

EXTRA

GEOGRAPHY

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geography now needs to enter a new phase of curriculum change and development follows from an alternative analysis of its social context.

The post-war consensus between labour, capital, and the state, which sustained welfare capitalism in a period of slow economic growth, has now collapsed. Faced with an economic recession, surplus capacity and falling profits, capital now seeks to restructure society and education in order to restore its vitality.

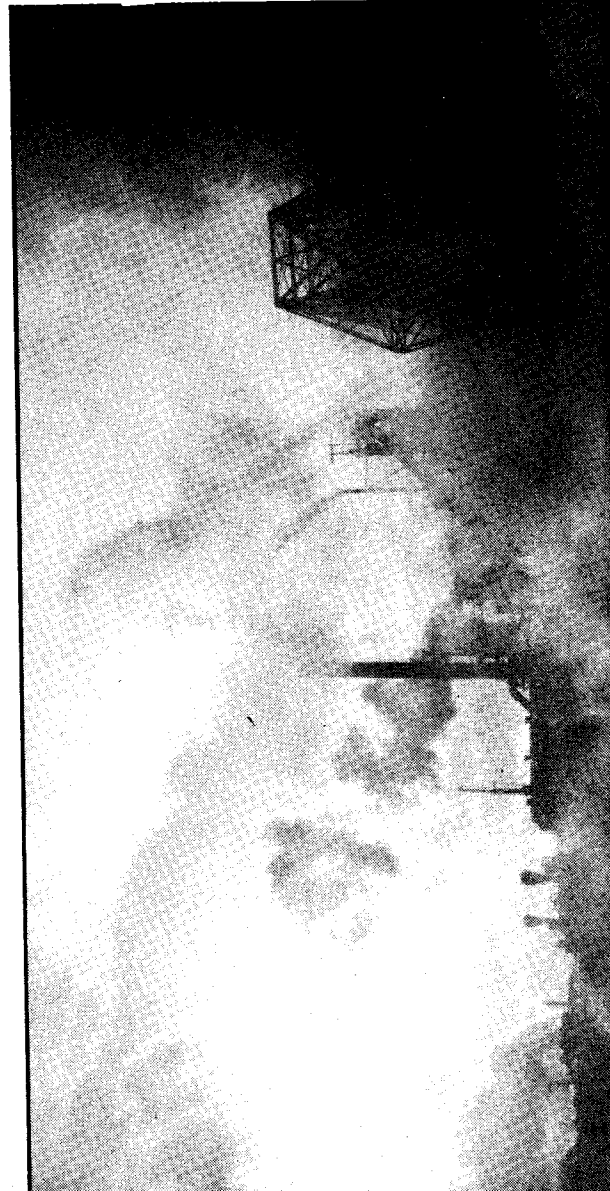
The resulting political policies lead to increased exploitation of people and environments both at home and overseas, continual attempts to adapt schooling to "the needs of industry", and increased opposition from organized labour and such pressure groups

as those formed by oppressed minorities and peace campaigners.

In this social context, geography teachers should acknowledge that they have a central role in helping pupils to understand the social and environmental contradictions of an economy based on greed rather than need. It is their area of the curriculum which deals with such topics as industry, employment, the city, regional development, labour migration, environmental management, and developing countries.

They therefore have significant opportunities to explore alternative explanations of deindustrialization, unemployment, inner-city decay, regional inequality, racism, pollution,

continued



Announcing a major new

It's time for a change

Too much current geography fails to reflect contemporary realities writes John Huckle

is an ecological problem, an problem, a problem of international trade, and yet we seem incapable of saying anything of deep profundity about any of them. When we do something it appears trite and rather obvious. - David Harvey, 1973

years after David Harvey's exposure of the philosophical weakness and irrelevance of the "new" geography, economic geography in Britain is in a very state of theoretical diversity. Many geographers are able to make important contributions to the understanding of society and the environment on public policy. The notion of a free or scientific human geography has been seriously challenged by those who point to its limited capacity for explanation and its personal and social costs. Behavioural and economic geographers have put perceptions and meanings of the world back on the agenda, while well-meaning radical geographers have directed attention to genuine issues of relevance and exposed the ideological function of much that passes for geographical science.

applying Marxist and anarchist radicals have shown that much geography fails to explain human-environment interaction or the spatial organization of society since it ignores, as given, the economic and social realities from which these "New" geography can offer only a distorted or limited view. Nonetheless provide tools for economic and environmental management, to serve established interests.

ing been accused by radicals of

propping up an advanced capitalist society with mounting economic, social and environmental problems, academic geographers have engaged in heated debate on professional responsibility and some have sought a more committed and political approach to their work. What has been the response of school geographers to this debate? Could it be that much school geography is also a form of social control to which there are now radical alternatives?

The major curriculum developments in school geography over the past 15 years have established the hold of the "new" geography in schools. I do not intend to describe these developments but merely to suggest that they were a conservative and adaptive response to the economic and political needs of an increasingly technocratic society, and that they failed to answer the true needs of either pupils or community.

While curriculum developers often humanized the "new" geography's arid theory, its neglect of feelings and politics has served to alienate many pupils and teachers. Curriculum reform has too often resulted in lessons which ignore pupils' everyday experiences of the world and fail to deal adequately with their expressed concerns. A diet of industrial location, city structure, limestone geomorphology, and problems of development, generally fails to cultivate environmental awareness and sensitivity or to reveal and question the economic and political realities which structure our world. To the extent that it stifles imagination and restricts the attainment of

political literacy, school geography represents a form of social control. At worst it ensures that the state is supplied with youngsters who have "appropriate" ideas, "useful" skills, and "considerate" attitudes and values. A subject which became established in schools and universities to serve the needs of empire, now serves those of the corporate state.

If readers doubt my claim concerning the politics of school geography, they should consult the recently published *Recommended 16-plus National Criteria for Geography*. Here they will find both overt and hidden assumptions about the nature of geography, education, and society. Few academic geographers would agree with the claim that the subject can be subsumed by "regional, spatial and ecosystemic approaches", while many parents would want to question a view of the social context of education which ignores conflict between social classes and the all pervasive influence of capital.

The recommended knowledge objectives emphasize the understanding of human environments without suggesting how it is to be developed; the skill objectives reflect a limited scientific geography; and the values objectives focus on individual decision making rather than on politics and power. At best, the recommendations are sufficiently broad for innovative teachers to employ humanistic and radical geography to advantage. At worst, they will encourage the majority of geography teachers to merely consolidate the reforms of the past decade. The realization that school

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