

## LEARNING ABOUT PEACE

A good deal of History, as a school subject, consists of the study of war. This seems to raise little controversy.

Recently, a new subject called Peace Studies has begun to appear here and there on some school timetables, or in special projects or extra-curricular events. About this there has been a fair old outcry, with every stereotypic emotive screech being pulled out of the trash-can for hurling. Brainwashing; political; Marxist; Catholic-inspired; Red; anarchist; each of these bad tomatoes, and many others, have been splatted vigorously and indignantly at the modest title Peace Studies.

To my mind there is brainwashing in the case. It happened long before Peace Studies were introduced into the curricula of a few schools. It happened, for example, when the British became persuaded that the word political means embarrassing, distressing and in bad taste. In a sense, all human behaviour is political, whether awarely or no. The brainwashing happened when anarchy, the most elevated and sophisticated political system ever dreamed of, became a word of condemnation, with the conversational meaning of chaos or nihilism. Yes, go and look up the root meaning in your dictionary, please.

So, the task for teachers and others introducing Peace as a study is to unpick some wrong and strongly held assumptions, as well as to feed in data that is incontrovertible.

As a tiny sample of this incontrovertible data, we have as a species, in what are laughingly called the developed nations, stockpiled a nuclear arsenal with the power to destroy the world ten times. You go into overkill. We go into mega-kill. You go into mega-wega-kill. We go into mega-wega-bega-dega-kill. When all the time we could have bopped the lot of us right out of the sky with our tinsy overkill.

We are in the midst of the ultimate mad nursery game, discounting the glaring truth that an annihilating retaliatory nuclear force is, as Blake might have said, Enough. Or too much. No satisfactory logic can be found for mega-wega-kill, even by people of such limited and defensive egocentric reasoning that they like to be sure they can instantly annihilate the world.

To achieve this gratuitous kill-us-all-ten-times, (We ain't cats. We don't have no nine lives, mister) we have locked into that arsenal enough wealth properly to feed the one third of the world's population who are at this moment as you read, starving, or suffering the multiplicity of disease brought about by poverty and long-term malnutrition.

When facts like these go mostly unnoticed, the challenge is to discover ways which are in themselves peaceful and life enhancing, to let pupils - to let anybody - enlighten themselves. The challenge is to make learning structures in which people can reach their own sane conclusions about how they are to conduct their lives, in the light of the facts.

What follows is an account by a worker in the Peace Education Project, James McCarthy, of just one small educational experiment among the many being introduced by his organisation.

Gaie Houston

James McCarthy

## AGENDA CONFERENCE

Put 30 young people from three countries together in a large house in rural Surrey, feed them with facts and views on war, racism, appropriate technology and environmental destruction, and invite them to establish and present their views on the kind of world they would like to inhabit in 20 years' time - and what do you get?

By the end of the Agenda conference when participants were making their presentations, it was clear there was enough vitality, enthusiasm and commitment in the first three days of the event to prove that our gamble had been well worth taking. A gamble partly for financial reasons - the sponsoring organisations have still not received the promised grant from the Greater London Council on which the event was based; but also because we could never be certain we had provided the right kind of format to entice 14 to 18-year olds to forgo £20 and up to a week of their holidays for what amounted to several days of hard work. In the end all seemed to have thoroughly enjoyed the week, and many of us had learnt a great deal as well.