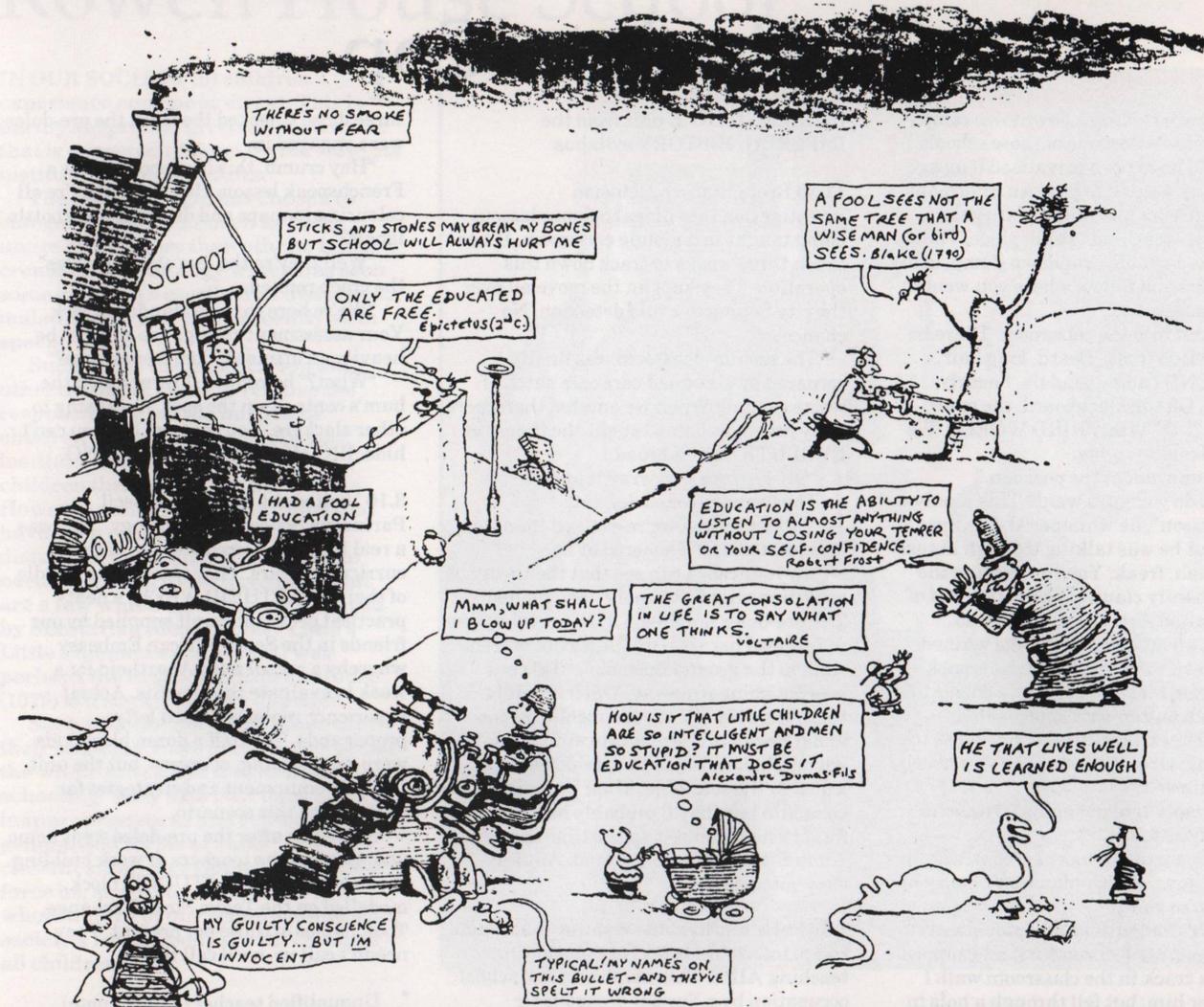
Despite all this I was a happy child and my parents were continually providing me with interesting things to do.

Now that I live in a more multi-racial society I am learning about so many of the things that were denied me as a child and yet were essential to aid me in coping with

**Jeans didn't hug, my legs seemed too short and my bottom stuck out too far.**

living in a predominantly white country.

I refuse to condemn my parents, they always did what they believed was best. My father in his well meaning way would say, "I don't see people as black and white, I just see people." But black was what I was and I sometimes wonder whether he sees me at all. The more I meet black people and realise that I can share something special with them and regain some sort of identity, the more I become aware of the racist traits in the people I was once so close to - although in a life of travel and learning, as it becomes harder to find people I can really relate to I realise that this is often a symptom of their ignorance and not my blackness.



CITY FREE SCHOOL

## Many happy returns

Will Langworthy reports from Britain's oldest urban free school.

IN SEPTEMBER 1987, White Lion Free School celebrated its fifteenth birthday. There were several reasons for celebrating this occasion; amongst these is the accumulation of experience over this period, with lessons for those interested in libertarian education. One of the lessons learnt painfully at White Lion Street has been the danger of the school losing its libertarian approach. WLSFS has recently been split by a serious disagreement about the Founding Principles. Over the last five years, with new arrivals amongst the workers, a majority of them rejected the Principles and introduced an alternative Code of Practice in 1985.

The Code gave the workers' meeting a veto over the school meeting removing the school's principle of full democratic decision-making by all. Another principle was that the school should be rooted in the local community and that workers were there to help parents in all matters, not just the education of their children. This

was undermined by the attempted abolition of the school's catchment area, previously 1000 yards with no selection, and by much greater referral of families to outside state services. Further, the introduction of selection which aimed to exclude kids not considered suitable for the school in the judgement of the workers challenged the commitment to an egalitarian school. Although the Code paid lip service to the idea of voluntary lessons, a new and more coercive attitude to non-attendance was also apparent.

After a lengthy dispute between the workers and the charitable oversight body (composed of ex-workers, parents and students), the Founding Principles were reaffirmed, following which several of the workers resigned. And so September was also a rebirth of the school with a new complement of workers and its original Principles reinstated. As Britain's only state-funded free school, WLSFS has a unique role in demonstrating libertarian

education in action.

White Lion Street has had many obstacles to overcome, but has managed to survive - other free schools have closed through internal conflict or external hostility, or have survived but lost their direction. Future projects should learn from the pitfalls that other schools have fallen into. Summerhill has the permanency of a Director, but the conflict between the school's principles and its undemocratic administration has become more pronounced now that Summerhill is changing direction. White Lion Street has always been co-operatively run, but an eventual majority of the workers (not a majority of the whole school community) was able to reject the Founding Principles and abandon a libertarian approach. How can free schools be flexible and yet retain their libertarian identity? This would be an interesting and valuable topic for future discussion in *Lib Ed*.

Will Langworthy

# Curriculum Cop

9.40 We were raiding a downtown comp., the Clement Attlee, one of those schools that would have been privatised long ago 'cept no one wanted to buy. An informant in the staffroom had reported illegal Humanities teaching taking place. The school was a shabby, rundown dump, badly lit corridors and toilets where you went in twos for safety.

We burst into the classroom. There he was. A weirdo freak! Beard, long hair, glasses, CND badge, sandals. I nearly threw up. On the blackboard, the proof: POVERTY IN THE THIRD WORLD. We had him bang to rights.

"OK punk, adopt the position."  
"What do you guys want? This is only a history lesson", he whimpered. His lips moved, but he was talking through his ass!

"Oh yeah, freak. You're violating the anti-Humanity clause, sub-section 234 of the Education Act. This is it, weirdo."

"What about democracy?" he whined.  
"We have a mandate, Joe. Now pack your bags and let's go before we decide to give you an on-the-spot appraisal." I thwapped my Bakerlite blackjack into the palm of my hand. The scumbag was nearly wetting himself.

"I'll complain to my union." His voice was barely audible.

"The Department has new contracts on all of you guys. Your union won't help you where you're going."

"Aargh! Compulsory redeployment!"  
The creep made a run for it and slipped through a crack in the classroom wall. I raced after him, but fell through a hole in the floor before I even got near. He got away - for the moment! But we have his DES number. I left a U/Q\* in charge of the class, teaching the POVERTY IN THE THIRD WORLD BECAUSE THEY GOT

INDEPENDENCE unit from the IMPERIAL HISTORY syllabus.

11.30 Brought to a conclusion investigation into illegal Science lessons being taught in a mobile classroom. It has taken three weeks to track down this operation. They kept on the move all over the city hoping to avoid detection. No chance.

The mobile classroom was finally cornered by six squad cars on a patch of waste ground. When we entered there were sixty pre-doles being taught the theory of EVOLUTION by a broad.

"OK lawbreaker, wrap it up!"

The woman looked defiant.  
"So you reckon we're evolved from the apes, dirtbrain?" I sneered at her.

"In your case I can see that the theory of evolution might not apply," she replied. The pre-doles laughed. I didn't get the joke so I zapped her with my Bakerlite and she sank to the ground insensible. This one was not going runaway. Unfortunately there were six of us in the mobile by now and it began to disintegrate around us. We got out, but eleven of the pre-doles were killed in the scramble. Their parents might complain but they'll probably have forgotten all about it by the time the next Annual Meeting comes round. Anyway they voted us in!

1.50 False alarm at the Ramsey Macdonald comp. Informant reported someone teaching AIDS. This involved a full school occupation by a Special Weapons Or Tactics unit - the Curriculum Cop SWOT squad. The report had been garbled and misunderstood. The suspect was only using a teaching aid. Checked his assessments log. His class had not been assessed for

three days! Checked the work the pre-doles were engaged in.

"Hey crumb, this is supposed to be a Frenchspeak lesson. How come they're all colouring in maps and drawing wine bottle labels?"

"Well they're the less able pre-doles", the creep replied.

"We're here to raise standards, jerk. Your assessment ratings are going to be heavily scrutinised. Comprenez vous?"

"What?" he replied. I terminated the bum's contract on the spot. A warning to other slackers. You can run, but you can't hide. BIG MOTHER IS WATCHING.

3.10 Visited the bright new Cecil Parkinson School of Technology. This was a real treat for a tired veteran of the curriculum wars. They were in the middle of their APARTHEID WEEK, a neat practical geography unit supplied by our friends in the South African Embassy whereby a school tried Apartheid for a week to evaluate the benefits. Actual experience replaces biased lefty propaganda. The half a dozen black kids were complaining, of course, but the unit includes equipment and strategies for coping with this scenario.

Stayed on after the pre-doles went home and watched the teachers at work building the new BUSINESS STUDIES block, modelled on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. Took names of those not present. They needn't call us, we'll call them.

\* Unqualified teacher (editor's note)

Next issue The Curriculum Cops raid a Soviet-sponsored Peace Studies class at the Nelson Mandela Free School, but are driven off with heavy casualties.

# Rowen House School

IN OUR SOCIETY all children experience enormous stress. This is hardly surprising given the deference that is expected of them by the state, its institutions and its adults.

The state, though, has chosen to categorise some children as being under more stress than others. It has created a terminology which has seen some children described as disturbed, maladjusted, and more recently as in special need.

Such forms of classification and other attempts made to remove the responsibility for the burden of children's stress from society, its institutions and adults onto the children themselves are pernicious. However amidst the institutions that have been created for so-called disturbed, maladjusted and special needs children, there have been and are a few which have been influenced by libertarian ideas. Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth (1913) was perhaps the first while Rowen House (1979) is a contemporary example.

Such schools, and most importantly their students, have much to say about the whole process of traditional schooling. They also cast light upon the inappropriateness and redundancy of generalised forms of child classification. Most importantly, they force us, as adults, to consider the whole nature of our relationships, and society's relationships, with children - all children.



## A radical experiment for children under stress

Rowen House School, named after the nineteenth century educational innovator, Robert Owen, was opened in 1979. It is the inspired initiative of Bryn and Meg Purdy and Neil Redfern, who joined them in 1981, and offers a residential community education to girls, ranging in age from nine to sixteen. Most of the girls who currently attend the school, twelve in all, are referred and funded by local authorities. They are deemed to have a variety of educational and emotional problems.

'Children under stress' is how the staff of Rowen House (five full-time and three part-time) choose to regard the girls. This is as distinct from being disturbed, maladjusted or in special need, which usually implies an irremediable category of handicap. The stress is seen as quite discrete from the child. Rowen House seeks to create an environment which can help the child to become aware of the phenomenology of her stress, its causes, its symptoms and, above all, its remediability by positive and practical steps. The aim is to create as relaxed a community as possible, consistent with the needs of the

individual child and the stability of the group.

The school itself is situated on the edge of a council estate on the outskirts of a small industrial and market town. Its frontage is part of an ordinary residential road; its rear overlooks rolling Derbyshire hill country. Thus the child is not sequestered from society, and contact with the community is encouraged. Friends are met and invited into the school. The girls attend local youth activities, join the Public Library, and occasionally attend local schools and colleges of Further Education. Furthermore, they do not stay at the school at weekends. They go home, or to 'befrienders', local families who invite them into their homes.

The school offers a highly individualised programme of education and a communal education in personal relationships. Most of the girls are deeply antipathetic to schools and schooling. 'Formal' lessons operate in the mornings, with 'option' times in the afternoon. However, there is no compulsion upon the girls to attend lessons or options. As far as

their formal education is concerned, everything is developed co-operatively and collaboratively between teacher and student.

'Therapy' is not so much practised 'on' the pupils, but is experienced among the girls and teachers themselves. A 'Moot', open to all people in the school but again not compulsory, is held at the beginning of each day. It is an hour-long forum, where points of principle are discussed and established and where particular day-to-day issues raised by members of the community are talked out. Occasionally decisions are taken to restrict cases of persistent anti-social behaviour. Even in such cases the community aims at consensus. This discussion-mode of the Moot is in evidence during much of the school day, between individual staff and a girl or girls, and between the girls themselves, who fulfil a mutual counselling role. In many ways it is their experiences of, and attitudes towards, the school that are the most illuminating.



## The Moot

The Moot is there to talk. We talk mostly about other people and try to sort out their problems and any problems that might be going on in running the school. Some people think it's grassing, but grassing is talking about people behind their backs. In the Moot the people are there and you don't really talk to them, you talk to the Moot but you're in front of them. The Moot makes it possible to be in the open with people and to share things with people. I think it's a very good thing because you can't sort things out with one or two people. If two people aren't getting on it's not just their problem, it's everyone's. It's the same with the school. We all belong here, we live here, we are involved in helping the school

work. Mind you, don't get the wrong impression. Some people really don't like the Moot and if you're being talked about in the Moot it's horrible. I actually can't stand it. If I'm talked about sometimes I walk out or just shut off. But in the end the Moot makes you think about whatever problem it is. It won't go away until you've faced up to the problem. The big difference between the way in which problems are sorted out here and most schools is that here everybody is involved and people get to the bottom of problems. By problems I don't just mean school problems, but people's problems too. The Moot is about helping people as well as the school.

*Dawn*



## Girls only

It's strange being in a school where there are all girls, but it's better. You don't have all these problems about who's going out with who. But the big thing is there's more privacy. At the school I was at before boys were always dominating. The girls used to look up to them all the time. Well not all the time. And not all the girls. But lots of girls show off to boys. It's much easier for girls to be themselves here. Also we get to do what we want to. This place could work if boys were here but they'd have to be different. I wouldn't disagree with boys being here, in fact, it would be quite nice. But I just think it would stop us from being close together. We really do get to do what we want.

*Nikki*

It's alright being in a school where there are all girls. I expected that being all girls it would all be dead bitchy and that. But when I came it was alright. I got welcomed and people were friendly. If there were boys here it would be a very different place. Not having boys means that you can be yourself much more. I'm sure that if boys were here there would be loads more problems. For a start one girl would go out with someone and there'd be arguments about it. Don't get the wrong impression, I like boys more than girls, I usually get on much better with them. But here it's totally different somehow. The girls aren't catty and bitchy here. At home if you're a girl you've got to be hard and look big in front of everyone, especially the boys. That used to annoy me. It's not like that at all here. I actually wouldn't want boys to be here even though I usually get on best with boys.

*Liza*



## Rules

It ain't perfect here you know. For a start the staff gang up on us at times. Something happens in the night and they decide that something has to be done. I suppose there have to be rules and once you've got rules the staff put them into practice. Like bedtimes, right, they're dead strict about bedtimes. I don't like them but I realise that you have to have them. I suppose the difference about rules here is that if you break them it gets talked about openly and the Moot decides about punishment. I suppose the rules get talked about in the Moot in the first place as well.

*Dawn*



*Nikki*

## Learning

Learning here is not just about lessons, about subjects. It's about friendship, learning to be friends. When I came here it was hard to begin with. I'd never been into a community before where people were always being loving to each other and caring. I thought it was hard. People showed affection to each other and I never knew how to do that without feeling, you know, queer. To begin with I thought I'm not going near them. But I've learnt to be affectionate. I've learned to share my problems with other people, you see. And when you've done that you feel affectionate to them.

*Nikki*

## The individual

The most important thing about this school is confidence. By that I mean it makes people more confident as individuals. Before I came here I felt I was nobody. I didn't believe that I could do anything. You know one of the things that really helped was learning karate. One of the girls here introduced me to it. I never would have thought of doing it at my other schools. I would have never have got a chance to do it. But here it was easy, you can choose to do things here that you would never think of doing anywhere else. That makes you more confident. You come to find out what you as a person want to do. And you can do it. Being able to decide what I want to do and learning to do it has made me more confident. I feel that I have some value as an individual but it's me who has decided what I do. I've had a lot of help but a lot of love as well. The teachers here really care. They help you feel like you are somebody.

*Dawn*

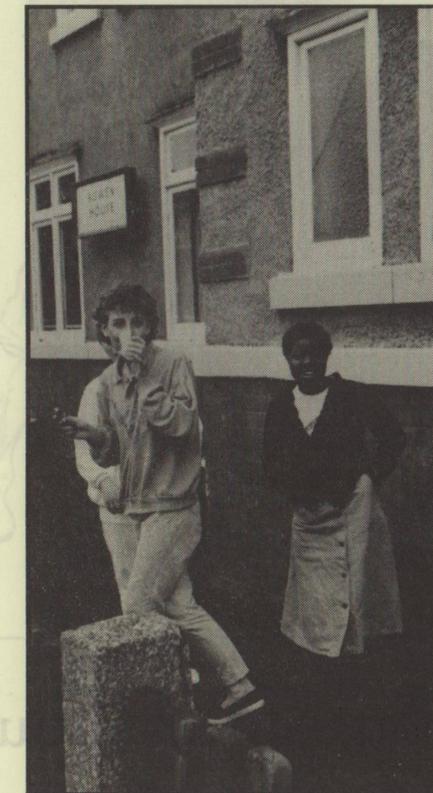
## Rowen House as a school

In this school everything's out in the open. You don't get staff going and talking behind our backs. Like when I was in the other schools teachers were always doing that, you know, finding out what you'd been doing, coming back and telling you off about it. Here it's different. The Moot is important. That's where everything gets talked out. Anybody can talk, you know, say what they like. It helps people to get to know each other. The teachers are dead different. They treat you like people. You don't have to go to lessons either. I go to lessons when I feel like it. I suppose it's important to go to lessons, but there aren't any set lessons. That makes it different. You just go to a room and do different things when you want to. You do Maths and English and stuff but it's different. I can't explain it but it doesn't feel like a lesson in a normal school. I suppose it's me who decides when I'm going to work. It's

my choice. You know, Meg doesn't make you go to a class. Anyway why should she? It's not for her benefit. It's for me. It's up to me isn't it. People who come here have got a lot of freedom. They're not always told what to do. They don't have to go to lessons. They can talk to people about their problems. There are rules here but it's different to most schools. We have a say in what goes on. Say if Bryn wanted to build a new bedroom. He'd talk to people about it. And it would get talked about in the Moot. And also when there's any trouble it's talked about in the Moot as well. That sort of thing never happens in other schools. It can be hard in the Moot because its like grassing on your mates but somehow it is different. I still think I'm grassing on my mates if I talk about them in the Moot but I suppose I'm not really.

*Julie*

## Maladjustment



I just hate that word maladjusted because it's a label. We're not maladjusted. The other day Bryn said to someone who was visiting, "We're a special school". I was really annoyed at him. We're not special either. Alright we're here because we've had problems. It's not necessarily our fault you know. I think if there's anyone who's special it's the teachers in the schools. What a bunch. All they could say about me was, "There's something wrong with you". Maybe there was but what did they try to do about it. I can't stand labels. Backward, I don't like that either. It doesn't explain anything. I'm not any different to anyone else you know, except that I used to find it difficult to talk to people about what I was feeling and certain things that had happened to me. Yeah, I know they called me maladjusted. I'll tell you what that means to teachers: stick stroppy kids in a corner, put a label on them, don't give a toss and forget that they're real people. Like they call handicapped people special, don't they? It depends which way you use it, I know, but these people are not special, well they shouldn't be anyway. It's like when people use the word nigger for black people. They're not niggers, they're black people. Labels stop people thinking. They're a form of prejudice. It's like calling somebody big tabs because they've got big ears or big nose or big head, small, short. Labels, they make me sick. I'll tell you what, right. Nobody's perfect. I used to label people. Sympathy for people was inside me but it couldn't come out. It was like there was barbed wire around it. But when I came here, right, I could tell people what I felt, I expressed my feelings. I told people what had happened to me. People used to listen. I realised I was alright you know. I wasn't thick, I wasn't a problem, I'd just had a hard time. Now I can see what all sorts of people feel. Labels, you can stick them, they don't tell you anything.

*Nikki*

*Nikki*

After spending time at Summerhill when he was a college student in the sixties, Bryn Purdy worked for several years in a school for 'maladjusted' boys, whose headteacher was so committed to the Summerhill Idea that he sent his own children to be educated by Neill. After this grounding in alternative ideas about education, Bryn found difficulties in putting his ideas fully into practice in state schools, and he and his wife, Meg, set up Rowen House in 1979. Bryn talked to *Lib Ed* about the school, its philosophy and its workings.

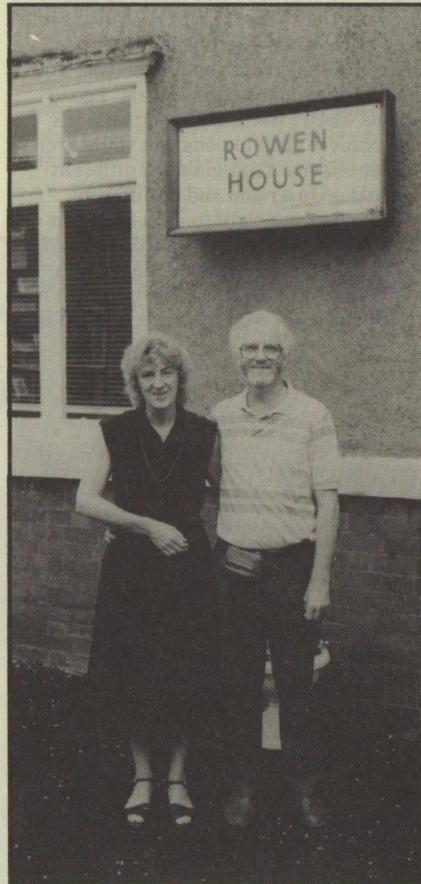
**Lib Ed** Could you talk a little about the philosophy behind Rowen House?

**Bryn** I believe in a balance between freedom and authority. When I visited Summerhill I really believed in freedom but experience taught me that there was a limit, no a boundary, to freedom. Somewhere beyond freedom there is permissivism, what Neill called 'license'. I positively am a responsibilitarian who embraces authority and embraces but who rejects authoritarianism and permissivism. Concerning authority we have to remember that the word 'authority' is cognate with 'author', one who originates, creates. In educational terms authority may be used to create equal relationships between adult and child. Adults have a responsibility to create relationships with children, not to establish a control over them.

**Lib Ed** Do you think that your ideas about freedom and authority have been moderated because you have always worked with children under stress?

**Bryn** Indeed. The climate of control within the school can change according to what I call the 'maladjustment quotient' of the group of children which we may have at different times.

With an overwhelming number of new children, which our financial situation sometimes dictates, we recognise the need to exercise more control. We always aim, however, at 'sharing the responsibility' of running the school among us all. The school is functioning most effectively when each girl feels she is making her contribution to, and has her place in, the community. We aim at a climate of



tenderness among all members of the community. During stormy days when firmness will be in evidence, tenderness will never be absent.

**Lib Ed** What about self-government?

**Bryn** It's a term I don't use. The word 'self-govern' is tautological, like 'self-discipline'. I much more like to talk about responsibility, about David Will's phrase 'shared responsibility'. Lane held a Children's Court, Neill a weekly meeting. We have a moot which *shares* the responsibility for running the community among all its members.

**Lib Ed** How do you see learning, Bryn?

**Bryn** Children here arrive at states of emotional stress by a process of mislearning from the circumstances of their lives. We are asking the girls to unlearn some of their responses to common daily situations. We also expect the adults here to unlearn some of their professional and societal prejudices. Then learning can become a possibility. Please don't misunderstand me; I have the greatest respect for academic learning, but misgivings about teaching. Too many children who have been taught are ... taut. Properly understood, unlearning is the key to true learning.

**Lib Ed** In the end, Bryn, you are the headmaster here. What do you feel about the idea of participatory democracy?

**Bryn** Perhaps I enjoy my own areas of autonomy too much. Outside the Moot, I tend to take decisions which are, at worst autocratic, at best according to whim. I call it 'intuition', but my colleagues have to take me to task from time to time. Ultimately, of course, Meg and I are responsible to the Education Authorities who sub-contract our school out to look after their children.

## An exciting response to an enduring problem

It would be misleading to suggest that Rowen House offers the perfect model for libertarians. Its intake is to a large extent selected for it. Whether one likes it or not the girls are the casualties and rejects of a totally unsatisfactory education system. Uprooted from their own homes and friends, they have been sent to a safe, out of the way island where authorities (who pragmatically tolerate alternative schools for the unschoolable) hope they can do no damage and which may re-adjust them to an inhuman system. And the girls may also find that the stigma of having been to a special school, however pleasant and

friendly, will remain with them in later years.

Although the girls at Rowen House seem to appreciate their experiences in a school without boys, libertarian education in an ideal world would be co-educational. Both Bryn and Meg are co-educationalists and to begin with Rowen House was co-educational. It became girls only more by default than design because the school was just not big enough to satisfy inspectors' demands for separate toilets, sickrooms and so on. However, the experiences of the girls says much about the ways in which boys affect girls' social and educational

experiences.

Children who experience the kinds of stress that the girls at Rowen House have experienced are the most noticeable victims of the prejudice that society through its institutions and its adults encourages. But all children experience such prejudice in some shape or form and if Rowen House has one thing to offer to society it is a fundamental belief in and respect for children as autonomous individuals and a demonstration what that belief and respect can achieve.

# From pay things to play things

Children who interviewed old people for a project reported in the *Guardian*, came to the conclusion that life was more fun when their grandparents were young, even though they had strict schools, less entertainment and far fewer toys. Although the elderly were probably looking at this past through sepia tinted spectacles there may be some reasons for their conclusion.

ONE ASPECT mostly lost to today's generation of children is the fun of self-discovered toys made from scrap materials. In fact, today there are still plenty of things lying around that fall into this category and there is no reason not to have fun with them. For young children useful "found" toys, such as crinkly packaging, bits of string, clothes pegs, odd bits of wood and small mirrors nourish the senses of smell, sight and hearing. As a child gets older the same junk can take on a new significance. Paper plates can transform into faces, egg boxes can become mysterious space stations, yogurt cartons the bodies of miniature people, pipecleaners (OK you may have to buy them) can form the body of a butterfly whose wings are bright crayoned paper. A junked washing machine box becomes a den in which to hide and tell stories.

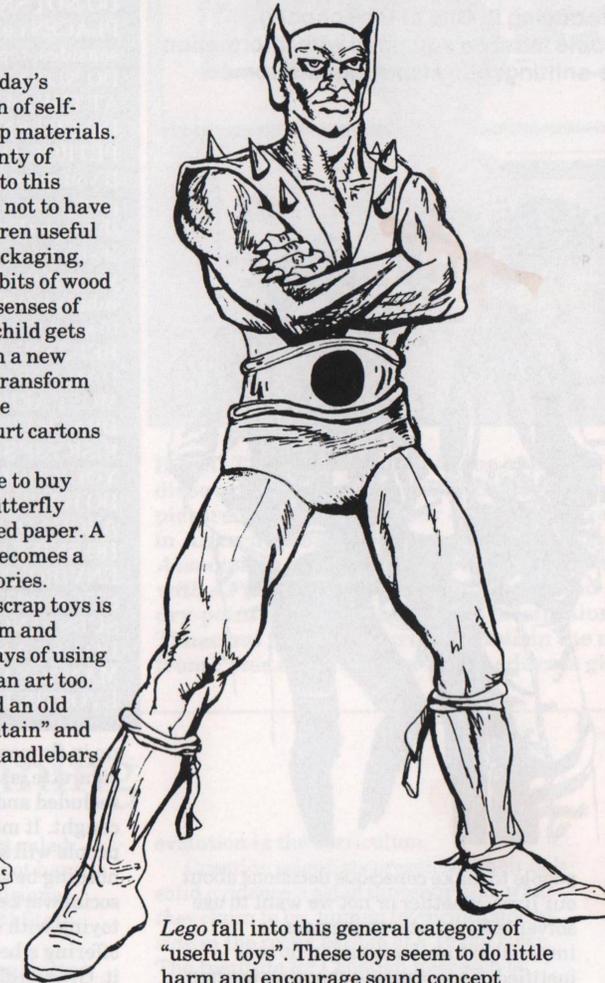
The wonderful thing about scrap toys is that youngsters can choose them and discover for themselves new ways of using them. This can be looked at as an art too. After all, Marcel Duchamp sold an old urinal under the heading "fountain" and Picasso chose rejected bicycle handlebars to be the horns for a bull.



In fact, some comics and TV programmes for children (like *Playschool*) often feed the idea of junk into entertainment. There's nothing exclusively libertarian about children taking their fun from society's trash cans, but they offer free entertainment, room for a child's imagination and the thrill of discovery.

### Useful toys

Some manufactured toys *can* be useful from the point of view of teaching particular skills to the young, particularly those who find some skills hard to learn. There are many manufacturers who sell those "inset boards" (a bit like simple jig saws), rings to stack in size order on pegs, games which involve matching and shape discrimination. Many of the "click together" building toys such as *Duplo* and



*Lego* fall into this general category of "useful toys". These toys seem to do little harm and encourage sound concept development.

However, there are some problems which arise as these toys become more representational. *Legoland* has little lego scenes to play with: the stereotypes on offer are anglo-saxon and traditionally sexist.

Kids seem to still love traditional teddy bears and dolls. But, by and large the dolls are white with blonde hair and blue eyes. It is possible to get black dolls, but they often have blue eyes. Interestingly it is exceptional to find a male doll with any genitals.

### Media toys

In the past an animator would make a cartoon. If it met with success, it would run again as a book. Someone would buy the concession and sell models in the shops.

In the last ten years things have changed. Once the concept of a toy has been adopted by a large company the whole

package is prepared at once. Cartoon, doll, models, stickers, books, videos and tapes are launched into the market place. The toy becomes an instant children's celebrity. The telly adverts tell them that every other child has one, and they must get one too. Worse, for a while they dominate the child's thinking as the multi-national toy interests try to squeeze every drop of profit from their product.

An example of this phenomenon was *My Little Pony*. The film, the video, tapes, magazine stories and models all emerged at once. Almost every infant in the country, if not the industrialised West, had to have the smooth model ponies that made up the stories. But it did not end there. Mattel then brought out a list of extra characters and bits that just had to be bought - pony shoes, pony brushes, pony mirrors and even pony nappies for the baby ponies.

The same mean blitz has been used to rob children of their minds and money for a lengthening list of expensive consumerist garbage such as *The A-team*, *Barbie Dolls*, *He-Man*, *Star Wars* and *Transformers* (toys that convert, for instance, from robot into rocket launcher). The point is that the media assault creates markets for this rubbish, which usually incorporates the worst stereo-typic views of sex, race and war, out of nothing. It is very hard for a concerned parent to counsel a child who is busy in battle with his laser-killer gun, or her frilly Barbie wedding dress when the child feels these are normal activities. In fact, it raises the question as to how far children can control their own learning in a society where choices are forced onto children from such an early age. How libertarian can we be before the revolution?



What we can do is go back to the waste bins and spend time creating a world with our children from tape, paper, colour, wood bits and shoe boxes. Add to them the cool shapes of wooden bricks, mud and sand, some shape sorters and construction toys and we can occasionally entice them away from toy guns, transformers and Cindy dolls.

# Solvent abusers can look normal!

Parents and teachers at Acland Burghley School in London were outraged when an article on drugs appeared in a school newspaper produced by the students. The article tried to provide "an honest account of what is good and what is bad about some widely used drugs". These included cannabis, speed and LSD. Most of the school students who read it found it useful and thanked the people who had been involved in producing it. One of the school's ex-students argues here that young people must be equipped with information to make their own decisions about glue-sniffing. She also suggests some guidelines for safe sniffing.



IMAGINE a description of the experience of alcohol consumption without including the enjoyable atmosphere of the pub, the relaxation, and the pleasure of intoxication, but stressing the expense, the health risks, the danger, the vomiting. The glue sniffer's experience is generally misrepresented in this way by adults who have no understanding of glue whatsoever. Sensational **GLUE DEATH HORROR DESTROYS FAMILY** headlines in the media have sparked an outcry for action against gluesniffing, resulting in a bill being put to Parliament which would make it "an offence in England and Wales for a person to supply or offer to supply substances to young people under 18 if that person knows or believes that they are likely to be inhaled to achieve intoxication." It is difficult to determine which is worse; the infringement upon the rights of young people implicit in the bill, or the smugness of the politicians who think they have effectively dealt with solvent abuse by putting this bill to Parliament.

Any age-related legislation is discriminatory. Age does not determine maturity. The refusal to allow young

people to make conscious decisions about our lives, whether or not we want to use solvents for whatever purpose, is impossible to enforce and in no case justified. Young people choosing to alter our states of consciousness through glue is hardly different from adults choosing to do the same through alcohol. The social workers and do-gooders who get paid to keep kids off glue can afford to drink and have access to other drugs. The hypocrisy lies here. Kids sniff glue because, as an ex-sniffer friend said to me, "It's the best way of having fun at that age when you're too old for playing and bikes, but too young for adult privileges, when you don't have your own place. When you don't have much money, it's the cheapest and easiest way to have fun."

Glue sniffing only becomes hazardous when the sniffers are ignorant of what is safe and what is not, otherwise it is statistically safer than alcohol (see DHSS 1985 leaflet *Drug Misuse: A Basic Briefing*). The more inaccessible the safe substances, the more heavy-handed the reactions of parents and peers to sniffing, the more the deaths from falling off of buildings, sniffing the wrong stuff or going

## SAFE SNIFFING

**DO NOT SNIFF ALONE**  
**DO NOT SNIFF WITH PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW WELL**  
**DO NOT SNIFF IN DANGEROUS PLACES** i.e. construction sites, cliffs, seashores, tops of buildings.  
**DO NOT SNIFF AND SMOKE OR DRINK AT THE SAME TIME**  
**DO NOT SNIFF 'TIPPEX' THINNERS, PETROL, OR GAS**  
 If you must do 'Tippex' don't swallow it but pour it on to your sleeve and breathe through that.  
 If you must do gas, i.e. lighter fuel, when you put the canister in your mouth and inhale **DO NOT** put your head back and try to keep the canister horizontal  
**BENZENE CAN CAUSE LIVER DAMAGE**  
**MOST AEROSOLS CONTAIN INSTANT DEATH FLUOROCARBONS AND ARE RISKY IF SPRAYED DIRECTLY INTO YOUR MOUTH. FORGET IT!**  
**DO HAVE SOMEONE WHO ISN'T HIGH AROUND IF POSSIBLE**  
**DO SNIFF IN A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT**  
**STICK WITH ONE BRAND AND ONE SUBSTANCE THAT YOU KNOW**  
**DO USE A SMALL, THIN, MANAGEABLE BAG**  
**EVOSTIK IS SAFEST!!!**

up in flames from a mouthful of gas and a cigarette, as kids will be forced to sniff in secluded and unsafe places to avoid being caught. It must be accepted that young people will sniff glue so long as there is nothing better to do. The money paying the social workers and politicians and teachers toying with our freedom could go towards offering a better life for us the way we want it. Glue sniffing should not be a taboo subject, everyone should know the highs, the lows, the dangers, and how to do it safely. Only when equipped with this information can young people make decisions about glue sniffing that should be theirs to make.



*Glue Sniffer* by Roselyne Williams is available as a print from the artist at 1 Belmont Road, Falmouth, Cornwall, TR11 3NF.

# Tara wins through

TARA HUNT was in the 4th year at school when she was time-tabled to do a History option in error. She refused and was offered Woodwork. She took it and started enjoying making things.

On leaving school she was accepted for a two-year course in Furniture Making and Wood Machining, with twelve lads and one older woman.

She has now completed the course and reflects that it was hard for the male teachers to overcome their sexist assumptions. "You got the right room, me duck?" said one on the first day. Some of the lads on the course tried the "did you wiggle yer bum and flash yer eyes?" bit at first - and again when she carried off the course prize. But they soon saw that the two women were more than their equals at Woodwork - and they were accepted.

She suspected one teacher of attempted harrasment. "He was dead creepy - sort of leant on you and once grabbed my lapels saying "These are a bit low'." But she enjoyed the work - "sexism didn't matter to me on the course."

Perhaps it matters more now. She is finding it hard to get interviews in spite of her top class course performance. "One teacher told me to sign myself T. Hurst, so employers wouldn't know. But I won't."



**HARD TIMES GALLERY** is one of Bristol's harder to find art galleries, yet its discovery is well worthwhile. Gallery owners Christine Higgott and Peter Ford, pictured above, are former editors of this magazine, in fact Peter wrote the article in *Anarchy* which sparked off the formation of the *Libertarian Teacher's Association* in 1966. They have just exhibited a collection of three hundred *Prints with a Point*, prints either with some kind of political message or made by the dry-point method or both. This international exhibition has now closed at Hard Times but it will be touring Britain in the next year. Further details are available from Peter and Christine at the address given in our Contacts column.

# In the beginning

IN JUNE the US Supreme Court ruled that biblical creation stories do not have to be given equal "air-time" in Louisiana classrooms, as required by a 1981 State law. The enormous power of fundamentalist Christians in the United States explains why the American courts are even considering such an issue, and have been almost continuously for the last sixty years.

In 1925 a schoolteacher from Tennessee, John Scopes, was prosecuted for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. He was convicted but the ruling was later overturned on a technicality. In this famous trial the evolutionists convincingly and publicly discredited the creationists' arguments. But the law stood and has quietly taken its toll. This has included the hiding away of evolutionary theory in biology textbooks, both by a reduction in space allowed for the ideas and, in some cases, its removal from the index!

In 1961 the Supreme Court ruled that religious doctrine should not be taught in state-run schools. Since then the fundamentalist Christians have been battling in southern state legislatures to return creation fables in the guise of "creation science" to be taught alongside

evolution in the curriculum.

Creation scientists present as their only solid evidence a set of dinosaur and, what they claim to be, human footprints side by side in the rocky bottom of a Texan river. The Institute for Creation Research is looking for more. It spends much of its money and energy in a search for Noah's

ark, for its discovery would be evidence of the great flood. And the great flood is important for creationists as it's their explanation for fossils of various creatures being found in different strata of rocks.

Despite their latest defeat in the Supreme Court, it is unlikely that the creationists will give up their crusade.

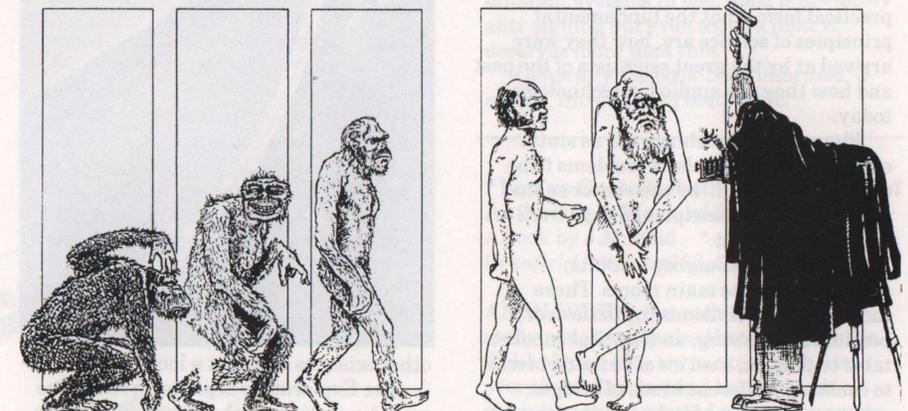


illustration from *Darwin for Beginners* published by Unwin Paperbacks

# Outlaws in class

## Outlaws in the Classroom - Lesbians and Gays in the School System

A book by the City of Leicester Teachers' Association NUT  
pp126, £1.95

ALL TEACHERS need a copy of this book to keep. For heterosexual teachers it will provide a reminder of the need to keep the issues it deals with at the front of the mind until such reminders become unnecessary, and teachers however they define their sexuality will find it a valuable resource book that can be used with students.

The book consists of a collection of short easy to read pieces dealing with a variety of issues important to gay and lesbian people in education. The collection is informative and at times very moving. The personal experiences describe all too common stories of young people becoming aware of their developing sexual orientation to others of the same sex as themselves. The knowledge that this does not fit in with family, friends and school's 'taken-for-granted' expectation coupled with widespread active hostility and derision towards lesbians and gays from apparently everyone causes the utmost misery.

Some pieces tell of the positive change which occurred when contact with other gays and lesbians was achieved.

However difficult some heterosexual teachers may find it to openly challenge homophobia at school, one thing schoolteachers could do is make themselves the means by which young

lesbians and gays can find each other. Confirmation of the self identity so desperately needed by all people will not then be denied them. There are many ways in which this could be done, but they could not do better than to start by making sure that this book is in the right place at the right time.

STAND UP STRAIGHT AND BE COUNTED . . . .



# Hands on, not hands off

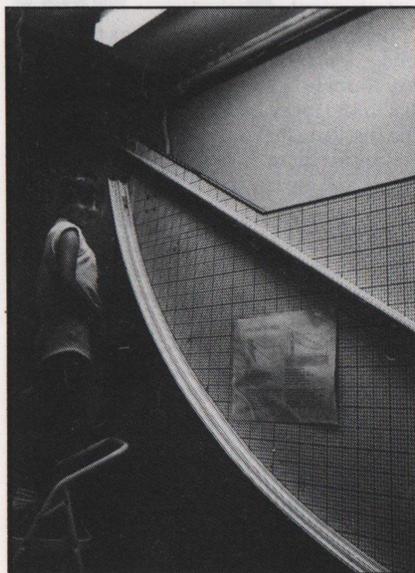
## The Exploratory

A hands-on science centre, Victoria Rooms, Bristol. (tel: 0272-634321)  
Admission: £1.50 (adults), £1 (children and concessions)

THE EXPLORATORY sets out to be "a new kind of museum in Bristol designed both for children and adults to show in practical form what the fundamental principles of science are, how they were arrived at by the great scientists of the past and how they are applied in technology today.

Phenomena are shown not as static exhibits but as models or problems to be explored 'hands-on' by the visitor so that the underlying principles emerge from actual experiment."

There are over eighty exhibits, arranged in three main rooms. These include optical illusions to puzzle over, pendulums to swing, an elliptical snooker table to play on, a series of building blocks to construct different kinds of bridges, prisms and beams of light to experiment with and a plasma ball - which no-one really seems to understand! As illustrated by this list the Exploratory is really a hands-on Physics centre, unfortunately



other sciences don't get a look in.

The Exploratory organisers recognise some limitations of the centre. The topics and exhibits are chosen to evoke interest and stimulate curiosity, but do not, and indeed cannot, provide a complete account of the various principles or phenomena.

"Explorers are encouraged to fill their gaps by thinking for themselves, and seeking further information or deeper explanations." But this is easier said than done - you can't take the exhibits to pieces or modify them for yourself, which is hardly surprising. Also, as in all exhibitions, you feel pressure to keep moving, it's not fair on other visitors to dominate a particular exhibit.

Nevertheless, as an exhibition, it's a breath of fresh air which should certainly capture the imaginations of those with little or no knowledge of science. It cannot teach science to visitors, but it should be successful in motivating people and giving them confidence to explore scientific and technological ideas outside of the centre. Many of the exhibits are easy to set up and require no specialist equipment so we should expect to see experiments appearing all over the place - even in school science labs!

The Exploratory will not only be a useful resource for schools, as claimed in Exploratory publications, but also an excellent resource for children learning out of school, already Education Otherwise children are visiting a similar project based in London's Science Museum.

# Halcyon days

## Early days in the Forest school

A booklet by 'N' Brand  
Published by Anne and Tom Holloway, but available only from 'N' and Ron Brand, Bourne Cottage, Park Lane, Heytesbury, Wilts, BA12 0HE. There is no price, but donations payable to Forest School Camps Aid Fund will be welcomed.

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about some pioneering ventures in education - Summerhill, Kilquhanity and others - but there is a danger that other bold experiments are forgotten because no-one publishes an account of them. Forest School, which opened in 1930 and ran successfully for eight years in Hampshire and two more in Norfolk, is a case in point. Fortunately 'N' Brand, who was one of the first members of staff there, has recently recorded her reminiscences in a short booklet. Based on the ideas of the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, the school at one stage had 40 children and attracted some distinguished staff including Cuthbert Rutter (the school's founder), Dorothy Ravel (author of *Cheiron's Cave*) and R.F. Mackenzie (author of *A Question of Living*,

*Escape from the Classroom, The Sins of the Children, State School and The Unbowed Head*). Rutter wanted "people who could love children but leave them free to make their own decisions and learn about things because they wanted to find out all about life." The emphasis was on outdoor life and self-sufficiency, and there were no concessions to modern comforts.

After the war, the spirit of Forest School was perpetuated in the Forest School camps which continue successfully to this day, run until very recently by Ron Brand who was also on the staff of Forest School.

*Early Days in the Forest School* is a charming personal account of those halcyon days. N.W.



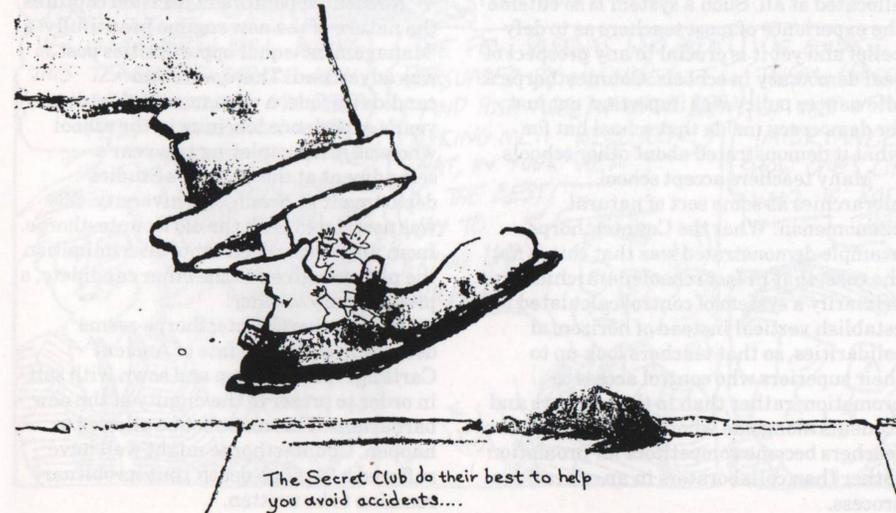
# Join the club

## The Secret Club

A book by John Watson  
Macmillan Children's Books, pp27, £3.95

TO BEGIN at the end: "Are you a member of the Secret Club?" is the question posed on the last page of this highly original book. Susheela, six years old, who was helping to review it, said "Yes!"

The Secret Club, winner of the Macmillan Children's Prize for 1986, shows in pictures, and a few words, what a mysterious band of little people do to the world. They wake up the birds and insects in the morning (with megaphones), teach ducks to go quack, and have a bath patrol to sniff out people who don't wash themselves. They do a lot more besides.



It is the pictures that make the idea work. They are a riot of wriggly movement and detail. It is a book which the reader needs to come back to again and again in order to appreciate the finer points.

It is an ideal book for a child and adult to read together and talk about the ideas that are thrown up. For example, "The Secret Club make the world go round. This involves a lot of pushing." raises the idea that the world does go round; new to some six year olds.

It's not perfect. There are far too few images of females in it - Susheela noticed this. It is, however, a zany, provocative and attractive concept. Let's hope John Watson gives us more Secret Club in the future.

## Education Free from Fear

A book by Laurence Speight  
Dawn Publications, pp56, £1.00

THIS BOOK is published as the fourth in Dawn's occasional series of publications "Dawn Train". It looks at the benefits which the traditional educational system gives to parents, the church and the state. The writer argues that only an education free from fear can benefit children. It is a good overview of the nature and purpose of our traditional educational system and is a challenge to all those interested or involved in the search for alternative educational institutions.

## Food for Protest

A video cassette produced for schools by, and available from, the RSPCA, The Causeway, Horsham, Sussex.  
approximately 25 minutes, free hire

MODERN FARMING methods owe more to the concentration camp than the rural idyll. This video uses footage of battery hen units, the rearing of veal calves and the cruelty of pig production to expose the reality behind the image. It's a valuable free resource which is marred by unimaginative presentation and a determination to restrict all viewers protests to respectable RSPCA type strategies like writing to MPs.

## Educating Hearing Impaired Children

A book by Michael Reed  
Open University Press, pp187, £7.95

THIS BOOK is integrationist in approach and clearly laid out. It explores in fair and readable depth issues surrounding children with a hearing disability in school.

Only three pages are given to the topic of manual (signed) English. There is chaos in the "world of the deaf" with several different systems in use. Reed is obviously anti-signing but even so, as a topic it deserves more than this.

Generally the book is an informed, if statist, introduction to its topic.

## "You've Got to Rebel" - The Exercise of Authority in Work with Young Adults

A book by J.M. Reid  
Cranfield Press, pp103, £3.95,

AN IN-DEPTH, but rather academic, study which concludes that young adults dislike those who try to exert authority over them, and respond better to self-discipline than imposed rules. It suggests that young people will sometimes challenge the justice of the decisions of youth workers. Funny that...

# The death of a progressive school

## Democracy in One School?

A book by Tuula Gordon  
The Falmer Press, £9.95

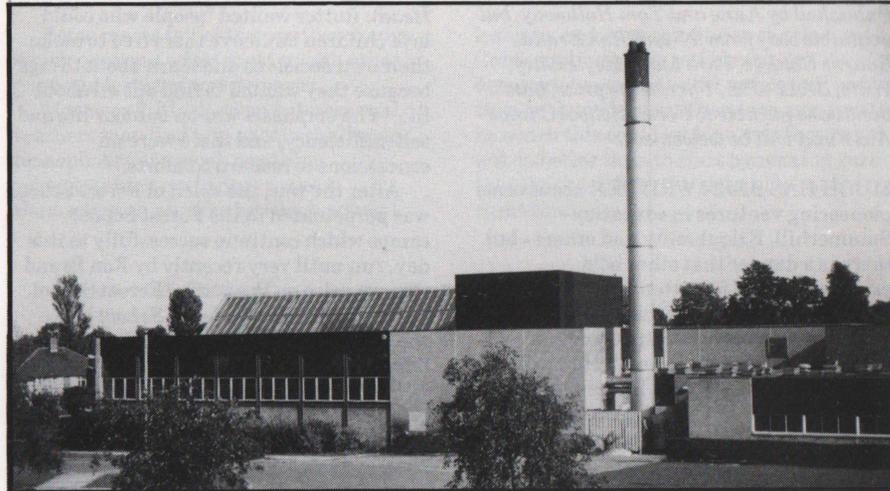
COUNTESTHORPE COLLEGE in Leicestershire was once numbered among the most progressive schools in Europe. Its democratic system of government, its allowance policy, its team teaching, its individualised learning, all marked it out as a shining example of what could be accomplished within the state sector. This is all in the past now. Progressive Countesthorpe is dead and its passing has gone virtually unnoticed.

The only chronicle of this 'strange death' that has so far appeared is Tuula Gordon's *Democracy in One School?* and for this reason alone her book deserves attention. Unfortunately, after years of research all she has produced is a work of academic Marxist sociology that will be inaccessible to the great majority of teachers, a work that is geared more to the arcane debates that exercise academics than to the concerns of the classroom. Countesthorpe deserves better. The destruction of this school is one of the most important events in the history of progressive education in Britain and it is vital that it should be recounted in an accessible fashion and that it should become the subject of open debate. The destruction of the school's democratic regime took place in the shadows, its grave unmarked, the assassins are persons (perhaps deservedly) unknown. It is high time that supporters of progressive education initiated an inquest.

Tuula situates the school's demise in the wider context of the restructuring of education that has accompanied British Capitalism's economic difficulties. Progressive experiments like Countesthorpe were possible when the system was expanding; once this phase was replaced by contraction it was doomed. This is certainly the heart of the matter. She then goes on to discuss the tensions and tendencies within the school and to detail the different ways in which people, teachers and students, responded to the restructuring process.

One problem with much academic Marxism is that it is concerned with understanding the world, often in deliberately obscure language, and seems to contribute little to trying to change it. Tuula's book unfortunately comes into this category. What we need is not a detached academic study, but an engaged account that details both the destruction of the school and identifies those aspects of it that deserve to be remembered.

Progressive Countesthorpe, whatever its problems and difficulties and no matter



Progressive Countesthorpe: doomed to suffer the fate of Ancient Carthage.

what doubts one might have about education transcending the barriers laid down by class, race and gender provided a unique unique educational experience for students within the state sector. The school aspired to place control of the learning process in the hands of the learners on the grounds that this was both a right and that it made learning more effective. The absence of hierarchical concerns in relations between staff and students had to be seen to be believed. Many unsympathetic outsiders thought it was little short of blasphemous (if students call teachers by their first names, what will they call God!)

Of course, the way teachers are treated and the way in which they regard themselves are crucial in determining the experience of students. Originally the school's allowances policy was such that scale points were allocated by the staff on the basis of experience, age, equalising of incomes, rather than being used ostensibly to allocate responsibilities but in fact to establish hierarchical forms of control. For part of the school's history no scale 4s were allocated at all. Such a system is so outside the experience of most teachers as to defy belief and yet it is crucial to any prospect of real democracy in schools. Countesthorpe's allowances policy was important not just for democracy inside that school but for what it demonstrated about other schools.

Many teachers accept school hierarchies as some sort of natural phenomenon. What the Countesthorpe example demonstrated was that this is not the case, that in fact school hierarchies are primarily a system of control calculated to establish vertical instead of horizontal solidarities, so that teachers look up to their superiors who control access to promotion, rather than to the teachers and students alongside whom they work. Other teachers become competitors for promotion rather than collaborators in an educational process.

The fact that the ending of this allowances policy was crucial to the overthrow of democracy within the school and the establishment of a proper hierarchy with everyone in their place precisely illustrates that school hierarchies are matters of control and not of function. These lessons need to be remembered and preserved.

What has happened at Countesthorpe then? A new management team has carried out, over a number of years, a veritable counter-revolution. What was once a progressive school is now probably the least democratic and most patriarchal upper school in Leicestershire and well on the way to becoming the first Suburban Technical School. This year (1987) marks the final demise of the Countesthorpe team system, the famed mini-schools that were generally seen as one of the school's most important contributions to wider educational development. Many outsiders who considered other aspects of the school too radical nevertheless endorsed this form of teaching organisation. It is dead and awaiting burial.

A recent appointment decision captures the nature of the new regime beautifully: a 'Management' equal opportunities post was advertised. There were two candidates, one, a woman with thirteen year's experience teaching in the school who was just completing two year's secondment at the Women's Studies department at Bradford University. She was associated with the old Countesthorpe. In an amazingly open act of discrimination the post was given to the other candidate, a probationary teacher!

Progressive Countesthorpe seems doomed to suffer the fate of Ancient Carthage: ploughed up and sown with salt in order to preserve the dignity of the new barbarians. This must not be allowed to happen. Countesthorpe might well have suffered a 'strange death', but its obituary remains to be written.

## Leave well alone

Dear Lib Ed,

In your last issue you suggested that Education Otherwise should withdraw help and refuse membership to parents who take their children out of school for their own benefit rather than that of the child; and further "the appointment of a co-ordinator responsible for monitoring and supporting the role of children within the organisation".

You are suggesting that EO becomes an authority able to decide who should and should not be members! Surely, we don't need an alternative authority. The suggestion is strictly in opposition to liberation.

The freedom to choose an appropriate form of education is not in doubt. (Education is compulsory though school is not). If you start qualifying the use of this freedom that questioning may undermine the right to educate at home. It will cause undue upset and probably divide EO as a movement. It may also create a mafioso of watch-dogs, ready to pounce on "parents-rights operators". It may well destroy EO.

Leave well alone. EO has achieved much, against opposition. Its steady increase over the last eleven years both in its membership and its own awareness, its capacity for consciousness raising without pushing its beliefs too hard, make it a truly organic movement, giving support and practical help to parents and children who wish to choose educational options other than school. Any abuse of its integral beliefs by individual members is far outweighed by EO's positively liberating principles. That is, the liberation of both child and parent and the necessary mutual respect that such liberation implies.

Yours sincerely,  
Poppy Green, London, W10

We're always delighted to get your letters. Please send them to Lib Ed, The Cottage, The Green, Leire, Leicester, LE17 5HL.



## Gay Youth respond

Dear Lib Ed,

The Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement run a penfriend scheme, a phonenumber, a magazine, two festivals a year, a summer camp, a legal/health/housing advice service, a number of local groups and campaigns against bigots (most recently against a councillor who called for gays to be gassed, leading to the jailing of a dozen of our members over Christmas). And just how much money are we talking about? £2 a year to an unemployed person, and nothing at all to school students, students without grants, Restart victims, women dependent on a man's income, prisoners, strikers, migrants not entitled to dole...

As an organisation of young lesbians and gays - our average age is 17 - we have to keep good security. We also have to have a permanent address. Since we can't afford an office, and no member of LYGM can remain as one after their 26th birthday, our mail goes to a BM post box. London Gay Switchboard, London Lesbian Line and sod knows how many other groups use the same mail-holding company. This isn't

## Alive and kicking

Dear Lib Ed,

A letter to let you know that Kirkdale Free School is alive and kicking! We are moving to premises in New Cross in September and looking for new children, parents and teacher-workers to join the co-op.

If you are interested, please contact us c/o 10 Dallas Road, London SE26 (01-699-4938).

Best wishes  
The Collective, Kirkdale Free School.

a cruel ploy to frustrate visitors. Apart from our other events we run a monthly drop-in in London and have several local groups.

None of our 600 members is complaining about the service they're getting. Indeed, until now, neither has the Gay Youth Help Service.

The differences between LGYM and the GYHS are that we are a mass membership organisation and GYHS is not; we have many activities, sub-groups and autonomous sections of school students and young women; and we are an organic part of the Youth and the Lesbian and Gay movements.

And we still need money, despite all the teenagers we mug and exploit for no return! We don't see any of the gay largesse that Labour-led councils are reportedly so free with, and we've got services, conferences, meetings and publications to run. Please send donations - or even just messages of support - to our address. See if it takes "months" to acknowledge them.

Yours,  
Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement, BM GYM, London, WC1N 3XX

## STU'S STRIP

