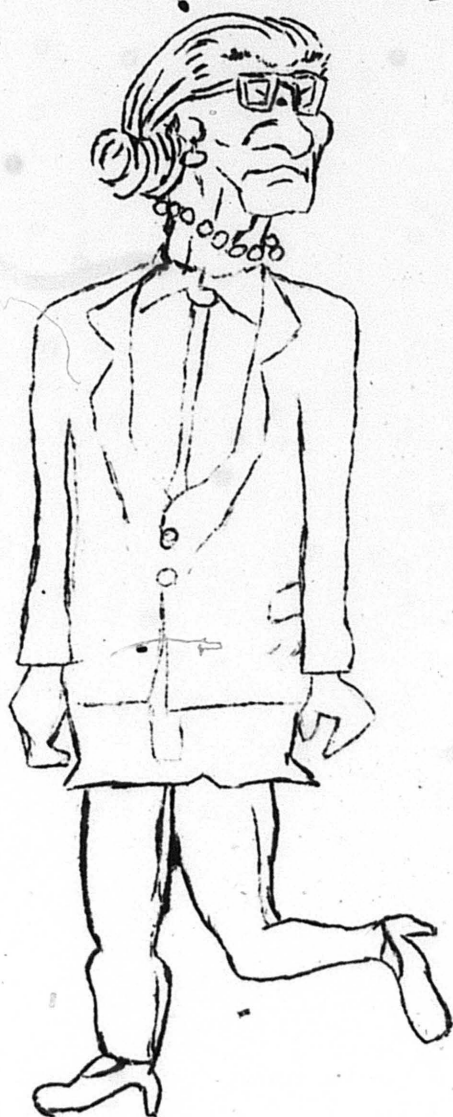


# LIBRARIAN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

CONFERENCE ISSUE No. 8



LIBRARIAN STEREOTYPE



LFSC FREAK STEREOTYPE

BORIN & BILL



### THE INSTANT COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICE

The following is the result of an evening rap with Mike Sparrow: unfortunately our amusing little tape recorder refused to pick up any sound we made so with a superhuman effort of memory we hope to have encapsulated the main points of the interview.....

At a time of even larger, more remote administrative areas in local government it is refreshing to find an information service which lies somewhere between the bland sterility of mass media and the mystifying gadgetry of individual SDI and tailored abstracts. "Breakthrough" is a unique weekly programme broadcast by BBC Radio London which hopes to provide instant information at the service of the community, maintaining some element of individuality and participation. It reaches an audience of about two million, can be received as far away as Brighton and Birmingham (on 94.9 VHF) and boasts John Peel's legendary "Perfumed Garden" on the original pirate Radio London as a precursor.

Mike Sparrow, who has the awesome task of producing and presenting the unbroken two hour programme, followed his Cambridge English/History degree with a short spell in Fleet Street, working on the now-defunct "Mirrorcolor" magazine, then on to local radio. It is in local radio that he sees hope for restoring a sense of identity both within the community and between it and its purveyors of entertainment and information.

"Breakthrough" started life with the birth of Radio London itself in Autumn, 1970 and seems in its early days to have been the Beeb's sop to to young people, consisting very much of youth clubs and boys' brigades. The programme developed in the hands of Steve Bradshaw, Mike Sparrow and Richard Williams and gradually music entered the scene. Now an essential element of "Breakthrough" occupying about 60% of the air-time, Mike sees the rock content and admirable interviews with people in music as complementing their information side to reflect youth culture (intrinsically recognising drug influences, sexual freedom and other outrages). We asked him whether the

## THREE

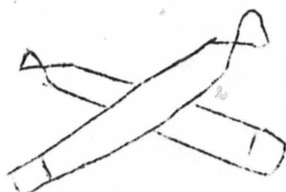


rock music might not alienate some potential listeners to whom the information might be just as valuable, however, judging by the tremendous feedback in the form of letters and phone-calls, he thinks this is not the case. Indeed the music can be seen as a sort of bait to attract the teeny bopper audience who might normally avoid subjects like squatting and community action.

Obviously "Breakthrough" remains a youth-orientated service, but its contents are frequently of much wider interest. Incidentally an established extension of the call-in type of show provides broader advisory and referral services for listeners with any sort of problem or just for those who want a good argument. The Radio London prototype, now run by Dave Simmonds, meets such rivals as Capital Radio's nightly "Open Line" with Alan Hargreaves where, besides special guests, a card index of organisations can be instantly consulted to advise a listener as to further lines of enquiry.

In its earlier forms "Breakthrough" contained brief news items which are now crystallised into "The Alternative London News" spot each week. This was originally handled on a regular basis by BIT (see LAR 74(6) June, 1972: pp 99-100) until an unfortunate rift occurred last year. Following a number of guest editorships by groups such as the Clapham "People's News" and the impressive London Black Information Centre, Jenny Lacey, a free-lance reporter with many useful contacts in the u/g, now compiles the news.

Besides the "Alternative London News" there is also a full "What's On" coverage of local evening gigs and festivals, plus interviews with people involved is O.S.C.A. (Organisation for Student Community Action), C.A.R.O. (for pot legalisation), the Diggers, student unions, CLAP (Community Levy for Alternative Projects), "Spotlight" (who provide help and crash accommodation for young people in London with nowhere to stay) and many other organisations. (Mike has unconfirmed plans for "breakthroughs" devoted to a single subject such as squatting, feminism or gay lib - Gay Liberation has already produced its own "Platform" discussion programme for the station.





FOUR



Community radio, if such a thing exists, compares favourably to the librarian's customary concern: printed matter, especially small circulation ephemera, local newsletters and journals. The obvious advantage of radio is its immediacy and because of the encouragement of participation by Radio London, corrections can be made to outdated items on the air, events can be inserted and details repeated for listeners who may have missed them, all by a simple phone call to the studio. In a recent programme listeners were invited to phone in and vote which of the tracks on Dylan's new live album they would prefer to hear on the air.

Receiving information in this way of necessity runs alongside Mike's own monitoring of all the printed sources he can lay his hands on: "Spare Rib", "P.F. S. Bulletin", "Gay News", "Time Out", "Bitman", "Rolling Stone", the newly-rejuvenated "IT" and any other community orientated pamphlets that get sent it, and close relations with BIT are maintained through Jenny Lacey. The disadvantages of time-lag in publication are thereby completely avoided whilst such sources are utilised to maximum advantage. The listener merely has to turn a knob to receive up-to-the-minute information and there are no subscription expenses. (If librarians start taking an interest in the radio medium, as they surely should, maybe there'll soon be a vacant post for an information officer at the "Breakthrough" studio???)

Problems do arise, however, in the area covered by Radio London. Whilst this is the model held up to other local stations in BBC terms, the sheer size of London and environs presents problems not only in getting to know of all that is going on, but may also cause barriers to a true community function for radio. Here, of course, the library should win out with its person-to-person contact. True "local" radio ought to be run on a smaller scale. We asked Mike if there was not a need throughout the country for the kind of service and link




# FIVE

"Breakthrough" provides; he agreed and quoted areas such as Liverpool and York where people are working within the local radio framework along similar lines.

A point that has always intrigued us is the extent to which Auntie exercises control over such a programmed, and it seems that what Mike judges to be the apparent liberality of that corporation many smaller, especially left-wing, groups are reluctant to avail themselves of air-time when offered it, because they are suspicious of the mass-media. Mike appears to stand between establishment and radical elements, trying with some success to bring them together. There is no censorship of material before it is broadcast and he has full control over the programme. Whilst the danger of abuse of such undoubted power by one person unchecked can be envisaged, Mike is very conscious of the large numbers of people listening critically each week. He wants the programme to be the people's, not his or the BBC's. O.K., corny maybe, but an intriguing notion all the same.

The future for "breakthrough", now well-established in Southern England, seems to bode that its steady improvement in recent years will continue. Mike tells us that no matter how he feels on Monday nights the programme is a gas to do and two hours never passed so quickly, this is surely so for regular listeners too. Perhaps its success will encourage further moves elsewhere towards the realisation of the instant community information service.

Borin Van Loon and R. Slicker  
You Scratch My Back Dept. It had to happen. One would suppose that when two degenerates from the very mixed bunch comically calling themselves the LfSC Conference Collective appeared on a certain local radio programme at 8.40 pm on Monday, 20th Jan. the resulting bouillabaisse of idealistic naivete and bland, unsupported assertion, tempered with not a little incoherent meandering might reveal such people in their true light. It was so. The liberal sprinkling of pretentious epithets convinces us, as if we needed convincing, that the laughable juvenilia who make up this body of people can be discounted out of hand. I hereby dissociate myself from my ego-tripping co-author in the foregoing piece and from that or any other vain attempt of my own to inject a serious professional approach into the contents of this trivial journal. R. Slicker.



# Six

## DECADENCE, DECLINE AND THE DEATH OF ROCK'N'ROLL

We live in strange times. Ten years ago some of us were still able to believe in something that resembled a Whig view of history. Things were getting better and would continue to do so for the foreseeable future. In 1975 it is hard to imagine how things could get much worse. War, economic collapse and starvation, we are told, loom around the corner. These have been facts of life for the majority of the world's population for time immemorial, but in cushioned Europe we have evaded them for a considerable period.

Contemporary popular culture is particularly barren. Nostalgia and imitation are the parameters of current taste. The ersatz and the kitsch reign supreme, whilst we, the cognoscenti, giggle gleefully as we lionize the transparently bad. Lacking the imagination, the energy of the insight to create something of our own, we take malicious delight in parodying the outrageously rotten products of an earlier generation. We only succeed in displaying the bankruptcy of our own ideas. Nostalgia and decadence are the twin hallmarks of a dying culture, combining the clashing but complementary sentiments of uncritical remembrance and conscious mockery.

Neo-classical and renaissance artists used the past to energise and inspire their own creations; revolutionary changes in art stem from the recognition of the best of former periods and the rejection of the worst. We exaggerate and parody the worst because we have nothing better to offer. In that we do this knowingly, we stand condemned. At least it can be said of writers such as Hemingway, Burroughs and Mailer that they lived on the outer fringes of edge city. We don't have the courage to do that. We breach no new ground. We take no risks. We embrace the worst - the grotesque and the shoddy - because we dare not strive for the best. We are afraid to fail.

Some critics would argue that this distortion has occurred only at the teeny bop end of the market. Adam Faith and Cliff Richard have been replaced by Gary Glitter and David Bowie. David Cassidy and The Osmonds maintain the tradition of wholesomeness and asexual sexuality. It is hard to say which is worse - a ghoulish cock rock that makes the late Jim Morrison seem positively naive or the repression of instinct evident in Richard and Cassidy. The cutesiness of the Osmonds does not bear thinking about.

Rock'N'Roll Madness comic said it all in the strip where the bi-sexual, high drag rock star threatens to stomp a faggot because the latter takes his act seriously. We ought, here, to ask how far the kids take it seriously. Most English audiences regard Jagger's flouncing with the indulgence of an elder brother who knows that he is really one of us. And when Alice Cooper mutilates baby dolls, it does not mean that his audience will go out and do likewise. However, it should be recognised that the exploration of violence by certain bands is intended

to be exploitative rather than cathartic. The glorification of violence for its own sake, like the glorification of arbitrary power and brute force, is essentially fascist. Fantasies of control and domination need willing victims to be fulfilled. Cultural decadence tends to be the midwife of fascism, which although totally corrupt claims to be the one force that can clean up the moral cesspit. As society, tottering like a spinning top that is losing its velocity, veers ever closer to collapse, it is up to us to postulate new values, and new directions. We have to do it in our work, in our art, in our politics and in our lifestyle. The alternatives are too gruesome to contemplate.

Roger Lewis

Dear John,  
I don't advocate censorship of pornography but I did think that John Lindsay's 'objective' test of good sex writing - that it gives a hard on - rather revealing (LfSC no.6). Pornography has presumably contributed to his unthinking assumption that only men are people and capable of reacting in any way to what they read. One man's hard-on is often another woman's feeling of disgust and anger.  
Yours, Hilary J. Brown, Manchester.

P.S. Sorry I missed the meeting I was working that weekend.

1ST S.W. REGIONAL GROUP MEETING:

Sexism, Racism, homosexuality, feminism, media, literature bias and the library. SATURDAY 22nd MARCH, Bath

Details write or phone Angela Needham, University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath, Avon. Bath 6941 ext.580

Do you know any good books, articles, pamphlets, etc, which are anti-sexist, feminist, positively portray gay people - especially good fiction. Send bibliographical details and annotations to Angela Needham, The Library, University of Bath.

# SEVEN



# DATE

## Down Below the Librarians - a Junior's View of Library Work

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After years of office work, a job in a public library seemed like heaven on earth. So I started there full of idealism last August, only to find that life with books and librarians isn't all that sweet. Shelving, tidying, overdue notices, counter duties, the daily routine gets boring pretty soon. To avoid paranoia, you have to forget the public eye watching you, but some nasty boss comes around to remind you all the time.

Looking at books - no time for that. Talking to readers - not permitted, plus you don't know (so they think) what you are talking about. "Please ask at the enquiries desk", (if there is somebody).

After a while you come to the conclusion that they think you are dumb, so you act like it, so they are confirmed in their attitude, so you get pissed off and stop doing things and trying altogether.

Once a certain proportion of the junior staff has reached that point of total incompetence, the librarian in charge calls us in to thunder over our heads, beginning with the memorable words "Until now you have fitted the time into the jobs: from now on you'll have to fit the jobs into the time". Then she continues to tell us of all the new reform-school regulations to be introduced to increase efficiency, tea-breaks in groups under supervision, time-schedules for various jobs etc. Any comments, questions?! No, of course not, everybody is too stunned. For the next two hours everybody is doing their daily routine, steaming internally, but nobody says much. Attempts to unionise fail, people are afraid to lose their jobs if they stand up in opposition. The subversive plaming committee at the Wimpy bar at lunchtime is attended by two - 20% of the junior work force. What can you do?

P.S. I am handing in my resignation this week. Will anybody join me in solidarity?

Christine Lemster

BIAS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS - A LETTER TO SENIOR  
CHILDREN'S LIBRARIANS! -

The letter below was sent out at the beginning of December last year to the senior Children's Librarians in the London area by the groups listed at the end of the letter.

November 1974

c/o 35a Eaton Rise,  
Ealing, W.5.

NEON ! JA,  
YA  
BUM

Dear -

We, the undermentioned groups have been looking at children's books for some time, and in particular at their content. Working separately we have all come to the same conclusion, that most available children's books, many of which are rightly considered good books, fall down when it comes to the portrayal of sex roles, and cultural and racial minorities. This is in addition to their now widely recognised middle class bias. We feel that a concerted effort is now required to encourage a) a wider distribution of already available books that do not contain sexist and racist stereotypes, and b) the writing of books that attempt to give a more realistic portrayal of modern society, i.e. a multi racial community in which, women, men and children are accurately portrayed.

The questions on racism raised in "Books for Children: the Homelands of Immigrants in Britain", edited by Janet Hill, has not yet been paralleled by similar work from librarians on sexist and class bias in children's books. In fact a great deal more work is required by all of us, readers, writers, publishers and librarians, to combat sexist, racist and class bias in our children's books.

We are writing to you now to solicit your support for new initiatives in this direction. Could we perhaps recommend that Children's Librarians base their selection of books on criteria that take into account these points?

At a recent London meeting we decided to coordinate our work in approaching librarians and publishers. We would therefore welcome an opportunity to discuss these points further with you and your colleagues. As a first step we are sending this letter to the Senior Children's Librarians of all the London Boroughs and hope that you, either separately or together, will want to pursue this matter further with us.

(Signed by): Children's Rights Workshop (Book Project), CISSY, Children's Books Study Group, Leeds Women's Liberation Literature Collective, Women's Education Collective, Education Collective Kids' Book Group, Librarians for Social Change Children's Group, Spare Rib magazine.

contd.

# W E W L O N E Z

## LIST OF SOURCES

In the discussion on sexual politics the problem of getting a good list of books on a particular subject (gays, women's liberation, racism etc.) was brought up. It was agreed that individual librarians did not have the time or expertise to choose books in many areas without some sort of list and that these were difficult to find. If you want to put some good books on the gay question in your library, how do you find out which are the best to get. If the children's librarian in your library says she doesn't know where to get good books on the West Indies, where can you send her? It was decided to compile a list of all people, organizations, places which have general information or possible bibliographies in the fields of sexual politics, gays, racism, and class bias. I have agreed to collect this information and make up the list. Please send me the name of any group or person which has information in one of these areas, the address, and, if possible, what sort of information they can provide -- a bibliography, someone to speak etc. Once I have a fairly good list, I'll send it out. Send all information to: Anne Peters, 681 High Road, Tottenham, London, N17, phone = 801 0173. I am also compiling a second list of people (other than LfSC) who might be interested in the first list or should be (i.e. school librarians in ILEA). Any suggestions for this one? Send to same address.

BIRMINGHAM (and West Midlands if you can make it!)  
LfSC will be 'formed' at a meeting on Monday, March 10, in Aston Univ. Union at 7.30 -- room number to be confirmed in Grapevine. Contact: Victor Anderson - Birmingham Peace Center (he also has the literature) or Andrew Coburn - Birmingham Poly. Dept. of Librarianship.

### Contd. 'Bias in Children's Books'

A similar letter was sent to the Children's Book Editors of the major publishing houses. So far we have received a lot of letters from publishers - and all of them are positive and sympathetic to the issues raised in the letter. (But do their books show this!) Few letters have been received from Senior Children's Librarians, so if you are London Children's Librarian have you been shown this letter and given a chance to express your views? We'd like to hear from you...

### Contd. 'Uncommitted Reader'

councils to finance them once they have got off the ground. Most people agreed that it is necessary to be tactful in dealing with committees and others in authority but that change however slow can only come about by maintaining constant pressure on those in positions of power.



# THIS IS PAGE 11

## WORKSHOP ON THE UNCOMMITTED READER

Basically two problems were thrown up by this workshop: firstly, how to attract people who are basically non library users into libraries, and secondly, how far once people have been attracted in we should seek to influence their choice of reading materials. Most of the discussion centered on the first of these dilemmas. All of us were agreed that libraries don't do as much as they could/should to make people aware of the services they do provide. Among possible ways of overcoming this were: advertising in the local press, or, as this is expensive, better still to persuade them to do a feature on you for nothing (one enterprising librarian from Cheshire had done this); using local radio; and establishing contact with local community groups.

The last point provided a fruitful topic for discussion and most people agreed that if libraries are to be useful and relevant sources of information, they must create a two-way feedback, with community groups providing as well as receiving information. Another point raised was the question of bookstock and its effective display. Most of us agreed that libraries could attract a wider readership if they stocked more paperbacks, and the attractive displays in bookshops were contrasted with the slightly forbidding atmosphere of many public libraries.

One interesting idea put forward was that there is no need really to keep the books inside the library. Why shouldn't we make a small selection of books available in doctors' waiting rooms, old peoples' homes, swimming baths, or even in pubs? Some of those in the group had tried this with success, apparently. Two of the group work in Lambeth and were able to tell us what could be achieved by effective cooperation between the libraries department and the arts and entertainments department.

It was also suggested that it might be a more effective use of resources to open more small shop-front branches rather than pouring money into impressive cathedral-like central libraries.

Finally of course we had to return to the more mundane problems of how we individuals can best bring about such changes when faced with library hierarchies and committees and the problem of limited finance. One way suggested was to try to start projects with community groups and to persuade

(continued on p. 10)

People interested in Sexual Politics

Jeannette Daley: Lancaster University Library.  
Baitrigg, Lancaster.

Sheila Smith: Bushbury Library, Probert Rd,  
Wolverhampton.

Hilary Brown: Manchester Business School  
Library, Manchester 15.

Margot Lindsay: 79 Brooke Rd, London N16 7RD.

Susannah Simons: City Univ Library, St John St  
London EC1.

Anne Peters: 681 High Rd., London N17.

Clare Jeffery: Dorset County Library, Dorchester

Angela Needham: Library, Univ of Bath.

Richard Wallace-Tarry, 19 Old Ford Rd, London  
E2 9PJ

David Ricketts; 29 Lymbank Rd. Liverpool 18.

Terry Spencer: 3, Wellington Rd, Altringham,  
Cheshire.

Anne Davies; 1A Holywell Rd, Abergavenny,  
Gwent.

Anne Clark: 3, Hamilton Pk, Highbury.

Chrissy Allott; 143, Highbury New Pk. N5.

Vicki Scarlett; 188a Baker St, Enfield, Middle  
sex.

Barbara Guthrie: 73 Starfield Rd, London W12.

Lesley Reid; 4, Lingards Rd, London SE13 6DH.

Ray Billington; 161 Brays Rd, Birmingham B26 2

H.A. Fernworth; 69 Carlton Road, London N7.





### Discussion group - children's books

Are librarians aware of the content of children's books? Is there some way that librarians can be made more aware of the impact of books on attitudes to sex and race, for example?

It seems very clear that librarians should take a positive stand against books such as the Macdonald Starters countries series which promote racist and nationalistic stereotypes. Children's book reviewers can also have a positive role to play, though so many take an academic, purist view.

This is summed up by the attitude taken by many librarians to board books, comics prams, toilets - accessibility and the awareness of children's needs come very low on their list of priorities. This sort of provision, coupled with the existof librarians from their buildings will hopefully lead to a service for all sections of the community.

### Discussion group - school libraries

People in this group found there were many common problems and thought it would be a good idea for school librarians to get together more often to discuss what goes on in their schools. What we may see as our role in school is not so easy to carry out in practice. The school librarian may recognise his potential as an instrument for social change but if he works in isolation, he's easily put down. Personality's half the battle.

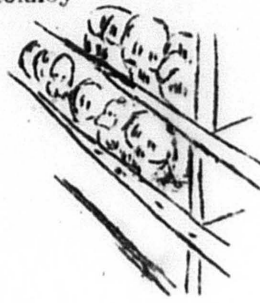
If you're interested in what's happening to school libraries/resource centres, especially in London, and would like to meet up with others to discuss ways of improving our job effectiveness, please contact:

ROSEMARY FOOKS,  
WALWORTH SCHOOL,  
SHORNCLIFFE ROAD, SE1. (tel. 703 7624)

First meeting is planned for 7th April at South Hackney School (11.00 a.m.)

Recent ad in Guardian:  
"HEAD CATALOGUER WANTED  
FOR NEW GUINEA. APPLY..."

(NO KIDDIN')





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## A DEFENCE OF THE COVER

(by Bill, the Gnome of Norwich, and  
Borin, the Pixie of Tooting)

During the first day of the conference we were asked to produce a cover for No.8 by the editor

Being of sound minds, we then proceeded to illustrate the concept of the stereotype in librarianship, using the exquisite corpse technique. By this method, one person secretly draws a head, the next person adds a torso with the head hidden, and so on.

Although we both knew the concept of the cover, the actual method of illustration of it was not decided on, and the product remains the composite of our separate subconsciousnesses. In the same way this "defence" has been written using alternatively encribed meanderings. Anyway, back to the images. These represent to us how the general public sees a librarian and a member of Lfsc.

The fact that, upon being shown round by Mr. Noyce, certain comments were made such as "the Lfsc picture makes no reference to the involvement of women in it" seems to us surprising. This is in fact the very point that we are trying to make. The general public still sees the librarian as an ageing spinster and the radical as being long-haired, dirty, and male. So, were we being that obscure? Surely, the conference is about breaking down artificial barriers and stereotypes. And please don't get hung up on the cover--read the contents and really see what the conference is about!

## EDUCATION FOR LIBRARIANSHIP

The one thing that comes out of comparing library school courses is...they're all hopelessly out of sync with the society they're working in. True, some of them have great bases and great ideas for relating librarianship to everything else. But particularly in polytechnics, there are problems of teaching staff both in librarianship and in subsidiary subjects.

In librarianship, the lecturers are too tied to the old L.A. courses and the style of "school" teaching which accompanied it. This is noticed particularly by postgrads who come from university lectures. But even B.A. students straight from school are finding many lectures a sheer waste of time.

In subsidiaries, the problem is that lecturers from other departments are accused of fobbing off library students with "tourist" material or verbatim readings from standard texts.

To this writer, the problems are bound up with the binary system of education, but also, the number of (B.A. especially) students who think of librarianship as an academic profession and who are pandered to by overambitious lecturers and courses.