

# **THE CHANGING URBAN SCHOOL**

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Robert Thornbury

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ROBERT THORNBURY

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ROBERT THORNBURY

# The Changing Urban School

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*For Mary Lou and our children,  
Richard, Clare, Jane and Paul*





# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 Classroom crisis and teacher stress	3
2 The EPA myth	16
3 Two housing nations	28
4 Multi-ethnic muddle	43
5 Juggling children and catchments	57
6 The day the roof fell in	71
7 The caretaker has the keys	82
8 Management by mafia or creative bureaucracy	93
9 The Curriculum Church	110
10 Cargo-cult and innovation	120
11 Teaching English: a curriculum case study	129
12 Electric, plastic classrooms	142
13 Counter-reformation with Inquisition	157
14 Children's rights and counsellors	172
15 Social mix for urban classrooms	189
16 Community schools and teachers	202
<i>Glossary</i>	214
<i>Bibliography</i>	221
<i>Index</i>	242



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# Introduction

In stressed cities all over the world the contemporary urban school seemed a confusing and disturbing place to the newspaper reader or parent of the 1960s and 1970s. Conflicting reports from teachers, children, journalists, government departments and educationists aroused general interest and concern simply by begging the question: what really does go on in schools? In Britain the Great Education Debate, officially initiated by the Prime Minister in 1977, formally put questions of the kind that everyone was asking: what is wrong with schools? Who is to blame? Who, if anyone, is right in their analyses and answers?

This book cannot provide answers to all these questions – no one can quantify educational neglect; but it attempts to give a composite portrait and an explanation of the urban classroom over two decades, and to show what went wrong. It confronts the administrator with the scarcely credible newspaper report and the headmaster with the problems of the increasingly influential ‘silent’ figures – the caretakers and ‘helpers’ – who play such an important if unnoticed part in the running of the school. It considers not only what and how children are taught, but also the conditions in which they are taught and those in which they live, which vitally affect their achievement. The stance throughout is uncompromising on how awful many schools and classrooms have been. The teacher is not a psychiatric nurse, the classroom is not a therapy unit. The school should not be a territory of protection rackets and wary, frightened or aggressive children, staffed by harassed adults chafing at a resented career and poor pay.

[2] The book begins by looking at the school in its wider setting. Some of the misguided attempts to provide a better education for educationally deprived urban children are considered in Chapter 2; following chapters outline the social conditions which meant that such short-sighted strategies were born to fail. Chapters 6 to 8 discuss the school as a whole – its construction, running and management, and the effects these have on the life of those who work in it; Chapters 9 to 12 survey the enormous field of changing theories, projects and practices in curriculum. The teaching of English is taken as a case study to show how the pursuit of desirable objectives sometimes resulted in the destruction of social control or curriculum stability because of untimely innovation. Chapter 13 looks at reactions to radical techniques and the new call for accountability. Chapter 14 considers the reactions of the urban child to inner city conditions, and the various attempts that have been made to help him, both from within the school and from without. The book ends by looking at social mix as the means of combating urban disadvantage, at policies that may help to improve it, and in particular at the part that teachers and schools can play in achieving it.

I have never forgotten my first week as a young teacher fifteen years ago in an inner city comprehensive school belonging to Britain's largest urban authority. On the second day the book stock given to me for a class of 'remedial children' consisted of thirty brand-new bibles. These were provided by the County Hall; the school had nothing to give me, so great had been the previous term's destruction. Ten of the children needed special educational placement, one was psychotic and the remainder presented a formidable galaxy of problems. The school suffered repeated spasms of fire-raising. Professional life was nasty, brutish and short – many teachers left each year. Individual departments achieved social order, but often by violent means. Cliques among the staff complained to cabinet ministers in secret after-hours meetings that the school was a disaster – yet it was one of the most expensively staffed, best resourced and most carefully designed inner city schools in the country. In painting a turbulent picture in my first chapter, therefore, I have not exaggerated; I have presented a simplistic cartoon of the urban classroom jungle as it stirred the popular imagination, because it makes a good starting point for the following chapters, which have attempted to deepen the reader's understanding, and my own, of what really was happening and what must happen in the future.

# 1 Classroom crisis and teacher stress

What was the pathology report on the British urban classroom as 1980 approached? It was a portrait in the cities and large towns of schools in tumult. Indeed, in the conurbations of other advanced countries, such as the US, Australia, and Canada the crisis in the urban classroom was causing widespread alarm.<sup>1</sup> Urban education in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s was devastated by demographic landslide and ravaged by epidemic maladjustment. Some 21 per cent of boys and 16 per cent of girls in the inner city playground exhibited aggressive and abnormal behaviour. Juvenile crimes of violence multiplied seventeen times in the twenty-five years before 1977. Schoolchildren in London and other major cities were often a year behind the national average in reading attainment at eleven years.<sup>2</sup> Not only were playgrounds hazardously menaced by disturbed children, the school curriculum was visibly distorted. Yet such endemic maladjustment among urban children ruled out special educational treatment as too expensive. The cry rang out, disguised as enlightened policy; 'contain your problem children' in the ordinary school. Perhaps, as the teaching profession uneasily claimed, schools merely reflected the deterioration and quality of urban life. But beyond doubt, in London, Glasgow and many urban authorities the schools system, especially in new comprehensives or multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, was on the edge of total collapse.<sup>3</sup>

Urban crime statistics showed soaring violence among 14- to 17-year-olds and younger children as well, most markedly in the inner cities. Among teenage girls the flowering of unisex violence and resort



[4] by the authorities to high security imprisonment were clearly documented. Cannabis, amphetamines, glue sniffing, occasional heroin addiction, and lunchtime drinking sessions among older children all obtruded on teachers and taught in the urban classroom.

Parents and the general public, relying on newspapers and the gossip of children for their picture of the urban classroom, listened to hair-raising tales.<sup>4</sup> Playground stabbings, the murder of a street trader planned during playtime, muggings by alienated West Indian teenagers at lunchtime, the teenage suicide following persistent bullying – any of these were easily believed. The long, hot summers of the mid-1970s in the capital city witnessed school and street riots among pupils. Shops displaying stern notices refused to serve schoolchildren, as pilfering exceeded profits. Juveniles shoplifting during lunchtime unprecedentedly found themselves pursued back to their school gates by a police helicopter.

Schoolchildren dominated the criminal statistics. A Scotland Yard study of housebreaking trends between 1973 and 1975 aimed to spot target criminals who could be put under observation and eventually arrested; but the police researchers found that over half of the 37 per cent increase in London burglaries were committed by children aged 11 to 15 years. Police also found that most juvenile crime was committed between noon and 3 p.m. – when children should have been in school.

Behind the daytime crime wave among schoolchildren, according to popular belief, press comment and the confidential mutterings of teachers was the untimely raising of the school leaving age. A monumental professional blunder led the teacher unions in 1973 to insist on ROSLA, the 'raising of the school leaving age'. Within three years the teaching profession was to make a complete volte-face. By 1976 liberal heads of comprehensive schools, and the *Black Paper* enthusiasts, as all along, were publicly urging exemption schemes for early leavers, or even lowering the school leaving age to 14 again.<sup>5</sup> Truancy became particularly bad as ROSLA exacerbated teacher stress at a time of acute staff shortage and part-time working by schools. London secondary schools in 1973 reached the point where each morning the education officer had on his desk a list of twenty schools likely to close down that day through staff shortage.<sup>6</sup>

Despite whitewashing school attendance surveys, which fondly showed an average 89 per cent attendance in city schools, inquisitive journalists nevertheless alleged that secondary school attendances had dropped enormously. After all, as an anonymous education officer wrote, an official 89 per cent attendance could still mean that 54 per cent of the children truanted at least one morning or afternoon each week.<sup>7</sup>

Fire-raising in urban schools was a growing trend. In 1973 in Britain [5] there were 89 major school fires with total damage amounting to nearly £6m; whereas ten years previously the annual figures had been 18 such fires costing £½m.<sup>8</sup> Most school fires in the conurbations of Merseyside,



*'We've called you in to help with this appalling problem of truancy.'*

Manchester, Birmingham or London were deliberately started by young people at weekends or the evenings, and bomb or fire hoaxes during the school day were even more common. A contemporary primary school which had taken two years to build could be a smouldering wreckage barely two hours after the fire-bug had struck.

Vandalism in urban schools was pandemic and astronomically costly; an estimated £15m of damage was done in 1977. In 1974 the ILEA Chief Architect cited one comprehensive which spent £50 per day – £1,000 per month – on repairing broken glass alone.<sup>9</sup> Visitors to new urban school buildings were shocked at their rapid deterioration – ranging from the graffiti on the corridor lockers, or the orange peel and coke cans in the biology pool, to the conflagration which had gutted a staffroom or stockroom. Glasgow education officials estimated that

[6] two new primary schools each year could be constructed with the money they spent on repairing vandalism. Such statistics were mostly conveyed in confidential reports to education committees, for most policy-makers and teachers feared that publicity would have an immediately contagious effect in making school damage worse. Unfortunately this low-key approach also inhibited anti-vandalism campaigns. So glass continued to be smashed in classroom windows or false fire alarm calls, playground seats survived a week or two, and only constant vigilance by patrolling teachers prevented pipes being pulled away from walls or lavatories stuffed with anything to hand. A school might well employ a full-time plumber, glazier or carpenter. There was no such thing as a safe cloakroom. Children distrusted other children; secondary pupils, especially in the larger comprehensives, carried their coats and satchels everywhere.

Little, apparently, could be done about disruptive or violent pupils. Despite constant horse-trading between heads on the principle 'you take my problem and I'll take yours', very often there was nowhere else to send an unruly teenager. Suspension was an option frequently denied to heads of secondary schools on grounds of legality, professional pride or political acceptability. 'Don't rock the comprehensive boat'; teachers were warned, or 'don't say you can't cope, it will hinder your promotion.' The suspension of primary pupils was unthinkable. Special school places were scarce. The vagaries of professional politics, social work fashion, educational and children's legislation loaded the problems onto ordinary schools. The two persistent vandals who broke into the headmaster's study, ruined the carpet with ink and used his desk as a lavatory were accepted back after several weeks. An assaulted teacher might writhe in embarrassed anger: he could do nothing when the convicted offender, given a supervision order but sent home because no residential place could be found, sauntered nonchalantly back into the classroom.

Despite police complaints about the lack of burglar alarms in schools, many education authorities found it cheaper to replace stolen or vandalized school property than meet the high premiums and security demands of an insurance policy to protect the school. Not uncommonly in the newer schools, one master key, easily stolen from a teacher's desk, fitted every room or cupboard. The complexity of the school caretaker's task was much increased under such circumstances, particularly in the large secondary schools where expensive science laboratories, closed-circuit television or audio-visual aids rooms were an Aladdin's Cave for the thief. Tactics like rationing keys, setting up vandal patrols, laminating windows, or painting drainpipes with non-drying paint to mark the clothes of the intruders all proved remarkably ineffective. The problem was so chronic in Newcastle that

its education officer declared that society had turned full circle to a scale of vandalism and arson characteristic of 1900, when anyone in the city hiring a school for a wedding or function was required to employ two policemen to keep order.<sup>10</sup> [7]

Education was news. A second wave of books appeared, following those of the early 1950s which had exposed the 'blackboard jungle' in secondary modern schools.<sup>11</sup> Television offered sharp, timely documentary coverage of educational issues. The slow progress of the Tyndale enquiry was prominently featured on television news and media coverage could make an academic research controversy about the 'progressive' primary classroom a matter of popular concern.<sup>12</sup> The comic possibilities of the urban staffroom and classroom, or the daily saga of a school caretaker's life were sentimentalized in television serials. Leila Berg's highly-coloured book about the ill-fated Rising Hill comprehensive school,<sup>13</sup> at the beginning of the period under review, or the realistic portrait of life in a comprehensive in 1975, given by Hunter Davies in *The Creighton Report* ten years later,<sup>14</sup> were as gripping as fiction. There were cliff-hanging accounts in the educational press of the threatened survival or HMI inspection of the progressive secondary school Countesthorpe College. Trendy editorial teams flooded the market with messianic paperbacks by the radicals of US urban education.<sup>15</sup>

Local newspapers were eager for educational 'stories', especially those featuring rows over comprehensive plans, the debate about educational standards, the multiracial classroom or progressive primary school. One newspaper was accused of being an *agent provocateur* after smuggling a reporter (herself a qualified teacher) into a teaching job at an unruly London comprehensive.<sup>16</sup> A sensational exposé of classroom conditions followed this 'inside story'. More sustained, less inflammatory coverage was given to the urban school by newly-launched magazines like *Forum*, which was committed to unstreaming and comprehensivism, by the sociological weekly *New Society*, which began life in 1960, or by *The Guardian* newspaper, widely read by teachers, which introduced regular education pages. Journalists were heavily criticized for their unbalanced reportage.<sup>17</sup> But they complained that inside the school system too many people had given up conceding the truth and got into the public relations habit of playing down bad news. Teachers were urged not to cry 'stinking fish', so as not to make the job even more intolerable. Inspectors remained mute, for reasons we shall discuss. Politicians murmured 'don't rock the comprehensives'.

Of course all schools, especially the city comprehensives because of their size, were like the curate's egg – good in parts. Calm might reign in the science block, while across in the school-leaver's huts a teacher

[8] battled for classroom co-operation from raucous young adults. It was as difficult to find out whether a school was really any good as to assess the professional competence of a family doctor. You found out by word of mouth, or the hard way.

With all the conflicting reports and impressions, no one in the end could tell how serious and widespread the urban school crisis really was. No national reporting system assessed the schools. HM Inspectors were allegedly more active in inspecting lavatories than classrooms. Heads and senior staff hesitated to confess that they were losing their grip, they and the politicians shamed young teachers into collusive silence. At national level, synods of researchers, evaluators, curriculum developers and policy advisers, convinced that there were purely educational solutions, academically disputed issues of questionable relevance while an urban earthquake rumbled beneath them.

Teachers were under stress. A Cambridge researcher in 1975 monitored the cardiac rate of teachers experiencing crises of classroom control.<sup>18</sup> A Friday afternoon with difficult fourth formers could raise the heart rate from 70 to 120 beats a minute. Actuarial records for 1976 showed that deaths among men teachers had more than doubled, and early retirement on a breakdown pension was three times more frequent than it had been ten years earlier.

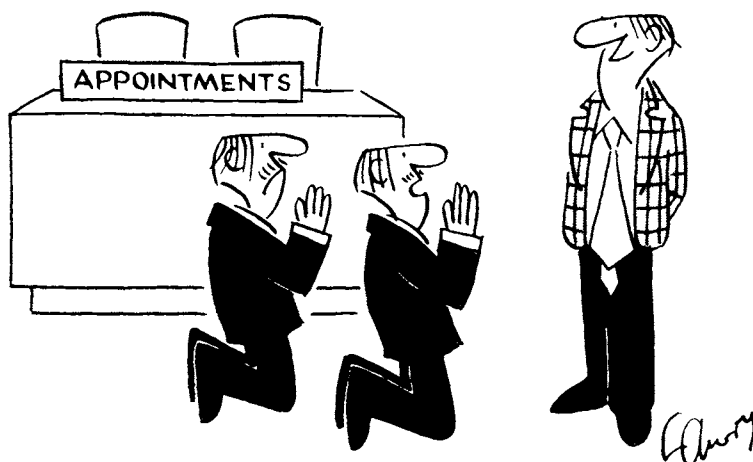
At the height of the staffing shortage, newspapers jovially reported that the biggest truants were teachers themselves.<sup>19</sup> Even hardened Australians, men 'supply' teachers sent to a different school each morning to cover staff absence, were unable to quell classroom turmoil – and were going home to bed in the afternoon with 'battle fatigue', or sliding off to the cinema. Educational psychologists pointed out that truanting pupils received counselling and social work help, while for the teachers there was nothing. The psychologists put themselves forward as staffroom therapists with whom teachers might discuss their professional traumas and disturbing classroom experiences.

Marked reluctance by teachers to begin or continue their careers in the city schools was nationally observed. Teachers from elsewhere in Scotland would not go to work in tough Glasgow, which by 1972 had 10 per cent permanent vacancies in its secondary schools. Similar reluctance to undertake urban classroom teaching was widely reported, not only in British cities, but also from New York, Sydney, Auckland and Toronto. The effect of teacher shortage in distorting the curriculum and school timetable was more devastating than crude statistics suggested. Technical, craft, mathematics and science teachers were virtually unobtainable: even head of department posts were left unfilled.

British urban teachers had fallen badly behind in pay; the relative

salary position of all teachers had been falling steadily since 1936.<sup>20</sup> At that time a teacher's salary was 91 per cent of that enjoyed by a member of parliament. In 1967 it had fallen to 43 per cent. A young teacher starting in 1973 would work for ten years before achieving the average manual wage. A Ruskin College research project, commissioned by a national union, showed that teachers were earning less than other professionals throughout their careers, the gap being especially wide among the over-35-year-olds.<sup>21</sup> It was the 25- to 40-year-old teachers who led the diaspora from the urban classroom, and indeed from the teaching profession itself. Women teachers complained they had to delay babies until they were too old to enjoy them. Some young teachers, wincing under pupil gibes that they could earn more as a waitress or minicab driver, took such jobs.

[9]



*'... and if you promise to stay for a whole year we'll give you a Scale 5.'*

A 1974 survey found large numbers of teachers among the young professionals joining the middle income flight from cities.<sup>22</sup> This was a phenomenon which had been observed world wide. Teachers gave as their main reasons for leaving the city and the urban classroom: marriage and housing difficulties, promotion, dissatisfaction with teaching or their schools, and need to widen their experience. Like other white-collar employees, teachers were refusing attractive urban posts because of inflated housing costs and the stress of the commuter life-style. Their average daily journey to work was, for instance, 17½ miles in London.

By 1974 teacher turnover in London was so high that one teacher in three was leaving each year. London's turnover, at 29.8 per cent, was twice the national average. Urban classrooms could only be staffed by enticing young, inexperienced college leavers temporarily towards the

[10] bright lights of the capital. But they soon left, for marriage, easier jobs, or because they faced a housing crisis. Most teachers were not born locally, or resident locally during teacher training, and therefore did not qualify for public housing. Indeed, some did not want the 'social death' of council tenancy. The cheap bedsitter disappeared as the private rented sector shrank, hastened by Government legislation, and property prices boomed. Yet the extraordinary inflation of house prices during the late 1960s made it at first difficult, and later impossible, for poorly paid teachers to get an initial foothold in the housing market. Some squatted. But most, reflecting an occupational preference for house ownership, sought teaching jobs in the countryside or outer suburbs where they could afford to buy a house. Many teachers, as well as politicians, administrators or inspectors who were parents, moved their families out to the suburbs, considering that children were not safe in the playground and did not learn any more in the urban classroom. Even a payment awarded nationally to teachers working in the disadvantaged urban classroom, or the additional London allowance, failed to dissuade teachers from deserting the cities.

The renamed training colleges, or 'colleges of education', expanded and boomed with activity during the early years of staffing crisis. Many new colleges opened. But most of the colleges were placed deep in the countryside or the remote suburbs. Paradoxically, although dozens of academic courses were designed and numerous books on curriculum were written by college lecturers, contact between colleges and experienced urban teachers in their classrooms was negligible. Colleges were too preoccupied with their own expansion and the need to convince their university colleagues that educational studies were academically respectable.

The colleges and university departments churned out wave after wave of young teachers who nevertheless annually deserted the urban classroom in such numbers that the training task seemed endless. That comfortable assumption was painfully reversed when in 1976 the government imposed drastic cuts in initial training places and began closing down many individual colleges. Even as late as 1973 LEA recruiting officers were globe-trotting in search of teachers. Ecstatic advertisements offered teacher training to mature entrants for city schools – attracting police officers, miners, nurses, hoteliers, actresses, opera singers and countless housewives with teenage children. These enthusiastic recruits, having been promised employment in a fruitful second career, were cruelly left outside the school gates upon qualifying in 1976, when full employment opportunities for the urban teacher vanished almost overnight.

During the years of stress the young woman teacher, arriving in the city and confronted by a turbulent classroom, was dismayed to find

she had completely lost contact with her college. She was a professional orphan on an educational conveyor belt. She was a cypher on the hieroglyphic timetable of some giant comprehensive; or, dropped anonymously into a volatile multi-ethnic primary school, was given a task for which she was quite unprepared. Young teachers in surveys complained that they had not been taught at college to teach junior children to read. Their culture shock was profound when, in the classrooms of decaying cities and industrial towns, they met children who invited them genially to 'Fuck off' and appeared unteachable.<sup>23</sup> Yet the young teacher found her senior colleagues themselves were often under such stress and so demoralized that they could offer little professional help in the early months of classroom life. The important James Report into teacher education in 1972 castigated the 'professional negligence' of headmasters and senior staff.<sup>24</sup> Young teachers were given full timetables, difficult classes, a cursory chat and an occasional cup of tea, instead of receiving a proper programme of support in their first year. The James Committee prescribed instead that each young teacher be released from the classroom for one day a week in the probationary year; to prepare lesson materials, observe other colleagues, learn about the urban background or just draw breath. It also recommended that experienced teachers should be given a term's secondment every seven years to research, work in industry or convalesce by travel. But the economic crisis delayed action on this valuable report except in a few experimental education authorities. So young teachers continued to be propelled into the urban classroom as pedagogic cannon fodder.

Young teachers were now a majority in the urban classroom, often sharing the pop culture, fashion interests and politics of their own pupils. In 1974 63 per cent of London's teachers were under 35, and 34 per cent were 21–25. Not surprisingly, professional manners and style changed emphatically during the urban classroom crisis. Fastidious, even objectionable, demands traditionally made by head teachers concerning the appearance, dress or deportment of younger colleagues were no longer heard. Young teachers had a limited amount of spare cash and could not afford party dresses. Anyway the primary classroom was a messy, practical arena suited to working clothes. An urban head teacher could not afford to criticize the class teacher, for whatever he, the parents or the pupils themselves thought privately, any barely competent teacher was a valuable colleague whom you certainly didn't go out of your way to offend.

Undeniably, these trends occasionally led to problems of classroom authority and control, or confusion between personal and professional identity.<sup>25</sup> The fashionably militant or sexually provocative young teacher of teenagers ran the risk of inflaming passion, mutual infatua-



[12] tion or classroom indiscipline. Love affairs between young teachers and girl sixth formers gained such press notoriety that in 1975 the National Union of Teachers, other unions following suit, issued guidelines which specifically barred teachers from having sex with their pupils. Officials explained that while it would be hypocrisy to say that 16- to 18-year-old girls were not attractive, young teachers were nevertheless advised to seek their girlfriends away from the classroom.

The indefatigable Marje Proops, a national figure and agony columnist of the *Daily Mirror*, informed her mesmerized readers: 'Teachers have told me how sexy girls pursue them both in and out of school. Schoolgirls have actually asked me to tell them how they can get their teacher into bed. A code for teachers may be a good idea – and reassuring for parents.'

A predominantly youthful, urban teaching profession also placed greater emphasis on women's liberation and sexual freedom. It was not surprising therefore to find homosexuality publicly championed in union meetings; and press publicity for a teacher who had openly held hands and kissed his male friend on the way home from school, and impenitently discussed these sexual proclivities with girl pupils.<sup>26</sup> Yet apart from a glaring minority, most young urban teachers were not professionally irresponsible. Waller has described how a hundred years ago the schoolmistress in the small American town was expected to go to bed early and do her courting only on Sundays. For the young city teacher of the 1970s it was very much the same. She was likely to go to bed early on week nights, restricting her love-life to weekends; but less for reasons of moral propriety than because the daily emotional and physical strain of the urban classroom demanded peak athletic condition for survival.

Changes in professional lifestyle and career patterns, and a generation gap in the staffroom transformed teacher politics.<sup>27</sup> Differences ran deep. Older teachers already owned their own houses, which rapidly gained value during this period; young teachers scraped for a mortgage deposit, while their professional poverty was further sharpened by high rents.<sup>28</sup> The gap in life-style between urban teachers themselves widened continually. Staffroom relationships polarized over such matters as curriculum, discipline, school organization and internal politics. Older teachers, tired after decades of stress, suspiciously resisted curriculum changes and other innovations, such as counselling, proposed by their younger colleagues or even the headmaster.<sup>29</sup> They predicted that the team teaching or mixed ability innovation would be left in their lap after the younger staff proposing them had left for greener pastures or promotion, or that they would have to sustain an experiment they had originally opposed as possibly weakening social control in the school. The departed 25- to 40-year-olds, the 'lost genera-

tion' whose chairs stood empty in the staffroom, might have mediated these quarrels and smoothed edgy tempers – but they had gone. The older teachers were often right. Many young teachers leap-frogged from school to school for the slightest promotion or salary advantage. A post of responsibility, carrying an additional hundred pounds a year, could reasonably be expected after a year of urban teaching. If you taught craft, music or religious education in an urban secondary school, you might lead your own department within two terms. Before the war, older teachers resentfully remarked, it had not been unusual to wait ten years for your first promotion.

Not surprisingly, such feverish staff turnover often resulted in teachers failing to identify with the children they taught. Cases were recorded of urban secondary schools where the average length of stay for teachers was seven months. Primary children as well as exam pupils in the comprehensives could suffer as many as twenty changes of teacher in a term, to the disruption of classroom life and curriculum progress. Worse still, the social cohesiveness of each school community was visibly sabotaged.

The hierarchy of headmaster and senior staff, with their administrative duties and comfortable offices, nicknamed the 'gerontocracy along the corridor', was often derided and disliked. At the same time the 'collegial' staffroom, in which the headmaster discussed all policy with senior staff, grew increasingly common, particularly in the larger comprehensive schools. Teachers spent hours lobbying and politicking over school decisions, in a miniature democracy of endless committee meetings and a vortex of after-school bureaucracy. Equally time-consuming, but far less productive, were the staffroom cliques, brewing coffee and dissent on the Bunsen burner in the science lab, in the metalwork shop or housecraft flat.

Inter-generational friction among teachers became explosive when transferred to union politics.<sup>30</sup> The main teacher unions fragmented. An NUT splinter group, Rank and File, formed in 1968, was soon producing its own newspaper.<sup>31</sup> Politically, Rank and File was mixed, containing a high proportion of international socialists, some Marxists and Trotskyists and even a few communists. The active membership of Rank and File, an estimated nucleus of 150 teachers, was concentrated in cities like Liverpool and London. It was they, and young urban teachers in other small organizations, who typically voted their support for schoolchildren on strike. Radical young teachers produced their own samizdat magazines and underground press.<sup>32</sup> The 'new English' movement in London launched *Teaching London Kids*, and other groups, including the educational psychologists, had their publications, with names like *Hard Cheese* or *Black Bored*.

Historical tensions often propel individual heroes into public view;

[14] such was the background of the Christopher Searle affair.<sup>33</sup> A left-winger, teaching English in an East End secondary school, Searle encouraged his pupils to write angry political poems and stories about local life. His headmaster, author of the standard British text on the teacher and the law,<sup>34</sup> thought the respect of pupils for the authority of the school had been weakened. Searle was sacked, then afterwards reinstated, amid much publicity. As time went by, such confrontations became unnecessary. Teachers like Searle, whose perceived commitment to the urban child led them to reject the traditional classroom, were increasingly able to find public employment running adventure playgrounds or alternative schools within the system.

Rivalry between the teachers' organizations sharpened.<sup>35</sup> Three new teacher organizations were formed: the reorganized Union of Women Teachers, the Professional Association of Teachers, and one wholly Welsh-speaking union. The PAT, founded in 1970, soon claimed 6,000 members who disapproved of the militancy of other unions and pledged themselves never to go on strike. Hilarious shotgun marriages took place, made necessary by new laws against sexual discrimination but also improving negotiating strength. One example was the conjunction of the National Association of Schoolmasters, noted for their male chauvinism, and the Union of Women Teachers.<sup>36</sup> By 1977 their membership had grown to 90,000.

Professional combativeness among the dissatisfied teachers grew. During the salary campaign of 1973 feeling ran so high that a rally of 2,000 London teachers at the Central Hall, Westminster turned into a bear garden.<sup>37</sup> Proceedings were disrupted by left wingers who pulled out microphone cables and tried to take over the meeting, bringing on darkness, scuffles, punches and chaos. Executive members could not make their speeches, six Labour MPs prematurely abandoned the platform, and police stood anxiously by – although in the event they did not make any arrests.

Teacher militancy had finally reached fever pitch when in 1974 more than 15,000 teachers marched in procession from Hyde Park to the House of Commons in a salary protest. Price inflation and low salaries had emptied the city classrooms of teachers. The secondary schools system in London and other major cities was in imminent danger of collapse.

The teachers who marched expressed a common viewpoint, and by no means conformed to the popular stereotype of the left-wing agitator. Certainly, control of teacher politics in London and other cities was in the hands of communist teachers, who were thus able to influence policy; but the communist teacher-politicians enjoying power in London, and elsewhere, were classroom traditionalists rather than revolutionaries.<sup>38</sup> They were depicted even by their own Rank and