


Direct Action

No.12 autumn 1999 £1.50

Learning to Live, Teaching to Fail

Riding the Tertiary Rollercoaster
-Enabling-disabling-

Clinton After Kosovo
Childrearing in Reality



EDUCATION
the key to
Liberation?

Chuck the chalk, get stimulated

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Action**
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What was your school like? Does the word 'education' sound like a prison sentence in a straightjacket, or simply uninteresting - the cerebral equivalent of limp toast?

The good news is that the group of contributors to this issue went to the same sorts of schools as you. Some left as soon as they could, or just drifted away when they were 'supposed to'. The bad news (you may think) is that others include teachers, lecturers and other people who work in education, not to mention students.

For so long and for so many school has been years of soul-destroying silent exams and squeaky black boards. The only certain thing about school is that most people are set up to fail - some more than others (*Enabling Disabling*). In fact, even the parents are made to feel failures, without even sitting any exams (*Childrearing in Reality*).

But why can't we mix some stimulation with our education? After all it can, should and does happen anywhere - including behind the bike sheds. Did you know 99% of all education takes place outside the spoonfeeding factories? (official made-up statistic). So Tony and David, stick that in your pipe and smoke it - we are gonna get our own education despite any amount of your 'summer camps' and obligatory extra hour of boredom (yes, the all New Labour 18th Century style 3 R's class). For a rundown of the latest on Blunkett's houses of bondage themselves, look no further than *Schools: Learning to Live, Teaching to Fail, and Anti-Racist Education*.

Wasn't it Oscar Wilde who said "Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught."?

So just add self. All real education is self-education. You learn useful things from people you respect, and who respect you. In mutual

respect, it is the learner who decides what to learn, not the teacher. You learn yourself - from others and from your experience.

In contrast, most of what is taught in school is not the ability to think clearly or solve the problems of everyday life, but to imbibe a set of facts and take on board an ideology. State education mainly means reading books you don't want and listening to people you don't like.

And after school, it doesn't get much better - the latest changes in the further/higher/university sector are essential reading (*Riding the Tertiary Rollercoaster, Restructuring HE*), if only to note how bad things are getting.

New Labour, like the rest, go to great pains to tell us we need them, and we need their education medicine. Result 1 - we 'support'


capitalism. Result 2 - we become passive accepters of what is 'right', and receivers of other people's 'knowledge'. Result 3 - we realise where

all real education is self-education - you learn useful things from people you respect... in contrast, state education mainly means reading books you don't want and listening to people you don't like

this is leading and ditch state education for something more worthwhile.

Luckily, I'm wrong on the first two results. People simply are not stupid enough to swallow capitalist values whole - most of our useful learning is outside the state education system. If not self-taught, we are definitely self-educated. Despite what we are told ('don't worry, leave it to us/the experts/the party/the government, just give us your money/best years/blood/freedom'), we remain human. We live reasonably and we educate ourselves 'proper' - despite capitalism. And we can do more - look no further than *The Free-Ed Interviews*.

There's never been a better time. With technology more than ever, we can educate ourselves, sort out our communities, our environment, and our world, and run it ourselves. Not easy but necessary if you want to get a result (Result 3 that is).

Just look out for stimulation on the way. 

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Notes for Contributors If you would like to contribute more than brief opinions, we request you send articles (between 500 and 1500 words if possible) in hardcopy and on disk in either Word for Windows PC version not greater than 7 or ASCII format. Contact us for electronic mail addresses or alternative formats. Failing that, any decent typewritten script will do, or even neat handwriting, if necessary. While unsolicited articles are welcome, they can only be returned if a SAE is enclosed.

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After McPherson: Anti-Racist Education?

As if it were needed, the McPherson Report into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence told us we need anti-racist education. A teacher in Hackney, East London, highlights the implications.

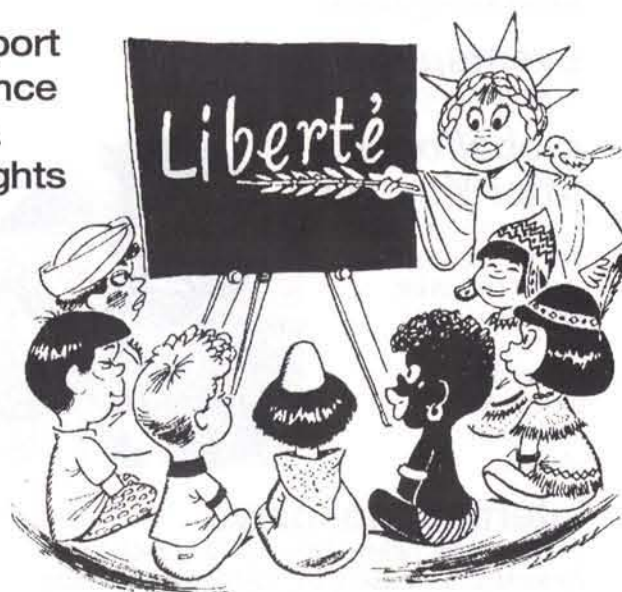
So why has the Government done precious little despite its deafening rhetoric? Amid the posturing, could there be a hint of an acknowledgement that local government - schools included - has a major role to play in challenging racism? If so, will we actually get some 'anti-racist education'?

What does it mean, anyway? The very idea of anti-racist education raises immediate issues. Can state education possibly improve society? Could Stephen Lawrence's killers have been stopped if they'd had a decent, progressive, anti-racist education that didn't steer them into a violent, racist and macho 'don't-give-a-f***' attitude?

After all, they were Thatcher's children. Their formative school years were a time of greed, selfishness, and nationalism, a time when fear of different cultures was encouraged. Streaming, league tables, school privatisation and a new prescriptive national curriculum appeared. Education unions were being undermined, dismantled or smashed. And many teachers, especially those who had built up any semblance of progressive learning, were being victimised or forced to change.

Enter New Labour, no change. Then, when McPherson came out, ministers ran around acting as if they were seriously interested in tackling this racist society. Many education workers felt a nauseating sense of déjà vu. For many years, progressive teachers have tried to deal with the problems kids have brought to school, many to do with racism, poverty or deprivation. This has always been a struggle, very often

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mess*



against the grain of government policy and school culture itself.

race harassment

The early 1980s in Hackney, for instance, saw an increasing use of stop and search and general harassment of black pupils; a string of suspicious deaths of black people in police custody; and an increase in racist murders and attacks that the police refused to take seriously. On occasions, police helicopters even landed in playgrounds in pursuit of children. The police's 'Don't go with strangers' lessons were crude attempts at low-level surveillance of pupils.

In many areas, community-based resistance grew up against these practices as both students and teachers acted together to counter the police. For instance, Hackney Teachers' Association banned police from entering schools except for their legal duty. Groups like Teachers against Racism and Fascism, and Teachers against the Nazis also attempted to change their schools, by providing responses to racism both in the curriculum and in the culture of schools.

anti-racist schools

This roughly coincided with the growth of left-controlled local

authorities, including the much-vilified Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). Beyond the tabloid hysteria, this era was simply an opportunity to pursue a less hierarchical way of teaching; to practise mixed-ability and non-discriminatory education; and to broaden the curriculum to include pupils' actual lives and communities.

With the abolition of ILEA and the rise of New Labour in local authorities by the early 1990s, 'equal opportunities' was now to be addressed in a 'professional' manner, and 'minority' issues had no 'special' status. Although anti-racist education had been built up on the strength of community and trade union based direct action, it had also seeped into the realms of the local authority bureaucratic structure. Many activists lost themselves in the various race, women's and trade union units. When these units came under threat, they discovered that the original collective power was no longer there to defend them.

New Labour old hat

Now, once again the state is saying: "That consideration be given to amendment of the national curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order to better reflect the needs of a diverse society"

Labour's asylum proposals in sound-bites

Government proposals for asylum seekers and their children: The introduction of a cashless support system for all asylum seekers arriving in Britain (exceptions only for children who arrive on their own). Refugees and their children will be expected to live on vouchers with virtually no cash.

Asylum seekers will not be allowed to work to support themselves. Employers will be liable for fines.

Asylum seekers will be offered one choice of housing and will be deliberately dispersed around the country as a matter of policy.

They will have no say in where they end up, and face hostility, stirred up by local racists and the press, as in Dover last year. Immigration officers already have the power to fingerprint and detain. They will get new powers to enter homes and arrest people on a whim of suspicion.

"Other pupils were obviously shocked and frightened, and wanted to do something about it. The kids in my class were actually weeping when they first found out. From that day, we had a campaign at the school involving public meetings, petition and a lobby of the Home Office. When another Angolan student, Muyeke Lemba, and her family, were threatened a few months later, the two campaigns joined together. We worked closely with Hackney Refugee and Migrant Support, a very practical group that brings together people facing deportation.

There was no question about the need to support these families: it was very straightforward. At the beginning of the campaign, the girls were very scared and shy.

The activities and the fact that other refugee pupils and their families actively supported the campaign gave them a lot of confidence. We were able to bring out into the open something that is often hidden. It obviously helped that the whole thing struck a cord with many other students.

And, most importantly, we won the two campaigns: in autumn 1998, the families gained exceptional leave to remain."

Angela Sibley from Haggerston School in Hackney talked to DA about a campaign at the school to stop the deportation of three students at her school. The week before Christmas, 2 pupils, Mansanga and Felician Nanga (12 and 13-years-old) from Haggerston came to school with a letter their father had received from the Home Office ordering them to leave for Angola by Boxing Day.

(McPherson Report, February 1999, Recommendations 67 and 68). But the government's response fails to even acknowledge the catalogue of campaigns, struggles and backlashes against racism in education over the past 20 years.

Beyond Blair's sound-bites, all that remains is a half-baked mess. They stress that the history curriculum already recognises pupils' 'cultural heritage' and considers the 'social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of societies, both in Britain and elsewhere'. Equally banal sentiments are offered for geography, music, art, health and social education, and so on. In a bizarre time-warp, we are plunged back to the 1970s, when 'celebrations of difference' and a superficial and token multiculturalism that became known as the '3 S's' (saris, samosas and

steel bands), did more to reinforce stereotypes than challenge them.

cut-price reality

New Labour's real attitude to free, critical, anti-racist education is stark. For example, Hackney Education is being offered to the highest bidder. It is currently a close contest between the Metropolitan Police (looking for inner city helicopter pads) and the Corporation of London. The very subjects alluded to in the government's response to McPherson, along with anything that encourages thinking, questioning or creativity will be out.

Instead, learning is to be 'dumbed down' to create space to focus on the 'employability' of Hackney's kids. In other words, the 3 R's (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic) and employment-related training - how to say 'yes' to a shit job

below the minimum wage.

Meanwhile, the DFEE boasts of spending "over £430 million in the next 3 years for extra language support and mentors for minority ethnic pupils". But the fact is that there are massive cuts in, and rising pressure on, the pitifully few Section 11 teachers offering language support to students with English as a second language. Another raging success for government policy.

asylum seekers

To underline the government's real attitude to 'minorities' and anti-racism, the White Paper on Immigration makes some of the most vicious attacks on any minority by any British government for generations. Even the Refugee Council (government funded, not exactly radical) has described it as making refugees the most excluded and deprived group of people in the country. Asylum-seekers and their children are already liable to be moved with little or no warning, typically up to five times in their first few years in Britain. Since 1996, local authorities have been barred from offering them permanent homes.

With abuse or harassment, it is often the people who work with children to whom an attack, or threat of it, is first disclosed. Racist attacks by the state, whether by the police or immigration authorities, are no exception. Those who work in schools or with young people can and must be vigilant and ready to offer help and solidarity wherever it is requested. Anti-racist education is partly about demonstrating a willingness to take direct action to stand up against state racism, a much more prevalent beast than the odd group of thugs.

union elitism

The fact that teachers are in elitist unions like the NUT (National Union of Teachers) hinders collective anti-racist organisation. As long as cleaners, teachers, canteen workers, and classroom assistants never meet together to look at common problems, they will be unable to tackle issues collectively.

The reality is that many left-wing teachers save up their 'activity' for the monthly union branch meeting. Here they vote with other lefties to pass a motion proposing the Branch Secretary writes a letter to the 'Action' Committee to ask for an indicative ballot for a campaign about something or other. By

cont'd over...


learning is to be 'dumbed down' to create space to focus on the 'employability' of Hackney's kids. In other words, how to say 'yes' to a shit job

the time all this is sorted out (and it rarely is), the original issue is often forgotten.

It is a lot more difficult, but a lot more useful, to start building real (albeit small and personal) links and structures that encourage all school workers to be part of the same union group. Then the real issues start coming out.

doing it right

In all types of work there are contradictions and difficult people, not to mention the boss hierarchy and the capitalist system itself - all of which make work inefficient and stressful. However, there are always ways to subvert the worst excesses. In school, work is no different. By getting together, school workers can find their own ways to make the place at least more tolerable for the kids themselves, who have no choice and make no living out of going there every day.

There are concrete things that many good staff have always done. Organising curriculum work that is actually meaningful to the kids themselves is a good start. Treating the kids and their parents like human beings is another. Creating an environment where students can set up their own structures or groups independent of the staff is another. Active solidarity, self-reliance, and celebration (not mute acceptance) of cultural diversity hold the key to real anti-racist education. 

1999: fighting racism in the British classroom

Patrick Carey, a secondary school teacher in Dover and N.U.T publicity officer, spoke to DA about his experiences over the past year of supporting mainly Roma refugees in the face of an onslaught of xenophobia from the media and politicians.

DA. What has the climate been like in Dover over the past year, and how has this filtered into schools?

PC. Racist name-calling of students on grounds of skin colour has increased. Words like "paki" and "wog" have resurfaced again after many years. There are many physical attacks - 15 have been serious. Two Asian shops have been attacked recently.


DA. What were the main difficulties you faced in school?

PC. Harassment. When the press and media witch-hunt started against local asylum seekers, misinformation began flooding in from racist politicians and across the national and local press. Local schools had a good opportunity to re-address this, by giving pupils information and an understanding of the real picture of what was happening. Human rights is usually seen as a "safe" issue to take up but, when I attempted to raise political asylum and human rights in my lessons, I was reported to management for "bringing politics into the classroom", and my job was on the line for it.


DA. Did the McPherson Report change things?

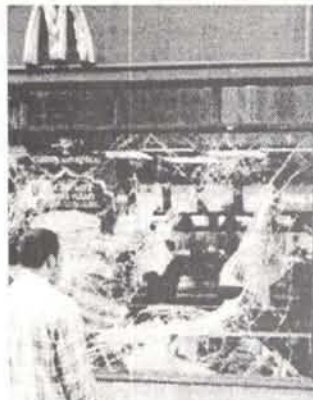
PC. Suddenly, it was management that were on the defensive and asking what they could do about racism. The McPherson Report is meaningless in itself on paper, but at least we can use it as a bit of breathing space for ourselves. Hopefully, we will not now get sacked for dealing with issues like discrimination.

On the positive side, there is progress being made inside and outside the school community to challenge racism. "Dover residents against racism" have produced and distributed thousands of leaflets. In school, some girls in Year 8 have taken their own initiative by setting up their own anti-racist club. These may sound very small-scale, but they are real and are signs of a vital step forward locally. If nothing else, we can use the new post-McPherson climate to be open about challenging discrimination, whereas eight months ago it was basically taboo.

To find out more about anti-racist education, contact Education Workers' Network, PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN. 

Martin's June 18th

Mercedes Showrooms: Now you see them, now you don't! June the 18th, well, what can I say? Got up in the morning, went to work, made shitloads of money, went home and blew it all on booze and drugs. Sorry? Ok, I got up alright and dragged my body to Liverpool Street station, where the carnival action was already well under way. Got kind of confused and didn't really know where I was supposed to go. Why did nobody tell me that it's the colour of your mask that matters. Ah well... eventually met up with some friends at St Paul's and, strolling through the city, came across Upper Thames Street. Good music, sunshine, water from a hydrant, colourful happy people and no SWP-paper boys or girls in sight. And, not to forget, that Mercedes showroom. We did have a good party until late afternoon, when I had to leave for about an hour. When I came back: no Mercedes showroom, no music, and a complete different kind of party! Tango time and by the almighty atheist, did we tango! The police pushing us gradually up Upper Thames Street away from Cannon Street. Can't really say how it all started, 'cause I wasn't there. Some pictures were just hilarious, like a small bloke desperately trying to smash a bank's window with a huge iron bar. He never made it, but got thrown into the gutter twice by the force of the rebound. As the sun went down, so did the number of people, many had already gone to Trafalgar Square, where we'd meet them again later on sitting and dancing around camp-fires. Meanwhile, we were sitting on the steps of St. Paul's once more, watching the sun go down. "Hey, did we have a good day", a friend of mine said. "We sure did", I replied. 



Amidst the fun, McDonalds gets a free delivery



J18 J48

The most satisfying part of the Carnival against Capitalism in the City of London on June 18th is that, despite the surveillance, paramilitary policing and almost total hostility from the press, we can still hit them where it hurts.

The Solidarity Federation, as well as supporting direct action on the day itself, produced a leaflet, which we distributed to City workers during the weeks before. It explained what was going on and invited them to join in, and/or start looking at how they can take on the boss at work. We managed to chat with quite a few, and generally got interested/sympathetic reactions.

On the day, a few thousand young people, in sandals and shorts, a few hundred bikes, some systems, some well-aimed bricks and an attitude that they weren't going to be beaten into defenceless submission, managed to take over large areas of the City of London. And it's official – the action did have an effect on the people in control. Tucked away in the small print in the financial press last month, a poll commissioned by Law firm, Eversheds, revealed that a majority of City financial leaders were now worried that the protest had damaged the City's standing as a financial centre. So now we know, if you want to


influence the people in power, get down to the City and get yourselves noticed: It works wonders.

For all the hype about a mindless, violent minority, the truth is that people basically fought back a bit more this time. Past Reclaim the Streets events, for example, Islington Upper Street in 1997 and Seven Sisters Road in North London last year have ended in virtual massacres when the riot police, wound up from sitting in their sweltering vans all day, have decided to go in and beat the crap out of a few tired and drunk stragglers. It was good to see that on June 18th people did stick up for each other. Obviously, the police couldn't get away with everything in broad daylight – which helped – but there was definitely a different attitude.

And it was a good, positive event, that most people will remember for the atmosphere and the vibe: sitting about, dancing in the sun, chatting to passers-by (and plenty of City workers stopped and joined in). Without being too over-romantic, it was a little glimpse of what can be done if we all put

our minds to it. On a practical level, it showed that creativity and good planning can still outwit the State. If we transfer this sort of action (and the numbers involved) to other struggles – strikes, environmental campaigns, etc., it shows we can still have an effect with a relatively small number of people.

As the excellent Schnews newsletter (www.Schnews.org.uk) said, in a Spot the Contradiction column, "City Police Commissioner Perry Nove claimed there were two main problems: firstly, the cops didn't know what was going on 'cos the protesters unspontaneously refused to tell them; and secondly they published "significant information" on the Internet before the event!

This sums up the advantages of anarchist organisation of which June 18th was a good example: good co-ordination, planning and, non-hierarchical but flexible, creative and dynamic. And it worked. Lets start making plans and looking forward to the next one. 

Andy's June 18th

I missed the chance to go on an early morning bike ride through the City of London or hand out leaflets to City Workers and had a lie-in. By the time I got up, the World Wide Web was filling up with reports, photos and video footage of actions half way around the world so I set off with a mate in Liverpool Street to find out if it was true and join what was going on.

From there, and without any sense of direction, we followed a long traffic-jam into the heart of the City to the first reclaimed square. The place was packed with dancing day-trippers and office workers. The pubs were open, the sun was shining and the few police trying to clear the roads were having no success at all and were being openly laughed at.

Down at the Bank of England, road junctions in every direction were occupied by partying crowds lapping up the weather and decorating the streets with the circled @ and new street calming signs saying things like "Can't see the wood or the trees for the Greed". Builders from nearby construction sites put up their feet to watch the celebrations before joining in. We sat in the sun on a traffic free road close to an open pub and part of a massive crowd dancing to D.I.Y samba with 12-foot puppet

monsters and what seemed like half the skate-punks of London and Barcelona. However, the laid-back atmosphere didn't last for long.


What started with a line of fully kitted-up riot police appearing along one arm of four-way street junction turned into a police riot in less than 5 minutes. The 2-3 deep lines of baton wielding boys-in-blue forced their way towards the junction beating the shit out of anyone brave or foolish enough to stand in their way. A teenage skate-punk standing close-by was truncheoned in the back as he stood pleading for calm. Squads of police horses charged into the crowd swinging-out with ferocity in what appeared to me to be a deliberate attempt to create a panic.

People did fight back, and at least one copper was pulled off his horse as fear gave way to anger and windows were smashed, fires lit and fire extinguishers let-off slowing the police charge and giving people time to retreat in safety. However, shorts and sandal-clad day-trippers crowded in narrow streets were no match for the well-armed 'up-holders of the law', and we were pushed down a canyon of monotonous office blocks until we found escape through narrow footways and up flights of steps away from the river.

After all this drama, we headed up to Trafalgar

Square past a trashed McDonalds shop and the McLibel Law Courts on The Strand to Trafalgar Square. Here, the relaxed party atmosphere that had been created earlier in the day was back on show as people tried to regain the party mood.

The statues were occupied, the fountains were full of over-heated party-goers cooling-off and the tourist bars of the West End were open for those who wanted a beer after a day in the sun and the forced walk to avoid a beating.

Smart-suited reporters were buzzing around the square like proverbial flies picking up quotes for the police or the next day papers. After asking one officer if and why he was wearing a bullet-proof vest and getting the reply "Yes! - you never know what might happen", I asked why the reporter wasn't interested in this story of armoured police dressed-up like Judge Dread herding around what was quite obviously an unarmed and mostly unclothed crowd of weekend ravers. However, he was more interested in a "Scruffy rioters hell-bent on throwing themselves like lemmings under police vans, riot shields and batons" than anything closer to reality. We left after an hour or so as the 20-30 riot vans on The Mall and boiler-suited bobbies milling around threatening everyone turned from fun to dull. 

Stop The Crop!

National Rally, Model Farm, Watlington, Oxfordshire. July 18th

The week before the Rally, some activists occupied a derelict cottage next to the test site and established the "alternative Model Farm", much to the annoyance of estate owner, the Earl of Macclesfield.

This event, organised by GEN, was billed as "the first opportunity that there has been in England and Wales for the public to say a resounding NO to the continuation of GM crop trials", and boy, did we say it loud and clear.

First impressions were ones of mild shock, "Christ, these people are organised". On site parking, a crèche, food stalls, a sound system, toilets (!) and everyone issued with a "biohazard" suit as you entered the rally site. About two o'clock, the cabaret started with Seize The Day and then music from Hunters Moon, followed by mostly boring speeches, except one from an activist from Swindon detailing their campaign against local genetic engineering.

Then it was time to put on your suit, mask up and hold hands around the GM test crop. Sounds a bit fluffy, huh? Well, not for long. With barely a hesitation, hundreds of people stormed into the field and started "decontaminating" the site. There were only half a dozen cops around at this point, so folks just got on with the job. Thirsty work under a blazing sun but immensely satisfying when you stopped for a moment




and took a look across the 25-acre field. Hundreds of white clothed figures pulling up plants or lying down and rolling the stalks flat. Flags fluttered in the breeze and a police helicopter buzzed overhead as we felt the power of collective action. This was one of six Government farm

scale tests. So, 1 down 5 to go!

Then the down side as police reinforcements arrived and 3 people were arrested. The cops have vowed to arrest anyone they identify from the pictures they took on the day. Though how they are going to arrest people who were hooded, masked and invariably wearing sunglasses is beyond me (hang on... is that the door bell...?)

Up until this point, the only blot on the landscape was the mass of journalists hanging about. At one point I was merrily engaged in a spot of Sunday afternoon gardening, when a voice said, "How do you feel right now?" I looked up to see this bloke, notebook in hand and pen poised. I looked at him, then around the field and said the only thing that seemed appropriate, "fucking brilliant, how about you?" It turned out he was from The Face. Damn, I knew I should have worn my designer shades.

Those arrested need support, so contact GEN on 0181 374 9516. Also contact them and GenetiX Snowball (0161 834 0295) for info on future events. 

Name and shame your inspectors

Snippets from the SolFed Education Workers' Network OFSTED Research Group survey:

"In a number of cases, it was 25 years since some of the inspectors had been active in the classroom"... "My inspector has never taught or delivered a subject within the national curriculum and has no idea of the difficulties" (from a School in Ealing, W. London).

PLUS: Dodgy inspectors named and shamed:

Mike Nichols—Lead Inspector: Refuses to give details of qualifications of his team, as


this information is "commercially sensitive". He is also vehemently against mixed ability teaching, and his team showed general incompetence, making random judgements and turning up at the wrong lessons.

John King and team: General rudeness to staff—reporting negatively to staff in front of students. John King himself continually sets up companies. His record of putting schools on special measures is notorious.

The science Inspector in his team was found to have been sacked from her previous school for poor management. Five separate rounds of amendments had to be made to one

of Kings Inspection reports. To quote from one of his victims: "Clearly a Woodhead zealot who believes that state teachers need shaming".

DA are keen to hear more from students and education workers about what's going on in your school, college or university. Send letters or requests for more information, or ask to be put in touch with like-minded education workers across Britain:

**Education Workers' Network,
PO Box 29, SW PDO,
Manchester M15 5HW. **

Events/Campaigns/Gatherings

Friends and Neighbours

[To get listed here, write to DA Editorial & Production, address on p.2]

LIB ED at London Anarchist Bookfair

Libertarian Education - for the liberation of learning. Meeting at the London Anarchist Bookfair on 16th October, starting 10am in Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Sq, London, WC1R 4RL (info, 0171 247 9249). Contact LIB ED: Phoenix House, 170 Wells Road, Bristol, BS4 2AG.

London Anarchist Forum & Bookfair

LAF Meets Fridays, 8pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London. Forthcoming talks include: Class and Class Struggle, 24th Sept; and at the London Bookfair (see above).

After Hillgrove

Congratulations to everyone involved in the long fight to close the last cat farm breeding cats for experiments. Contact for info on other campaigns against animal experimentation labs: Save the Hillgrove Cats, Box CB, 111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford, OX4 1RQ. Tel. 0121 632 6460, email sthc@excite.com.

Anarchist Trade Union Network

Not a union, but a new forum group for workplace issues and 'platform for debate' - info and free bulletin - 'Fighting Talk', from ATUN, Box EMAB, 88 Abbey St, Derby, DE22 3SQ. www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Parliament/2522/

Corporate Watch

CW produces some excellent material through a variety of sources, including their periodical, *Multinational Monitor*, and a superb website at www.corpwatch.org. Action side mainly limited to lobbying and exposures over issues like Nike Sweatshops, Global Climate Change and Agribusiness. Contact: Corporate Watch, PO Box 29344, San Francisco, CA 94129, US. corpwatch@igc.org

Infoshops Network

The main purposes of setting up the infoshops network are to:

1. Enable networking, skill and information sharing between autonomous groups who run info shops/cafes/etc.
 2. Discuss how info can best be disseminated on the web.
 3. Initiate a central information database.
 4. Inspire others to create their own autonomous spaces.
 5. To help put people in touch with others near them.
- A mailing list has been set up at: infoshops@tao.ca. Send the message 'subscribe infoshops' to majordomo@tao.ca. To make contact, email teapot@worthing.eco-action.org, or write to PO Box 4144, Worthing, West Sussex, BN14 7NZ.

Andy Ward Benefit Fraud Campaign

Practising class solidarity, supporting victims of benefit fraud investigations. Campaigning for abolition of 'fraud hotlines', more control over investigators, and full legal rights for victims to pursue libel cases against grasses. Contact: AWBFC, c/o Brighton Against Benefit Cuts, PO Box 2536, Rottingdean, Brighton, BN2 6LX.

Solidarity Federation

Africa Solidarity Group

Supporting struggle in Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. More people always welcome - Red & Black Club, PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX. Tel. 0171 358 1854.

Manchester SolFed

Support and Advice Sessions Drop in, last Tuesday of the month, 7pm, followed by Discussion Meeting, same day, 8.30pm. 26th October - The Media. Write/phone for info on November and December topics. All sessions open & free at: The Brow House, 1 Mabfield Road, Fallowfield, Manchester. Or contact Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW. 0161 232 7889

Self-Ed Education Collective

The SelfEd Collective is a group of people producing materials with revolutionary intent using collective means. Write to us to find out why we think self-education is essential. Try the correspondence course 'A History of Anarcho-syndicalism'. 24 pamphlet-sized Units, plus the opportunity to attend Discussion meetings up and down the country. Only £18, or a total bargain £9 for DA Supporting Subscribers (cheques to SF). SelfEd also seeks to share and develop practical skills for revolutionary activity. Everything from writing and talking to printing and DTP and much more. Send an A5 sized SAE for a copy of our first pamphlet in the Skills for Action series 'Writing and Talking'. Self-Ed, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR.

Education Workers' Network

For everyone in the education sector; from cleaners, teachers, students, lecturers, etc. Info from EWN, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.

South-west Solidarity

Swindon-Bristol based but looking for contacts across SW England. Write for a free newsletter, visit the website! South-west Solidarity Federation, PO Box 741, Swindon, SN1 3UG. www.re-creation.ndirect.co.uk/sws.html

South Herts Solidarity Federation

Discussion Meetings 8pm, 2nd Wednesday of the month in St Albans (near main railway station). Contact South Herts SolFed, PO Box 493, St Albans, AL1 5TW.

North & East London Solidarity Federation

Socials: Last Thursday of the month, 8pm, near Camden Tube. We also hold advice surgeries and have regular discussion meetings. For details of times and places, contact: SF, PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN. Tel. 0181 374 5027.

West Yorks SolFed

Members & contacts already in Hebden Bridge, Bradford, Leeds and York areas. Info: West Yorks SF, Box 5, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks, HX7 8YN.

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DA on the web

DA is monochrome - and that's the way it's staying. So if you like pretty colours, get on the Web for the only technicolour DA production. Just slip into your local cybercafe or switch on your PC, and at the right moment, type:

<http://www.directa.force9.co.uk>

SelfEd Skills for Action: Advice Day

If you want to discuss/find out ways of giving and obtaining advice - this Discussion Day is for you. **Experienced advice workers** will speak/kick off discussions.

Date: Saturday, 30th October
Place: Birmingham. Free admission.
Details from SelfEd, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4EX.

An abuse of trust

Tackling homophobia in school remains elusive - what happened to gay-friendly New Labour?

Section 28 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1988 is still with us. No-one has ever been prosecuted under it, it does not cover schools because they are no longer under direct local authority control, and its wording is nonsense. Despite this, many teachers fear (or fondly believe) that "promoting homosexuality" is illegal. This places a huge obstacle in the way of tackling homophobic bullying and creating a safe environment for lesbian, gay and bisexual kids.

Stonewall, the Lesbian & Gay lobby group and the Terrence Higgins Trust recently commissioned a survey of secondary school teachers called "Playing it safe". The resultant statistics are alarming. 61% of teachers were aware of lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) pupils and 42% had been asked for advice; 44% said Section 28 made it difficult for them to do so; 82% knew of homophobic verbal abuse (26% of bullying); but only 6% had a policy for dealing with this, and only 25% included sexuality in their equal opportunities policy.

In practice, only brave teachers are prepared to argue that they are not "promoting homosexuality", but addressing the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils. Even if they are brave, they will be without support from colleagues or policies, and vulnerable to attack from bigots. Homophobia is often worst in services dealing with children and young people, and discrimination is rife.

turning kids queer?

Away from the fear of "turning kids queer", the overriding legal obligation to provide services to all sections of the community tends to win the argument. What it does, however, is give a license to straight workers not to give a toss, leaving it up to those of us who are queer, or who have close friends or relatives who are, to give attention to LGB services.

Section 28 has to be repealed before any lasting progress can be made, and repeal is a long-standing Labour Party commitment. Or it was. Despite vigorous opposition to Section 28 dating back to the original parliamentary debates, and involving manifesto commitments, there are no definite plans for repeal. While making a film for Channel Four last year, *Time Out* journalist and broadcaster Paul

Burston's enquiries got an official line that it will be repealed in due course, when there is an appropriate Bill to include it in.

However, one of the central pieces of legislation in the last session of Parliament was a Local Government Bill, which replaced the Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) method of privatisation, the guts of the 1988 Act, with New Labour's "Best Value". Repeal of Section 28 was originally trailed as being part of this Bill. Not only was it omitted, but the Bill was drafted specifically to avoid amending it in the same way as was tried with the age of consent last year.

Local Government Minister Hilary Armstrong could not attend a June public meeting organised in the House of Commons by Stonewall. This was due to a prior engagement, but the minister remained personally committed (aren't they all?) to repeal "at the first available legislative opportunity".

With support from the Local Government Association, the local government and teaching unions and various politicians, all that was missing from the lobby in favour of repeal was the "gay-friendly" government. Despite the popular backlash against homophobia since the April bombings, the official message remains "we don't hate you, and we deplore prejudice, but you don't actually count, so just allow us to use you to show how enlightened we are, and shut up".

abuse of trust

On top of this, having canvassed gay support for years on the basis of equality measures, Labour is not just dragging its feet, but planning to introduce a new homophobic measure. This is the new criminal offence of "abuse of trust", which will carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison. This was originally introduced as an amendment by Joe "Massage Parlour" Ashton to the amendment of the Criminal Justice Bill last year, which would have reduced the age of consent. Its wording is gender neutral, but the timing and positioning of the legislation reveal its homophobic intent.

Earlier this year, the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill was wrecked by an amendment to its Second Reading in the House of Lords tabled by Baroness Young. This was supposed to reduce the age of consent for sex between men from 18 to 16 (17 in Northern Ireland), achieving parity with sex involving a maximum of one man, and "balanced" by the "abuse of trust" measure.

The Government will invoke the Parliament

Act and reintroduce the Bill to the Commons a year and a day after its Second Reading in the Commons, to become law without the Lords' agreement. One way or another, the age of consent will be the same for everyone by Summer 2000.


The facts remain though - our supposedly gay-friendly Government was forced into this by the European Courts, and no further gay equality measures are likely before a General Election, if ever.

Also, why does "abuse of trust" need to be addressed by legislation urgently, even though no date has been set for the completion of a review of sexual offences currently in progress? The latter includes all the discriminatory laws like Gross Indecency and Buggery, as well as prostitution. The urgent reason could only be a newly-established right of 16 and 17-year-old boys to consent to sex with other men. By some strange coincidence it also appears in the same Bill!

What "abuse of trust" will do is criminalise gay teachers, social workers and other carers, who work with those under 18. They will have to choose between staying in the closet or being a potential sex criminal. Many gay teachers, for example, already stay in the closet at work to avoid being branded a paedophile; those who are out are now targeted by this legislation.

As well as the difficulties and psychological damage caused to the adults by being forced into the closet, the greatest harm will be caused to lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers. A terrible sense of isolation and fear of rejection by their families and friends lead up to a fifth of lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers to attempt suicide. If suspected or found out, they are also likely to be bullied at school.

Reducing the age of consent to 16 will mean that gay teenagers are no longer criminals, and should now be able to be open about their sexuality and to seek information, advice and support. By criminalising the likeliest source of help, this legislation will ensure that they are no more able to avoid being exploited and abused than before. Many have no support from their families, so the only adults they can turn to are those teachers (et al.) who are known to be, or they work out are gay.

The Labour victory in May 1997 was supposed to bring Equality by 2000. In spite of the unprecedented numbers of out gay MP's, including two Cabinet Ministers (and a solitary lesbian junior minister), reforms have stayed over the rainbow. That really is an abuse of trust! 

Students at Goldsmiths College in London occupied some of the college buildings at the beginning of March, in protest at eight students being expelled for not paying their fees. These eight are only the tip of the iceberg with hundreds of students at Goldsmiths in financial trouble and a similar situation in colleges up and down the country.

One student involved in the occupation, Andy, summed up the feelings of many of the students involved that things had gone far enough;

"I'm training to be a teacher and I'm going to be heavily in debt when I've finished. The wages I'll get are not going to add up to much for quite a long time. I'd like to think that my kids can go to university when they get older, but what kind of a chance will they have if things carry on the way they are going?"

making connections

The occupation received widespread support, with visits from students from other colleges in London, including North London and Camberwell, where students were trying to drum up support for their own occupation. Advice and tactics came from students from East London, who were involved in a successful occupation last year. Some impromptu gigs by a number of musicians and performers, including the comedian Rob Newman, were held in the occupied buildings. The occupiers also had letters of support from Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn.

Attempts were made to broaden the action, to

Keeping Occupied

connect with other groups of students and encourage them to do the same, since many have been demoralised by the succession of changes for the worse over the last few years. They received some low-level media interest from *The Independent*, but attempted throughout to keep people informed by sending out regular faxes to the media and posting information on the Internet.

Morale was high during the occupation with a solid core of people holding the building, and a larger throughput of other students. They tried to enable access for students and lecturers so that studies of the psychology department in particular (whose buildings were mainly affected) could continue, but the college threatened lecturers using a legal technicality to do with health and safety and closed off this part of the college. The occupiers emphasised that it was the college, not them, who were stopping the lecturers and psychology students from following their usual timetable.

college plays dirty


Worried by the groundswell of support for the occupation the college warden put out a misinformation leaflet suggesting that only a small number of students were involved or supported the occupation, and stooped to the usual discrediting tactics of suggesting "some of those taking part in the demonstration are not our students"; twisting the fact that some students from other universities and colleges in London had come down to show support with the occupiers, into some kind of menacing idea of outsiders.

The occupiers then put out an imaginative

spoof leaflet mimicking the calm, rational, oh-so-reasonable language of the leaflet put out by the college, to reply to some of the misinformation put out by the warden.

The NUT (Teachers' Union), which opposes the idea of tuition fees on paper, provided the occupiers with some much needed money in support of the day to day survival costs of the occupation. The NUS (Students' Union) also supported the occupation, although when the president came to speak at an occupation meeting, he did not take up the suggestion by those involved that the protest be widened and other colleges encouraged to do the same, thus the union effectively ensured that the opportunity for a much larger and sustained campaign was lost.

The occupation eventually ended with all the students' demands being effectively met and none of the students being expelled. Those involved had learned and shown that direct action - taking things into their own hands - is a powerful and necessary antidote to the in-action of supposed 'representatives' and politicians, and the steady privatisation of study.

It is only a shame that the attempts to broaden out the action weren't more successful. The 'education' system is swinging back to being a preserve of those who can afford it. Any idea of learning being about creativity, questioning and thinking critically, takes second place to producing an obedient appropriately-trained workforce, to suit the current needs of big business and industry. Thankfully, more and more students are refusing to be the fodder. 

Czech Flag burning

At 12 noon on Friday 30th July, about 30 protesters from the Solidarity Federation, Anarchist Federation and London Class War mounted a protest outside the Czech Embassy in London, culminating in the burning of the Czech national flag. The Protest highlighted the case of Michal Patera, a member of the FSA, the Czech section of the IWA.

The Solidarity Federation believes Michal has been victimised for his active opposition to fascist and neo-Nazi activities in the Czech Republic.

ferocious attack

The case stems from an incident which took place in a Prague Club on Friday 27th November last year (DA11). Human Rights groups have warned that neo-Nazi violence is now reaching "epidemic proportions" in the Czech Republic, mainly targeted at the Roma Gypsy minority, who are forced to live in ghetto areas. Human Rights groups say that at least 30 gypsies and foreigners have been

murdered and thousands attacked by skinhead gangs.

A spokesperson from Solidarity Federation said:




North/East London Solidarity Federation would also like to express our belated thanks at the successful fund-raising social that took place on May Day at the Arsenal Tavern, particularly Anarchist Communist Federation, London Class War, and to the bands who took part, in particular the Doleclaimers, Steve Cope and the North London Anarcho-Syndicalist Choir.



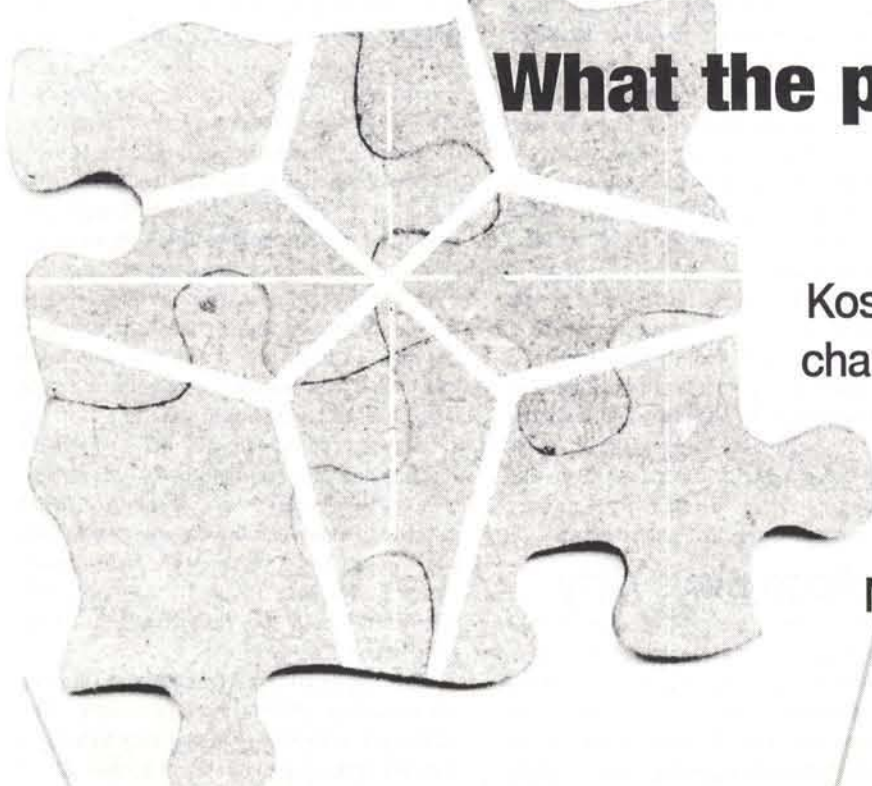
"Members of the IWA and other anti-fascist and libertarian organisations in many countries around Europe are actively attempting to create solidarity and peaceful and safe multi-ethnic communities in every country in difficult circumstances, while fighting off attacks from neo-nazis. For instance, in Britain, the Solidarity

Federation are active in supporting Asylum seekers in Dover and elsewhere, against racism and victimisation from our own Government. It is vital that people such as Michal are defended from victimisation from the state."

She added: "On July 30th, a Czech Flag was defaced with a swastika and burnt, symbolising the Czech state's collusion with neo-nazis and publicising Michal's victimisation for his anti-fascist activities. We call on the Czech prosecution service to immediately drop the charges". 

After Kosovo:

What the papers don't say



Kosovo gave Clinton and Blair the chance to put another piece in the New World Order jigsaw.

Anyone who supports

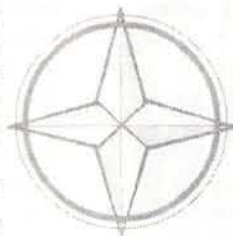
NATO's involvement take note.

Remember the collapse of the Soviet Union? Those powerful images of crowds of people tearing down the Berlin Wall? The cold war was over. The threat of nuclear war had passed. A New World Order was coming, and the billions that had been poured into the war machine would now be used to create a better world. Within a decade, any such hopes have faded fast. The first major war in the region in nearly half a century has brought ethnic cleansing back to central Europe. Where did it all go wrong?

When the Soviet Union collapsed, there was much media talk of a massive aid package for the former USSR, similar to the Marshall Plan that helped rebuild Europe after the Second World War. In reality, this was always just talk. The collapse of the Soviet Union was greeted with deep suspicion amongst much of the United States' political elite. They were victims of their own propaganda - they refused to accept that the USSR could be peacefully overthrown from within.

The powerful US military

instead of money, the west poured economists into Russia...



establishment was dependent on the continued existence of a Soviet threat, real or otherwise, to justify continued massive defence spending. Given this, it is not surprising that the US approach to the collapse of communism was one of extreme caution. Any talk of aid was couched in terms of Russia publicly embracing western capitalism. In the arrogance of the victor, the US laid down a number of strict conditions that Russia had to meet before receiving aid.

The central US demand was that Russia must adopt a free market economy. Instead of money, the west poured economists into Russia. These free market advisors new how best to make the transition to a market economy. They promised that once the free market was established to their satisfaction, investment would pour into Russia, attracted by a cheap, well-educated workforce and huge natural resource wealth. The western advisers put together a plan that would transform Russia into a modern capitalist system. Using restructuring strategies developed by the IMF, they decided on a course of "shock therapy" for the Russian economy. This involved a "big bang", under which the state-regulated economy would be withdrawn over a very short period. They predicted that

production would fall dramatically between 30-50%, forcing the free market to step in and salvage production and distribution.

Russian markets

Amazingly (or perhaps shamefully), Russia's political elite accepted this hair-brained nonsense. Duly, in January 1992, the plan was put into action. Price controls on 90% of goods were abolished overnight. The rouble was made convertible and a privatisation programme was introduced. Prices immediately rose by 250% in a single day, and by 2000% over the ensuing year. The rouble plummeted, trade and output collapsed, and wages dive-bombed by 40% in real terms.

Amid the misery and chaos, it was not the free market but a "spiv" economy that emerged, run by powerful ex-communist officials and Russian gangsters. The more prosperous economic sectors were sold off for ridiculously low prices, while the lame ducks remained in state hands, dependant on handouts from a financially crippled state. Rapidly, Russia became dependent on the export of raw materials, with a small, corrupt, money-grabbing elite subordinate to

western interests, while the majority languished in rapidly increasing poverty. In short, Russia began to look a lot like a classic third world economy.

As the region plunged into a permanent, deepening state of crisis, the US political and military establishment quickly went onto the offensive. They argued that little had changed; the system in Russia had not been de-sovietised and remained a threat to US interests. This line has been maintained to the present day. National Security Advisor and close associate of Madelaine Albright, Zbigniew Brzezinski proclaimed recently that the financial crisis in Russia signalled the "end of the naive spin... namely, that Russia has successfully privatised and has been successfully democratised. I am afraid neither is true".

The idea that the western advisors' free market medicine might be responsible for Russia's illness was never countenanced. The patient, not the treatment, was blamed. Russia became increasingly portrayed as a shambolic place, incapable of change, inherently unstable and still armed to the teeth - and hence a constant threat to US global interests. The military establishment quickly drew up strategies to enable the US to confront and contain Russia. Needless to say, any idea of diverting money from arms spending to Russian aid to bring some stability was never seriously contemplated. The US political military elite constantly need an enemy, and Russia has been it for most of the 20th Century. *It is in their interest to ensure that Russia remains unstable.*

The world's media spent the first years of this decade portraying Russia as a heroic place, demonstrating its courage by throwing off its communist yoke. Suddenly, it had to about-turn (at the US elite's behest), and we were back to the old pre-Glasnost image of a dark, menacing threat. US political strategy became fashioned around the aim of Russian containment, to ensure that it will never again pose a threat to the world number 1 superpower. A centrepiece of this strategy was NATO expansion, through which the former Soviet colonies would become dependent on the US. The aim was to isolate Russia both militarily and economically. As one US commentator Garry Willis noted in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, "the dominant faction in Washington was persuaded that the best way to deal with the Russian threat

was by encircling that country with military bases, client states and NATO protectorates".

However, the policy of expanding NATO set off alarm bells amongst the US ruling elite. Former ambassadors and senior diplomats to Moscow, such as George Kennan and Jeff Matlock, lined up to condemn the idea of NATO expansion, arguing that it would lead to greater instability within the region. NATO expansion would be recognised as a direct threat to Russia, and a crass attempt to use the collapse of the Warsaw Pact to strengthen the Western Alliance. In the event, the instability of which they talked was not slow to appear. Almost overnight, the Balkans erupted into the war in Kosovo.

war in Kosovo

The west did not go to war in Kosovo over the issue of ethnic cleansing. Any idea that it did is pure nonsense. Those who proclaim the Kosovo war to be a "just war" are mixing cause with effect. The bombing of Serbia transformed a vicious civil war into ethnic cleansing on a large scale. Without the cover of war, the Serb forces would have been unable to commit the atrocities they did against the Albanian Kosovars.

The reality is that the west went to war over the role of NATO, not ethnic cleansing. At the Rambouillet peace talks, the Serbs, under extreme pressure from Russia, accepted the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo, apart from a token Serb force on border crossings. The Rambouillet package was accepted in its entirety by the Serbs, apart from Chapter 25, dealing with the NATO-led occupation force. Serbia signalled their willingness to withdraw their forces, provided it was a UN security force that replaced them. On 8th April 1999, the Serb parliament accepted a political settlement monitored by UN forces.

However, the US insisted that the agreement should be policed by a NATO-led force, which would not only have the right of inspection throughout Yugoslavia, but would also be exempt from responsibility for their actions before local courts. This was rejected by both the Serbian and Russian delegations. The Russians pointed out bitterly that the US concerns had little to do with the rights of the Albanian Kosovars and everything to do with its plan to take the opportunity to extend its influence in the region by



Humanitarian mission? Not quite. Kosovan refugees lie dead on the road after NATO bombed them.

the reality is that the west went to war over the role of NATO, not ethnic cleansing

establishing a NATO protectorate in Kosovo.

In late April, a round of peace talks assisted by the Finnish and Russian Governments foundered on US insistence that the proposed security force should be NATO-led. Further negotiations at the G8 Summit in June failed when the Russian foreign minister made it clear they could not accept Kosovo becoming a NATO protectorate. By May 27th, the Financial Times reported that the Russian Government was now proposing the total withdrawal of all Serbian forces in return for a UN peace keeping force. The needs of Serbia were now secondary to its desire to oppose further NATO expansion in the area.

The US leadership (and its puppet, Blair's Britain) refused to allow a role for any UN-led peacekeeping force, and stuck to their insistence on NATO domination. This outraged the Russian elite. In a speech in Cambridge in March, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke out. He expressed his astonishment that the west prioritised its expansion of NATO so much, it was prepared to make a bonfire of all the international accords

and organisations that had been put in place to safeguard international peace and human rights. He argued that if the diplomatic machinery set up to tackle such issues had been used (such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the war would have been avoided. Instead, Russia had been deliberately sidelined, and denied a direct input into negotiations. He concluded that the only explanation was that the NATO strategists must have wanted the war in the first place.

Meanwhile, the war had been sold to sceptical European allies on the basis that a short aerial bombardment would force Serbia to accept NATO's terms. However, buoyed by Russian support, Serbia was holding out far longer than expected. Pressure mounted for a full scale ground war, and some hot-heads within the US administration even called for direct NATO invasion of Serbia, on the basis that invading Kosovo alone would prove too difficult and costly. Slightly more sensible elements of the NATO alliance (notably Italy and Germany) broke ranks and voiced their opposition to a ground war.

As time went on, the NATO alliance began to show signs of fraying. Now under pressure, the US accepted terms allowing some Russian peacekeeping involvement, though it still insisted it must come under overall NATO command. This is currently still hotly contested by Russia. Nevertheless, the decision by NATO to allow a limited role for Russian troops has led some commentators to point out that if this minor concession had been made at Rambouillet, the war would have been prevented.

Alas, in reality, the concession was only made because the US feels it can 'handle' the limited Russian presence in Kosovo and still achieve its aim of a major NATO bridgehead in the region. It still appears that Kosovo will become little more than a NATO protectorate. As the Washington Post recently noted, the final outcome in Kosovo will have "NATO at its core, a NATO General in command, and not an Official of the United Nations, the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe or anybody else".

If you are still hoping that a truly international peace keeping force will be established which will lead to a neutral Kosovo in which Serbs and Albanians can coexist, forget it now. You have only to look at Appendix B of the peace agreement reached with

Serbia which gives NATO personnel "free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access... NATO is granted the use of all airports, roads, rail and ports without payment of fees, duties, dues, tolls or charges... NATO forces have immunity from prosecution for civil or criminal offences". In other words, the undisputed rulers are NATO and the Albanian majority has little say. Meanwhile, the Albanian minority is the subject of increasing persecution.

victory for humanity?


The war in Kosovo has been hailed by many liberals as a victory for humanity. Clinton and Blair are held up as heroes intervening to stop ethnic cleansing. The talk is that the war has redefined NATO's role to that of 'world humanitarian police force', intervening here and there to right wrongs. A kind of Superman image is tentatively being tried out by the worst of the world's yes-media (Hollywood press?).

Anyone who really believes any of this is either thoroughly ignorant of reality or embracing crass stupidity. As NATO's first Secretary General, the late Lord Ismay, once remarked, the aim of NATO is "to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down". He could have been describing the aims of the war in Kosovo.

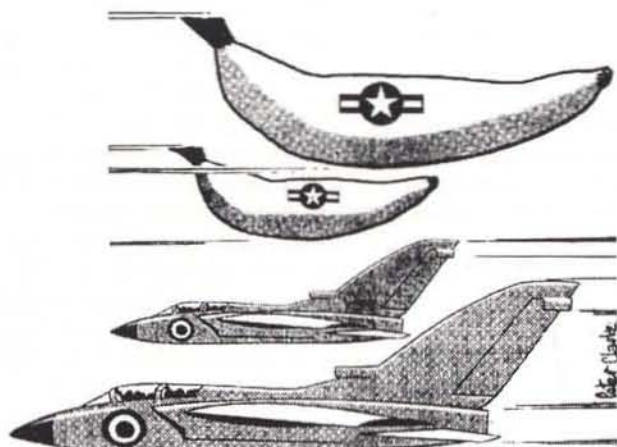
NATO has now completed another step in its strategy to surround Russia with pro-western countries. In this context, for NATO, Kosovo was not a war but a single battle within a wider war strategy. This wider strategy continues apace, with both Romania and Bulgaria expected to join NATO shortly.

The events in Kosovo have also put on hold German moves to set up a European Security Council, which would have included Russia and other non-NATO countries, aimed at allowing greater European independence from the US. This has been bitterly resisted by the US, who viewed the setting up of the Council as a direct threat to its dominance. With the NATO 'victory', at least in the short term, the US hegemony over Europe seems assured.

As for Russia, the war in Kosovo can only strengthen the anti-western hawks within the Russian elite, who see NATO as a direct threat to Russia. The Herald Tribune recently reported that, since the war, the Russian high command has decided to modernise rather than dismantle Russia's Nuclear arsenal. The increasingly vocal extreme nationalists have seized upon the war to stir up anti-western sentiment. The nightmare combination of these two factors is neither easy nor pleasant to contemplate. In an unstable Russia still in possession of some 3,500 intercontinental ballistic missiles, should the nationalists gain power, we may all look back on the cold war as a period of relative stability.

Remember the collapse of the Soviet Union and the hope that the world could become a happier and safer place? The fall of the Berlin Wall seems such a long time ago... Unfortunately, there is no short-term moral to this 'story' or 'way out' by marking a ballot paper or switching allegiance. Kosovo is simply proof, if proof were needed, that the only certainty is that we must live in fear and uncertainty. That is, as long as we put up with this crazy world dominated by capitalism and politicians. 

Kosovo is simply proof that the only certainty is that we must live in fear and uncertainty. That is, as long as we put up with this crazy world of capitalism



India

There are 3,300 dams in India, and another 1,000 are currently under construction. At the same time, 200 million people (a fifth of the population) do not have access to drinkable, clean water.

The 1960s and '70s saw countless large dams built across the world on money from loan sharks such as the World Bank. However, the drastic environmental and socio-economic consequences are now so obvious that they are now recognised as usually a bad idea. As an instrument used by governments to accumulate power (it allows them to decide who gets how much water, and who grows what in different parts of the country), large dams constitute a guaranteed way of stealing from peasants the benefits they've gained from traditional knowledge. They are also a blatant way of taking water and land away from the poor to give it to the rich. Dams force huge numbers of people to move away, from their homes and means of subsistence, often making them destitute migrants.

The environmental news is not good either. They ruin the land, cause floods (and even local earthquakes) and spread diseases.

But unfortunately, there are still powerful forces of capital at work, and, like a homing device, they seek out weakness and opportunism. Any chance will be taken to export large dam projects to the third world disguised as development aid, along with other types of rubbish like obsolete arms, old aircraft carriers and illegal pesticides. Aid for India is just another business deal.

According to detailed studies on 54 big dams carried out by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, the average number of


Sardar Sarovar



people forced to move away by the construction of a big dam is 44,182. That means that, across India as a whole, we are talking several tens of millions of people during the last 50 years - and another one or two tens of millions with the existing dam-building programme! And that is not counting all the other thousands of people moved away by other "development" projects.


During a private conference, the Secretary of the Indian Planning Commission estimated that the total figure is close to 50 million. It's like stumbling on the largest ever mass grave. 50 million people is more than the whole population of Gujarat; it's ten times the number of Palestinian refugees; three times the

population of Australia; and over three times the number of refugees caused by the apartheid in India. By contrast, the mere million people that fled Kosovo is chicken feed.

The problem is it is difficult to study displaced populations of dam projects, because, forced on by dire poverty, they tend to migrate. So what's happened to all those people? What do they do for a living? Nobody knows; they don't exist anymore. During the French-Canadian wars of the 1770s, Lord Amherst exterminated most of the native Indian population of Canada by presenting them with blankets infected with the smallpox virus. Two centuries later, in India, different methods are being used to achieve similar objectives. 

Turkey

Recent events surrounding the arrest of Kurdish resistance fighter Ibrahim Oholan have highlighted the apparent state of 'democracy' in Turkey.

The reality is that, 50 years after winning the vote, the position of women in Turkey does not get easier. A quarter of Turkish women remain illiterate. Laws which allow state orphanages to enforce virginity tests on older girls remain in place. As does the police right to investigate "crimes of morality", a phrase often used to justify virginity tests on women about to be married. Adultery remains a crime but only for women, who if found guilty by the courts, are imprisoned. While male offenders only face, at worst, small fines. Who said voting changes things? 


Mexico

Recently, huge foreign-owned paper companies have acquired large tracts of land in southern Mexico to grow eucalyptus and palm trees, which have been genetically altered to yield pulpwood with short growing times. Evidence suggests that much (or most) of this fibre will end up as packing materials for products assembled in the maquiladoras, for shipping goods out of the country.

Since the enactment of NAFTA in 1994, there has been a proliferation of sweatshops in Mexico, especially along its northern border region. Known as maquiladoras, these factories assemble products for export, mostly to the U.S. The Mexican maquiladora industries now employ more than one million workers on pitiful wages and conditions, in the production of clothing, auto parts, furniture,

electronics and other goods.

This is the picture of NAFTA. Workers across Mexico finish the most productive years of their lives as poor as when they started; the border region is despoiled by uncontrolled disposal of industrial wastes; and rainforests and farmland in the south of the country are converted into tree plantations which drain the soil of its nutrients and leave it virtually useless for agriculture.

Reports from Mexico record that multinational corporations even rent land from *campesinos* on short terms, because they know a few years after putting in tree plantations, they can return it to its owners, the land ruined. 

J18 across

USA


37 people were arrested after people reclaimed the streets in New York's financial centre. For nearly 2 hours, 500 costume clad protesters took over, tying up traffic and rallying in front of the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street. Two people were arrested and equipment seized.

In San Francisco, over 500 people came out to Reclaim the Streets, dancing through the Financial District, stopping outside the corporate headquarters of some of the world's largest and most vile transnational corporations and financial institutions. Stops also occurred in two of the city's giant retail chains.


In Los Angeles, protesters played cat and mouse with the police as they tried to hold a party, blocking streets despite baton charges. Police were forcing people out of the park by pushing and hitting people with their batons. More than 100 activists joined in a Carnival Against Capital in front of a Bank Boston in the city's financial district. Hundreds more workers watched, costing the bankers many thousands in lost "productivity."

600 demonstrators organised by Jubilee2000 in Washington DC formed a human chain around the U.S. Treasury Department.

In Eugene, Oregon, a parade escalated into violence as police deployed tear gas and arrested 15 people for rioting, felony, and other charges. Three officers suffered minor injuries in the rioting, as did an unknown number of protesters. As many as 200 protesters held a stand-off with police for hours, stopping long enough at intersections to disrupt rush-hour traffic and anger drivers, but paraded away when threatened with arrest and tear gas.


Around 50 demonstrators in Austin, Texas, barricaded both ends of a street and took control of a section of road. The police arrived and arrested three of them. 

Canada

In Vancouver a hundred people blockaded the Stock Exchange. In Toronto, the RTS was a fun celebration and reminder that public space is for public benefit. 



Spain

300 people spent a couple of hours with music, fireworks, closing down streets and banks and Lladro's, the richest and most hated speculator in Valencia. In Madrid, seven days of action in the financial capital came to a head with a Reclaim The Streets smack bang in the commercial centre of the city. Other highlights of the week included 100 people occupying the Madrid Stock Exchange for more than an hour. In Barcelona, two small groups of people closed two main streets in. One of them, in Sant Andreu Town, recreated a beach and they gave fried potatoes to commuters in cars. 100 people took part in action at the derelict site of a squatted house evicted and demolished by police two years ago, creating an organic vegetable and medicinal garden, with water features. In Sant Cugat (20 km from Barcelona), a bike demonstration of just 13 people managed to close the motorway and get to Barcelona to join the main demonstration. Barcelona's Reclaim The Streets proper took place with up to 700 people dancing until 11pm. 


Czech Republic

350 people met in central Prague, disrupting banks and multinationals despite over a thousand police (probably due to the previous 7000-strong street party with people from the Intercontinental Caravan, where there were 114 arrests.)




Germany

In Cologne, about 95 people were arrested, mainly from the Intercontinental Caravan, who have been making peaceful protests throughout Europe. People were beaten by police outside an art hall and 500 people protested outside the chemical transnational company Bayer in Leverkusen.

The Caravan members came to Cologne for the World Economic Summit to ridicule the Gang of Seven in a Gandhi-style "Laugh Parade", but 250 were prevented by police from entering the city centre. They were surrounded and some arrested, including Vijay JAWANDHIA, president of the Inter-State Co-ordination Committee of Farmers' Organisations, and his wife. Police used brute force, injuring at least two and making racist remarks, this despite an admission that there had been no violence on the side of the Caravan. On Saturday 19/6, estimates of the numbers still in custody ranged from 6 to 30 people. 

Uruguay


The Montevideo June 18th Network occupied the main square of the Old Town (the financial centre). A trade fair was set up, with themes such as cheap labour, child labour, education, local culture, consumption and communication. Trade unions were also involved. There was also a parade, entering into the Stock Exchange, the Banco de Montevideo and passing in front of the Ministry of Housing and the Environment and McDonalds, where they stayed for a while singing and getting in the way. 

For more reports from around the world on J18 see the Schnews website at www.Schnews.org.uk.

the planet




Australia


Kim Beazley, opposition leader, was pined for speaking at an APEC/Global Trade meeting sponsored by Shell. Protestors harassed the Stock Exchange, McDonalds and the Australian bank, Westpac, who invest in the Jabiluka uranium mine. Elsewhere in Melbourne, bells were sounded to wake up the world to Third World Debt problems, a Critical Mass and a Food not Bombs breakfast was held. Protesters blockaded the stock exchange with dead wombats! 

Pakistan

In Gujrat, Pakistan, there was an enthusiastic anti-nuclear procession. The leadership of the trade union association, Apfutu, which had gone underground on the 14th, came out masked and veiled and joined the rally despite blockades by a local administration eager to arrest them. Angry protesters broke the police control circle. Women went on hunger strike outside the deputy commissioner's office. During a protest gathering about 300-400 hundred, police commandos arrested several of the 'leaders'. They used baton charges and tear gas on innocent men, women and school children. 50 of the protesters were released on bail, and the rest were shifted to the district jail. A reliable source says they are charged with attempting to damage/harm the territorial integrity of the country. The punishment for this is death. Bail had now been granted to all but 9 leaders, who are said to have been tortured and beaten. Neither the defendants nor the trade union organisations can raise the money to hire lawyers to defend them in court, but they welcome any donations to the "International Solidarity Funds of APFUTU"; title of account:

International Solidarity Fund of APFUTU, bank account no : 1180 (U.S. Dollars), 1181 (German marks); Allied Bank of Pakistan Limited, main branch, Chowk Nawabsahib Gujrat (Pakistan). Supporters may transfer cash direct to the above accounts or send cheques/bank drafts to the union address: All Pakistan Federation of United Trade Unions (APFUTU) Union House, Rang Pura, Sargodha Rd, Gujrat 50700, Pakistan Tel: + 92 4331 28736/26398 Fax: + 92 4331 525302 E-mail: union@grt.space.net.pk 

Nigeria

A 10,000 strong "carnival of the oppressed" brought Port Harcourt, Nigeria's petroleum capital, to a standstill. Many were from the Niger Delta, where oil corporations are destroying their environment. Shell and Agip had their offices blockaded. Elsewhere, a street named after General Abacha was unofficially re-named after Ken Saro-Wiwa and the old signpost pulled out. 

Lithuania

Pabrade is a town in East Lithuania. The main industry in the town is imprisoning asylum-seekers, migrants and immigrants.

Pabrade prison (known officially in Stalinist double-speak as the Foreigner's Registration Centre) has about 200 detainees - men, women and children. A couple of years ago it held 1000, but the International Organisation of Migration then became complicit in paying for and arranging the deportation of the majority of prisoners. For those who remain, there is no formal education (for the children), no work opportunities, and daily living in the prison is controlled by violence from guards. HIV/AIDS is spreading.

The detainees are families from all over the world. Russians, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankians and Afghans were double-crossed by criminal racketeers who, for a fortune, promised to get them into mainland Europe. Meanwhile, the European Union countries are intent on creating a ring of buffer or client states which will operate as a first line of exclusion from Fortress Europe. The Nordic countries, in particular Sweden, Norway and Denmark, are acting as financiers for the erection of immigration controls around the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

These Baltic countries are in effect on trial. Not yet fully capitalist, but in transition to capitalism, their role is to act as buffer zones to control migration into Europe. Once they have shown they can fulfil this role, then they too may be offered the Holy Grail of millennium capitalism - membership of the European Union.

Pabrade is not a death camp. It has no gas ovens. But the barbed wire and emaciated faces echo the imagery. The racism of immigration laws that necessitate prisons like Pabrade is no more justifiable than the anti-semitism of the Nazis. Oppose racism and immigration controls by faxing or writing to your Lithuanian embassy.

From the UK, write and protest about Pabrade prison camp to: Lithuanian Embassy, 84 Gloucester Place, London, W1H 3HN. Fax: 0171 486 6403. Protest to: Commissar Aligaatas Varnelis, Foreigner's Registration Centre, Pabrade, Svencionys District, Lithuania. Get info./offer help to: The Legal Assistance Project for Refugees, Gedimino Avenue, 2600 Vilnius, Lithuania, or, in the UK: Campaign To Close Down Pabrade, c/o GMIAU, 400 Cheetham Hill Rd, Manchester, M8 9LE. Fax: 0161-740-5172, email: CloseDownPrabade@ncadc.demon.co.uk 

Learning to live,

The modern school is a crucial instrument for maintaining and justifying continued hierarchy and privilege in today's society.

But that doesn't mean we should reject the idea of schools as centres of learning.

School prepares people to participate (or not) in a variety of other institutions, while levels of education largely determine a person's earning power. This, in turn, determines where they can live, and in what social world they can mix. Thus, school is a powerful mechanism for distributing values of all kinds and 'making' particular kinds of people.

In fact, historically speaking, school is quite a recent invention. It is therefore useful to understand how and why it has developed into the institution it is today. Furthermore, different people at different times have had all sorts of expectations and made all sorts of claims for the 'education' system, none of which it could ever meet.

first schools

Schooling developed initially under the auspices of the church in medieval Europe. But it wasn't until the 18th and 19th Centuries that there emerged a trend towards universal and compulsory schooling supported and regulated by the state. France and Prussia led the way. The 1717 Prussian system became an important international model (like the

later

German one), which developed a common, graded and integrated curriculum, designed primarily to meet the Prussian state's legal, labour, military and political needs. In many ways, such schooling systems helped the consolidation of nation-states, legitimising and propagating the ideology of the nation. In Britain, it was 1833 before the government accepted that philanthropic groups could educate the poor. In 1839, when Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools was created, it was still felt that a compulsory system would be hold back learning.

By providing a liberal education for boys (girls weren't even considered), the school system ensured, through sons replacing fathers, stability of the social structure in a period of change. It also meant that able, ambitious, intelligent and competitive lower middle class boys (working class boys had scant primary education at best) could be incorporated into the growing social apparatus, a process that was later to be applied more widely.

The rapid development of capitalism brought population growth, industrial depression, increasing deprivation, and the first signs of emergent European competition. There was widespread concern at rising social unrest amongst the poor, especially the unemployed, as workers resisted the new working conditions. Both the factories and the armed forces demanded a skilled, disciplined, numerate and literate workforce. This restructuring of working class lives caused the breakdown of the traditional family function as a work unit. Instead, family members entered the workforce as isolated individuals. At the same time, the factory acts removed children from many jobs (supposedly to stop child exploitation, although the worst jobs, like chimney sweeps, remained) creating a need for custodial care.

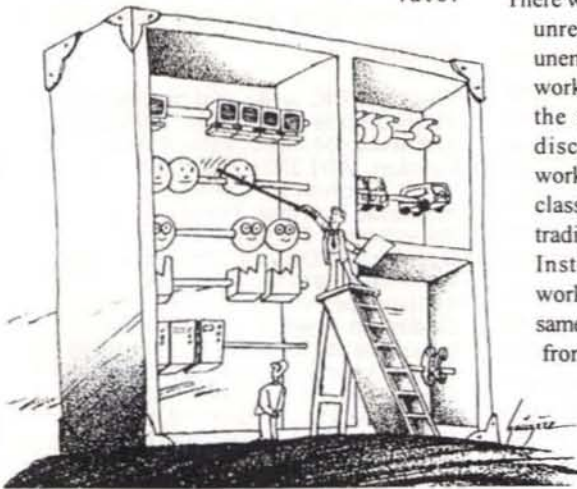
the universal cure

So it was no coincidence that, by 1870, school was seen as a panacea. It was the solution to poverty: "Pauperism cannot be checked until the children are nurtured in the habit of self-reliance, independence and morality... cultivated by a proper system of education" (Earl of Devon, 1862). It was the solution to social disorder: "What would prevent the working classes from engaging in those vain strikes... from habits of waste and improvidence, but some knowledge of the succession of events in life, such as education could supply" (The Times, 22nd July, 1870).

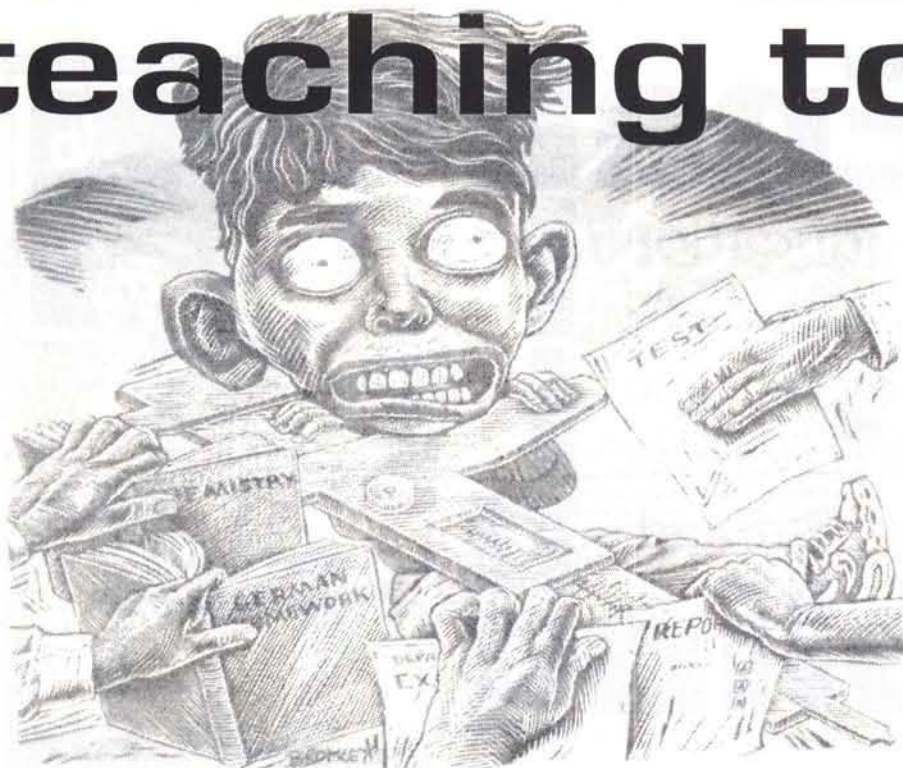
State education promised to cut crime, prevent poverty, stem social unrest and bind the poor more closely to the nation state. The Elementary Education Bill of 1870 created new schools in 2,500 school districts, while the 1886 Mindella Act made school attendance compulsory for children aged 5 to 11. There was a clear desire for more direct and successful social control. Mobility in schools was regulated by timetables and bells; actions were monitored and rewarded or punished; religious, gendered, capitalistic and eurocentric values were imposed with an emphasis on knowing your proper place.

Growing demands for 'national efficiency' and a streamlined, rational education system led to the 1902 Act and the establishment of the kind of school system we know today. This set up 140 Local Education Authorities run by county councils and controlled by experts, who administered codes of regulations and a system of inspection. This national compulsory education system allowed both efficient administration and the propagation of a national ideology, serving the needs of central government.

Education reform was again the magic formula to end class antagonisms in the 1940s. Ideas about citizenship, education and nation



teaching to fail



had gained ground in the inter-war years, particularly after the 1931 election of the National Government, which faced a widespread crisis of legitimacy. What was required was a form of political and economic intervention to pre-empt and contain fascism and Bolshevism. The writings of Keynes, Roosevelt's New Deal in the US, and contemporary Liberals in Europe and America all stressed the need to reconstruct and modernise both the economic and social organisation of capitalism. Keynes in particular influenced the Liberal and Labour parties with his stress on the regulation and integration of social and economic planning. In terms of education, the solution was seen to be the extension of secondary education to all.

Education was to be central to convincing the electorate of the validity of such extensive state intervention. There was widespread propaganda about the role of citizenship in a democracy and the need for this to be developed through education. The end of the 2nd World War brought rising expectations, of which the Labour Party was the main beneficiary, converting war time unity and patriotism into a new consensus around state management of the economy and intervention in social policy. The 1944 Education Act was designed to avoid controversy and gain the widest possible support. To this end, its two main planks were free education, and its extension to the age of 15.

This was a considerable achievement for the labour movement. It would be wrong to present the education system as merely about the ever more subtle regulation and discipline of the individual by the state. Working class

resistance and demands were also part of the backdrop to the post-war school system. There was a long history of working class alternatives, such as the libertarian Sunday schools that existed up until the war, which were part of ongoing struggles for self-emancipation by developing a critical awareness through literacy and 'learning'. However, traditional labour movement concerns with the class character of educational politics as a whole have gradually narrowed since the 1944 Act to become almost exclusively an issue of access to a system that has been effectively directed and controlled by government. Thus, state provision of 'education' for all was a historic compromise comparable to the incorporation of politicised workers into the 'representation' promised by political parties and trade unions.

'investing in people?'


The 1944 Act established a three tier school system - grammar, secondary modern, and secondary technical - with each tier said to enjoy a 'parity of esteem' in catering for the needs of different children. However, they basically ensured that social divisions continued to reflect the division of labour. By the 1960s, it was no longer possible to support such an obviously selective system, so the National Plan of 1965 responded with an 'investment in people' theme: "Education is both an important social service and an investment for the future. It helps to satisfy the needs of the economy for skilled manpower of all kinds, the needs of any civilised society for educated citizens who have been able to develop to the utmost their individual abilities, and demands by individuals for education as a

means both to improved economic prospects and to a richer and more constructive life".

With this new emphasis, education came to be more and more the preserve of experts and professionals with little or no understanding of working class children. The sixties saw a procession of investigations into how education could meet all the demands placed on it - from industry, for fostering social unity, and for solving working class 'failure' and parental indifference. Youth, usually male and working class, were seen to need a preparation for work. This was both in the senses of developing appropriate skills and of forming the right character to correct the influence of the supposedly 'bad' home environment. The working class family home was seen as not being conducive to learning for a variety of reasons - from bad housing and living conditions to the supposed bad morals, lack of encouragement and 'restrictive language codes' of parents. Indeed, the social life of whole communities now came under the increasing scrutiny of an expanding array of professionals, dissolving the boundary between schools and social services.

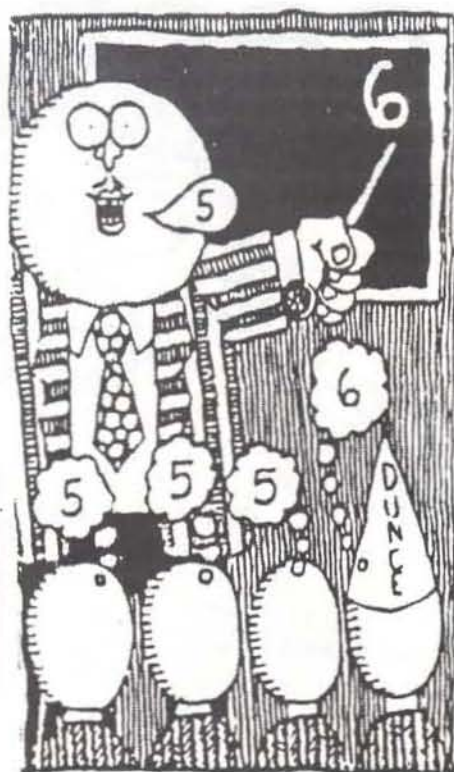
This 'civilising' mission is alive and kicking today as New Labour touts parenting classes, curfews for youngsters, as well as parent-school and parent-child contracts. Despite its claims regarding 'education', an enduring function of school has been as a childminder - freeing parents to go out to work by warehousing their children. Custodial care (childminding), although relatively cheap, is by far the largest part of a school's budget. At the same time, compulsory attendance ensures that all children receive the appropriate ranking, grading, work discipline and skills useful to capital and state. This is the ultimate reality of schooling for the vast majority of children. It is carried on under the camouflage of education and the myth of social mobility.

Calls for more and better education then, need to be set in the context of the social reality of schooling, which has little to do with education. It would indeed be surprising if one of the core social institutions of liberal-capitalist society had much to recommend it to those of us interested in social revolution. It is important to develop alternative models and practices of learning based on creativity and fostering critical and independent thought and action.

There are well-meaning people involved at many different levels in schools, but it is important to remember that the fond memories some of us might have are largely in spite of, not because of, the school system. 

Enab Disabling

Doesn't state education produce enough 'failures'? New Labour want more - and their first victims will be forever labelled 'learning disabled'



The education system in Britain brands the majority of working class people as failures. It strengthens capitalist hierarchical structures, and prepares people to live with daily increasing greed and poverty. Working class teenagers are 'successfully' churned out every year onto the dole queue or into alienating jobs with no future. With the odd exception, schools produce workers who reflect their class background. In short, schools and colleges serve the purposes of capitalism. At the bottom of the pile are the kids with what are referred to as special needs and learning disabilities.

Many learning disabled children come from backgrounds where unemployment, low income and dependency on benefit is rife. Many live in unhealthy, overcrowded and poor quality housing, often with a history of failing and being rejected by schools. This is not to say that most children from such a background are 'learning disabled'. Most aren't. Nevertheless, statistics show a high correlation between class and learning disability. For instance, a child from a 'socially disadvantaged background' is

children with special needs are being marginalised, isolated and excluded from developments in education

seven times more likely to have a learning disability than a 'normal' child. 'Socially disadvantaged' here is the simultaneous presence of low income, overcrowded housing conditions and 'adverse family circumstances'.

So what actually are learning disabilities? One definition is a dysfunction in one or more neuropsychological systems that affect school performance - that is problems in one or more parts of the brain involved in the learning process. They include speech and language disabilities (including dyslexia), attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, autism and other social contact conditions, acquired memory disorders, and various non-verbal problems. These can occur singly or together in various combinations. For instance, dyslexia, a difficulty in learning to read and spell, often co-occurs with other language problems.

Besides different patterns of occurrence, learning disabilities also vary widely in severity, from mild, to moderate, to severe. The majority of learning disabled people are in the mild bracket and, within the school system, kids with mild learning disabilities are found both in mainstream and in 'special' schools.

The causes of learning disabilities are complex and not completely understood. Research points to the involvement of the most recently evolved parts of the brain. The argument goes that these brain areas are more subject to genetic and

environmental variation, whereas the older, longer evolved brain parts, are more highly conserved. Thus, there is a complex combination of genetic/biological, and environmental factors to be considered which affect brain development. Environmental factors contributing to and exacerbating learning difficulties include emotional/psychological factors, many of which can be related directly to conditions of deprivation. To these should also be added the nature of the education system itself and its handling of learning in general, and learning disabilities in particular.

Within and beyond the education system, much has been made of moves towards the integration of learning disabled kids from special schools into mainstream schools. This idea is credited to the 1978 Warnock Committee, which greatly influenced the 1981 Education Act, the first to centrally address special needs education. Such moves seem to reflect the comprehensive schooling ideals of the 1960s and '70s. Thus, the 1981 Act established a conditional duty on LEA's to educate children with special educational needs in ordinary schools.

However, the educational and social integration of children moved from special schools must be considered in the light of what the mainstream schools are already offering to the pupils in them. What is taught and how it is taught, as well as the way in which we organise and manage

schools, are major causes of children's difficulties. Although it would be simplistic to dismiss wholesale the traditional view that the origins of some learning disabilities lie in the child, it is nonetheless equally simplistic to state that all learning difficulty results from the basic impairment.

What's more, there is much historical evidence (some of it even quoted in the Warnock Report itself) that there have always been children with difficulties and disabilities in ordinary schools. Despite this, the report continues to identify 'handicapped' with special schooling and 'non-handicapped' with mainstream schooling. To move away from this perceived segregation, Warnock brought in the term 'learning disability' to describe the range of children who would not only still continue to attend special schools, but who would also be integrated into the mainstream.

A further weakness of the 'education for all' talk is that it cannot currently be achieved. Leaving aside the whole capitalist ethos of the education system, it is naive to think an under-funded system could deliver the goods. The whole idea smacks of the same short-sighted cost-cutting as Care in the Community, despite its 'libertarian' packaging. To cap it all, what few gains resulted from the 1981 Education Act are now threatened by the battery of school tests which have been introduced since the 1988 Education Reform Act. It is more than a suspicion that children with special needs, whether in ordinary or in special schools, are being marginalised, isolated and excluded from developments in mainstream education. They are less welcome because priorities lie with children whose needs are easier and cheaper to meet and who will not adversely affect the school's public performance indicators. The danger is that integration of special school pupils could be halted or even reversed, and an increasing number of children already in ordinary schools could become educationally and socially segregated in their own schools or inappropriately sent to special schools, making the system even more divisive and damaging.

testing, testing, 123

Another feature of learning disabilities that must be knocked down is IQ testing. While there have been some moves away from IQ tests, they are still influential in diagnosing learning disabilities. This is despite a mountain of evidence to prove their inadequacy. For instance, 58% of the

kids in one sample who were classed below the IQ cut-off were found to have IQ's that changed by between 15 and 30 points when they were re-tested. In another sample, 25% of children had changes of up to 15 points between five and eleven years old. A New Zealand study revealed that only 57% of kids diagnosed with reading difficulties at seven years old were similarly diagnosed four years later.

IQ tests tend to be based on the traditional school curriculum notion of intelligence and, as such, they are unreliable. The original standardisation is often based on groups of children who don't adequately represent the children for whom the test may be used. They are often biased toward the dominant (middle class) cultural grouping. Nevertheless, despite their poor ability to predict educational achievement, IQ tests are still used to separate kids off into special schools. Of course, they perform an ideal role for a capitalist-inspired education system, by filtering out potential 'under-achievers' and beginning the process of ranking children according to how they fit some into some rigid notion of intelligence.

The inadequacy of IQ testing should be no surprise, as it gives scant recognition to the real nature of the learning process. Different children develop different skills at different rates. But educational orthodoxy tries to shoehorn this important process into school curricula, where the rate of progress is rigidly pre-determined. Those who can't keep up fall by the wayside, to be segregated off into remedial and special education. From this point on, kids are labelled as failures.

remedial rejects?

On the face of it, the idea of integration may seem to be a move away from this situation. Integrated education in mainstream schools in theory involves learning disabled kids being taught alongside others, but with additional individualised support. The true picture, though, is one of an under-funded education system without the resources either in the classroom or in the training colleges to turn the rhetoric into reality. Nevertheless, as knowledge about specific learning abilities develops, researchers and educationalists can and do put forward strategies for improving the learning disabled child's chances. The point is that not all children need have access to all aspects of the curriculum. Instead, if individualisation of learning opportunities is to work, it must be recognised that slow progress by learning disabled children in a few parts of the curriculum is far more

desirable than little or no progress because the whole curriculum is presented too quickly.

The days of wholesale withdrawal to special remedial class may be beginning to wane. While this approach may be the most suitable in some individual circumstances, it is still over-relied upon, above all because it is cheaper and uses less resources. Attempts to explore other forms of individualised support are still the exception rather than the rule. Such methods can play to a child's strengths. For instance, for those with language difficulties, an emphasis on non-linguistic approaches, such as the use of film, video or demonstrations, may be much more valuable.

quick, slow, quick

A look at language development demonstrates just how much variation there can be between individuals - and proves that an individualised approach is crucial. Normal language development goes from stage to stage, with language use, understanding and interaction all going hand in hand, reflecting the child's growing understanding of his/her complex social environment. Such progression takes place in different orders and at different speeds for different children (though school curricula and IQ testing give little allowance for this fact). All children, therefore, go through various stages of having problems in producing sounds correctly and in stringing phrases and sentences together. However, for some, language difficulties persist beyond the age when other children have got to grips with their native language.

Language disabilities differ in type and extent. Differences in children's memories, verbal reasoning abilities, inferential abilities and verbal playfulness are all important factors, but language disabled children can have difficulties in one or more of these. With age, these problems can change and/or disappear, sometimes to reappear later. Language disabilities can become apparent at any stage in a child's education. In fact, many children reach secondary school with language problems which have gone undetected. These show up due to the increased demands of the secondary school curriculum.

So, there is a changing picture; children with language difficulties are sometimes able to cope, sometimes not; able to cope in some subjects, not in others. Difficulties can even disappear, only to reappear again as curriculum demands increase once more. The overall picture is one of a wide range of subtly different language

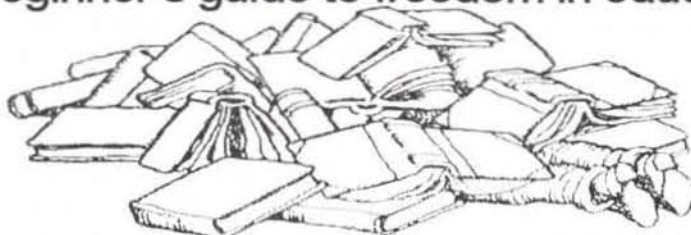
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*as long as
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concern*

FREE Education

Reprinted from *Freedom in Education* (Lib Ed, 1992 - see reviews)

A beginner's guide to freedom in education



What's wrong with ordinary education anyway?

It is anti-life, it is a systematic attempt to repress the natural instincts of the developing person. Play, fun, spontaneity and love are crushed and replaced by conformity and the fear of freedom.

But some people like it.

Of course... a lot of ordinary authoritarian education is simply building on the foundations laid by traditional authoritarian child-rearing. Even before entering school the child has been 'broken'. The child's personality develops as a projection of the parent's ambition - the rest is repressed - the child is polite, quiet, guilt-ridden and awaiting further instructions. It's not surprising that many of them want to be told what, when and how to learn.

Well, what's the alternative?

Freedom - freedom for people of all ages to learn what they want, with teachers supporting the learning, not directing it, no matter how subtly.

Isn't that a bit pie in the sky?

Not at all. It's not only practical, but it exists. There are lots of schools and colleges around the world where there is freedom in education. In England, Summerhill is probably the best known example.

Are they all fee paying places?

Not entirely. In this country most progressive schools are outside the state system and exist by charging fees, but some, like The Sutton Centre in Nottingham, are financed by local authorities. In other countries such as Denmark, the state is more prepared to fund free schools, so there is much less need to charge fees.

Well, what of the rest? They won't change, will they?

They are already changing - they are becoming more authoritarian. As the economy continues to decline, the state is even less disposed to allow experimentation and creativity in schools. Cost-effectiveness and discipline are the order of the day. The need for the education system to meet the increasingly stringent needs of the state are more and more articulated. What schools do for (or to) the individual is even less considered.


Is this libertarian idea of education new, then? Has it developed as a critique of modern society?

Yes and no. No, it's not new, in that schools have been criticised since they were first invented, but the developed libertarian philosophy of education goes back about 200 years to William Godwin, who wrote of the child as "an individual being with powers of reasoning, with sensations of pleasure and pain, and with principles of morality... By the system of nature he is placed by himself; he has a claim upon his little sphere of empire and discretion; and he is entitled to his appropriate portion of independence." Since then, many people, including Tolstoy, Ferrer, A.S. Neill and Paul Goodman have developed the idea. But it is also new in the sense that it continues to develop. We see Libertarian Education in that tradition, updating the critique of authoritarian education as we also describe and encourage the libertarian alternative.

But if libertarian ideas are so good, why hasn't the education system adopted them?

Mainly because it is in the interests of some people to make sure that institutions don't develop along libertarian lines - people who profit from the willingness of others to be exploited and enjoy it. Most importantly, the owners of capital want workers who will not only work for less than their work gives the owner in profit, but who will be grateful for the opportunity. Ultimately, though, so many of us gain a vested interest in the prevailing system that the majority are reluctant, at least initially, to see changes.


How can we support the struggle for libertarian education?

Firstly by being critical - by questioning what the experts are telling us, whether the experts are teachers, journalists or parents. It is helpful if we can work in groups with other people in the same position. We can do this as women, kids, teachers, whatever, we don't need a political party. In fact, the record of all of the major political parties in Britain on education is bad. The problem is that most parties think they know best how to organise peoples' lives. The libertarian idea is for people to control their own lives. The struggle will mainly be local and small scale, around issues people feel strongly about. Talking to friends, reading, picketing, writing, organising might all be involved, but determined by those involved. Our role is to keep people in touch with the positive developments, to inform the struggle and encourage it along. 

...more on democratic education in the interviews over the page...

Summerhill School under threat of closure

Summerhill School, probably the world's most well-known free school, is under threat of closure by Britain's Department for Education. The school has now received an official Notice of Complaint. There are six points: three about accommodation, three about lessons. They want Summerhill to ensure that the children are engaged regularly in learning, either at lessons or a self-supported study system, and to aim at standards in line with national expectations. This hits at Summerhill's central philosophy - freedom for children to choose what they do and when they do it. Those who have written to the government to complain have all been receiving a standard reply, saying that no progress has been made at Summerhill since the last inspection. This is untrue. It also says that schools are obliged to provide a broad, balanced curriculum, which seems to be more of a definition of the sort of curriculum offered by Summerhill than that offered by conventional schools, whose curriculum is narrowed to the exclusively academic, missing out on all social learning and most practical experience. Anyone who can describe the British national

curriculum as broad and balanced has odd definitions. The main reason the government wants to shut Summerhill is that it doesn't have compulsory lessons but, if pushed, they'll say anything and everything is a problem. The real problem with this emphasis though, is that logically, all the thousands who teach their kids at home will be next to be told how to bring up their kids. And then they blame the parents. They assume that because a nine-year-old is at a certain standard, they're never going to make it. For some reason, they refuse to take any notice of Summerhill's exam results and the records of what people do after they leave. Summerhill has been a high profile school in the history of alternative education. Not only is New Labour intent on closing it, but they're going to try to make it look as if Summerhill is a failing school, which will affect other democratic schools across the world. Letters of protest to: David Blunkett, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT. Email: dfee.ministers@dfee.gov.uk 

Who is Solidarity Federation?

Solidarity Federation is the new solidarity movement. Formed in March 1994, it consists of a federation of groups and individuals across England, Scotland & Wales. The basic foundation of Solidarity Federation is the Local.

Getting down the Local
People are getting together to form Locals - Solidarity Federation groups. Locals put solidarity into practice. In time, each Local will have a premises as a base for solidarity action in the local community. Locals are organising or getting involved in local campaigns across a wide range of issues - both in the community and in workplaces. Issues are wide-ranging: defending our natural and local environment and health; opposing racism, sexism and homophobia; in fact, anything which defends or contributes to our mutual quality of life. It is all part and parcel of building a solidarity movement.

Direct Action
Apart from being the name of this Quarterly, Direct Action is the tool which Locals use in all their work. At a basic level, this can be simply the spreading of information through leaflets, local bulletins and public meetings to raise awareness and involvement locally. However, Direct Action is not limited to spreading information. It means a physical presence in defending and promoting a better quality of life. Fundamental to Direct Action is the reality that we can only rely on ourselves to achieve our goals. While we reserve the right to take opportunities to fight for improvements to our quality of life now, the solidarity movement must always remain independent from those

we are demanding from. Solidarity Federation will accept neither leadership, charity, nor guidance from government or business - instead, we must couple our principle of solidarity with the practice of self-reliance.

Networks
Solidarity Federation members who work in the same work sector have formed Networks. Their purpose is to promote solidarity amongst workers. Networks also use Direct Action to fight for better pay and conditions. Networks form the basis of a completely new labour movement, nothing like the Trade Unions, which are weakened by having to abide by ridiculous laws, and by hierarchical power structures and self-interested paid officials. The fundamentally different nature of Networks fits their fundamentally different aim.

Where to?
As Locals and Networks grow, they practise community and workers' self-management. Eventually, industries will be run by producers and consumers. In other words, by workers (in Networks) and people in the wider community (Locals) who want the goods and services they provide. And this is no flight of fancy or text-book dream. As the solidarity movement grows in members and influence, so does the scope for action. Both the Locals and Networks have already established a reputation and are showing real results in membership & effectiveness.

Global Solidarity
Capitalism is international, so we need to be organised globally to oppose it and build a viable alternative. Nationalism and patriotism lead to

pointless and false divisions, used as tools to fuel economic and bloody wars. Solidarity Federation opposes these in favour of a movement built on global solidarity.

Solidarity Federation is the British section of the International Workers' Association (IWA), the anarcho-syndicalist association. This gives it essential international solidarity and experience from much larger sections such as the CNT (Spain) and USI (Italy). Founded in 1922, the IWA has a long history of solidarity in action; by the 2nd World War, over 5 million people worldwide were affiliated. A combination of war, fascism, and soviet 'communism' all but destroyed the movement, but after the Spanish CNT re-emerged in the late 70s, the IWA had a new lease of life. Today, there are sections ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members, and growth is rapid. At the last IWA Congress in Madrid, another 7 new sections were affiliated from South America, Africa, Ireland, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Getting Involved

A global solidarity movement can only gather strength as many more people who share the same aims get involved. Contacting Solidarity Federation offers the possibility of contributing to this growing momentum.

It is not like joining a club, union or political party - rather, it is an opportunity to channel your efforts for change and, at the same time, benefit yourself from the experience. It might just be worth it. For more info, write to the SolFed Contact Point below. 

Aims and Principles

The Solidarity Federation is an organisation of people who seek to destroy capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit world-wide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their servants; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and the source of privilege.

In their place, we want a society based on solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism. That society can only be achieved by working class organisations based on similar principles - revolutionary unions. These are not Trade Unions only concerned with "bread and butter" issues like pay and conditions. Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside - which arise from our oppression.

We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Unless we organise this way, politicians - some claiming to be revolutionary - will be able to exploit us for their own ends.

The Solidarity Federation consists of Industrial Networks and Locals which are the nuclei of future revolutionary unions and centres for working class struggle on a local level. Our activities are based on Direct Action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through direct participation of the membership. We welcome all who agree with our aims and principles and want to work to achieve social revolution. We recognise that the class struggle is world-wide, and are affiliated to the International Workers' Association (IWA), whose Principles we share.

Solidarity Federation Addresses

**SF Contact Point: SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.
Tel. 0161 232 7889**

Networks - make contact with others in your type of work -

Education Workers' Network, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.
Public Service Workers' Network, PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN.
Communication Workers' Network, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.

Locals - get involved locally in regular meetings and action -

North & East London SF, PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN. Tel. 0181 374 5027
Red & Black Club, PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX. Tel. 0171 358 1854
South-west Solidarity, PO Box 741, Swindon, SN1 3UG
South Herts SF, PO Box 493, St Albans, AL1 5TW.
West Midlands SF, PO Box 6705, Redditch, Worcs., B97 6SQ
Norfolk & Norwich SF (Norwich Solidarity Centre), c/o PO Box 29, SWPDO, Manchester M15 5HW.
Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 511W.
Tel. 0161 232 7889.
Sheffield SF, PO Box 1095, Sheffield, S2 4YR.
West Yorks Solidarity Federation, PO Box 5, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks, HX7 8YN

To make contact with groups and individuals in the following areas, get in touch through the SF Contact Point: North-west, Middlesborough, Chester-le-Street, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Cambridge and Kent.

The Free-Ed Interviews

LibEd and SelfEd; Two Collectives committed to freedom and self-expression in education -

-DA cornered them and demanded to know what on earth they think they are trying to do

LIB ED

LIB ED is....? How far does LIB ED go back and what was the original driving force for setting up?

LIB ED is a small collective whose aim is to promote "freedom in education". We do this by publishing an irregular magazine, and more recently books, and organising occasional conferences and meetings - we're running a series of meetings at this year's Anarchist Bookfair, for instance.

It all began in 1967 with an announcement in Freedom. An organisation called the Libertarian Teachers' Association was formed and it put out a newsletter. This developed into a magazine called The Libertarian Teacher. Most of the people who started it were teachers in state schools, you see. Later, people thought that this title was a contradiction in terms and changed the name to Libertarian Education. The collective used to refer to the mag as Lib Ed for short, and that was adopted as a snappier title in the 1970s. At the same time, the subtitle "a magazine for the liberation of learning" was added, and we've stuck with that ever since.

What sorts of things do you do, and where do you look to influence the way we view and use education in society today?

Well, we try to examine the way society educates its members. We look at schooling, as this is an important part in the process, however much we may dislike it. There is, or at least has been, some scope for libertarian teachers to counter the ideology of the school. So we like to look at those possibilities. We try to discuss how a non-patriarchal anarchist society might educate, and look at alternative education projects/experiments to see if these give us any clues. Our last book, *Real Education - varieties of freedom*, explores different approaches to incorporating freedom as a cornerstone in various education projects or schools around the world. We also attempt to look at non-institutional learning - our next book, *The Dredd Phenomenon*, looks at political ideas conveyed through comics, for instance.

Tony Blair was supposedly elected on an 'education education education' platform. What do you think of New Labour's general attitude towards education?

As you might have guessed, we're not keen on Tony Blair! You just have to read the regular Curriculum Cop feature in the magazine. In the latest issue, Blair is featured as a character in a New Labour re-written *Great Expectations*: "Young Pip (the affectionate nickname given to him by all the people whose hopes he has betrayed) is plucked from the obscurity of top public school, Oxford and the Bar by a crazed old hag called Mrs Thatcher, who lives alone in a ramshackle ideological ruin." Unfortunately, both the Tories and New Labour have got some of their worst ideas from reading this feature. We keep meaning to sack the writer.

So, more specifically on New Labour education policy, what is LIB ED's position on teaching quality assessment and testing?

Many of the people who make up the collective work in state schools or colleges, or have done so in the past. Others work or have worked in free schools of various sorts. Some have home educated their own children. So we try to explore the educational issues from lots of different angles. Ideologically we may be opposed to testing and exams, but we'd be irresponsible if we encouraged teachers as individuals to refuse to take part in assessment of their classes. It would have to be part of a sound and carefully worked out campaign, as it was when SATs testing was first introduced. Whilst we also have strong reservations about the teachers' trade unions, we work within them, until there's something effective to replace them. And while some of us have educated children at home, we would not advocate that all children should be home-educated. While parents and children should have the freedom to do so if they wish, it is not a practical proposition, nor desirable, for everybody.

In order for us all to put libertarian education into practice today, what should we be looking to (a) accept and (b) reject from the state education system? What role do you think libertarian education needs to play in helping to bring about a revolutionary transition to a libertarian society?

We believe that education is a lifelong process that should be in the hands of and under the control of the learner. Schools which are tied to curricula, exams, grades and certificates, and which rely on compulsory attendance, prevent people from knowing enough about the workings of society to enable them to understand and change it. Such schooling is merely a process of blatant social engineering.

Education can't be divorced from society. The goal of enabling the development of human beings to their fullest potential necessarily implies, and cannot be achieved without, fundamental social change. Which is why it's important to explore how people come to think differently, how they come to start to challenge the way our present society is, and how we can get from what is, into what might be.

For further information and a free magazine, send a large stamped self addressed envelope to:

LIB ED, 157
Wells Road,
Bristol BS4
2BU
Or you can
e-mail us:
[editors@LIB
ED.demon.co.uk](mailto:editors@LIB
ED.demon.co.uk)
Our web page:
[www.LIB
ED.demon.co.uk](http://www.LIB
ED.demon.co.uk)



SelfEd

DA: Who is SelfEd and what is self-education, as distinct from any other sort?

The SelfEd Collective is a small group of people within the Solidarity Federation who come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including people with and without a state and university education - and even people who are still involved in it in one way or another. We provide materials and structured learning environments, such as discussion and skills days. The idea is to help people improve their knowledge and awareness through individual study and thought, and through discussion with others.

Self-education simply means education ourselves. The main differences with, say, state education are that the self-education learning environment is voluntary and non-hierarchical. No-one is in charge. There are no 'party leaders', no gurus, no masters. This doesn't mean we don't have facilitators, organisers, even 'experts', etc., (an expert is who you choose to call one - not what they call themselves). In SelfEd, no-one has any power over anyone else, and no-one seeks to have the monopoly on the 'best' or 'right' knowledge. We don't get involved in testing and failing - instead, we concentrate on mutual assistance, respect, and free expression and development of ideas. It is only by creating this environment that we can get together, educate ourselves, practice our principles of solidarity and mutual aid, and start preparing to run our own society ourselves, without the need for leaders of any kind. Self-education, for us, is 'practising what we preach'.

DA: Why did you form a group about Self-education instead of spending your time doing useful, practical direct action - demonstrations, campaigns, strike support and the like?

SelfEd: Your question suggests that it is an 'either-or' choice. Far from it - it is a 'must do both' choice.

Everyone involved in the SelfEd Collective also has other lives as direct action anarchists.

As to self-education, there are a whole range of practical and theoretical

reasons why working things out for yourself with the mutual aid of others (and helping them too) is important. For a start, if you want to one day embark on a programme of workers' control, you need to know how. We are going to run our own society one day - so we need to understand how it works and how we want it to work. We need to develop new values systems, and that means understanding and finding out about the current ones and what would be better - and how it can be done. This is not rocket science - just practical common sense.

DA: OK, then, give us the theory - briefly.

It boils down to about 3 key things. Firstly, collectivism; at the core of anarchosyndicalist principles is group solidarity (collectivism & mutual aid). To live by group solidarity, you need organisation. What is organisation? It is a means by which people can co-ordinate and develop their thoughts and actions. To develop,

Liberation can only come through building confidence, overcoming fear and insecurity; through self-education

you need to have an idea or theory and then try it out. It never works perfectly, so you alter it on the basis of experience and try it some more. Each time, it should get better - this cyclical process is what organisation is about. Education makes knowledge, which allows the process to continue.

The other 2 key things relate to the personal. First, to have democracy (real democracy, that is) everyone has to have the same amount of power. Knowledge is power - power sharing means knowledge sharing. At its simplest level, having free, self-education helps you feel confident and informed enough to take part in meetings. Without everyone at the meeting feeling like this, it is not democratic. Real self-education is empowerment - without it, democracy is an empty, meaningless word.

This links into the social and cultural power of self-education. Fear, insecurity and uncertainty are major threats to people's daily quality of life. Typical state education makes you feel more insecure and more of a failure. Self-education plays a major role in reducing the levels of fear and insecurity people feel. Liberation can only come through building confidence, overcoming fear and insecurity; through self-education.

DA: Judging by your view of state education, do you think all teachers are 'soft cops' and schools should be burned to the ground?

No, this is over-simplistic. The fact is, I can read and write and I don't feel so frustrated I want to hit someone every time I have to fill



a form in or do a sum. State schools teach language and literacy, let's not forget, and in the 18th Century most people were effectively excluded from participating in paper-society because they were illiterate. That doesn't mean we should have more literacy, nor does it mean state schools are OK - they are not. But we need a more sophisticated analysis than just 'soft cops'. Most teachers mean well, some are misguided - and schooling damages kids.

But people damage kids at all levels of life - it is not the idea of education that's wrong, it's the set up. School as a physical centre where people go to gain

knowledge is fine; New Labour curriculum, spoon-feeding, exams and getting you used to failure and punishment is not. The major problem is not the teachers, but those who order them about. The net result is that school is there to 'break you in', rather like some people do with horses. You are lucky if you come out of it with any spirit left. A school where there is a celebration of what knowledge is and can be used for - and this can only be voluntary - is a fine idea.

DA: But you seem to be arguing against schools in their present form?

Yes, but we need to start building the alternatives before (or at least at the same time as) we get the sledgehammers out. It is not just schools - the whole capitalist system is geared to making us passive receivers - we are only encouraged to actually do anything ourselves when it comes to going to work. All century there has been a general rolling back of self-awareness, self-education and self-actualisation. Life has become a spectator activity - TV, parliamentary democracy, you name it. Getting self-education up and running again is crucial to building a movement for real change and for building our mutual self-respect. Without it, we will keep slipping back into pupil/teacher relationships, have's and have-nots, looking around for the leader when things go wrong, etc. - confidence and independent thought is at the heart of self-education - and that is what we need to replace state schools with.

For more info., contact: SelfEd, PO Box 1095, Sheffield, S2 4YR. 




...cont'd from page 21

difficulties, rather than a few very similar problems. This is why having a wide range of individual support strategies is so important.

dys-ing

Specific language problems include dysarthria, dyspraxia, and other difficulties in making speech sounds, as well as grammatical difficulties. Dysarthria is a range of problems in producing standard speech sounds due to either abnormalities in the structures involved in speech production (lips, tongue, teeth, etc.), or abnormalities causing difficulties in controlling and co-ordinating the movements needed for speech. Dyspraxia, on the other hand, occurs without the presence of an obvious physical problem. The difficulty in producing speech sounds results from difficulties in programming the patterns of movements required. In addition, there are a range of other less-understood phonological difficulties where neither obvious physical nor programming difficulties are involved. These tend to co-occur with various grammatical difficulties.

Some of these language difficulties can occur alongside dyslexia, which is the most understood of the learning disabilities. As a consequence, where they have been implemented, support strategies are now enabling some dyslexic children to survive the education system and even progress to higher and further levels. It is to be hoped that such progress can be extended to other learning disabilities as research and knowledge extends. Even so, with the education system now so doggedly tied to ideologically-motivated testing of children as young as seven, we are in a far from ideal situation to benefit most from such innovations. Real individualisation of learning is a prerequisite to any system which will allow the full potential to be brought out in all children; and it can never be realised under capitalism. The simple reason is that the maintenance of power and privilege is of prime importance. So as long as the education system continues to select the few, filter out the many, and teach them to know their place, the capitalist has no cause for concern. 

Not the Millenium

Dear DA,

I sincerely hope I can trust DA of all mags NOT to do a Millenium Review or some such (words of warning). The only thing I have found of any use to do with this year 2000 crap is as a way to point out how bad things have got since Market Capitalism arrived about 250 years ago. Can you imagine 500,000 people in one place - 10-15 packed football stadiums? 500,000 people were killed in a few months in one country in the last 5 years (Rwanda 1994). How many has this Capitalist system killed in the last 100? We should be talking about 'year 250' not the Millenium. Then get on with getting rid of it.

PC.

Letters

Send letters to: DA-SF (letters), PO Box 1095, Sheffield, S2 4YR. All letters are welcome, but space is always very short. Make yours incisive, brief and questioning if you want it printed.

Children without childhood

Dear DA,

I'd like to contribute some points following your piece on 'Lost Innocence' about childhood and child labour (DA11).

Children didn't exist in the modern sense of the word before the 18th Century. Instead, children dressed as adults, worked with adults and were imprisoned, tortured and hanged like adults. Childhood was largely created by the emerging middle classes, along with a number of social transformations accompanying capitalism. The children of peasants, nobles, and craft workers remained largely unaffected until the advent of industrial society, when the mass production of childhood became feasible, desirable and within the reach of the masses. Most cultures distinguish infants and sexually immature youths from adults through initiation rites, which signal full adult status. However, the separate 'culture' of childhood of the present liberal-capitalist countries, is a recent invention, and something for which the modern schooling system is largely responsible. Still, even today most of the world's children don't fully experience such a childhood.

Children are now associated with a jumble of conflicting images and social projections, from supposed purity and innocence to the evil monster. These have something to do with the contradictions of marketing. We are sold an adult's version of what a child would want, full of sentimentality, soft colours, and 'protection' from 'growing up too early', while, at the same time, young people are growing target for marketing and consumerism, from fashion sportswear, to computer games, to music and film. Children, as the bearers of the latest goods and fashions, often become the repositories for a host of adult anxieties and tensions due to their powerlessness in the changing world around them.

The youngster as 'hooligan' is a figure that goes back as far as the early 1800s. The moral panics around computer games and videos today are voiced in remarkably similar terms to the condemnation of a variety of working class leisure pursuits of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The unruly football crowd, the immorality of cinema, or the danger of 'scorchers' - working class cyclists whose new-found mobility allowed them to travel beyond the confines of poorer areas - were all seen as threatening and, in some way, immoral by respectable opinion. This was no doubt due to the contradiction of the promotion of mass consumerism in a society that remained ultimately divided by class. R

Talking nonsense

The American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.

The Mexican replied, only a little while.

The American then asked why didn't he stay out longer and catch more fish?

The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs.

The American then asked, "but what do you do with the rest of your time?"

The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos, I have a full and busy life."

The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat with the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats, eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA and eventually NYC where you will run your expanding enterprise."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But, how long will this all take?"

To which the American replied, "15-20 years." "But what then?"

The American laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions."

"Millions.. Then what?"

The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos."



The Scapegoat Generation:

America's War on Adolescents

Mike Males

Common Courage Press, 1996
ISBN 1567 510809

Teenagers are not the rebels and troublemakers the mainstream media would have you believe, is the central idea of this book, and Males puts together an impressive barrage of sociological statistics to back his claim.

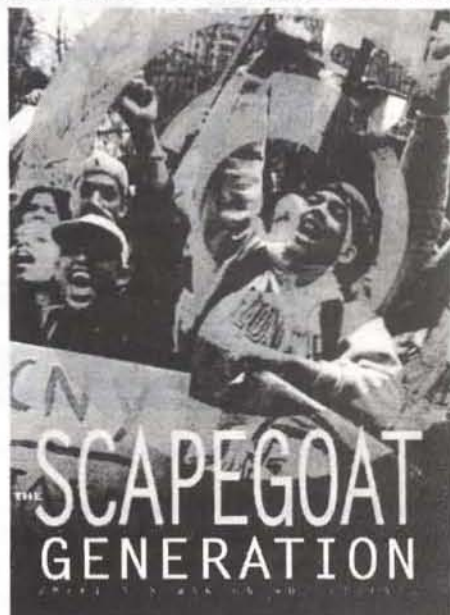
Here's just a couple - two thirds of all teenage mother births are fathered by men over 20 years old (i.e., not teenage); twice as many 21-24 year-olds kill pedestrians as drunk drivers than 16-20 year-olds; the homicide arrest rate for 21-24 year-olds is also twice that of 13-19 year-olds; teens smoking rates mirror adults of their respective race/sex/locale/class; and teens have much lower drug-related deaths than adults.


And so it goes on. In meticulously referenced, blow by blow style, Males documents the sociological profile of the young American, and lays the blame apparently at the door of the media machine which continually victimises and, yes, scapegoats the apparently straying teenage population for all societies ills.

Or should that be at the door of the parents - or was it 21-24 year-olds? Anyway, it isn't teenagers.

The drawbacks of this book for me were that it is exclusively American in perspective, and that I tend to get rather bored of Chomsky-like densities of critique. Bored but extremely impressed. Now, if I lived in America or had friends there, I could now impress them with my very own (stolen from Mike) shock-horror defence of teen-culture, but I don't.

The real appeal of Scapegoat Generation is as a semi-academic sourcebook for backing up your argument. The arguments you could use it for are; the central thesis, i.e. teenagers are scapegoated; the US media machine lies about teenagers and is big and powerful enough to persuade people of its inherently conservative, anti-young views; teenagers are so socially alienated and economically deprived that the future is in jeopardy, and we need to change this (though the change message is rather vague); teenagers aren't like you think they are, they are responsible and OK and misunderstood. The refreshing thing



about Males' style is that, though it is detailed, it is not full of academic-speak, opaque claptrap or bullshit theory. It is clear and to the point. The only problem is the point itself, that it is capitalism and its henchmen who are to blame for society's ills, not teenagers, and I thought, 'Yes, but I knew that already'. Maybe it's not so obvious in America. 

The Siege

Denzel Washington, Annette Bening, Bruce Willis.

It's rare that a "mainstream" film makes you think; rarer still that my partner and I agree on what video to hire for a Saturday night.

True to our sexual stereotyping, all she wants to watch are light romantic, musical comedies, and all I want is psychotic action (not true, of course). So - roll out the red carpet when we agreed to watch 'The Siege', a thriller no less! The premise is simple - what would happen if instead of sitting smugly behind the Atlantic and having to cope with killing each other with the millions of guns they have, Americans had to cope with the kind, indiscriminate terrorism they normally dish out - or at least support.

Violent terrorist cells are on the rampage

and New York City is under siege.

So what do our cousins do? Well, that's where Washington, Bening and Willis come in. Denzel plays an honest and true FBI agent, Bening a CIA officer and Willis an army General. All sounds pretty pat so far, but all is not well in the state of the American State. Right from the start we have the impression of security forces at war - with each other! There is the bitchy sniping

FBI to CIA "The first the CIA knew about the fall of communism was when the bricks of the Berlin wall fell around their heads";


CIA to FBI "Yeah, and J. Edgar Hoover wore a dress."

It all begins with Washington arresting Bening for contaminating a crime scene and ends with Willis... ah, but that would be telling. Couldn't happen here? - I think not. Already we have our own M15 opening their gates, with a female M and a website, offering help to fight the IRA and international drug dealing, while the police and Special Branch grumble; "that's our job".

The Siege got heaps of criticism from liberal and Islamic sources for being anti-Arab, racist and intolerant to Islam. Personally, I

thought it more anti-American! Two scenes where Islamic terrorists are shown undertaking a religious act of ritual purification were particularly criticised. But personally, I thought the first act of hand-washing had more to do with a group of self-serving US politicians 'washing their hands' of a particularly difficult problem.

The film is good thriller stuff - tension, super production, arty camera and, at times, some very grizzly violence (all part of the plot - but beware - *very* grizzly). However, good though it is, the ending is a marginal cop out on both the thriller and political fronts - sorry. Still, it's worth watching.

Denzel Washington plays Denzel Washington, and well. All good guy and clean. It's a tight film and Denzel does it well, but too much of this and the words type-cast will be on everyone's lips. Willis, however, plays Willis through the looking glass. Dark, villainous, evil or maybe just a good guy doing his job. Satan or a very insecure playground bully - you tell me. The true find though, is Bening and Washington's Lebanese FBI partner, but since I forgot the actor's name, he'll just have to remain the unnamed soldier. 



CD: Ozomatli. Armo Sounds, 3 Heathman Road, London, SW6 4TJ.

OZOMATLI

“...come militants in struggle and song.” *Aquí No Será.*

Born out of a labour dispute over union recognition, Ozomatli started life doing fund raising gigs in their hometown of Los Angeles. Early shows were a laid back affair with a constantly shifting lineup with sometimes upwards of 15 people on stage at one time. The squatted cultural centre they helped create and sustain is no more, but the band continues to support good causes, like that of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

“Lyric fistfight brother, we don’t need no glocks.” *O Le Le*

On this record, Ozo have distilled the controlled chaos of their live shows and their disparate influences into the ultimate, all-time, agit-pop party-music. They’ve got grooves that Chumbawamba would kill for. Take the first couple of tracks, for instance. You get Latin horns, African township guitar, zouk drum patterns and carnival whistles. On another track we get HipHop, dub, Mexican banda and what sounds like klezmer. Elsewhere can be heard the influences of salsoul, funk, jazz, Indian music and more Latin rhythms than you could shake a pair of maracas at. Yet, all this sounds entirely natural, unlike some so called “world music”, which comes across as an academic exercise- Jah Wobble, Peter Gabriel, etc., take note. This is music that is guaranteed to get even the most die-hard, armchair, crusty, Crass fan dancing.

“I think it’s a tragedy how we let people we call protectors inflict and oppress us.” *Chota*

And they pay their dues, citing the likes of Mandrill, War, Subhuman, Wutang, and Santana as influences. Indeed, two members are moonlighting from old skool HipHoppers, Jurassic 5. But it’s Latin and Rap that dominate in the mix, despite all the other ingredients. To these ears, their willingness to embrace disparate influences and their political stance reminds me of Asian Dub Foundation or The Ex.

“Soon as we’re rid of society’s small terrors,
the sooner these teenagers don’t have to be pallbearers”.
Cumbia De Los Muertos

So much for the music, what about the politics? Well, Ozo come from one of the most segregated cities in one of the most segregated countries in the world, where the gap between rich and poor leaves people from the same town living in different galaxies. They have claimed in interviews that their very existence as band of “Mexican Americans, a Japanese dude, a black dude, a Scottish dude” says a lot in the present political climate. Naïve maybe, but Ozo’s lyrics aren’t. Songs about crooked cops, political corruption and racial tensions. Life affirming songs to lift the spirit and melodies to break your heart. They manage to put over their message without leaving the listener feeling powerless and pessimistic.

“Free your mind and your ass will follow.”- *George Clinton.*



Vol. 21 No. 1
£1 (+50p p&p) or £8 for a
sub
TOM P.O.Box 1032,
Birmingham, B12 8BZ.

The Troops
Out Movement
and its
magazine have
both been
going since
the early 70s.

Troops Out campaign, as they always have done, for immediate British withdrawal from Ireland, and they identify the British State as being the most serious obstacle to lasting peace. They also state that they are “not aligned with any party or faction”.

So far so good, you might think. Why then does the Troops Out magazine spend so much time explaining Sinn Fein’s position on various issues? I wouldn’t mind so much, but it’s done without a hint of criticism. For instance, in this issue there is what appears to be the full text of Gerry Kelly’s speech to the annual Bloody Sunday Rally in London. Elsewhere we get a statement from Conor Murphy that appears to be simply a Sinn Fein press release. Much of the rest of the TOM articles view things through republican tinted spectacles.

This is a shame because, for me at least, it mars an otherwise excellent magazine which, at £1, is great value. In this one, there is an in-depth look at the issues surrounding the Orange marches, exposure of continuing RUC and Army crimes (including the case of Robert Hamill- beaten to death by Loyalists as the police looked on), reviews and some interesting historical articles. All stuff that you wouldn’t normally see in the British media. Add to this the regular feature “One Day At A Time”, which chronicles notable events in Irish politics between issues of the magazine, and you’ve got a pretty indispensable document.

Troops Out have exposed the lying, manipulative and corrupt nature of the state in its dealings with Irish people. It is a proud legacy, which I hope will continue. Just wish they’d give Gerry Adams a grilling now and again. Having said that, it would be pretty boring if we only ever read things we agree with, or magazines were so anodyne and bland for fear of upsetting any of their readers.



Freedom in Education:

A d-i-y guide to the liberation of learning

Libertarian Education, 1992
ISBN 0951 399721, £3.95

Real Education: Varieties of Freedom

David Gribble
LibEd, 1998
ISBN 0951 399756, £8.95

Two books from LibEd - very different, but somehow complementary. The d-i-y guide is just that - essentially a practical introduction/first source book on alternative education, the second is more ambitious, based on case studies from alternative schools across the world.

The d-i-y guide is split into two main parts - a series of articles on curriculum, and a section on pointers and resources. The latter is ideal for anyone starting out in alternative education - maybe you want to educate your kids at home for a few years, or you are just interested in what there is and what it involves. Excellent, practical directories of organisations, a bibliography, and an index of the LibEd periodical's articles since forever make for a really clear set of signposts of where to go next.


The curriculum section is a series of LibEd magazine reprints on, amongst other things, green issues, maths, music, craft, design and technology, and a particularly engaging piece on 'global futures' - how teaching and learning about sustainability and future change needs to be central to any curriculum. This was a real thought-provoker for me (maybe because I teach in this area). Why is it that anything 'green' or 'future-based' is always tolerated but basically treated as, at best, 'general interest' and, at worst, 'science fiction', by both National Curriculum and much of

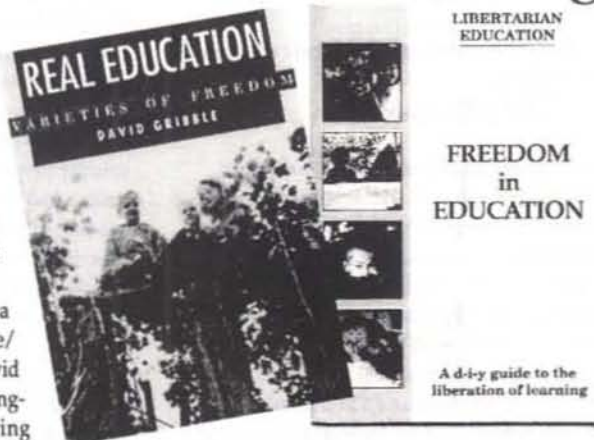
the teaching profession? Well, this concise little sound-bite of an article points to ways in which the subject can be tackled a bit more robustly.

Gribble's book is less of a sourcebook and more of a bedside/coffee table affair. I don't know David Gribble, but I gather that he is a long-standing alternative teacher, having worked at 'posh' libertarian schools, i.e. Dartington (which is covered), and that he spent two years travelling the world's alternative schools doing research for this book. The result is fourteen case studies of free/alternative schools in countries as far afield as Japan, New Zealand, India, Ecuador, Israel, England and the USA. So, a load of middle class liberal set-ups for independent rich kids to prepare them for a life of 'expression' on daddy's bank balance? Not quite. Well, at least not all of them.

One particularly fascinating school is Kliengruppe Lufingen in Switzerland, not really a school as such, more a series of small groups of kids. What stands out is that this isn't a high fee-paying enclave of liberal nicety - the kids are from some of the most deprived sections of the community, and all have major behavioural problems. The personal accounts from students are really moving - it becomes immediately apparent how desperately hideous your average 'state' school experience has been, and the expression of relief at having landed themselves

in Kliengruppe Lufingen is powerful stuff.

I could go on with relating stories of schools in Harlem, leafy glades in the country - and then there's Summerhill - but that would ruin your sense of discovery when you get your copy. So instead, my overall impression: the best example of collated evidence for free schools I've seen; the best evidence that, despite immense variety and huge geographical spread, alternative schools are their own best proof that children do better when they are allowed to think for themselves; the best constructive (rather than purely critical) demonstration that the classic state school mantra of discipline, curriculum and testing is completely irrelevant to useful human development. Enough said. 



Preview:

The Dredd Phenomenon - comics and contemporary society


John Newsinger
LibEd, £5.95
To be published:
October 1999

THE DREDD PHENOMENON

COMICS AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY



Comics - kids' stuff or window onto

our troubled times? John Newsinger examines 2000 AD and the Judge Dredd strip, and asks why the most popular comic strip character in Britain is an authoritarian neo-fascist. He goes on to look at the writers 2000 AD has nurtured: Alan Moore, Peter Milligan, Grant Morrison, Garth Ennis and others, and their impact in America. Comics like Hellblazer, The Preacher From Hell and The Invisibles are at the cutting edge, he argues. They shine light in dark places. 

The Adventures of Tintin:

Breaking Free

Attack International
ISBN 0951 426109


Anarcho-Tintin is 'classic' amongst certain 'anarcho-circles'. This full length (170 page) cartoon epic has got to be Tintin's finest hour - packed with apparently meaningless violence, it follows Tintin's transformation from yob to yob-activist. Along the way, he overcomes his homophobia and 'fuck society' traits, gets off his arse and does some work, and rapidly ends up... well, I'll leave that for you to find out.



NOW PISS OFF OUT OF HERE!



What he never shakes off is his rather excellently pointless foul language, taste for smashing perfectly useful items (including some probably less useful people), and exceedingly bad attitude towards people from Hampstead. Well, I guess I was bound to find some common ground (before the flood of letters to DA from the Hampstead Wombles or some such, this is a joke - I think).

If you like looking at pictures and not reading too much politeness in your books, but more importantly, you like fairytale endings (well, they have to happen some time, don't they?), then you'll enjoy Tintin as much as I did, and probably much more. Makes a welcome change and provides a break from all those dry doorstops on 'How we shall bring about the Revolution', etc. 

When Columbus sailed the ocean blue

The Four Voyages

Christopher Columbus
Penguin, 1969. ISBN 0-14-044217-0. £8.99

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies

Bartolomé de las Casas
Penguin, 1992. ISBN 0-14-044562-5. £7.99


Christopher Columbus, of Genovese origin, finally, after many years attempting to convince different European sovereigns to sponsor his attempts to find a seaward route to the Indies by sailing West, achieved the assent of the Catholic monarchs of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, in 1492. Setting off from near Cádiz in the south of Spain, in a fleet composed of the legendary Pinta, Niña and Santa María, Columbus arrived in the New World, naming place after place in honour of Ferdinand and Isabella and the Catholic faith.

These two books, despite focusing on the theme of the Spanish 'discovery' of not the East Indies, but Haiti, Jamaica, and later the mainland of Latin America, are very different in tone and spirit. *The Four Voyages* describes, through the mouth of Columbus himself and his son, the hardships of sea faring, the constant perils of the high seas, the wonder and dangers of the New World. The amazement of the Spaniards - not to say of the native population - is rapidly tempered and brought down to earth by the self-confessed dual motivations of spreading the Catholic faith and bringing spices, and particularly gold, back to Spain. Columbus constantly refers to this higher mission of 'civilising the natives' and bringing them the Catholic faith when writing his log book and reports for the Spanish monarchs. *The Four Voyages* is written in an adventure book style, replete with insights into the political, racial and sexual mores of both the natives and the Spanish of the Sixteenth Century. On the one hand, it is difficult not to get swept along with the exciting prospect of discovering new lands and people; on the other, we quickly realise that new lands, riches, people and objects were soon seen as one and the same, a route to wealth and power, and the justification for one race's rule over another, or many others.

This pernicious objectification of the natives ('Indians' in Spanish terms, since they believed that they had arrived at the East Indies) and rank

exploitation of people and resources is countered in some degree by the account of the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de las Casas in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, published some forty plus years after Columbus' first arrival. De las Casas was horrified by the slavery and mass murder perpetrated by the Spaniards against the native peoples, and his *Account* is a gruelling reading of the sustained cruelty of the invaders. Despite his plea for humane treatment of the indigenous population, however, de las Casas was not in favour of any kind of withdrawal from America. He was convinced that the Spanish presence was established in that part of the world as part of God's plan for the evangelisation of those that had not heard the word of God before. Speaking as a kind of Christian humanist, if such a thing is possible, de las Casas pleaded for the humanitarian treatment of the Amerindians, but not their living in any kind of 'state of nature' or ignorance of Christian theology.


His *Account* opened up considerable debate within royal and ecclesiastical circles and much controversy. Some hated de las Casas for his explicit short account and wished to deny its content, while others were far more amenable to its critique. Broadly, from a Catholic perspective, there were two main interpretations of the state of the 'Indians' in the New World: (1) that they could be Christianised and that the attempt should be made to do so; (2) that because of their social, sexual and religious practices - such as, reputedly, in some cases, sodomy, cannibalism and transvestism - the death toll was principally due to disease as a punishment from God. It is difficult to understand the mentality of the Spaniards 500 years on. Of course, a sharp critique of imperialism and racism is required, but it is less useful if it is merely from today's perspective. It is necessary to understand the motivations behind the 'conquest' and the perceptions of those doing the conquering.

In the context of 15th Century philosophy, it was not even certain that the indigenous people were human and, consequently, whether they should be treated as such by their 'superiors'. Of course, unravelling this theology and philosophy of the time is our clue to unravelling racism and imperialism, both then and now. 

Prisoners and Partisans: Italian Anarchists in the Struggles Against Fascism.

Kate Sharpley Library, BM Hurricane, London. 1999. £1.50. 37pp.

The latest pamphlet offering from KSL continues their fascinating mission to uncover the lost history of anarchist struggle. And it is never too much. Anarchist, anarchosyndicalist and working class history is too long forgotten, overlooked and actively suppressed. KSL's work helps the process of rediscovery. And this is not a lengthy, dry or dusty tome; it is a fresh, well-researched collection of articles on resistance, and gives a graphic description of the Italian anarchists' struggle against Mussolini and after (the period covered extends from 1922 to after the Second World War).

Nowadays in Britain, fascist violence is mainly directed towards ethnic minorities, gypsies, asylum seekers, gay people and their supporters. Here is a timely reminder that fascists are also totally opposed to freedom, organised labour and autonomous working class organisation and action. This pamphlet well illustrates what we were and still are up against. It also chronicles the types and merits of the various methods and means of struggle and direct action which the Italian anarchists used. There are important lessons to be learned. In 30 minutes, you can be entertained, uplifted and gather topics and anecdotes to impress your friends. That's got to be worth £1.50 of anyone's money. 

LIB ED

A Magazine for the Liberation of Learning

No.30 Summer 1999.
£1.50
LIBED, Phoenix House,
157 Wells Rd, Bristol, BS4
2BU

LIB ED, now at issue 30, puts 'alternative'


forms of education centre stage - while in the mainstream education press, it still lurks in the shadows.



For your average educational supplement, 'education' invariably means 'state education', and state education is mainly about imbuing a particular ethos and ideology into pupils and students. Also, it teaches those skills required by capitalism, but only incidentally (if at all) 'how to think', and only very rarely how to think 'rationally'.

LIB ED couldn't be more different from the current New Labour approach to education. I wouldn't go as far as to say that the New Labour mantra 'Presentation is everything' is reversed, but LibEd's content is certainly far more useful than your average colour supplement, and certainly far better than its cover suggests. I am not usually put off by plain or odd covers on things (I even read DA!), but I must say, when I picked up LIB ED, it was with some trepidation - the front design reminds me of some sort of trade union mag or corporate report.

But once inside, it all changes immediately. While there is definite variation in content quality - the standard is high, the topics almost always interesting, and the level of debate and ideas worthy. To illustrate, in this issue there are articles on life in an alternative school, informal education in NW India, behaviour in children, and the new Literacy Hour and National Literacy Strategy in the UK, plus various reviews and commentary. After twenty minutes of engaged silence, I asked myself; 'did you really need to know that new Labour's 3 R's really stand for Routine, Repetition and Real Life? The answer was yes - which means LIB ED is a refreshing change. Sixteen pages (shame no more in this one) of succinct eye-openers.

Libertarian education has always been critical of state education and corporal punishment, and this is very laudable. However, the perennial question is how do we introduce libertarian ideas into the mainstream state education system? Discussion of home-based education is fascinating, and it is good to see that new support systems for parents and children are being developed. While New Labour are planning to see to it that these advances reach the few, not the many, LIB ED is doing its bit to spread the word on home and alternative education. 

A pair of books about twins

The Twins. John Wallace

Collins, £10.99. For children aged 3-6 years.

As an adult reader, my impression from the book is that its main idea is twins can be different. The strong dose of political correctness is all pervasive - Lil is a computer-head at the grand old age of 4 years, 11 months and 5 days, while twin Nelly likes welding. Their personalities are both conflicting yet complimentary, like any other sisters. The illustrations are lively and vocabulary readily accessible to the intended age group. Behind the words is a powerful and essential message about developing and recognising 'identity' at a young age. This is great - the author should be applauded for bringing these important concepts into the field of vision of young children, who are taking their first steps in developing a complex self-identity (resounding 3-6 year-olds clapping).

Twins: Genes, Environment and the Mystery of Human Identity.

Lawrence Wright

Weidenfeld and Nicolson. ISBN 0297819763. £14.99

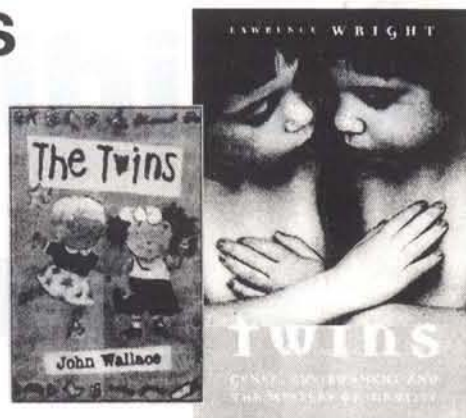
Identity and alienation is at the heart of the 'identical twins' fascination. This much it shares with any social-political way of thinking - such as anarchosyndicalism (but that's another article). If you avidly watched the recent BBC1 series 'A Secret Life of Twins', then you need this book on identical twins as a follow-up.

Identical twins are like gold dust to geneticists and other scientists in a wide range of disciplines. Unlike fraternal twins, which are the result of separate eggs fertilised by different sperm at the

same time, identical twins are natural clones. They happen when one fertilised egg splits into 2 very shortly after conception and develops into 2 foetuses - and then 2 people.

Identical twins are relatively rare, and even more rare are the cases when they are separated shortly after birth. It is these separated identical twins which are 'ideal' scientific experiment material (provided their relationship, identity and whereabouts are known at a later date). The experiments all seek to assess some aspect of the relative importance of 'nature' and 'society' in people. Scientists have still hardly started understanding how human personality and identity are created and fashioned. Two identical gene packages brought up in different socio-cultural environments provide an apparently ideal 'control' experiment, where the 'nature' bit is known. The nature versus nurture controversy is still at the centre of much political debate. If scientists were to prove that we come pre-programmed, if our genes determine our personality, identity and intelligence, then there is little that society, culture and education can do to improve the lot of the human race.

The study of twins has generally been taken to support the side of the 'nature-ists' against the 'nurture-ists', who stress education and socialisation. The hereditarians claim twins studies as evidence for their case - as Wright puts it: "Twins have been used to prove a point, and the point is that we don't become, we are". The 'environmentalists' (nurture-ists) condemn the genetics-based twins



studies as full of flaws.

It was Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin and the originator of Eugenics, who first used twins to investigate human differences. Galton also first identified the difference between identical and fraternal twins and carried out the first scientific studies on twins, which convinced him that 'nature' was paramount in determining human makeup. Galton's eugenics ideas were extremely influential in the latter 18th Century and the first half of this Century - both in left and right politics.

The Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb thought eugenics could be used to breed a 'new, improved' working class. The Nazis had other ideas. Using eugenics concepts in their racist ideology, Josef Mengele, a Nazi 'scientist', conducted twins studies in various Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz. The Nazis enthusiasm for eugenics did this 'pseudo-science' no good at all, and had a negative effect on the study of genetics as a whole. The pendulum swung, and it became fashionable to assume that people are like they are because of their environment, education and socialisation.

Recently, with the decline of social democracy and Marxism, the hereditarians and the geneticists staged a comeback. In 1969, Arthur Jensen published an article in the Harvard Educational Review entitled 'How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement?' Jensen's answer was 'not much, because IQ is inherited'. Consequently, the money spent on pre-school programmes for poor children is wasted. The hereditarians were back with a vengeance. Conservatives welcomed them as part of their ammunition against social democracy and welfarism. Now, 'nature-ism' has been adopted as a centrepiece of new right conservatism, and twins studies have provided major underpinning for this 'new' (recycled) hereditarian ideology.

Wright remains reasonably agnostic on nature-nurture, preferring to tread the typical 'academic' line of trying to present the (impossible) 'objective' reporting view. If anything, he is probably on the nurture side. Whatever, his particular style of combining detail with clarity is attractive. The result is you get sucked inevitably into what must be one of the most critical debates of the modern age - this is certainly no cure for insomnia.

Obituary - Jim Allen

Jim died on 24th June; he made it to 72. He was well-known for both his writing and scriptwriting. Of his TV work, perhaps 'Days of Hope' was his best, with its portrayal of 'ordinary' people being betrayed by leaders. Jim was best known in libertarian circles for his collaboration with film Director Ken Loach - which produced, amongst other things, the film 'Land and Freedom', about the Spanish Civil War. After the first screening of 'Land and Freedom' at the Cornerhouse in Manchester, he spoke to those of us there about his work on the film. He had been scheduled to speak before the screening, but characteristically, he left his entrance until after the curtain went down, so he could have a discussion where we, the audience, would know what we were talking about and it wouldn't be a question of simply listening to what he had to say. Jim was not just a writer, he lived his beliefs. Going back a few years, I recall the dispute which arose when the National Coal Board estate in Morton was to be sold off. The vigorous squatters movement in Manchester at the time ensured that it was occupied, and Jim came around on a number of occasions. Eventually, Manchester Council took over the estate, and the whole episode was seen as a victory by the left. In those days, there were still Tories on the council, and one Alderman Fieldhouse (honestly!), top banana of the Housing Committee, was invited to attend a meeting to explain their position. It was chaired by the Secretary of the Tenant's Association, and I, along with other squatters, had places alongside the chairman. At one point, Jim Allen raised his hand to indicate he wished to speak. Fieldhouse spotted him and, momentarily forgetting where he was, leant over and muttered to the Chair 'that's Jim Allen, don't let him speak'. The Chair replied at full volume "this is a democratic meeting, not a Tory meeting, Jim, would you like to speak?" Alderman's face went purple with embarrassment and fury, most unbananalike. Jim, who was also an excellent orator, accepted the invitation and provided the meeting with a lucid account of what the Council should do with Morton, in the interests of the people who live there. 'Land and Freedom', now more than ever, is an unrepeatable epic (and if you haven't seen it, do yourself a favour and get it on video).





Riding the Tertiary Rollercoaster

faster-higher-longer-more!

**In for repair *again*?
Isn't it time it was given a *proper* going over?**

In short, it's a mess. The Further and Higher Education (F&HE) sectors in Britain have been undergoing massive change for some time, but no one seems to know what the aim of it all is. Successive governments have encouraged a massive increase in student numbers in both FE and HE and have then realised they didn't want to pay for it. The result is well-sounding words about education for all, well-meaning welcomes and throwing open of doors, followed by hasty slamming on the brakes and kicking everyone off the rollercoaster (unless they're rich). So far, New Labour have got one emergency stop under their belts, so what's next?

Let's start with Further Education. FE colleges were hived off from local authority control and set up as mini-quangos a few years ago now. This was accompanied by an expansion of courses. Students at a FE college, a F&HE College, a sixth form college or even a University, are now likely to be studying any number of BTEC National Diplomas/Certificates, BTEC Higher National Diplomas/Certificates, NVQs, GNVQs, Access courses, A-levels or some other such thing. These courses often have different levels, are accredited by different bodies, have a different expected outcome and different philosophies behind them. College staff have had to deal with these changes and have managed to deliver an increasingly complex and diverse education to an increasing number of diverse people.

Unfortunately, changes in courses have only been a small part of the overall changes. Freed from local authority shackles, college principals have had fun! Colleges everywhere have undergone restructuring,

redundancies, an increase in casual contracts, attacks on pay and conditions and a huge increase in uncertainty and fear.

Apart from the wear and tear on the body and mind, which cannot be overstated, working in such an atmosphere does not encourage workers to develop their jobs. It is to the credit of many staff in colleges that courses are still developed and that many students get opportunities to study on more and increasingly varied courses.

By contrast, the fact that none of the colleges have actually managed to go bust yet is no credit to the managers, principals and governors - they sure have tried. There have been numerous mergers, 'downsized' and a few have come close. Cases like Halton College¹, which got so bad the government had to step in, are not the exception but rather the cutting edge of management's ignorant and arrogant empire-building at any cost.

The mess in further education is reflected by the number of local disputes. A quick look at the main teachers union; NATFHE's website reveals disputes at Lewisham College over the sacking of a union activist and other redundancies; at Harlow College over job cuts; at Waltham College and at Newcastle College (where £1 million has been spent on a new central piazza in the campus) over pay.

HE does no better

In higher education the picture is not much rosier. Student numbers have increased exponentially since the early 1980s, and particularly over the last ten years. This has not been matched by any noticeable increase in resources or

staffing.

The AUT (Association of University Teachers), which represents the lecturers and some support staff in 'old' universities, is now in official dispute over pay and conditions. NATFHE, which represents lecturers in the 'new' universities (former polytechnics and some HE colleges), looks likely to ballot its members soon. Unison, which represents the bulk of clerical and administrative support staff, is in 'campaign' mode. The GMB, which represents many of the manual staff, is having its website revamped so there is no information on current activity.

The AUT sums up most of what is wrong with the trade union movement, but with knobs on. The dispute in HE is, if you read the official union leaflets, about pay, which has stagnated while student numbers have rocketed. The union wants pay to return to levels of similar occupations (not generally specified) and has rejected the 3.5% offered. What the dispute should also be about is the massive increase in short-term, often part-time, contracts and the disparity between women's earnings and those of men.

Now, it is true that pay has been eroded, but making this the main issue for developing activity is problematic. The AUT is rife with snobbery, for ages seeing itself as a professional body rather than a union. This has been reflected in dismissive attitudes to the problems of manual, clerical and administrative staff. It has also been evident in the AUT's attitude to potential merger with NATFHE, which, because it represented FE colleges and polytechnics, was dismissed as not the



proper stuff of the traditional university. With the end of polytechnics, NATFHE's financial instability was the problem. When the latter became financially more sound than the AUT, the rhetoric turned to mumbles and bluster.

striking for solidarity number 1

Unfortunately, the AUT's elitism is matched by a significant minority of its lecturers. Thus, the concentration on pay is seen by many of the rest of us as a reflection of this elitism. Those who have to live on temporary contracts were basically told to continue suffering in silence, especially if they want their contracts renewed. Meanwhile, women were told that, although blatant pay inequality was recognised, they too should not rock the boat, as increasing everyone's pay was far more important.

The one-day stoppage was a mixed success. It was called during final exam time at very short notice. The AUT, being a strange beast, gives a great deal of discretion to local branches, so in some institutions the strike was very solid, in others it was patchy. Moreover, because lecturers are not expected to attend when they have no direct activity, it is difficult to judge who is, and who isn't on strike, apart from those who turn up on the picket line. Some institutions required those going on strike to submit a slip saying so. It is therefore disgraceful that many union members, whilst not attending university on the day, did not submit their slips - in effect scabbing from the comfort of their own homes. The AUT appears to have decided to ignore this. It remains to be seen what will be the effects of further action, such as days of not answering the phone and local boycotting of appraisals, quality assessments and admissions. Given that unified national action seems a strange concept to the AUT (indeed it has great discomfort with the idea of action at all), those taking this action will probably be in a minority.

Non-academic workers' pay generally peaks at the lower end of the scales for academic staff. This, along with the dismissive attitude to other campus workers, means that the latter's support for the pay claim is mixed, to say the least. Until it is recognised that the workers in a university need to work together to make any solid gains,

progress will be minimal. The university year is a series of deadlines; if work is not completed by these deadlines, chaos ensues. Lecturers boycotting admissions could mean increased pressure on office staff to cover. Likewise, if Unison were to organise action amongst office staff, lecturers would come under extreme pressure to cover the work.

the 'Student Experience'

What is commonly called the 'student experience' has also changed radically compared to only fifteen years ago. Of course, there are now the infamous fees. Students must pay none of, part of, or all of the £1000 per annum fee depending on their families' disposable income. This has upset many people, and it is right to see it as an attack on free education for all. However, what has had the biggest impact on students, especially the less affluent ones, has been the erosion and elimination of the student grant. The grant was never very much, and it was means tested so that generally only students from working class families got the full grant (oh, and those whose parents had an accountant). Given that the numbers in HE were relatively low, particularly amongst the working class, the government could bear the cost.

After a few pot shots in the early 80s - huge cuts at some universities and a general attack on the value of the grant - the Thatcher government's policy by the end of the decade was a streamlined mass system, which was vocationally based and responsive to the needs of industry. Funding was accordingly altered to a basic 'more students = more cash'. HE institutions responded willingly by getting more students - lots more students. Thus, in a couple of years student numbers had already reached long term targets. The government responded by once again changing funding, bringing in the MASN (maximum aggregate student number). Recruiting to the MASN has now become the all hallowed objective of every institution - go too high and you are penalised; go too low and you are penalised. The be all and end all of the current system is to recruit students in big, but restricted, numbers.


It was soon found that more students didn't mean a higher



participation rate from working class people. Now, in the late 1990's the buzz is about widening participation and retention. Thus, whereas traditionally a student was expected to enter university with reasonable A-level points, to study a bit, drink a bit and get by on lectures, library time and the odd personal tutor, it's now very different. Most current students are on modular semesterised courses - buzzwords for studying courses in lumps, with the year split into two semesters containing a number of modules. Thus they are assessed, by course work and examination, in a number of different areas at two points in the year.

turning the screw

Meanwhile, students getting no grant need to get their money from somewhere. The much-vaunted student loan is not enough to house, feed and clothe a student for a year. These 'generous' loans, with their lower interest rates and repayments postponed until you earn above a set threshold, have to be supplemented. The great majority of students now work, and it's not just a few hours behind a bar. Many work many hours a week, often approaching full-time, at a variety of low paid jobs. Some students also have to take on additional debt on top of the debt to the Student Loan Company, debt which isn't on such 'favourable' terms.

End result - we have higher and further education system in a permanent state of change - a system where pay has stagnated; where the rise in casual and short-term contracts has been relentless. The divide between workers is encouraged by at least one union which, through years of neglect and refusal to address issues directly, is now forced into industrial action, action it is incapable of thinking through or enacting in any meaningful manner. It is an education system where students no longer come to learn and understand, but merely to jump hurdles, get the certificate and hopefully become employable enough to get a job to pay off their debts. What a great place to work. 

*the be all
and end all
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restricted,
numbers*

For more information about issues raised in CloserLook articles, write to DA. The next DA focuses on cults, mysticism and religion. Bargain sub. and contact details are on p.9

Restructuring HE

The most striking aspect of New Labour's higher education (HE) policy - 'lifelong learning', 'the learning society' and other variants of the 'social partnership' agenda - has been the vastly uncritical stance taken by trade unions. The same goes for adult education agencies (e.g. National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education), intellectuals, policy makers, academics and student unions (both the NUS and the Mature Students Union).

The more 'radical' left parties advocate a response based on defending 'free education.' Two serious charges can be levelled immediately here. One, that liberal critics and the left have reinforced and legitimated the general processes of state restructuring. Continuing its historical relationship vis a vis the state-form, the liberal 'framework' has lacked any critical analysis in the role of the state. All developments are benign, engineered for the overriding 'general interest.' Since when was higher education free? As one example, top social class groups one and two now account together for approximately 70% of all HE students. Bottom social class group six? About 1.8%. Why purport to defend 'freeness' of something which has massive historical in-built institutional and structural

inequalities - many of which commence from pre-16 education? The second charge, more critically, is the glossing over of the complex historical development between policy makers, the state, local state, institutions and social struggles - the fractured mosaic which is HE. In reality, radical HE restructuring is happening, post-Dearing and post-Blunkett, along with the destabilisation of those (already unequal and class based) complex relations.

Then there is the link to wider global capital restructuring and the general implications of these for HE. There are four main aspects here. Firstly, the immediate real and psychological precondition for access is now income - it comes down to wage relationships between units of capital. 'Labour markets', as many 'vulgar economists' point out, vary: within individual capitals, between them - locally, regionally, nationally and internationally - all sorts of massive institutional discrimination. Equally, 'Labour markets', the institutional basis of power relations in society, discriminate further against women, older people, sexual orientation, people of colour and those physically and mentally infirm. A general approximation indicates that the debt of HE participation is felt greatest by those who suffer discrimination the most.

Secondly, HE restructuring and the discriminatory individualisation of debt through fees etc. reflect 'New' Labour's attempts to stay within the dual constraints of the European Union (EU) 'convergence criteria' and the general supra-national imposition of the 'power of money' through global trade/finance institutions.

Thirdly, restructuring and fees have exaggerated the historical status of HE institutions. The 'new' universities have essentially provided the rapid growth within HE during the last 20 years. The 'access movement', policy initiatives (e.g. the Russell Report), adult education


and a number of limited changes in law (e.g. the 1976 Race Relations Act), failed to 'crack' the elite institutions and their internal mode of regulation - the A level. Since the abolition of the Older Students Allowance in 1995, the sector has witnessed more than a 40% drop nationally in adult and non-traditional students, which has fallen disproportionately on the 'new' or less elitist sector since this is where

the real and psychological precondition for access (to university) is now income - it comes down to wage relationships

most of the mature students went. Some institutions have witnessed total intake drops of more than 25% - the case of Ruskin College is a good example.

Fourthly, institutional funding for the 'new' universities lacks the 'stability' of the elite institutions, who can maintain general student numbers through historic status, and also have dominant links within research councils. In effect, this is state institutional 'protectionism' against 'market shortfalls'; 75% of Research Council funding is directed at a handful of elite institutions. Overall decline of student numbers, indicated in recent evidence, highlights the even greater future instability that the less elite new university sector will face.

So, while New Labour engineered part of its election 'victory' with a call of 'education, education, education', current HE policy points to a rather different reality. Against this, the access movement and related progressive groups have failed to challenge core institutional circuits of power. The collapse of adult and non-traditional student numbers, given the immense struggles it took to open access here, is doubly devastating.

While going to university is not the be all and end all of life, universities do offer a limited framework of 'freedom' within state capitalist societies, a contradiction which people like Chomsky have often pointed out. Now, groups opposed to restructuring need to develop strategies and approaches which offer a sustained response; one that includes the wider state attacks on all institutions which may help in building a more humane society. 



CHILD REARING in REALITY

The words 'children' and 'family' are heavily loaded and, depending on their context, can be used to evoke a range of images from the cosy ad-land family to the tabloids' depiction of single mothers.



Families have always been high on politicians' agendas. After all, the perfect family produces the perfect workshop and cannon fodder. This isn't a new phenomenon. The Romans exhorted their women to have more children to prevent the barbarian hordes overrunning Rome.

In this country, everything but the nuclear family of two parents, one of each sex, is seen as abnormal. Yet, as we all know, and as the likes of fostering and adoption agencies are having to accept, families come in all shapes and sizes with no model any more valid than another. Children are to be raised within the family with no outside help. After all, nuclear families are supposed to be self-sufficient. In spite of current moves towards children's rights, children are seen in most respects as the property of their parents to bring up as they see fit.

Obviously no family exists in isolation, and the upbringing a child receives depends on the parents' background and any number of outside influences on the parents ranging from religion to the media, fashion and showbusiness influencing the choice of a name. One major influence, especially on first time parents, is the vast range of childcare manuals. Whilst they aren't a new idea - the Puritans were writing them - manuals began to multiply after the Second World War with the advent of Truby King, who aimed to produce a generation of self-reliant adults, social engineering at its most blatant.

Another obvious influence on childrearing is the state. The state, not unnaturally, wants all its future citizens raised to be economically productive, not to indulge in any criminal activity and not to cost more than the minimum in welfare or healthcare. Up to now very little has been done by any Government to actively participate in childrearing beyond a lot of rhetoric and scare tactics, such as the shock horror headlines about teenage single mothers. In actual fact, the rates of teenage pregnancies

have remained more or less stable for the last 30 years - hardly an epidemic.

However, the present Government looks set to interfere more in family life. Jack Straw wants to impose curfews on children in certain areas and, from 2002, all children from 5 will be taught 'citizenship', including parenting skills, teaching children the Government approved way to raise their own children. Also, with the provision of wholesale nursery places, children are at school, at least part time, from the age of three or four learning whatever the national curriculum decides.

practical parenting

Being a parent is a 24 hour job. It's incredibly demanding and, in its early stages, utterly exhausting and very repetitive (even boring). It is expensive and it has low status. Also, expectations of parents are increasing all the time. No longer is it enough for your children to survive to maturity or to be 'well turned out'. Now parents are expected to ensure that children are fully stimulated from birth, or even before.

Mothers are told that children need them 24 hours a day and that paid childcare is dangerous, and not only for young children either. Even when your children leave home one wrong move can cause depression and suicide. Yet mothers are working in increasing numbers, not necessarily from choice but from economic necessity.

No parent, however committed, can meet every emotional, social and educational need of their child. Nor is it healthy for them to do so. Instead, children need a variety of loving carers, be they grandparents, teachers, friends or child minders. However, all the hype about how family life is supposed to be can leave parents feeling inadequate, guilty and confused. All this pushes parents towards the array of 'how to' manuals and TV programmes with their dire warnings about the consequences of getting it wrong. These all serve to reinforce parents' guilt and sense of

inadequacy. Childcare books do not empower parents to be the best parents they can be. Instead, they undermine any confidence the parents ever had in their own abilities.

Some of the ideas put forward by childcare experts are fairly harmless, but can be confusing as the fashions are continually changing. Some ideas are harmful - the 'bonding' idea, for example, which can leave mothers feeling permanently inadequate for failing to 'bond' properly with their child. Other fashions can kill. From the 1960s until the early 90s mothers were instructed to put babies to sleep on their stomachs. Eventually, it was realised that this directly contributed to cot deaths. The 'Back to Sleep' campaign in 1991 halved cot deaths in just one year.

sending for schooling

Unless you educate your child at home, school is something every child has to deal with. Parents have no input into what their child is taught or how. That schools are labelling many children as failures from an early age is shown in the rising number of exclusions, even of nursery age children. The values taught in schools are those of the mythic 'ideal family' - conformist, Christian, academic. This in no way reflects society as a whole and does not provide most children with the style of education they require in order to learn, nor does it teach them the skills needed to survive in adulthood.

Parents need to be able to interpret what their children learn at school and re-teach it in ways that are relevant to the child's background. Also, they need to be able to recognise if the style of teaching is not suitable for their child - for example, dyslexic children need extra support in written work - and be able to fill in the gaps left by school.

All this requires parents to be confident in their abilities both as parents and as adults. Parents are taught to feel inadequate and to doubt their own abilities through reference to an unreal ideal of family life. Then, when their children are at school, parents are left powerless to intervene to ensure they get the education they need. All this helps breed the next generation of parents unused to controlling their own lives and lacking the confidence to control their own children's upbringing.

Students owe and I

STUDENTS OWE universities an estimated £15m in overdue tuition fees, according to a survey by vice-chancellors published yesterday.

BY BEN RUP
Education

owe

£15m

tuition

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