

[front cover]

ANARCHY 43

TWO SHILLINGS
THIRTY CENTS

PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Mum
one of our teachers

[inside front cover]

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Printed by EXPRESS PRINTERS

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ANARCHY 43 (Vol 4 No 9) September 1964

Stunted to school

LEILA BERG

IT SEEMS STRANGE TO ME THAT PEOPLE SHOULD FIGHT so hard, and so rightly, over education for children from five upwards—primary, secondary, university—and not care at all what has happened to the child before this.

For their first five years, thousands of our children are unable to grow. They live in flats—new flats—where their mothers have to keep all windows permanently locked because the child might climb and fall to the concrete ground; where the balconies, the only nearby play-space, are also kept permanently locked because the walls have been built too low; where the inside walls and floors are so thin, and let so much noise through, that children cannot run across the floor to greet their father when he comes home from work; where mothers walk round and round the block with the baby in the pram and the small children hanging on to the pram handle because father, who is working nights, is asleep; where the children who cannot play upstairs cannot play downstairs either because the mother—eight or nine stories up—cannot see them, or get to them quickly when they need her, and dangerous traffic runs nearby.

It is, ironically, the gradual realisation that there must surely be a better, saner, happier, more human way of living than this, that will finally break the ban on nursery school building. Mothers cannot go on like this much longer. I heard recently of one who arrived hysterical at a nursery school that was already filled to capacity, and said if they would not take her children she would abandon them; they took them—and now she has begun to have joy in them.

So mothers come to the nursery school with children whose infant education has already been stunted by their environment, and those of them who are lucky enough to get in—how pitifully inadequate the number is—begin to grow.

They have space, they have a tranquil and interested love, they have time, the long time of childhood, that is abundantly theirs, they have access to the basic things—sand, water, earth, grass, and clay, with a flowing changing uncramped sky above—and they begin to make relationships, to appreciate first themselves and then other people as unique human beings. They begin to make patterns of casual co-operat-

LEILA BERG who used to run a nursery school at her home is a writer of children's books who contributed to ANARCHY 39.

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ing that is very beautiful to see, like ballet.

And their parents too begin to grow. In nursery schools, parents are welcome, parents are part of the whole educational vision. There are no notices in nursery schools that say “Parents may not come beyond this point.” They are not kept outside the gates while their children scream for them. They come in with the children, and they stay, and they talk and watch and discuss and wonder. The realisation comes to them that it is possible to *rejoice* in a child’s laughter, a child’s dancing, a child’s exploring, a child’s developing skills, a child’s growing independence, a child’s glee. All these things, which had been so twisting them with anxiety and anger, for they saw them only as a threat, because their environment had become more important to them than the child, they begin at last to see as the human heritage. They suddenly see that to behave like this—joyously, spontaneously, curiously—is *possible*. Nothing dreadful happens. Their sky does not fall. Their children are happy, not depraved. And then they see that what is wrong is their environment, the way they are living. And this they will then begin to change.

Then we will have homes where children can play together, where they can have cats and rabbits, where they can dance and sing without guilt. We will have as many nursery schools as mothers need, because small children, even in the best of homes, need a bridge into the outside world. And then the children will not come already stunted to the primary schools.

Primary courtesies

CHARLOTTE FRANKLIN

EVERYONE KNOWS THE DISCREPANCY between private and public services in England in Health and in Education. In many cases the essentials—medical or teaching skill are no better in one or the other.

But some of us like to pay, quite a lot even, for being treated as an individual with feelings and possibly even ideas of our own.

With more and more compulsory education greater efforts must be made to make it as palatable as possible or else the fundamental aim of producing able and civilised individuals is defeated. A change in attitude towards the parents and children by the local Education Authorities is essential.

The Welfare Clinics seem to be able to combine courtesy and efficiency and achieve the co-operation of the mothers in the current phases of medical hygiene. Their positive approach must be carried on in the educational field at the primary school stage.

In my own area, London, which has had a pioneering, enlightened

CHARLOTTE FRANKLIN lives in North London and has four boys who have experienced a variety of schools.

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Education Committee for years, the parent of the five-year-old is confronted with the most unenthusiastic, unwelcoming and clumsy note straight away:

From L.C.C. School ...

“Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am to inform you that if your child X is not attending school and there has been no infection or contagious illness in the home during the last three weeks he/she can be admitted to the above named school.”

Of course this is purely formal and unimportant. Nevertheless it reflects the whole attitude which is most important. From a Private school the parents might get a slightly different letter:

“We are pleased to tell you that we have a vacancy for your child starting next term ...”

and only then a sentence to the effect—please inform the school if there has been an infection or a contagious disease in the house.

The emphasis, the spirit is so different.

Most Educational Authorities seem only to understand if you write to them in their own limited language. On the following point I myself have had experience in London only, but a friend in Norwich and one in Cambridge have found the same in their areas.

We all thought (quite independently) that for our five-year-old children the morning at school would be sufficient and that in fact spending the whole day at school was very tiring and possibly doing more harm than good.

Our ideas as parents were of no interest to the heads of the schools.

Only a doctor's letter, that the child had started bed wetting again or something similar was understood and accepted as reasonable.

In the Middlesex area some schools make it very difficult for the parent to meet the teacher of the child without complicated appointments. The school has no telephone number available to the parents. Every call has to go through the Town Hall.

We have found in the private school an entirely different approach. Any problem, please let us know at once—we are here to help, to work together with you.

I should point out that Parent Teacher Associations are not the answer. They can have interesting meetings and help in educating parents in the work of the schools. But my experience of this is that parents join together in a kind of minor plot to redress grievances. This Trade Union atmosphere is also wrong and no substitute for a direct and trusting contact between parents and the schools.

The state primary schools are still permeated with a critical approach towards the parents. In fact collection of dinner money, taking numbers in a class, medical inspections have an importance in the minds of the poor child quite out of proportion with actual importance.

The whole bureaucratic, slightly bullying, we-know-how-to-do-it, keep-out-of-it tone has, of course historic reasons, but it must be changed now and quickly. Unnecessarily, the gap between private and public education widens. And if private education should be abolished, all the more reason that the civilised approach towards the children and their parents must win through and not the authoritarian.

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Teacher's dilemma

MISTER P.

MY HEADMASTER LOOKED UP FROM THE BOOK HE WAS READING, and although I had been teaching on his staff for ten years I still retained that sense of guilt whenever I disturbed him. A quiet, gentlemanly type the head is—modest, undemanding, kindly—a face wrinkled with fifty odd years of experience. Rather like an amiable bloodhound—the sort you want to pat on the head. Some of the boys say he's too much of a gentleman to be headmaster of a Secondary Modern School. His voice is one of undertones, a whisper almost. He is rarely roused. His equable nature seems incapable of deep emotion.

When a boy was caught looking at pornographic photos we all thought it would break the trend but it didn't.

“Where did you get them?” the head asked in a dull monotone.

He could even have been thinking of the weeding still to be done in his back garden. The boy said he found them on the floor of a public lavatory.

“Which one?”

“... The one by the Green, sir.”

The head turned in that direction before he replied.

“I doubt the story. Go away and think it over. Then come and tell me the truth.”

The incident was never referred to again. I admired his attitude, but soon realised it was right not because of deliberate motive but because of a dreadful indifference. Thirty years of State School teaching had tainted the head’s enthusiasm with cynicism. He was in that vacuum when the curve of success flattens and when there is nothing ahead but retirement. But in all sincerity—a good man, seeing the follies of politics, of systems, of ideals. Turned in on himself. The fight given up. Just jog along. Read quietly behind the closed door and let the school run like a well tuned machine. Enthusiasm is there on his staff—but they’ll learn with the years. Disappointment will seep in. Repeated failures with disgruntled, aggressive pupils see to that. The staff will perhaps join the pupils and rebel—give up. An unlikely event, since their livelihoods depend on it. Or they’ll stifle their dedication and save their nerves.

...So the headmaster looked up from the book he was reading and I felt guilty.

“This boy David,” I began. The book closed. Sad, tired eyes raised themselves up enquiringly. His face reflected an assumed interest.

MISTER P. teaches in a London secondary modern school.

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“Yes, Mr. P. ?”

“He just doesn’t like Science—that’s all there is to it,” I said. “Can I put him in the library during these periods? He won’t learn. He hasn’t a capacity for Science.”

“We can’t help that.” A few papers were pointlessly shuffled. “Don’t accept so many explanations from these boys—they only make your job more difficult. Tell the boy you expect the work done. If he doesn’t do it, keep him in after school—and keep him in until it IS done.”

It was hopeless, of course, but I persisted.

“The boy is unhappy. His mother has no affection for him and there is tension between his parents.”

A little more useless paper shuffling, then:

“Don’t look for excuses. These boys must do what is asked. You always seem to get emotionally involved. Don’t. It doesn’t help your discipline. Just do the teaching and take it for granted they’ll follow. They will if you insist. Don’t get side-tracked on these sort of issues.”

Problem solved. The book was carefully reopened at the page to intimate the interview was over. I was left wondering how any teacher could inspire without being emotionally involved. Surely it means just that—an emotional involvement with one or more pupils. Of course, the system of packing thirty boys into a room with one teacher who is expected to be a light and inspiration to them all is absurd. The Ancient Greeks knew the answer, but unfortunately their method was not extended to the masses. No Government can afford to experiment along those lines because in our too complex society the individual doesn’t count any more. The Greeks gave the warning long ago—the individual must be more important than the society.

“The greatest training (not education) for the greatest number”—this is the adage of our school system. The Government, that far remote body with its hierarchy of serving officers, is well out of touch with those who are expected to apply their rules, and even further removed from those who are forced to obey them. Of course, amenities are available for the recalcitrant in the form of Child Guidance Clinics, but I have never yet succeeded in getting a boy into the hands of a person who has done more than the merest superficial remedial work. The surprisingly high number of stammerers in our schools shows this: little, usually absolutely nothing—is done to help them.

I have 32 boys in my form. They are in their third year—average age about 14. It is a typical “B” stream of a Secondary Modern School. Here are some details concerning a few of them.

1. Father and Mother separated. Mother regards son as a husband substitute and appears amazed to find boy is uncontrolled. He has been unruly but has responded to a very personal approach, and welcomes opportunities to be a child and not an adult.
2. Repeated migraine keeps this boy away from school. No action or treatment from his doctor. Parents are quite indifferent and lack common sense, though they are kindly.
3. Noisy, boisterous child, who has been in the courts for petty

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stealing three times in the last year. No serious work done to resolve his problems. He has no parents and lives with his grandmother who is too old to cope.

4. A difficult child who gets temper tantrums and has tried to injure himself by banging his head against the playground wall. Father a dominant ex-army sergeant who believes in “the iron fist” upbringing. “It did me no harm—made a man of me,” he says. Father divorced and boy hates his step-mother. Boy recommended for Child Guidance. After three short talks with “a nice lady” he was discharged, and the tantrums continue.

5. A long history of truancy, dishonesty, migraine and asthma. Mother is baffled by his disorders and says she can’t understand the child. After successive interviewing her confidence was won and she admitted the boy is illegitimate, but he has been led to believe that the man he regards as his father is his father. Mother says his real father was a cruel man who “used the belt on me often.” The boy feels a tension at home, especially with his “father”. There is lately an added burden—the arrival of a baby which “was an accident” and “is an awful nuisance to us all”. The quotes are the mother’s.

6. An inaccessible, quiet, introvert with no personality. Parents show no interest in his education and have not appeared at the school. Boy now opening up a little and has become emotionally upset because of the frequent quarrels between his parents. There are repeated threats that they will part and the boy doesn’t know which side to take.

7. This boy has no interest in anyone or anything. He seems spoiled by well-to-do parents (hairdressers) who have guaranteed him a “cushy job” in the family firm. Has had frequent intercourse with 13 and 14 year old girls and has also homosexual tendencies. He regards all these activities with pride, feeling it is a flout at authority.

8. A pleasant lad who is experiencing difficulty with certain teachers who use an authoritative approach. This makes him react aggressively. His father uses this method and the boy resents it, but is unable to demonstrate his resentment. His father lost one arm during the war and is envious of the boy being able to be “the man of the house” by doing all the jobs he cannot do. He says the boy is trying to usurp his authority and tries to make him feel inferior in the home.

9. An extremely pleasant boy who is very emotional, craving affection. He shines academically only when shown affection and when a special interest is taken in him. His father and mother live together but decided three years ago to go their own ways. He is rarely at home—“preferring the company of the chaps in the local” she says. The mother has an affair with a man residing in the room upstairs whom the boy has come to know as his Uncle Peter. This man spoils him and encourages his extravagant ways. The boy has definite homosexual tendencies.

10. A stammerer. Father and mother are keen Salvation Army workers who have little understanding of the problems their child is experiencing. Mother says, “He’ll grow out of it. We have faith, both of us. We know.” I hope, for the boy’s sake, they do.

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11. Rather inattentive and dreamy. Lives within himself. Not surprising. His father is in prison serving a long sentence for robbery.

In my form there is also an Indian, a boy from Hong Kong, another from Morocco and two from Ghana. I had one from Cyprus but he was removed to a remand school because he was discovered by a police constable masturbating a boy of twelve behind a bush on a common.

How is it possible with such diversity, to make them fit into a scheme? It is to be expected that any teacher, however conscientious must by the sheer force of the burden, break under the strain and adopt a less serious attitude if his sanity is to be kept. How can he gain the confidence of every pupil? A man cannot turn himself into 32 personalities. And how can he cope with the boy who is resentful because he has been made to feel a failure by finding himself damned to a “lower stream”, no matter how hard he works? The Grammar Schools are streamed into A, B, and C forms in just the same manner. Naturally the reputation of the school rests with examination results, so the A’s are favoured—the élite. A “good” school is the one with “good” results. Exams are the currency of education and the rot spreads to the staff rooms. The A stream teachers pride themselves as being the chosen, while the C stream teachers are regarded with a certain disdain.

As well as this, the scramble after “special allowances” for supposed responsibilities can only be compared with what goes on in the worst type of business concerns. These privileged members are naturally envied, and the jealousies ferment. It is the fault of the system which does not recognise that all teachers, no matter whom or what they teach, are valuable contributors of equal importance.

Of course, this system exalts only the few academically minded pupils who, with their crushed individuality, succeed in knuckling down under the pressures. All incentives go to create schools which fit these and tolerate the rest. If the majority of pupils leaving our schools leave them free of bitterness, it is more luck than planning, for there is only boredom for those who do not shine at examinations. This is the age of Science and Technology and the Government intends to glorify only those things. No politician sincerely believes that the mind of a child is sacred—that it should be respected and encouraged to develop naturally—surely the real task of the teacher is to guide each child individually, not to force a group along one channel laid down by politicians. It is quite astonishing how few people realise the dangers arising from a system of education based on government policies—a government which holds the purse and calls the tune, whilst the teachers are the vassals who merely dance to it.

I see no way in which the position can be improved—at any rate, not so long as we have a State education. Of course, there are many dedicated teachers who are struggling against impossible odds in our State Schools. They are trying to create some sort of reform. Without them the position would be even worse.

The tragedy of it all is that schools can make a child into anything—a patriot or a traitor; a Fascist or a Rocker; a saint or a scourge; and almost, it seems, in spite of himself.

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Progressive experience

OLIVE MARKHAM

OUR FOUR CHILDREN, ALL GIRLS, were educated at Burgess Hill School, where the three eldest stayed until they were ready to leave. The youngest had to change to a more conventional school when she was thirteen, because Burgess Hill closed down.

Their father and I had been educated at Public Schools, where we had both been unhappy. His was worse than mine and his unhappiness was more acute. I made a sudden unpremeditated attempt to run away when I was sixteen but I was seen from afar (we wore red jerseys under our gym-tunics) and brought back by the matron in a taxi.

When we had children of our own, we cast about for happier ways of educating them. Through an article by Marie Louise Berneri, we became interested in Wilhelm Reich. Then in A. S. Neill. Looking for Neill's books led us to Freedom Bookshop. Someone in the bookshop recommended Burgess Hill School, then in Hampstead, as being co-educational, fairly free and unorthodox. It was also one of the few schools that didn't mind taking weekly boarders. Our children had never wanted to be whole-time boarders at any school; partly, I think, because I'm a good cook, and we have a small farm with our own cow, so that they had always been used to good food. It would have been difficult to get them to school daily because the farm is very isolated and I can't drive a car. There was a village school four miles away, but it was only a primary school and the headmistress used the strap.

When we first saw Burgess Hill School, Geoffrey Thorpe was the headmaster. He interviewed us, or we interviewed him—I think it was mutual—sitting on hard chairs in a big bare room heated by a very meagre gas-fire. Afterwards we went round the school and found it ugly, untidy, bare and comfortless. Only the walls, covered with paintings and drawings, showed signs of creative activity. At the back there was a sooty looking garden with huge leafless trees. But somewhere behind this unpretentious and forbidding exterior, we smelt a whiff of the freedom and non-conformity which we so wanted to incorporate in our children's education. At any rate, we arranged for our two eldest daughters to start the next term. The school, though extremely poor and without any financial aid from the State, did all it could to help the children of artists, actors and musicians, and for years we paid the

OLIVE MARKHAM also writes children's books, some of which have been illustrated by her daughters.

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ridiculously low fee of £30 per child per term.

When our two eldest daughters started, Burgess Hill was not as completely unauthoritarian as it became later. There was no school uniform, smoking and swearing were allowed, but a few simple rules had to be obeyed. Lessons were compulsory, though games were not. There were fixed hours for going to bed and getting up. If you went out in the evening you had to get permission and say where you were going and when you would be back. There were rotas for washing up and helping to clear away meals.

The teaching was of a very high standard and the teachers were more imaginative and original and less neurotic than in most State schools. A school meeting was held every week at which the children aired their grievances and settled disputes. There were no marks, punishments or examinations, but if children wanted to take the State examinations before they left, and many did, they could get all the help they needed. The theory was that any lively-minded child could pass an examination if it wanted to, without all the pressure, forcing and stuffing that most state-educated children have to put up with. This theory was born out by our eldest daughter, an academic type, who insisted upon taking her General Certificate after five years at Burgess Hill. She went on her own to Hampstead Town Hall and in spite of the fact that she had never taken an examination in her life, passed in five subjects, getting nearly 100 per cent in both the French papers and over 80 per cent in both English papers. This is not written in a spirit of pride (I personally abominate examinations and have never cared whether my children passed any or not) but to refute the charge that schools like Burgess Hill can never get examination successes.

It was in Geoffrey Thorpe's time that the children were asked to write end of term reports on the teachers and these were sent to the parents together with the reports of the teachers on the children. In spite of some showing-off, the children were honest and were able to judge their own progress far better, in many ways, than the teachers. I still have one of these reports headed: Pupil's Own Report. It reads like this:

ENGLISH I have nothing to say. Peter thinks I haven't been working but I think I have.

GEOGRAPHY I don't think I take it quite seriously enough. I haven't done enough work on it.

SCIENCE I like it very much and have worked quite hard. Mary is very helpful and cheerful.

FRENCH I know a lot of vocabulary. But I'll have to do more essays.

ART I have done some good things in clay and was just "letting myself go" over a painting only it was burnt which is rather a waste.

GAMES AND SPORTS Hockey I like. It would do John Rhodes good to play.

OTHER COMMENTS School meetings are much better with John as Chairman and me as Secretary. I like expeditions. I would like very much to do cooking.

Of course, there were doubts, regrets and difficulties. The school, being tolerant and without racial prejudice, took in many problem children who were often a great trial to the more normal pupils. A child

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with violent tempers (during which she attacked, shook and bit those nearest to her) shared a bedroom with two of our children who became so terrified of her that at one time we told Geoffrey Thorpe that either our children or the problem would have to leave. The staff were very sympathetic but nobody wanted to abandon the difficult child who had already been expelled or rejected by various State schools, and was unhappy at home. In between tempers, the child was friendly and co-operative. The whole thing was discussed at a school meeting when all the children put their points of view and it was finally decided to give our children a bodyguard of tough boys who would come to their assistance at the onset of an attack. As far as I remember, the tantrums gradually decreased. Or perhaps our children, as they grew older, learnt how to deal with them.

Another of our troubles was the Press. Progressive Schools have a weakness to opening their doors to "sympathetic" journalists whose articles always turn out to be anything but sympathetic. The closing down of Burgess Hill was assisted by two journalists of this kind, who bought a bottle of whisky at a nearby pub and tried to persuade some of the children to drink it so that they could take pictures of them wallowing in a drunken orgy. As parents, we suffered a good deal from seeing lurid pictures of our children used as illustrations to untruthful and salacious articles in the gutter-press. Relations and friends harassed us with criticism. Were our children turning into savages? Were they learning enough? What would happen when they had to fend for themselves in the real world?

Some of these questions we are now in a position to answer. Two of the children are self-supporting. The eldest has held for several years a difficult and responsible job requiring extreme tact and forbearance. If she had shown even the slightest inclination towards savagery, she would have been out on her ear at once. The youngest child likes an occasional cigarette; the other three don't smoke. They are all excellent cooks. Their sexual relationships have varied according to their temperaments, but so far, unwanted babies have been avoided. They have a great affection for us and we for them. What more could parents ask?

During the last few years, interest and support for schools like Burgess Hill, has been growing less and less. When Geoffrey Thorpe retired and Jimmy East took over the headmastership, the numbers were already dropping and the L.C.C., which had for years regarded Burgess Hill as an unsightly boil upon the residential face of Frognall, had condemned the building because of supposed bomb damage. Eventually, the house in Hampstead had to be evacuated, and after frantic efforts to raise money to add to the miserable compensation paid by the L.C.C., the school moved out to High Canons, a derelict mansion in Hertfordshire.

By this time, our two eldest had left and the two youngest were installed. The school had become in some ways more anarchistic and experimental. School meetings continued, but carried much more weight. The children did really run school affairs. Bed-time and getting-up time were left to the child's discretion. You could stay up all

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night if you wished: some children, who came from authoritarian homes, did, at first. If you got up too late you missed your breakfast. Lessons were no longer compulsory. At the beginning of each term, children made contracts with the teachers whose lessons they wished to attend. One child went to no lessons at all but planted out a big patch of garden where he worked all term, producing a wonderful crop of vegetables and flowers for his grandmother, who looked after him. Reports were abolished. We rather missed them but made do with verbal ones. I think Jimmy East felt that reports were incongruous when staff and children lived on such equal terms.

At High Canons, the staff problem, both domestic and academic, became much more acute. No-one who has not actually had children at a Progressive School, can realise the awful conditions, due to perpetual shortage of money, which such places have to contend with. Not only is the teaching of voluntary pupils more exhausting than the teaching of conscripts, but the staff and children have to cope with most of the domestic duties as well. Jimmy East was a very competent cook, but it wore him out and shortened his teaching periods. One of the things that Burgess Hill can be said to have proved is that children, whatever their home environment, are not naturally tidy and clean.

The move from Hampstead to Hertfordshire might have put new life into Burgess Hill, but, in fact, it killed it. For one thing, a huge financial debt was incurred, which lay like a deadweight on staff, parents and even children. There is no doubt that all those forty-five children who followed Burgess Hill from town to country, cared enormously about the school. You had only to see the efforts they made when they heard that the School Inspectors were coming, the startlingly beautiful mural that two of them painted along one wall of the vast dining-room, the pride they took in showing visitors round, to realise how they felt.

It was the adults who bickered, vacillated, were unreliable and failed to clarify, let alone live up to their ideals.

Even so, behind all the ambiguities and excuses, a real spirit of tolerance and freedom, unique in many of its expressions, existed in Burgess Hill to the end. An imaginative Ministry of Education might have thought it worthwhile to preserve such a place, if only as a study for anthropologists.

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High School U.S.A.

JANICE GREER and PEG BLOSSOM

IT IS TIME FOR US TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE FACT that we are the ones responsible for creating the violence that is present in our society, and that we can do something about it by realising what we're doing. Psychiatry has laid bare the fact that we affect the child in infancy and childhood. But once we put the child in the schools we stop probing. Can't we continue the search and find out what conditioning in the schools fosters so much hatred in adults? The very methods we are so virtuous about in the schools are not giving the results we think they are, but are creating an anger and resentment that lasts the whole of our lives. At the High School level this conditioning reaches its peak. The following notes on High Schools are the result of discussions between concerned parents.

Schools create life and death pressure to succeed, but to succeed into what. High schools pressure kids at a College level for the school's glory, and parents sit on the side lines and root them on. We take advantage of the fact the children want to please the parents and teachers. They do a lot against their own grain for the parent's approval (love). The parents exploit this. The students should please themselves. High School should be a time for self discovery, and for sampling at the student's own speed. Instead they are taught techniques, not how to think. The students are interested in knowing where they will fit, what they would be good at, but instead are driven for excellence in subjects that have no meaning to them at this time.

We dull them in an incubation period so they won't know what the world is really about. They get reward for falseness in testing instead of truth. The truth of the matter is they really don't understand, can't possibly understand most of what they are writing or reading, or getting tested on. But they have to find tricks for studying to get a good grade. To get a good grade things have to be done superficially so everything that is required can be finished on time. A trick for doing things you don't like to do as well as what you do like thereby dulling your true feelings. There is no energy left for what you really want to do therefore setting a pattern for all your life. It leads to a subtle feeling of guilt if you're really are having a good time at something.

JANICE GREER and PEG BLOSSOM have been trying to interest other parents in the Chicago area to start a school, perhaps on the model of Summerhill.

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We don't let students start at their own level. We set up standards for them. They should be allowed to start at a beginning level, even if garish, whether in clothes, music, art, history, ideas, anything. We don't let them begin at the bottom and work up to the level they are able to reach. Only through a long slow process of freedom of choice, and plenty of trial and error, plenty of errors, can a person develop any authority on his own. We would then be able to break through the mediocrity of our culture, and wouldn't rely on fashion or critics to judge for us. We must have the judgement to act on our own insight and decision, and not from the mere wish to copy convention.

Another destructive aspect of the grading system is the emphasis put on each student for self-attainment and the continual competition fostered between each child. A whole group of children can't be doing well, each at his own speed under the present system. But we are so proud of the curve system where some are Champions, some failures, and they can rise only at someone else's expense. Work isn't done for a feeling of self-fulfilment, or for the community, but for the grade. Even in some lower grades where the grading system has been abolished the slow learners still feel pitted against the fast learners. And under the new SRA reading method the child knows by the colour pencil he has to use. The methods are subtle but even more deadly than report cards. A line graph, black and white which seems invulnerable, you're below average, in the middle or above average. A mother feels as if God has spoken when they show her where her child rates against his room mates, the area, and the nation. After 12 or more years of this conditioning what wonder the adult thinks more of his profit than the value of his product or service. He has never had the experience of community action. It was wrong if you helped another pupil write a theme, or pass a test.

For at least 80,000 years man was a hunter, until possibly 8,000 years ago when he began to settle into agricultural communities. Man's emotions, drives and physical inheritance, all are geared for survival as a hunter. Our patterns of living should take into account what is a natural part of our make-up. In the near past boys of high school age satisfied their drives by going to sea, into armies, the frontier, or becoming apprentices in the economic world. It wasn't necessarily perfect solutions to their needs, but now the children seem to be in school as much because there just isn't any other place for them. They aren't wanted in the home or the economic world. So we pile them into bigger and bigger schools of hundreds or thousands of children. the architecture of which is like a modern jail, and fearfully watch them so anticipated violence won't break out. Well for the most part the students have been so well conditioned through grammar school that very little violence breaks out there. But is it any wonder that our world fantasises on the greatest of all possible violence. I agree with Jung that maybe we shouldn't maintain that atomic physicists are a pack of criminals, but unconsciously they must be aiming at some kind of violence when they plan a weapon, and they could just as easily be inventing something useful and beneficial to humanity. And we could

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be giving a healthy direction to the instinctual drives instead of creating a pent up danger through distortion and submerging of the hereditary urges.

Since the educational institutions tend to perpetuate themselves and seem to be indistinguishable from freedom and democracy one must overcome a feeling of extreme disloyalty to criticise its foundations. Just as a parent retains a feeling of submission when entering a school building or talking to a teacher. But there are alternatives, and there should be as many different types of schools as there are communities. Perhaps we needed a homogeneous system to draw together our large country into a workable whole, but now it is outmoded and detrimental to a creative thriving people.

The great architect Le Corbusier, who was apprenticed to architects, but never went to school past the age of 13½ wrote, “The schools are the product of 19th century theories. In a time of complete upheaval they have, with their diplomas, officially applied the brake. They have killed architecture.” And I would add they kill and dull and maim innumerable minds in every field.

While schools might be varied there are some basic musts for any school that aims at giving the students self-esteem, and a feeling of achievement.

1. Schools must be small. I would say between 50 and 300 students, obviously you cannot get an organic community in the large prison-like structures we now have.

The ideal environment is one that the students can modify. One of the barriers against change is the excuse it will cost money. This however is easily breached. There are tenements going begging to anyone who will take them off the landlord’s hands, and mansions left to estates that would be charitably given. Considering the tremendous cost of the huge buildings we now put up, a change-over would be relatively economical. The buildings should be small and unimportant. New buildings or old they should be so unimportant that they invite change—of the space, colour, wall. They should allow for experimentation and each new group of students should be encouraged to modify their surroundings to suit themselves. This includes being messy, splashing or splattering paint, making murals on the floor, stars on the ceiling, anything. We have a fetish about being neat and set up arbitrary ideas, this alone makes us angry inside. All children have their own sense of order, and it is very different at different stages.

Groups of boys could learn construction together and with today’s mobility they could meet from the suburbs and city. The boys who will go off to college to become architects and the boys who will go into construction trades. There is a nesting urge in us and most important are the students who will construct for the sheer delight a man takes in building, repairing and seeing what their hands can produce. Architects moan because their clients don’t want or appreciate good form, or the joy of a beautiful wood. A boy who has worked with lumber and had the feel of lumber would demand good materials and workmanship when he buys a house. In addition all of the students should

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be involved in making the environment. If they feel they have some control over their environment they will demand, not ignore better city planning, and will not allow destruction of what is beautiful whether made by man or nature. But this insight cannot come about through books—it can only be learned through the handling of space and materials.

2. There must be no grades. The grading system is destructive and has no positive value.

The children from the most economically deprived areas are humiliated by being pitted against the averages of others who have been trained from nursery school in the techniques for success in school. Haven’t these children feelings, sensitivity like any others. For 12 years we tell them they aren’t good enough. But good enough in what? In writing a paper, organising words found in reference books? Passing tests with symbols not understood, putting down these words they don’t understand. I could quote from Tolstoy, Goethe, Plato, Pavlov, Thoreau, Ruskin, Kierkegaard, all to the point that words are the most superficial level of learning. Herbert Read writes, “It is not merely that we have disguised our feelings as symbols, but what in effect we have done is to accept a limited number of

symbols as an adequate account of the total reality, and what escapes our consciousness is what ultimately destroys us, individually in the form of insanity, socially in the form of war.”

The student working with his complete self, without pressure of time, who develops his own project will know how he is doing, he will judge himself. If he makes poor choices he knows eventually where it doesn't work, and will progress. If his work is carefully kept, valued and respected—never marked on and written on—if it is kept in order his progress will be easy to see, and he will evaluate it himself. He begins to value himself if the work he does is valued and respected (and if it is degraded, he is degraded). If he is pleased he will have a tremendous desire to share what he's learned. This is a natural human need. We negate the need to share knowledge with our system of competition. The child who has the desire to give, and the opportunity to give will be able to take in other areas.

What a cross we have given each child to bear. Those who feel inadequate because they cannot hope to compete, and the student who has managed to please the teachers feels guilty because he has cheated himself.

3. A fluid Curriculum. The curriculum may be stimulated by the teacher, but should be planned by the students within a very loose time structure.

There should be regional differences in courses. Why shouldn't the special problems relating to an area or culture group be discussed, probed, evaluated in depth. Why minimise them in an overall story which we pretend is history. One of the important aims of education should be to give students some idea of who he is and where he came from. The Puritans have no immediate relevance to the problems confronting a negro student whose family is supported by ADC, but he

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could certainly understand a discussion about his position in our society politically and economically. He could understand evolution and survival of the fittest, as well as the idea of the individual cell being part of a total whole, a community. He would have something to say about morals and ethics in our society. We have humanists, psychiatrists, anthropologists who could help with seminars and projects with these students (and all students probing their background). And from experience I know it would be reciprocal, the professionals would find themselves learning things from the students.

It is the last time most of them will be in school and there is no more important knowledge we can give them than some insight into their emotions, into the problems they are confused and worried about. Why can't we be truthful with them and let them discuss and probe into the areas that bother all of us. Using the same method as used in group therapy they could find out they are not carrying fears that are unique with them, but are common. Fears of homosexuality, disturbing dreams and emissions, family relationships full of tension. Why lie and call the Oedipus drama *theatre* when it is a myth dramatising the relationships within every family.

Our advertising tends to glorify in a glow of perfection lovers, wives, mothers. It makes the average person feel inadequate and a failure in their real life situation. How much better the old fairy tales of queens who were jealous of the princess, brother against brother, and children being put out of their house by their parents (rejected) like Hansel and Gretel. It is the last time they will be in school where they can learn the real dance we all go through, and perhaps some bad family patterns can be broken and some insight given into the compulsions that determine who we marry.

Every subject studied is actually to find out Who we are, Why we are here. Psychology and religion are at the basis of every subject studied whether it be chemistry, literature, history or biology. At the basis of all our studies is our search to find out what our life really is, and if we treated subjects from this viewpoint what subject could be boring. But in the present curriculum each subject pompously parades as an end in itself.

But learning should not be emphasised as a verbal process. Art materials, drama, music, dance should be the most important part of the school. In the creative process the student reaches into himself for perceptions. He learns to see and feel for himself. Forms take shapes particular to him, and feelings will not be sublimated to become the breeding ground of hates. A person who can work

through his feelings and relationships in the art mediums does not have resentments that fester in him. He develops confidence because every line he has put down or every movement he has made is a part of himself and he sees the progress and achievement that comes from his own attempts. He should feel satisfaction and be relaxed after each day at school. Now students speed out of school after five hours of being pent-up, and tensions are set up that are never released.

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4. Human Relationships: When you think of a great teacher you think of someone who is excited about a particular field, and has a strong viewpoint. Ideally the teacher should be hired because she has a love and excitement for a subject, instead of a desire to teach in general. Her preparation should be in her field and the educational system should be set up so that she continues to work in it in conjunction with teaching. Instead of years of lesson plans, traffic plans, and curriculum planning she can work out her methods and ways of teaching and handling the group by trial and error. Teachers should also be given a knowledge of themselves through psychological help all through college. The student must not become tools the teacher manipulates to satisfy her own weaknesses. There should be some place the teacher could go at any time to discuss his relations to his students, and as a group the teachers should be able to talk over problems.

The teachers should lose their fear of having relationships with pupils. Attachments to teachers is one way of breaking away from the family when he is not ready for the responsibilities involved in sexual relationships. It has the element of sex but can be constructive and is a normal and healthy way of development.

We don't call it fascistic, but our school, teacher set-up has a strong element of fascism in it. The students shouldn't be dictated to, they want to talk over their own ideas, the beginnings of their own solutions, they want to make their own decisions, set their own goals.

A teacher who is herself working on a project part of the day will automatically show the pupil more by example than can be learned through any other teaching method. When there is a good relationship the students tend to work out solutions to problems that the teacher is struggling with, and she incorporates it into her own work. She refines the students' ideas and in this way they both go forward. In a natural atmosphere a group will develop between certain students and the teacher. If a teacher is right for them there is no reason she should be forced to stop at the end of a semester or year, and the students forced to readjust to a new situation. There is usually a breaking point where the teacher and the group will be finished with each other. At that point the group too might rearrange itself. We all know the feeling of being finished with a friend who was really a teacher to us and suddenly you know enough or had worked through the relationship and it was over. If we continually break into activities and relationships before they are consummated we contribute to the fragmentation that is a problem in our culture.

Every time a variation on our education is broached you get the response there aren't enough teachers available. Poppycock, there just aren't enough diplomas. Everywhere there are people who come into small schools and give a little of themselves. Who would be glad to give of their time, for the pleasure they would have being needed for themselves. Doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs. The school hours could be flexible to enable the students and teachers to take advantage of the hours that can be given to them. When personal relationships develop between students and "resource person" apprenticeships could

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develop. Working as an apprentice a few days a week or a few hours a day would be a way for students to sample the real atmosphere of a profession, or to just partake of the adult world as he feels ready.

Jane Addams knew what Tolstoy meant when he said we spread a "Snare of preparation" before the young people's feet, "hopelessly entangling them in a curious inactivity at the very period

of life when they are longing to construct the world anew and to conform it to their own ideals". We deaden their intuitive abilities.

There is another source for teachers that we neglect, and that is the student himself. An excited student want to share what he has learned, and there should be a constant interchange between the students all day long. The idea that sterile silence is the best environment for education is false. How does a student know that he has really learnt something unless he tries to pass on that knowledge in his own way while he is still involved in it. In a new book on education by a leading authority it was suggested that the students each have their own cubicle for studying. We are alienated, fragmented, isolated in the words of psychologists today. Why not let the students grow up in an atmosphere of friendship, relationships, and awareness of each other?

SOME ADDRESSES OF ORGANISATIONS MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE.

ADVISORY CENTRE FOR EDUCATION (ACE), 57 Russell Street, Cambridge. Annual subscription £1, covering four issues of *Where?*

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS: Honorary Secretary, Mrs. B. M. Humphrey, 127 Herbert Gardens, Harlesden, London, N.W.10.

CONFEDERATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF STATE EDUCATION: Honorary Secretary, Mrs. N. Rein, 277 Trinity Road, London, S.W.18. Annual subscription 5s., covering four issues of CASE Newsletter.

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Reflections on parents, teachers and schools

JOHN ELLERBY

WHAT ANARCHISTS ARE AFTER is personal and social autonomy—the idea that individuals and their organisations should be self-regulating autonomous bodies. It is this which makes us advocates of workers' control in industry and which makes us enthusiastic about such examples as we find of social organisations spring up from below, from people's urge to satisfy their own needs, as opposed to those which depend on a structure of hierarchy, power and authority in which one set of people give instructions and another set of people carry them out.

The theoretical application of our ideas to the organisation of education is clear enough. The autonomous self-governing school is the aim, and in view of the obvious limits within which children may be said to govern themselves, this means in practice a school controlled by teachers by virtue of their functional responsibility to children, and by parents because of their biological responsibility for them. But the issue is more complicated, for in both primitive and complex communities it is recognised that all adults have a responsibility towards children, which because of the vagaries and vicissitudes of individual parentage, may have to be exercised on its behalf or on the child's behalf. Once this is admitted, we have of course admitted that education is the concern of the community. But what community? The state as in France, the local authority as in the United States, or a mixture of the two as in Britain? And where does the responsibility of the community begin and end?

Should education be compulsory anyway? (And is the compulsion to be applied to the child or to the parent?) Bakunin saw the question dialectically:

The principle of authority, in the education of children, constitutes the natural point of departure; it is legitimate, necessary, when applied to children of a tender age, whose intelligence has not yet openly developed itself. But as the development of everything, and consequently of education, implies the gradual negation of the point of departure, this principle must diminish as fast as education and instruction advance, giving place to increasing liberty. All rational education is at bottom nothing but this progressive immolation of authority for the benefit of liberty, the final object of education necessarily

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being the formation of free men full of respect and love for the liberty of others. Therefore the first day of the pupil's life, if the school takes infants scarcely able as yet to stammer a few words, should be that of the greatest authority and an almost entire absence of liberty: but its last day should be that of the greatest liberty and the absolute abolition of every vestige of the animal or divine principle of authority.

Eighty-five years later, Ethel Mannin in her utopian survey *Bread and Roses* took a more absolutely "libertarian" line:

At this point you perhaps protest, "But if there is no compulsion, what happens if a child does not want to attend school of any kind, and the parents are not concerned to persuade him?" It is quite simple. In that case the child does not attend any school. As he becomes adolescent he may wish to acquire some learning. Or he may develop school-going friends and wish to attend school because they do. But if he doesn't he is nevertheless learning all the time, his natural child's creativeness working in happy alliance with his freedom. No Utopian parent would think of using that moral coercion we call 'persuasion'. By the time he reaches adolescence the child grows tired of running wild, and begins to identify himself with grown-ups; he perceives the usefulness of knowing how to read and write and add, and there is probably some special thing he wants to learn—such as how to drive a train or build a bridge or a house. It is all very much simpler than our professional educationists would have us believe.

Some of us think it is not that simple. But the point is academic, for in practice the decision is that of the parents. Nowadays it is only highly sophisticated and educated people who bother to argue about whether or not it is desirable that children should learn the three Rs. The law in this country does not in fact require parents to send their children to school; it imposes an obligation on them to see that their children while within the compulsory age, are receiving "an appropriate education". The occasional prosecutions of recalcitrant parents usually reveal a degree of apathy, indifference or parental incompetence that hardly provides a good case for the opponents of compulsion, though they do sometimes rope in highly conscientious parents whose views on education do not happen to coincide with those of the local authority. (Mrs. Joy Baker's account of her long and in the end successful struggle with the authorities will be reviewed in a coming issue of ANARCHY). Usually, apart from a few of the rich, with their governesses and tutors, there are not many parents with the time or skill to teach their children at home, and of those who could, many must feel it unfair to deprive their children of the pleasures and social experience of belonging to a community of their peers, or may cherish the right of parents to have the kids out of their way for some of the time—and the reciprocal right of their children to be outside the parental atmosphere.

* * *

Historically, in this country, the struggle to make education free, compulsory and universal, and out of the exclusive control of religious organisations. was long and bitter, and the opposition to it came, not from libertarian objectors, but from the upholders of privilege and dogma, and from those (both parents and employers) who had an economic interest in the labour of children or a vested interest in ignorance. The very reason why it had to be made compulsory ninety-four

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years ago was because children were an economic asset. Readers of chapters 8 and 12 of Marx's *Capital* will not dissent from the assertion that the industrial revolution was made by the children of the poor. As late as 1935 Lord Halifax, as President of the Board of Education, opposing the proposal to raise the school leaving age from fourteen to fifteen, declared that "public opinion would not

tolerate an unconditional raising of the age” and the Bradford textile manufacturers assured him that “there was work for little fingers there.”

The notion that primary education should be free, compulsory and universal is very much older than the English Act of 1870. It grew up with the printing press and the rise of protestantism. The rich had been educated by the Church and the sons of the rising bourgeoisie in the grammar schools of the Middle Ages. From the 16th century on arose a gradual demand that all should be taught. Martin Luther appealed “To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian Schools”, observing that the training children get at home “attempts to make us wise through our experience” a task for which life itself is too short, and which could be accelerated by systematic instruction by means of books. Compulsory universal education was founded in Calvinist Geneva in 1536, and Calvin’s Scottish disciple John Knox “planted a school as well as a kirk in every parish.” In puritan Massachusetts free compulsory primary education was introduced in 1647. The common school, writes Lewis Mumford in *The Condition of Man*:

...contrary to popular belief, is no belated product of 19th century democracy: I have pointed out that it played a necessary part in the absolutist-mechanical formula. Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia, following Luther’s precept, made primary education compulsory in his realm in 1717, and founded 1,700 schools to meet the needs of the poor. Two ordinances of Louis XIV in 1694 and 1698 and one of Louis XV in 1724 required regular attendance at school. Even England, a straggler in such matters, had hundreds of private charity schools, some of them founded by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which had been incorporated in 1699. Vergerious, one of the earliest renaissance schoolmasters, had thought education an essential function of the State: and centralised authority was now belatedly taking up the work that had been neglected with the wiping out of municipal freedom in the greater part of Europe.

All the rationalist philosophers of the 18th century thought about the problems of education, and of them, the two acutest educational thinkers ranged themselves on opposite sides on the question of the *organisation* of education: Rousseau for the State, Godwin against it. Rousseau, whose *Emile* postulates a completely individual education (human society is ignored, the tutor’s entire life is devoted to poor Emile), did nevertheless concern himself with the social aspect, arguing, in his *Discourse on Political Economy* (1758) for public education, “under regulations prescribed by the government”, for

If children are brought up in common in the bosom of equality; if they are imbued with the laws of the State and the precepts of the General Will ... we cannot doubt that they will cherish one another mutually as brothers ... to become in time defenders and fathers of the country of which they will have been so long the children.

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William Godwin, who, in his *Enquirer* attacks the concealed authoritarianism of Rousseau’s educational theories, criticises in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1792), the idea of national education. He summarises the arguments in favour, which are those of Rousseau, adding to them the question:

If the education of our youth be entirely confined to the prudence of their parents or the accidental benevolence of private individuals, will it not be a necessary consequence, that some will be educated to virtue, others to vice, and others again entirely neglected?

Godwin’s answer is:

The injuries that result from a system of national education are, in the first place, that all public establishments include in them the idea of permanence. They endeavour, it may be, to secure and to diffuse whatever of advantage to society is already known, but they forget that more remains to be known ... But public education has always expended its energies in the support of prejudice; it teaches its pupils not the fortitude that shall bring every proposition to the test of examination, but the art of vindicating such tenets as may chance to be previously established ... This feature runs through every species of public establishment; and, even in the petty institution of Sunday schools, the chief lessons that are taught are a superstitious veneration for the Church of England, and to bow to every man in a handsome coat ... Refer them to reading, to conversation, to meditation, but teach them neither creeds nor catechisms, neither moral nor political ...

Secondly, the idea of national education is founded in an inattention to the nature of mind. Whatever each man does for himself is done well; whatever his neighbours or his country undertake to do for him is done ill. It is our wisdom to incite men to act for themselves, not to retain them in a state of perpetual pupillage. He that learns because he desires to learn will listen to the instructions he receives and apprehend their meaning. He that teaches because he desires to teach will discharge his occupation with enthusiasm and energy. But the moment political institution undertakes to assign to every man his place, the functions of all will be discharged with supineness and indifference ...

Thirdly, the project of a national education ought uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government. This is an alliance of a more formidable nature than the old and much contested alliance of church and state. Before we put so powerful a machine under the direction of so ambitious an agent, it behoves us to consider well what we do. Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hands and perpetuate its institutions ... Their view as instigator of a system of education will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity: the data upon which their conduct as statesmen is vindicated will be the data upon which their institutions are founded. It is not true that our youth ought to be instructed to venerate the constitution, however excellent: they should be instructed to venerate truth ... (Even) in the countries where liberty chiefly prevails, it is reasonably to be assumed that there are important errors, and a national education has the most direct tendency to perpetuate those errors and to form all minds upon one model.

Godwin's arguments are worth quoting at this length, not only as the classic statement of an anarchist position on this issue, but because they have had such ample subsequent justification. On the other hand he does not really answer the question of how we can ensure that every child can have free access to whatever educational facilities will suit its individual needs.

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In practice, in this country today people who want to try an anarchist approach to education have two possible courses of action: to work in the private sector—independent schools of one kind or another, a minority of which are progressive, or to work in the normal school system and try to influence it in a “progressive” direction. These two courses are by no means mutually exclusive, and there is plenty of evidence of the influence of the former on the latter.

It is surprising, and certainly saddening, considering the number of people interested in “progressive” schools, how few of them there are and how they seldom inspire other people to start them. For example, the publication of *Summerhill*, a compilation of the writings of A. S. Neill, brought about a great deal of interest in his school and his ideas in America; there was an embarrassing procession of overseas visitors to Neill's little school in Suffolk, but how few of the admirers and visitors set about starting more schools on similar lines. A few did: one of the contributions in this issue of ANARCHY comes from people who are trying to.

Why shouldn't the parents of a group of babies in the same age group get together and plan a school for them well in advance, so as to accumulate the funds required before they are needed? They could as several groups of parents do, run their own nursery school when their children reach the appropriate age and then develop from the primary stage onward. The wealthy who are also intent on educating their children in independent schools, have found a variety of ways for financing them by way of Deeds of Covenant, endowment policies and so on. (John Vaizey estimates that at present something like £60 million a year is spent on school fees and £15-£20 million of this is found by tax-avoidance).

Many of us on the other hand, are more concerned with changing the ordinary primary and secondary schools which the vast majority of children attend, changing the teaching methods and changing parental and social attitudes. Some will simply say that this cannot be done—this would be the view of the secondary modern school-teacher who contributes an honest account of his problems elsewhere in this issue. But others will say that it would be foolish not to try to take advantage of the present wave of interest in education and in the state of the schools.

The anarchist, seeking functional, as opposed to political, answers to social needs, and contrasting the social principle with the political principle, sees in the state's control of education a usurpation of a social function. (Historically of course, the Education Act of 1870 didn't “usurp” anybody's function, but if you accept the conception of an inverse relationship between the state and society—the strength of one resulting from the weakness of the other—you can see how the social organisation of popular education was, so to speak, atrophied in advance, by its political organisation. That this has not been the disaster—though some would say it has—that anarchist thinkers like

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Godwin predicted, has been due to the local diffusion of control, the divergent aims of teachers and the resilience of children).

Functionally, the administration of the school is the concern of parents and teachers, and if we really seek a society of autonomous free associations we must see such bodies as parent-teacher associations as the kind of organisation whose eventual and “natural” function is to take over the schools from the Ministry, the County Councils, the Directors, Inspectors, Managers and Governors who, in a society dominated by the political principle are inevitably their controllers. I don’t know whether schools so administered would be any better or any worse than they are at present, but I do believe that a “self-regulating” society would run its schools that way. Among independent schools in this country which exemplify this kind of organisation, there used to be Burgess Hill School (described by one of the parents in this issue of ANARCHY) which was owned by a Friendly Society of parents and teachers and there still is King Alfred School, governed by a society of people interested in modern educational methods and “administered by an advisory council of pupils and staff”. I have not heard of any parent-teacher associations in the ordinary school system which aspire to such functions, though with the development of a variety of organisations in the last few years concerned with interesting parents in education, one can imagine the members reflecting after a time on whether their own intense “participation” had not rendered the usual complicated and expensive bureaucracy of school administration superfluous.

The mention of parent-teacher associations—in theory an epitome of the kind of social organisation which anarchists envisage—reminds us of their greater development in America, and the fact that this has not had exactly the results that we as anarchists would find desirable. In his book *On Being Human*, writing about the school as “a most important agency in the teaching of the art and science of human relations”, the anthropologist and biologist Ashley Montagu declares:

We must shift the emphasis from the three Rs to the fourth R, human relations, and place it first, foremost, and always in that order of importance as the principal reason for the existence of the school. It must be clearly understood, once and for all time, that human relations are the most important of all relations. Upon this understanding must be based all our educational policies ... Our teachers must, therefore, be specially qualified to teach human relations ...

But the kind of thing that happens when this point of view filters into the school system is discussed by David Riesman in his “Thoughts on Teachers and Schools”. The teaching function, he observes, “has been extended to include training in group co-operation, manners, the arts, and self-understanding, as well as large residues of the traditional curriculum”. For Human Relations has in fact already become a classroom subject, but somehow not in Montagu’s sense. “The school is implicated and embroiled”, says Riesman, “in the changing forms

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of America’s preoccupation with success—the patina of success now being defined by such terms as “group co-operation”, “self-understanding”, “personal adjustment” and “getting along with people”. The progressive education movement, spreading in a distorted fashion through the state school systems, has, he feels, dovetailed with the “mindless pragmatism and vocationalism” which the schools absorb from their social surroundings, from parents, supervisors, taxpayers and the variety of pressure groups, great and small which surround the American school boards. Meanwhile the teachers lead lives of harried desperation fighting a “losing battle in defence of the traditional intellectual values”. And he evolves, on the analogy of Keynesian economics a *counter-cyclical* theory of education. Just as Keynes recommended spending in times of depression, so Riesman recommends that “teachers, in selecting among the expectations held out to them, have some modest opportunities to oppose life in its momentary excesses”. He wants “to encourage some of them to give up trying to be psychiatrists, mothers and moralists, to give up making citizens, democrats, and tolerant children. Could they not be persuaded to concentrate more than many now feel justified in doing, on their roles as teachers of specific subjects? This is, after all, a job no one else is assigned or trained to do.”

Montagu writes that “A society such as ours, in which human relations are submerged in the economic system, can rescue itself only by submerging its economy in the matrix of human relations ... And this is the task that the schools must assist in undertaking, no less that the rescue of

man from his debasing enslavement to the principles and practices of an acquisitive society". But how does the attempt work out? We may gain a clue from the book *Crestwood Heights: A North American Suburb* by Seeley, Sim and Loosley. Crestwood Heights is built around its modern, well-equipped and enlightened schools. It is particularly "child-oriented" and the Crestwood Heights parents "appear to have accepted nearly all the values which the humanists, the liberals, and the psychiatrically oriented speakers and writers have advocated over the last fifty years." All the right adjectives are used. "In the city", writes William J. Newman, "competition is open, acknowledged, and brutal; in the suburb toleration, permissiveness, and individual choice are the rule. The child is brought up as an autonomous spontaneous individual: thus the open glass school. The suburb will provide the arena in which the family and especially the children can emerge as 'free' and 'responsible', ready to take their place in the world." But the well-meaning parents of Crestwood Heights are pursuing for their children two contradictory goals, "success" and "psychological maturity". The authors observe that:

The child must be free in accordance with democratic ideology; but he must, by no means, become free to the point of renouncing either the material success goals or the engineered co-operation integral to the adequate functioning of an industrial civilisation.

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And Newman comments:

But it is not only the functioning of an industrial civilisation which provides the drive behind the overmastering of individual choice; it is the urge to go from status to status. for one generation to achieve in the eyes of their peers what the other could not, which is the motive force of American life in the suburb. The child 'is forced into the position of *having to choose* those means which will assure his ultimate entrance into an appropriate adult occupational status'. Since it is a choice made on the sly through an omnipresent culture, the child sees no authority figures against which to rebel, should he feel the desire to do so ... The child has therefore, only one recourse—to turn his attacks against himself.' A pleasant society this, a new society, in which freedom is institutionalised, where choice is dictated.

So this "free and progressive" education becomes, with the best of intentions, no better than Rousseau's system which Godwin described as "a puppet-show exhibition, of which the master holds the wires, and the scholar is never to suspect in what manner they are moved."

Ashley Montagu, in another book, *The Direction of Human Development* writes of the coming together of parents and teachers in the complementary task of developing the potentialities of the child:

The parents would contribute what the teachers ought to know, and the teachers would contribute what the parents ought to know, for the benefit of the child as well as for the benefit of all concerned. The teaching the child receives at home and the teaching it receives at school must be joined and unified. The teaching of the elementary skills of reading, writing and arithmetic is important, but not nearly as important as the most important of all skills—human relations.

But David Riesman again, in his book *Individualism Reconsidered* makes this observation on the children of Crestwood Heights:

Their parents want to know how they have fared at school: they are constantly comparing them, judging them in school aptitude, popularity, what part they have in the school play; are the boys sissies? the girls too fat? All the school anxieties are transferred to the home and *vice versa*, partly because the parents, college graduates mostly, are intelligent and concerned with education. After school there are music lessons, skating lessons, riding lessons, with mother as chauffeur and scheduler. In the evening, the children go to a dance at school for which the parents have groomed them, while the parents go to a Parent-Teacher Association meeting for which the children, directly or indirectly, have groomed *them*, where they are addressed by a psychiatrist who advises them to be warm and relaxed in handling their children! They go home and eagerly and warmly ask their returning children to tell them everything that happened at the dance, making it clear by their manner that they are sophisticated and cannot be easily shocked. As Professor Seeley describes matters, the school in this community operates a "gigantic factory for the production of relationships".

This really frightening description pulls us up with a jerk. Accustomed to think of parent-teacher co-operation as a Good Thing, we seldom consider its possibilities as a tender trap, a well-intentioned conspiracy against the child. For where home and school are two separate worlds a child unhappy at home might find a means of escape in the different life of school, and a child who is miserable at school might find consolation in the atmosphere of home. But if home and school are "joined and united", all avenues of escape are closed. After

all, how many children of your acquaintance enjoy discussing their school life with their parents or their home life with their teachers? Is not the plurality of environment one of the child's means of defending itself against the paying omnipotence of the adult world?

* * *

In this country the pioneer of parent-teacher co-operation was the Home and School Committee of the New Education Fellowship. Another body, the National Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations was founded in 1956, linking together many existing bodies. Some of these associations have sprung up in a negative way to resist, and in some cases successfully avert "closing-down" orders for schools. In the case of one independent school in London (St. Paul's Junior School, Hammersmith) due to be closed down because the existing building could not economically be kept in repair while the trustees could not find the money for a new building, the parents successfully raised loans for it, announcing that they "would accept financial and educational responsibility for a new school". Other associations connected with both primary and secondary schools have provided their schools with swimming baths, or have seen their function in improving the school's equipment-providing such equipment as record-players, film-projectors, stage-lighting and so on. On the pitfalls and possibilities of this kind of organisation, the staff at one school reported that:

...the progress of several children in arithmetic was being impeded by well-intentioned efforts to help them at home. At a series of evening meetings, the staff worked through specimen arithmetic papers with the fathers and mothers, explaining the particular methods in use at the school. Similarly, the headmistress of a village school introduced italic handwriting, a move which appeared to perturb some parents. As a result of discussion several mothers became interested and asked her to arrange evening classes so that they might learn it for themselves.

Formal association between parents and teachers does face certain difficulties. on occasion it may provide a hunting-ground for the committee-minded man or woman. and a trap for the excellent teacher who may be less adept at committee work. Another criticism is that it does not necessarily bring in the type of parent with whom contact it most needed: for example those whose children present particularly difficult problems, perhaps because of their home background.

* * *

Another of the difficulties frequently met in the relations of parents and teachers is the narrow concern displayed so frequently by the anxious middle-class parents in little Johnny's 11-plus or GCE prospects, to the exclusion of an interest in the class or the school or the age-group as a whole. The attitude may be understandable, but it is nevertheless primitive to those who see as one of the pleasures of parenthood an enlargement of sympathy and concern from one's own biological offspring to children in general. Two other more recent developments in educational organisations may help to bring about this wider view which is certainly a prerequisite for the parent-teacher control of education which we see as an eventual aim.

The first of these is ACE, the Advisory Centre for Education founded in 1960. This is another brain-child of Michael Young who started the Institute of Community Studies and the Consumers' Association, and just as the latter organisation and its journal *Which* seeks to improve the quality of our consumption of goods and services, so ACE and its journal *Where?* (subscription £1 a year) seeks to give the same kind of independent, unbiased assessment and advice for the consumers of education. The consumer approach with its implied philosophy of "he who pays the piper calls the tune" could be the vehicle of a narrow philistinism, but in practice it is sound and sensible. Michael Young returns to the theme in the annual report of the Consumers Association, published last month. The attitude of regarding parents as intruders in the schools is ruinous to good education, he declares, "How can parents take an interest if they are barely allowed inside the schools? The sooner parents play a part

in our schools, the sooner will the money be found for their improvement.” In fact, ACE, as readers of *Where?* will agree, is an invaluable medium for closing the gap between parents and teachers.

The second of these new trends is the springing-up of Associations for the Advancement of State Education. This movement again began in Cambridge in 1960, when a group of parents tried to hurry along improvements to a Newnham primary school. They found that the poor conditions were more widespread than they had realised and that restrictions in educational expenditure prevented anything from being done. From the original pressure group, others sprang up in different parts of the country and today there are about 90 such associations with a total of 10,000 members federated in CASE, the Confederation of Associations for the Advancement of State Education, which has been conducting national enquiries on a variety of educational topics. Undoubtedly this movement-co-existing, not competing, with Parent-Teacher Associations, has helped to widen people’s field of concern from one child in one school, to the schools of the city or county and of the country.

Before getting too excited about this trend of course, we should attend an association meeting, to discover, once again, the solidly middle-class attendance and the disconcertingly vocational attitudes to education expressed from the floor. However, what better forum could there be for the education of parents? And is it inconceivable that some, without adopting an attitude of patronage or superiority, could devote themselves to bringing others in?

Certainly the phrase “Advancement of *State* Education” is unfortunate from our point of view (and is an indication of the middle-class origins of this movement since it is people who normally think in terms of private education who most frequently refer to the “council” schools as “state” schools). Continual use of the phrase in *The Observer* led to a protest recently from Mr. Terence Kelly who wrote:

I am sorry to see references to State education in your columns from time

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to time. In less happy lands the Minister of Education (or of Public Instructions) determines what is taught in every school. In this country the State—thank God—does not own or run a single school. Those which are not independent of direct grant are maintained by local education authorities, who, with their various sub-committees and divisional executives on which teachers are represented, run an education system which is the envy of the world.

I understand that there are even societies for the advancement of State education. Do these good people know what they are asking for? Do they really want a State system on the Communist or Fascist model?

In case anyone should think this is an idle quibble on words, I ask you to consider, Sir, what the view of your readers would be if you began referring to the State police.

It is not an idle quibble from another point of view: because we tend to be hypnotised by the idea of an educational monolith we take far too little advantage of the local autonomy that does exist, nor of that degree of autonomy (differing widely from place to place) which individual head teachers have, or could demand. Informed local pressure from parents and teachers is a weapon which we have hardly learned to exercise.

* * *

Are there ways in which parents can push further into the decision-making bodies on education. The original Cambridge Association for the Advancement of State Education put up two members as independent candidates for the county council elections. One was elected and is, now on the education committee. This is hardly a procedure which fits into an anarchist approach to the problem, although one of our frequent contributors, Paul Goodman is proud to be a School Board member in New York. But what about parents as school governors or school managers? (Readers interested will find an article on what their functions are and how they are appointed in *Where?* No. 10). Discussing parent-teacher relations in a letter to the *New Statesman* in March this year, Mr. John McCann made an interesting point which most of us never knew and which should provide useful ammunition in arguments with local authorities: that back in 1944 the government gave a pledge that parents would be properly represented on the managing bodies of the schools attended by their children. Mr. McCann says:

At the Committee stage of the 1944 Education Act the government gave an undertaking to see that parents would be properly represented on the managing bodies of primary schools. It was stated that they were not to be “drawn from a different social stratum from that in which the pupils of the schools are found, but that some, at least, of the Managers will be people who live the daily life of the village or town, who are in close association with the parents, and can make the wishes of the parents known to the Managers and to the teachers.” This admirable principle was laid down in the form of an undertaking which is binding—for it was on that assurance that a Member of Parliament withdrew an amendment he had proposed.

This undertaking has not been implemented. Some authorities try to see that parents are genuinely represented, some pay lip service to the principle, some regard the principle with suspicion. The bodies which appoint Foundation Managers of voluntary schools often come into the last category. Hundreds of years of strife over electoral representation have shown that there is only one way to achieve adequate representation; that is for the people concerned to elect their own representative. No nomination from above is going

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to work or to satisfy the people who want to be represented.

The government undertaking could be honoured very simply, without any change in the law, if the Minister of Education would ask local authorities to appoint one Manager *who had been elected at a meeting of parents convened by the headmaster*. The parents should have the right to elect one of themselves or any other person (other than those already disqualified—teachers at the school, tradesmen supplying the school, etc.). Local education authorities appoint one, two or four Managers according to whether it is an Aided, Controlled or County school. I am suggesting in all cases that this election procedure be applied to the appointment of one LEA Manager.

It is sometimes said that School Managers have no powers. At Aided schools they have very real powers, at all schools they have duties. Managing bodies vary greatly in the extent to which they fulfil their duties, but in the most successful schools they perform a valuable service particularly in the field of parent-school relationships.

* * *

And how do teachers react to all this? Many of course are delighted to make contact with the parents of their pupils and to feel that they have a shared concern. Their only regret is that the parents whom they most need to meet are the very ones they never see at open-days, parent-teacher functions and so on. Relations are closest in the infants’ school and seem to dwindle away later. “What happens then” asks Jean Rintoul, “that this close parent-teacher relationship should be broken as the child gets older until, in the later secondary years, it is worse than non-existent? Is the teacher to blame and, if the teacher is, will a brief talk with a parent at an appropriately-spaced ‘surgery’ suffice? The answer to that is in the answer to another question: ‘Who are the parents who are going to attend the surgery?’ That’s an easy question and every teacher can answer it. They will be the same parents who attend the parent-teacher association meetings, the school prize-givings, the school concert or play; the same parents whose children are readily identifiable in every class because such children exhibit all the well-being and confidence that a privileged home provides.” This is one of the problems of parent-teacher relations for which a solution has not been found.

There are teachers too, who have a deep suspicion of parental encroachment on their functions and their autonomy. Their point of view was put with more-than-usual frankness by Mr. G. B. Corrin in a letter to the *Times Educational Supplement* (10/4/64). Commenting on a proposal by an AASE secretary that time for evening meetings with parents should be written into the teacher’s conditions of service, Mr. Corrin asked:

When the child of one of these parents goes into hospital for an operation, do they demand a meeting with the surgeon at a time convenient to themselves and then criticise his methods? I consider myself as highly trained and as experienced in my work as any surgeon, and I resent this intrusion by the ignorant, who apparently have no faith in my ability to do the job for which I am paid. Parent-teacher associations and such-like may be useful for raising money which the government is too parsimonious to provide and arranging social activities for those who have nothing better to do, but, in my experience, they in no way benefit the education of the children and can become a positive

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nuisance because of their inability to resist the temptation to interfere. Certainly, many parents are ignorant about education, but is it the teachers' business to instruct them? If so, let classes be arranged and the teachers remunerated. But parents cannot plead ignorance and at the same time demand the right to interfere with those who have been properly trained to carry out the education of their children.

Obviously the writer of this letter would be not only hostile, but derisory about our view that the form of educational organisation which we should see as our aim is one in which control of the schools is in the hands of associations of parents and teachers. For teachers, as Sir Ronald Gould once put it, "neither love nor trust the parish pump." The vehemence with which London teachers opposed the intended break-up of the LCC's education service shows how strongly they prefer the remote and impersonal control of County Hall to the near-at-hand interfering bureaucracy of "the office" which teachers in many other parts of the country suffer and resent. We can certainly understand, in view of the sheer number of bosses which the organisation of education has set over them, why they regard encroachment by parents beyond a certain point and beyond certain topics, with suspicion. And when you see some of those self-confident high-income consumers in some of the AASEs, who quite obviously regard the teachers as their servants and not as their partners, you can see the point of this suspicion.

Nor would it be wise to assume that it is a question of progressive parents and reactionary or time-serving teachers. It is much more often the other way round, as everyone who has tried in humble ways to introduce progressive methods into the schools has found. When Teddy O'Neill was headmaster of Prestolee School in Lancashire and set about transforming it, it was with the support of the local education authority and of the Inspectorate, and against the hostility and abuse of local parents—and it took him years to win them over.

* * *

In looking for the roots in our existing society for a different kind of organisation, we have found pitfalls and dangers everywhere—for children, for parents and for teachers. This is not surprising, for our society is riddled with these problems of status and hierarchy, and the concept of social organisation which most of our fellow-citizens understand, is one in which one lot of people order another lot of people around. But somehow, somewhere we have to develop the germs of a non-authoritarian method of co-operative social organisation. Where better to make the attempt than in the schools?

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cabbage patch

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Banana

Verse

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A house liked a pickled onion

A nose like a squashed tomato

And feet like fried fish

Our teacher is a funny 'un

A face like a pickled onion

A nose like a squashed tomato

And lanky long legs.

[checked May 2018]