

SEAN FRENCH



AS I PLEASE

punky logos and articles about Band Aid and glue-sniffing and columns by Phil Redmond, the creator of the TV series Grange Hill. Worst of all, they print articles by schoolchildren themselves which are about as interesting to read as other people's essays.

I may sound bitter about this well-meaning scheme but that is because of the time I spent as a child watching Valerie Singleton make things out of old squeeze bottles and listening to awful children's radio shows presented by Ed "Stewpot" Stewart. The records on Stewart's show, a juvenile version of Huis Clos, seemed never to change: The Laughing Policeman, Nellie the Elephant, something tinkly by Russ Conway, something about being all bound for morning town by The Seekers, The Ugly Duckling by Danny Kaye and Morecambe and Wise before they became funny.

Today's children listen to Duran Duran and Boy George and watch EastEnders and Dallas, and they're more likely to read John Blake's pop gossip column in the Mirror than enlightened advice in the Guardian.

This is a fundamental change, though not necessarily an improvement. The best writers for children have not been kindly uncles and aunts, but strange outsiders whose alienation from the adult world paralleled that of the children's own. Lewis Carroll and Hans Christian Andersen shared with their young readers a complete incapacity for dealing with the adult social world. Mark Twain's principal feeling for his own society was ferocious contempt. His antic savagery can be seen in the



In Bergman's classic, The Seventh Seal, the chess game represented life or death.

best children's writers of today as well, like Raymond Briggs and Roald Dahl. Children's writing can never be respectable. Perhaps the best thing the Guardian could do would be to turn the page over to Steve Bell.

Even for the less stoutly patriotic of us it is a matter of some shame that Britain seems to have become a negligible force in all sports except those like cricket which virtually no other countries play. One of the bizarre exceptions is chess, where for no good reason we now stand second only to the USSR. We also have in Nigel Short the best non-Soviet player in the world.

Last weekend's television provided an unparalleled feast of chess. On BBC2 we saw a match in which the world champion Garry Kasparov humiliated the British grandmaster John Nunn, and on Channel 4 we saw a match in which Kasparov humiliated Nigel Short.

By coincidence there was also a screening of the movie which makes the most memorable use of the game—Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal. In this great film a Swedish knight plays chess against Death in an attempt to lengthen his life.

All the ingredients were there: genius, passion, a life-and-death duel. But there was one quality missing from the television coverage: crass stupidity. Furthermore, it occurred to me that NEW SOCIETY would benefit from an occasional chess column. The following match was between me and a computer disc that I bought for a small amount of money. Nigel Short was combating the world champion, the Swedish knight was combating death, and, in a no less titanic contest, I was up against 20th century technology. It was a bitter struggle. It was also a very short struggle.

French-Computer: Caro Kann Defence, French's variation (not recommended).

1 e4 e6 2 Nf3 A neglected move in the Caro Kann and, as subsequent play shows, justly so. Correct is d4. 2... d5 3 d3 Nf6 4 Nc3 Bg4 5 Be2 dxe4 6 dxe4 Qxd1 7 Nxd1?? A gross error, instantly losing a pawn for no compensation. 7... Nxe4 8 0-0 e6 9 Ne3 White tries to throw all his pieces in front of the king but the match is almost over. 9... h5 10 Nxe4 hxg4 11 Ne5 g3 12 fg3 Fatal. 12... Bc5+ 13 Kh1 Nxe3 mate.

Now, normally I'm a good sportsman. But in this case I was so angry I leant across, looked straight at my opponent and switched it off.

NEWS

Asians 'pushed' to special schools

CAROLINE ST JOHN-BROOKS

Bangladeshi children in Tower Hamlets risk being pushed willy-nilly into special schools. In many cases, this happens without the informed consent or even the understanding of their parents, according to the ACE "Special Education" Advice Service Annual Report—(from the Advisory Centre for Education, 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2, £1.25).

The situation is so serious that the report recommends that the Inner London Education Authority should immediately review the provision it is making for every Bangladeshi pupil who is in a special school.

The Warnock Report on special education envisaged that the parents of "statemented" children—those with special educational needs—should be equal partners with the professionals in the assessment of their children. This report makes it clear that, so far as Bangladeshi parents are concerned, this is very far from being the case.

Many parents do not even realise that their children have been assessed as having special needs; they think that "special" education (a typically British euphemism) means that their children are getting a particularly good deal, or are having special language teaching. They tend to go along with the professionals, believing that they know best, and say that they are satisfied with the schooling their children receive, although they have no idea what it is supposed to be achieving.

Those parents who are not happy with what's on offer, moreover, find that they cannot get the professionals to accept their viewpoint, or change their approach. Some are unhappy about the assessment procedures, and say that their children would be able to carry out the required tasks if the assessment had been carried out in the child's own language. But even interpreters tend to stress the role of the professionals, and discourage the parents from intervening.

The report recommends that a competent bilingual professional should be consulted before the decision to assess a child is taken, and that assessments should be carried out in the child's own language. The tests which are being used should be standardised so that they can be shown to parents, and explained to them.

The report also finds that Bangladeshi children are grossly over-represented in schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties—the most extreme category of all. Over 40 per cent of the Bangladeshi children with special needs in Tower Hamlets are in these schools, yet the overall figure in inner London is 17 per cent. On the other hand, not one Bangladeshi child is in a school for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties, though nearly 16 per cent of special needs

children in London are in these schools.

The authority should investigate the reason for these discrepancies, the report argues. On Tuesday, community organisations such as Tower Hamlets Association for Racial Equality and Bengali Educational Needs in Tower Hamlets meet to discuss the report's findings; they will be looking for a speedy response from ILEA. Caroline St John-Brooks

Scottish prisons inquiry call

The Scottish Prison Officers Association and local authorities north of the border have given their backing to a demand by the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties that a Royal Commission should be appointed to examine the continuing crisis in Scotland's prisons.

The SCCL and its supporting groups describe the penal situation in Scotland as "exceptionally serious," and declare that they are not

satisfied that the Scottish Prisons Department can resolve the problems. They are to write to Downing Street this week urging the establishment of a Royal Commission to look at the conduct of Scotland's courts, the introduction of real alternatives to custody and the nature and effects of Scottish prison regimes.

This latest expression of concern follows last week's announcement that the early release of nonviolent prisoners was being considered in England and Wales in an attempt to relieve overcrowding. Similar moves in Scotland would require additional legislation, as well as a review of the way Scottish courts deal with the problem of fine default. A total of 11,345 people were jailed for failing to pay fines in Scotland in 1985, compared with 20,000 for the whole of England and Wales.

The Scottish Office has admitted that most of the recent rise in the use of custody for fine default is accounted for by a 75 per cent increase in the Glasgow district court. This, in turn, is blamed by prison groups on that court's reluctance to grant legal aid for minor offences. Senior Scottish judges last week joined the chorus of criticism of the Glasgow court over its refusal to grant legal aid in a case which came before them at the High Court.

In fact, from 1 April, the power to grant legal aid in Scotland will be removed from the courts altogether and handed over to the new Scottish legal aid board. Prison reformers hope that this will slow down the influx of nonviolent offenders into Scottish prisons, but they argue that much more needs to be done as well.

According to the SCCL, the government's

Advertisement for Police Monitoring and Research Group publications. Includes images of three briefing papers: 1. POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, 2. POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND A NEW STRATEGIC AUTHORITY FOR LONDON, 3. POLICING WAPPING AN ACCOUNT OF THE DISPUTE 1986-7. Text: NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM THE POLICE MONITORING AND RESEARCH GROUP. These publications are available free, and contain information which is of vital importance to all Londoners. To: Room 801 LSPU, Middlesex House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 2SB. Tel: 633-5944 (24 hour ansaphone). Please send me/us copies of: Domestic Violence (no.), Police Accountability (no.), Wapping (no.). Also available: Leaflet - How to make a complaint against the police (no.). Please put me/us on the mailing list for the Policing London newsletter (✓). Includes a form for Name, Address, Postcode, and Organisation (if any). Logo: LONDON STRATEGIC POLICY UNIT NSO.