



The end of an era for higher education

The fact that universities are now planning a 6 per cent reduction in their intake next year will convert a period of slow growth in university student numbers into an absolute decline.

But the picture for higher education as a whole is more disjointed (see graph). While the numbers in universities grew by a mere 2.5 per cent per year throughout most of the 1970s, the polytechnics have still been bounding ahead—by an average of 18 per cent a year between 1974 and 1976.

The continued numerical growth of higher education in the 1970s has taken place against a background of lower real demand. Only in the past twelve months has there been any real sign of an upswing. The Universities Central Council for Admissions has reported a rise of 6 per cent in applications for university places. Even this rise may be largely accounted for by demographic factors.

The revulsion against higher education in the 1970s has gone further in Britain than in other advanced societies. There has been a sharp slowdown in demand for "qualified" teenagers with two or more A levels. Furthermore, there has been a slight reduction in the proportion of the age group which has got two or more A levels in the first place. Whereas in 1970-71, 14.3 per cent of boys gained two or more A levels, along with 11.9 per cent of girls, the comparable figures for 1976-77 were only 13.5 per cent and 11.2 per cent.

It is questionable whether a girl's chance of going on to higher education has improved much, in spite of egalitarian legislation and the ambitions of the women's movement. Women have gained in the universities, where they accounted for 33.7 per cent of all United Kingdom students in 1975-76. But women have been losing out in advanced further education with the reduction in teacher training places. Between 1975 and 1976 the number of teacher training places dropped by over 15,000. The percentage of women on all advanced courses, both in colleges and polytechnics, fell by 0.8 per cent.

The rise of social studies

For the teenagers that do make it into higher education, what subjects do they take? In universities the two largest blocks of students are either doing science, or social, administrative and business studies (see chart). But it is wrong to suppose that social, administrative and business studies are sociology writ large, as the junior edu-

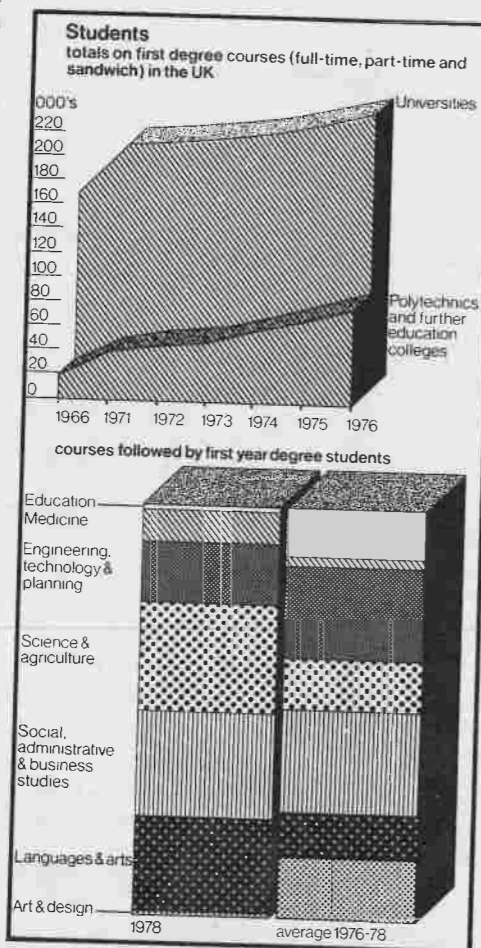
sector are lawyers, economists, and people taking a combination of subjects.

In polytechnics and advanced further education, the build-up in CNAAs degrees shows a roughly similar picture. The number of CNAAs degrees in social, administrative and business studies nearly trebled between 1972 and 1976. Science doubled, but technology and engineering grew much less slowly over the same period.

By many international standards the size of most British universities is still small. London, with just under 26,000 students on first degree work in 1975-76, and the University of Wales, with just under 14,000, are the largest—and both these consist of largely autonomous colleges. There is a group of five universities with between 8,000 and 9,000. Nearly all the rest are under 6,000. Indeed, it is remarkable how many relatively tiny institutions there are, scarcely economically viable as the fast-growing 1960s gave way to the much tighter 1970s. In 1975-76 the following universities had fewer than 2,000 first degree students: Brunel, City, Essex, Keele, Stirling and the University of Ulster at Coleraine.

The poly intake

Unlike the universities, the polytechnics almost double their numbers by the addition of part-time and evening students. In some ways the distinctiveness of the polys has been growing over the last decade—particularly as they take increasing numbers



to 22 age group.

The Committee of Directors of Polytechnics did a survey two years ago which suggested that threequarters of poly students had made a poly their first choice. However, this may partly be because they have been choosing their higher education by course and convenience, rather than that they made a conscious decision to prefer a polytechnic to a university. In general, it is still reckoned that you need higher A level grades to get a university rather than a poly place. A few polytechnics—and more colleges of higher education—cannot fill all their places and local authority spokesmen see the current cutback at universities as an opportunity to fill their empty places.

College mergers

Part of the expansion of the polys has come about by mergers with redundant colleges of education. The ending of teacher training as a separate sector of higher education has led to a mass of mergers. The new colleges and institutes, which are usually the sum of two or more teacher training and further education colleges, mark a rationalisation rather than necessarily an extension of degree-level opportunities. Some of their offerings, like recreation studies, have an air of slightly desperate improvisation.

While new universities and polytechnics were the products of the 1960s, the mark of the 1970s will be these new colleges and institutes of higher education, together with the Open University. Starting from nothing at the turn of the decade the OU had reached over 60,000 part-time students by 1976-77.

The 1960s academics

In financial terms the universities have been squeezed for most of the 1970s. Even before the government's latest round of public expenditure cuts, many departments had posts frozen. This will mean that the group of academics who came into university teaching in the 1960s and won rapid preferment, will dominate university life for most of the rest of this century. In the 1970s, their seniority and existence have already kept out arguably brighter people. A whole generation of teachers have been forced to make their careers in the expanding polytechnics instead.

Higher education may expect to change more in the 1980s, particularly if it begins to serve mature adults on a larger scale. This is already starting to happen in a quiet way as the polytechnics boost the number of people on short courses. The Open College scheme in Lancashire—whereby further education colleges provide an alternative route from A levels for adults who want to go to university—is being copied.

In this context, the 6 per cent cut in university admissions could come to have a historic significance. The Robbins principle—of a place in higher education for every qualified 18 year old who wanted one—would have to be overturned at some point, if higher education was ever to address itself to a wider constituency.



West Indians and school

Last week NEW SOCIETY published Geoffrey Driver's significant research findings that some West Indian school leavers (especially girls) outperform their peers in public exams. Findings have now also been published which draw on the National Child Development Study, to reach apparently different conclusions. It is not, however, impossible to reconcile the two.

The NCDS research relies on reading and maths tests administered at 16 to all the 16,000 youngsters being followed in the study. It shows West Indian children scoring less than the average, though West Indian children born in this country do considerably better than those who came as children (*New Community*, vol 7, No. 3).

Juliet Essen and Mayer Ghodsian have re-analysed NCDS data to look at first and second generation children from the West Indies, Asia, Ireland and Europe—comparing these with children born abroad to parents born in Britain, and with the overwhelming majority who were born in Britain to British parents. They found that all the first generation groups have lower scores on both tests than the indigenous group. But, among the second generation, only the West Indians had clearly lower average scores than the indigenous children.

All the second generation teenagers did better than the first generation, with the exception of the Irish, whose maths scores showed no improvement. The Asians, who became the highest scorers in the second generation, comfortably excelled the children born abroad to British parents in the maths test. But, as Essen and Ghodsian point out, simple test comparisons do not mean a great deal unless allowance is made for social class, sex, family size, crowding, language at home and other variables. They, therefore, sought to adjust the data for home and social circumstances.

On this basis, the differences between each immigrant group and the indigenous youngsters are sharply reduced. Of those who were worst off—the first generation West Indians and Asians—the difference is reduced by between 20 per cent and 40 per cent. In the second generation, all groups except the West Indians were performing slightly better than the indigenous children.

How then does this NCDS material relate to Driver's exam figures in five secondary schools? There are four possible factors to consider. The first is sample size and representativeness. Driver was concerned with 2,300 children and the NCDS was theoretically interested in 16,000, but in fact, because of

the NCDS subgroups considered by Essen and Ghodsian were small: the first and second generation West Indians numbered 41 and 58 respectively. Again it seems likely that the indigenous English children in Driver's sample were below the average for indigenous English children as a whole.

Second, there is a question of timing. The age of the teenagers was roughly the same but the NCDS sample was 16 in 1974, while Driver's group were taking their CSE and O levels in 1975 to 1978. Given that there may have been an improvement in reading and certain other standards in the course of the 1970s, and that Driver has demonstrated a dynamic improvement for West Indians in their secondary years, even a couple of years could have made a difference.

Third, there is a probable school effect. Driver's sample attended only five, while the NCDS children went to a multiplicity of schools. As Michael Rutter and his colleagues have demonstrated in their book, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, individual schools can dramatically help or hinder roughly the same kind of children. It is conceivable that Driver's five were determined that their West Indians should do as well as they possibly could.

Finally, and probably of crucial importance, is the difference in data which results from public exams and individual test scores. Many would argue that, for employment prospects and a teenager's self-image, exam results are far more significant. Motivation and industry play a far greater part in exam success and, even in O level but especially in Mode Three CSE, teachers can tailor exam entries to maximise their pupils' chances.

The contrast between Driver's work and the Essen and Ghodsian evidence will arouse greater interest in the much larger project to be carried out by the Department of Education, possibly in conjunction with the Assessment of Performance Unit.

We are all gradualist

Accepted wisdom has long held that one of the major differences between western capitalist political systems and communist ones is that we change our policies slowly and gradually, while they are much freer to change direction boldly by state diktat.

But is this really true? Valerie Bunce and John Echols compared budgetary changes between 1950 and 1973 in four communist countries—the USSR, Poland, East Germany and Rumania—and in four western ones—the US, Sweden, Great Britain and West Germany (*Journal of Politics*, vol 40, No. 4, page 911).

In all eight countries, budgeting seemed to be based on the principle of incrementalism—that is, each year's spending for any particular sector was largely determined by the previous year's allocation. Overall budgetary increases followed just as straight a line in communist countries as in western ones. Changes in priorities were just as slow.

Some have argued that communist leaders are subject to less constraints than western ones: the main ones being ideology, national

and emcacy. Bunce and Nichols suggest that the familiar western constraints of bureaucracy, compromise and routine need to be added to this list. There may not be plural bases of independent power in communist societies, but leaders still have to fight through their policies with other members of the political elite, and with managerial, military and bureaucratic groups, in the face of scarce resources.

These constraints, the authors believe, explain the resistance in Russia, for example, to major reforms in the economy or education. Communists are as limited in their power to change policy as western leaders.

Make parents happy

Though the divorce rate for professional men remains below average, that for professional women—usually partners in a dual career marriage—is higher than for other women. Are we defying nature in seeking an alternative to the classic family pattern? Or is it just, as Carole Holahan and Lucia Gilbert of the University of Texas at Austin ask, that the stress is so much greater in such marriages (*Human Relations*, vol 32, No. 6, page 451)?

They interviewed 28 couples (18 with children, ten without) to see how the dual career arrangement worked out. Their sample were clearly dedicated professionals. In a society where a 40-hour working week is about the maximum expected, they found that childless professional husbands were putting in 48 hours, on average, their wives 42 hours, and their counterparts with children 49 hours and 48 hours respectively.

Since children are a workload in themselves, the authors began to look for signs of "overload" among their childbearing professionals. And on every measure of role conflict—whether between profession and self, profession and spouse, or spouse and self—parents recorded more stress. On these measures, and also on measures that only parents could comment on—like profession and parenthood, spouse and parenthood, and parenthood and self—wives recorded more stress than husbands. On a seven-point scale, professional mothers averaged 2.73 for conflict between job and children, as against their husbands' average of 2.62, and 2.98 for conflict between children and self.

But there were a couple of major surprises in store. First, the highest stress scores for all dual career people occurred on the count of self versus profession. Among the non-parents, this was the dimension that counted particularly. The mainspring of contentment with life in general seemed to be a job that allowed for enough self-expression. Second, when the survey turned to the count of satisfaction with life, the parents—regardless of the workloads—won hands down.

The authors, like so many researchers, were left feeling that they had asked the wrong questions. Children, for example, were an unexpectedly crucial differentiating factor. Among childless couples, both stress and satisfaction seemed to be related pri-

Letters



West Indians at school

SIR: There is much that is puzzling about Geoffrey Driver's article ("How West Indians do better at school (especially the girls," 17 January). He does not appear to claim, as does your front cover, that "West Indians do well at school." But even what he does claim, that black girls "do better," requires careful scrutiny. One must ask: better than whom? The answer is: than their white schoolmates, in rundown inner city areas.

Whether looked at in relative or absolute terms, this does not seem much of an achievement. Almost certainly a skewed comparison is being made, between a very broad cross-section of black children and a very narrow range of (unskilled working class) white children.

This suspicion can only be heightened by Driver's failure to specify the actual levels of attainment which he is ranking. In an earlier paper, he similarly claimed that black girls were doing better, on the basis of an average level of CSE performance of 5.3 points obtainable by (say) two grade 2s, or three grade 4s. One of us is a black, female university lecturer, and we both wonder on what basis Driver considers two or three middling CSEs to be any cause for celebration.

If there is no "achievement" to be explained, then, strictly speaking, Driver's theory is redundant. It must be said, however, that for someone who avowedly rejects deterministic orthodoxies, Driver himself embraces a relentlessly monocausal determinism: "ethnicity" is all. A whole chain of speculation is set up, equalling the rural Jamaican matrifocal family with its urban black British (not necessarily ex-Jamaican) counterpart, and linking the latter with the fact that girls do better.

But no hard evidence is offered for the first hypothesis, and none whatsoever for the second. Driver does not claim to have discovered empirically, or even investigated, any such links between school attainment and family structure. No alternative variables are even considered, strangely—even though, in earlier work, Driver had looked at classroom interaction and teacher expectation, and suggested (much more plausibly) that this might help account for the different performance of West Indian boys.

The immediate danger in such loose and ill-supported work is that it may encourage a quite unwarranted complacency about the level of school attainment of black children: a complacency which, in the context of current financial stringency, is hardly conducive to the maintenance of social services that benefit black people.

The more insidious risk, as with much use of the term "ethnicity," is that once again black people are being labelled as having certain inherent characteristics: whether as

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individuals or members of a "community," whether good or bad, but in all cases different. Will "ethnicity" become the 1980s' functional equivalent of "heredity"?

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OLIVIA FOSTER-CARTER
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SIR: Geoffrey Driver's article on West Indian pupils looks set to become a *cause célèbre*. Of course, any research that sheds some empirical light on the vexed issue of ethnic minority pupils' attainment, and helps to counter stereo-typical perceptions of black children, is to be welcomed. However, your prominent publication of his "findings," as if they were the new received truth, requires mention of two important reservations.

First, Driver's sample consists of only five (possibly non-typical) schools, from which it would be dangerous to draw national conclusions.

Secondly, Driver's research design appears intentionally to exclude precisely those factors which one would expect to be important influences on educational achievement: *ie*, pupil-teacher relations, school ethos, teachers' attitudes, curriculum, and so on. Whatever the balance between home/school factors in the structuring of scholastic performance, surely Driver is going too far in insisting so forcibly on the primacy of cultural patterns (or what he refers to as "ethnic qualities")?

It is to be hoped that your journal will produce a searching evaluation of Driver's full report, when it is published, so as to avoid the possibility of complacency and false optimism among teachers and LEAs, which may result from a superficial reading of last week's article.

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SIR: "Why West Indians do well at school": should now be contrasted with the question why working class whites do worse at school than West Indians.

Geoffrey Driver's report on the part sex roles play in this is true. But also true is the fact that the working class white child is, perhaps unintentionally, being neglected.

During the past two years, I have been visiting schools in inner London in connection with my own research project. I have already discovered that teachers see the "black children" as the main cause of the problem in inner London schools. I've found that it is practically impossible to get teachers to talk in general terms, or about white working class children, when issues such as discipline, behaviour, academic or language are raised. It is always the "black kids" who are pushed forward.

At one school I was given a class of children to work with. All except two of these children were "black" (here I include Asians and Greeks). I soon found out that the two white children were not writing anything for me. They sat together at the back, and looked bored. When I investigated, I found to my horror that these two children were not given paper to write anything for me. I asked them if they wanted to take part. Both said they did; but how could they, if they were not given paper? I got them paper from the teacher's desk. Though these two children started later than the rest, they produced two lengthy pieces of writing for me.

No doubt the teacher's reason for leaving

the children out was based on the strong belief that it is the black children who need to be tested, since they are the trouble. The two white children would not have seen it that way. From the sulking mood of one of them—the boy—it was obvious to me that they saw it as yet another pro-black action on the part of the teacher.

What one can see here is that the attitude holding the black children up as a cause of problem—which started as a racist thought—is now beginning to backfire in the very face of the people (white teachers) who held that view: all attention is now on the black. The main point is that *the white working class is falling behind*, not so much that blacks are shooting ahead.

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University of Keele

Militant moles

SIR: I realise that it's a little early in the year to be thinking of annual awards, but I'd like to use your columns to nominate Tom Forester for the 1980 Bernard Levin Prize for Objectivity Reporting and Service to Truth, Democracy and Freedom.

His article in NEW SOCIETY on the Trots (10 January) was the finest piece of investigative journalism that I've seen since 1924 with the exposure of the letter from Zinov—something or other (anyway he was Ruskie).

It was a splendid article all round. I expect the cryptos will whine about it and say that there's only your word to back up the vote-rigging allegation and that "one student union officer" and an "ex-Militant" are hard authoritative sources, but then some traitors will whine about anything once they've got a little Moscow gold in their pockets. Besides, one can hardly expect sources to reveal their names after courageously blowing the gaff on the menace in our midst. These Trots will stay at nothing to silence their enemies. They had Stalin killed in Mexico with an ice axe.

I've met a few of these Trotskyite chappie myself and Forester's quite right. They're boring and totally humourless, and if that doesn't prove that they want a one-party state then I don't know what does.

The exposé was a timely piece. Somebody got to put a bit of backbone into the Socialist Party and force them to publish the *Red Underpants Report*. Tom's work has not gone unnoticed in the press either.

Mind you, Tom had me worried for a while. I must confess that I thought that he was a bit of a fellow-traveller himself with those sympathetic articles about the bloody miners and council workers' low pay, not to mention using phrases like "Fleet Street boob boys" and "hysterical press attacks" to describe good honest, patriotic journalism.

But my mind is at rest now. Tom Forester once described himself as a "humble Labour councillor." Stuff and nonsense, he's obviously a man of substance. And not only that, he's upholding a great British tradition, because isn't Timothy Raison (the chap at the Home Office making life difficult for those darkie immigrants) the same fellow who was the founding editor of NEW SOCIETY?

Better dead than red, and Tom Forester ought to know. Keep up the good work, sir!

STEVE DAVIES
Cardiff North Labour Party Young Socialist
(McCarthyite Section) and Campaign for a
Tory Labour Party

... when he moved to Las Vegas he simply bought the place up, moving on to as much of the rest of Nevada as he could lay his hands on. To protect his interests he tried to get a finger into every pie, and to control every pie in which he had a finger. There was a time when it seemed that Howard Hughes was at the bottom of everything; such suspicions turn out to have been well founded. When Watergate broke, it was evident that he had to be involved somehow, and so he was, in several thoroughly central ways, the full extent of his involvement being only now revealed by Barlett and Steele.

If the authors had high hopes when they first set out to rake the muck about Howard Hughes, such hopes have been amply fulfilled. *Empire* is a very long book, but with such a plethora of astounding material it is easy to see why they couldn't bear to leave anything out. The nub of the story is the contrast between the two Hugheses—the one the public saw and the one who compulsively hid himself away.

Hughes's public image was formed in the 1930s, when he became known as the epitome of everything that was dashing and glamorous. He was a daring aviator who designed his own record-breaking planes; he produced box-office smash-hit films such as *The Outlaw*; he was Hollywood's most eligible bachelor. Then he married Jean Peters and disappeared from view.

The legend he had created was that of a brilliant young man who did not let riches spoil him but who, on the contrary, used his wealth to promote fabulously successful enterprises of his own, preferring to live simply and work hard. The invisible reality conflicted with this in just about every way. Hughes had the opposite of the Midas touch. Only the limitless flow of cash from the Tool Co kept him going, and there were times when he nearly ran through even that. Every business in which he was personally involved failed spectacularly. He was every businessman's nightmare backer, insisting on pursuing grandiose visions regardless of cost or failure, incapable of delegating final responsibility, equally incapable of taking a decision, never there when he was needed. RKO went down; Hughes Aircraft, fabulously successful when he kept away, made staggering losses on every project with which Hughes himself was involved. The only money-losing casinos and hotels in Las Vegas were those owned by the Hughes Organisation.

Partly this was due to sheer, unrealistic perversity, but partly to madness. Hughes always found difficulty relating to people, and as the years went on retreated ever deeper into psychosis. His immense wealth ensured that every whim would be indulged by sycophantic aides who constituted his sole channel of contact with the outside world. He might choose to receive a message or he might not; he might return a reply, or not. Enormous contracts, crucial decisions, might wait upon a word which he chose not to give, preferring, as he sat—naked—in a darkened hotel room, to

injecting himself with the codeine to which he was addicted; more concerned with whether to have an enema than with the fuming emissaries he refused to see.

It is a sinister and miserable story. Finally, of course, the aides took over—and an unsavoury lot they were—until in the end they were Howard Hughes, controlling his empire as they controlled its nominal master. His money may be said to have bought him, at least, the chance to be mad in peace and on his own terms, instead, like other unfortunates, of being herded into a hospital and plagued by doctors.

Going Hollywood

John Gregory Dunne
Quintana and Friends
Weidenfeld & Nicolson £7.95

John Lahr

John Gregory Dunne salutes Los Angeles as "the kingdom of self": "It is the end of the line. It is the last chance. *Eureka!* I love it." And this selfishness is very much part of his journalistic posturing: "I hate to ask questions. In any event I am not interested in the answers . . . What I do is hang around." This could be called the surfer's school of journalism where the laid-back reporter simply goes with the flow. It's a hard balancing act to pull-off, and Dunne has neither the powers of description nor talent for debate to sustain it.

Of the 33 pieces in *Quintana and Friends*, the best are where he squares off against his subject matter and tries to get to the bottom of things—the migrant workers ("Memento Delano"), a rural nurse in the California outback on trial for practising without a licence ("The Nightingale of Jackrabbit Flats"), his friend's autistic child ("Friends"), and his adopted daughter ("Quintana"). These are touching, well written and powerful. For the rest, which purport to probe the western experience, nothing is more telling than the accumulated sense of emptiness, the thinness of experience that Dunne conveys but will never acknowledge.

A crotchety Connecticut Yankee with an Ivy League pedigree, Dunne transplanted himself and his wife, Joan Didion, on the Pacific coast in 1964. A sceptic by nature and a hustler at heart, Dunne found himself in hog heaven. He thrived. His book, *The Studio*, is arguably the best reportage on the film industry; and his section on Hollywood in this collection shows him at his most vivacious and amusing. Dunne doesn't have a good sense of humour in print. He overwrites the jokes; but he has a good ear for the one-liners and the throwaway absurdities of the Hollywood monsters he loves.

"Sneak," part of *The Studio*, is a fine account of *Dr Doolittle*, one of the industry's famous failures. He deals out welcome rough justice to film critic, Pauline Kael ("Pauline"), with so much gusto that he gets giddy with his own rhetoric. ("One critic's cant is another's Kant.") As a screenwriter, he defends going Hollywood

Joe Levine produced *Panic in Needle Park* (which Dunne and Didion wrote) on the basis of a one-sentence synopsis: "Romeo and Juliet on junk."

"Why write for films?" Dunne asks in "Tinsel." "Because the money is good . . . and because the other night, after a screening, we went to a party with Mike Nichols and Candice Bergen and Warren Beatty and Barbara Streisand. I never did that at *Time*." Jack Warner once called screenwriters "schmucks with Underwoods." Nothing Dunne confesses about his film experience belies this description.

"I can say now what I dared not say then: I was a jerk," Dunne writes of his young east coast adulthood before he moved west to find fame and fortune. In "*Eureka!*", the final combative essay in the book, Dunne defends the chic, wealthy, isolated, fast-moving California life he loves. "Driving the freeway induces a kind of narcosis. Speed is a virtue, and the speed of the place makes one obsessive, a gambler. The spirit is that of a city on the move . . . Mobility is their common language; without it, or an appreciation of it, the visitor is an illiterate."

But Dunne never questions the consequences—the absence of community, the moral stupor, the greedy self-aggrandisement that characterises and enchants the place. These criticisms of Los Angeles life Dunne would dismiss as east coast envy. "We have a sense out here, however specious, of being alone, of wanting to be alone, of having our own space, a kingdom of self with a two-word motto: 'Fuck off.'" *Eureka* means I have found it. He can keep it.

Reviews in brief

Bryan Breed
White Collar Bird
John Clare £5.95

Britain's rarest jail-bird, white collar *felonius*, is usually to be found in open prisons which are modelled, for maximum psychological destruction, on working class life at Butlins. Bryan Breed's sample of 100 of the species contains the customary assortment of the lower rather than upper middle class; they are there not for chasing the romantic 3Bs (broads, bookies and booze), but the mundane paraphernalia of suburbia. Breed's account is very readable, possessing both a style which is reminiscent of Tony Parker, filtered through the American new journalism, and a nicely complementary weighty statistical appendix.

JASON DITTON
Roger Smith
Social Work and Law: children and the courts
Sweet & Maxwell £3.95

It is valuable that eminent legal publishers should sponsor books designed primarily for non-lawyers. Roger Smith, with a grass roots law centre experience, has written a work which should be readily comprehensible to the social workers for whom it is principally aimed, while not sacrificing anything in accuracy (if something in fullness) in its description of the relevant law and legal procedures. MICHAEL BELOFF

Letters



West Indians at school

SIR: Your 17 January issue sported a cover illustration with the caption, "Why West Indians do well at school." This heralded a major article with the title, "How West Indians do better at school (especially the girls)," by Geoffrey Driver. The piece turned out to be one of wishful thinking, passing as social analysis.

There is a breed of latter-day witch-doctors of philosophy abroad, who in spite of their failure to diagnose the ills of the society, feel obligated to promise remedies. They attempt to appease us with incantations and mumbo-jumbo, while passing out placebos. In prominently publicising Driver's possibly well-intentioned but nonetheless opinionated essay, you are either party to these pretensions, or you've swallowed the line.

Britain is patently a class society and a racist society. The postwar experience of expanded numbers of working class black people in Britain is structured by the combined practices related to these ideologies. Unless and until a way is found to fundamentally transform or eradicate these political economic practices, the essential condition of Britain's

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black population will continue to be oppressed and exploited one.

A significant consequence of this structured reality is that the educational system, which services and reflects relations in the society, has consistently failed alarming numbers of black children. Some black children, by hook or by crook, as well as by the deliberate but limited intention of the system, do better, academically, than the mass. Geoffrey Driver has decided—having collated some figures loosely relating to this "limited" phenomenon—that Afro-Caribbean children who get to and pass at the standard of CSE and O-level examinations, do so on the basis of strong ethnic identity. And his sociological implication is that the development of strong ethnic identity transcends class exploitation and racist oppression as determinants of life chances for blacks in Britain.

Such liberal sentiment in the guise of social science is:

(a) Spurious in the use of statistics that bracket off the many who are failed prior to CSE and O-level; as well as over-rating the market value of a couple of CSEs.

(b) Devious in its astute rejection of the alienating, opprobrious label of "under-achievers" for black children failed by the schools—and simultaneously invoking the cold comfort of ethnic pluralism (which, for example, as "black power" has taken the mass of blacks nowhere in the US).

(c) Impertinent and insulting in its professional dismissal of the experience and testimony of the black masses which have demonstrated that only an anti-racism combined with an "anti-classism" can effectively combat or remove the inequalities which affect their lives. The mass of blacks will not do better simply because they try harder.

I am appalled at having to represent so elementary an argument at this stage of the game. And I have not even touched on the neutralising of sexism attempted in Driver's thesis.

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SIR: Perhaps Geoffrey Driver's unabridged publication takes note of some of the observations I make here about his report of school achievement patterns among groups of students categorised by sex and ethnicity. However, I hope you will consider it appropriate to draw your readers' attention to them, since they qualify, to some extent, Dr Driver's interpretation of the results.

Driver shows that group rank—orders of overall achievement (table 1) are also related to group percentages of students who stay in school during the course (table 4). One can convert these percentages to rank orders. As each sex × ethnic entry occurs only once, in each school, for separate yearly cohorts of pupils, it is possible to take all 40 entries (4 sex × ethnicity groups over 10 different occasions) and treat them as individual "subjects" or "persons."

We now have 40 entries for group achievement, marked on a scale 1 to 4, and 40 "marks" for group attendance, also on a scale 1 to 4. These two sets of ratings can be correlated, giving a positive correlation of .625.

The index of correlation between two variables may vary between +1 and -1, and the closer the value is to unity, the easier it is to predict one variable (group achievement), knowing the other (group stay-in-school rate). We know, from the value of .625, that we can predict with some accuracy any group's

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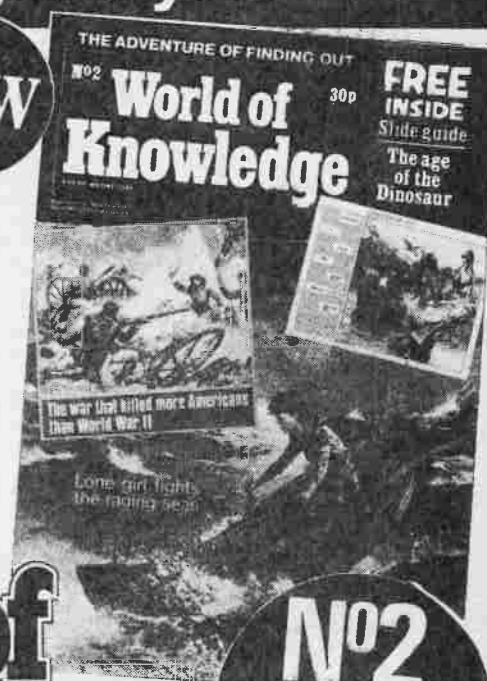
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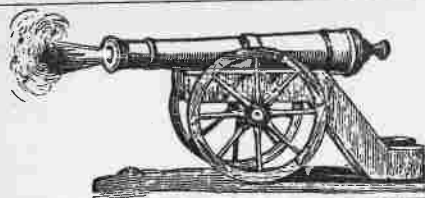
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Tailgunner Parkinson



Methodism has yet to match the established church for the eccentricities of its clergy, but certainly the Rev Brian Cooke, of the Cole Street Methodist Church, at Nethererton in the west midlands, has "upped" Nonconformity's chances for 1980 by proclaiming from his pulpit that Maggie Thatcher's amazing grace has its roots in her Methodist childhood.

From a report of the incident, it appears that some lady members of the congregation were so incensed by the minister's observations that they virtually took over control for the rest of the service.

I would hazard a guess that the development and disclosure of this little incident was probably the tip of the iceberg in the religious life of this small congregation. Certainly my own early experiences in Methodism lead me to believe that quite a few churches go through highly-explosive periods, often around the most curious issues, but the outside world never gets the faintest glimmer of what is going on.

I knew of one Methodist church in Surrey that stayed in a state of civil war for many years. One faction devoutly believed that the energies of the congregation should be devoted to the extension of "foreign missions." Another faction yielded not an inch in its commitment to "home missions." Attendance at services often seemed little more than an opportunity for the "foreign" and the "homes" to pop their heads up during prayers and exchange hostile glances.

When I was a young man, I longed to believe that the messages I was offered by my local church were true. The idea of a world in which the rich cared for the poor, where hatred was opposed by love, almost seemed a possibility at times. And I came across one or two remarkable people who quietly devoted their lives to seeking after the kingdom of heaven. Most church members, however, were only marginally interested in religion.

Pass any Methodist church on a Sunday morning just as the service has ended. Most of the men will be talking about cars, gardens or business while the women catch up with gossip.

Methodism's claim to separate development from the Anglican church, as I understand it, has always rested upon its firm commitment to evangelism. Not long ago a pleasant Methodist parson called to see me and promptly commenced our interview by explaining that he had long since given up trying to convert anyone. I suspect he may have been very wise. But I also wonder if he'd explained part of the reason why Methodism is now probably on the path to extinction.

achievement in any year, knowing the stay-in rate, or vice-versa.

Groups with high stay-in rates do well, groups with low stay-in rates do poorly, whatever their composition by sex or ethnicity. No prior knowledge of the sex or ethnic origin of the group is needed in order to make a prediction about its average achievement. The drop-out characteristics of the group, on the other hand, are a good guide to any average group performance in any one school, at any one time.

For many years now, cross-cultural psychologists have argued against using sex or ethnicity as proxies for the complex individual and social variables that enter into the acquisition of skills. Dr Driver is not, indeed, insensitive to the problem. However, until interpretation of his results, however socially desirable they may be as evidence of industrious and able minority groups, can account for marked school context effects on achievement, we can only say that his are statistical findings lacking theoretical explanation.

Our weather reports are like this: they may be accurate, more or less, but we do not know why.

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Pre-schooling

SIR: In the first volume of the EPA reports, Professor Halsey stated that "pre-schooling is the outstandingly economical and effective device in the general approach to raising educational standards in EPA's." His discussion ("Education can compensate," 24 January) of the recent findings about the long-term effects of Headstart contains some similar remarks.

Unfortunately, the data presented in the EPA volumes do not allow such an inference to be drawn. There was no systematic attempt to compare children who were and were not exposed to pre-school experience. Some evidence was presented from the West Riding study which suggested that children who went to nursery schools set up by the project made and maintained test score improvements when compared with an earlier baseline survey.

However, this evidence does not stand up to careful methodological scrutiny; it could be explained by familiarity with the test used and with the test situation or by secular trends which distort comparisons of cross-sectional and longitudinal data, or by a combination of these and other reasons.

The new Headstart results are, if true, interesting and important but it would be wrong to suppose that they are supported by the EPA data not only for the reasons given above but also because the measures used were different.

There are powerful arguments in favour of expanding pre-school services, not least of which is that many mothers want their children to use them. However, neither the pre-school cause nor the cause of educational research

Contributors

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Abortion bill

SIR: Parliament is now considering John Corrie's anti-abortion bill which will have its third and final reading on 8 February. On its second reading there was overwhelming support for the bill with 270 votes for it and only 90 votes against. If passed, this bill will make two thirds of all abortions illegal and will affect 80,000 women every year.

The present Abortion Act was passed in 1967 and opened the door for the National Health Service to provide safe, legal abortions and for a number of charities to provide counselling and low cost abortion facilities. Prior to this act, many women died in the hands of "back-street" abortionists, their own desperate hands, or were forced to carry through with unwanted pregnancies. Since the act came into effect, the death rate due to abortions has declined tremendously.

If the Corrie Bill is passed it will be almost impossible to get a doctor to perform an abortion unless:

- i) the woman's life is in "grave" danger,
- ii) there is a "substantial" risk of "serious" injury to the woman's physical or mental health or that of her children.

These three words, grave, substantial and serious, will severely restrict the number of legal abortions.

The more well-off women in society will always be able to buy abortions, no matter what the law provides. This Bill will mainly hit women who are in a vulnerable position, like poor women and teenage girls.

Almost all informed areas of medical opinion have expressed their opposition to the bill but social work has remained shamefully silent. There is not time to be complacent, we must stand up now and show our opposition to this destructive bill.

Between 2 and 8 February there will be a National Week of Action against the Corrie Bill, including a mass lobby of parliament at 2 pm on 5 February and an assembly of women on 8 February while the bill is being debated. Write or visit your MP and express your opposition and join your local campaign against Corrie. The time to act is now or we will be fighting for the basic right to abortion rather than for extending and improving abortion facilities.

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CORRECTION: The report on energy options mentioned in our Observation, "No soft option" (3 January) was produced by the Centre for Alternative Industrial and Technological Systems at North East London Polytechnic, not by the Open University.

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