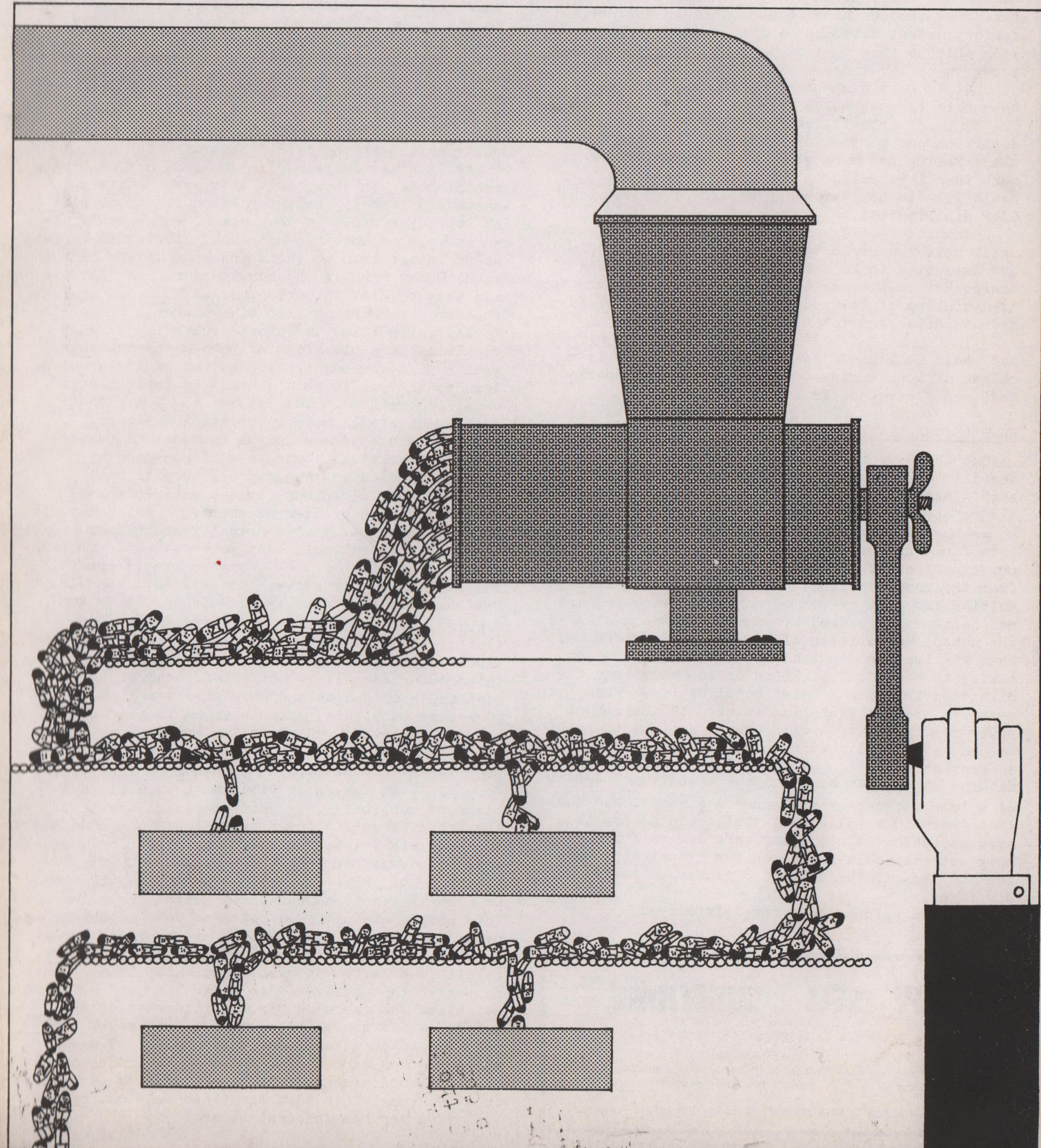


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BY MEN WHO HAVE
NEITHER THE RIGHT
NOR THE KNOWLEDGE
NOR THE VIRTUE

LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION 11

formerly Libertarian Teacher



EDITORIAL COMMENT

WHERE WE ARE

Since we have been producing Libertarian Education on a more frequent/regular basis we have attempted to provide some kind of forum of the kind suggested by Alan Ross (see 'letters'). We cannot say that, as an editorial group, we are satisfied that we have chieved this to any satisfactory extent although we are pleased to have been able to show that it is possible to produce a paper on a five-times-a-year schedule.

What is more disappointing is that we have not been able to push sales much above the 1000 mark. The cause of this is, we feel sure, simple lack of effort on our part - work involved in producing the magazine has exhausted our energies. We'd be more than interested to hear from anyone who would like to help with any aspect of production &/or distribution.

Meanwhile this issue (No. 11) will be the last until next August/September. Before then it is our intention to hold some kind of day/week-end conference to discuss the future of the paper. We are thinking of Saturday 30th June/Sunday 1st July and would be glad to hear from anyone

and would be glad to hear from you if there is any chance of your coming - we have plenty of spare beds and floorspace in Leicester.

WHAT IS OUR LINE?

One thing we have been careful to avoid is a dogmatic - "this, and no other, is the way we must act" - attitude. Quite simply we do not see any clear, obvious way forward.

We have encouraged personal accounts of problems faced by correspondents because it has been our experience that many comrades gain strength from the knowledge that specific problems/difficulties are part of our common experience and are not necessarily caused by personal inadequacies as the school authorities always try to convince us. This realisation might not make the problems any easier to solve but it helps us to understand the direction in which a solution might lie. Thus, it seems to us that Probation is used by the school power machine as a threat/ weapon against those of us who reject the authority/discipline/obedience concept of teaching. We have never heard of any attempt being made to check the educational effect of a 'probationer's' presence in a school and doubt that there is a valid test that could be applied even supposing such a thing were desirable. The only ascertainable criterion for 'passing probation' in fact is the extent of 'classroom contrl' displayed.

We would welcome more case histories.

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LEICESTERSHIRE

The problems and opposition which must be faced by anyone trying to achieve fundamental changes within the state system, as we saw in operation at Risinghill, are underlined by the experience of various schools within the much vaunted Leicestershire Plan. It must be pointed out that, contrary to the image that many people have (especially, it seems in the U.S.A.) the majority of schools in the County are indistinguishable from any other teaching factories, despite the liberal image that some like to present. As an example of this look at the article 'Discipline Problems', on page 15. You might also have heard of some of the absurd petty antics at the Melton Mowbray Upper School (ages 14 plus) where pupils who were not wearing a school badge on their left tits were suddenly suspended recently (nothing of course to do with an impending visit by the Duke of Edinburgh!) As an example of more blatant authoritarianism we can do no better than to quote the head of one of the local Upper schools who considers it his "Christian duty to beat children who use violence against others"! There is also a High school (ages 11 to 14) which tries to enforce rules like, "When pupils enter a classroom or when a teacher enters with pupils already present at the beginning of a lesson, the pupils should stand in their places until instructed by the Teacher to resume their seats. This will help in creating an orderly beginning to a lesson and an increase in respect for the teachers." Depends what you mean by 'respect'. And what about, "All pupils must remain in the classroom for the entire lesson except in cases of dire necessity." No, Wendy, it isn't dire unless you're actually dribbling.

There have, though, been some real and encouraging attempts within the County to create humane, life-enhancing, creative, 'educational' schools. One example, the Fernelley High School at Melton Mowbray, has been successfully turned into a typical bland nonentity of a school by the simple expedient of getting rid of the previous head and introducing compulsory uniforms, corporal punishment and a more open and persistent nagging.

A more publicised example of panic reaction is the sudden setting up of an 'independant enquiry' (ho - ho - ho) into Countesthorpe Upper School, prompted by the activities of one John Farr, local Tory M.P., who recently visited the school in a blaze of publicity (his main complaint was that the Press weren't allowed to follow him around and turn the visit into the circus he hoped for - we are, of course, in the middle of local County elections.) Farr's visit was at the instigation of a small reactionary parents action group and by this simple expedient we get some vote-catching publicity for the local Tories and everyone who is anyone in local politics (meaning Tory and Labour politicians backed up by a reactionary local press) supported the enquiry - "to clear the air" - "to establish the facts" - "in the interests of the school" - and so on, ad nauseum. Presumably the preamble to an attempted clamp down. Just a thought - has anyone ever heard of an 'independant enquiry' into a school which was based on parental, or kids, complaints that the place was too repressive? You see how innocent we are?

School Councils
and the Democratic Ideal
by Michael Fielding

Many of those who long for and work hard towards the transforming of our education system into something which can meaningfully be described as 'democratic' tend to be either overenthusiastic or overpessimistic about apparent advances within the state education system. Seldom does one find a realistic assessment of such changes, realistic in the sense that the judgements pronounced are not merely statements of virgin principles unsullied by the battering of practice, or unprincipled utterances which elevate expediency to the level of a basic tenet, but are, instead, judgements which have been tested on the pulses and in the actuality of the present system. It is in the hope of providing a realistic yet principled assessment of one advance within the public sector that I offer the following observations on pupil councils and their role in the democratisation of secondary schools.

MANAGERIAL TOOL OR FORCE FOR DEMOCRACY?

Sorting through the often haphazard statements about school councils which one encounters both in print and in conversation, it seems to me that the aims one is invited to accept are justified either by reference to a managerial or a socio-political and education goal; in other words, school councils are either seen as a means towards a more efficient running of the authoritarian school system, or as opportunities for increasing a pupils sense of responsibility for the running of his own life with the lives of others, or both. Arguments to support the managerial claims might include such ideas as offering the pupils a safety valve, providing an outlet for new ideas, improving communication within the school and having a beneficial effect on staff/pupil relationships. Advocates of school councils as a further tool of democratic education within the school offer aims such as enhancing the pupils' moral development, fostering self-discipline and a sense of responsibility, developing a feeling of co-operation and community; encouraging participation in the running of the school, and giving the pupils an experience of what it means to govern responsibly, thus preparing them for democratic citizenship. (1)

I am not one of those advocates of school councils who see them as no more than a handy lubricant with which to oil the groaning cogs of the status quo. My main concerns in this article are with suggestions that school councils are an indication of democracy in schools and that they are the most appropriate means of bringing about democratisation. I have in mind statements such as the following from the Little Red School Book: "A school council is a body which represents pupils (and sometimes teachers as well). It is a first step towards getting any school run democratically." (2)

DEMOCRATIC IN WHAT SENSE

My first point is that school councils within the public sector of education are not fully democratic. It is one which is too often lost under the weight of enthusiastic aspiration and confused liberalism. Even writers such as Kevin McGrath (3) and Harold Entwistle (4) occasionally lapse into merging the two very different concepts of consultation and participation. School councils are often used in a consultative role

which, at best, is a sign of enlightened autocracy and, at worst, a deliberate charade behind which pseudo-liberal Headmasters board the bandwagon of "democracy in schools". Democracy has to do with participation, that is to say active involvement and its attendant responsibilities. Communal decisions which are subject to the veto of a single person are not democratic. Indeed, many would say that because the school is not a law unto itself, and is subject to the expectations of the governors and taxpayers, as well as to certain legal considerations, the idea of school councils, or even schools themselves, being operated democratically is a utopian concept which will not fit in to the recalcitrant straightjacket authoritarian, heirarchical society such as the one we live in now.

I would agree that it is essential to define precisely what powers, if any, the school council has in a particular school; such clarification forestalls disillusionment and makes the useful point that political activity does not take place in a vacuum, but rather in a complex world where vested interests, both psychological and moral as well as financial, are notable for their ubiquity rather than their absence. However, I do not think one is necessarily entitled to go on and say school councils are useless within their restricted areas of reference or that the present heirarchical organisation of schools is some sort of self-evident truth which will forever remain untouched by the aspirations and demands of those currently oppressed. The main point I want to make here is that it is vitally important for advocates of change to be honest in their assessment of current practice. This is no mere quibble about words. If a practice is not democratic, one ought not to call it so, for if we start confusing important concepts of this sort we are liable to become prey to those who are primarily interested in using such terms as 'liberty' and 'choice' to act as a sop to gullible progressives while they strengthen their own positions of priveledge and power. Unless we are clear, we may also find ourselves initiating changes which are muddle-headed. Clarity in our assessment of current practices enables us to gauge with some accuracy what point we have arrived at and therefore make meaningful and relevant suggestions for future action. My reservations and criticisms about school councils as currently envisaged in our state schools are thus intended as goads helping us towards a democratic society, not the reverse. Adulation promotes apathy not dynamism.

Another claim often made by advocates of school councils which needs close attention is that they give the pupils useful and necessary experience of the democratic process itself. Such claimants usually justify themselves by pointing out that, rightly, unless askill is actually put into practice the learner will never understand how to perform it properly. What is often forgotten is that although the last point is sound, presuppositions about our society being democratic and about the desirability of emulating the present parliamentary system are not.

LIMITATIONS OF PARLIAMENTARY MODEL

Usually, school councils are loosely modelled on our parliamentary system which, we are supposed to assume, is the most desirable example of democratic procedure available. But when one considers that parliamentary democracy in this country provides no opport-

4 entary democracy in this country provides no opportunities for the ordinary man or woman to participate in government, encourages an essentially passive, acquiescing role (I accept X's policy rather than Y's), and offers no real accountability of MP's to the electorate, one begins to wonder whether the model is as appropriate as some found it at first sight. A system which encourages people to think of the mere act of voting as all-important and all that is required of a citizen, is a long way from the ongoing and lively participation in government which is essential to democracy. It is sad, but true, that pupils who attend school councils which are merely asked to ratify or choose one or other of the Head's policies are being prepared for the adult world many of them so avidly seek.

There are other ways in which any modelling of schools councils on parliamentary lines alone may prove to be less desirable than one would wish. One concerns the 'mock' nature of the procedure in councils where their functions are merely advisory. Unless the councils have some actual power to implement decisions arrived at, the whole business becomes little more than an exercise in verbal skills and, as such, dangerous. Apart from the dangers of encouraging cleverness rather than wisdom, such activities may well lead pupils to believe that democracy is essentially about argument and words totally divorced from actions. Yet nothing could be further from the spirit of democracy, for democratic discussions are a good deal more constructive than a mere carping at authority or squeezing consent out of unwilling pupils for decisions already made.

There can be no sense of responsible involvement if no actions are going to result, nor can there be any realisation of what it means to make a meaningful decision, act on it and be prepared to be accountable for those actions. Yet these experiences are the very stuff of democracy and unless people have opportunities to see the link between the making of a decision and the often difficult task of carrying it out, democracy will remain a very dusty unreality. The Ancient Greeks' insistence that the holding of office should be subject to rotation was a deliberate attempt to involve as many people as possible in the actual business of carrying out decisions. Such a system was a method of ensuring that democratic debate was not a merely verbal or hollow exercise. It might well have implications for school councils of today and would, in addition, make them less elitist in nature. In this connection, the fact that very few pupils actually experience the business of being a rep and that some would like to see increased status attached to being a rep suggests that the system is encouraging education for leadership rather than education for democracy.

POSSIBLE DANGERS AND PITFALLS

Perhaps the most obvious danger connected with the establishment of school councils is that their setting up may merely be a well considered move on the part of a reactionary Head who knows that he is in complete control of what amounts to an assembly of juvenile puppets, and that he can fob off any cries for 'democracy' by pointing to the existence of a school council. By a complex series of manoeuvres the Head could ensure his position is never questioned, let alone challenged. These might include such things as careful screening of candidates ('No uniform, therefore not responsible enough to be a rep', etc.); eloquent tailoring or gelding of discussion points; deliberately refraining from publicly encouraging the council or ensuring adequate communication between reps and those represented, and even turn-

ing reps into prefects, thus incorporating them into the disciplinary machinery of the school. Such tactics are not all that rare. I have encountered some in my own teaching experience, and in the first national conference of the N.U.S.S. one delegate from Scotland hinted at these very procedures. (5) We need to be aware that, quite apart from unintentional failure to foster genuine democracy in schools, school councils can and are being used as a democratic facade behind which the authoritarian system flourishes with renewed vigour.

I mentioned in the last paragraph that a Head might jeopardise the chances of a school council succeeding by deliberately failing to encourage the involvement of the pupils. Similar dangers can also result from inexperience, oversight, or a feeling that such promotion techniques are not necessary. I feel very strongly that a considerable amount of publicly expressed support must come from the staff of the school, particularly those in positions of greatest power and prestige. This is a point seldom mentioned in literature on the subject, but which is nonetheless of considerable importance. My experience teaching in large mixed comprehensive schools where a variety of innovations have taken place has led me to believe very firmly that if one is to attempt innovations that run counter to traditional patterns of thought and behaviour, one must grasp every opportunity to explain to staff, pupils and parents exactly what one is trying to do and why. It is not enough to abolish corporal punishment, uniforms, a prefectorial system, school rules and initiate a school council and leave it at that in the naive belief that such actions speak for themselves. Pupils and staff in particular need to be aware of the fact that the head is endeavouring to encourage communal responsibility, self-discipline, participation in decision making, or whatever. Successful innovation depends on a great deal more than the strength of the Headmasters convictions.

OTHER SUPPORTS NECESSARY

There are a number of ways in which a Head can encourage school councils within their schools, two of which I should like to mention here. Firstly, he can encourage every member of staff to take the idea seriously, and to show this by making sure that each class or tutor group within the school is fully aware of the role and achievements of the council as well as being encouraged to express their views. Secondly, and this applies to any worthwhile innovation, it could be made crystal clear that participation is as important a part of school life as going to Geography or English lessons by allocating what used to be teaching time to discussion lessons or periods when the vital business of reporting back and receiving new suggestions is done. I would suggest that these are minimum requirements and would invite Heads who balk at the idea to reflect for a few moments on the fact that in a number of European countries (e.g. Sweden, Denmark and West Germany) (6),(7)and(8), educational practice has gone beyond the stage of a pupil council to a school council proper, often consisting of staff, pupils, parents and outside representatives. Let it be noted too that these councils are not merely advisory bodies; they run the school.

Another important point too often ignored in discussions on the role of the school council in democratising the school is that the school council alone can do very little towards this end; indeed, it is doubtful whether it could function with any degree of success for more than a short while without other things being present. There are two points I should like to mention here. The first one conce-

5
rns the teaching methods and general atmosphere of the school. If school councils are to try to encourage people to participate in the running of their own lives rather than letting others do it for them, then the old idea of the teacher as the sole fountain of knowledge, imparter of facts and omniscient director of all activities within the classroom must go. Pupils must be given the opportunities to develop social skills and the variety of skills associated with making choices in a multiplicity of situations. So many teachers and Heads appear to expect pupils to miraculously be able to participate fluently and maturely and be critical and discerning in their intellectual and social behaviour when they reach the 5th or 6th year without ever being offered any genuine opportunities or encouragement to do so in the previous ten years of their school lives. Often people have expressed horror at the docility and disinterest of 5th or 6th formers and then gone on to suggest that this intellectual lethargy was either proof that school councils could never work or the root cause of their frequent failure. Such critics seldom, if ever, pause to consider that there might be some connection between such sheepishness and the authoritarian, teacher dominated classroom methods still typical of most secondary schools today.

Clearly, the general attitude of staff to pupils and vice-versa is important in the fostering of democracy. Participation implies co-operation and mutual respect and these stand no chance in an environment where there is a good deal of antagonism between teachers and pupils, or where teachers are primarily concerned with their own prestige and a quiet life. It is also important to recognise that many of the pupils will have to alter their ideas of what a teacher is. Not least among pupils' adjustments must be the change from passive spectator to active participator. A teacher must give and must try to present meaningful things in an active way, but the pupil must learn to give too, and not sit back and wait to be entertained or bored, whichever the case may be.

The second point in connection with the inability of school councils to act alone as a democratic influence concerns its parallel role to parliament.(9) I mentioned earlier that it can be justifiably said that parliament is an inappropriate model on which to base democratisation of schools, largely because it is so far removed from what democracy really means. If this is so, how then does the ordinary citizen participate in our so-called democracy, and, by analogy, how is the pupil to participate democratically in his school life if not through the council? Harold Entwistle, whose book 'Political Education in a Democracy' I fully recommend to all readers, suggests that our society is still democratic in what he calls an 'associational' sense. Individuals usually belong to a variety of formal and informal groups, such as a Union, Church, Working Mens Club, Society and Neighbourhood group, and it is in these groups that he feels he can most meaningfully make a contribution. These groups themselves then bring pressure to bear on National and Local governments to achieve certain aims. This is associational democracy. Now Entwistle sees such associational groupings within the school as being a variety of largely extracurricular groups. He suggests that encouraging such groups is a more fruitful way of fostering the democratic spirit than through school councils with their macro-political orientation. Participation in such groups may often be considerable and can involve pupils in policy-making and management. Very often these various sports, recreational, social and academic societies are not run democratically, but there is no reason

why they should not be. Such involvement in democratic decision-making in a group in which the pupils feel really involved and interested enables them to understand what it means to make a democratic decision and take the consequences of it, whereas a school council might never provide that experience.

THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES

I agree with much that Entwistle has to say, but I do not share his view that because school councils are based on a parliamentary model they are therefore doomed to very limited success from the start. Clubs and societies form an important part of people's lives, but they do not constitute the sum total of an individual's aspirations, needs and interests. People do have very real areas of concern which their clubs and other groupings do not cover. Entwistle also assumes that, because of our system of associational democracy which exists at the moment, all our energies ought to be channelled into encouraging pupils to adopt that form of government. But what about the future? What about change? Can we think of no better system than one whose claim to being democratic substantially relies on the possibility of membership of an interest or attitude group and the equally uncertain power of that group to influence and persuade governments, at whatever level? If the democratic ideal is to be a living reality the answer must surely be "yes".

Many who feel the pressing need for an alternative to our current form of parliamentary democracy suggest that considerable decentralisation of power may well be the most appropriate next step. In this connection it is interesting to note that Countesthorpe College, one of the few progressive schools in the public sector in England, abandoned its pupils' school council some time ago and is gradually recognising that its staff/student council is a failure too, largely because meetings put a large premium on articulacy. I understand that the idea of breaking the school down into small units is being considered by some. (10) It will be interesting to see whether or not this happens, and, if it does, how much autonomy is given to each group. It will also be interesting to see whether or not meetings of pupils about matters of mutual interest will adequately replace any of the functions of the school council.

If anything approaching a proper democratic system or, as I prefer to call it, "shared responsibility" is to work effectively in the large secondary schools of today, I feel there will have to be a subdivision of the school into small working units along the lines already suggested. I prefer the term "shared responsibility" to "democratisation" for three reasons: i) Although in its true sense democratisation amounts to the same thing, it has for most people come to mean little more than the setting up of bureaucratic machinery on a parliamentary model. We have already seen that such an approach is fraught with danger. ii) The word "shared" emphasises the involvement of all within the school, not just one particular group (e.g. pupils), however important that group may be. iii) The word "responsibility" brings home the essential point that democracy is not mere verbosity; it is concerned with discussion linked to action, with the practical business of putting democratic decisions into practice and the attendant frustrations and rewards associated with it.

The idea of shared responsibility is by no means new. A long standing advocate in this country is David Wills, who is among the pioneers of this approach, particularly with maladjusted children. In

his study of the treatment of maladjusted children in the English educational system, (II), Anthony Weaver points out that the practice of shared responsibility is quite common in both voluntary and local authority establishments, though less common in the latter. He lists 14 areas in which shared responsibility might be operated. Among these he includes school attendance, curriculum, diet, out of school activities, bullying, stealing and destructiveness. It is interesting to note that these last four were used most often. This is an exceedingly important point, for it highlights the feasibility and value of pupils being responsible for the nature and operation of their own system of sanctions. Weavers' research is particularly significant in another respect: Namely that it effectively silences those (I2) who argue that shared responsibility can only work with highly intelligent adolescents, the remainder of the school being too young or too simple for such a system to be workable. He cites the work of Howard Case at Epping House School where a system of shared responsibility is operated with junior-aged boys.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion: While I think school councils have a valuable part to play in the democratisation of schools, I nonetheless think they have only a part to play, and that their limitations should be counteracted by support for democracy within the school from other areas. It is important that a realistic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of school councils is attempted by all those who wish them to succeed as part of the democratic organisation of schools. If they become mere slogans or are given the status of a panacea, they will aid the forces of reaction rather than those who wish to see education for democracy become a living reality, instead of the sham it is at present. It is also important to explore alternative organisational means towards democratic running of schools. Not least of these is the idea of shared responsibility operated through interconnected small working groups throughout the school.

SUMMARY

1. A decision to establish pupil school councils can either be seen as primarily managerial or primarily socio-political and educational. This essay has concerned itself with the latter.
2. School councils within the public sector are not fully democratic. One needs to define their powers and real nature accurately, otherwise disillusionment and frustration will follow.
3. Claims that school councils give useful and necessary experience of the democratic process are often wide of the mark because
4. Democratic processes are often wrongly thought to be synonymous with parliamentary procedure. Such confusion is profoundly dangerous to the fostering of democracy proper because
5. People then tend to mistakenly regard mere discussion as the essence of democracy. Democracy must combine discussion and action. School councils which are merely advisory tend to geld the democratic process of the essential business of acting on and being responsible for the democratic decisions arrived at. This in turn encourages cleverness rather than wisdom and the mistaken view of democracy as mere verbosity.
6. School councils are also used as a facade behind which reactionary Headmasters increase the effectiveness of authoritarianism.

7. Failure of school councils may often be due to lack of public encouragement from the Headmaster and other senior members of staff. Any innovation must be prepared for and constantly reinforced.
8. One way of increasing a councils chances of success is to give it status. Allocating former teaching time to procedures connected with the council would be a clear indication of the Headmasters intention of taking the council seriously
9. Teaching methods and general atmosphere of the school have a marked affect on the likelihood of success. Opportunities to develop social skills and those connected with the making of choices are important in lessons as well as outside them.
10. Staff attitudes to pupils and vice-versa are important. Democracy implies co-operation and mutual respect. Both teachers and pupils will often have to make adjustments to their attitudes.
11. The Parliamentary model on which most councils are based may well be inappropriate because it is macro-political. Associational groupings are the real basis of democracy in this country and schools might well consider founding their efforts at democratisation on similar groupings within the school e.g. Societies, Clubs etc.
12. This approach to democratisation via associational groupings is valid but not sufficient. School councils still have an important role. However, should we not search for more direct forms of democracy than any so far suggested?
13. Decentralisation of power might well be an appropriate step. This might involve experimenting with the sub-division of the school into small working units.
14. Shared responsibility nearer to direct democracy than most suggested schemes. The term explained and reasons given for preferring it to 'democratisation'.
15. Shared responsibility as already practised in many schools for maladjusted children highlights the feasibility of children of primary as well as secondary school age being responsible for, among other things, the nature and operation of their own system of sanctions.
16. Conclusion.

REFERENCES:

1. Assuming one accepts some of these claims, there still remains the intractable problem of assessing whether or not the aims have been fulfilled. Do all these wonderful things actually happen, and if so, what conditions are necessary for success? The only research published in Britain so far is by John Chapman, research officer with the Bloxham Project Research Unit in the department of Educational Studies at Oxford University. I recommend any readers interested in these questions to read his article published in the 1st edition of The Journal Of Moral Education, Oct 1971.

John Chapman
"School Councils: in Theory and Practice",
Journal of Moral Education Vol:1 No:1 Oct 1971
pp 33-42

Readers may also be interested to know of two articles by John Chapman on School Councils which were published in New Era.

"Origins and Developments of School Councils"
New Era Vol:5I No:8 Sept/Oct 1970 pp 268-279
New Era Vol:5I No:9 Nov 1970 PP316-321

continued on page 18

WHY I RESIGNED

WHAT DID I WANT TO DO?

Why did I want to be a headmaster? It wasn't the money: I had better pay and conditions in my previous job, and living at Sutton Park has always been damned uncomfortable. Maybe I craved for power or status. My admitted motive, anyway, was that I didn't like the way schools were run and wanted to do it differently.

I didn't see why schools should have to be places where there is bullying and unhappiness (your tough little extrovert may not suffer these things, but many schools are just hell for sensitive, insecure or less assertive children); why they should be places where children are taught cupidity, subterfuge, self-aggrandisement (yes they are taught these things by marks, form orders, prizes, privileges, prefect systems, etc.) where the competitive motive is fostered in a world already mad with greed and status-seeking. I didn't see why children should have to put up with supervision by inadequate adults who must wear gowns, be called "sir" and have people stand up when they enter the room. I didn't see why schools had to be so full of hypocrisy and pretence, phoney respect for dignified teachers, phoney manners, pretended respect for silly conventions, phoney religion, phoney discipline based on fear. I didn't see why schools had to be places of rejection and failure for those who are not strong or clever, or why schools should separate boys from girls, catholics from protestants, intellectuals from the rest. I didn't see why schools should be sending out droves of conformist yes-men ready to soak up anybody's propaganda, or of frightened conservatives opposed to radical changes in a society that badly needs them.

HOW WAS I GOING TO DO IT?

I would have a school that would not segregate by religion or sex or "ability", a school without fear of the stick or the sarcastic jibe of the insensitive teacher, and without the phoney "respect" that is based on that fear; I would have a happy friendly school without authoritarianism, regimentation or the silly stiff formalities that often exist in schools to uphold the tottering dignity of insecure adults, a school where it would be more important to think, feel, speak and act fearlessly and honestly than to wear a blazer and tie, where the go-getter and the status-seeker would have no reward and where there would be no reinforcement for the competitive and acquisitive impulses that may bring the world to an unpleasant end soon through war or greedy over-exploitation of the earth's resources. I would have a school without indoctrination, religious or other, a school where the teachers were mature and unshockable people who liked children, accepting that they shout and swear and get dirty and don't have table manners. Finally I would have a school where people could be happy, where each pupil would be valued and loved equally, regardless of his achievements or lack of them.

HOW MUCH WAS ACHIEVED?

We did a great deal of what we hoped to do. We avoided a prefect system and other authoritarian community patterns. Thus, there was no lust for privilege or status - there was none to lust after.

This article consists of large extracts from a "valedictory letter" sent by Ruarc Gahan to the parents of pupils attending Sutton Park School in the Republic of Ireland. We are grateful to Ruarc for allowing us to print these extracts which raise a number of important points. Ruarc was appointed headmaster of the school from its start in 1957 - he resigned in 1972.

After two or three years the pupils elected (at my suggestion) a school council with representatives from each class. At first it was purely advisory, but after a while it began to make rules and decisions.

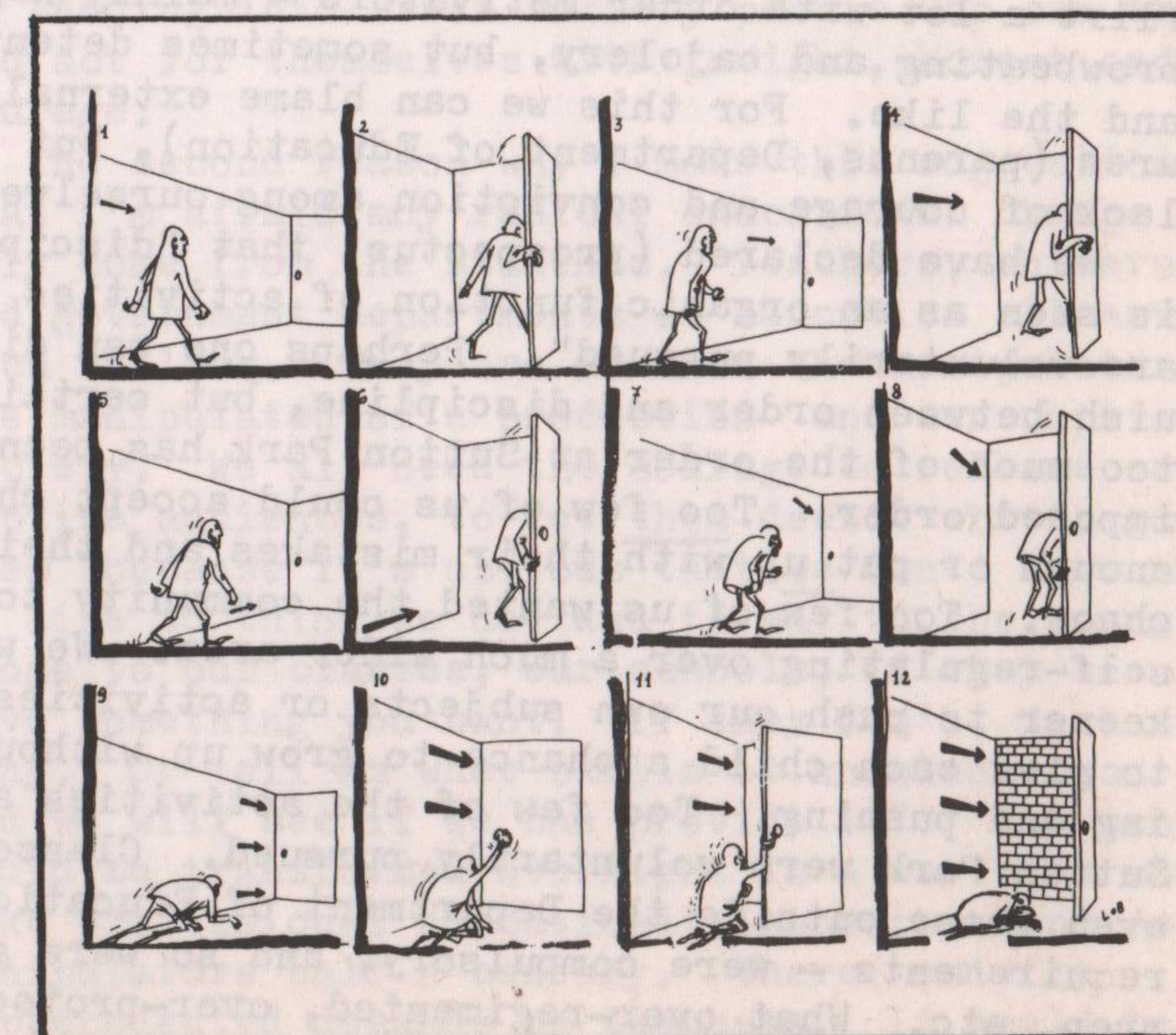
In 1964 the weekly whole-school meetings began. This was a sort of parliament where every pupil and teacher could speak and vote. From its inception the weekly school meeting played an important part in school life, though for a number of reasons the area of community life over which it had control was smaller than I would have wished. But it was greatly valued by most of the pupils: several proposals of mine that it should be abolished were opposed indignantly and defeated almost unanimously.

Over the years, our compulsory morning assembly gradually lost any resemblance it may have had to an act of worship, and finally it disappeared altogether. You now have a school that is really mixed as to religious affiliation. The question is never, "What's your religion?", but always, "How are you treating other people?"

This happy condition is only possible because Sutton Park acts on the principle that religious instruction is a matter for homes and churches, not for schools. This is a very important principle to stick to. And, in passing, beware of the words inter- and multi-denominational. These appellations cover a cosy assumption that everyone will have a religious label round his neck. Sutton park has always been a place where pupils, parents and teachers without such labels have been able to feel that the school was theirs as much as anyone else's.

We have done without competition in the classroom. Our scholars did not become conceited, nor did the less able feel shame. There were no second class citizens in the classroom. Our exam. results were quite good considering that we did without the obnoxious motivators usually thought essential in schools - form orders, prizes, etc - and really did very little pushing at all.

Certainly we've had pupils who under-achieved. But don't many of us older people under-achieve too? And remember, under-achieving is only a bad thing if the goals not attained are goals worth striving for.



On the whole we had teachers who liked children and didn't aspire to be feared by them, who had an approving rather than condemning attitude, who didn't need dignity and the absence of children to bolster up their egos. We got rid of gowns, and of children springing to their feet when teacher entered the classroom, and of "sir" and other boot-lickin nonsense. We had teachers who could be friends with the pupils without patronising or condescension and without needing their friendship. Pupils and staff were on the same side.

We managed to have a school where everyone could say without fear what he really thought. (Not that the pupils always do blurt out what they really think; they gradually learn tact and consideration. There is complete freedom of speech at Sutton Park, so there is no hypocrisy and humbug.)

This was part of having a school without fear. The staff weren't afraid of the headmaster (who, astonishingly, wasn't afraid of the Board), the pupils weren't afraid of the headmaster or the staff, little pupils weren't afraid of bigger ones, and so on. So there was very little bullying, domineering, pushing about. We were gentle with each other. Perfect love casts out fear, someone said. Well, we didn't do it perfectly, but love was what we had in view, and there was no room for fear.

Boy-girl relationships? On the whole we (staff) tried to mind our own business and not interfere. After all, one of the points of co-education is that each sex shall gain knowledge and understanding of the other one. They couldn't very well do this if we spent our time prising them apart as is done in some "co-ed" schools. (Sex education classes were always mixed, which just about doubled their value, I'd guess.) Our boys and girls had a real advantage in getting to know the other sex well, in learning to assess and discriminate, in coming to terms with heterosexual longing, acceptance, rejection.

Our attitude of acceptance in this regard (and indeed a general attitude of approval rather than condemnation) may have had much to do with the happiness boys and girls knew at Sutton Park. And, by the way, during my fifteen years at Sutton Park there was only one pregnancy: a day-girl conceived a child in the middle of the summer holidays. She kept her baby, married the father (who wasn't a Sutton Park pupil) and the three live happily together.

COMPROMISE, FAILURE AND THE ULTIMATE CRITERIA

I have not been blind to our failures. We have declared (prospectus) that "the incentives to work are interest and, in the later years, the desire to pass examinations". Well, we did try to make classes interesting, using lots of television, filmstrips, tape recordings, projects and so on. But we did flirt a lot with other motivators - mainly nagging, browbeating and cajolery, but sometimes detention and the like. For this we can blame external pressures (parents, Department of Education), but also lack of courage and conviction among ourselves.

We have declared (prospectus) that "discipline is seen as an organic function of activities that are voluntarily pursued". Perhaps one can distinguish between order and discipline, but certainly far too much of the order at Sutton Park has been imposed order. Too few of us could accept children enough or put up with their mistakes and their chaos. Too few of us wanted the community to be self-regulating over a much wider area. We were keener to push our own subjects or activities than to give each child a chance to grow up without forcing and pushing. Too few of the activities at Sutton Park were voluntarily pursued. Classes - even those outside the Department of Education's requirements - were compulsory, and so were games, prep, etc. What over-regimented, over-protected children they are at Sutton Park!

We certainly never provided alternatives for the pupils (a majority, by the way, in any non-selective school) whose interests and abilities were not predominantly academic. Like other schools, we just made them sit in classrooms all day learning frustration, boredom and inferiority. This was inexcusably cruel and dishonest. We may plead that circumstances were beyond our control - but were they really?

Too many of us were prudes, easily shocked by young people's "bad" language. (I even remember, in early days, someone telling girls it was wrong to hold hands. - With each other, of course.) So some of us reinforced their upside-down sense of what really matters, and maybe sometimes their sex/guilt hang-ups as well.

We trusted our boys and girls to use sense if they had deep romantic friendships, but we didn't trust them quite enough. We were too worried and uneasy, even too suspicious and prurient; we made too many rules and did too much checking. You can never do enough checking, so the net effect was a general slight vitiation of relationships.

What I would like to know, but don't know, is, how do our past pupils compare with other adults in things that really matter - that is, things that affect their happiness and the possible future happiness of humanity? Do they more than normally enjoy and spread happiness? Will a less than average proportion of them need psychiatric help? Are they less than normally dependant on status and possessions? Are they more than normally serene, compassionate, understanding, tolerant, actively concerned for others? Do they care? If the answer to these questions is "yes", then Sutton Park, with all its faults, was worth while and should be emulated. These are the ultimate criteria. But I can't answer these questions, and neither can you.

WHY SUTTON PARK AND I HAD TO PART

Still, Sutton Park was at least an outward success and you'd think I might be reasonably pleased with my fifteen years' work. But I'm not; I'm deeply dissatisfied.

The main reason for this is that, with all its modest liberalism, Sutton Park is now firmly established as a school for the well-to-do only. It's an exclusive school, and that's that.

Why do you send your child to Sutton Park instead of to the nearest free secondary, vocational or comprehensive school? Maybe you chose it because, like me, you're against the competitive atmosphere that fosters greed, against religious and other brain-washing, against authoritarianism and for freedom and autonomy.

Well, whatever Sutton Park provides for your child - be it an ethos or a swimming pool or a little extra personal attention - your child is the privileged offspring of well-off parents.

What are we at Sutton Park doing? Are we mad, dedicating ourselves to giving further advantage to the already privileged? We could be working towards equality of opportunity for all children in our bit of the world, working to close the gap between rich and poor, lucky and unlucky, overfed and underfed, but in fact we're doing all we can to widen the gap.

If I teach again, it will certainly be in a non-fee-paying school. But a society which permits gross disparity in rates of pay as between the different means of livelihood of its members inevitably has money snobbery, and thus has areas where the well-to-do live, areas where the less well-off live, and areas occupied by the positively poor. Even with equal state subsidy, schools and their educational standards will reflect the prosperity of the areas they serve. So, in a society where gross salary differences exist, equality of educational opportunity is not a thing that free education can provide.

"BESIDES... JUST HOW FAR DO YOU THINK YOU CAN GET IN TODAY'S WORLD WITHOUT A GOOD EDUCATION?"



So we have the definition of the E.P.A. - educational priority areas - poor areas where bigger money is poured into education to compensate for the cultural deprivation and consequent educational handicap the children would otherwise suffer. Even if the recognition of E.P.A.s has some limited usefulness (limited, because importing middle class values to working class areas isn't always successful or necessarily desirable), how futile ultimately, when society, still based on free enterprise and acquisitiveness, is busy creating the E.P.A.s of tomorrow.

So it's naive to think that free schools for all will finish social injustice. My ideal of social justice goes far beyond the illusory equality of opportunity that is provided by free schools for rich and poor. I don't so much want a society with no fee-paying schools as a society in which everybody is equally able to afford to use them. I'd far rather see fee-paying schools in a just society than free schools in an unjust society, which is what we now have. Mind you, I'd rather still see a just society with no fee-paying schools.

I suppose, therefore, that I did not really leave Sutton Park because it is a flourishing fee-paying school, but because it flourishes as such in a grossly unjust society. In society as we have it, I can't work any more in a fee-paying school; but that's only the beginning of my discontent, which is really with the unjust social order that we know.

I have a further dissatisfaction, which is not only with Sutton Park as a financially exclusive school, but with the whole "educational" process as we know it. Dear parents, it's a confidence trick! We're not educating your children at all. We're forcing them to attend our classes (because you pay us to) so that we can tell them things they don't want to know, so that they can pass examinations, so that they can get "good" jobs and enjoy the same socio-economic status that you enjoy. That's what it's all about. And, by the way, indoctrinating children with safe establishment views so that the social order won't get upset and the haves can go on being haves.

Well, it's understandable that you should want this, but I don't want to be part of the plot any longer. In a free-enterprise society I'm totally in sympathy with poor parents who know that a school "education" may give their children the chance of a less penurious life than they have had to put up with.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

So I'm brought back inevitably to this sad inescapable fact: as long as the teacher, the engineer, the lawyer, the businessman, etc. get a lot more money than the mechanic, the bricklayer, the policeman, the bus conductor and the farm labourer, so long will you people demand schools that will put your boys and girls through all the "educational" hoops. Sutton Park has had to be such a school. You parents say you like the happy informal school that Sutton Park is, but I've noticed all along that you only like it so long as your children can be cajoled into working fairly well for their exams. (Okay, there are exceptions among you - mainly the particularly well-heeled) So long as you children are reasonably industrious you approve of the freedom Sutton Park gives. But if a child becomes a bit uninterested in working for exams, then, "perhaps Sutton Park isn't the right school for him". He can be free to work, but not free to idle.

But part of maturity is learning to plan for the future, to work for increasingly distant goals instead of only enjoying immediate satisfactions. People reach this maturity at different rates. Part of our hypothesis at Sutton Park is that children should grow to maturity at their own rates and not be beaten or brow-beaten into a superficial appearance of it. But you don't want for your children the freedom that

is necessary for their individual growth rates, because you're afraid they might fall behind in the rat-race. And as I said before, though I can understand this I don't want to be a cog in your machine any more. I don't like your machine. We must, as a matter of urgency, ABOLISH THE RAT RACE!

WHAT SUTTON PARK COULD DO NOW

The first suggestion is that the pupils, through their school meeting and their elected council, should be asked to make decisions about things that really seem important to them. They should be asked to decide what games, if any, should be compulsory, and what classes, if any, should be compulsory, over and above the requirements of the Department of Education. They should be asked to decide whether or not attendance at school lunches, supervised prep, and other institutions should be compulsory. Perhaps boarders should be asked to make their own bedtime rules in collaboration with the matron and the school doctor.

I make this first suggestion for two reasons. First, I suspect that insight is best learned by corporate decision-making following group discussion, even - perhaps especially - if the decisions prove unsatisfactory. (Efficiency is not the aim of an educational institution) And you will only get children really interested in decision-making if you let them decide things they think important. (That's why our school meeting was never quite the success it could have been) Sutton Park could pioneer the way in sending into Irish society people who can think and act for themselves with insight, honest and courage.

The second reason why I make this suggestion is that I'm afraid any radical educational change will only come from the students. Teachers, university and government departments of education all have too much to lose. They are at once the manipulators and the manipulated of a production- and consumption-mad society. We all need the courage to release our captive audiences, to let them decide what's good for them (because it's obvious that we don't know though we like to think we do) and to say to the young: "come to our classes, our schools, if they seem to have something you want. If they don't, just stay away. Or tell us what skills or knowledge you want and we will see if we can provide it". The schools would be transformed overnight in a way that would take professional educational innovators and social manipulators half a century. There would be unprecedented demands on teachers. It would be the moment of truth.

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SPECIAL....?

Should children be segregated for different educational treatment if they are backward in the 3 R's? Should there be separate classes for them? Should entirely separate 'special' schools be built? In 1950 there were 491 Special schools. By 1971 the number had increased to 933 involving 86,824 children. Half of these are labelled 'educationally-subnormal', now to be known as 'educationally-handicapped'.

What is esn?

According to the 1944 Education Act children not successful in ordinary schools should be treated in specialist classes, whether their failure to make progress is 'by reason of limited ability or other conditions'. This virtually means that any child who fails along traditional criteria can be selected for transfer. We are not to select children simply on the basis of I.Q. score (though in practice this is nearly always what happens.) But I.Q. tests are not considered dispensable. It is just that 'low intelligence' is recognised as being only one possible cause of poor attainment. It is realised that children may do badly for a number of different reasons; ill-health, lack of interest, social factors and so on. But the 'pure e.s.n.' child is backward because of 'inferior ability'. (c.f. a widely accepted textbook, 'The Education of Slow Learning Children', by Tansley and Gulliford). The notion that some children are intrinsically of poorer quality than others rests on two assumptions. Firstly, the theory of the genetic pool of ability and, secondly, the belief that 'intelligence' is an identifiable and measurable characteristic.

The 'genetic pool of ability': are 5% of the population born stupid?

When Binet constructed the first intelligence test in 1905 he placed into the hands of psychologists the power to categorise and divide children according to their performance. Psychologists like Cyril Burt postulated the existence of innate ability predetermined by hereditary factors. The distribution of intelligence was presumed to follow a normal curve; i.e. most people are neither particularly clever nor dim, but only a tiny percentage are potentially capable of achieving a great deal. It is often forgotten that this is a theoretical hypothesis which is unprovable. In accordance with this hypothesis, the I.Q. test was specifically designed to conform to a normal distribution pattern. Since reliance on I.Q. tests will inevitably categorize a section of children as 'dull', it could be argued that 2% of the population are educationally subnormal by definition.

Educability & IQ

In practice, we know that children get transferred to a special school on the basis of an intelligence test result. The test may be carried out by a School Medical Officer who has taken a three-week course on the Stanford-Binet. But the correlation between I.Q. score and school attainment is not complete; this is indeed recognised in the 1944 Act by the reference to other conditions causing retardation. But what is important is that school progress and I.Q. results are both influenced by aspects of the environment and by the child's perception of the process to which he is subjected. Many eminent psychologists have related performance on I.Q. tests to social, cultural and emotional factors. A brief review of these research findings can be found in Pidgeon's book, 'Expectancy and Pupil Performance'. Bernstein in particular has suggested a relationship between social class and language, which is intimately bound up with the concept of intelligence. Such evidence unfortunately tends to be overlooked when a child is considered for transfer.

The application of universal

standards

Our education system expects most children to conform to certain norms of attainment and behaviour. It is also a strictly competitive process. A small proportion will inevitably be seen as 'failures' in some sense. When this happens, the child is assumed to have a defect; either he lacks intrinsic qualities, ('brains', 'memory' or 'concentration'), or he comes from an 'inadequate' home. We do not ask whether the standards operating are appropriate. We do not see his failure in relation to the curriculum used, or the attitude of the teacher, or the general atmosphere of the school. We do not recognise that the child has failed only in the context of traditional educational criteria. Perhaps they need changing.

Is transfer to esn school beneficial?

The claims made for this form of provision have not been substantiated in practice. R.N. Jackson, in an article in the Times Educational Supplement, wrote: "it is indeed paradoxical that mentally-handicapped children having teachers especially trained, having more money per capita spent on their education and being enrolled in classes with fewer children... should be accomplishing the objectives of their education at a lower level than similar mentally-handicapped children who have not had these advantages!" Even using the traditional criteria of educational success, which is not necessarily desirable, segregating children has not helped them achieve more. Research findings, on the contrary, suggest that grouping slow-learning children together acts to their disadvantage. It has been suggested that deprivation of the stimulation of a normal environment leads to apathy and low expectations. Ainsworth, Thurstone, Cassidy and Stanton, Johnson, Kirk, Osterling... all these researchers have found that backward children do better if they remain in ordinary classes. (c.f. Osterling's 'The Efficacy of Special Education').

It is claimed that children suffer from feelings of inferiority if they make little progress in a normal class. Special class placement is designed to remove the anxiety resulting from failure in a competitive situation. But why does a competitive classroom structure exist in the first place? Again, we must challenge the status quo of current educational practice.

There will anyway be differences in achievement between children even in a special class, and the majority of e.s.n. schools have classes of 16 to 25. So why don't the children making least progress in special classes become anxious? It is because the teacher expects little from them, and provides a more accepting and tolerant atmosphere. They are out of the rat race because of their 'handicap'. Such children may indeed feel happier in a special class. They may have been subject to ridicule and rejection over a number of years. They may experience a sense of relief on being removed from a painful situation.

But why are they exposed to rejection? Why are schools unable to accept those who do not seem to fit in? Though it may be true that children in special schools are happier at the time, can we be sure? What are the long-term effects? Osterling suggests that within school, the child's relationships with his teacher and classmates are better in special classes, but outside school he finds himself

stigmatised by the community at large. The negative attitude of family and neighbours tends to increase over time. It has been pointed out that children from special schools encounter more problems on leaving school than they would have done had they not been transferred.

Special education as social stigma

Careers Officers tend to place children labelled 'mentally-handicapped' in unskilled, poorly paid jobs, even when they are capable of more complex work. Society segregates, and denigrates, the 5% who do not conform to the majority norms. Educators and

administrators like to believe that special schooling is not seen as a degradation by the general public. But we know what the neighbours and others call the e.s.n. schools. They are the 'daft' schools and the 'silly' schools. One American study found 80-90% of teachers were aware that derisive names were given to special class children.

The labelling process pursues its effective operation throughout the child's life. Whenever he is required to complete a form - applying for a job, housing, medical services - details of previous schooling are requested. Do we fully appreciate the implications of special schooling for the individuals concerned?

The ethics of segregation

Separating children from their peers, labelling them as deficient and inadequate and denying their parents' rights over choice of schooling is a fairly drastic procedure. To justify this, the evidence that the children benefit must be unequivocal. It must be apparent to teachers, administrators, parents and the children themselves. Such evidence appears to be lacking.

Self-image & special schooling

Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that special school labels imply shortcomings in a child, leading him to view himself in a negative light. We have not taken seriously enough how the children themselves perceive the services, and labels, they are offered. We do not fully understand how changes in self-image relate to the way a child functions. Perception of negative labelling is hardly likely to be self-enhancing. "Certainly none of these labels are badges of distinction". (Lloyd Dunn, Past President, Association for Exceptional Children, U.S.)

Self fulfilling prophecies

The assumptions underlying special educational treatment do appear to be justified; children in special schools achieve less than their normal counterparts. So the initial categorisation is superficially seen to be validated. Thus the procedure is perpetuated, together with the myth that qualitative differences exist between children. Teachers in special schools believe that their pupils have been correctly placed. They must also believe that their intelligence has been accurately measured, which suggests a fundamental misconception about the nature of intelligence. They are told that the children are not capable of achieving a great deal. And they do not.

We tend to overlook the influence of the labelling process in itself on the outcome of the treatment offered. Educational labels have been shown to affect teacher expectations, which in turn affect the child's performance. Children come to live up to the labels they are given. Most work in this area has been in the field of streaming by ability. The operation of the self-fulfilling prophecy masks the discrepancy between the stated ideals of special education and its actual results. It also helps to mask the ambiguities in the definition of the e.s.n. child.

Why do we continue to build special schools?

Is the justification for special educational treatment removal of pressure from the ordinary schools? Are they necessary to support the existing system? The concept of some children being unsuited to normal education will prevent ordinary schools from adapting to accommodate deviant children. It is cheaper and easier to cater for those who do not conform by herding them together in one building, rather than alter the present structure. Such special provision appears as a demonstration of concern, giving the illusion that individual needs are being met. By spending additional resources on 5% of children, the fact that 95% get no extra help is easily overlooked. 'We contribute to the general delinquency of the educators since we remove the children that are problems for them and thus reduce their need to deal with individual differences' (Dunn).

Special educational treatment:

60-70% of children in special schools come from homes which can be described as economically deprived. I.Q. tests are known to discriminate against children from minority cultures. There is a disproportionate number of working-class children in e.s.n. schools. The percentage of immigrant children being ascertained is extraordinary. It reached 51% in one outer London borough. Once he has been segregated and labelled, the demands made on the child decrease. His progress is adversely affected as a result. Society now treats him as a person of lower caste, deserving poorer opportunities.

In the U.S., the ascertainment of children has been taken up as a civil rights issue. Parents have launched court cases against the labelling of their children as 'mentally-retarded'. They claim this to be an official branding which contravenes the constitution. They were successful.

The proliferation of screening procedures, the massive reliance on tests of all kinds, the formulation of new categories of handicap - 'dyslexia', 'minimal brain damage', 'language disorder', etc. - all rely on psychological theories and techniques. Have the psychologists asked themselves whose purpose they are serving?

Alternatives

It is generally recognised that the aims of special education are the same as those for any children. Dewey said that all good teaching rests on the same fundamental principles, whatever the type of child involved. Teaching skills demand respect for the child's own interests and individual development. Can we really believe that only a small minority of children need preferential treatment?

We need greater flexibility for all children in the community whatever their background. Schools should recognise that certain factors in a child's environment may create difficulties for him and should be involved in improving that environment. The education system has consistently ignored pleas for change to make school experience more relevant for children who may neither be highly motivated nor interested in academic study, or who come from different cultural backgrounds. Why should any child be subject to rejection? If necessary, additional resources should be made available within the normal school. It is not suggested that the child who asks for help should be ignored. Let all children be given the facilities they need. Let all be treated as special.

Right of appeal

Several LEA's have now dispensed with formal ascertainment procedures. This has in fact been recommended by the Department of Education and Science.

If a child is to be formally ascertained, the LEA is legally required to inform parents of their right to appeal. They may stipulate a time limit of 21 days. It does not have to explain how appeals should be made, and to whom. In fact, the DES alone has the power to uphold or reject appeals, though the LEA can approach the DES on the parents' behalf. This means that the LEA can influence the decision of the DES, which does not actually have any contact with the people involved. Most appeals are not upheld.

It would seem, therefore, essential that parents should themselves appeal direct to the DES as well as the LEA. We do not know what criteria are used to decide whether or not appeals are upheld. If you have any information about this, we hope to hear from you.

This article was lifted, with thanks, from the radical psychology magazine, HUMPTY DUMPTY, available at 10p. per copy from 14 Haslemere Road, London N.8.

My second suggestion is one that I made at the annual general meeting of the P.T.A. in October 1971. I quote here the relevant portion of it:

That Sutton Park is a school for the financially well-off fills me more and more with shame. And the general truth that we are such a school is not altered by the fact that a few parents find it difficult to pay the high fees. They had better not find it impossible or they will get short shrift. We are, then, an exclusive school, but we don't screen parents so as to exclude the children of any profiteers, speculators, cheats or bullies who might apply: we just check their bank balances and exclude the children of the poor. Are you greedy, grasping, on the make, arrogant, smug, self-satisfied? - you are welcome. There is only one thing we - Catholics, Protestants and non-aligned alike - do not tolerate: poverty. The criterion for entry to Sutton Park is not, 'do you understand and approve of our approach to education?' or, 'do your children need this sort of school?' but, 'can you pay?'.

All this is obvious, and the fact that Sutton Park has to make ends meet is inescapable. But... it is just too easy to blame our predicament on the unjust social order that permits gross disparities of income, and throw up our hands in gestures of helplessness. We will all readily acknowledge that the society we tolerate for ourselves and our children is full of injustice and gross inequalities. We need only compare living conditions in a Dublin slum, or even a Corporation housing estate, with those in the luxury of an upper class suburb, where the people are not necessarily morally better, or more hardworking, or doing more useful or important jobs. Or we could remind ourselves that the postman who delivers letters to the lucky children at Sutton Park could not possibly afford to send his children here. Nor, probably could the equally indispensable men who clean our chimneys, drive the bus our children come to school in, and so on.

Having acknowledged and deplored the gross disproportionate inequalities that characterise our society, most of us will dismiss the possibility of doing anything about them by observing sadly that we cannot change the world overnight. This is, of course, true but I challenge the facile conclusion that we are thereby absolved from changing what we can change. I put it to you that we have no excuse whatever for not abolishing overnight the gross inequalities that exist within our own organisation, Sutton Park School. An example of these inequalities is that part-time teachers of academic subjects receive £1.12 per hour, part-time teachers of piano 70p per hour, and part-time domestic assistants 30p per hour.

Some will try to justify this sort of inequality by pointing out that those in the best paid categories have qualifications, sometimes university ones, while the domestic assistants have none. But we must remember that the people with the university degrees are the lucky people. They have the ability and they had the opportunities to obtain their degrees. They are lucky even before they get their pay packets, because they are doing work that can be interesting and satisfying. There is a good deal less job satisfaction for those who sweep the stairs and passages which are just as dirty again the next day. To compensate for this, they should receive more pay, not less, if there is to be any differential. But they could improve themselves and try to obtain some qualification, you may be thinking. Not all can; if all could and did, who would then do the sweeping?.

As an example of the injustice we allow to exist within our own little institution I quoted the rates of pay for three sorts of part-time workers here: the subject teacher, the piano teacher, the domestic assistant. It seems to me just about time that the people in these three categories were all allowed the

same amount of human dignity. People who do intellectual work are not worth more than those who do manual work. It is time that Mrs.A., who sweeps the floor or cooks the meals, didn't have to wear cheap clothes and live in a cheap house, while Mrs.B., who is a teacher, can dress better and live in a nice house in a nice area. It is time Mr.X., who cleans out the lavatories or does the odd jobs, was able to have a car just like Mr.Y., who is a teacher. It is time that our fellow workers at Sutton Park didn't have to bear all the time the marks of social inferiority - cheap clothes and no car. It's time, in short, that we at Sutton Park got rid of feudalism and class distinction, and recognised the equal human dignity and worth of every person working in our establishment. We could do this with no intolerable hardship to ourselves, with just a bit of sacrifice on the part of each of us who has something to sacrifice. If we don't do so, any expressed sorrow that our fees are too high for the postman is just so much nauseating hypocrisy, and so perhaps is our profession of whatever religion or ethical code we do profess. We at Sutton Park could pioneer social justice in Ireland. Let us ask ourselves, "Why don't we? What are we waiting for?".

The reaction to my speech was a highly emotional one. There was a marked reluctance all round to engage in calm discussion of what I said; there was a general attempt to forget that my embarrassing speech had ever been made. I was met with the greedy assertion that the lower-paid are quite happy with their lot and we should leave them alone and not be stirring up trouble and putting ideas into their heads. (I've got the biggest piece of cake, but lets hope no-one will notice.)

I was met also with the argument, cogently advanced, that it is I who places a money value on people when I argue that the same salary for each person means the same estimate of each person's human worth. I don't accept this at all. If different salaries don't represent different estimates of human worth, what do they represent? Not differing needs, certainly, and you can hardly maintain that they represent the worth of people's different jobs. For if you think you can really decide with any conclusiveness which jobs are the most important, the most difficult, or the most demanding, and if you think that rates of pay should relate to these assessments, you are on very shaky ground indeed.

Who should be paid more, an excellent racing driver or an excellent ambulance driver? Who should get more, the clever and busy head of a wine importing firm or the social worker who helps alcoholics? The teacher of classical Greek or the person who attends to the cleanliness of a public lavatory? A bishop or a judge? And of course the man who says, "I may be stinking rich but by God I've been through hard times and I reckon I've earned every penny of it", may never have worked quite as hard as the man who still heaves coal. Or he may have. Who is to judge?

Libertarian Struggle

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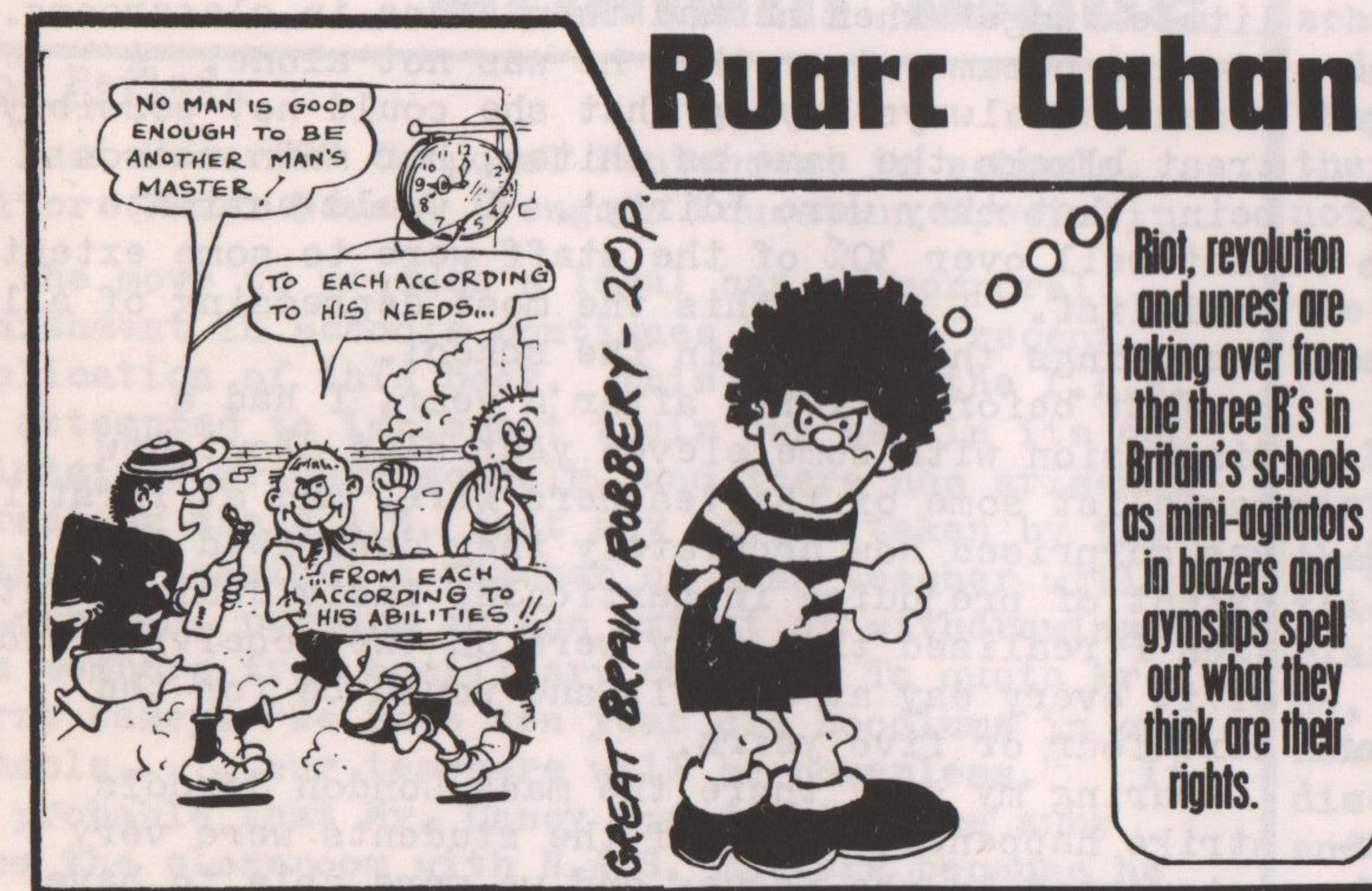
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It's folly, then, to pretend you can ever know what any job is "worth", and of course it's presumptuous to debate what any human being is worth. This being so, how do you now justify large disparities in remuneration? I'm afraid we just have to recognise that we all have the same basic human needs and the same right (if any of us have any right) to have them adequately provided for. You reply, perhaps, that the more hardworking and efficient citizens should enjoy better standards and more luxuries (to achieve this would need a revolution anyway). But then you have to ask yourself whether a very zealous teacher who spends all his spare time marking exercises and preparing classes should be paid more than his colleague who does much less marking and preparation but spends much more time with his wife and children. Or whether a hard-working and productive cigarette executive should get more than a relatively idle, or just unsuccessful, cancer researcher - and you're back to the other question - which job is more "valuable"? And having returned to that unanswerable one, you could just ask yourself this last question: should a manufacturer of cigarettes or fast cars, whose products will certainly cause much suffering and premature death, be paid more than a complete idler, quite unproductive but no harm to anyone?

After all that, you cannot any more try to justify disparities - let alone the gross disparities we know today - in rates of pay as between different occupations.

You cannot justify a school system that is in effect a machine for selecting people for the better-paid (but not necessarily more important, more difficult or more demanding) occupations.

You cannot justify, within that system, the existence of the fee-paying school where privilege can be bought.



ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Alsager College of Education near Stoke on Trent had a week of Alternative Education, March 13-20. This is in protest against a merger with Crewe College of Education. The merger is being imposed by both Cheshire and central government bureaucracies, against the wishes of students and staff, (including principals), of both colleges. The Alternative Education included workshops on group dynamics, films and discussion on the Third World First group, and a talk by Michael Duane, etc.etc. The atmosphere was rather like a sit-in. Real issues, important problems were being discussed instead of the normal claptrap of syllabuses. For more details of the programme contact Pete Blohm, Students Union, Alsager College of Education, ALSAGER, nr Stoke on Trent. (lifted from ROADRUNNER;-thanks).

FULLY COMPREHENSIVE

"It's a bloody school for hooligans" was the first non-official description I had ever heard of the place. So much for the duplicated hand-out which spoke of modern buildings, specialist accommodation, a fully integrated community, plentiful equipment, and so on. I didn't believe either view would be totally accurate, but instinctively felt that the first had the greater ring of truth. Anyway, I'd got an interview there, and I wanted the job more or less regardless.

Interviews, in an odd way, reflect the values by which our society operates. The interviewer is trying to give a pleasant picture of the job, and the applicant is trying to give a pleasant picture of himself. Both, more often than not mangle reality in the process. I presented myself at the school respectably dressed; I was playing the game. Most of the clothes I had on were specially borrowed for the occasion. I'd also had my hair cut. Only one of my competitors was paent. Only one of my competitors was patently not participating in the charade: he was wearing jeans and long hair.

The interview itself was reasonably straightforward. Myself, all I wanted was the job; they, the headmaster and head of English, in the first place wanted someone like themselves. Someone with liberal attitudes towards the subject, English, but certainly no idiotic, airy-fairy ideas about freedom in the classroom. After all you must have DISCIPLINE in a school. In the second place they wanted someone who wouldn't have a nervous breakdown once they got to the school. I shambled through my answers to their predictable enquiries, giving to them what I calculated they wanted to hear. I got the job. By a combination of half-truths, misrepresentation, lies and a painfully acquired knowledge of authority I was now a teacher.

More specifically I was a Temporary, Terminal, Part-time (9/10ths), Assistant Teacher of English working in a large, mixed, ten-form-entry Comprehensive in South London. There were about another hundred teachers on the staff. I soon found out just how comprehensive the school was. The ten classes in each year were rigidly streamed. This wasn't hidden in any way by some set of obscure letters and numbers as happens in some schools, but baldly stated: the first number denoted the year, the second the grade. The only slight concession to mystification was that the bottom four classes were referred to as H1 to H4. The 'H' stood for Houseblock, a most fitting name. These Houseblocks were situated on a separate part of the school site. H1 to H4 spent virtually all of their school time in these areas which also served as a place for all of the school to eat dinner in. Needless to say these rooms were not very pleasant places to either teach or be taught in. Although much larger than the ordinary classrooms, they were extremely bare with only chairs and formica topped tables. The kitchen also served. Kitchen also shared the Houseblocks so the smell of food was never far away, and it was not unusual to find potato dropped on the floor or smeared on a chair during an afternoon lesson. So this was what they meant by specialist accommodation. Streams 1

to 6 were taught in more conventional surroundings: neat rows of desks in which the students kept their books. These classrooms led off a single corridor on each floor of a seven storey teaching block. Each was more or less identical.

The bottom grade classes, H1 to H4, were designated the "social education" band. Similarly the middle classes, 4 to 6, were called "general education", and the top ones, 1 to 3, "academic education". The students didn't only find themselves categorised into grades, but also into all-embracing bands which dictated the type of education that student was deemed fit to receive. At least you knew exactly where you stood.

This was the set up I found myself part of: a daunting prospect. I decided to concentrate on just one thing: to try and get my students to talk and write freely about their world and what it meant to them. I tried to open up the normal constraints of classroom discipline as much as possible. The first thing that hit me was the official attitude to noise. Noise was frowned upon. Noise meant indiscipline - meant teacher had lost control - meant trouble. I believed that silence was unnatural and the kids didn't seem to like it either. They were nearly all working class, and about a third were black, mostly born in the West Indies.

As I was afraid of the authority lurking above me, and made no effort to hide this from the kids, we tried together to find a noise level above the norm but not so high as to cause interventionary visits. We were not always successful. The worst clash came with the librarian. Basically I don't think she liked children, or else she was afraid of them; probably it was a bit of both. I honestly believed that my classes' noise levels in library time were very reasonable, and although she had mentioned the need for quiet on a couple of occasions, I thought she had come to accept that little extra noise for my two hours a week there. One morning a student came in to a class and handed me a sealed brown envelope with my name on it. I was soon to learn that all messages of doom were sent in this way; as if the sender couldn't tell you to your face. It was from the head of English. "The librarian finds much extra work for herself after your classes' visits, and she cannot cope with the additional demands thus made. I must ask you therefore....." And so it was that my classes were excluded from the room with the books in it. I shared the letter with the students and they all saw themselves as the victims of unreasonable decisions made by unreasonable people; only they put it a little more strongly.

I also fell prey to one particular senior master who tip-toed down corridors stopping at each door to listen at the keyhole. If the noise was sufficient he would try to gain a visual confirmation of the teacher's identity, and if this person's status was suitably low he would then enter with a stern look on his face. I always found this very embarrassing.

Half way through the year I started using a record player with records brought in by the students. This too seemed to infringe the unwritten noise code; although if you played opera this constituted art, and was therefore exempt. Inexplicably I suddenly found it very difficult to obtain a record player from the head of department's office.

The one visit I tried to arrange was quickly squashed with more references to regulations which all appeared to have been designed to prevent and stop, rather than to create and to enable.

The bureaucratic and authoritarian attitudes that surfaced so frequently had a depressing effect. For every single lesson a class register had to be taken, presumably to counter truancy. This was over and above ordinary registration in the morning

and afternoon. This meant that an individual student would be marked in up to ten times every day; once every thirty-four minutes. Any resemblance between this system and that in prisons is purely coincidental and superficial. Plenty of the kids I taught stayed away, and who could blame them? At least they would tell me when they were going off, and often when they came back we'd have a discussion on what they'd done with their free time. I'm sure they learned much more in the streets than they ever would in the classrooms.

Another side of this new experience for me was to be working in a truly multi-racial setting. The classes I took were quite well integrated on a person to person level, but many showed racial prejudice on a general level which wasn't related directly to their fellow students. I had tried to make it clear from the start that I was not a racist. Some of the black kids had treated me with suspicion and said that as I was a white teacher then I must be a racist. It took a long time to overcome these very real fears, and even then an ambiguous word might bring new accusations. The most important thing I had going for me was that I knew who people like Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson were, and could discuss what ideas they stood for. Most of the teachers there either didn't understand or sympathise with working class, white culture let alone West Indian black. Eldridge Cleaver or Bobby Seale might have been prize-fighters for all they were concerned.

Ignorance about the backgrounds of the students was bad enough, but some of the teachers there were committed racists. This shocked me. I was talking with an older teacher and although he was known as a physical bully I was still not prepared for what he said. In effect he blamed everything that was wrong with the world on the filthy, dirty wogs, who ought to be taught a collective lesson. I wonder what sorts of things he did and said to little 'wogs' when he had them alone in classrooms. It also became clear that he was not alone. A woman was always saying that she could not possibly treat blacks the same as whites, her main reason being that they were 'dirty'. I would estimate that well over 30% of the staff were to some extent racist. I found this the most depressing of all the things that I saw in the school.

Just before I left, after a year, I had a discussion with some eleven year olds about how racist some of the teachers were, and at first I was surprised how accurately they described the extent of prejudice in particular individuals. But then I realised that they were on the receiving end of it every day at school, and would be for the next four or five years.

During my stay there the mass London Schools strike happened. Most of the students were very interested in the issues and we were able to have some really excellent discussion on them and related topics. There was more than enough to criticise in our own school. On the days of proposed strikes the police were called in to patrol the gates and the senior staff along with the senior-minded staff went out to join them. Of course teachers aren't wardens. And like the headmaster said in morning assembly, "This school's not like a prison, is it?"

As far as violence was concerned I never personally saw any that was serious apart from a teacher assaulting a student, and the everyday mental torture. However, serious violence lingered just outside the gates and it was as effectively ignored as that dealt out by teachers inside. A student was severely beaten up and robbed as he left one afternoon, and apparently two policemen in a marked car on the other side of the road chose not to intervene until it was all over. A former black student at the school died mysteriously in police custody. Mugging, a term only recently to

appear on the headlines in this country, started on a section of underground line which included the tube station right by the school. One of the odd things about this was that there appeared to be a peak of incidents between one and two in the afternoon, also the time of the school's dinner hour. All of these occurrences were pretty directly linked to the school; all were of a serious nature. And yet none was generally discussed by the staff, while the students talked widely of them; virtually a conspiracy of official silence. Like the interview situation at the beginning it is outward appearances that are all-important and not what is really going on underneath them. The official myth and the hard reality.

Adding it all up the answers don't look too promising. Most of the students in that school weren't very happy with it, and any happiness there was achieved largely in spite of the school and what it stood for. Some teachers tried their hardest, and I don't want to obscure those efforts, but the forces they were up against seemed enormously powerful. The all-pervading atmosphere was one of fear: authority based on fear. Those above depended on your fear, and they were constantly afraid of you being free. Freedom to them meant chaos, with no authority in control. I'll always remember a memo issued by a senior master, part of which ran: "... if your arrival was delayed then we could get some trouble in the queue which might lead to something even more serious." They were always afraid that "something even more serious" was going to happen. Every little thing had to be carefully supervised by an authority who would double check every two minutes and make sure the rules were kept by issuing threats of various punishments.

Graham Wade

Book Review.

"A Last Resort?" Corporal Punishment in schools.
Editor: Peter Newell (Penguin Education Special)

The move to produce a legal ban on corporal punishment in schools continues with the recent publication of this book. This January the I.L.E. A. attempted to implement their own ban in its 660 maintained primary schools, and there has arisen a threat by the N.A.S. that any action taken by the authority against a teacher or head teacher will be opposed, perhaps to the extent of withdrawing its members from ancillary duties. To quote Mr. Terry Casey: "We have ten year old hoodlums in our schools,.....our teachers will be powerless." It is probable that Mr. Casey spends his time away from the classroom with N.A.S. matters because he was frightened by these creatures, and we all secretly admire his expertise in leaving a difficult job to other people. "A Last Resort?" does much to expose the flailing emotionalism of this type of man, and it should generally be agreed that legal abolition of corporal punishment is a worthy cause, but the book also employs a degree of emotionalism which establishes it only in the annals of the debate 'for and against'. We still need a truly radical argument against any form of punishment, which this book does not give, although it is indicated occasionally in its pages. It is so easy to avoid the deep-seated falsities in the relationship of authority and power in our society by clouding them with emotionally based arguments, that we will have to accept this piecemeal attack for radical reform, but let there be no mistake that once we have won this trivial battle we will then sit back and accept our masters

cont. pg.16.

DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS b.r.j.

I am having 'discipline problems' with a class of 4th formers in my Comprehensive school. Since I've been teaching for more than ten years I can't blame the situation on my lack of experience; and, on the other hand, since this is revolutionary Leicestershire, the reason can hardly be a repressive system which, when a libertarian teacher arrives, automatically channels all resentment and protest in his direction. Perhaps not - but let me describe the situation before I draw any conclusions.

All my classes are on C.S.E. courses. Whether a libertarian teacher should ignore his principles to the extent of conniving at the examination system I don't know. I felt it was justified in January, when I started at the school, but now that I've seen for myself some of the effects of the system, I feel that I can no longer justify my position except by saying: 1. how else can I reach students of this age and 2. I need the money.

What are the effects of the system? One is so to condition students that they regard anything that doesn't help them in the exam as a waste of time. Work is something you do to pass an exam - otherwise why do it? Another effect is to produce apathy so palpable that you can literally see it in the students faces. Their expressions say: "O.K. We expect to be bored. We always have been bored. You won't do any better, so stop trying and let's get on with it." They have written school off as being boring, futile and irrelevant, and yet they accept this situation as inevitable. They accept that the exam must be passed, and so they trudge drearily through the two-year syllabus, not expecting to find anything in it interesting or relevant to their own lives. Nor is there, on the whole. Why should there be, when the students themselves have no part in making it?

My predecessor had not enjoyed teaching this particular class, and some of the students told me they had not enjoyed being taught by her. Perhaps this helps to explain why my relationship with the class was reasonably good to start with (and remain so, with most of the students, individually). I asked them to suggest topics they would like to discuss and the most popular ones - violence, sex and schools - provided the occasion for several panel-type discussions, with the four or five panel members answering written and oral questions from the rest of the class and myself. This went quite well for a time, until the last one more or less broke down because various people were ignoring the panel and holding their own private conversations. I pointed out that no class discussion could work in such circumstances. (It is quite possible to argue, of course, that their own "private conversations" are of as much value to the students as a class discussion, but they themselves would reject this.)

During the session about schools, several students complained about various forms of punishment which were in use in our school, especially detention. I said that I didn't agree with any form of punishment and that, although I might occasionally lose my temper, I would hope not to punish anybody.

cont. pg.16.

Some time later came our first crisis (John Ord says that crises are educational and necessary). I asked the class to vote on whether or not they wished to have further discussion lessons, of whatever kind. This was a secret ballot on bits of paper. The voting was 15 - 15. At the next lesson I read out the results, and took up somebody's suggestion that the class should divide into two groups, those who wanted to talk, and the rest who could read. I then asked the first group to raise their hands, so that I could see who they were. Only four hands went up. I was surprised and disconcerted. What had happened to the others? I concluded that there was no longer any real desire for discussion, and since no-one disagreed, decided to do something else. The class was due to be issued with a new novel, which they would have to read and then write about as part of the course work for C.S.E. I had three books in mind, and I tried to give the class some idea what they were like, to help them in choosing. I say 'tried' because there were so many people who wanted to talk about other things at the same time that eventually I gave up. I said that I had better things to do at home, and walked out.

Next day I learned what happened after I left from my head of department, who naturally wanted to know my version of the events. Some students had gone down the corridor, making so much noise that another member of staff had intervened and he had complained, later, to my head of department.

At the next lesson the students listened quietly while I explained why I had walked out. They made no comment when I had finished, but later I was told that they found it hard to adapt to the varying requirements of different teachers, and somebody else said I was "too gentle".

Matters drifted on. A rare good lesson obliterated by the memory of far more which failed - failed in the sense that my objectives were not realised, and sometimes were abandoned quite quickly. (And what are my criteria for "good" and "bad" lessons? And do the students share those criteria)

So to the next crisis. Books were given out so that we could read a story together, from which they were supposed to get ideas for a piece of writing. I asked for quiet and almost got it for long enough to announce the page. Then the talk recommenced. They weren't noisy, but just talking. I picked up a paper to read, and read for about fifteen minutes while they carried on talking. The situation seemed alright: I was fairly happy, and they seemed to be. But then two students walked towards the door, and when I asked why, one said that he didn't agree with what was going on in the room. We discussed the matter, and then I said they could do as they thought fit. The spokesman said, "Fair enough", and they walked out. Even that didn't produce silence. Only when I asked someone to leave the curtains alone, in a more teacherly voice, did the talking stop. Someone then said: "Let's discuss what's happened." Good, I thought, but several voices were raised in opposition, and so at last we got on with the story.

At some point during that lesson a student said: "You should tell us to be quiet." And indeed my reluctance to do so, at any rate in a manner sufficiently forceful, seems to be the immediate cause of our present troubles. An authoritarian teacher can easily get silence, and never has "discipline problems". A teacher who refuses to impose discipline naturally creates problems for himself and for his students.

But this is Leicestershire, and the official line at the school is liberal, with its talk of "self-discipline" and "self-realisation". How can students learn self-discipline if I constantly impose it? It would seem that I am toeing the official line. But, in that case, why am I having problems? A hostile critic might reply that I am a "bad teacher" - to which my retort would be that I am trying to put into practice what, theoretically, is widespread Leicestershire practice and so should, presumably, cause no problems whatever.

I therefore wonder to what extent, and by how many teachers, the line of self-discipline, etc is actually carried out. And I would ask, further, to what extent can it be carried out in a system like ours where, whatever the official line is, and whatever the personal inclinations of individual teachers may be, the fact remains that the main function of the school is to get students through exams. Faced with the imperious demands of the syllabus, how libertarian can a teacher be, especially when most of the students say that they want to pass the exams? If to be libertarian means that the students decide when to work and what to work at, then the answer must be that it is impossible for a "libertarian teacher" to work in this system without compromise.

One could go further still and point out that a libertarian teacher is a contradiction in terms since, as Keith Paton says, the role of teacher is inherently authoritarian. And the school itself is an authoritarian and hierarchical structure, whatever its ideology. Students are forced to attend. They have very little choice of subject, and the time-table then plans their day for them. They can complain if they have a grievance, and may even get concessions, but the power structure remains unchanged. The students remain order-takers from whom no initiative of any substance is expected. (The same is basically true of the staff)

This conclusion that would seem to emerge from all this is that the isolated efforts of individuals aren't going to have much impact on the system. It needs concerted action by students and staff, together. At least we would then begin to really appreciate what we are up against.

SOME COMMENTS FROM THE STUDENTS INVOLVED

- "I think that you should be more strict because I for one don't like sitting there just talking for an hour. A lot more people will walk out in future if you don't stop the few people talking and interest the whole class."
- "It's all one-sided speaking highly of the teacher and badly of the pupils."
- "(This teacher) is too progressive for the school. In 5 - 6 years schools would welcome his ideas but at the moment he is a way-out optimist."
- "I think that you should start telling us instead of letting us do as we please."
- "It is all one sided - all how you do things - how you want things - what about us?"
- "It's good and true to the point. Nothing really needs changing."

once more. For the abolitionist (and his adversary, note) the book is an extremely useful handbook on tactics, but for libertarians generally they must continue as before, drawing attention to all instances of injustice due to bureaucratisation of power, which does include much of what goes on under the term 'corporal punishment'.

BARRY COPE.

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Bryn Purdy's letter is surprisingly immoderate for someone who appears to be pleading for moderation. His mistaking a signed article for the editorial, and his inaccurate description of Ralph Gibsons article lead me to suspect that he was not giving the material his fullest attention.

He describes John Booth's article as 'an uncomfortable piece of self-messianisation'; surely an over-reaction to an article which illustrated well the nature of 'Liberal' schools, though it was over-optimistic about the effect of individuals as a counter-force to a whole repressive system, of which school is only a part.

I can certainly agree, however, that the choice of articles for LE is sometimes rather odd; I fully understand that the editors can only choose from what is submitted, but a blank page would have been preferable to that puerile piece of mystification - 'On Probation! If I deciphered it correctly, the article portrays the struggle for acceptance of a semi-liberal, rather than thoughtless teacher, foiled at every turn by a bunch of evil balding fatties, determined to withhold at all costs the Seal of Approval from our hero.

Apart from its gross insult to balding fatties like myself, this badly written sob-story tells us nothing about the repressive nature of the school system, or how to provide alternatives or fight it. The reason for its inclusion escapes me.

The function of LE, as I see it, is to provide a thorough libertarian critique of the school system, to formulate a viable libertarian educational philosophy and to suggest ways of transforming what is into what might be; neither Bryn Purdy's "Let's see both sides of the question", nor 'X's self-righteous whine are relevant to this task.

fraternally Alan Ross.
24 Thomas Road, Fulbourn.

Dear L.E. I don't suppose it was intended that way but the page 2 comment in Lib. Ed. IO reads as if I was an advocate of working inside Rank and File. So lest there should be any confusion let me clear up one or two points.

I do work inside a state school, and I am a member of the N.U.T., and the local Young Teachers Association where I find myself associating with R and F members. That is the practical side. The reasons are simple. I believe that any anarchist, wherever they find themselves situated, should use every opportunity to present his arguments concerning anarchism whenever relevant. Since I was in state schooling before I became an anarchist, I decided there was no point in immediately leaving in some kind of grand moral gesture. I decided simply to stick it out as long as they/I could stand the strain.

When it comes to prescribing what a person should or should not do as a qualified teacher re. the State system, I have no fixed standpoint, at least not a moral one. In principle I find myself in total agreement with what you say about teachers occupying a privileged position within the State hierarchy - however little it may seem like that for the individual teacher, who is constantly under pressure from entering the profession to bend his ways to the needs of the state, and the class society which that State seeks to perpetuate.

I do not share the Rank and File view concerning wages and conditions: that a struggle on these issues on a class line will introduce teachers to an appreciation of the class structure of society. (That is not to deny that in a few cases, teachers who already have doubts for other reasons about the nature of our society might finally be convinced by consideration of the teachers economic position).

What I do think ought to be done by teachers in the State system is to argue, particularly with young teachers, about their personal situation as teachers. The first few years of teaching, as the article on 'On Probation' showed in no IO, are a continuation of the education one has been receiving since nursery school - i.e. the process of indoctrination into support for the status quo. These first years will decide the issue - either teachers will accept and join in the process as it's front-line troops, or they will make some kind of bitter psychological adjustment and Schweik their way to retirement, or, very often they will leave the profession. The role of the anarchists is to the second two groups. It is to present the anarchists' case on the role of education in class society, and the role it might play in a free society. In so doing one hopes to convince enough teachers that it is not necessary to do a mental backflip, or to opt out into some civvy street job; that it is possible to find and build alternatives and to conduct some kind of fight, albeit a relatively unsuccessful one inside the schools.

Let me give you an example, and show how this approach is relevant to anarchist teachers themselves. I was profoundly encouraged by the reports of probationary years in issue IO. I have just started work in a junior school, where the set-up is much more personal than in the technical college where I have worked for the last 4½ years. It has therefore been rather difficult to know where to start, since I was bogged down by the kind of fears of isolation inside a closed unit. The bureaucratic, impersonal tech was much easier to work in from that point of view. Already I have been carpeted (within four weeks), simply for writing a letter to the local paper attacking corporal punishment in schools, on the grounds that I might have been traced to the school, and brought trouble, this being construed as 'unprofessional conduct'. To say the least, I have felt rather paranoid since that incident. But I was tremendously bucked up by those articles, - by hell, you can get away with a lot if you have the courage - and those descriptions gave me courage. I have set myself a time limit of fifteen months anyhow, after which I get out of the State system a sadder and wiser man, but they will be much less daunting now.

This kind of work being done by Libertarian Education and by my own activity, the Libertarian Education Network, as well as a number of other groups up and down the country, is very important. But in the end the answer will lie in the attempt to build alternatives along free school and de-schooling lines. At the moment the going is particularly hard, but the more work is done hand in hand with students and pupils, and the more they themselves kick over the traces, the better will be the success of the experiments in alternative education.

Finally I agree with your last point about the failure to really put over the anarchist analysis. I think this too is changing, along with many young teachers and students themselves. I also think that if LIB.ED. maintains its present high standards then the journal will make a tremendous contribution.

Yours for freedom, MARTIN BASHFORTH.

LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION BULLETIN IS printed and distributed free from 23 Needwood Close, Wolverhampton, WV2 4PP.

18 From page 6
 2. Soren Hansen and Jesper Jensen
 The Little Red School Book. Stage One 1971
 pp 195

3. Kevin McGrath...."School Councils"
 Where..October 1971 pp 314-317

4. Harold Entwistle
 Political Education in a Democracy
 Routledge & Kegan Paul 1971
 (e.g. p 94)

5. Times Educational Supplement Fri. Nov 3, 1972
 p 10

6. Swedish Ministry of Education
 "The Participation of Youth in Present Day Society"
 Duplicated 14th February 1969

7. Danish Ministry of Education
 "Student Government" and "Sketch of the 'Gymnasium' of the future"
 Duplicated I/II/1969
 Duplicated I5/I2/69

8. Charles Whiting
 "Co-determination gains ground"
 Times Educational Supplement 31st December 1971

9. I am indebted to Harold Entwistle's book (see note 4) for bringing this and a number of other points home to me.

10. My information comes from a talk given by Michael Armstrong at a one day conference entitled "Democracy and Innovation in Education" held at the University of London Union Building on 20/5/1972

11. Anthony Weaver
 An Inquiry into the Treatment of Maladjusted Children within the Educational System in England
 Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of Oxford
 1969

12. e.g. Department of Education & Science in Pamphlet No 47.

Michael Fielding is on the Editorial Board of the educational journal New Era.

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PACIFISM AND THE EDUCATIONAL SCENE

An occasional Bulletin of papers, articles and sources of information issued free by the Education Commission of the Peace Pledge Union. No.3 - April 1973 - from General Secretary, P.P.U., 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC 1 H ODX, or from the Editor, Cyril Wright, 6 Chickereall Road, Swindon, Wilts. SN3 2RQ to whom contributions may be sent.

- Here are some suggestions from the T.A.R. group:
1. Form a T.A.R. group in your area.
 2. Collect case histories of discrimination - report to central T.A.R. for publication.
 3. Subscribe to T.A.R. (quarterly bulletin - £1 pa) - discount for bulk orders.
 4. Contact your local community relations set-up.
 5. Check on your school library - submit book list to librarian for purchase of black books.
 6. Central T.A.R. will help you to get your school or college interested in including black studies in their curriculum.
 7. Get a playgroup started if there are none.
 8. Get pictures of black people in ordinary urban situations onto classroom walls (esp. infant & junior). T.A.R. hopes to produce material.
 9. Read books on lists available from T.A.R.

Teachers Against Racism, 9 Huddleston Road, London N.7. 'phone: 01-607-7633

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BY MCRUDEN & M. SUDDEN
 IT'S A BRIGHT NEW MORNING IN NICETOWN AND ALL THE HAPPY CHILDREN ARE OFF TO SCHOOL!



AFTER ASSEMBLY CHILDREN AND TEACHER'S SOON SETTLE DOWN TO THE DRY'S WORK.

HERE YOU ARE JOHNNY... GIVE OUT THE LABELS

SOON ALL THE CHILDREN ARE VERY BUSY...

MISS GREAT... I'VE FORGOTTEN ARE CHINESE BLACKS OR WHITES?

MISS... IS BORROWING SCHOOL PENCILS A GOOD OR A BAD?

GO BAD

IS BULLY BRIGGS A NASTY OR A NICE?

AT THE END OF THE DRY... ALL THE TEACHERS AND CHILDREN GO HOME WITH THE INNER SATISFACTION OF A JOB WELL DONE!

FUCKIN SCHOOL!



JOHN HINSLEY

The usual way of ridiculing what has been termed the 'Free School Movement' is to present it as the activity of groups of pissed-off middle-class teachers imposing themselves and their school upon some community in which they have a purely philanthropic interest, if any.

Picture the teacher leaving school at 4.30, jumping into a roaring red Lotus Elan and accelerating away through the broken bottles and last weeks Daily Mirrors into the splendid sunset, the suburbs, restaurants, opera, 5-star brandy and Arthur Negus. The 'Free School Movement' does have such people. It could very well do without them.

Two approaches to the problem of a Free School & Community, or Free Centre have been worked out. The first, and no doubt the best in the best of all possible worlds, is exemplified by Scotland Road and takes place in a tight, well defined area in which the people of the area feel the need for a Free School. The main problem here is that there just aren't that many areas with the required degree of cohesion, (which in Scotland Road originated as religious sectarianism), and thus sufficient 'enlightened' people. One can list such areas on the fingers of one hand: the old East End, Notting Hill, Handsworth. Such cohesion arises out of opposition to a number of oppressive forces, racial and religious, as well as economic. Felt oppression breeds opposition, and thus cohesion, and such a community will generate it's own counter-culture which may, or may not, involve a Free School.

It is the second example with which I'm concerned here. For ideological and/or personal reasons, (like being a revolutionary/having kids), a group of people may feel the necessity of establishing a Free School. Where to put it? One of the common problems which people engaged in such enterprises have come up against is the difficulty of finding premises. The premises should be both suitable for a school (in as far as the building will have to meet certain requirements) and situated in an area which needs such an institution. Every area in which I have lived, be it middle or working class, needs a Free School, (obviously the needs of a particular school will differ according to the needs of the community), but it'll probably be in a working class area. This area will constitute a possible, or if your'e lucky, existing community, but one which lacks the community consciousness to set up its own Free School, - it needs a shove, but from within. From this point on the Free School and the Community must become inextricably linked. This means that those who work in the Free School should if at all possible, live in the community, and work there if not fully employed in the Free School. This is an absolute minimum requirement. Further to this comes the desire to know and identify with the community and the realisation of the necessity of one's own replacement.

To be successful in it's relationship with the community, the Free School must be run by that Community, and not by entrenched, paternalistic teachers determined to be the guardians of the school.

The role of those who set up the school is primarily that of instigators. No Free School can belong to those who set it up, but rather, must be owned and run by the community. The instigators can serve a valuable function in broadening the sphere of community activities, 'outside' the school, but must, if the project is to succeed, be faced with the realisation that they are no more or less than any other member of the community. It is then time for them to leave if they wish to carry on this innovative role, - other areas may well need them. Our aim should be our own redundancy. Since the role of the Free Centre is to enable people to control their own lives, we cannot allow ourselves to stop them by doing everything for them.

The above article raises various points. There is a very thin borderline between the 'pissed-off, middle-class imposition' and that that springs from 'ideological and/or personal reasons', as John Hinsley cites as necessitating a Free School. Without deriding Scotland Road in any way, its impetus came not from the 'cohesive community' so much as from a rationale based on the professional training and experience of its innovators, (who may well have been integral to a 'community consciousness' nonetheless). It seems unlikely though that a community 'counter-culture' would generate a Free School without some sort of 'professional Expertise'. The intervention of outside people is not in itself wrong as long as it is understood as such by both sides, and its reasoning accepted by the community.

John seems split between the innovatory/intervention role, and that of living in the community, anti-role. It is good to hear the seldom voiced thought that the instigators role is to aim for his own redundancy. But if the revolutionary and/or parent encourages a Free School through his/her being part of an existing community, then why need they think of replacing themselves.

Being no more or less than any other member of the community is dependant on the community itself sharing that view. A sharply defined political point-of-view, and the ability to see a Free School realised, against all the likely pitfalls, will probably cause the community very much to regard the instigators as something more than the other members. An unwelcome hurdle, but pretending that it is not happening is equally dangerous.

Finding a possible, or existing, community that coincides with the community one envisages for the Free School, is unlikely. Chances are that an area may only be defined as a community for reasons totally divorced from ones own hopes, e.g. an area that only shows community cohesion when it vocalises against blacks, or harasses nearby gypsies. Such sentiments are not the preserve of affluent areas.

See also... Politics of Intervention by Tom Wooley. and... Intervention in Social Situations, by R.D. Laing

P.A. CUMMINGS

RACE TODAY

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The April issue contains a special section on ESN schooling, and what parents should know about it.

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 ...'(Time Out).
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