

# THE OTHER SORT OF FAIRY TALE...

Most fairy tales for children are harmless enough. But in many school textbooks there's another kind of fairy tale: a lot of them contain false and prejudiced ideas about race, social class, the role of women, and life in other countries. PETE DODD reports...

LAST autumn Liverpool Community Relations Council held a display of books used in some of the city's schools. A panel of interested people made a general study of attitudes in the books and found two important trends:

1. Many books did not reflect the nature and form of the various groups in society.
2. Many text books, with particular reference to racial bias, are rooted in traditional 'white colonial' thinking and don't give balanced information about coloured peoples.

The most direct reason for this bias in school books is the nature of publishing in our society. Writing, publishing and selling children's books is predominantly a white middle class occupation.

Children's books therefore reflect the middle class values and attitudes that are accepted as the norm in society. The effects of this are obvious when we consider young readers who are open to influence and who are encouraged to use books to gain information, to widen their knowledge of the world and to increase their awareness.

Many books are suppressive tools, but because they have become accepted by teachers and parents, are considered faultless. It is sad that most of us are ignorant of attitudes presented to our children in books they read.

## FALSE IMPRESSION

Factual information, for example, can create a false impression. The stereotype view of particular groups can suggest to the reader that all people with a particular trait in common live and act in the same way.

The most blatant and damaging examples of this deal with race, social class and sex.

**RACE:** In most geography text books black people are only presented in pre-industrial rural situations. The facts given about small groups like the pygmies and bushmen are naturally correct, but the impression created does not reflect the true multi-racial nature of modern urban life.

If the only context that coloured people are seen in is a village in Africa with its associated culture and life style then conflict will arise in the minds of black and white children in our city's schools, manifesting itself in false beliefs and prejudices. White children grow up conditioned to believing that black people inevitably live in pre-industrial situations, have 'strange' habits and cannot be in positions of authority. Black children may well grow up without a sense of self pride.

**SOCIAL CLASS:** The assumptions arising from the stereotype method help propagate the racist nature of our culture, and in the same way stereotypes of social class encourage economic divisions within capitalist society. It is not surprising that if the values put forward to

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children are middle class, many young people feel alienated from society.

**SEX:** It is pointless society agreeing to equal opportunity for all if women are never shown in any other situation than as housewives and mothers. Children's reading books rarely show women or men in any other role than the mother/father, housewife/breadwinner situation.

## MINORITY GROUPS

Text books also reflect the suppressive nature of powerful societies in their treatment of minority groups. I shall explain this with two quotations from a geography book called 'Homes' by W.G. Moore (published by Hulton Education, reprinted in 1958). In dealing with Eskimos he explains:

"The Eskimos of southern Greenland have been so long in contact with Europeans that many of them have quite up-to-date wooden houses."

Later in the book he gives just two paragraphs to the American Indians and states that the white man...

"drove the Indians from their historic hunting grounds... the Indian population gradually declined. Those who have settled in reservations are left undisturbed to pursue their tribal life."

It is doubtful that when one group of people exterminate an ethnic minority the true description is "gradually declined" or that an "up-to-date house" is the same thing to an Eskimo as it is to a European.

The numerous conflict situations that took place in the colonisation of Africa for example are never mentioned, and the proud cultures of many minority groups all over the world are dismissed in favour of the all-embracing twentieth century western industrial life-style.

There is a particular language applied when talking of suppressed minority groups and powerful majority groups. All too often our own language is heavily laden with words that have preconceived values and attitudes bound up in them. Ask yourself what the following words imply and who they are applied to:

- \* primitive, unsophisticated, undeveloped, underdeveloped, barbaric, strange, native, tribe, pagan, witch doctor, kaffir, wage, duty, slave, peasant, servant, people, worker.
- \* colonial, sophisticated, hunter, salary, gift, master, government, boss.

## VERY LITTLE CHOICE

Generally children have very little choice in what they read. Children's books are usually sold to adults and then given to children. Therefore it is up to parents and teachers to find out what values their children are being indoctrinated with in books.

Many books show the suppressive nature of white capitalist society at its worst. We must recognise that children are searching for an identity of their own suffer because of the overwhelming middle class attitudes imposed on them, much of which is achieved unconsciously in books.

We must demand books for our children that reflect the true nature of the society we want to live in and rid ourselves of half-truths and prejudices contained in many of them.

● If you would like to help in the more detailed study of text books and children's books, contact Pete Dodd, c/o Liverpool CRC, 64 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool 3.

# Britain's own Watergate

ALTHOUGH shocked by the American Watergate affair, British newspapers still like to think of our own elections as good, clean fun.

But the British Tory party had already joined the political spying game by 1927 - when Richard Nixon was still in short pants. What's more, in the British Watergate no-one got caught, and the Press failed to expose it.

The whole business was kept secret until 1967 when Lord Davidson described in his 'Memoirs of a Conservative' how he recruited a man from MI5, Joseph Ball, to spy on the Labour Party.

'With Joseph Ball,' he wrote, 'I ran a little intelligence service of our own, quite separate from the party organisation. We had agents in certain key centres and we also had agents

actually in the Labour Party headquarters.'

Most Labour Party literature was printed by Odhams Press, and the pair arranged to get advance proofs from a workman there.

Although bugging devices hadn't been invented, Davidson seemed pleased with the results, and Ball continued to work for the Tories' 'research' department until 1939.



Liverpool Liberal leader Cyril Carr - as seen by cartoonist Frank.

# It's the drain game

**POOR ELLEN KELLY!** It's such hard work fighting elections, putting all those leaflets through people's letterboxes.

With these thoughts uppermost in her mind, Mrs Kelly - who is a Labour councillor - popped into a shop at Childwall Fiveways.

The shopkeeper is Councillor William Fearenside, a Conservative and Mrs Kelly's election opponent. She is a regular customer of his.

Chatting away, Mrs Kelly mentioned her problem. And Councillor Fearenside had a brainwave. He was about to deliver some leaflets himself. Conservative ones.

Wouldn't it be a help if he took two lots of leaflets - Labour and Conservative - and delivered them together?

What a nice idea, thought Mrs Kelly.

That incident in the May elections probably counts as the most bizarre bit of electioneering for years. And it perfectly illustrates what many people feel about Labour and the Conservatives... they have too much in common.

The Liberals tell us they are different - and get things done.

Among their recent achievements was the discovery of potholes in Croxteth Grove by Nick Wood, while in Church Ward: "Delays in dustbin clearances have been reported for action, and the police have cooperated well in our attempts to control"

Over in Rock Ferry Liberal Coun-

cillor David Hughes was photographed peering down a blocked drain.

In Childwall, Tony Limont got excited about light bulbs... so much so that he included the story three times in the same issue of 'Focus'. In the old days some street lamps had two 75-watt bulbs. The mean Tories replaced them with one 100-watt bulb to save money. Tony Limont is having them put back.

## LIBERAL MENACE

Alarmed at the Liberal menace Tory Councillor Weaver lashed back "Don't get things out of Focus", he wrote. "Vandalism: Police time taken up with demonstrations led by Peter Haine, Chairman of Young Liberals and a local Liberal Councillor prosecuted for obstructing the highway - time wasted on hooliganism instead of fighting crime."

And: "Violence: Thorpe urged the dropping on bombs on white Rhodesia - little wonder there is violence in Liverpool."

On the Labour side, a leaflet supporting Coun Harold Lee took the form of a questionnaire, headed "Truth". Among the questions:

"It is said your Liberal candidate is opposed to corporal punishment for crimes of violence. Are you?"

"It is said your Liberal candidate supports uncontrolled immigration. Do you?"

No, Councillor Lee is NOT in the National Front.

# HOSPITAL VISIT MAN SACKED

**NORMAN McCormish** received a message at work to visit his wife in hospital. She was about to give birth to their first child.

He was told by his employers that if he went he would be sacked. Naturally he still went to see his wife.

He was ill himself the following week, so he sent in a doctor's note. When he returned to work he was given his cards.

His child has since died and Mrs McCormish has had a nervous breakdown.

Norman worked for Cubbon's bakery in Old Swan for about six weeks. He had been late on only two occasions (because of bad weather) so he was rather shocked at this sudden dismissal.

Conditions at Cubbons, a family firm with a string of about 30 shops, are typical of non-union factories in the catering trade. Mr McCormish worked on the ovens from 6.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with an hour for lunch. For this he was paid £20 a week. (Sixteen-year-olds get £7 a week for the same hours).

An attempt was made by two employees to start a union. Both were sacked within the week, as their work was considered 'substandard.'

But a workforce consisting mainly of two age groups (16-20 years, and those close to retiring) is difficult to organise.

Meanwhile callous and inhumane management actions will continue and Cubbons will grow fat on their cakes.



ABOVE: David Hughes and the blocked drain.



LEFT: A Labour attempt to show the Liberals are not quite the ordinary, extravagance-hating folk they like us to think. Top picture is Trevor Jones' smart house on Queens Drive. Below it is Cyril Carr's modestly named 'Yew Tree Cottage'. The photographs were in a Kensington Ward leaflet.