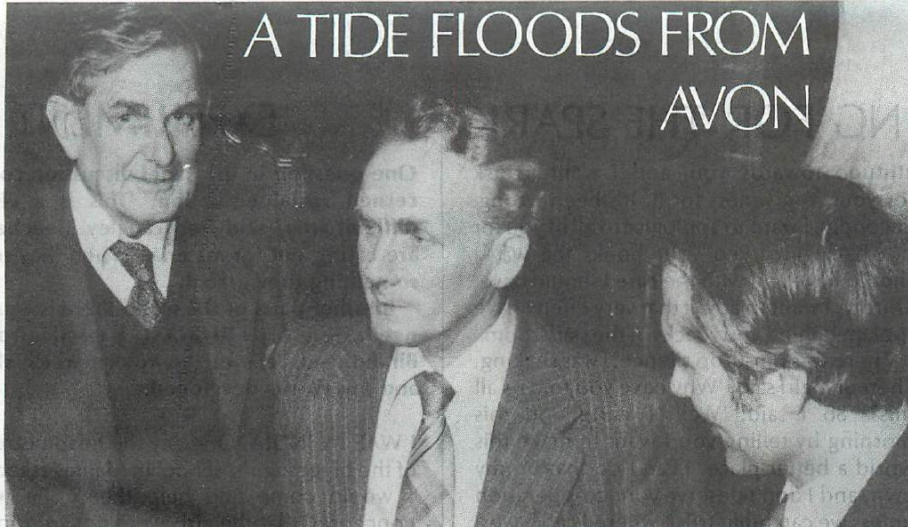


A TIDE FLOODS FROM AVON



Councillors Robert Smith (left) and Albert Lowe with Peter Coleman at Tirley Garth.

A TV NEWS STORY about a Bristol supermarket's ban on pupils from the nearby secondary school for shoplifting started a far-reaching trail of events. The latest stage on the trail was a conference last month of 150 people at Tirley Garth, the MRA conference centre in Cheshire.

Fred Langley, headmaster of Lockleaze Comprehensive School in Bristol, told the conference about it. 'The whole tone of that TV story was, "This is the school's fault,"' he said. 'When we Bristol headmasters next met we considered it. What could we do when the standards we are expected to instil are increasingly not instilled by society at large?'

Their deliberations led to the publication last year by the Education Committee of Avon County Council—the county in which Bristol lies—or a report setting out the responsibilities of school, home and society in fostering the moral development of children (see page 4). It attracted wide attention in the press.

But what next? Councillor Robert Smith of Avon, together with civic leaders from other counties, called a conference at Tirley Garth and invited teachers, doctors, the police, school governors and leaders of the immigrant communities to meet with some of the initiators of the report and consider how to reverse the trends it details. The conference was held on the last weekend in November.

'Twenty-two years from the end of this century,' wrote the civic leaders in their invitation, 'society is fundamentally unsettled, integrity denied, divisions grow between clashing sections of the community, and violence increases.'

'The next century belongs to those now at school and their children. What lamp can be lit for them, to give a light which will continue to shine?'



A Weeks

Peter Coleman, Assistant Director of Education, Avon

Tirley Garth is a country house with a glorious view across the Cheshire plain to the distant hills, covered on this occasion by a deep layer of snow. All the work was done

on a voluntary basis. Members of the conference could be seen helping with the washing up, cooking and other tasks.

There was a note of urgency underlying each of the discussions. As Alfred Stocks, Chief Executive of the City of Liverpool, chairing one session, said, 'The fashion for depravity and decadence is threatening the foundations of our society.' Mr Langley pointed out that 30% of his pupils come from one-parent families, and this is not unusual. 'Parents give their children everything but time,' he said. 'But we are long on diagnosis and short on cure.' The purpose of the Tirley Garth conference was to seek out moves towards cure.

The conference was opened by Councillor Albert Lowe of Cheshire, who then handed over to Councillor Smith to chair the first session. In this session Mr Langley described how, following the TV programme about schoolboys' shoplifting, the Avon secondary heads had set up a working party of eight which produced a draft report in October 1976. 'If you can get 65 heads to agree on anything, that is a miracle,' he said. But surprisingly it was adopted with only one dissenting voice. This draft was the basis of the report finally issued by the Avon Education Committee.



A Weeks

Fred Langley, Bristol Headmaster

Peter Coleman, Assistant Director of Education for Avon, then told of the response to the report. Many newspapers, local and national, had carried articles. *The Daily Telegraph* called it 'so far the most valuable contribution to the Great Debate'—the debate on British education launched by the Prime Minister. *The Guardian* described it as an attack on the 'double standards' in our society.

Four thousand copies had been circulated and there had been requests by many to reproduce it. They had received far more replies than is normal when a consultative paper is circulated, the vast majority supporting it and only 1% opposed.

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They have now followed it up by sending to each child's home a set of guidelines which deals with the respective responsibilities of the school, the parents and the child.

'When you see something that needs to be changed, do you sit back and do nothing?' asked Mr Coleman. 'We realise we have taken on a big task. We are setting out to change society. This won't happen overnight. We are talking in terms of generations. But someone has to start somewhere.'

A Weeks



Superintendent Deryck Johnson, Manchester

Councillor Smith told how, when this initiative came up before the Council, he 'knew that this was an opportunity to talk about moral standards'.

'I have never done this in public before,' he said. 'I have never had the courage. But this time I said, "Standards have got to be born within a person. If we expect them to be honest and not to cheat, we should say so." In Avon Council people always interject what they think. I was delighted to hear the people around me say, "Yes, that's right." I said to them, "It's time we talked about these things."'

'When we started this thing two years ago we were trying to give society a push,' he ended up. 'Well, it certainly got a push.'

Superintendent Deryck Johnson of the Greater Manchester Police, who was representing the Chief Constable, pointed out that there was a deliberate attempt on the part of some people to undermine a moral, caring, law-abiding climate. 'We must not buck the issue,' he said. 'We must speak out.'

Through speeches, open session, and panel discussions, the conference considered how to create the right climate in the country. 'When we are in trouble the Marxists are always there, ready to help—often capitalising on our troubles,' said Habib Ur Rahman, Vice-President of the UK Islamic Association. 'But you have the ideas our people need. Will you come and help us?'

AVON contd p4

SEARCHING FOR THE SPARK

Chairing one session of the conference, Alfred Stocks, Chief Executive of Liverpool, described those who initiated the Avon report as 'in the tradition of the Wesley brothers, who, from the same area of the country, successfully reversed the trend of history in their century'.

He went on to introduce Joy Weeks and Ann Rignall, who have taught in several parts of Britain and elsewhere, and are joint authors of the handbook on social education, 'The Way Ahead'. 'They have mined out in their experience the ingredients of an answer to the situation our country faces,' said Mr Stocks. Speaking at the conference JOY WEEKS said:

SOME YEARS AGO I was teaching in the Midlands. I desperately wanted to see the situation change. The pupils never listened to what I had to say. Half the time they did not do the work I set. Several were away more than they were at school. They were rude and insolent and thoroughly unco-operative. Sometimes as individuals they were quite pleasant, but never en masse.

Discipline at home was either very strict, or there was no discipline at all with parents out at work and children going home to empty houses.

Shaking

One day I poured out all my feelings to some friends. One of them asked me, 'Do you think it is a privilege for your students to have you as a teacher? Or do you think it is a privilege for you to have the future generation in your hands?'

I was convinced that the students were extremely privileged to have me as a teacher. I came from a professional home background. I'd had a private education both in school and college. I had passed out well from a good drama school.

These kids came from homes the like of which I'd never seen before. I reckoned it was terrific of me to go up there to the Black country when I could have been teaching in Swanage, by the sea.

As I pondered it, the awful thought came to me that the situation in the school might be largely because of me, and not because of the students.

Then I started to think seriously about the way I was living. I asked God to show me the truth about myself. Three thoughts came: 'You are superior in your attitudes. You do not correct your books adequately. When you find students difficult, you talk about them behind their backs in the staff-room and put all the other staff against them.'

Then I thought, 'Now, how do I make a really new start?' Gradually the conviction came to me that I could never start afresh unless I could put something right. So I took what I considered a very big risk. I told my class that I had come to a decision that I wanted to be part of making this world a better place to live in. They didn't pay much attention.

Then I said, 'I've had a very superior

attitude towards you, and I want to ask for your forgiveness for it. It's been wrong. Secondly, I want to apologise to all of you for not having marked your books the way I should have and with the care I should have. Thirdly, I want to admit that very often I have spoken behind your backs in the staff-room.'

There was pin-drop silence. I was shaking. Then one girl said, 'Why have you told us all this?' So I said, 'Well, I started off this morning by telling you I want to make this world a better place. I can't do that on my own, and I don't deserve your co-operation unless we can build trust, where I can have a respect for you and you can gain a respect for me.' We had a great discussion.

They didn't all become angels. But trust began to grow. I was teaching the 'B' stream, the ones who were not the best academically. Usually positions of responsibility in the school went to people in the 'A' stream. The next year, when these girls became seniors, half of those who had responsible positions in the school came from my class.

Poverty

This experience has given me my convictions and commitment now. We have got to somehow multiply people who are courageous enough to live what they talk about. It has made me search, too, for the thing that makes people say, 'If that could happen, it would be worth changing.'

When I was in New Zealand a year ago, I visited a boys' school. We talked about all sorts of things—the world, poverty. I was looking all the time in our discussions for what was the thing that will make these boys say, 'If that could be different, then it would be worth being honest.' I searched and searched.

After being with two or three classes, I began to realise that the thing they were deeply concerned about was family life. Many of them had divorced parents. They were scared about the future. They were not sure whether they could bring up children in the way they would have liked to be brought up. Ever since then, I have been working at this: 'What is going to make people want to move into a different sphere, begin to find a reason big enough to be honest, to be unselfish, to be clean-living? What is the spark that we have got to light in people?'

'The error of the so-called permissive society is the illusion that a better society can be created by dulling the conscience. This contradicts the whole of history. Every social advance is based upon sharpening the conscience, upon concern for others. The essence of the permissive society is self-gratification, and this is incompatible with concern for others.'

DR KIM BEAZLEY, Australian Minister of Education in the 1972-5 Labor Government.

EXPERIMENT IN

One question in the panel discussion concerned social education. 'This is a very difficult area,' said Fred Langley. 'Teachers are crying out for material. When they see something they grab it.'

In other parts of the world there is equal need. Here ANN RIGNALL, a teacher from Birkenhead, tells of the course which she and Joy Weeks developed.

I WAS IN INDIA. One day the headmistress of the biggest girls' school in Madras asked if I would come and help them. She was concerned that the girls were not going out of her school with a purpose and direction in life.

The school had girls from very affluent homes. The headmistress told us about two sisters who had a quarrel before they came to school, and therefore travelled in two different cars with drivers.

Before starting, I said to the headmistress, 'What do you think is the main problem in the school?' Without hesitation she said, 'Selfishness.' I was surprised. She said, 'These girls don't care anything about anybody else except themselves. How do we help them to think of other people?'

We worked with three senior classes in the school. I met with the teachers once a month. They did most of the teaching. I had to put over to them what was in my mind. We started by taking a look at the world, to make these girls aware of what was going on in their own country and further afield. Maybe there was racial tension somewhere, political rivalries, religious wars. We tried to get at the root causes of what was happening—was it fear, was it hate, was it selfishness? This was something that every child knew about.

No preaching

Having looked at the world in which we live, we moved on to the standards on which a new society could be built. We tried to do this by discussion and practical experiment. And also by reasoning. For instance, one day we asked, 'What do you think about the politicians?' These girls certainly had opinions about them, saying they were corrupt and power-seeking and pushed each other for positions.

Then I said to them, 'How many of you have travelled on a bus without paying your fare?' There were grins all round the class. So I said, 'What relation does your dishonesty have with the dishonesty of the politicians?' Again, light began suddenly to dawn in the classroom. I said, 'Well, if you go into a shop and get the wrong change, are you happy?' 'No, no.' They realised what they had said. They were quite happy to be dishonest themselves but they didn't like the effects of other people being dishonest with them. Then we got them experimenting. For example, to try being absolutely honest for a few days and to see what happened.

One day one of the teachers was very worried about the relationship between her class and a parallel class. They wouldn't do

AN INDIAN SCHOOL

anything with each other. Because of that need we created a topic on friendship.

We found that when we gave a questionnaire to the girls, many of them asked such things as, 'What do you do when you want to do something you know is wrong?' So we had a topic on what we called 'Keeping on the right path'.

We were encouraged when the teachers began to tell of the change in attitudes in their classes. One teacher said to me, 'A mother of one of my girls came the other day and said, "What has happened to my daughter? She hardly ever fights with her brother now."' Other girls had said they had decided not to lie to their teacher or parents. We began to notice a concern for other people. The girls began to want to do something to help people less fortunate than themselves.

And we found that the teachers began to enjoy teaching these lessons. I don't think they always found it easy, because you didn't always know what was going to happen, and they found they needed to get involved, to decide where they stood on things. With some teachers it meant change.

After working with this school, Joy and I were invited to visit many parts of the country to give seminars for teachers on what we had been doing. We had a month with trainee teachers in the very north of India, in Darjeeling. They were mostly men. Half of them were Anglo-Indians, very westernised. The other half were mostly older men from Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, and from the hill states in the north of India, and would go back to very responsible jobs.

We decided that we wanted to pass on to them the faith and the commitment that we had and to give them a chance to find the same thing. At the end of the time we gave them a questionnaire. One young man wrote, 'When we heard we were going to have a course on morals we decided to be thoroughly unco-operative. Your first lecture took us by surprise. We thought that was the softening-up process for the preachy stuff to come. But the preachy stuff never came. So we got interested in spite of ourselves.'

'The Way Ahead' is available from Grosvenor Books, 54 Lyford Rd, London SW18 3JJ. Price £2.50, p&p 40p.

'I want India to have schools and colleges where the aim of the teachers is to produce unselfish, fearless and faith-filled men and women. Where students learn that India will become what they make of her. Where they decide, too, that the world is their responsibility. Where they discover that the object of knowledge is service.'

RAJMOHAN GANDHI, quoted in the invitation to an education conference at Asia Plateau, the MRA centre in India, to be held at the end of December.



A panel discussion chaired by Councillor Smith (centre). L to r: Fred Langley, Dr Molly Richards, Peter Coleman, Ann Rignall, Superintendent Deryck Johnson, Joy Weeks, Conrad Hunte.

Frightening silence

JOY WEEKS

I SAID TO A CLASS in Sydney, 'Is it true that young people are afraid of silence?' There was an immediate response. Some of them liked silence. One said, 'I get very annoyed if somebody talks to me when I am fishing.' Another liked reading. Others said that even when they were doing their home-work they had to have the radio on.

Then I said, 'We are now going to experiment with silence.' I gave them all a piece of paper and said, 'Now, will you write down every single sound you can hear, particularly the ones you have never noticed before?'

There was dead silence. After three or four minutes I said, 'What did you write? Let's have one sound from each of you.'

'My watch ticking', 'the boy next door breathing', 'the sound of pencils on the paper', 'the hissing of the radiators'.

Then I said, 'We will be quiet again. This time write down any thought that goes through your mind.' Immediately heads went down and they started to write. There was as profound a silence the second time as there had been the first. Then I asked three questions: 'Did anyone think of anything to do with your homes?' Several put their

hands up. 'Did any of you think of anything to do with school?' A lot put their hands up.

'Did any of you write down anything that was worrying you?' They all put up their hands.

So then we talked about what you do with your worries, who you talk to about them. Is it your parents? Is it your friends? It disturbed me deeply that many of them said they talked to nobody.

I was able to tell them about a young girl whom I had taught. This girl had a very difficult situation in her family. She talked it over with me. I didn't know what to do. So I said to her, 'You know that I believe that God can speak to me. Why don't we be quiet for a minute and see if you get any thought which might help in your situation?'

She had one thought—to go home every night after school, prepare the tea and clean the house, so that when her mother came back from the factory she didn't have to do it all.

That girl stuck to her decision. And over the next months a change began to come in that family.

I told these students this story. And I left them with the idea, 'Well, silence may be more productive than we realise. There may be a source of strength in silence to which you can turn.'

Shoplifting ended

AFFIRMING the Avon County Council's stress on moral standards, the conference invitation stated: 'Surely no one has any right to expect anyone else to be more honest, righteous or charitable than he or she is prepared to be.' This was illustrated at one session by young people who are training in world responsibility and faith at Tisbury Garth.

'I got involved in the drug scene and had to go to court for shoplifting,' said Mary Jane Richards from Norwich. Her parents had given her everything they could—a good education, love, independence. She always felt she was welcome at home whatever she did. 'But one thing I had to find for myself was a purpose in life.'

'At an MRA conference I met the biggest challenge I'd ever been given. I felt that I was needed to remake the world. I began to see where I am part of what has gone wrong in the world and what I can do to create the new society. I wrote and apologised to the shops I'd stolen from.' Mary Jane's father,

Councillor George Richards, was one of those who called the conference.

John Mann, from London, said, 'I decided that I was going to be honest with my parents about things hidden from them. It was not easy. But I've found a new unity with them as a result.'

When such change happens at home it affects school. Annette Raetzer, a student from Germany, told how, having settled differences in her family, she was able to help her schoolmates. 'Last year I learnt to care for people in my class individually. I baked cakes for those who had birthdays. Eventually everybody else took part as well. Some friends and I had sales to raise money for the needy favelados in Rio de Janeiro.'

These young people carried much of the practical running of the conference. 'At university I worked for my own benefit,' said Edward Howard, a mathematics graduate. 'Here I have learned to work for people.'

Alistair Miles, from Australia, said he had always pictured himself soaking up the sun on a Pacific island. 'I'm an apathetic person who likes the quiet comfortable life. I don't

SHOPLIFTING contd p4

CASUALTIES OF FALLING STANDARDS

An extract from the Avon Education Service report, 'External influences and pressures in secondary schools'.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS are making progress in the education which they offer to young people. There are increasing course opportunities, a developing social unity, and a search for higher standards. However, it would be foolish to pretend all is perfect.

From time to time one or other of our secondary schools is the subject of unwelcome publicity. The immediate cause may be allegations of violence, dishonesty, vandalism or immorality, but the implications seem to be that in an increasingly violent, dishonest, vandalistic and immoral society, our schools should be temples of pure thought, speech and action.

Society's expectations

How realistic is it to expect schools to set and maintain high standards in all these areas irrespective of the standards demonstrated by the society external to the school? Some of the props which used to support the schools in their old roles have collapsed, or at least been weakened, placing a heavier burden on the schools.

The family unit

Is it by chance that the most stable of our pupils often seem to come from the homes where family cohesion is given something of its old priority? Pursuit of new priorities—of personal satisfaction, pursuit of pleasure and the worship of physical gratification—demand regular and continuously rising incomes. The casualties are often the children. The regular job and as much overtime as can be worked for both parents so often means that the physical and emotional needs of the children are not even noticed, or if noticed, relegated to low priority or even passed over to schools or other agencies.

Most of us have learned the futility of pious exhortation when dealing with young people

but we know how ardently they copy what they see and hear.

In the post-war period we have seen a terrifying increase in the percentage of marriages which end in separation and divorce. Perhaps the cultivation of the over-romantic image coupled with easier divorce has led us too easily to accept the break-up of the marriage as the way out of these tensions. Whatever the causes, the casualties of these broken marriages are the children. The physical and emotional deprivation which can follow sometimes has profound and disturbing effects on them.

The role of the family will inevitably change, and it is not being suggested that the old authoritarian attitudes are desirable. Genuine support, concern, interest and love are the qualities which will give children what they need.

Moral values

Moral standards and values based on an acceptance of the Christian ethic have not only been allowed to crumble away through neglect, but have been actively attacked by those for whom the only worthwhile objective is total freedom for the individual to do, write and say what he pleases free from all inhibitions and regardless of the effect on others. Sex is treated as an end in itself, obscenity is free expression, dishonesty is only self-help, yet in the middle of all this we have the same paradox. Schools are expected to be untouched by it.

Many retain the old values, but are too often silent in the face of the vocal extremists who appear then to represent a greater section of society than is the case.

The role of the media

It is easy to seek scapegoats for the present state of society, and frequently the media are cast in this role. It is greatly to be hoped

that they will feel able to be involved in the sort of action suggested in this paper to influence opinion for the general improvement of society, and to stem the tide of deteriorating standards. To many observers, the 'media' do seem to concentrate their attention on confrontation, the sensational, the trivial, the violent and the titillating to the exclusion of any presentation of the perhaps duller virtues of honesty, fidelity, consideration and generosity.

The law

There is a substantially firm structure of law dealing with many of the problems we face, but its enforcement is sadly neglected, as too few people are prepared to take it seriously. The law concerning school attendance, the age of consent, licensing laws for pubs, clubs and cinemas are designed to protect young people, but anyone in close contact with them must feel that these laws are falling into contempt.

Action

The question remains, 'What are we to do about it?' Should schools not concentrate more on their true educative role, including, particularly, constructive social education programmes for the next generation of parents? In this they must not be afraid to draw attention to the root causes of the ills of society of which many of our pupils have such scarring and bitter experience. They should involve parents themselves in discussion with them to identify and agree on the really important standards of morality and behaviour which they believe to be crucial.

The wider debate which we seek may help to achieve a greater consensus within society and lead to the partnership which is essential for all our children.

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Conrad Hunte, former Vice-Captain of the West Indies Cricket Team, said, 'Men like myself have for too long held up before Britain her mistakes of the past. Does this trap the possibilities of creation which must be released once more for the sake of mankind? I have decided to live to help Britain be the best she can be.'

The last session was an open forum in which many people, young and old, spoke on what they were going to do. 'We need to rally the solid, Christian people to participate in our democratic institutions, to attend meetings, to take office,' said Don Simpson from Kelsall. 'Then we wouldn't worry about the wrong people getting the headlines.' He and others are working to do this through presentations of the play, *Keir Hardie—The Man They Could Not Buy*.

'I've often taken assemblies at school,' said John Scarth, a Manchester teacher. 'But I need to live every day what I talk about there, to have the courage to challenge what is wrong.'

The conference was enriched by participants from several other countries. 'After meeting an Ethiopian exile here,' said Harry Pople, a Bristol teacher, 'I realise the freedom we enjoy in Britain. I am going to give all I've got to carry forward this move to preserve and strengthen its moral and spiritual basis.'

A Scottish teacher summed up what the conference had meant to her, 'It has led me to open my mind towards that new dimension of living, first on a personal level, then on a national and an international level.' by *Edwin Noble, former President of Manchester Teachers' Association.*

SHOPLIFTING contd from p3

like taking responsibility for anything because if something goes wrong I look like a fool.' But he has decided to come and play a part in the work of Tirley Garth. 'If you want someone to accept responsibility,' he said, 'then you will have to help them to face the Cross of Christ. And you can only do that if you have faced the Cross yourself.' **GI**

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