

the summerhill way: a critique of a.s. neill's notion of freedom

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Summerhill is a sort of educational shrine where the casualties of conventional education come to bathe in the healing waters as if in hope of a miraculous cure. Considering the number of pilgrims who have been attracted to this educational Eden and how widely its prophetic message, promising a new kind of civilisation, has been disseminated, it is astonishing how little critical work has appeared on the Summerhill sect. Indeed, Neill and Summerhill have attracted an uncritical adulation and have inspired an emotionally charged devotion that makes his followers appear like the disciples of a mass movement dedicated to preserving their leader's message. I say this not to belittle the reputation of a man who has been described as the most famous headmaster in the world and the greatest educator of the twentieth century but to argue that a more fundamental and critical appraisal of his ideals and influence is long overdue. And I would like to argue that Neill's message was not primarily educational but rather that it was spiritual and that, in appealing to some deepseated needs of intellectuals, he inspired unwittingly a commitment that was the antithesis of his belief in freedom.

As most people will know, Summerhill is a private, co-educational, boarding school for about forty children, mostly American, whose ages range from four to sixteen; it is situated outside Leiston in Suffolk and comprises a somewhat delapidated house with various annexes for classrooms and accomodation (1). Educationally it is the prototype "anti-school" (2). Fifty years before the de-schoolers began to castigate the orthodox school for its rigidity and futility, A.S. Neill had founded a progressive school that made it practically unique in English education -there was no uniform, no corporal punishment, no religious instruction, no compulsory sport, no prefects, and, above all, there was to be none of the moulding of character as perfected by the traditional Public Schools (such as Eton, Winchester, and Harrow) (3) who were so assiduously imitated by the state Grammar Schools. Paradoxically, Neill and the English progressives chose to use exactly the same means as the great Public Schools, namely remote, rural, residential schools. Remote because they were a retreat from industrial society, rural because of belief in nature and a distaste for urbanism, small because they wanted an intimate, familial atmosphere,

and boarding because they fundamentally mistrusted state control.

While Neill had always been something of a lone maverick on the far left of the English Progressive Movement he was, initially, deeply involved in the post-war progressive upsurge of the nineteen twenties and it is worth looking briefly at the radical ethos of that period. It is well summed up in the first issue of the journal *The New Era* (the progressive mouthpiece which Neill helped to edit) which proclaimed in 1920,

"Parents and Teachers! We shall be made *worthy* to help in the *sacred* work of training the Citizens of Tomorrow". (emphasis added).

The traumas of the First World War -with its blood-letting military policies and its rabid patriotism at home- led intellectuals to a concentration on the formation of character in early childhood which was greatly influenced by the novel theories of Freud. Generally, the progressive educational ideology in England was part of a regenerative social philosophy which sought to purify and reform society by raising an elite of rational co-operative, internationally, minded men and women who would end hatred and war. To protect these tender shoots they withdrew to rural communities where they exhibited many of the introspective symptoms of a sect (it was said of one school that the children consumed their brown bread and cocoa as if partaking of the Sacrament!) Indeed, the progressive literature of the time is shot through with the strains of millennialism, apocalypticism, and adventism, which reveal the intellectual's reaction to modern industrial society; it threatens to mechanize and dehumanize man who has lost his innocence, and he must be reborn again through the child -"for unless you become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven". This lends an essentially spiritual, redemptive, and religious tone to the progressive credo and thus its children are as missionaries who will crusade for a new social order. The purification motif was symbolized by a finicky preoccupation with soil, food, fads, elimination, eugenics, nature cure, etc. In essence, the progressives fervently believed that to liberate the child was to prepare the ground for wider social reform.

Neill too shared the heartfelt aspiration that "the abolition of characterbuilding will mean the beginning of a new, free, and happy world". But, more than anything, he and his school became synonymous with the espousal of freedom for the child. And it is with the nature of that freedom that I am primarily concerned. In particular, I would like to raise the question of the extent of Neill's influence on the children and also the degree to which they respond to being a deviant minority.

Neill was born near Forfar in the east of Scotland in 1883 (4). His early life was dominated by the lower-middle-class respectability of his home (his father was a village school-master), by the narrow Calvinism of sermons shot through with the themes of guilt and repression (at the age of six he was locked in a

dark room for engaging in some exploratory sexual fumbblings with his sister), and by failure to achieve at school (going up to university at the late age of 25 convinced him that forced learning in childhood was a waste of time). It is not difficult to see in Neill's later life and work a number of basic convictions that were shaped by his austere upbringing. Without doubt, the most central belief was in the innate goodness of the child; in this, like Rousseau, he was emphatically denying the doctrine of Original Sin. To a certain extent all his educational work can be seen as a working-out of his own educational freedom (he underwent analysis with Homer Lane and Wilhelm Reich) and, in turn, using his personal insights to fight a broader battle for emotional freedom in childhood. A number of other personality-traits are revealed in his words and actions including a degree of anti-intellectualism, a propensity for shocking conventional people, and a predilection for uttering educational maxims with all the moral fervour of a Calvinist preacher (he once thought about joining the Church).

In brief, I believe that Neill's main aim was to save souls. As such he should be seen as a moral reformer rather than an educationist and, while being a moralist is not a crime, this perspective does impair his espousal of freedom for the child. For the fundamental tenet of Neill's educational doctrine was that the child should be given the maximum freedom to grow and to develop naturally, that no effort should be made to mould or influence him or her, and that to indoctrinate a child (be it with militarism of pacifism, or even the sort of cultural evangelicism which he called "The Light of Post-Impressionism") was morally indefensible. And yet his writing is pervaded with a tone of moral absolutism which has turned him into a guru figure for educational radicals but which raises grave doubts in my mind as to the reality of freedom at Summerhill.

His writings bear the hall-mark of the missionary, and some might say, the ideologue. For example, the preface to his book, *Summerhill* is a diatribe against modern society,

"That society is sick no one can deny; that society does not want to lose its sickness is also undeniable. It fights every humane effort to better itself. It fought votes for women, abolition of capital punishment; fought against the reform of our cruel divorce laws, our cruel laws against homosexuals... Napalm? Difficult to get worked up about kids incinerated far away in Asia. Race hatred? O, natural; you can't mix races. There old Adolf was right. I know that Jesus tells us to love our neighbours but he didn't tell us to love niggers, did he?" (5).

This apocalyptic vision of contemporary society, which thinly disguises a crypto-elitist distaste for the masses, sees the outside world as evil which can only, it seems, be redeemed by a Summerhill education. For the free child will abjure hatred, cruelty, and war and, in so doing, will hope to shape a saner society. In suitably Biblical style, Neill expounds the Summerhill message, "Thou shalt not opt out". In effect, Neill is

proclaiming a sort of spiritual millenium; on the basis of his only daughter Zoe, whose free upbringing brought her to the cover of *Picture Post* at the age of two, he prophesied a new era.

"There are so few self-regulated babies in the world that any attempt to describe them must be tentative. The observed results so far suggest the beginnings of a new civilization, more profoundly changed in character than any new society promised by any kind of political party". (6).

A major source of inspiration for A.S. Neill was Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth -(Lane was an American who came to England and ran a radical, therapeutic-style community for young delinquents which was closed amid scandal towards the end of the First World War, after which Lane became an Analyst). His first visit to Lane's enterprise sounds not unlike a conversion experience; it was, he felt, the most important milestone in his life and he said of Lane,

"When we listened to him all our critical faculties were in suspense"(7)

Lane too was a fervent believer in the innate goodness of the child and he stated that,

"The child has a highly complex spiritual personality... unless the growing child be born again and again, it cannot enter the kingdom of the spirit". (8).

Neill has attributed Christ like qualities to Lane (who was not averse to attributing them to himself and who was given to saying in his later life, "it's not difficult to achieve perfection. After all, I have"), and also to Reich. And he writes cryptically in his preface to *Summerhill*,

"Two thousand years ago the people chose Barabbas and they crucified Christ. The people today make the same choice" (9).

Elsewhere he identifies with Socrates.

Neill himself has never had any party political affiliations, the closest being a long membership of the Progressive League (which is politically independent) of which he is a former President. But he was associated with a number of counter-traditional causes -enough to have him refused a visa by the United States in 1951- including at one time membership of the Committee of 100 in the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on one of whose demonstrations at a Polaris submarine base he was arrested. As he received increasing attention from the media throughout the sixties he was widely quoted on corporal punishment, delinquency, abortion, and on his opposition to all forms of censorship. In essence, much of what he said is religious and his denunciatory and hortatory statements are replete with the conviction of his own rightness; clearly, like many radicals, religious or secular, he yearned for a better society and believed that he had discovered the path to salvation,

"The future of Summerhill itself may be of little importance. But the future of the Summerhill idea is of the greatest importance to humanity. New generations must be given the chance to grow in freedom. The bestowal of freedom is the bestowal of love. And only love can save the world". (10)

To my mind, there is a fundamental contradiction here between Neill's claim that Summerhill does not indoctrinate and mould the child and his public identification with an emotional radicalism that was purveyed in crusading vein. For his "disciples" in the last few years of his life were increasingly a small group of disturbed American children, separated from their families for two-thirds of the year, who spent a number of years in remote, rural Suffolk. What did freedom mean to them? For instance, in the nineteen thirties A.S. Neill wrote to Bertrand Russell (who was then running his own progressive school) claiming that,

"Any inspector coming to me would certainly be greeted by Colin (aged six) with the friendly words "who the fucking hell are you?" (11).

The almost self-congratulatory interest taken in infantile co-prophiliac language, as if swearing was somehow a symbol of emancipation, seems to me to be very revealing. For one begins to feel that Summerhill works simply *because it is different*. Russell, for instance, came to a pessimistic conclusion about his efforts to turn his radical educational ideals into practice; he wrote,

"Many of the children were cruel and destructive. To let the children go free was to establish a reign of terror, in which the strong kept the weak trembling and miserable. A school is like the world; only government can prevent brutal violence". (12).

How did Neill avoid a "Lord of the Flies" situation where freedom leads to a Hobbesian war of all against all?

I consider that Summerhill was held together by Neill's personality and the hostility of the wider society. At the same time a school which attracted "incendiaries, thieves, liars, bed-wetters, bad-temperers, children who live their lives in fantasies" was not always a land of milk and honey. One man that I interviewed about his school days there in the nineteen-thirties revealed the two sides of Summerhill,

"I liked Neill very much, he was a very remarkable man and made a very deep imprint on me. I have memories of his Sunday afternoon stories in which the children would figure, say about a millionaire going off in his spaceship to the moon. It was incredible how we extemporised; all the children from four to sixteen would sit around him in his study, like so many birds around St. Francis, and he would bring in the children to figure in some adventure. If it was rescuing this spaceship from fire then whatever child was deprived in some way in the previous days was given a very glowing role in this episode - terrific stuff, and out of this world when you were children.

But it was grossly incompetent in terms of management and the place was cold and uncomfortable. Nobody would curtail anyone else so there was an absolutely unremitted hierarchy and if you were at the bottom of the pecking order, as I was, you got pecked chum, and pecked bloody hard. I was bullied bloody often and I had a horrible time. For two years I took myself to bed at 4.30 every evening after tea because it was the nicest place to be; it was safer and more comfortable in bed than anywhere else... But what he doesn't say in his books is that he has an absolutely electric personality with children and that he's failed to get anyone of the same calibre on the staff, partly because of money but partly because these really great chaps can't deputise".

Clearly Neill had charismatic qualities both for children and for grown-ups: equally clearly he was quite immune to the personal influence that he might be exerting. He was aware of a perennial battle to balance the demands of the individual with the need of the community (almost every article in *Id*, the magazine of the Summerhill Society, is about Summerhill freedom); and the mechanism for achieving some sort of equilibrium and equity was the self-government. In the School Meeting, which until quite recently was the show-piece for visitors, Neill's vote counted the same as a six-year old. But dit it? Young children imitate, and identify with, adults and, in practice, I find it difficult to accept that a six year old child remained uninfluenced by an internationally renowned radical figure with an "electric personality". And one should remember that many of the children at Summerhill were, and are, pre-adolescent; Neill himself said that self-government was difficult to work with too many older children and that his method of freedom was almost sure with children under twelve. What self-government did allow him to do, however, was to elicit by discussion those rules necessary for the survival of the community.

For some people it comes as a surprise that Summerhill has any rules or punishments; in fact, there were and are safety rules, voted by the General Meeting, concerning swimming, cycling, and smoking. There was an automatic fine for not keeping to the bed-rules, as there was also for riding someone's bike without permission, swearing in town, had behaviour in the cinema, climbing on roofs, and throwing food in the dining-room. Four boys who had sold articles from their wardrobes were confined to the school grounds and sent early to bed. The children could not decide on the organization of bedrooms, on the menu, or on the hiring, and firing, of staff. Neill also reserved a veto over matters of the children's "social security", as on dangerous weapons, or personal problems but endeavoured to interpret that role as a therapist rather than as an authority figure. And yet, ultimately, he *was* an authority figure as he had the right to expel children, a right he has exercised, albeit reluctantly. For instance, he imposed a regulation forbidding smoking under sixteen and introduced it by saying,

"I can't punish you. Only the community can punish, but I can say, all right, if you don't want to live the Summerhill way, you're not coming back". (13).

The concept of the "Summerhill way" seems to me to be particularly illuminating. For how many children are prepared to stand alone against the group, against the Summerhill way? Just consider the self-selection that sent them there in the first place; the parents were a minority of a minority, those who could afford to send their children to England and who believed in radical education, and the children of such parents may well have had prior socialization to the school's norms and values. The staff were those attracted to the school's ideals and who were prepared to work for a pittance. Many of the children were "disturbed" and in their playing out of aggressions, and their therapeutic relationship with Neill, might well have become emotionally dependant on the community which provided a paradisiac refuge from uncaring parents, a difficult home, or from repressive schools. In a number of ways, then, the child might have been predisposed to accept the Summerhill way and, as the final confirmer, there was the pressure of his or her peers. Neill has said that,

"I pin my faith in public opinion. No child will go on for years being disliked and criticized" and,

"The rules made by their peers are sacred to children" (14).

Thus, in contrast to the emphasis in the progressive literature on free unhampered growth in order to cultivate nonconformity and individuality, one finds a certain uniformity and rigidity in the way freedom was defined at Summerhill. (This tends to be true of progressive schools in general and recently Johnathan Kozol has said of the American Free Schools, "Why is it that "organic growth" turns out in every case to be the potter's kiln?" (15). The pupil society seems to have congealed into a sort of ritualized nonconformity that dictates norms of dress, language, and behaviour. It is as if the licence itself had become a kind of stereotyped obscenity by which wild impulses were channeled towards order and unity. One wonders how easy it was to challenge this consensus when a woman who attended Summerhill told me,

"I remember when I was about seven or eight finding a ten shilling note on the stairs and it was not believed that I found it. They thought I'd stolen it and I was taken up before the Council which was the school law and I remember the fear of standing before these huge boys and girls on the Council and being accused. And the panic that they would not believe me was quite terrific". (16)

Another powerful ingredient that made up the social cement of Summerhill was its notoriety. The school was continually threatened by the outside world and perceived hostility both in the press, which awaited any scandalous morsel with relish, about the "smoke and swear school", and in the educational establish-

ment which has sought at times to close Summerhill. Isolated and alone, the children were informed that they were nonconformers, the challengers, the courageous minority who promised to inaugurate a new civilization. At times, this made the children Summerhill look more like a beleaguered garrison viewing the outside world as predatory rather than as forerunners of a new era. But I cannot help feeling that Neill unconsciously used this antagonism of the wider society to promote internal cohesion. Two children, a boy and a girl, arrived in late adolescence at Summerhill and fall in love. Neill wrote them,

"I don't know what you two are doing and morally I don't care, for it isn't a moral question at all. But economically I do care. If you, Kate, have a kid, my school will be ruined. You see, you have just come to Summerhill. To you it means freedom to do what you like. Naturally, you have no special feeling for the school. If you had been here from the age of seven, I'd never have had to mention the matter. You would have such a strong attachment to the school that you *would* think of the consequences to Summerhill" (17).

The implications of this passage seem to me to cast serious doubts over the "freedoms" proffered at Summerhill, for Neill is saying that providing he receives the child as early as possible a strong identification with the school is almost guaranteed. And that, if I recall correctly, was one of the proud boasts of the Jesuits! He has also argued that if parents removed children because of swearing he would lose fees and that, while he would have liked to provide contraceptives for adolescents to enjoy a full sex life, it would have been the surest way of getting the school closed for permitting unlawful sexual intercourse. Now these may appear realistic compromises with some of the legal and moral norms of the wider society but implicitly Neill enforced them by a call to collective unity to preserve Summerhill. Behing a concern for economics, or health, or social security, Neill exerted a moral authority over the children, which was no doubt wholly beneficial, but which he continually refused to recognize.

In addition, the role that Neill adopted in relation to society appears somewhat disquieting. In rural Suffolk, he took up a sort of anchoritic position from which he cast almost gratuitous insults at unenlightened society as if seeming almost to invite martyrdom. He harped on precisely those themes most likely to alienate conventional society -sexual freedom, four-letter words, and a radicalism that focussed on crime, religion, corporal punishment, the mass media, Vietnam, censorship, and so on. At one and the same time he patently wanted to influence other people and yet seriously weakened his own message by antagonizing them (shades of Rousseau). In some ways he was perhaps still the young Scot blaspheming to the heavens, wondering why God did not punish him and yet enjoying the shocked looks on the mean faces in the kirk. Ironically, the moral determination of his message probably owed more to Calvin than to Freud.

In turn, he inspired a romantic, uncritical dogmatism in his

followers (and vituperation from his opponents) that is in stark contrast to their corrosive onslaughts on orthodox education and organized religion. A whole generation of radicals has become mesmerized by Summerhill and by the end of the sixties it had become an international mecca for progressive parents and teachers. And yet in the thirties Neill was writing to Bertrand Russell, in awe of the Elmhursts' wealth at Dartington Hall,

"And here I am absolutely gravelled to raise cash for a new pottery shed. Pioneering is a wash out man"; (18).

also in 1961 the school was in danger of closing as numbers were down to only 25 pupils. But the sixties were the turning point as Neill became adopted by educationists and the media. The precarious existence of the school was ended when Neill's reputation became to sweep America where, in 1969 alone, his book sold over 200,000 copies thus making Summerhill financially secure. World-wide recognition had come at last to this remarkable man in his mid-eighties.

What is even more remarkable is that his international influence rests on such a slender base. Intellectually Neill is a derivative and intuitive thinker rather than an original and creative mind. He is essentially a pioneering maverick championing with almost messianic stubbornness the benefits of freedom for the child. Ideas take second place to his justly famous methods of handling difficult and disturbed children. Thus his writings are vague and ambiguous and their sudden success can only be explained by their meeting some urgent need. For Neill's book is certainly not a blueprint on how to run a school. There is no conception in his work of any other type of school, even of other progressive schools, and, in particular, he ignores the problems of large, state, day, urban schools, in which the majority of children are educated. A small, rural, residential school with radical, fee-paying parents, who can subsidise their childrens relative "failure" (academic achievements have always been meagre), is surely only of very limited relevance in solving the pressures and problems of a national system which has to cater for millions of children? Furthermore, Summerhill itself is in no way a pioneer of teaching methods or even a continuing experiment in education. Neill has said that he is not really interested in new methods of teaching, while he wrote in 1968, "I have not changed anything fundamental in my philosophy of education or life. Summerhill today is in essentials what it was when founded in 1921" (19). Rather than "progress" one sees almost a static and tradition-bound school; Neill himself seems to sense this when he says that Summerhill has ceased to be experimental and has become instead a "demonstration" school. Partly this is because the original adjective "experimental" jarred somewhat as it seemed ethically dubious to experiment with free children but also perhaps because the burden of innovation proved too onerous. Why continue to change when you are certain of the path

ahead? For, as Neill wrote,

"For over forty years, this belief in the goodness of the child has never wavered; it rather has become a final faith" (20).

Now there is no denying that Summerhill has greatly enriched contemporary education. In particular, Neill's humanity is unquestioned and his great work -following in the tradition of Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Homer Lane- has been concerned primarily with benevolent therapy for the difficult child, replacing condemnation and repression with acceptance and affection. But what worries me is that radicals with a missionary purpose, and also a barely concealed alienation, turn to children for their own unrecognized ends and derive gratifications from their company that are not always very savoury. With Peter Pannish zeal they become emotionally committed to the idea of freedom in childhood rather than the reality and, in emphasizing the child's freedom, they are somehow both working out their own emotional freedom and yet also avoiding responsibility for the child. It may be coincidental that Zoe, that uninhibited fore-runner of a new civilization, has found her niche with animals, running a riding- stable in the heart of Suffolk. For the predicament of the "free" child was that he or she had to be saved from the dangers of contamination by "anti-life" children and this meant isolation from, and subsequently difficulties of adjusting to, conventional society.

To my mind, Summerhill appears static, introspective, and congealed; it is a symbolic statement about the state of a corrupt society rather than a genuine exercise in freedom. The dirt, the obscenity, and the apparent lawlessness are like rituals of seclusion, delineating the boundaries of the elect from the unenlightened. Education has become a faith, the teachings have become sacred, and the inspired seer has become the custodian of the sacred who keeps pure the old dogmas. And, in this remote self-insulating environment that promised "freedom from any indoctrination whether religious or moral or political, and freedom from character moulding" (21), we find that the young, immature child was in danger of fervently embracing the tribal rituals of the group and of deeply imbibing the oracular pronouncements of the Pied Piper of Summerhill.

Towards the Anti-School.

The "classical" progressive school of the twenties and thirties was a revolutionary educational statement that sought to posit a radical alternative to the social structure of the orthodox school; in the sixties and early seventies, equally revolutionary statements are being made about the necessity of finding alternative forms of educational institution to replace the allegedly barren and anachronistic stereotype of "school" (22). But unlike the classical progressives, this new wave of educational radicalism has concentrated not on the independent, middle-class, rural boarding school but on deconstructing the working-class, urban, day school. Yet, while the vocabulary

has changed, there are remarkable similarities in diagnosis, disposition, and precept with the "traditional" progressives. With the advantage of having analyzed a prototype "anti-school" in the Summerhillian model, I would now like to examine briefly the structural dilemmas that are likely to face those who wish to institutionalize freedom in alternative educational structures.

In such alternative structures I would anticipate a certain tension between the anti-authoritarian ideology and the innate demands of social life for a modicum of order, regularity, predictability, and cohesion (23). But simply because of their radicalism and marginality, and because they promote individual liberty to a greater extent than in conventional society, they can be more unstable and precarious than orthodox institutions. There is evidence from the free schools, for instance, that they do have difficulty in maintaining control and commitment.

For example, the Scotland Road Free School in Liverpool, which was generally seen as the spearhead of the free school movement in Britain, opened in July 1971 with five pupils and the backing of A.S. Neill, Michael Duane, Leila Berg and John Peel (24). The founders of the Free School saw traditional structures and boundaries as artificial and constricting and sought to remove the barriers between young and old, between home and school, between play-time and work-time, and between different subjects. Freedom was to be the catalyst at Scotland Road and freedom tended to be defined as the antithesis of restraints. There were no rules, no compulsory attendance, no uniform, no homework, no punishment of any kind, no formal lessons, no syllabus, and no permanent groupings of children assigned to any individual "teacher".

In practice, the reality of institutionalizing abstract problem led to contradictions. The offices in Limekiln Lane were heavily barricaded -to keep out the children! The heavy iron door was padlocked, the walls of the yard were topped with barbed wire, and the windows were protected by heavy wire mesh. There was a belief in total freedom and consequently a refusal to ensure that equipment was securely locked away so books, food, and tools were destroyed, four sets of paints "disappeared" and pigeons were released from their loft. No-one appeared to perceive any inconsistency between this refusal to lock up the tools and the necessity of locking up the building. Nor did there appear to be an awareness that the freedom to steal equipment conflicts with the freedom of others to make use of it. About the only recognizable form of "authority" within the school was the strong personality of John Ord (one of the founders). For example, a group of children remained behind while the others had gone to the ice-rink or museum, and there was a pervasive atmosphere of apathy and boredom. Bottles and plates were being smashed in the yard. One boy threw a potato at an already broken window although another boy was standing directly behind it. The "teacher" looked on exasperated but

without reacting. Then a few boys climbed on top of a cupboard and started hurling down rolls of drawing paper and packets of paper towels which burst on hitting the ground. Others began throwing them back. For almost half an hour the fight continued in an atmosphere of anger and frustration. The "teacher" standing ankle deep in a sea of paper, reasoned and argued with them to stop, but with little impact. John Ord arrived and within a few minutes had quietly brought the fight to an end (25).

The New School Vancouver was totally unstructured. A small gang of aggressive young boys, called the "Monkey Patrol" began to dominate the school, bullying the other children and destroying school property. A teacher recalled,

"There were Cuisenaire rod fights, fort fights, paint fights, water fights. Student art work was destroyed, pencils and rulers karate chopped, chairs broken up, desks smashed, sawn in half. The ditto machine became a juvenile pornography and hate-literature plant -----talks about fucking so much you get the idea she wants to be fucked. C'mon... Or Every good boy should fuck his sister (26).

Now I am not suggesting that these few illustrations are necessarily typical of free schools but I am merely pointing out that, having espoused freedom, they have to face the possibility that with the fetters removed freedom devolves into licence which is difficult to check. In addition, the contemporary free school has probably a greater difficulty in generating commitment than had the English progressives (27). It may be that their attempts to live perpetually on the margin, resisting the encroachments of formalization, generate greater internal tensions than say at Darington or Summerhill.

But what are the key areas for analyzing the structure and functioning of the "anti-school" in the light of our insights gleaned from Summerhill and the English progressives? I would like to suggest four: namely, goal setting, charismatic leadership, crisis and insecurity, and relations with the wider society.

The specificity of ends is the defining characteristic of a formal organization. The progressives, however, drew upon eclectic, ambiguous and potentially contradictory sources for their diffuse ends. They also espoused continued experiment and self-evaluation. But as their diffuse abstract aims were in principle not measurable there remained the dilemma of which innovation was successful and which not. Indeed, the personal commitment of the pioneer-missionary may clash with the demands of evaluation, and this may inhibit discussion of the legitimacy of the venture (28).

A multiplicity of ends may prove functional at inception when a widespread attack, say on the aims and means of orthodoxy and convention in education, can provide self-legitimation and assist in uniting disparate groups. Later, however, it may prove dysfunctional either because original extravagant aims appear unfulfilled or because it enables factions to express their

sectional interests. I would maintain, then, that unrealistic goal setting, conflicts of goals, and difficulties of evaluation are likely to prove problems in the long term for the "anti-school" because of its highly diffuse aims.

The natural leader with charismatic authority, inspiring a following because of some special quality (traditionally believed to be supernatural) is normally the antithesis of the technically specified relationships of authority in formal organizations. But Neill's qualities of leadership, as we have seen, were undeniably charismatic. Account of his personality, often couched in reverential terms, leave little doubt that he was an inspiring figure to many people. Indeed it is noticeable that several founder-pioneer headmasters of progressive schools appear to have possessed charismatic qualities. It is my feeling that their personalities constitute an important ingredient of the social cement. This style of leadership may be extremely valuable, especially at the pioneering-missionary stage of the venture, when single-mindedness and decisiveness is required although it is possible that later it may become potentially dysfunctional. The charismatic leader may become autocratic and domineering in practice and become wedded to his own brand of innovation. Furthermore, this style of leadership tends to create a problem of succession, and presumably there will be considerable problems for Neill's heir at Summerhill.

The formal basis of the modern organization is designed to give them stability and continuity. Almost by definition one expects an anti-school to have few mechanisms for regulating orderly change and to generate a greater level of insecurity and anxiety than is normally found in orthodox education. Indeed the anti-school ostensibly espouses socially structured insecurity (29).

The vanguard-missionary role may appeal to rebels who enter with unrealistic hopes and who may become disillusioned and resentful at the unusual and demanding practices of alternative structures. Combating disillusionment and buttressing commitment, in the face of unforeseen setbacks and unintended circumstances, is another vital function of the leader and his personification of control can mean that the death, demise, or failure of the figure-head proves potentially disastrous (30). In short, the anti-school may have less resources for dealing with unanticipated crises; indeed, its radical stance may heighten insecurity as it has voluntarily embraced marginality while eschewing mechanisms that help to ensure continuity and to reduce anxiety.

No institution exists in a vacuum and no innovator can start an alternative institution with a completely clean slate. The anti-school either retreats from, revolts against, or seeks to replace, the orthodox school; and this makes a disjunction between it and the wider society highly likely. There is then the problem, as with most deviant groups, of combating the hostili-

ty of "straight" society. Sometimes educational radicals like A.S. Neill and Bill Curry appear to invite criticism and then use it as an argument to bolster their own case, e.g. the views expressed by Neill on sex, politics, religion, censorship etc., effectively cut him off from most state educators (as well as from some of his fellow progressives). Neill, moreover, described Summerhill as an island and it is interesting that there is no mention of any other progressive school in his book.

More generally, there is the almost insoluble problem of the relations with, and attitudes to, an "unenlightened" outside world for a radical institution. The problem is how to operate a free education in the midst of an unfree society; how to remain tolerant in a prejudiced world; and how not to be seduced by the competitive rewards proffered by the predominant values of capitalist society which could lead to the drawing of psychic boundaries between the "elect" and "non-elect" as the pupils at Summerhill became almost like a beleaguered garrison viewing the outside world as predatory. Thus one gets the paradox of a radical anti-school that is "open" yet total in its scope.

The anti-school may appear to be a contradiction in terms and in a sense it is, for the sociologist would argue that social life is essentially rule-governed (and that even an agreement to reject all norms constitutes a norm). It is rather more usefully perceived as an ideal with the interest being not so much *does* it work, but *how* does it work. All social life involves some kind of bargain between the individual and the group where individual liberty is exchanged for some benefit. The radicals argue that in conventional society the bargain is intolerably one-sided with the individual paying too high a price in terms of his own liberty while receiving too little of value in return.

Rousseau's solution to the dilemma was to create a corporate communion where each person simultaneously discovered himself in the closest possible solidarity with others so that each person, in giving himself to all, was giving himself to no one. (31). In practice, I feel that it is easy for Rousseau's solidarity to suppress the rights of the individual while elevating the leader as the prime exponent of the unity of corporate feeling (32). And, in conclusion, I would like to suggest that the anti-school treads a precarious path between, on the one hand, the rigidity and impersonality of formal organizations and, on the other hand, the myopia and lack of privacy of the traditional community. My personal opinion is that libertarian groups in education, who try to work the perilous balances and delicate bargains of the anti-school, face the basic dilemma of how to dissuade Hobbesian man from destroying the anti-school while, at the same time, avoiding the emotional flight into the arms of Rousseau's man.

NOTES

1. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd, 1968, and R. Hemmings, *Fifty Years of Freedom*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1972.
2. For the concept of the "anti-school" see M. Punch "Dartington Hall School: a sociological analysis of an anti-school", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 1972, Chap. I.
3. cf. J. Wakeford, *The Cloistered Elite*, London, Macmillan, 1969.
4. A.S. Neill, *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973.
5. A.S. Neill, *op. cit.* 1968, p. 10.
6. *Ibid*, p. 102.
7. D. Wills, *Homer Lane*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1964, p. 206.
8. H. Lane, *Letters to Parents and Teachers*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1928, p. 103.
9. A.S. Neill, *op. cit.*, 1968 p. 12.
10. *Ibid*, p. 92.
11. B. Russell, *Autobiography: Vol. II, 1914-1944*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1968, p. 185.
12. *Ibid*, p. 154.
13. A.S. Neill, *op. cit.* 1968, p. 53.
14. *Ibid*, p. 61.
15. J. Kozol, "Politics, Rage & Motivation" *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 42, No 3, August, 1972.
16. Recorded interview, 1969.
17. A.S. Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 68
18. B. Russell, *op. cit.* p. 187.
19. A.S. Neill, *op. cit.* p. 9.
20. *Ibid*. p. 20.
21. *Ibid*. p. 9.
22. I. Illich, *De-schooling Society*, London, Calder and Boyars, 1971.
23. M. Punch, "The Sociology of the Anti-Institution", *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XXV, no 3, september 1974.
24. The following account draws heavily on R. Swirsky "The Scotland Road Free School", unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Essex, 1972.
25. *Ibid*, p. 79.
26. R. and B. Gross (eds) *Radical School Reform*, London, Gollanz, 1971, p. 279.
27. Kozol, *op. cit.* p. 421.
28. M. Miles (ed.) *Innovation in Education*, Columbia, Teachers College Press, 1964, p. 659.
29. M. Ash, *Who are the Progressives now?*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.
30. E. Stotland and A.L. Kobler, *Life and Death of a Mental Hospital*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1965.
31. S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1961, p. 370.
32. For the emergence of "guru"like figures in hippy communes see L. Yablonsky *The Hippy Trip*, New York, Pegasus, 1968 and B. Berger et al *Child Rearing Practices of the Communal Family* in R.M. Kanter (ed.) "Communes". New York, Harper and Row, 1973.