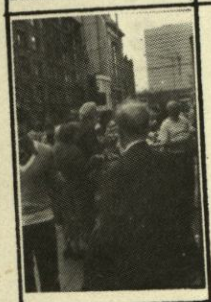
25p

WRITE ON 10

STORIES

POEMS

Joan Batchelor, Joe Smythe, Ian Thorpe, Bill Pavlides, Nick Ripley, Dave Prestbury, Phil Boyd, Keith Stephens, Wilf Carr, Kevin Otoo.



ARTICLES

PLUS

Writing from a battered women's refuge, the Gatehouse Project, and kids at the Withington Festival.

September '79 Issue

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Illustrations: Pages 11,15,27,31: Wendy Whitfield; Pages 32,33: Katherine MacDonald; Pages 42,44: Dave MacDonald; Pages 45, 57,65 Greg Monks.

INTRODUCTION

At last.....WRITE ON 10!!! Old readers of the more or less tatty Write Ons 1-9 stand back in amazement at the new, quality look. New readers, of whom there will be several hundred if we are not to be up to our arm pits in unsold copies, wonder what all the fuss is about. WRITE ON is now a quarterly magazine of writing by and for working people. The material comes mainly from the Commonword workshop (see back cover for more details), but also from the other writers' groups in the area - Rochdale, Hulme and the Gatehouse project in Blackely. We are also interested in writing that people send us through the post - poems, stories, articles, letters, abuse.....WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

Old readers will be familiar with work by John Koziol, Celia Roberts, Joe Smythe and the rest. But there are new names as well. Joan Batchelor, whose poems here are a foretaste of a whole collection due to be published this autumn; John Gowling who has been taking the workshop by storm with his stories; and Dave Prestbury who turned up one day with poems by the dozen..... For the first time we are publishing a couple of non-fiction articles, the first being a run down of British politics since the days of "Unflappable Mac" as seen from a working class point of view; while the second takes up the question of who writes and reads and why.....This being 1979, we thought we would turn over the centre page to kids and let them say what they thought about being nine or ten in the Year of the Child.

Commonword needs your support. If you write or can do illustrations, we want to hear from you. If you can sell copies of WRITE ON (worthwhile commission paid), we want to hear from you. And if you like (or even hated) this magazine, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

PHIL BOYD

THE DAY TRIP

On the coach Lynn was still fighting a losing battle with two bored kids. Dave had copped out, he was asleep. he shifted slightly, grunted.

Lynn thought, "Typical. He's a good looking bugger, though, I've got to give him that."

Her husband, the father of two kids wasn't touched by seven years of marriage. His face was still almost girlish, almost pretty. He'd got a bit bigger, heavier, harder in body but she thought it unfair the way time was being kind to him.

The kids squabbled listlessly.

"Cut it out! If your dad wakes up, he'll kill you."

She bent, picked up the doll Linda had discarded. Its legs stuck out at unlikely angles. She straightened them, looked at the frozen smile on its dirty plastic face, the half bald head with straggly nylon hair.

"You're just like me, aren't you?" she silently asked its battered blandness. "Hardly out of the cellophane and already scruffy. She'll soon lose your head, or pull off one of your legs. Then you'll end up in the bin."

The doll stared back, blankfaced, one eye half closed. Lynda sleepily grabbed it, dragged it close to her pudgy body.

Lynn, trying to avoid her reflection in the window, looked beyond it.

"Look Jamie, sheep."

The boy registered the vanishing woolly blobs.

"Can I have a bucket and spade when we get there, can I?"

"I've told you, we're not going to the seaside, there's no beach."

"What is there then?"

"A big lake with boats and things."

"I want to go to the seaside."

"Oh, shut up! You're as bad as your dad. You can't go to the seaside, if you behave yourself, you can go on a boat."

Lynn returned to the magazine on her knee. She couldn't get any enjoyment out of its stories. Something inside her denied their escapism, their easy answers.

"Love's a con," she thought. "It's OK when you're a kid, gives you summat to dream about. But it doesn't last, it doesn't really exist does it.It's not fair, the way you get trapped by the things you think you want."

They arrived. People on the coach stood up, grabbed bags, kids, streamed out into the car park.

Dave hefted the heavy carpet bag, all the things needed for a day's survival away from the house, sandwiches, drinks, nappies, a damp face cloth in a plastic bag.

Lynn unfolded the trolley, sat Lynda in it.

"How far is it to this lake?" Dave asked her.

"I dunno, a fair bit I think. We've got to go through the town."

The town was pleasant but didn't try to be quaint. It was just a backdrop to their walk. Once or twice Lynn stopped to look at antiques, faded vases or dark, solid chairs. She tried to imagine these things in her own home, failed.

One window stopped her dead. Inbetween polished bits of local stone were stuffed animals. Two ducklings, soft, fluffy, obscene in new born innocence.

"Oh, that's horrible."

"What is, oh I dunno, it's only like making things out of leather and that."

Dave stared fascinated. The only other stuffed animals he'd ever seen had been dusty, lumpy distorted shapes. These were impossibly alive, frozen in potential movement. The kids stared with him, not realising these things had ever been alive.

Hot and tired they eventually reached the lake. The kids responded with a fresh burst of energy. They chased along the lakeside, approached ridiculous pompous ducks, backed away gingerly from a swan.

Dave and Lynn sat on the bench. Dave felt the lake was an anticlamax, it was pretty, he gave the quick impersonal look over he'd have given a model posed on page three. Nice but nothing you could do with it.

Lynn groped uncertainly within herself for a resonance. To her the vast blue sheen that poured itself over the horizon and the great over sweeping hills demanded some quality as massive, as pure as unconsciously magnificent as they were.

The kids begged money for icecream. Dave, anxious for action stood up.

"We going on one of those boats then?"

"I thought we could hire a rowing boat."

"Oh, aye, with me doing all the donkey work and those two little buggers trying to tip us over. No chance. Let's try that big 'un."

He pointed to a largish boat at the end of a wooden pier. He joined the queue, bought tickets for the next trip.

The kids had bought their ice creams. Lynda, totally concerned with the huge cone she held, didn't notice the large yellow wasp that floated round her head. Suddenly it hovered right in front of her eyes, she looked into its fierce alien face, dropped the cornet and ran screaming to her father.

He caught her, laughed and swang her up in the air, then clenched her close to him, squeezing out her outraged fears.

"Lynda's going to be a fishy. Lynda's going for a swim."

He swang her out over the edge of the pier. Dangled over the water, the child shrieked with delight, squirmed as he set her on his shoulders, digging her fingers into his hair. He walked over to Lynn, the child's fat, sweaty little bum bouncing on his neck. Playing like this, in direct contact with his children, he could accept them. Other times they were a mental burden, one more tally on the list of unwanted responsibilities.

He swang her down, picked up the bag and folded the trolley, left Lynn to follow him onto the boat with the kids.

As the boat shuddered into movement, Dave and the kids moved to its front. Lynn watched the dozens of small boats that were scattered over the lake. Distant triangles as yachts bent close to the water. Cheeky jeering kids in hired motor boats. A rowing boat, two young blokes showing off in smooth easy strokes to their girls sat back regally in bright summer frocks. Families in orange life jackets moved busily about fat, foreshortened cabin cruisers. Yet all of them, with all their activity failed to disturb the light spattered calm of the lake.

Beside her a young man was sketching with confident,

certain strokes that ignored the slight movement of the boat. He noticed her watching him, smiled shyly.

"It's only rough, I want to do a painting."

"It's very good, honest. I wish I could draw like that."

He smiled again and resumed his work.

At the front of the boat Dave, bored, was remembering a trip on the 'Royal Iris' when he was a kid. His mam and dad had danced in a smoky room and his brother and him, tired of laughing at this unusual exuberance of their parents, had stood at the prow of the boat dodging spray and tasting the dirty water of the Mersey estuary as it drenched them.

He still held Lynda. Jamie was mithering him with questions about the lake.

"How deep is it dad, is it as deep as the sea, where does all the water come from, how did the hills get there?"

Dave fobbed him off with imaginative lies, he didn't know the answers himself. He returned the kids to their mother, discovering that the boat had a bar and went down to it.

It was a cool, quiet room, reflected light was thrown onto its ceiling in irregular moving patches.

In one corner sat a group of girls in shorts and jeans, thick wool socks folded down over chunky, thick-soled boots. He bought himslef a bottle of beer, joined them.

He was attracted to girls of their age, the age his wife had been when they married. They were happy, uncomplicated, didn't impose responsibilities and demand difficult responses. He liked the freshness of their bodies and minds, usually felt easy with them.

"Mind if I sit here?" he asked, seating himself before they responded.

"Where are you going camping?"

"We're youth hostelling in Ambleside."

The girl who spoke to him was small, rather stocky. He tried to draw the whole group into conversation.

"What's the night life like in Ambleside? I mean, I might look it over, drive down, is there any good discos or clubs?"

They laughed, but at him not with him, and he tried harder to get their attention.

"What do you do? I'm a welder, just come off the rigs."

The stocky girl answered him again.

"I'm a nurse, Judy and Viv are training to be teachers and Les is a catering student. You really work on an oil rig?"

"Yeah. It's rough, you know, but it's where the money is. You know what they say, work hard, play hard, that's me."

She grinned, he liked her snub nose, and soft, fluffy looking hair.

Lynn came downstairs looking for a toilet. Lynda's fist unfolded from her hand as she ran to join her father. She stood, uncertain while the girls laughed at her.

"What a lovely girl, is she yours?"

"Uh, yes."

He saw Lynn, her hard face, vanish into the women's loo. He carried Lynda upstairs, waited for Lynn to join him. She didn't. She bought herself a drink and joined the group of girls herself. Dave felt he was being challenged to stop her, thought sod her and went on deck.

She rejoined him about twenty minutes later, sat beside him without speaking. He wanted to ask her about what she and the girls had talked about, out of curiosity not a desire for reconciliation. However, he stayed silent. Without speaking Lynn reached in the bag, brought out the last of their sandwiches and gave him one.

He chewed mechanically, threw the crust out over the water where a gull swooped and swallowed it.

"What did you talk about with those girls?"

"Oh, nothing much, just women's talk, about what bastards men are and that. They told me this bloke had made a fool of himslef trying to pick them up."

He reddened and then grinned.

"I was just talking. You talked to that bloke who was drawing. There's no harm in it is there?"

She didn't answer, just looked away to the high unreachable hills.

"Oh, come on love. I wasn't doing owt."

"Oil rigs, I dunno. If you fancy working on one don't let me stop you."

"I was kidding, seeing if they'd swallow it, leading them on like."

"Yes" she thought, "just like you've always lead me on. But it's not your fault, you just are who you are, made

that way, you'll never change."

She turned to him, his body trying to mime dejection and remorse, say things his mouth never would.

"It's nice her," she said, "But I don't think we'll come next year."

JOHN KOZIOL

John lives in Partington. He used to work in a margarine factory till he had a close encounter with a machine that tried to bite his hand off. He writes poems and stories.

WALES FOR THE CUP

Of course I love you
Very madly
Why do you say
I'm acting badly?
Is it because
I must be home to bed?
Come on lass,
We'll soon be wed.
As I say - Friday
I must be in bed at nine.
Did you just mutter
"Bloody fine."?

You know I'm filled
With hot desire
And of course my
Heart's on fire.
But Saturday
The match is away
So I can't see you at all
That day.
After the match? Well -
It will be late
And the boys will
Need to celebrate.
I refuse to let you
Hear the songs they sing.

Monday night
Yes, that's fine -
Oh heck! a meeting
On the line.
Come on and cuddle
Up to me.
Don't you sulk
You know I can't
Let down the team:
How would it seem?

Tuesday? Well the Rugby Club
Has a sort of do -
But not my lovely
For a girl like you.
Now how can I
enjoy myself at all
Just taking tickets
In the hall?
Just a pint of beer
To keep me company,
All alone there
My pint and me.

Wednesday? Well why not
Come and see
The trial match
And cheer me?
It's cold I know
But wrap up warm
Then you won't
Come to harm.

Thursday? Alright -
I'll take you out....
Now what are you
Going on about?
I know it's seven
Damn days away,
And home by ten
For I can't stay!
So Thursday it is
My little sweet,
A big night out
As a sort of treat.
For Friday, as I've said,
It's early to bed,
Come on now
Don't shake your head.

You know Saturday
Is the big game, Now come on Val
It's not the same.
Last week I made
My greatest try,
For heaven's sake
Don't start to cry!
Just you put that ring
Back on your finger.
It's ten pm and I can't linger.

Sometimes my love
You don't understand
The pride in the game
That's big and grand.
Look, don't be silly
I have to go
And I don't believe
You won't see me any more,
You think I don't know
Of your pride in me?
Wales for the cup?
We'll win, you'll see.

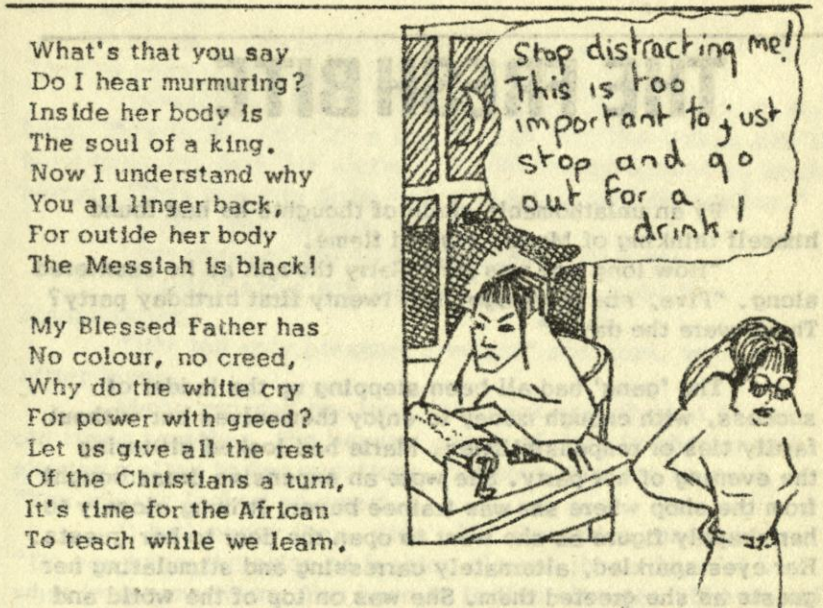
NO COLOUR NO CREED

Now come all you people who long for my birth,
Knowing a saviour is needed on earth,
I never said I would come back as a man,
Try to accept me just as I am.

See that young woman there
Scrubbing that floor,
Nursing the sick and
Caring what's more.
Hear the gentle voice speaking
See bright eyes agleam,
Now don't be surprised
Your Messiah's a Queen.

What's that you say
Do I hear murmuring?
Inside her body is
The soul of a king.
Now I understand why
You all linger back,
For outide her body
The Messiah is black!

My Blessed Father has
No colour, no creed,
Why do the white cry
For power with greed?
Let us give all the rest
Of the Christians a turn,
It's time for the African
To teach while we learn.



JOAN BATCHELOR

Joan is Welsh and proud of it. Most of her family is grown up now and she finds lots of time to write - novels, stories and poems. Watch out for ON THE WILD SIDE, a book of her poems due out shortly.

THE FRESH BITE

By an unfathomable chain of thoughts he had found himself thinking of Marie, his old flame.

"How long ago was it?" Garry thought as he sauntered along. "Five, six years ago. Her twenty first birthday party? Those were the days!"

The 'gang' had all been stepping up the ladder of success, with enough money to enjoy themselves but without family ties or responsibilities. Marie had looked glittering the evening of her party. She wore an expensive dress bought from the shop where she was trainee buyer. It hung closely to her shapely figure as she went to open the door to her guests. Her eyes sparkled, alternately carressing and stimulating her guests as she greeted them. She was on top of the world and everyone knew it.

"And what became of her?" Garry wondered.

Garry held open the bank door for the woman following behind and was rewarded with a "thankyou". He couldn't believe his ears and had to turn to look. It was her! The very girl he had been thinking of. It took several seconds for them to fully recognise each other. Garry had prospered working for a large store as a fashion buyer and looked very trendy in dress. His appearence was almost a physical insult to the woman who stood beside him. Her hair hung thin and untidy over her neck; her figure carried pounds of excess fat; her face looked red and blotchy (she wore no make up) and her coat hung shapeless around her body. Garry was amazed at the change in her. She looked older than her years. He took her in, right down to the worn heeled shoes. A red scarf was the only brightness added to her appearence.

After their greeting Marie pressed him to come back to her house, and time to kill and curiosity made him accept.

It was old council property, an estate littered with broken glass and rubbish. He sat on the settee once inside her house and looked around. He noticed a framed photograph

of a small girl.

"Yours?" he asked, bringing it closer for examination. "You've been married then?"

"Something like that" said Marie. "She lives with my Aunt. This is no place for a kid. I don't like the school she'll have to go to. And this place...." She stared around in mock horror. "This place is damp and I've got no proper heating."

"Can't they rehouse you?"

"Fat chance" she said, lighting a cigarette.

"I didn't know you smoked" he said, faintly disapproving.

"It's the only pleasure I've got" she said, with a bitter laugh.

Marie crossed her legs, sat back and chatted of the old times together. She became aware of Garry's shorter and shorter replies to her questions. Without thinking he said, "You always looked so smart."

"I had money then, didn't I?" Her voice rose higher. "Do you know the price of fashion clothes these days? I buy what keeps me warm. You have to in this climate." She waved a hand at the dull climate outside.

He tried to change the subject to a lighter topic but something goaded him to question her. "But your hair? I thought it was so nice."

"It's clean. I wash it regularly in soap. I can't afford fancy hair conditioners you know."

"You were always so slim." His hands drew parallel lines in the air as illustration.

"Time works its changes on us all" she remarked and then stopped as she noticed his own trim figure and she had to admit to herself how handsome he had become.

"Look," she said, "potatoes and bread are cheap foods. They fill the gap in your belly." She patted her stomach in a way that made Garry wince.

"To stay healthy you must eat the right food, no matter what the cost. It would.....it would improve your complexion." It was Marie's turn to wince.

"I eat liver once a week.....and apples every day, well nearly every day" she said defensively. "That's good for you." She sighed. Her previous bright manner faded.

"I get so down in the dumps. I can't be bothered with

myself. There's no one to care. I'm not married, you know. We moved in here when the baby was due. But he left soon after. I was glad to see the back of him. It was great when we first went out together. He swept me off my feet, he promised me the moon. But he could never settle down to one job. He always had so many different schemes. I had to give up my job to look after the child and things got tough. I couldn't get her into a nursery. They don't have much in this district. Now I've got her at home I'm looking for a job. But I get turned down all the time. I get so depressed."

Garry forced a smile to his lips as she sunk her head in his hands. For one awful moment he thought she was going to cry.

"You must keep your chin up. Show a prospective employer you're keen. Keep trying."

She looked up slowly. "I'm not stupid" she said, "I still know."

They gazed at each other and for the first time he began to understand her. He realised how she must be suffering and hurting inside to think of the past. Somewhere deep inside her, never completely buried was the memory of Marie Molyneux, the bright prospective manager of Dunn's Department store.

"I'd like to help you. There's a cleaning job going at my works."

She gave a wry smile, cynicism creeping into her eyes once more.

"No, it's a good job. You'd be over a team of cleaners. They want someone to keep them up to the mark. You always had a will of iron. Never let me get past first base."

Marie smiled coyly, a look of sexiness came into her face as she remembered their past relationship. "I might take you up on that offer."

After he had gone Marie sat musing to herself, planning the new lifestyle she'd adopt as the wife of such a good catch. "Every day brings a fresh bite at the apple, as my mother used to say." And for the first time in a long time she began singing to herself.

That night her visitor was down at his night club with

a mate of his. Two stunning girls dressed to kill, chatted together at the bar.

"So you've been to see Marie," his friend was remarking. "Bonny girl that, a bonny girl. Shall we look her up?"

Garry absent-mindedly caressed the onyx cufflinks at his cuffs, and eyed the blonde girl at the bar who had begun to notice him and look back.

"No," he said, "I wouldn't bother yourself there. She's let herself go. Gone to the dogs." So saying he dismissed the woman from his mind and went purposely, glass in hand, over to the bar.

CELIA ROBERTS

Celia has been a frequent contributor to Commonword publications. She has been a student, a shop assistant and a secretary. She used to write mainly poetry but has now turned her hand to stories such as this.

THE REFUGE

This and the next poem were written by two women in a battered women's refuge. For obvious reasons they have decided to remain anonymous.

Sick of being beaten
With bruises blue and green
I dressed the kids and packed my bags
And quit the bloody scene.

I wandered round the streets a while
Not knowing what to do
And then I heard a friendly voice
"We've got the place for you."

A welcome door was open
A bed and cup of tea
Though very overcrowded
They still had room for me.

A time to rest my shattered nerves
A time to sort things out,
To stay in peace or live in hell,
In my mind there is no doubt.

First of all it's easy
But it gets harder by the day.
Everyone is different,
They do things different ways.

Watch out! Watch out! A thief's about!
It really is a sin,
We've fridges in the kitchen
We mustn't put things in.

"I'm doing no more housework"
Says Sheila with a frown
And all that can be heard from Sue
Is "It really gets me down."

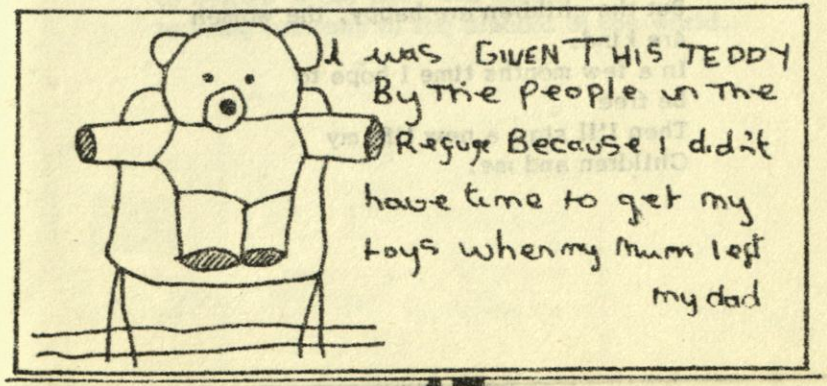
This place is pretty awful
The women get me down,
But then we had a laugh today
I like them being around.

For things to sign and forms to fill
There's Bonnie and Elaine
And Lyn's the one to chat to
If you're needing to complain.

"I could write a book"is often heard,
Well now we've got the chance:
There's groups for this and groups for that,
They lead us such a dance.

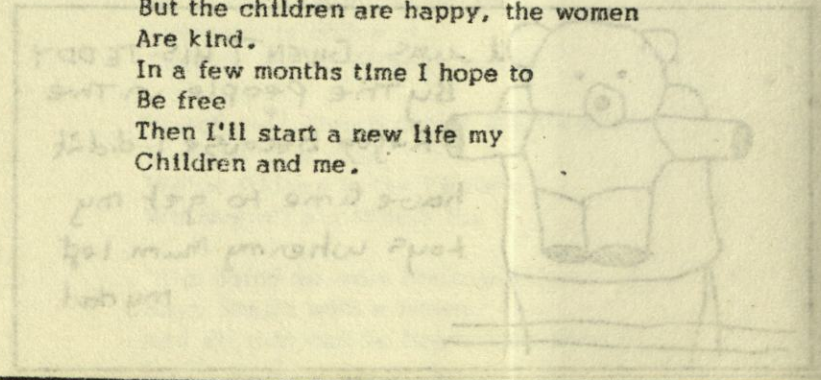
When we've all departed
And gone our separate ways
We'll look back with affection
On these hectic refuge days.

I'll leave an empty bed
And let it all begin
For the poor wretch at the door
Shouting "Please God let me in."



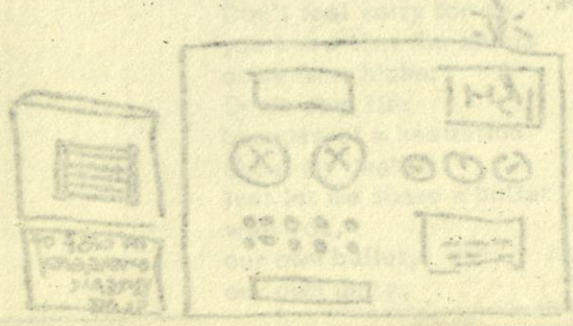
PUTTING UP A FIGHT

Where could I go to to seek shelter
And care?
So I took all the beatings and
Had to stay there.
I pretended to laugh so that no one
Would sense
That the happy smiling figure was just
A pretence.
A figure I was, not a person
You see:
He had knocked all the spirit
Right out of me.
Please give me the strength to carry on
And face another day
Tomorrow may bring peace of mind
And happiness my way.
I put no value on life since life
Means little to me.
I've even thought of suicide, how easy
That would be.
Why should I give up without putting
Up a fight?
My faith has grown stronger it seems
Overnight.
I came to the refuge, almost out of
My mind
But the children are happy, the women
Are kind.
In a few months time I hope to
Be free
Then I'll start a new life my
Children and me.



THERE ARE STORIES

There are stories in the hands of old people,
fables in the lines and callouses
that can, if you take time to read be
more revealing than any biography
or chronicle of a lifetime's work.
There are parables in the scars
and the tragedies of age spelled out
in swollen joints and knotted sinews.
There are poems in the faces of old people,
sonnets on a love of live
or elegies to faded hopes and dreams.
There are lyrics in blank verse
and rhyming couplets, metaphors
that defy mere words, proclaiming
the truth of personalities bottled up
inside a skin more clear than crystal.
There is music in the voices of old people,
jigs and reels of childhood memories,
laments in the talk of lost loved ones
and friends already claimed by time.
There are hymns of hope
for children yet unborn and symphonies
to heroes of the past who fought
to bring harmony to the discord of the world.

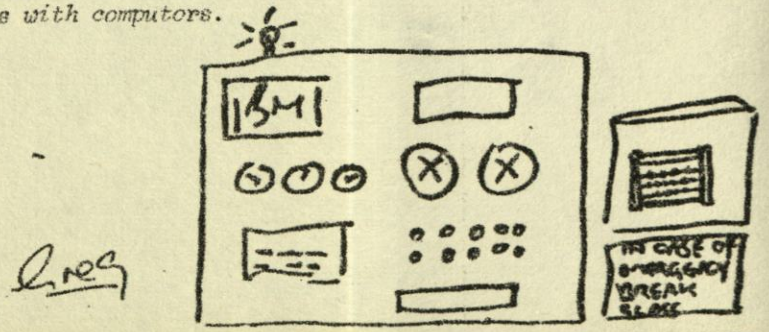


SOME PEOPLE I KNOW

Stone statues standing in a gallery
filled with fading portraits
whose subjects are of less importance
than their fanciful frames.
Stone statues, carved so carefully
they appear alive, and seem to represent
all that I should aspire to be.
Their lives are so well planned,
so perfect that they make
my world seem second rate.
Standing, smiling fixed smiles,
exuding wall-eyed bonhomie as they
condescend to let me move among them,
I, so coarse and shabby, from a world
where nothing seems to fit quite properly.
Each one is ringed around by a
velvet barrier and labelled "Do not touch"
for if somebody from my coarse
ill-fitting world might happen to,
he would discover the reality of cold clay.

IAN THORPE

Ian is a newcomer to Commonword. He lives in Accrington and works with computors.



SOLDIER OF THE NIGHT

This poem refers to the massacre of 1,000 or so students on the streets of Athens just before the fall of the Junta in 1974.

They ordered you to kill
soldier of the night,
they ordered you to harvest
thousands of dreams and lives
at dawn.
At dawn then,
you and me will share
a hot and unjust bullet.
From you to me,
after it has travelled
a short distance
will unite us for ever.
The killer and the victim.
After, I won't exist
but dead,
after. You won't exist
but divided.
Soldier of the dead night,
soldier of life and death,
I can see you hesitating
in front of your gun
the night before.
Don't feel sorry for me,
you know that the orders
come from higher.
Don't stop life
because of a hesitation
about my death.
Just let me share a bullet
with you,
our own bullet,
our own unity.

Thus we'll help life
go a step further,
even if I'm dying for life,
for flowers, for the wind.
So don't hesitate,
get your gun ready
from the night before,
the colourful dawn
will unite us for ever.

BILL PAVLIDES

The name sounds Greek and indeed it is. Bill has five years experience as a student in England. He has been writing poetry for many years, mostly in Greek.

LONGING

Being blind
Our hands reflect our needs
And, disguised as eyes
Feel their way through the lives
Of others.
Disguised as Angels -
The hands of lovers lead their prisoners
Through the house and to the attic
Through the midnight and to the morning
When there is light enough to feel their own way
Down again.
Being blind
Our eyes become an obstacle to understanding
We see ourselves only in another's fingertips
Feeling ourselves
Wanting to touch
The stark braille tree on the eternally distant horizon.

KEVIN OTOO

Kevin has written a lot of poems and a number of stories, one of which is due to be published by the Hulme Writers Group of which Kevin is also a member.

YOU'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD

This is the first of a series of articles in which working people write about things that affect them. It might be, as in this case, the state of British politics, or it might be the history of where you live.

You've never had it so good was the battlecry of the Tories during the mid-fifties.

Harold McMillan (equally well-known as Unflappable Mac) was then Prime Minister and as he traversed the length and breadth of the land, he never tired of telling all who wanted to listen as well as those who didn't, "You've never had it so good."

Now Harold was not simply a competent type of chap, he was also a right honourable gentleman, so there had to be a grain of truth in what he proclaimed. True enough, many skilled workers of that period had begun to acquire a motor car which until then had been considered a vehicle for the middle classes and the rich only. In those days, anyone fortunate enough to gain a lift in a motor car, would not have slumped down nonchelantly in the seat, but would have sat erect and self-conscious, fervently hoping to be seen by some workmate or friend. A ride in a taxi was a rare event, indulged in only to attend a funeral or a wedding.

The mid-fifties saw skilled workers venturing timidly abroad for holidays, when a few years earlier anyone who had been to London was regarded with awe and looked up to as something of a local celebrity. Thanks to a little pressurising by the door to door salesmen prevalent at that time, working people began to purchase washing machines - those not buying excused their deficiency by asserting that the new fangled machines tore the clothes and ripped buttons from garments.

YES! We never had it so good! and as we advanced into the Swinging Sixties, it was mini-skirts, mini-cars, the Beatles and perhaps most important of all, the little box in the corner of the room was now considered the norm. What a difference the "Telly" made to our lives - the politicians no longer had to travel the country to proclaim their successes - the turn of a knob brought them into our living room.

Unflappable Mac was rarely glimpsed, but we had Ted Heath with the shaking shoulders, and we had pipe smoking Harold Wilson blandly telling us from behind clouds of smoke how well off we were (thanks to him, of course). They started to refer to us all as "The Affluent Society".

Harold and Ted were also right honourable gentlemen, so we must accept once again that what they claimed was true, and we saw the big spenders of the rank and file were now the proud owners of refrigerators - even those who had previously boasted the coldest stone slab in all England were buying. The Affluent Society Had Arrived Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! and we proceeded into the seventies.

What will the seventies become known as? Perhaps the Sexy, Savage Seventies? No matter what we shall call them, it was a time when life-styles shanged rapidly - for instance, one of the "In-things" nowadays is the practice of taking your wife (or someone else's wife) out for a meal, usually called dinner. In the fifties, the only time workers went out for meals was to attend a Potato Pie supper at the local Sunday School. It's a safe bet that a working man invited out to dinner would probably have turned up sometime around midday.

What with North Sea gas and North Sea oil, we were riding the crest of a wave. After being granted the privilege of a referendum, we entered the Common Market and marched boldly into Europe. (The reason why entry should have been made a political issue remains a mystery.) At this time, it appeared a rosy future was in store, but soon a word was being used - INFLATION. It was continually being spoken about by the Honourable Gentlemen in the little boxes in our living room - "Too much money chasing too few goods" roared the honourable gents. "Peg all wages except ours" they yelled.

Ted Heath and it seemed everyone else was telling us about Phase 1 and Phase 2. Even the Trade Unions agreed with Ted, but Phase 3 was too much for anyone to swallow, and exit Ted!

As unemployment increased and the numbers reached and passed the 1,000,000 mark, the unfortunate out of work were soon given a new label - "Dole Scroungers." "We are wasting Millions keeping idle people" cried the Tories. Never a day passed but that the press printed stories of idle people living the Good Life on hand outs from the NASH. "Make them work" squeaked Margaret the Iron Lady - "No work, No pay."

Knocking the Dole Scroungers has now become a national pastime. "They get more for being idle than for working" yell the honourable gentlemen in Westminster. Of course, the right honourable gentlemen are again stating the truth. Many working men from this area would be better off financially if unemployed, for although the media assured us that the national average wage is more than £80, there are more men in this part of the country taking home less than £50 than there are taking home more than £50. Deduct constantly rising bus fares and ever increasing meal costs from the earnings of the low paid, and it's easy to see how life can be easier on the dole. It is now obvious for all who care to see that a highly immoral situation has developed insofar as we now have living amongst us "The Working Poor!!"

Reading the newspapers, watching television, we are led to believe that the working poor could be the doctors, now demanding rises varying from £35 to £ 90 per week to enable them to maintain their living standards. They threaten strike action should their demands be refused. What is the oath they take - "The Hypocritical Oath"?

Could it be that the working poor are middle and top management who say they will have to emigrate as they can no longer exist on their paltry £12,000 or so a year salaries?

Perhaps it's our much overworked M.Ps who can hardly pay their secretaries a reasonable salary (here it is worth noting how many M.Ps have the same person acting as wife and secretary.)

Maybe it's the growing army of overpaid administrators, especially the Civil Servants with their inflation-proof pension.

We could continue our suppositions indefinitely and finally conclude that we all want more money. There is, however, a deal of difference between wanting and needing. Inflation is still with us and the honourable gentlemen still asure us that the only solution to the problem of retaining living standards is that we tighten our belts and accept minimal increases in our wage claims. Trades Union leaders still negotiate percentage increases which only serve to increase the gaps between the naves and have-nots. They seem to lack even elementary mathematical knowledge or they would realise that any percentage increase gives least to the neediest. A surpising fact about unions is that they have never accepted the need for introducing a realistic basic minimum wage.

Our M.Ps state it is not possible to set a realistic figure and are quick to point out that supplementary benefits are available for all poorly paid workers (they never use the term underpaid workers). They accept as right the fact that a working man has to go cap in hand to apply for supplementary grants and they turn a blind eye to the fallacy of employing an army of bureaucrats to administer the present set-up: - thousands employed "giving away". Thousands more employed "taking away".

The M.Ps. in fact, condone the senseless set up, and the low paid workers, earning wages below the accepted poverty line are taxed.

Is there anything more immoral than taking money away from the impoverished?

In 1215, King John signed the Magna Carta, a much misunderstood Bill which in the main restored the rights of the barons and not the common people, so another Magna Carta would not help the poor.

We could and should, however, insist that our M.Ps. draw up a Bill of Rights which would give even the poorest in our

midst the right to enjoy a reasonable standard of life.

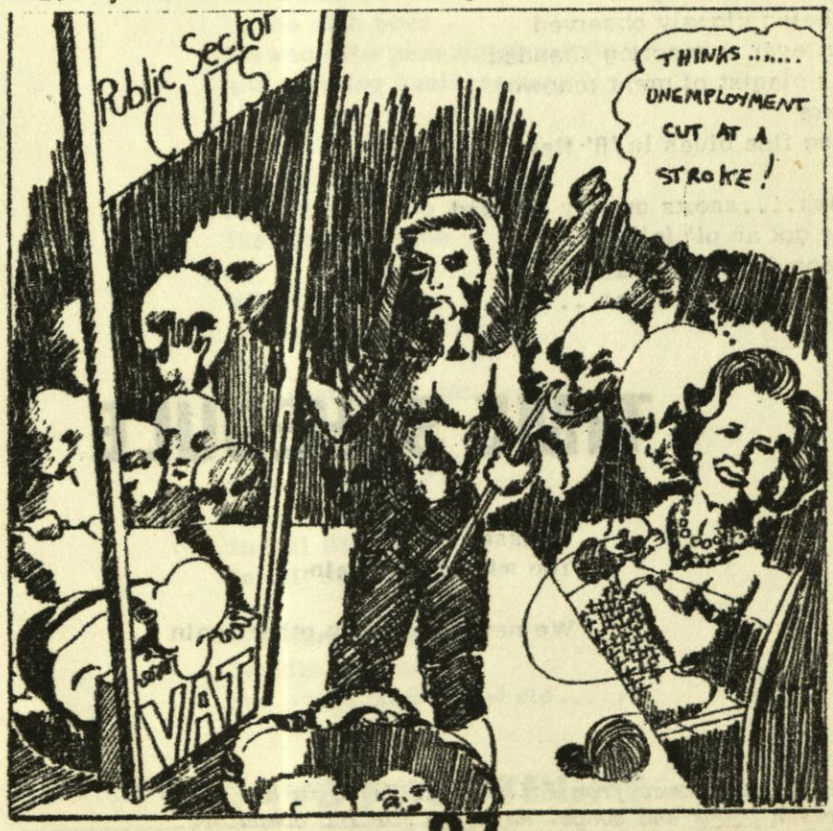
Iinstead of attending all-night sittings, arguing pithy matters and passing obscure acts, they should be attending Parliament 9 - 5 evaluating society.

Future historians, two hundred years hence, will surely note and record the lives of the impoverished serfs of the 1970s. Or because of apathy, will the present system still exist?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

STAN HELM

Stan Helm is 58. He works as a time clerk. In the past he has travelled a lot, living twelve years in Australia. He is a member of the Rochdale Writers Group.



JIGSAW

I hope my life
is like a jigsaw puzzle
And when I put
all the pieces together
I would be happy
to die complete

GRANDAD

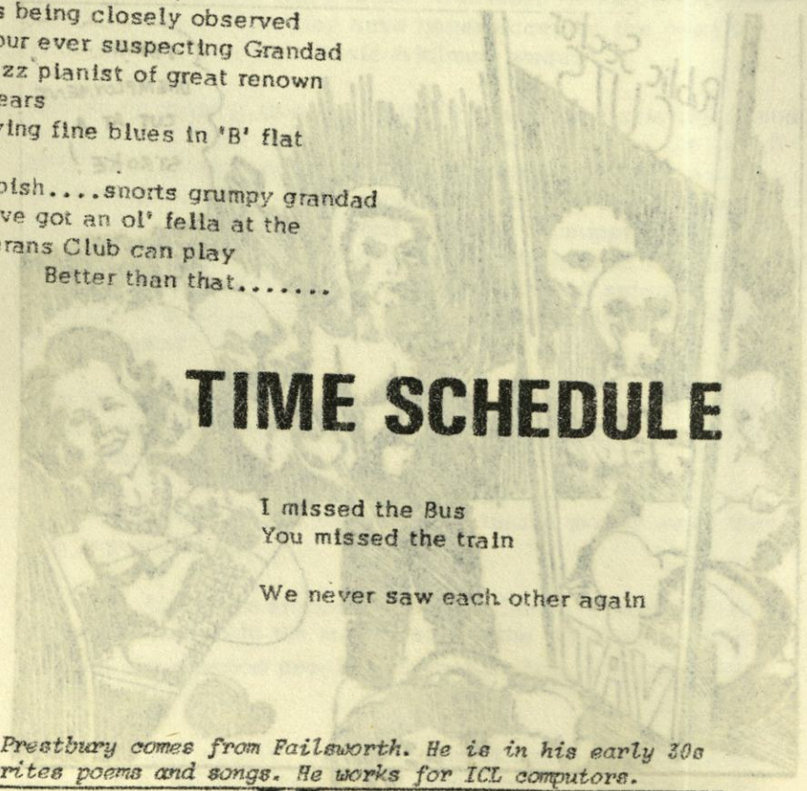
One night our telly
Was being closely observed
By our ever suspecting Grandad
A jazz pianist of great renown
appears
Playing fine blues in 'B' flat

Rubbish....snorts grumpy grandad
We've got an ol' fella at the
Veterans Club can play
Better than that.....

TIME SCHEDULE

I missed the Bus
You missed the train

We never saw each other again



Dave Prestbury comes from Failsworth. He is in his early 30s and writes poems and songs. He works for ICL computors.

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG

WE MADE LOVE
On the steps of the Free Trade Hall
The concert audience applauded us
And called for an encore

WE MADE LOVE
Behind the churchyard wall
"Go forth" God commanded
and gave an almighty roar

WE MADE LOVE
In the rush hour
Between the passing motorists
and hurrying business people

WE MADE LOVE
In the pouring rain
Splashing in the puddles
Just going insane

WE MADE LOVE
In the telephone booth
From dawn until noon
We were in the groove

WE MADE LOVE
At every hour of the night
At Every minute of the day
In full flight
In full display

We were young
We did not care
We would do it anywhere.....

DAVE PRESTBURY

PERSECUTION

The peculiar tired man,
Trudges to work on the same route every morning.
Wearing the same cap and tweeds,
With a newspaper positioned under an arm,
People's watches are set by him.

As he joins the bus queue
He is separated like a leper.

On the bus,
Acquiring his usual forward position,
He sits astride the seat,
Unfolding his newspaper,
Only to look through it
And read people's faces instead.

I hate him,
I don't know why.
Maybe it's because of his squashed, gross nose,
Or his sickly, undying rituals:
Perhaps since I was taught to hate him
By just about everyone I know.
All because, so they say,
Years past anyone can remember
He was tried and acquitted
Of a sexual offence.

When I ask why is this bad,
The reply is always the same:
"If he can be tried for it,
He can also be guilty of it,
And anyway the jury might have been wrong."

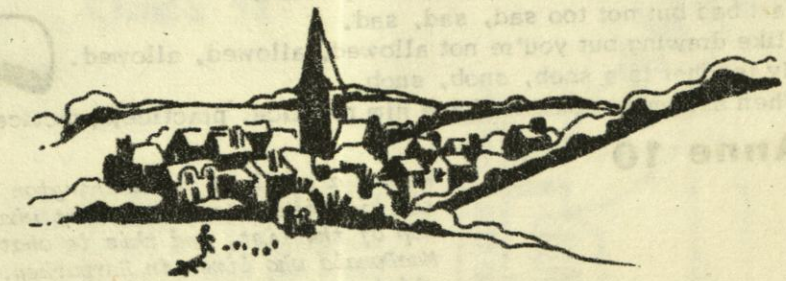
I was going to talk to him one day on the bus,
Then I remembered
I still hated him.

THE SNOWFIELD

The snow,
Freshly fallen and floury,
Lay carpetted across a field.
It betrayed no evidence at all
Of man's presence along its length,
So with great deliberation,
I jumped as far as possible
Into the field,
Then turned and jumped back.
As I stared
At the two huge imprinted footprints
The sense of pride
Of my achievement dwindled.
I bent my head
And walked with my guilt,
Away from the destroyed snow field.

NICK RIPLEY

Nick Ripley is one of the younger members of the workshop. He is also a member of the Contact Youth Theatre, writing, directing and acting in plays. He also draws a bit.....makes you sick doesn't it?

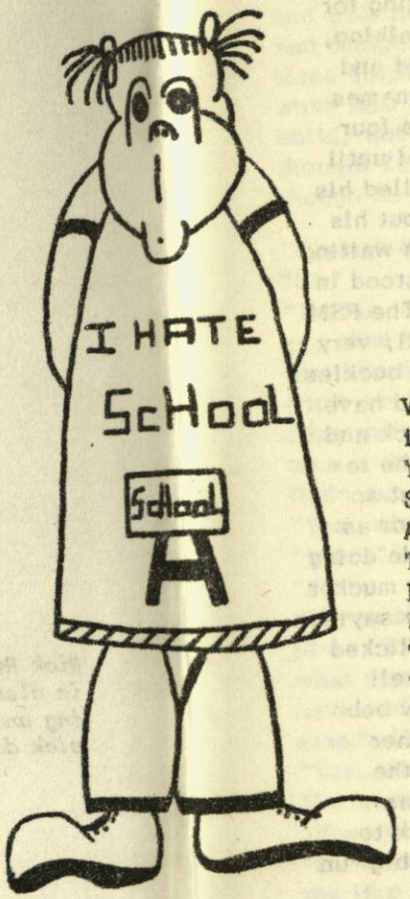


My school
is very big and
I go to school
every day except
for Saturday
and Sunday

Rachel 6

I hate school it is terrible
My teacher is an old bag
She always knocks you in the back.
At dinner they say you have to have everything.
One teacher said if you do not bring your
Swimming kit, you will have to go in
With nothing on. I think the kids should decide
What play they have.

Jacqeline 10



I hate school, school, school.
If you talk you get the stick, stick, stick.
I am bad but not too sad, sad, sad.
I like drawing but you're not allowed, allowed, allowed.
My teacher is a snob, snob, snob.
When assembly come we have him practice, practice, practice.

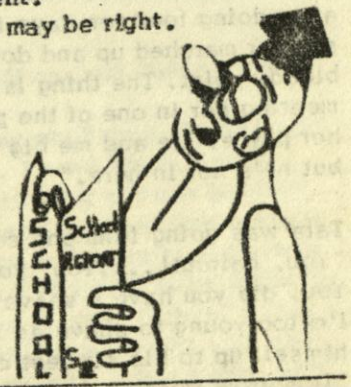
Anne 10

Maths, English they make me sick.
Five times a day at school.
It's horrible, ugly, sicking too.
They make me feel terrrible inside.
I run home at night and
No more fights to do.
I run home feeling good
And having my freedom.
School, school,
Bomb it down!
Use dynamite to do it
But do it PLEASE!!!

John 11

What I like about school
it isn't very much,
You just sit and do things.
Subjects I dislike at school
Are horrid. Anything you do is silly.
The subject I like is German and Englisn.
In the school we go to we're
only allowed three playtimes.
The school is very big and I am very small.
The dinners are terrible but the teachers
think the dinners are excellent.
I dont think so, though they may be right.

Linda 11



We had a stall at the Withington Festival with lots of pens and paper, and we asked all the kids there to write about whatever they felt like. School, surprise, surprise, came top of the list, and this is what they thought of it. The drawings are by Katherine MacDonald who lives in Harpurhey. More of the kids' writing is in IN YOUR OWN WORDS which costs 5p from Commonword or Withington Library.

THE NIGHT OUT

It was Friday night and the soldiers stood around in small groups of twos and threes outside the guardroom waiting for the transport into town. They were still stood there talking, laughing and smoking when the guardroom door opened and out came the RSM, known among other, unprintable, names as Tara the Terrible. He was as usual followed by his four special camp police. Noone seemed to notice the RSM until he opened his Norf an' Souf as one of the soldiers called his mouth. Tara had however heard the remark passed about his mouth and this was just one of the things he had been waiting for. He walked very quickly towards the soldier and stood in front of him with the four Special Police around him. The RSM made an impressive figure - he stood over six feet tall, very big in the chest, wearing the Cameron kilt, glengarry buckles on his shoes and in his hand he held a staff. He would have made a good advert for a whiskey firm. He stepped back and flicked his fingers at the SP. The man who had made the remark felt himself being picked up, heard the RSM shout an order, saw the guardroom door open and then a cell door as he was thrown in. His mate who was still stood outside doing his best not to burst out laughing at the thought of his mucker in the guardroom whose feet had never touched, as the saying went, could not control himself. Tara looked at him, flicked his fingers and nodded at the SP. He ended up in the cell next to his mucker. "Well, we'll be able to save a few bob after doing fourteen days in here" he remarked. The other soldier marched up and down the small cell. "It's not the bloody point. The thing is I was on a cert tonight. I was meeting her in one of the pubs for a few jars, then back to her place. Me and me big mouth. I thought Tara had a big 'un but he's not in here."

Tara was going from one soldier to the next with his SPs. "You, haircut! ....You, you have a dirty belt. Book him! .... You, did you have a shave today?" "No, sir, me mam says I'm too young to shave as it's only bum fluff." Tara drew himself up to his six feet odd and glared at the young soldier. "Tomorrow morning you will shave and....." The young soldier tried again, "But, sir, me mam says....." Tara flicked his fingers and nodded. The young soldier, close to tears ended up in cell three.

Yorky Taylar, Wacker Jones and Panda Hammer stood perfectly still and upright. They knew Tara from old, they had seen the nod and the flick of his fingers too often to take any chances and tonight was a very special night. Tara walked up to the three soldiers and looked them up and down, noticed the dark wavy hair and how clean looking Taylar was, his thick set build, not as tall as the RSM, but nearly six foot. "Odds on" thought Tara, "he's already broke a few girls' hearts even though he's only twenty."

"Taylar" the RSM said.
"Sir"
"Taylar, as this is a transit camp and we could be away at any time to God knows where, when you go into town tonight just bloodywell behave yourself, or at least be careful. I don't want any outraged father at the CO's office shouting the odds over you putting his daughter in the family way. Don't take it for granted you'll be on the troop ship by the time she finds out, understand Taylar?"
"Yes, sir."
"Jones"
"Sir"
"If you should end up at the local Catholic Club for a few pints, for God's sake keep your mouth shut about you being what you call "one of King Billy's men" and the punch ups you have had on St Pat's night down Scotland Road. Do you understand, Jones?"
"Yes, sir."
"Hammer, take your eyes off that staff car and listen to me."
"Yes, sir."
"Even an RSM like me knows that army staff cars, lorries and the like all run on wheels and petrol. I even know that the wheels have a tyre and as a rule every staff car has got one at each corner. So, as it's already been reported that quite a few cars are doing very well for petrol and parts in the town, if the MT section are short of spares I may just know where to look. Don't stand there with that look on your face as if you don't know what I'm talking about. Any more spares and what nots missing and the MPs may want to have a few words with

you, understand?"
"Wot me sir?"
"Yes, you Hammer"
Taylar, Jones and Hammer stood there thinking to themselves that the RSM seemed to know everything about them. He knew every one by name. Maybe it was like Taylar once said, you just can't kid an old kidder all the time. The army transport came along and every one climbed into it under the see all eye of the RSM and the guard commander. They watched it go round the corner with the soldiers looking back at the RSM, each one with his own thoughts about him.

The SP stood there while the RSM and the guard commander walked a few yards away and stood talking with their backs to the SP.
"Tell you what Bert" said the guard commander "we've got some right rum hard case bastards 'ere with this lot. What with petrol, spare parts, the pub owners on the phone every saturday night, the young women shouting the odds they're all sex mad at this camp, what do you think about it Bert?"
Bert, the RSM, looked for a long time at his spotless shoes, his dice stockings, his Cameron kilt and said, "I don't know so much, Harry, you take your mind back to just after the General Strike when you and me took the King's shilling. We had a lot of hard cases in those days, men from the '14 war who had been promised the best things in life, plenty of work, good wages, better houses to live in and so on. What did they get out of it, Harry? Cock all! No work, millions on the dole and the Means Test. It made many a man hard and bitter when he sat back and thought about the so-called promises he was looking forward to after the war to end all wars. If that's the case, Harry, what are you and me doing now in 1940 stood in this army camp? We are here to train these young lads to go and fight the Japs or Jerries, and as we both know only too well that discipline and obedience and more discipline is all part of training these lads. Those three lads in the guard room and those three lads I talked to, they call me the biggest B that ever walked, but I'll say this about them, Harry, with discipline as I know it these lads will follow me to Hell and back and at the same time 'f' and blind about me, and ask what side of the blanket I was born on. I'll go so far as to say that at the present time the three of

them will be sat in a pub wondering whether men such as you and me were born at all, and if so why."
"I suppose you're right, Bert. After their fathers have had a talk to them about how they got treated after the last lot - that's why they brought in conscription in '39 - it makes you wonder what the hell's going to happen after this lot's over. Will it be a land fit for heroes or will these kids get treated like their fathers? No work, bad housing, another General Strike? Anyway, we'll have to wait and see."
Bert had to agree with Harry regarding the future when all this lot was over. "By the way, Bert" what about these three in the guard room? asked Harry. "Get 'em to clean the guard room inside and out in the morning. Keep them at it till dinner time and then let 'em have the rest of the day off. Send young Bum Fluff over to see me so I can have a talk with him about the army. Tell you what, Harry, you've got to laugh about that Bum Fluff and what me Mam says. I can see her now on the donkey-clean doorstep saying "Rite lad, you tell that there feller if he upsets you he's got me to deal with - you know the feller I mean, him wiff the bloody big gob on the barrack square, don't worry lad, I'll sort out that there bugger if he puts on you." Anyway, send him to the office after dinner and I'll try to talk to him like a father. But God help him if he starts "Me Mam says" I'll put him back in right away."
If anyone could have seen both the guard commander and Bert, the terrible RSM having a good laugh over the things they had to put up with from the young lads or soldiers under their care, they would never have thought they were the same two men who were trying to teach young soldiers the meaning of discipline.

Yorky, Wacker Panda and four of the local girls were sat in the pub and as the saying goes they were chatting up the girls and at the same time making sure the girls paid their corner. After all, the girls were working and had more money in their pockets than the three soldiers, and as Yorky always said, "Let 'em get 'em in now and again. Fair do's."
Yorky was sat next to Kath with his arm round her shoulder while she told him what he called the tale. He sat listening to her with his long practised look of concern on his face. It seemed that Kath, after being married for four days just over a year ago, had had her husband sent out to the Middle East,

and as she was feeling rather fed up with one thing and another had decided to have a night out with friends. What with working all those long hours in the factory on War work and going home every night to an empty house, with only the odd letter from her husband in the Middle East, she thought a night out would make her feel better.
Yorky was saying it was a bad thing, war. It upset the way of life, sent men all over the world away from their loved ones and so on. He didn't really care where Kath's husband was as long as he didn't walk into the pub and upset his plans. It was after all, a very special night out for him too.

Long before closing time the beer had run out and they all stood outside the pub talking, no use going to another pub as their beer would have run out too. It was while they were stood there that the air raid warning went. Wacker said to Panda, "Every bloody night's the same. Like our Mam was saying in her last letter, they made a right mess down the docks the other week. I think they use the river as a run in and they can't miss it on a clear night."
"I suppose it's the same over there with the RAF and the Yanks at it nearly every night and day. I wish to God it would all end soon and the whole world could get back to normal" said Anne, one of the other girls.
As they all stood talking the air raid went on, the ack ack crews doing their best to find the German bombers by their searchlights, and the German bombers doing their best to dodge them.
After a while, Yorky said to Kath, "Tell you what, as you seem rather frightened by this air raid. I walk home with you to your front door and then I'll get the transport back to camp at 11.30. How about that, Kath?" Yorky gave his two mates a sly wink. They knew that wink and they also knew that if it had anything to do with Yorky he would not be on the transport that night. Still, it was Yorky's night out after all.
When they had got to Kath's cottage, the air raid seemed to be a lot worse. The heavy drone of the bombers on the way to their targets: docks, railways, cities, storage dumps and so on - the very air seemed to be full of the drone.
Kath asked Yorky would he stop with her for a while as the raid was on. She would make him a cup of tea and maybe by that time it would all be over. But the raid went on long into

the night.

The first time Yorky awoke it was still dark and very quietly he lay there for a while wondering where the hell he was. The soft bed and sheets brought it all back to him. He smiled to himself in the darkness and turned over to face Kath. It was daylight the next time he woke, the sun was doing its best to get through the drawn curtains to shine on them.
"'ere, Kath, wot time is it?" said Yorky.
"Ten past ten"
"Bloody hell, ten past ten? I best be going. I must be back at the camp for 11 o'clock or I will be in lumber. Where's me clothes?"
"You'll find most of them where you left them on the floor, get dressed while I go down stairs and make a drink and a bit of breakfast for you. By the way, Yorky, what's so important about getting back for 11 o'clock. Won't your two mates sort things out?"
"It's not as simple as that, Kath. I can't explain now, but the next time I see you I will. Wot's the time now, by the way?"
"Did you say 10.25? Bloodynora, I'll never make it. Did you say you are only five minutes off the main road back to the camp? I may get a lift in one of the transporters." Yorky was busy putting on the rest of his clothes and at the same time doing his best to eat the egg and bread she had got ready for him in the kitchen.

Kath wanted him to meet her that night in the pub. "If it's a question of money, don't worry, I've got a few bob. We could go for a walk if it's a nice night and then get back here for a drink of tea and then.....well, you know, stop the night here sort of thing."
Kath was walking about the room with just the dressing gown hanging loose, the belt ends pushed into her pockets. She kept on and on about seeing him that night. Yorky stood up from the table looking at the cottage door and then at Kath and back again at the cottage door. He looked at the clock on the sideboard - 10.30, just turned.
"Well, luv, it's not as simple as that" said Yorky. "I must be back at 11 o'clock and as I said before I'll explain everything the next time I see you."
"What's so damn important about getting back for that time I

just don't know, why can't I see you tonight, that's what I want to know."
Yorky had one hand on the door latch looking at Kath.
"Well, love I'll tell you" Yorky took in a deep breath and opened the door slightly. "The reason I must be back for 11 o'clock is" Yorky took another deep breath and opened the door wider, "The reason is I'm getting married at that time."
Yorky was out of the door quickly but not quickly enough, the hot tea pot hit him in the middle of the back followed by the nearly full milk bottle. He got as far as the gate when he got a blow on the back of the head. He looked back at the cottage door for a second and saw Kath running towards him with a very large, heavy poker, with her dressing gown open showing off whatever Nature had given her. She might just as well not have had one on. Yorky jumped over the gate and started to run down the small street. The lady a few doors down was stood cleaning her front windows on a stool and nearly fell off when she heard an expression she had never heard before. She was not that countybred not to know what it meant even at her time of life.
"You, you.....you bloody fornicating bastard that's what you are, you spend the night in my bed and then you tell me you have to get back as you're getting married in a few minutes, you bloody bastard you."

The lady stopped cleaning her windows and looked up the street at the young woman a few doors away. She saw the soldier running past with his back covered in tea and milk. She saw the young woman with her hands on her naked hips, her breasts exposed too, eyes like organ stops and coming out with the most terrible sayings - still it would be something to talk about at the next church meeting, or wouldn't it?

VICTOR IRVING

Victor has been, among other things, a miner, a soldier and a bus driver. He assures us that everything that happens here is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent.....or was it the guilty?

ARNDALE MAN

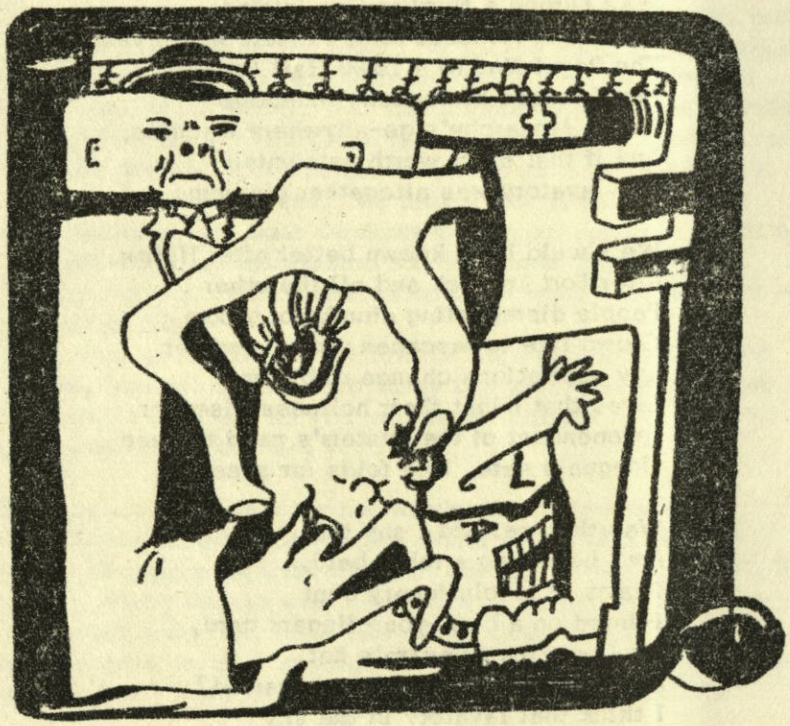
Who said our bran-new Arndale Centre
Was Europe's Number One latrine,
When The Princess Anne herself would venture
The Royal Nod to a Town Hall Dream?
Proof indeed of her long indenture
In the Monarchy's go-anywhere machine,
And if that's not worth esteeming
The lavatory was altogether gleaming.

We should have known better after Hulme,
After Fort Ardwick and all the other
People disregarding chunks of gloom
Grown like townscapes out to smother
Any aspirations chance of bloom,
Lives that might their holiness discover
Independent of the system's need to keep
Unequals safe, like folds for sheep.

Was that me, did I say that,
Am I becoming a rebel bard,
Reams of revolutionary chat
Printed on a burn-your-fingers card,
Am I wearing Guevara's hat,
Are Trotskyist leanings ever jarred?
I think that lavatory in the sky
Has more to answer for than I.

Two thousand years ago, almost
We joined the Common Market of the day,
Rome's, whose sun was never setting boast
Kept until some vandals moved our way,
So goodbye Rome and Caesar's shattered ghost
But not beaurocracy which had come to stay,
For Rome was a clerical paradise, what's more,
The same clerks still work the Town Hall floor.

The Normans came and won their battles,
Grabbed all the land with Holy Orders,
Recorded much of tithes and chattels
In a book called Domesday, warders
Named De Trafford named us vassals,
The clerks crept in the Churches cleric borders.
It was another heyday for those groupies,
United in a prototype of N.U.P.E.'s.



The Industrial Revolution put an end to
Our village occupation on the map,
We became a town you wouldn't steer a friend to
Unless you were a kinky sort of chap,
King Cotton's dynasties the blend through
Emergent money and religious pap.
All were happy except the many,
Who didn't count and were ten a penny.

There was a war once, a war called Great,
Thousands of our townsmen volunteered,
Clamoured for uniforms and rifled hate
At similar Germans who similarly cheered
A chance of slaughter on a famous date,
Today's July the First, what battle's heard?
I think that generations urge to kill
The long festering of mine and hill.

Now part of Europe's Common lot,
Our weights and measures, money, shrunk,
Italy seething like a plot
In one of Shakespeare's word drunk
Dafter plays, France all shot
With the usual brand of Gallic bunk,
Germany abounding,
Which is quite confounding.

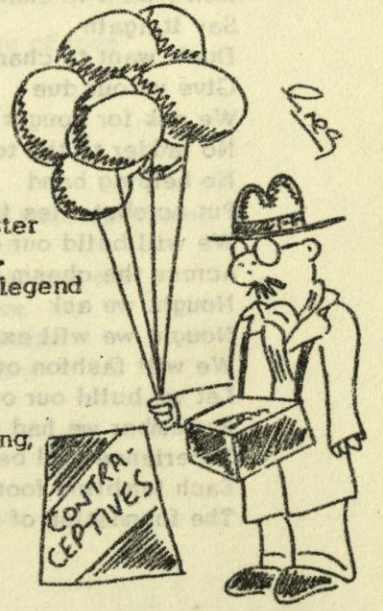
Ask the Bankers in their King Street castles,
Ask the Insurers in their High-rise keep,
Ask County Hall, expect some hassles,
Whose is the kingdom wherein we sleep,
Whose is the dream whose dreaming dazzles
Anonymous conquerers ill-got leap
On towns like ours? concerning which
The Evening News is a son a bitch.

I blame the Unions, I blame the Japs,
I blame United, too many Scots,
I blame the E.E.C.'s 'old chaps',
I blame Vanessa Redgrave's Trots,
I blame the town that towns elapse,
I blame the times for life it rots,
I never blame myself nor you
For what we are, much less, do.

You may have noted, or maybe not,
The odd anarchial thought or two
Within these verses, verses what
Sound uncouth at times, sometimes you
Might even think I"ve got
More cheek than poetry, screw
Your innuendos, sir, I'm going,
You pays your money, you gets your poem.

JOE SMYTHE

COME AND GET ME



Come and get me, invited the poster
outside the Adults Only cinema.
Come and get me, whispered the legend
at the end of Oxford Street.

Keeping my eyes on both I let
the town draw itself around me.
Funny, I heard only children crying,
the slow fall of an ancient rain.

Joe Smythe is a railway guard and poet. The poems in this collection are mostly Manchester with thoughts on the Royal Family, The World Cup, and British Rail thrown in for good measure. The subjects include the history of a big city, its beauties and uglinesses, Joe's own childhood, work, sex, and on occasions even politics. The world seen through another pair of working class eyes. Illustrations by Dave MacDonald.

64 pages. 25p from Grass Roots or North West Arts, or direct from Commonword (+15p P&P).

poems by joe smythe

WE ARE BLACK

The fact is we are black
Don't want to change that
Say it again
Don't want to change that
Give us our due
We ask for nought more
No ladder to the top
No helping hand
Put no obstacles in our way
We will build our own bridges
Across the chasm of time
Nought we ask
Nought we will expect
We will fashion our own destiny
Let we build our own tomorrow
Remember we had a yesterday
Experience will be our teacher
Each fumbling footstep
The foundation of our tomorrow.

AFRICA BLUES

Africa blues are calling
That's where our root are
Though four five centuries remove
The pangs of birth draws
As a mother to her child
To an open bosom of love
Dry of the milk that nourish
Full of the love that ever flow.

Africa blues is calling
We hear the murmur of your voice
We can see the dusky black men regal black
Carrying golden spears
Lift they the veil of darkness
The sleep of ten thousand years has end
Talking drums of wholeness
Speaking the universal language of love
To a still unbelieving world
The dawn of a new creation.

Africa voice is calling
Across the waves we embrace a wide continent
Sweet the kiss of a virgin's lips
The music of the talking drums to our ear
Broken the umbilical cord of love
Ship across the oceans of the world
Despair broken hearted and weary
Longing for Africa dear shore.

Africa blues is calling
We hear the murmur of your voice
Lift is the veil of darkness
That once darken our path
From across the oceans wide
Guided are our foot steps
To the shore of bosomly love
Africa that's where our roots are.

KEITH STEPHENS

Keith Stephens lives in Moss Side. At present he is doing a course at Fielden Park College. He is into Blues and black culture.

THE BUS

When Marion Summerskill had a mouth for something SHE HAD A MOUTH. She was the queen of the council rates office, or so she thought. Her biggest terror was that the world would become one big bureaucracy. The next was that everyone would become black and there would be no more whites. Marion, at 58, didn't have any children of her own. She worked for an infirm husband. She had loaded munitions in the Second World War while her husband was blown off his feet by a mortar. "No one wears a poppy any more. We fought for freedom. Everyone has forgotten.

"Women can't walk the streets nowadays." She says: "We let them come over here. And they're as bitter as hell. We didn't let them come. We never invited them. They've taken our jobs and now they're on the dole. Why should I keep them? They have six kids on the welfare state. All these muggings and break ins. You just have to look in the Evening News. Ninety nine percent of decent people are behind Enoch Powell. You're like me, you're too soft." She says: "Well, we've been soft for too long, now it's time for them to go back."

If ever there was a pain in the neck it was Delroy Winston talking politics. About going back to Africa. About the white man is after your ass. I mean, really all this was a big joke, but you didn't dare laugh. But where did he think up all this stifled fantasy from? About 'societal fantasies', black meaning the inner self or no-such person; and the 'white rapist', the unzipper of black Levis. On the subject of white females you wondered where he was going to stop. If they did wear you out I suppose there was always THE MAN'S VITAMIN. We all wondered why he didn't get a job as a household caller. But there he was, every Friday night. And I mean why did every prospective employer choke on his coffee when he walked into the room or dither when he offered to light a cigarette. Or go all faint and try to terminate an

interview ahead of time, then go staggering to the window and claw the lace. What's up, hadn't they seen a pair of A levels before?

But it was true, it was the way white people did look at him. Why did they always seem to be visually undressing him. Or because they thought it was their country, maybe. Or brown skin reminds them of their mothers maybe? Perhaps they were all delivered by black doctors and nurses and this obviously had such an impression that they'd catch his eye from long off then hold their heads down or pretend to look straight through him when he came up real close.

At school and college they'd made comments about his back-end. Played pulling his hair and threw pencils through it, reckoned he had a different scent. If Delroy Winston wasn't bent or crazy, he was being steered that way. I mean, how would you like to live with mad-people and not get paid for it? Would his children have to tolerate this abuse?

The key was to take it with a pinch of salt, not pay too much attention; to have a clear direction of where YOU were going. Let THEM fall over THEMSELVES. Delroy was heading for the revolution. But to be seen on the multi-storey Oldham Road in a green camouflage commando jacket and black beret WAS conspicuous. "White boys could do this sort of thing and get away with it," his Dad said "but when black boys come along upsetting the applecart....." Delroy burst out of the door and onto the street.

Our old friend Marion Summerskill (the other half) had just been shopping. It was a quarter to four in the afternoon when she climbed onto the two door single decker bus which would take her home to Moston. She put eighteen pence in the driver's tray and took her ticket from the machine. As the bus accelerated across Corporation Street she was flung up the gangway towards the middle of the bus where she sat down opposite the Exit doors.

The bus moved up Cannon Street, then joined a file of buses moving left into High Street. Then the bus swung up Shude Hill through a pool of brilliant sunshine which flashed down between the roofs and an alley and flooded the interior of the bus.

The bus crossed a junction into Rochdale Road where Delroy flagged it down. He slipped eighteen pence into the driver's tray and took a ticket from the machine. As the bus accelerated he was thrown up the gangway towards the middle of the bus where he sat down opposite the Exit doors beside a white woman (the dreaded Marion).

Marion looked at Delroy's tea-cosy hat. Red and yellow stripes. Then she peered down his red corduroy jacket, making no secret of her inspection. All this viewing session was self-conscious. She was appearing in this pretend, self-made movie for the benefit of the passengers sat behind her. They would surely be watching how this brave English woman could sit next to this big West Indian just as brave Hollywoood queens had won Oscars for keeping thier chins up under invasions.

She looked at his red denim jeans with the hole in the thigh. There it was, what she had not wanted to see....brown flesh. Any woman who could allow herself, bring her body to touch..... .....Marion's face was a study.

Meanwhile, Delroy was trying to mind his own business. He was, at the time, appearing in his own self-made movie about the black warriors chained in Babylon. They would never be free in the white man's country. Look at this one he was sat next to. Eyeing him up like she was naming her price. Surely she wasn't after his body. Delroy's eyes searched around, wishing he had the nerve to get up and sit elsewhere. "And you wonder why women get mugged. Look at her purse hanging out of her shopping bag just waiting to be stolen. Yeah, that's all women like that are waiting for. To be mugged. That's why she's sat opposite the exit door. You could just see it: as soon as the bus reaches Hollinwood Avenue: stop, grab and run."

As the bus rocked up Boggart Hole Clough, Marion averted her gaze to her shopping. She was lucky to get the bread, so late in the afternoon. Those new potatoes weren't bad at twelve pence a pound. To tell the truth she nearly did jump a mile when she saw her purse sticking out of her bag. Lord, and now she had made herself a sitting target. Supposing all she'd heard and said had been true. And there she was, God, she couldn't touch the purse now. Never mind, she was getting off in a minute.

What happened next was even more odd and not quite what it seemed at all. But it's hard to see the truth when you're thinking a lie. Firstly the bus stopped at Tweedle Hill Road and the Exit doors opened with a psshh. "Stop thief, stop!" Marion shouted in her explanation to the entire Rates Office the next morning. "I grabbed his arm." She told everyone. "I told him: 'Give me back my purse' And he pushed me down in my seat and ran through the Exit door. And the driver just sat there. And there were these West Indian boys sat at the back.

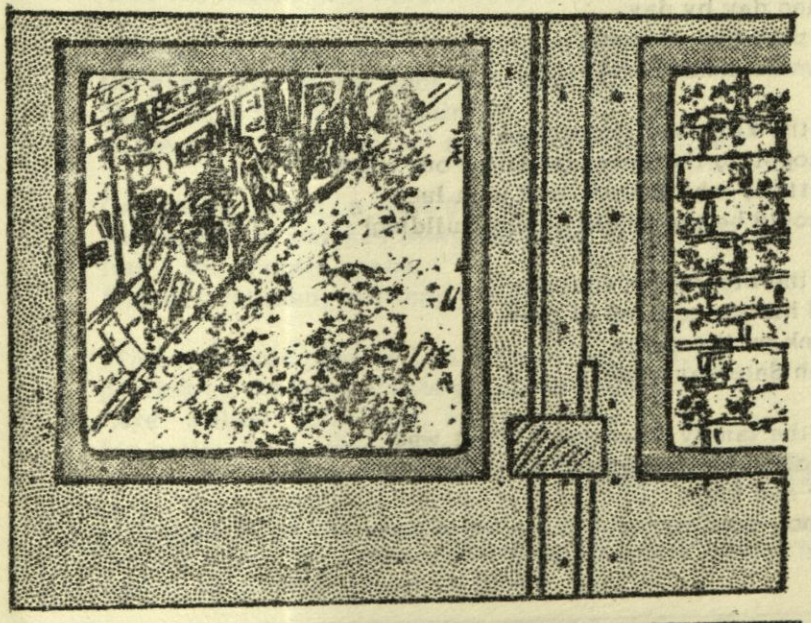
The single decker bus returned to Rochdale Road garage and a repair slip was placed beneath the windscreen wiper. On the second night the bus was placed over the inspection pit and stayed there for four days. Then it was parked a further three days in a side alley at the depot. By next thursday, inspection personell checked the faulty saloon motor hatch and found a purse that must have slipped between the centre seats. It contained about a pounds worth of change and an old photograph of a soldier in a war uniform. Marion's shaking panic had obviously dislodged the purse from her shopping bag.

By the time the purse reached lost property, the bus was in the paint shop awaiting new livery. As the old fleet numbers disappeared under the mist of spray paint, the bus scheduels for previous weeks found their way into a Manchester Corporation sack for Clean Waste Paper: and in an oblique stone city police station, a faceless woman identified a mugger from a line of faceless men. "This country is fast becoming like America" she told imaginary reporters as she rightly identified the wrongly suspected man.

Lee Williamson looked out of the Police van window. Pointless white buses with empty destination signs passed the van in either direction. And pointless, anonymous people walked meaningless grey streets that might have been home. Instead of their faces he could see only white blurs as he meant to start out laughing at the absurdity and found tears instead.

JOHN GOWLING

John was born in Moss Side, raised in Reddish, and has since lived in Moss Side, Merseyside and now in a Council maisonette in Beswick. He has worked in a night club, hostpital, housing department, and on the buses. He is 27 and white.



NEIGHBOURS

This poem is for you,
people known only by
the sounds of reggae or radio four
carried though water pipes,
the smell of boiling cabbage along the walkway,
the heels of shoes, and wheels of skateboards overhead,
the thirty seconds spent together, not breathing, in the lift,
the brief exchange of knowing looks,
words to pass the time of day

for the kids down the landing
who from my voice and brief case
have marked me down as a doctor
(at 4 or 5 their sense of distance is unerring)

for the old woman upstairs
noting day by day
the progress of buses
down Rochdale Road

for the kids who succeeded
in toppling the lamppost under our window
(in time, who knows, and with luck
it could be the whole bloody building)

for the bloke from Glasgow
and his succession of pals
drunk on the stairs
each Saturday night

for the family downstairs about who
for all the laughter and shouting and music
day and night
I know nothing

for the strangers next door
two feet away, half way up the wall
eating or sleeping or loving
as I sit here writing this

this poem is for you.

BUS STOP

Waiting on Monsall Street for a No 80 bus,
Two old guys chewing through a conversation:
"The first of bloody June" says the first
and scowls. "Aye" says his mate glowering
at the sky. "Think it 'as forgotten 'ow to shine."

On hearing which the sun burst forth
And beat down hard upon the earth
And baked and cracked and dried it out.
(The sky blazed and oceans boiled)

"Bloody 'ot" says the first guy, feeling
the sweat prickle the back of his neck.
"Aye" says the other, squinting
at the sky. "Could do wi' a breath o' wind an' all"

On hearing which, a wind got up,
And galeforce whisked away the earth
Into a pit in outer space.
(Planets collided, millions died)

"Three minutes past half past" says the first,
peering up the road. "Late a-bloody-gain."
"Aye" smiles the second, and scratches
his balls. "It's always the same."

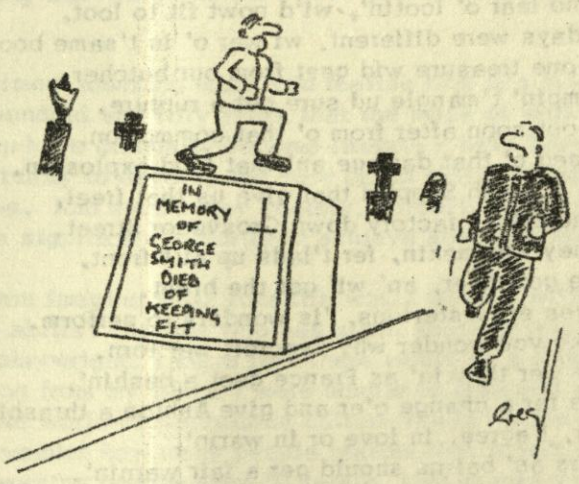
PHIL BOYD

Phil Boyd is 27. He used to be a bad liberal studies teacher, but now works for Commonword. These poems are about the Turkey Lane estate where he lives.

T' PLAYIN' FIELDS O' RYECROFT

They spout about t'playin' fields o' Eton,
Where Britain's great sportsmen are reared.
'Igh class education, provided the nation
Wi' bloodstock respected, revered.
Top 'ats, fancy clothes wi' stiff collars,
Were passports to privilege an' fame.
To keep a straight bat, an' to t'dons doff ther 'at,
Were considered as "Playing the game".
Now ah'll tell thi 'bout playin' fields o' Ryecroft
Weer mony a lad shined at sport.
It wer in owd Earnshaw's back,
We'd no grass an' no track,
As to privilege, wid nowt o' that soert,
Just a burnin' desire to kick at a ball.
The playin' conditions didn't matter at all.
There were nowt such as youth clubs
An' 'elp o' that soert,
Just a burnin' desire to join in the sport.
T'wer a pork butcher's shop on Stockport Road
That give it that 'lustrious name.
They'd be killin' ther pigs that they laid on a board
While we wer playin' our game.
Surrounded bi sqeels, oppen middins an' tipplers
There'd bi added the pong of some lass fryin' kippers.
Despite the distractions when th'opponants were beaton
Wi felt just as proud as them toffs playin' at Eton.
Where cream cakes an' pop 'ud bi served fer a snack,
Wid go wom fer jam butties from owd Earnshaw's back.
Our schoo' wer dear owd Trafalgar,
An' what wer more famous than that,
When t'three R's wer o'er wid dash fer that doer
Fer football in owd Earnshaw's back.
Now ah'll tell you 'bout summat ah'm proud on:
Wid a team representin' our schoo'
That nob'dy could beat, at wer a fair treat,
To see what them youngsters could do.
Ah'll mention a few ah remember,

'Though ah'm goin' back fifty odd year.
'Arry Driver wer t'goalie, Jimmy Robbin on t'wing,
Bud Walker an' Johnnie Dyson could make that ball sing.
Our teacher an' coach Mr Radcliffe,
A false leg from t'war 'add to bear:
To every lad 'e was more like a Dad.
Stalybridge later made 'im ther mayor.
It doesna' need class, aye an' privilege
To mek a lad good at a game.
Wearin' clogs or fine togs don't matter a jot:
When we're stripped off we're all just the same.



TH' ASHTON EXPLOSION

Who remembers th' explosion at Ashton?
That shook poor owd Ryecroft to t'roots.
We geet fairly battered, o' t'windows were shattered
An' t'doers were torn of ther 'ooks.
Them slates showered down like confetti,
Streets littered wi' debrie galore.
It were said that poor 'etty
Were blown of their petty
Bi a draught as who'd nare felt afore.
Front doers were left open, that 'ad um.

To lock um meant fumblin' wi' keys.
There were no time fer that, or searchin' fer t'cat.
Mony a gale now just seemed like a breeze
Wi o' started runnin' in t' direction o' t'moss,
Fer t'cover o' t'muck 'eaps an' ditches,
When wi geet on that bog, ah wer minus a clog,
An' mi brother were minus 'is britches.
It were 'ell of a scramble to ger out ut t'way.
Ah were nobbur a nipper on that 'ectic day.
Mi Mam pushin' t'pram, wi two 'anging on,
Wi scampered to safety from our battered wom.
Ther wer no fear o' lootin', wi'd nowt fit to loot,
But them days were different, wi wer o' in t'same boot.
Wid only one treasure wid geet from our butcher,
Any lad umpin' t'mangle ud sure get a rupture.
Wi found out soon after from o' that commotion,
What caused o' that damage an' that loud explosion.
It weren't a Bosch Sepplin that give us that freet,
It wer a munitions factory down Grosvenor Street.
T.N.T. they wer mekin, fer t'lads up at t'front,
Bur it nare got theer, an' wi' got the brunt.
God's moves er mysterious, 'is wonders to perform.
It fair meks you wonder why Ryecroft wer torn.
Per'aps 'e wer thinkin' as France geet a bashin',
'Twer time fer a change o'er and give Ashton a thrashin'
Fair's fair, I agree, in love or in warin',
But mothers an' bairns should ger a fair warnin'.
'E could a picked time, such as picknickin' day,
Daisy Nook or Belle Vue, when they'd o' bi away.
That day teks mi back o'er sixty odd year.
'Though Ryecroft remains, it's so different ah fear.
Familiar faces ah nare seem to meet,
Or greetin's o' welcome in Grosvenor Street.

WILF CARR

Wilf Carr is a pensioner. A member of the Rochdale Writers Group, he started work in cotton spinning in 1926, and experienced the Depression of the 1930s.

WORKER WRITERS AND READERS?

This is the first of a series of articles which take up the question of reading habits, literacy, and the kind of writing Commonword would like to see more of. This article was written by Ray Mort who spent 20 years in the building trade while developing his skills as a playwright. He has done part time teaching and now works part time for Commonword.

It's almost amazing when you realize that it's only within the last hundred and fifty years that the mass of working people in Britain have gradually become literate - have been given the opportunity to develop the very basic skills of reading and writing. And even today society, through its schools, fails to help a significant minority to achieve adequate literacy.

Can you imagine what your life would be like without these basic skills? As one who has spent years developing his craft as a playwright, I know that there would be a massive chunk missing from my life if I were unable to read and write. A whole world of marvellous culture would be denied to me. But I wonder how many people realize that it was no accident that working people were illiterate, that it was a deliberate policy of the upper classes to keep workers in ignorance the better to manipulate and exploit them? (Just as today people are kept politically ignorant for the same reason.) But how many marvellous poets, playwrights and novelists have been denied to us because of the greed and selfishness of so-called cultured and civilized people? And how many people today are having their creativity suppressed and stultified by the lives they are forced to lead in this oppressive, unequal society?

Literacy, that is basic education, had to be struggled for just like basic trade union rights and the right to vote etc. There were heated and protracted battles in parliament between the reactionaries who saw danger in workers becoming educated and those who, for commercial reasons, saw advantages for themselves in workers being able to read and write as Britain

became more and more industrialized. In a parliament entirely composed of rich people, no one saw it from the worker's point of view, that being able to read and write were very beneficial skills to the individual themself. A necessity if people are to reach any real understanding of the world and its economic and political systems. It took many years of struggle by the radicals of the time - the Chartists were pre-eminent in the later years - to change this blinkered and selfish attitude.

But writing has always been regarded as a potentially subversive activity by the ruling class and they have continually taken steps to suppress or control it. In the 1790's there was the ludicrous situation whereby pioneer (so-called) educationalists like Hannah More actually took care to teach the children of the working class to read but not to write in order to contain the threat of literacy. The government went to great lengths to try to control the early newspapers through a series of "taxes on knowledge", Stamp Duty, which meant registration, Excise Duties on paper and Advertising Duty. They also instituted strict libel laws.

It was the cheap, radical working class newspapers which suffered most from the taxes and they were effectively suppressed during an important period of social unrest by the swingeing Newspaper Stamp Act of 1819 which was introduced specifically for this purpose. But gradually the laws were flouted on such a large scale - almost 800 publishers and vendors were imprisoned between 1830 and 1836 for publishing a paper without a stamp or selling them without a licence - so that the duties were gradually reduced and abolished by 1861. The repressive libel laws remain.

Ironically, it was the abolition of the taxes which enabled the ruling class to expand newspaper production enormously, founding papers like the Daily Telegraph which pursued a conservative political line, while the radical papers, without much advertising revenue, couldn't compete. But previous to this, to counteract the radical newspapers like Black Dwarf (founded 1817), the Chartist Northern Star (1837) and Reynolds Political Instructor (1849) which told workers the truth about the viciously unjust society they were living in, the conservatives launched jingoistic and patronizing period-

icals like Friendly Visitor (1819), True, Home Friend and Evening Companion (1851), and British Workman and Friend of the Sons of Toil (1855). A passage from the latter clearly illustrates their obnoxious method and message. A working man is supposed to be speaking:

"Well (continued Joe), I heard a bit of news at church. I heard that God thought it worthwhile to send His own Son to give me a message .... and that He who had come to give me the message was worrying, like, to see how I took it. It came to me like a flash that He'd got his eye on me. Worst of it was I remembered that He'd been a carpenter Himself, and knew how much work ought to be put in in an hour; the kind of foreman you can't take in, who knows good work when he he sees it, and gets cut up when you scamp, so I began to do my "level", and I soon found it paid. The master took to sending me to do the best jobs, and as I didn't like Him to see me shabby, I always tried to be neat and clean, though my morning shave was a bit of a bother. I suppose it was noticed, for parson isn't the only one who calls me "Mr" now ... I was a poor kind of chap, and I saw that if, in spite of this he'd trouble about me, it must have been all on his own like ... so I've tried and asked Him to help me, to make myself more worth it. That's all mates!"

It's worth noting that the magazine containing this unctious, snide drivel didn't cease publication until 1921. Other sops to the working class included many "useful knowledge" periodicals such as Knight's Penny Magazine (1832) and Chambers Journal (1852); evangelical and pietistic stuff like the Christian Cottagers Magazine (1845); sentimental guff like Eliza Cook's Journal (1849); lurid penny dreadfuls like God's Revenge Against Murder (1833); and even an obscene and undated Star of Venus, or Shew Up Chronicle.

All have their counterparts among present day newspapers and magazines. The ruling class maintain even tighter control of the modern press and its technological brethren radio and television. Education is still regarded very largely as vocational training and is slanted towards fitting people for particular careers and turning out citizens who accept the status quo of our sod-you-Jack, I'm-all-right materialistic society. It does not open people's minds and teach them to

think for themselves, and question conventional "wisdom". It stultifies the imagination so that many people leave school not wishing to open another book, confining their reading to pernicious, slanted and sensational rubbish like "The Sun", "The Star" and "The Daily Express". It's hard won literacy being wasted. Books, the repository of most of the world's knowledge, which could give people a larger understanding of life and help them to develop political awareness, are being ignored. The ruling class - the well-heeled and the well-fed who misappropriate the wealth that workers create - must be very chuffed.

A bleak picture? Undoubtedly. But there are of course still areas of progressive activity: workers newspapers, workers political parties, teachers who believe in education for the "whole" person, alternative theatre groups, peoples' rights centres, etc etc. One such area is the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishing Groups. The Federation exists to develop, encourage and publish working class and socialist writing. It consists of about twenty writers groups spread around Britain and all are busy producing books of poetry, short stories, descriptive pieces, autobiography, etcetera. This magazine was published by the Commonword Writers Workshop based in Manchester.

The worker writer movement, dating from the first groups founded in the early seventies, is still in the fledgeling stage. But if it expands into every area of the country, encouraging many more working class people to write and express themselves, and succeeds in building up a mass readership, it may well have very significant cultural effects. Hopefully, working people will realize that they and their fellows have valuable things to express from their own experience, and will not as readily accept the trash served up to them by other classes. They may also come to realize that they, as a whole, have the power to shape and alter the society we live in to make it a just and truly civilized one.

RAY MORT

For substantiation of matters touched upon in this article, I

recommend the fascinating "Newspaper History: From The 17th Century To The Present Day" edited by George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate. "The Bleak Age" by J.L. and Barbara Hammond. And, most important of all, "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists" by Robert Tressell. Get hold of it, it's a must!

CASEMAKING

The fight for literacy is not over. The next two pieces were first published by the Gatehouse project which exists to publish and promote writing for and by adult literacy students. The first writer is a student at the Wythenshawe reading club, the second is a tutor.

Casemaking is what I work at - that's making cases to put machines into. I work in Deansgate. I've been there a few months but I've been doing this for twenty odd years. I worked in fibre-glass for a bit, sailing boats. That was when I lived in Blackpool for twelve months. Dustbins and all that are made of fibre-glass.

Then I came back to Manchester doing case-making. My Dad was in the job before, he'd done it for about 50 years. He's retired now. Where I'm working now they've got a machine that nails all the ribs on. It's the first one I've ever seen. Before you had to nail them together by hand.

I like the job but there's not much money in it. 38 hours a week. We're supposed to have gone in for 25% but whether we get it is another story.

PETER

BLACKBIRD

He clocked off at the usual time. The factory was full of the sound of clicking clock machines as men entered and left. A few wisecracks and pleasantries to his mates and he sank into the darkness outside.

The sharp cold outside made him shudder with relief, the machines and sweat behind him. A blackbird began to sing slowly and deliberately. Not a tree in sight! He could see the headlines in the Daily Star:

BLACKBIRD SINGS
IN TRAFFORD PARK

"They've invented a machine to make bird noises" he shouted and laughed to himself. A passing policeman asked him if he had been drinking and told him to keep his voice down.

In the distance he could see the outline of a stationary bus and he burst into a run wishing curses on the driver if he decided to move off without him. A thermos flask bounced awkwardly in the carrier bag which he carried on his shoulder.

The bus began to purr into life but with a final effort he jumped onto the platform and gasped out the price of the fare to the driver.

Upstairs the atmosphere was choking with smoke. Ten tired faces stared at him gloomily and one coughed heavily.

"Thanks for the seranade, cock" said Tom and settled comfortably in his seat.

He began thinking of his lonely flat he was going back to. Wythenshawe was no paradise at this time in the morning. At least it was getting light a little earlier these days and it was a marvellous feeling to know that he had a warm pit to look forward to when everybody else had to think of getting up for work.

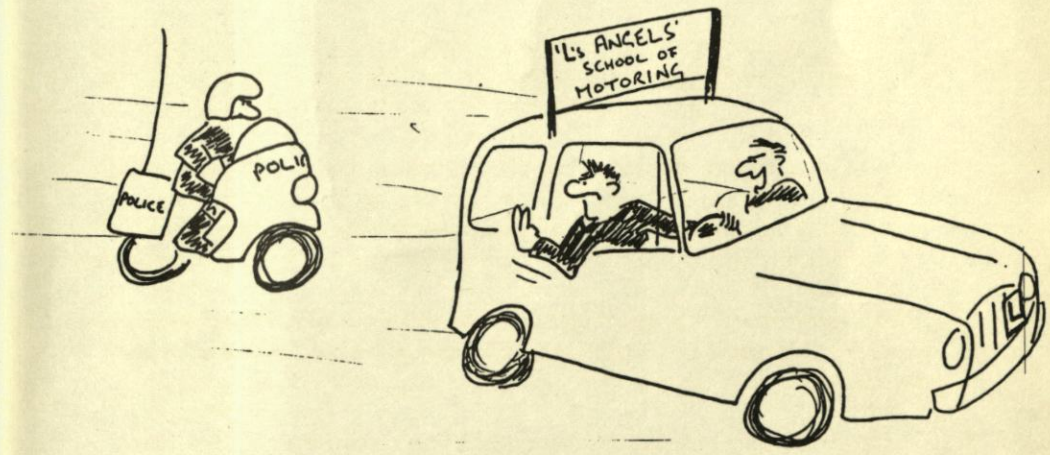
NEIL HARDMAN

MEETINGS

Mondays 7.30pm. Commonword Workshop meetings. Everyone is welcome. (See back cover for more information)

Tuesdays 7.30pm. Rochdale Writers Group meet at the headquarters of Rochdale Voluntary Action, 157 Drake Street. All are welcome to read or just to listen. Contact Ray Mort at Commonword.

Alternate Wednesdays. The Hulme Writers Group meets in Hulme Library. For more details phone Fran Kershner on 226-1006.



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COMMONWORD

WRITE ON is a quarterly magazine produced by the Commonword Writers Workshop. The writing in it is by working people and reflects the way they see the world. We believe that writing has been for far too long a middle class possession. We are fed up with 'serious' writers, members of the literary elite, writing for and about a privileged few; and with big publishers who serve up 'literature' for the minority and best selling trash for the majority; and with an 'educational' system that cripples most people's ability to enjoy or create their own writing.

We hold regular workshop meetings at which people who have always been discouraged from writing get together to read and discuss their own work. We try to find outlets for this work in public readings and our own publications. We get out into schools and colleges, working with different groups in the community. The important thing is communication, writing and helping other people to write about the things that matter to them and the majority of people. For the elite, the important thing is usually making money.

Workshop meetings are held at 7.30 every Monday. There are people in the office during the day to talk about your writing, or give more information about our work.

61 BLOOM ST MANCHESTER

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