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# Adventure Playground

A PARABLE OF ANARCHY



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# anarchy 7

a journal of anarchist ideas



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*We who demand freedom in education, autonomy in the school and self-government in industry are not inspired by any vague ideal of liberation. What we preach is really a discipline and morality as formal and fixed as any preached by Church or State. But our law is given in nature, is discoverable by scientific method, and, as Aristotle points out, human beings are adapted by nature to receive this law. Because we are so adapted, freedom, which is a vague concept to so many people, becomes a perfectly real and vivid principle, because it is a habit to which we are preconditioned by biological elements in our physical frame and nervous constitution.*

—HERBERT READ: "The Education of Free Men".

## Adventure Playground: a parable of anarchy

WHEN WE CALL OURSELVES ANARCHISTS, that is, people who advocate the principle of *autonomy* as opposed to *authority* in every field of personal and social life, we are constantly reminded of the apparent failure of anarchism to exercise any perceptible influence on the course of political events, and as a result we tend to overlook the unconscious adoption of anarchist ideas in a variety of other spheres of life. Some of these minor anarchies of everyday life provide analogies, some provide examples, and some, when you describe their operation, sound like veritable parables of anarchy.

All the problems of social life present a choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions, and the ultimate claim we may make for the libertarian approach is that it is more efficient—it fulfils its function better. The adventure playground is an arresting example of this living anarchy, one which is valuable both in itself and as an experimental verification of a whole social approach. The need to provide children's playgrounds as such is a result of high-density urban living and fast-moving traffic. The authoritarian solution to this need is to provide an area of tarmac and some pieces of expensive ironmongery in the form of swings, see-saws and roundabouts, which provide a certain amount of fun (though because of their inflexibility children soon tire of them), but which call for no imaginative or constructive effort on the child's part and cannot be incorporated in any self-chosen activity. Swings and roundabouts can only be used in one way, they cater for no fantasies.



for no developing skills, for no emulation of adult activities, they call for no mental effort and very little physical effort, and we are giving way to simpler and freer apparatus like climbing frames, log piles, 'jungle gyms', commando nets, or to play sculptures—abstract shapes to clamber through and over, or large constructions in the form of boats, traction engines, lorries or trains. But even these provide for a limited age-group and a limited range of activities, and it is not surprising that children find more continual interest in the street, the derelict building, the bombed site or the scrap heap.

For older boys, team-games are the officially approved activity, and as Patrick Geddes wrote before the first world war, "they are at most granted a cricket pitch, or lent a space between football goals, but otherwise are jealously watched, as potential savages, who on the least symptom of their natural activities of wigwam-building, cave-digging, stream-damming, and so on—must be instantly chivvied away, and are lucky if not handed over to the police."

That there should be anything novel in simply providing facilities for the spontaneous, unorganised activities of childhood is an indication of how deeply rooted in our social behaviour is the urge to control, direct and limit the flow of life. But when they get the chance, in the country, or where there are large gardens, woods or bits of waste land, what are children doing? Enclosing space, making caves, tents, dens, from old bricks, bits of wood and corrugated iron. Finding some corner which the adult world has passed over and making it their own. But

*What is so puzzling about our juvenile crime figures? These overwhelmingly concern boys, and most boys are brought up in adventure-frustrating suburban deserts, in slums or in matchbox council flats on keep-off-the grass estates. Millions of them, emerging semi-literate from our education factories, are instantly converted, at fifteen, into industrial cogs. They find themselves in a rat-racing society, the successful section of which depends on their labour for its sacred capital gains, but rejects them as people and savagely resents their claims to a decent wage.*

*Because of deadly home conditions, these boys naturally take to the streets after work, and because of the monotony of that work are naturally ravenous for drama and excitement. Their pay-packets can't buy this for them, but crime—particularly breaking and entering—can. It can also buy gang-status and is a means of giving society a kick in the pants, of forcing it to sit up and take notice of their existence.*

*Add to this the growing awareness that none of us may amount, tomorrow, to more than a handful of radioactive dust, and it should astonish us that young crime figures are not twice as high.*

—AUDREY HARVEY, in a letter to "The Observer", 13/8/61.

how can children find this kind of private world in towns, where, as Agnete Vestereg of the Copenhagen Junk Playground write:

Every bit of land is put to industrial or commercial use, where every patch of grass is protected or enclosed, where streams and hollows are filled in, cultivated and built on?

But more is done for children now than used to be done, it may be objected. Yes, but that is one of the chief faults—the things are *done*. Town children move about in a world full of the marvels of technical science. They may see and be impressed by things; but they long also to take possession of them, to have them in their hands, to make something themselves, to create and re-create.

The Emdrup playground was begun in 1943 by the Copenhagen Workers' Co-operative Housing Association after their landscape architect, Mr. C. T. Sorensen, who had laid out many orthodox playgrounds had observed that children seemed to get more pleasure when they stole into the building sites and played with the materials they found there. In spite of a daily average attendance of 200 children at Emdrup, and that 'difficult' children were specially catered for, it was found that "the noise, screams and fights found in dull playgrounds are absent, for the opportunities are so rich that the children do not need to fight."

The initial success at Copenhagen has led in the years since the war to a widespread diffusion of the idea and its variations, from 'Freetown' in Stockholm and 'The Yard' at Minneapolis, to the *Skrammellegeplads* or building playgrounds of Denmark and the Robinson Crusoe playgrounds of Switzerland, where children are provided with the raw materials and tools for building what they want and for making gardens and sculpture. In this country we have had at least a dozen adventure playgrounds, several of them temporary, since their sites were earmarked for rebuilding, but there has been enough experience and enough documentation of it, for us to gauge fairly well their successes and pitfalls.

These accounts—which should disabuse anyone who thinks it is easy to run an adventure playground, as well as anyone who thinks it a waste of time, include the following:

*Adventure Playgrounds*, Lady Allen's pioneering pamphlet, which incorporates Agnete Vestereg's account of the Emdrup playground and John Lagemann's of The Yard.

*Adventure in Play* by John Barron Mays, describing the Rathbone Street Adventure Playground at Liverpool.

*Annual Reports of the Grimsby Adventure Playground Association*, by Joe Benjamin, the project leader until 1959, who has also written elsewhere on this playground.

*Lollard Adventure Playground*, a pamphlet by Mary Nicholson, and *Something Extraordinary*, by H. S. Turner, the warden at Lollard Street.

*Play Parks*, by Lady Allen of Hurtwood, an account of the Swedish play parks with suggestions for their adoption here.

*Adventure Playgrounds*, a progress report by the National Playing Fields Associations on the playgrounds at Lollard Street, Grimsby, Romford, Bristol, Liverpool and St. John's Wood, with facts and figures useful to people thinking of starting a playground.



When The Yard was opened at Minneapolis with the aim of giving the children "their own spot of earth and plenty of tools and materials for digging, building and creating as they see fit",

it was every child for himself. The initial stockpile of secondhand lumber disappeared like ice off a hot stove. Children helped themselves to all they could carry, sawed off long boards when short pieces would have done. Some hoarded tools and supplies in secret caches. Everybody wanted to build the biggest shack in the shortest time. The workmanship was shoddy.

Then came the bust. There wasn't a stick of lumber left. Hi-jacking raids were staged on half-finished shacks. Grumbling and bickering broke out. A few children packed up and left.

But on the second day of the great depression most of the youngsters banded together spontaneously for a salvage drive. Tools and nails came out of hiding. For over a week the youngsters made do with what they had. Rugged individualists who had insisted on building alone invited others to join in—and bring their supplies along. New ideas popped up for joint projects. By the time a fresh supply of lumber arrived a community had been born.

As in Copenhagen the prophesied casualties did not happen. "After a year of operation, injuries consisted of some bandaged thumbs and small cuts and bruises for the entire enrolment of over 200 children. No child has ever used a tool to hit another person."

This question of safety is so often raised when adventure playgrounds are discussed that it is worth citing the experience in this country (where the pernicious notion that whenever accidents happen someone must be sued has actually caused some local authorities to close their orthodox playgrounds—so that the kids can get run over instead). The insurance company was so impressed by the engrossed activity at the Cyldesdale Road (Paddington) playground, with its complete lack of hooliganism that it quoted lower rates than for an ordinary playground. At Rathbone Street, Liverpool, the 'toughest' of the English playgrounds:

So many children crowded together with so many opportunities for mutilating one another were bound to produce a steady flow of abrasions, cuts and bruises with the occasional more serious wound requiring stitching or a fractured bone. Statistically, however, the slide appeared to be the highest risk while the permanent ironwork equipment generally produced more accidents than the junk and scrap materials in the Adventure Playground proper.

Reading Mr. Mays' account of the Liverpool playground, with its stories of gang-warfare, sabotage, thieving scrap-metal merchants, hostility and indifference in the neighbourhood except for one street of immediate neighbours, senseless and wanton destruction, the reader may wonder how on earth it could keep going. But the author, reminding us that the essence of an experiment is that it is experimental, concludes that

In spite of all its shortcomings, many of which were the result of hasty planning and lack of solid financial support, in spite of mistakes made by its management committee and the errors of its two appointed leaders, in

spite of the roughness of the site, the endless brickbats, the noise, the dirt, the disorder, sufficient evidence has accrued to support the main thesis on which the playground was established—that given the tools, the materials, the adult interest, advice and support children will indulge in constructional play, they do derive satisfaction from using hand and eye in making and building, fetching, carrying, painting and digging.

The shortcomings, he points out, are no more inevitable than the community allows them to be. The Rathbone Street playground only seemed a failure from a distance: those closest to it, as Mr. Mays says, "are much less gloomy about its value", and it has already led to further adventuring in Liverpool.

On the other hand, the Lollard Playground which seemed from the outside to be as the *Evening Standard* called it, "a heartwarming success story" gave rise among its workers to the kind of feeling which Sheila Beskine describes in this issue of ANARCHY, a "fantastic spontaneous lease of life" followed by a slow decline, so that its spirit had died *before* the LCC took over the site for building. But permanence is not the criteria of success. As Lady Allen says, a good adventure playground "is in a continual process of destruction and growth". The splendid variety of activities which came and went at Lollard from vegetable-growing to producing a magazine, plays, operettas, jiving and 'beauty sessions' were a measure of its success. As at Emdrup, this playground kept the interest of older children and young people up to the age of twenty thus enlarging the scope of possible projects. The older boys built and equipped a workshop and eagerly sought to serve the community in which they lived, doing repairs and redecorations for old people in the district, paying for the materials from a fund of their own. These were the same young people who are such a "problem" to their elders. The difference is that between the atmosphere of the irresponsible society, and that which was precariously built at the playground. The place, said the warden "stands for far more

*Granting that childhood is playhood, how do we adults generally react to this fact? We ignore it. We forget all about it—because play, to us, is a waste of time. Hence we erect a large city school with many rooms and expensive apparatus for teaching; but more often than not, all we offer to the play instinct is a small concrete space. One could, with some truth, claim that the evils of civilization are due to the fact that no child has ever had enough play . . . Parents who have forgotten the yearnings of their childhood—forgotten how to play and how to fantasy—make poor parents. When a child has lost the ability to play, he is psychically dead and a danger to any child who comes into contact with him.*

—A. S. NEILL.



than a mere playground", and the Chairman summed up

This playground is different because it's a place where the children have an infinite choice of opportunities. They can handle basic things—earth, water plants, timber—and work with real tools; and they have an adult friend, a person they trust and respect. Here every child can develop a healthy sense of self-esteem, because there is always something at which they can excel. The wide age range, from two years to twenty-three, is perhaps unique in any playground. There can be progressive development through rich play opportunities, to a growing sense of responsibility to the playground, to younger children and, finally, to others outside the playground. Their willingness to help others is the sign of real maturity which is the object of all who work with young people.

The Grimsby playground, started in 1955, has a similar story. Its cycle of growth and renewal is annual. At the end of each summer the children saw up their shacks and shanties into firewood which they deliver in fantastic quantities to old age pensioners. When they begin building in the spring, "it's just a hole in the ground—and they crawl into it". Gradually the holes give way to two-storey huts. But

they never pick up where they left off at the end of the previous summer. It's the same with fires. They begin by lighting them just for fun. Then they cook potatoes and by the end of the summer they're cooking eggs, bacon and beans.

Similarly with the notices above their dens. It begins with nailing up 'Keep Out' signs (just as in The Yard at Minneapolis). After this come more personal names like 'Bughole Cave' and 'Dead Man's Cave', but by the end of the summer they have communal names like 'Hospital' or 'Estate Agent'. There is an ever-changing range of activities "due entirely to the imagination and enterprise of the children themselves . . . at no time are they expected to continue an activity which no longer holds an interest for them . . . Care of tools is the responsibility of the children. At the end of 1958 they were still using the same tools purchased originally in 1955. Not one hammer or spade has been lost, and all repairs have been paid for out of the Nail Fund." Mr. Benjamin,

*A small space which belongs to it alone, a playground not too far from the house, providing the opportunity of contacts with children of different ages, and simple materials for creating things; that is all it needs. But these facilities are essential, and where they are lacking, the effects will be similar to that of a lack of vitamins to the body. The child starves and gets a mental beri-beri disease, psychic scurvy. Today we witness the eruption of wild destructive instincts among youth, which represent nothing more than distorted aggression which was not activated in the normal way in childhood. When denied natural outlets for activity and adventure, the child becomes prone to harmful and stupid forms of expression.*

—Professor H. ZBINDEN.

the project leader for the first years at Grimsby has thought deeply on the implications and lessons of the adventure playground movement answered sceptical critics in a memorable letter:

By what criteria are adventure playgrounds to be judged?

If it is by the disciplined activity of the uniformed organisations, then there is no doubt but we are a failure. If it is by the success of our football and table tennis teams then there is no doubt we are a flop. If it is by the enterprise and endurance called for by some of the national youth awards—then we must be ashamed.

But these are the standards set by the club movement, in one form or another, for a particular type of child. They do not attract the so-called 'unclubbable', and worse—so we read regularly—nor do they hold those children at whom they are aimed.

May I suggest that we need to examine afresh the pattern taken by the young at play and then compare it with the needs of the growing child and the adolescent. We accept that it is natural for boys and girls below a certain age to play together, and think it equally natural for them to play at being grown up. We accept, in fact, their right to imitate the world around them. Yet as soon as a child is old enough to see through the pretence and demand the reality, we separate him from his sister and try to fob him off with games and activities which seem only to put off the day when he will enter the world proper.

The adventure playgrounds in this country, new though they are, are already providing a number of lessons which we would do well to study . . . For three successive summers the children have built their dens and created Shanty Town, with its own hospital, fire station, shops, etc. As each den appeared, it became functional—and brought with it an appreciation of its nature and responsibility. . . .

The pattern of adventure playgrounds is set by the needs of the children who use them; their 'toys' include woodwork benches and sewing machines. The play of the children is modelled closely on the world around them—and as such has a meaning that is understood easily by all types. We do not believe that children can be locked up in neat little parcels labelled by age and sex. Neither do we believe that education is the prerogative of the schools.

\* \* \*

Apart from the kind of objection you will always get from people who resent anything pleasurable that doesn't make money, three kinds of objections are made to adventure playgrounds—danger, unsightliness, and expense of supervision. Happily the danger is more apparent than real, and the Secretary of the National Playing Fields Association has stated that the accident rate is lower than on orthodox playgrounds since hooliganism which results from boredom is absent. They are unsightly in the ordinary sense (and so is nine-tenths of our physical environment), for as Mr. Mays notes,

Children like disorder or find some invisible order therein. Most adults hate it. Children do not in the least mind being dirty. Most adults abhor it. Children will find a source of enjoyment in the oddest and most unlikely play material: tin cans, milk bottle tops, broken slates, soil cinders, firewood. The adult mind thinks of these things in terms of refuse and rubbish. . . .

The solution of course is to use a solid fence instead of chicken-wire, as is after all customary for adult building and demolition opera-



tions. (The Emdrup playground has a 6ft. high bank with a thicket hedge and fence on top, which also absorbs the high frequencies of children's voices).

Certainly more skilled adult assistance is needed than in a conventional playground. Indeed everything depends upon having something different from a park-keeper saying 'Don't!' or a patronising leader saying 'Do!'. Against the cost of this can be set the lower capital costs than for a conventional playground and the fact that much public goodwill, assistance as gifts of materials can usually be counted on. (Many advocates of adventure playgrounds who see them as "saving children from delinquency" would set the cost of leaders' salaries against the enormous cost of putting children in remand homes, approved schools and so on). On the question of such costs, local authorities are empowered under section 53 of the Education Act to grant aid to the cost of employing play leaders, and the adventure playgrounds in this country, mostly run by voluntary organisations, have in fact had financial help both from local councils and from the National Playing Fields Association and in some cases from philanthropic foundations.

Much could be said about the nature of adult help in an adventure playground. The NPFA report sees the person of the play leader as the over-riding factor in success besides which the other considerations fall into insignificance. (It is worth nothing that Stockholm with a population of  $\frac{3}{4}$  million has 84 play leaders and London with  $8\frac{1}{2}$  million has eight or nine). Yet as Mr. Turner in his book about Lollard shows, there is no specification for the ideal person, the most bizarre characters have been wildly successful. Discussing the early experience at Clydesdale Road, Lady Allen made the point that, although we use the word *leader* we want something different:

it must be a grown-up who exerts the minimum authority and is willing to act rather as an older friend and councillor than as a leader . . . It is these children, particularly, who so deeply enjoy the companionship of an older person who is willing to be understanding and very generous of his time. We cannot think of a good title for this individual: supervisor is wrong, connected in the children's minds with discipline; a play leader is trained for a different type of work, and for younger children. so we use the word 'leader' but it is not right.

The role of the 'leader' is catalytic, and it is apparent from the various accounts of adventure playgrounds that too few adults have had to fulfil too many roles—from social worker to begging letter writer and woodwork instructor. An informal and changing group of people, both full-time and voluntary, and including friendly neighbours and older children is evidently the happiest combination.

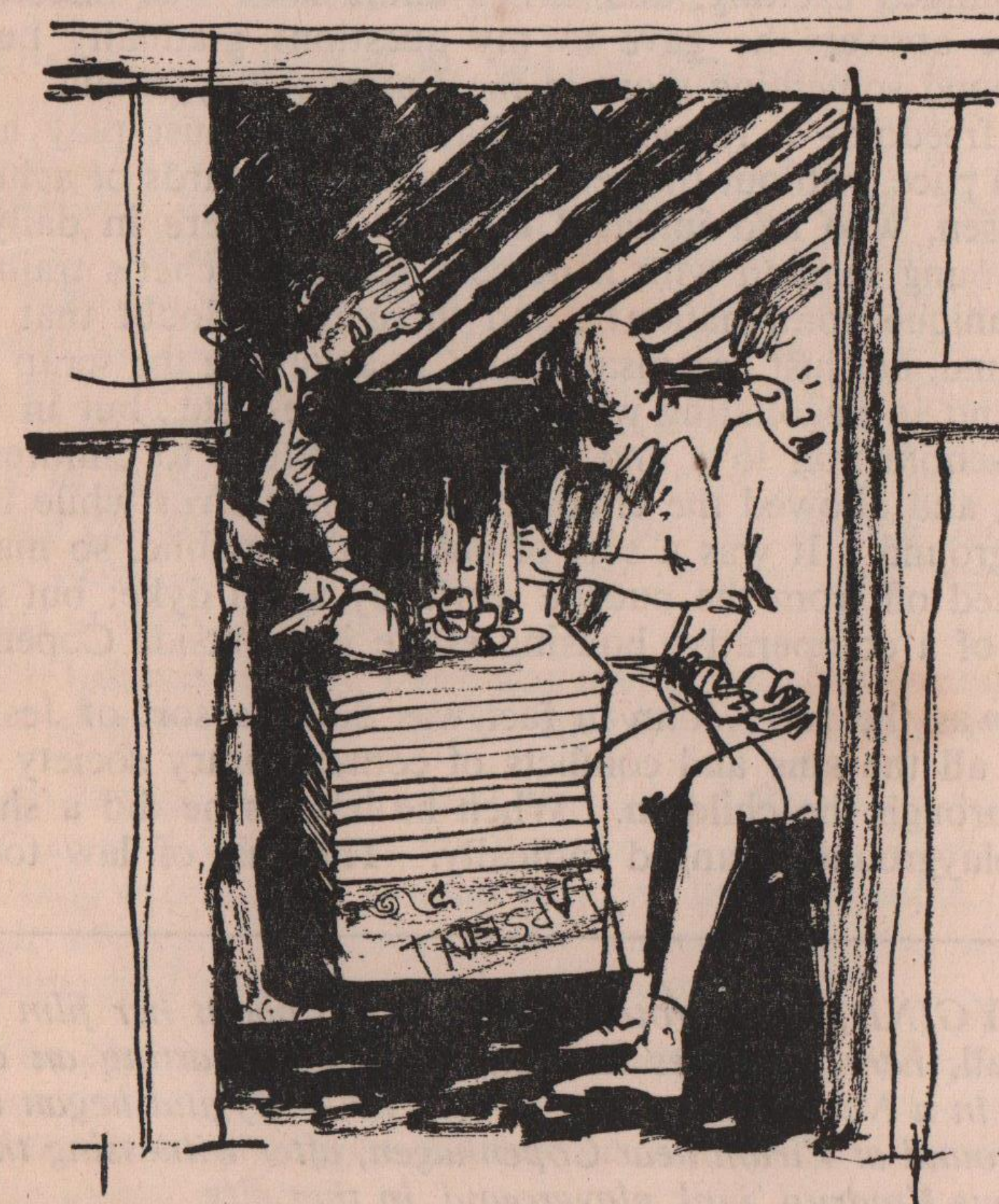
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Finally, in case it isn't obvious, why do we claim the adventure playground movement as an experiment in anarchy? Well, let us repeat yet again, Kropotkin's definition of an anarchist society as one which

seeks the most complete development of individuality combined with the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects, in all

possible degrees, for all imaginable aims; ever changing, ever modified associations which carry in themselves the elements of their durability and constantly assume new forms which answer best to the multiple aspirations of all. A society to which pre-established forms, crystallised by law, are repugnant; which looks for harmony in an ever-changing and fugitive equilibrium between a multitude of varied forces and influences of every kind, following their own course. . . .

Every one of these phrases is recognisably a description of the microcosmic society of the successful adventure playground, and it leads us to speculate on the wider applications of the idea which is in essence the old revolutionary notion of "free access to the means of production", in this instance to the means of every kind of creative and recreative activity. We think of course of the Peckham Experiment—a kind of adventure playground for people of all ages, or the kind of variations on work and leisure in freely chosen activity envisaged in Paul and Percival Goodman's *Communitas*. The adventure playground is a free society in miniature, with the same tensions and ever-changing harmonies, the same diversity and spontaneity, the same unforced growth of co-operation and release of individual qualities and communal sense, which lie dormant in a society devoted to competition and acquisitiveness.





## New Town adventure

ANNIE MYGIND

ON MY FIRST RETURN TO DENMARK after the war, my cousin Erik invited me to come and see a playground a friend of his had started. "It's a very special idea," he said, is to give town children the opportunity to play as children can in the country, and have bonfires, build huts and caves and muck around in safety; they need to be able to do these things without getting in the way of adults."

This sounded exciting, and Erik's enthusiasm was infectious—but although the answers he gave to my questions gradually built up a picture, I found something more in the Emdrup Playground. This was a sense of freedom—a recognition that children must play and work at their own pace, without the setting of adult standards of achievement. John Bertelsen, who had initiated the idea was there in daily charge. He was a young seaman with a nursery school teacher's training (fantastic and unique combination!), and there is no doubt that he made the playground, not just organisationally, in acquiring the scrap materials and tools, and in negotiating with the authorities, etc., but in the sense that his unsentimental love and egalitarian attitude to children set the atmosphere, and allowed the children to be *themselves* while they were in the playground. It was a sort of children's republic, so many yards square, fenced off from the outside world by a tall dyke; but set in the "kingdom" of a co-operative housing estate just outside Copenhagen.

There was the rub: John in fact was doing a sort of Jesus Christ act—taking all the sins and conflicts of contemporary society upon his shoulders through the children. When he left, as he did a short while later, the playground changed radically. The rule of law took over:

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ANNIE MYGIND, who wrote in ANARCHY 6 about her film *Circus at Clopton Hall*, here describes her experiences in starting an adventure playground in a New Town. Her cousin Erik Mygind began the 'Cave City' playground at Virum near Copenhagen, after witnessing the success of the famous Emdrup 'junk playground' in that city.

it was no longer a children's republic, but an extension of the housing estate.

But his example and vision inspired others—there were many visitors from abroad. Eight years later I saw the opportunity of starting such a playground in an English New Town. Among the neat, ordered rows of front gardens with their rosebushes and little lawns there were a small number of children who rebelled against the hire-purchase-washing-machine culture with unfortunate results for the rosebushes. Surely if their energies could be canalised in the right setting, *i.e.* a playground without adult rosebushes where they could dig and splash and build and make bonfires to their heart's content, the parents would be able to cultivate their gardens in peace and the children would be happy?

It took a year's hard work by a small band of enthusiasts to explain the idea of the playground, negotiate with the authorities, collect money from those who were willing to give, scout out tools from remote surplus stores, and find a playground leader, a site, scrap materials, get lavatories built, fencing and a hut. The support of Lady Allen of Hurtwood (who charmed us all when she came to give a lecture to the Community Association), as well as that of the National Playing Fields Association, was a great help, and the playground was opened in 1955.

The children flocked in, and the site, which was rough grassland, in a short while looked like a peacefield battlefield; earth dug up enthusiastically; houses built (the best of them by a gang with the reputation for smashing lamp-standards); potatoes roasted on bonfires; and they came back again and again. It was difficult to gauge local reactions—there were pictures and reports in the local press, polite and very mildly appreciative. But also "cartoons" depicting vicious behaviour and vandalism. (One child in fact did start to hack the bark off a venerable tree. The explanation that this would kill the tree satisfied him sufficiently to make him stop). Some mothers would say "This is a good idea, the children like it. *They* should have started one years ago" (!) Others wouldn't let their kids come because they were afraid they'd get hurt or dirty or both.

On balance though, there was a sense of achievement: it was worth while—in spite of press attacks, snobbery and minor crises.

But the small achievement highlighted the social disease around us. Much support was given for its prestige value. There was very little direct help except from a small band of devoted people. There was not enough money. The playground leader, who was no Jesus Christ, was underpaid and only lasted one season.

The children, although purposefully active, did not find that sense of easy freedom that we saw at Emdrup. One saw in fact that this was only a very ragged plaster on one social wound—the negative attitude to our children.



# Adventure in Lollard Street

**SHEILA BESKINE**

"AW—THAT'S NOT SHEILA IS IT? GOOD GOD!" Arriving for another interlude at Lollard, I meet the Masher, 17, in the Lambeth Walk, and receive his usual welcome. How long I stay this time depends on where I can find to sleep. Last time I was able to stay, on condition I fed the cat, at the top of a very rocky building. Like the rows of squashed, grey little houses, the place was due for demolition in 1939, and I believed it when the floor shook to my walk and rattled the windows. The girl in the "Top Value" food store smiles: she knows me and the grubby-handed children who call religiously for Oxo tins for our cooking and marbling. The stall man on the corner gives me a little grin and I turn into Wake Street to a noisier welcome from some of the smaller Clarks and Haleys.

I dump my rucksack on the platform in the Hut and sink down to be clambered over by various small children, and some older girls who want to "do my hair". I am presented with another Spearmint Chew, this time a *whole* one. When I first came as a student I was, like every other visitor, a subject of unhidden curiosity. A little girl whispered "Hasn't Sheila got *long* hair, Mr. Turner? But she's an *artist*, isn't she?" I'd always wanted to try jiving and had never plucked up the courage, but here one *could* and the girls had patiently taught me their dead set little pattern, but soon found my variations impossible to partner; and bare feet with the hair, which of course fell down, convinced them I was "Bowey" (pre-beatnik term for bohemian).

Today my rucksack contained, besides the usual fascinations of sketchbook and edibles, a marvellous lump of green glassy substance, very heavy, which I'd found half buried in a north Essex field, and

---

*SHEILA BESKINE, who teaches in a secondary modern school, was one of the voluntary helpers at the Lollard Adventure Playground in Lambeth, which was recently described in H. S. Turner's book Something Extraordinary (Michael Joseph). She edits the newsletter of the National Association of Recreation Leaders.*

hopefully suspected to be a piece of meteorite. So we took it to the museums to be identified, and we (myself and three boys of vaguely twelve) ended up in a very learned basement of the Natural History Museum. In no time at all our precious meteorite, with its popping bubbles and whorlings all suddenly stilled, was identified rather flatly, as a piece of roadstone probably from Fords at Dagenham. Anyway, they'd signed the Enquirers' Book and gone through a specially unlocked door, and we spent the rest of the morning in the Science Museum.

Peter, who had just finished his apprenticeship, was the only local person I met who helped at all regularly, spending most of the day in the workshop with a group of younger boys, emerging at dinner time for our co-operative cooking in Oxo tins, which became the rage. Today we had a "smashing" dinner, admired by many, and thus diminished: onions with burnt sausage bits greasily whammed in between thick lumps of bread, and then greengages, which were cheap. Other days we cooked mackerel or eggs. Once when it was hopeless trying to get myself any dinner (though there was always the Eel and Pie shop up the Walk), we had a hot dog session, very successful, at cost price (which varied according to face and pocket).

Another fire activity which magnetised the younger children was "Tie-Dyeing", and Paul, a little crippled Greek boy, was a most enthusiastic helper, often collecting firewood from the fruit stalls in the Walk. We tied up stones in bits of old shirt and then boiled up the dye, which I had got as free samples, and the cloth was attended to with much prodding and stirring. We hung them up, like so much brightly coloured seaweed, on sticks wedged into the netting fence to dry in the sun, soon to be untied, to discover, delightedly, the white circles. The interest caught on well, and one of the big boys, not realising that this could almost come under the heading of "needlework" and therefore be cissy, summed up the example as being "very flash". Then the older girls got interested. The fact that the idea comes from India and Africa convinced them that it was as nuts as me, though nice. But the one enamel bowl got stoned in when I didn't put it away, and in any case no one brought any more cloth.

Mr. Turner, the warden, has brought his violin today, and we went to the workshop to listen. Rita Quinn made a quaint little drawing of him, and then one of me, adorned with little circular bosoms. Sylvia was looking at the drawings over my shoulder. "Look at *them*, Sheila." "What's wrong with them?" "She's drawn *them*!" she said, pointing either side of her chest, in such a sweet way, not aggressive. "What's wrong with that, Sylvie?" "It's *dirty*," she whispered. "Why?". Shoulder shrug. Sylvia is 7, one of a family of seven children (including one by "uncle") ranging from the baby last Christmas to Jimmy who is 9. One day the father told us with the air of a dutiful parent, "I only reckon to drink 4 pints a day when I'm not working. I drink 10 when I am."

Once, by accidental invitation, I spent an evening in their kitchen. Sylvie had been sent to ask if I'd like a cup of tea (I was in the Hut



on my own) and I assumed this meant I must come and get it. There was a hasty and embarrassing tidying up, and then I was allowed to creep in. Dad and the baby were asleep in the front room. The space was mainly taken up by a solid table covered with a green chenille cloth on which was a bottle of milk and some bread and two of the smaller children with the breadknife. The walls were all peeled paper with bits of wood and plaster exposed in places. In the space between the table front and the oven against the wall were two chairs, where Sylvie's Mum and I sat. The pram was squashed into the space between the table side and the wall, and the space on the other side was taken up by the sink. The other children were around and between us, fidgetting, laughing, squabbling or scribbling on the wall. I had protested about the clearing up for me, and she now seemed anxious to keep me there, telling me about the terrible rent and the terrible houses and the cheek of the Council, while we drank our tea. One of the rooms upstairs was quite unusable, she said, and that left 3 out of 4. They were in the list for a new flat in Camberwell, but I wondered how that would improve the difficulties basically due to very poor intelligence.

Yet Sylvie is a much happier child than Rita, who at 8 is terribly distorted: no love would suffice unless she could endlessly demand the whole person. "She has had it in a big way". The amount of love within a home is the only valid means of valuing it. This is here in many homes, though often under guises not easily penetrated by people from a different upbringing, and often an extensive network of aunts and uncles within the locality is included.

I remember a particular day in the holidays when I'd been home for a few days. Almost as soon as I reappeared Rita triumphantly shadowed me. She was more claimative than usual and after we'd been shopping she waited tirelessly outside the door of the wobbly house where I was staying, while I went upstairs to unpack and eat. Then she started calling me. I couldn't open the windows, long sealed for safety and in any case they were too far back for me to see the pavement. So I went down and explained to her that I couldn't let her in because it wasn't my house, and tried to get her to go back to the Playground, or go and collect egg cartons in the shops for making paint divisions in Oxo tins. After another session of calling me she demanded I went home with her. I promised I would if she was sure Mummy wouldn't mind, but she must go back to the Playground for half an hour.

The atmosphere at her home was very awkward at first. I tried to dispel the *lady* idea straight away; I was just Sheila from the Playground. I was a bit afraid of Dad at first, and noticed uneasily the way he grabbed Rita in when she was introducing me, presented on the doorstep, as though he was afraid she might let them down. I stressed that I'd had tea, but they insisted that I share their paste sandwiches, which were good. Somehow the awkwardness disappeared and I listened to many self-assurance stories and played draughts with

various members of the family. They seemed to have much more living space than Sylvie's family; the room was lit by a single gas mantle, and when anyone left the room or went upstairs to fetch something for Daddy (who seemed to have everything done for him), they took a torch. The room seemed to be peaceful and the children happy enough, but there were little incidents that made me wonder how apathetic Mum had become, and how used to it and unsurprised the children were.

When all but the oldest girls had gone to bed, I asked, as far as I dared, why Rita was so much more "nervy" than the others. "Well she's very highly-strung," and there followed a long story of her schoolmaster, which sounded terrible to me, but if it were true, either they as parents were too dim to tell him anything, or the headmaster was dead to his job. But oh yes, she's been to *County Hall* about it. I wondered.

I had to learn to wonder. Didn't she realise how Rita always has a very difficult time with other children at Lollard, and doubtless at school as well, because she, in particular, is always so *dirty*. I haven't the sureness or tact then to try to talk to her mother. In any case I think it would come to a fight against her booze, and that there is probably more of "I can't be bothered" than I was allowed to see. At wash time the children used a large china bowl in the same room, one kettle of water, one *black* towel, and one sponge. A case of "you had it last, where is it?" This sort of dirtiness was very different from simply getting clothes filthy and torn at Lollard, and different from an acceptable "that'll have to do for today".

It didn't fit in with Mum's stories of her own school days, and having been Head Girl for three years running. I sensed that this was not a matter of lying, but a kind of wishful thinking, giving a mask of confidence to face living in a situation of unconsciously realised failure.

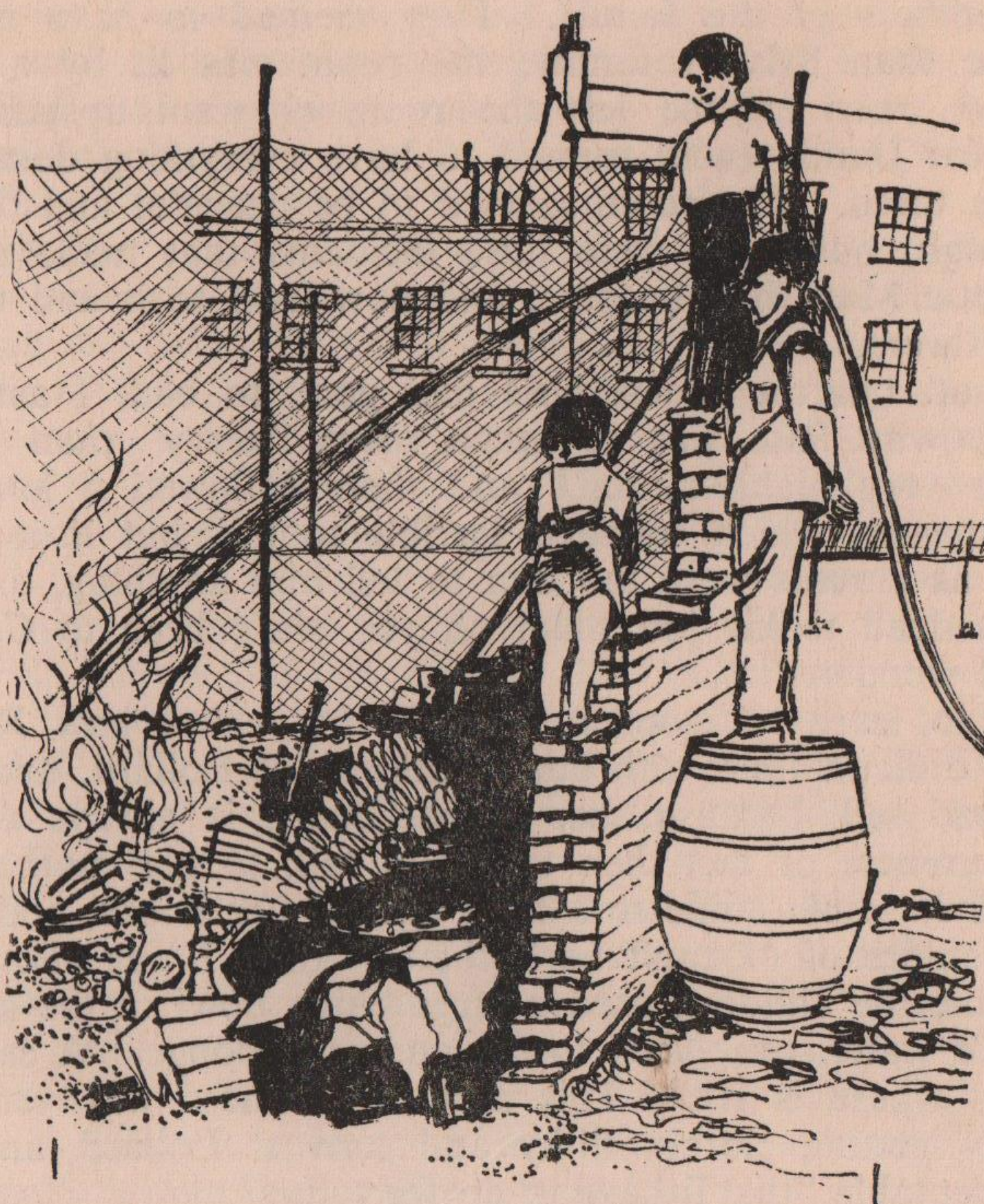
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We had another fire, to burn the ox-head (under threat from the warden) which the butcher had kept for me. (I thought to rescue the skull—I love skulls). I left it on a corner shelf in the main hut, covered with newspaper so the nursery children wouldn't be frightened, for its eyes were quite horrible. I came back later to find it dressed in a green woolly cap, a white silky scarf a daffodil and a newspaper ruffle. It looked quite transformed.

A crash through the hut door—Masher of course—as I am doodling on the piano. "Evening Mozart!" with no change of expression whatsoever. The greeting almost held some hidden respect. He only just remembered he was pally tonight and threw me his evening paper, which he couldn't read, and was satisfied that I agreed with him that the new Lonnie Donegan record was good.

The potholes by the swings have just been rediscovered, with much excitement when some *bones* were found, chicken-like, but with *teeth*. The Playground is fuller tonight—is there nothing good on





telly? Excavations are still going strong at 7.30: we close at 8 p.m. Sometimes, on such nights, there is time to talk to the warden about the children and the place. Our best perch was on the scenery steps (sent us by Ealing Studios) outside the train, a position from which we could "keep eye" over most of the  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres. I often drew while listening, (it was a way of hearing more!). Tonight's drawing was better than usual, and the leathr-jacket boys, wandering off, demanded to see it of course. There was general agreement that it was good. Then Charlie came over, always with a naughty grin for me. I sat back so I could watchback so I could watch his face—it went dead serious in admiration and disbelief mingled. "Cor! . . . it's Mr. Turner! Cor! It's fucking great!" This was obviously the greatest credit his vocabulary could give, and was quite sincere. "It's a smashing likeness." I laughed; we all did. Usually they check anything 'bad' coming out in front of me or Mr. Turner.

I am sitting again on the large wooden step, with my arm around little Greek Ida who has had a nasty bash on her head. She seems quite content to sit beside me while I scribble, not looking at her or speaking to her. Pamela is standing in the Hut door, licking her ice cream, dealing out malicious glares to Ida; it was she who knocked her

over. She's terribly spiteful; both her parents are practically mentally deficient. The WVS arranges children's holidays, and this year she went with Sylvie and another child, but she was so difficult with the others that she was sent home. This morning I made a special point of giving her a nice smile and decent bits of paper to draw on, and she was fairly reasonable. But I wonder what she will do when she is older; she is quite unlovable. Even Rita had moments when I thought I could help her. She was chosen for the WVS holiday too, but for some reason her father refused, and then changed his mind when it was too late. (The only cost asked was the child's normal Family Allowance).

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The essence of the Adventure Playground as I knew it was not merely its being an area of rough ground sporting an unorthodox collection of playthings, nor even the freedom from petty rules. It was the belongingness resulting from the struggle for it in which the children, or their older brothers and sisters, had taken part. Poverty was a strength of the Adventure Playground. As warden you'd suddenly remember: "My God! Five pounds due for the water rate at the end of the month!" You know the committee certainly wouldn't have any money, so somehow you had to raise it. When you needed wood for camp building, you couldn't send in an order for it, you had to find a local timber merchant and somehow get round him, giving the reasons. When the wood comes it's an absolute triumph. The installation of the phone at Lollard was an amazing example. Children came in just to look at this lovely black thing, to fondle it and hear it purr. "Cor, Blimey! We've got a bleeding telephone now," said Masher.

*Struggle* produces a whole range of human emotions that are otherwise absent. Without it the human spirit becomes apathetic and dies. Hence the "community spirit" of wartime that people always remark about. Also the bewildered fathers who thought they fought for the children of the future. Tradition is far too abstract. Each generation, each individual, needs to be involved in his own struggle for something. This is why freedom *to change* is so important in any community. One of Lollard's favourite activities was making and mending rules.

There is a widespread and childish theory that because there is *alleged* to be no material need to cause juvenile delinquency, there is no "excuse" for it, and therefore today's young people are worthless, etc. Surely it is simply that new living feet are squashed into very old boots, instead of being allowed to wear their own shoes or sandals, with plenty of toe-wiggling space and room for growth. How stupid is the surprise when the new feet grow social corns and bunions! Only the feeble stop growing altogether. So, in 1961, we have the Anti-Violence League . . . the tooth-for-tooth types.

In 1895 Oscar Wilde optimistically wrote that "When each member of the community has sufficient for his wants, and is not interfered with



by his neighbour, it will not be an object of any interest to him to interfere with anyone else . . . " Today we are not so much affected by the physical starvation which Wilde saw as causing so much "crime". We are in a new *emotional* starvation.

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The development of Play Parks as a kind of halfway house between the conventional asphalt-and-swings playground and the radical conception of the Adventure Playground, is of course a good thing as far as it goes, but even the most attractive architect-designed children's parks in Sweden, Germany and elsewhere have, to me, the most important thing missing. Things are provided and arranged for their pleasantness to the adult eye, but *atmosphere* of the personal kind can never be built, and it is easy to associate it with "eyesores". This is simply because voluntary organisations are never rich, a fact which is also their strength because it eliminates interference.

A vast administrative set-up automatically becomes "Them". There is far less care of equipment and much more stealing. At Charlton Play Park the leaders have a pawnshop deposit system to ensure that barrows, balls, chalks, etc. are returned. One day when I was there some children ran up to me: "Miss, a boy's just thrown a barrow over the wall!" He'd also climbed over a high brick wall to the road and disappeared. The leader checked the barrows: there were two missing. The place had been open a week and everything was new. About an hour later an elderly gentleman came up to the hut with both barrows, damaged, one of them wrecked. He'd stopped two boys in his road and guessed where they belonged. We were surprised that he knew of the Play Park and were grateful. Charlton (Blackheath) is hardly a "poor" district.

Because the LCC is "Them" and is also huge, it merges in many people's minds with the other Thems, like Income Tax, the Rates, the Government. They are "sue-able" establishments to get the better of, to be hostile to. The Adventure Playground is not; it is a personal thing in their midst which they have come to respect and value. It is even protected by them. It is often unworkable because unsupported. Offers of support invariably meant attempts to influence, to control, policy. We often met the idea that a benefactor could buy his way into the committee, and had a *right* to do so. (A reflection of the stocks and shares mentality.)

The financial ideal would be to be granted the bare running costs, covering sanitation, lighting, heating, salaries and maintenance of any hard surface; with the day-to-day things like paint, wood, nails, tools, etc., being covered by the children's own efforts. At one time at Lollard there was talk of a fantastic sum of money being given by an impressed and well-meaning visitor. In the warden's words, "the offer terrified me—it would have killed the place quicker than anything—unless I could have given it out at about 2½d. a day, when it would have lasted for years."

The Adventure Playground could be invaluable for developing

personality in a poor or apathetic area. The disadvantage at Lollard was the dependency upon the warden which began to appear in some of the older boys of 17 to 20. He became to them a kind of god. This is unlikely to happen on a Play Park because everything is far less personal and struggle-free. Also because there are more play-leaders and the boys would probably not stay so long, even if the present age limit of 16 did not exist.



The advantage of the Adventure Playground is mainly psychological: its direct human contact with people's emotions. The warden, or whatever he calls himself, has to live with the families in the neighbourhood. "He's got to attend their funerals, their births, weep with them, and on Sunday console some woman whose man has just gone off with some other woman . . . " There are no convenient hours. Play Parks on the other hand are cut off at the root and operate on a superficial level. The Play Park Leader must record each day's attendances for the LCC's staffing and equipment quotas. "80 children present . . . " Any children. The Play Park man is even discouraged from any real interest in individual children because it would be inconvenient to the monster organisation with all its different departments. If the leader does become concerned over some child or family, and thinks something could be done he is expected to report it to the Play Parks Organiser, who, in turn, would be expected to refer it to the appropriate department: Child Welfare, Housing, Health, etc. But human nature is not designed to be organised by a system of pigeon holes. It is precisely



because the leader is known and trusted that he is able, perhaps, to influence people. Quite apart from the fact that some parents are of unbelievably low intelligence, many are suspicious, even scornful, of advice from some abstract authority.

The Play Centres, on school premises, have been run for many years, drawing children up to the age of fifteen from the streets to a variety of indoor activities and organised games. The new Play Parks are a definite advance, using some of the features of the Adventure Playground, plus organised games as wanted. But activities like camp-fire building and so on cannot all be adopted at once for fear of a public outcry about the mess; there were even some warning complaints at one Play Park about the bits of stick the children were leaving on the grass from the wattle fence pieces they'd been using for building houses. At Brockwell Park the ground is much more interesting, being hilly and rough instead of like a lawn, with bushes at the bottom. An old willow tree there promised well for climbing, so a man was sent to trim it. He lopped all the branches off clean to the trunk, producing a useless wooden obelisk.

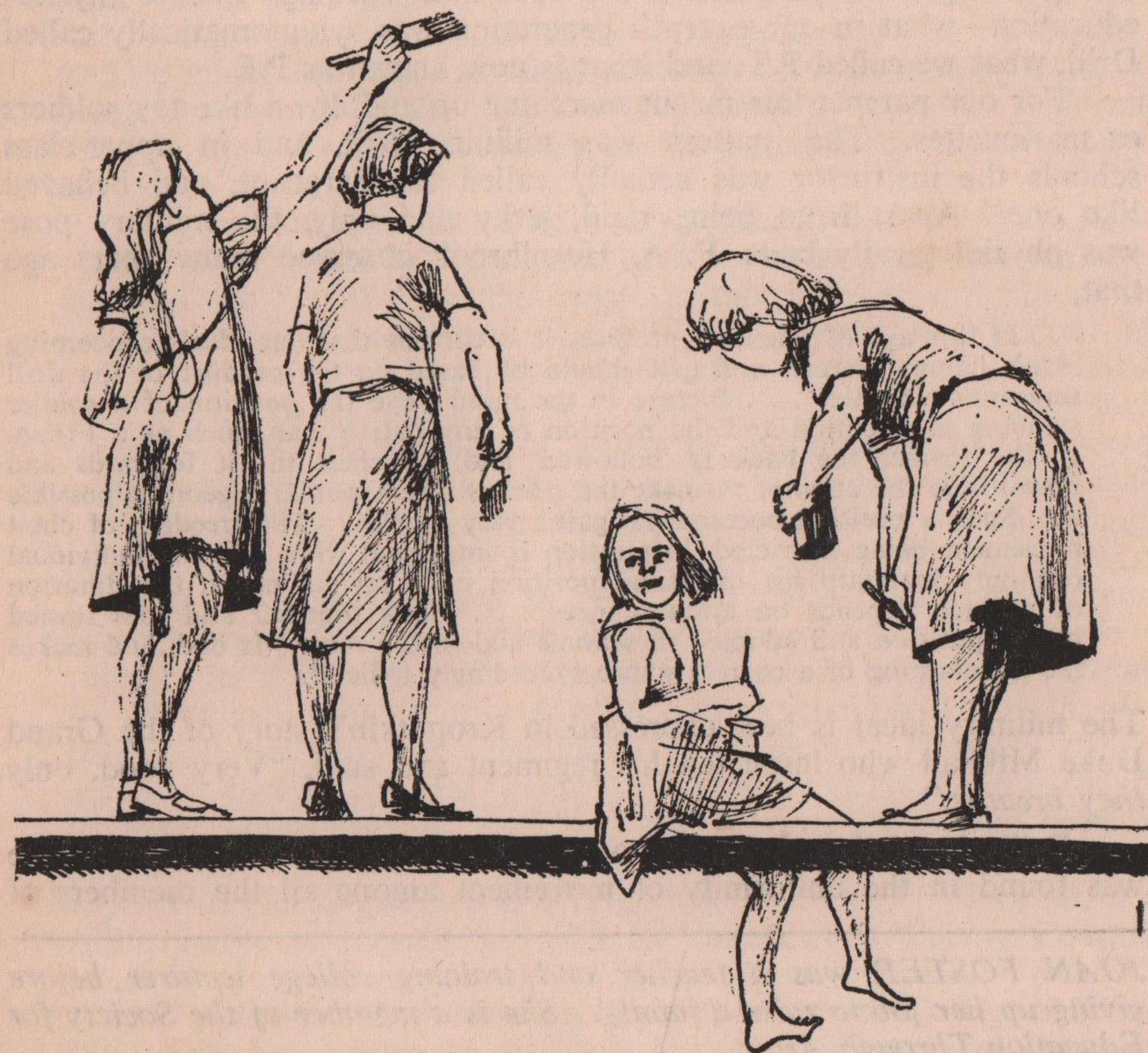
Lollard was a *genuine community*: by that I mean it was a place where anybody could fit in, making their own little niche, and through this security, could be able to peep out, creep out, or run out altogether, just as Michael, the mongol boy in Heather Sutton's film was able to fit into the village where he lived. Helpers who came were able to present themselves as they really were. For me at least this meant that much more valuable contacts could be made. I spent most of my first weeks there absorbing the *honesty* of these children and their relationship with the warden and helpers. I felt I wasn't doing anything at all, but then I saw that, simply by being there, the children and the older boys and girls were getting to know a new and different personality. You didn't have to stand on the grass with a whistle and a ball and organise games. You could just start doing something, unIntroduced—sketching, knitting, excavating for interesting relics in the skeletons of burnt mattresses—in no time you had followers and could arrange for continuing operations tomorrow. And of course you became involved in the delights and problems of these young people. (If only education could be based on this voluntary principle instead of on that of the policeman: it is no new discovery—see Homer Lane or A. S. Neill). And there was no need to be frightened when there was a lull and no-one wanted to do anything. Some days the place was bustling with camp builders and fire makers, and at other times there appeared to be very little going on, but the fact that the place was there was its value.

The reasons for success and failure are purely emotional. Lollard has a fantastic spontaneous lease of life, which, like Emdrup, made it known all over the world. And then the spirit went and the thing slowly collapsed. While I was still there one was aware of this decline. Things got pinched—my camera with a roll of used film was my most disillusioning loss. Children are ourselves inside-out. Once the spirit

has gone, they get sticks, they throw, they burn: the thing is dead, so destroy it, it isn't living any more.

When Mr. Turner took over from an earlier warden he had been told, "Unless you can do anything with it, the place is doomed." His successor was expected to carry on a spirit which had died, and it was not her fault that she could not stop this onrush of breaking. She could only have brought it off by bringing in new helpers and winning over a fresh nucleus of children; but the often unhealthy loyalty of the older boys to her predecessor and the fact that she was a woman, made it virtually impossible. Visitors came and spent two or three hours with us, and then went off enthusiastically to start their own places, with perhaps a romantic view of our activity but no awareness of the emotional problems.

Not long after the place was closed, the Hut was burnt down in the night. While it lasted it was indeed "something extraordinary". The workshop was the most rewarding example of the wave of possessive care these boys showed. "It wouldn't have lasted a week, elsewhere in this district."





# The revolution in physical education

JOAN FOSTER

IN A WELL-KNOWN BOOK the changes seen in the British educational system in this century have been described as "the silent social revolution." Anarchists, looking for fundamental changes in the structure of society, would be more than a little sceptical of such a description, but there is one field of education where the revolution in theory and to a growing extent in practice, has been most striking: that of physical education—what in our parent's generation was symptomatically called Drill, what we called P.T. and what is now known as P.E.

For our parents this meant marching up and down like toy soldiers or marionettes. The pattern was military drill, and in upper-class schools the instructor was actually called the Sergeant, and behaved like one. Apart from being rigid, jerky and ugly, the military pose was physiologically bad: F. A. Hornibrook observed many years ago that,

In this age of scientific progress it is curious that our ideals concerning man's figure, posture, and gait should be based on the product of the drill sergeant's activities . . . Picture in the mind's eye the position of a soldier standing at attention and the position of any native man, such as a Fijian. In the former the back is 'hollowed' and the chest thrust forwards and upwards in the attempt to make the man as like a pouter pigeon as possible . . . Such a position becomes fatiguing very quickly. The freedom of chest movement being restricted, inspiration is interfered with, and the individual can only maintain his unnatural position by a mental effort, the duration of which depends on circumstances . . . Heels together and toes turned out (a position still adopted in schools and in the Army) is bad, and makes the maintaining of a correct stance exceedingly difficult.

The military ideal is best expressed in Kropotkin's story of the Grand Duke Mikhail who inspected his regiment and said, "Very good, only they breathe."

Drill was followed by "physical jerks" in which the prime virtue was found in the uniformity of movement among all the members of

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the class, even though it might consist of children of all shapes and sizes, and in that peculiarly military method of keeping people on their toes—the delayed word of command. In gymnastic work, first German and then Swedish, and finally Danish gymnastics were in vogue, and anyone who attended a grammar school before the war can remember the tedium of those hours in the expensively equipped gymnasium in which—as in cricket—most of the class's time was spent standing around waiting for their turn to perform some particular evolution. Apart from the wastage of the pupil's time, and the torture of the fat or physically inept child, this period gave us that dreadful stereotype—the Gym Mistress. As Miss Crabbe, the principal of one of our best Colleges of Physical Education observed:

The gym mistress used to be hearty, bossy, the born leader who rides roughshod over the meek and nervous; the tomboy, who later becomes the 'hockey hag', the organiser of assembly, speech days and school lectures—the one with the carrying voice and the good disciplinarian.

Today we have quite a different picture, and a different conception of the instructor, who does not raise her voice, and judges her success not on how many pupils can jump 4ft. 10in. or climb to the top of a rope, but as Miss Crabbe says, "by the number who have felt success and pleasure in some way and to some degree through body movement", and we might add (since physical education is really nothing to do with competitive sport or the gladiatorial training of Olympic performers) that we can measure her success in the poise, grace and economy of movement of her pupils.

The great changes which have taken place in theory and are steadily ousting older methods in practice have come, as such changes always do from the "cranks" on the fringe; in this instance with the concern for the quality of movement as such. Probably the most fruitful influences from the outside on physical education have been Rudolf Laban's ideas on the dance and those of F. M. Alexander and his disciples, on posture. They are parallel of course to the general change, however partially and spasmodically achieved so far, to "child-centred" education.

The distance travelled in officially accepted ideas in one generation can be seen by comparing the Board of Education's *Syllabus of Physical Training for Schools* issued in 1933, with the Ministry of Education's manual on physical education in the primary school, issued in two volumes in 1952 and 1953. The first volume *Moving and Growing* is an absorbing study of the physical and psychological growth of the child and his physical capabilities. The second, *Planning the Programme*, applied to class work the principles derived from the first, modestly noting that it provided, "for those teachers who need it, a nucleus of material . . . both teachers and children will, no doubt, expand the ideas given, and evolve their own . . ." Even so, it was still possible as recently as 1954 for the London County Council to issue for its teachers a book called *Syllabus of Physical Training for Infants' Schools*. Ruth Morison of the I. M. Marsh College of Physical Education, has written an excellent pamphlet, *Educational Gymnastics*,



especially for teachers "who were trained in the Swedish System of Gymnastics and who are puzzled by the present day trends in Physical Education", in which she singles out the two great changes of the last few years as, firstly, that "we no longer think merely of giving instruction to classes but we set out to provide the environment, create the atmosphere and give the stimulus which will help the individual to grow and develop naturally" and secondly that instead of following 'systems' of set exercises "designed to suit the hypothetical average", and "making the whole class as nearly identical as possible in their movements, and in following a common 'rhythm'," the teacher is no longer concerned with preconstructed exercises "because each individual selects her own way and to help her through this way of moving."

When an account in the *Times Educational Supplement* on the change in approach declared that

A close study of children's natural movements, the use of their innate impulses to play and to dance, the encouragement of spontaneity and creativity, an atmosphere of permissiveness and informality, and a resolve to learn from the children themselves how to educate them—these are the marks of a modern programme of physical education for young children.

it called forth the comment that a serious omission from this list was "the teaching of fundamental skills such as running, jumping, landing, catching and throwing" since it does not follow that, without specific direction, children will perform them well or, in the case of some of them, even safely. This may be perfectly true, with the proviso that the child will be eager to perfect these skills when it is ready for them, and when they have a meaning and purpose for the individual child. An investigation to measure the effect of coaching in the junior school upon ultimate performance in the secondary school (in the case of soccer) printed as an appendix to M. W. Randall's *Modern Ideas on Physical Education* shows no significant relationship. The child learns when it is ready to learn.

On this question of correcting defects of posture and movement, the methods used by J. V. Fenton, a primary school headmaster, developed from the work of the late Charles Neil of the Re-education Centre, were described by him in an article in *The New Era* for Sept.-Oct. 1958, as follows:—

Whilst the rest of the class is distributed about the field or hall on various apparatus, one group is having specific instruction in a simple point of body mechanics. The teacher has chosen movement at the hip joint as the subject of the lesson and demonstrates the 'closing the lid of the box' action in leaning forward, while sitting. He then demonstrates distortions of this simple movement that involve the body in unnecessary strain. He encourages his group to suggest what is at fault. This they do with enjoyment and interest. He asks one or two to demonstrate 'right and wrong ways'. The children are highly inventive of wrong ways and find it fun; but all the time they are becoming increasingly aware that there is *choice* in the way one uses one's body.

Consciousness of choice is the first essential of freedom in any

sphere, and in a way, we can describe the object of all physical education as the *liberation* of the body.

Swimming, more than anything else, consists of the discovery of the art of perfect movement, and with the coming of cheap fibreglass pools there is now no reason, except inertia or the feeling that "the authorities" are responsible for such things, why parents' associations or Parent-Teacher associations, should not provide a learners' pool at every primary school.

Just like the adventure playground, the new approach to physical education is revolutionary in that it seeks to provide for individual needs and individual self-selected activity. But can we call this an anarchist revolution, a revolution which can claim that the interweaving of this ever-changing variety of individual activities will produce a social harmony without an externally imposed authority? I am indebted to the editor of this magazine for the marvellous description of a really modern gymnasium at work, given in the book *The Peckham Experiment*, which epitomises the social aspect of this revolution. The authors, Innes Pearse and Lucy Crocker, are describing the gymnasium at the Peckham Health Centre—before the war, when in the schools we were still lining up our pupils in teams for Swedish gym. In *their* gymnasium, the observer saw

boys and girls moving in every direction at varying speeds, swinging on ropes suspended from the ceiling, running after balls and each other, climbing, sliding, jumping—all this activity proceeding without bumps or crashes, each child moving with unerring accuracy according to its own subjective purpose, without collision, deliberate avoidance or retreat.

And did this anarchy result in chaos? Not at all, for if we go on to study this activity from the point of view of a child who goes into it, we see that:

He goes in and learns unaided to swing and to climb, to balance, to leap. As he does all these things he is acquiring facility in the use of his body. The boy who swings from rope to horse, leaping back again to the swinging rope, is learning by his eyes, muscles, joints and by every sense organ he has, to judge, to estimate, to *know*. The other twenty-nine boys and girls in the gymnasium are all as active as he, some of them in his immediate vicinity. But as he swings he does not *avoid*. He swings *where there is space*—a very important distinction—and in doing so he threads his way among his twenty-nine fellows. Using all his faculties, he is aware of the total situation in that gymnasium—of his own swinging and of his fellows' actions. He does not shout to the others to stop, to wait or to move from him—not that there is silence, for running conversations across the hall are kept up as he speeds through the air.

But this 'education' in the live use of all his senses can only come if his twenty-nine fellows are also free and active. If the room were cleared and twenty-nine boys sat at the side silent while he swung, we should in effect be saying to him—to his legs, body, eyes—"You give all your attention to swinging; we'll keep the rest of the world away"—in fact—"Be as egotistical as you like". By so reducing the diversity in the environment we should be preventing his learning to apprehend and to move in a complex situation. We should in effect be saying—"Only do this and this; you can't be expected to do more". Is it any wonder that he comes to behave as though it is all



he *can* do? By the existing methods of teaching we are in fact inducing the child's *inco-ordination* in society.

We have begun to realise this, and to create these conditions of freedom in physical education, which, in one small field, can be described as an anarchist society in miniature. What was once by far the most authoritarian, and indeed militaristic, subject in education, is becoming the most free and libertarian. Can such a change be entirely without influence in other fields of life?

## Where Can They Play?

(Following the publication of the report "Two to Five in High Flats", two students wrote to the Guardian as follows):

As students at the City of Leicester Training College (for teachers) we have recently undertaken an investigation into young children's play and provision made for it. Our inquiries—during the summer vacation—covered 200 families with children aged from 2 to 15, in old and new housing estates, villages and towns in districts from Kent to Lancashire.

In towns the uses children like—and need—to make of open spaces (where they exist) were very often prohibited: "No ball games," "No bicycles," "Keep off the grass." In villages the children were more fortunate in natural surroundings but even less official provision was made for them, particularly for adolescents.

In housing estates conditions varied. New estates, where more and more people are living, seemed the worst off because less space for communal use or for private gardens can be afforded since the pressure for actual dwellings is so great. On old and new estates there were garden-proud parents who put the appearance of their gardens before the needs of their children. Only on one privately built estate had the parents campaigned for extra space to be left for play as well as their own gardens. In no cases were there any provisions for supervised play places for children under 5.

Following our investigation we started a play centre at the college where children aged from 5 to 12 can cook, sew, paint or model with clay, dance, play in the gymnasium, in the 'Wendy House', or with sand, among other things. We opened in September with an attendance of 35 children from the neighbourhood. After six months the numbers have risen to 108 and the children now come from a radius of three miles. This seems a strong indication that the children do not have enough or sufficiently varied opportunities for free play of the kind they want close at hand.

Your article has drawn attention to the lack or adequate provision for small children "living high". Our enquiries and experiences have discovered that there are similar inadequacies for a much wider age range and in a variety of housing situations.

Scraptoft, Leicester.

H. STEWART.  
M. E. FERGUSON.

## Observations on Anarchy 4

### Where the Shoe Pinches

I think, as a socialist, I would make two comments. First, how do you make institutions as democratic as possible when you have to keep them going? It is not sufficient to be just *against* things, and this involves educating people in new knowledge and teaching people to observe facts and take notice of them.

Secondly, the community has to operate *against* fractional power, including (as you so rightly say) the family. I am utterly opposed to Peter Townsend's view because the family is extremely limiting and quite unsuited as a vehicle of the liberation of the human spirit. I quite agree with Bernard Shaw. If this is so, then *individualism* is quite an inadequate doctrine. Indeed, *laissez-faire* is what we have always been against.

Therefore, what do we do? Perhaps I haven't understood the line of argument; but as it stands I find myself pro-Lady Wootton, and anti-anarchy.

University of London Institute of Education.

JOHN VAIZEY.

I have read your article on institutions with keen interest. I agree almost completely with the approach you adopt and you may be interested to learn that I am hoping to include a lengthy discussion of all the literature in my forthcoming book on old people's homes. If I may make just one or two comments I think perhaps you over-rate the quality of the small residential home for old people. While of course they are a great improvement on the old workhouses I think there are some very real social and psychological deficiencies.

London School of Economics.

PETER TOWNSEND.

This is just a note to say how much I enjoyed *Where the Shoe Pinches* in ANARCHY 4. So much of what is mentioned in the article I have noticed from either personal or second-hand experience—in the social services, in mental institutions, hospitals, and public health departments. So often you cannot pinpoint absolute 'proof' of the type that would satisfy an official investigation, but there is an all-pervading



atmosphere, a general attitude and approach, in all these institutional organisations, that appals one in its lack of understanding, or even *considering* personalities or characteristics. The description of the 'co-operative' inmate in a jail or hospital or orphanage is so exactly what one sees. You hear commendation of the child who 'adjusts' or the patient who 'co-operates'...

South Pender, British Columbia.

(Mrs.) EVE SMITH.

I found Mr. Ward's comprehensive review of the institutional problem very interesting indeed, and I think he is to be commended for bringing together in a coherent way considerations affecting such a wide range of institutions and social structures.

I think the diagnosis is very sound and that this is a necessary first step in seeking remedies. What these will be and how they are to be achieved I do not know—where in any provision can one break the vicious circle; but small-scale examples offered by rare people in whom there is combined suitable knowledge and suitable personality probably have their part to play. I say this, having in mind my own interest in the liberalization of methods of caring for children in hospital. In the wards shown in my second film *Going to Hospital with Mother*, the chance constellation of several people who have personalities which are non-authoritarian, who have respect for the family and wish to preserve it, and who seek to understand what they are doing, has created a useful prototype. Too often, as Mr. Ward has noted in his survey, hospitals are among the institutions in which authority is exercised either for its own sake or as a defence against seeing the true needs of patients.

Tavistock Child Development Research Unit.

JAMES ROBERTSON

## Conflicting Strains in Anarchist Thought

ANARCHY 4 was most welcome, because in one step of only 32 pages it made sense out of anarchism as a contemporary outlook, firstly with George Molnar's sweeping away of the cobwebs of meaningless revolutionism to reveal the proper core of anarchism—permanent opposition, and secondly with Colin Ward's essay which showed just how constructive this permanent opposition can be since it insists on an alternative pattern of social behaviour. It shows how from this aspect the anarchists were right all along the line, and the rest of us are slowly catching up with them. I would like to take up two points in Molnar's argument. First that he omits to mention the whole school of individualist anarchism which never subscribed to the fallacies he exposes, secondly that when he says that the overwhelming majority of contemporary anarchists subscribe to anarcho-syndicalism, this may or may not be true of Australia, but is definitely untrue of the Americas or Europe.

San Francisco, Cal.

H. SCHWARTZ.

Mr. George Molnar, writing in ANARCHY 4, argues that whatever the merits of the anarchist ideal, *no* means exist for achieving it which are not fantastic and inutile (Kropotkin) or actually covertly subversive of it (Bakunin). He accuses the most considerable practical attempt to promote it—in the anarcho-syndicalist labour movements—of bureaucratic deformation directly proportional to public success. He concludes that anarchism is "not something which can assert itself over the whole of society": it must understand itself as a permanent ethical lobby.

We can agree with Mr. Molnar that Kropotkin was mistaken in his optimism ("everywhere the State is abdicating and abandoning its holy functions to private individuals" *Conquest of Bread*, p.188) and naive in his anticipation of spontaneous popular revolt; we can similarly agree that Bakunin's revolutionary praxis led him into deep contradiction. We can agree that the Latin syndicalist movements offer something less than continuous examples of conduct according to doctrine. But these agreements do not force us to accept his general conclusion.

His general conclusion, or capitulation, is illegitimate for the following reasons: (1) the judgment of syndicalism is over-reaching, and (2) even if it were correct, he would have successfully criticised *some* routes to Anarchy, but not all of them. We can take up each of these objections in order:

(1) How significant were the lapses and failures of syndicalism? Is all syndicalist enterprise condemned to repeat them? Anarchists recognise the tendency for the delegative strata to separate from the body of any organisation. This tendency is hard to check under any circumstances, but particularly so where a revolutionary-egalitarian ideology must co-exist with the routine meliorism of practical trade unionism. Opportunists are attracted with every increase in the physical power of the union: recruitment takes place in a power-oriented society. Levelling devices fall into disuse because—and this point is neglected by Roberto Michels, on whom Mr. Molnar leans so heavily—they are *antagonistic* to the economic functions of the trade unions. Hierarchy gains ground. The phenomena of struggle are degraded: even the General Strike becomes a device for personal publicity. Now, *in spite of all this*, it is safe to claim that the syndicalist unions were significantly *less* oligarchical than either reformist or marxist unions. This last is obliquely conceded by Michels in one or two places: "It may be admitted that the supreme directive organs of the French labour movement do not possess that plentitude of powers which the corresponding hierarchical grades of other countries have at their disposal—above all in Germany . . ." (*Political Parties*, p. 353). The *degenerescence progressive du syndicalisme*, prevented from coming to terms by World War I, was lowering the movement, in some regions, to levels of abuse which were *usual* for unions of other types: "From the ranks of the French syndicalists, leaders have already sprung whose sensitiveness to the criticisms of their followers can be equalled only by that of an English trade-union leader . . ." (*Political Parties*, p. 355).



There is another caution to be observed in judging syndicalism. Its visible history, the official and polemical literature, gives a very imperfect sense of the movement. That is to say, even the failure to contain bureaucracy, even the failure to produce ultimate revolutions, should not count so heavily against a movement which brought the great virtues of the *event* of Revolution—heroic generosity, courage, endurance, selflessness, social ingenuity—into the conduct of daily life. This is the unwritten history of anarcho-syndicalism and what we know of it we know only through the memories of old men.

Syndicalism, unsupported by other forces, we know to be corruptible. But we have learned something from the past; and it remains true that permanent democracy in organisations will still rest on devices proposed and employed by the syndicalist pioneers.

(2) Is there a route towards anarchy which lies outside Mr. Molnar's structures? There is. It is the route of piecemeal revolution, experimental socialism, the attempt to contrive enclaves of freedom: this line of effort assimilates broadly to the *Milieux Libres* tradition in France, to the movement for integral co-operatives elsewhere, but with great differences of scale, intention, and composition. This line of effort also depends *directly* on a conception of anarchism as a *general* form of society, and it is this conception which determines the scope and order of experiment. Conditions are appropriate for this kind of work in the West now. Where they are inappropriate, anarchists will necessarily conspire, in alliance with other democratic radical forces, to the point of Revolution: but the object of Revolution, for the anarchists, constituted everywhere as minorities, must be the limited one of creating conditions of free organization and agitation.

Mr. Molnar's "anarchism as permanent opposition" is identical with the condescending formula of Michels: "anarchism as prophylactic". It is a headlong inference from infirm premises. There is a last charge against it: anarchism now considers itself as "something which can assert itself over the whole of society" but it functions—where it does—in the main as an ethical lobby or interest; its critical force derives from the conviction that it embodies a set of radical alternatives; if it understood itself only as a lobby it would lack the numbers or force for any function whatever.

New York City, N.Y.

NORMAN RUSH.

The two articles in ANARCHY 4 invite comparison. States, just as the lesser institutions, have, *until now*, acted as George Molnar suggests; but the political leaders, just as the institutional leaders, have been products of, and dedicated to the continuance of authority, whether in the same (conservative) or a modified (*e.g.* 'Labour' form). None have expressly had the aim of 'de-institutionalisation' of the State, or a clear programme for doing this.

Just as those in control of some of the smaller institutions Colin Ward surveys, have been able to reorganise them and break down their

power-structure, once they have recognised the need, and achieved a libertarian re-orientation which was impossible for the inmates themselves, ignorant as they almost universally were (staffs included) of the nature of their malady. But it noted, however, that, once given the opportunity and a little help, these inmates were henceforth capable of organising themselves anarchistically.

Is it not feasible therefore, that a future generation of state-administrators, reared in contact with the psychological and sociological theories and experiments now developing their influence on the lesser institutions, may take the first steps in the dismantling of that mammoth institution—with the growing support, we may hope and anticipate, of an increasing body of socially-aware and informed opinion?

George Molnar's views represent well the general anarchist view of the State—witness his abundant quotes—but of the State *as it is* and as it has been in the past. All anarchists wish to see the State, as an instrument of authority, disappear. But they have, mostly, despaired of the main hope of the 'classical' anarchists, of a mass uprising to overthrow it and substitute a 'state' of anarchy, as they realise that mass uprisings are fertile ground for rival power groups; violence breeds violence, despite the heartening glimpses of spontaneous social organisation discerned briefly during, for example, the Spanish and Cuban revolutions or the Hungarian uprising.

Most now pin their hopes on a growth of social awareness among the general population, and an extension of civil disobedience to force an abdication of power; but despite the growth of support for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Committee of 100, etc., there is little sign yet of any general growth of social responsibility; few even of the participants in the sit-downs, as FREEDOM reports, have any conception of the wider implications of the movement.

But as Alex Comfort says (quoted in ANARCHY), 'the importation of science into the study of crime is an irreversible step, and its outcome can only be the suppression of science itself, or a radical remodelling of our ideas on government and the regulation of behaviour.' As in the field of criminology, why not also in the field of social (political) administration? As administrators become aware of the conclusions of social scientists, may they not increasingly feel compelled to implement them?

This awareness among administrators is an essential, before any decentralisation of the political structure, any more towards the abdication of power, can start; but equally, I regret I must return to my point of divergence from other anarchists—the breakdown cannot commence before the unrealistic financial mechanism which distorts the perspectives of all those attempting to comply with its restrictions, is replaced by one which will facilitate instead of inhibiting socially desirable production and distribution of wealth; and such a change would be a powerful ally of those seeking social freedom.



George Molnar quotes Lenin's remark, 'The machine isn't going the way we guide it . . . A machine doesn't travel exactly the way, and often travels just exactly not the way, that the man imagines who sits at the wheel.' This is due either to plain bad driving, or to the built-in nature of the machine. In the latter case, given an understanding of the mechanism, it can be redesigned to do what a competent driver wishes.

He then quotes Maximoff: (Anarchists believe that) "it would be impossible to make the State change its nature, for it is such only because of this nature, and in foregoing the latter it would cease to be a State." This is mere tautology, for if you define the State in terms of its nature, it is perfectly true that if its nature were changed it would cease to be a State in accordance with your definition; but this does nothing to inhibit such a change; it merely requires a new descriptive label to be provided.

Molnar states: '(this) domestic imperialism of the State compels all parties, *despite any allegiance they may have to specific parties or groups*, to frame and execute policies which, irrespective of the intentions behind them, have the *effect* of extending state tutelage over wide areas of society formerly not under central control.' True; and, as he suggests, this domestic imperialism is a built-in aspect of the State machine, which no party which has *so far* been elected has recognised as such or sought to modify . . . Alex Comfort in a broadcast talk on *The Art of the Possible* about a year ago, put forward Riewald's idea of 'satisfactory' crimes, and extended it to 'satisfactory' political projects. This motivation of psychopathic politicians is serious enough in itself; but when it is joined to the unrealities *inherent in the financial mechanism* it proves disastrous. But this is inevitable only while the successful politicians are psychopaths of the present kind and while the financial mechanism remains as it is. Neither condition is inherently unalterable, powerful though the protective devices built-in to the present State mechanisms may be.

I think Molnar's conclusions (Part III) unduly pessimistic. In answer to his para. 2, part III: the social scientists and psychologists are gaining increasing social influence, while directly attacking political, or at least, institutional authoritarianism. In para. 3, a more useful distinction than between 'free' and 'authoritarian' organisation would be between 'free' and 'arbitrary' authority. Thus technical experts might reasonably be expected to lead in their fields, and have their advice acted upon, without any coercion. Their 'functional authority' would be respected, without the support of 'arbitrary authority'. Indeed, the action of arbitrary authority commonly degrades or negates the 'functional authority' it is supposed to supplement.

I would agree with George Molnar's conclusion that 'anarchism as a plan for the liberation of society does not work', but I believe that, nevertheless, it is both justifiable and realisable as an aim for social development.

London.

B. LESLIE.

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