

EXTRA

GEOGRAPHY

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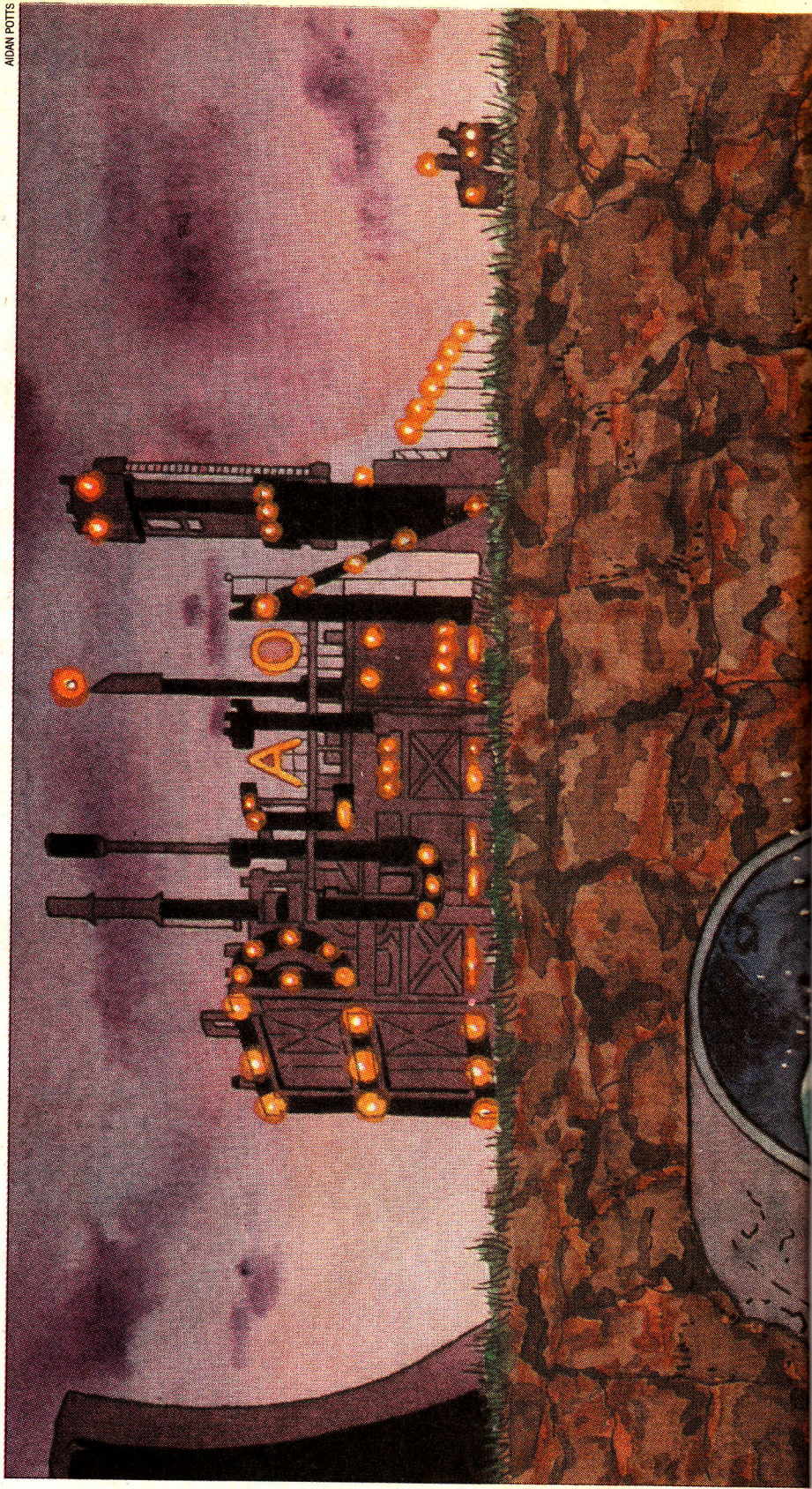
In June last year the Government launched its national strategy for environmental education. This allows the concepts of sustainable development and responsible global citizenship to be "instilled" in people of all ages. The strategy promises to help ensure appropriate educational materials and arrangements for monitoring and encouraging education for sustainable living.

A national strategy for environmental education is long overdue but geography teachers should only welcome one that outlines a clear and acceptable theory and practice of education for sustainability. The Government's strategy lacks such analysis, is open to wide interpretation, and is contradicted by other elements of its educational reforms.

It is a response to commitments made in Europe and at the 1992 Earth Summit but as a means of encouraging more sustainable forms of living it is grossly deficient. Education for sustainability represents the major challenge to school geography but to meet this challenge, teachers should look well beyond the strategy's limited horizons.

Education for sustainability is a form of citizenship education. It is a shared speculation on those technologies, rights, responsibilities, and institutions which will enable us to realise shared values and live sustainably with the planet. It draws on the natural and social sciences,

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from economics, politics and cultural studies, and seeks to connect academic knowledge with the everyday knowledge and needs of people and communities.

Such thinking underpins radical interpretations of Agenda 21 and the work of many local governments that are seeking to revive local economies and communities through the Local Agenda 21 process.

Geography teachers are well placed to embrace education for sustainability which now features in the geography programme of study at each key stage. While the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority's guidance document *Teaching Environmental Matters* rightly emphasises cross-curricularity, there is a recognition of geography's "notable" role. Revised GCSE and A-level syllabuses also provide opportunities. With all such guidance there is a danger that lessons will merely "instill" the meanings and agendas of "weak" sustainability favoured by dominant interests.

Education for sustainability can quickly become public relations for a slightly greener version of business as usual unless geography teachers and others develop economic, political and cultural literacy, and provide their pupils with opportunities to reflect and act on such alternatives as those outlined in *The Politics of the Real World* (Jacobs, 1996, published by Earthscan).

Evidence submitted to the National Commission on Education suggests that a significant number of pupils is bored by school lessons and fails to see their relevance. Other surveys point to young people's low interest in conventional politics, their cynical view of politicians, their rejection of older people's moral panic, and the readiness of a sizeable minority to experiment with new forms of identity and lifestyle politics.

Young people consistently rank the environment as a key issue of concern. The challenge to school geography is to respond in ways which draw on interest in consumerism, the cultural economy, and identity, link the new and old politics, and

offer the prospect of a more secure and worthwhile future. Young people are seeking the visions which strong sustainability offers. Perhaps geography teachers have something to learn from road protesters. During the past decade geography teachers have become too pre-occupied with the national curriculum and neglected advances in the parent discipline. A glance through the 1997 geography titles from a publisher such as Routledge will reveal *The Politics of Sustainability*, *Eco-facts* and *Eco-fiction*, *Ecological Feminism*, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*, and *Consuming Geographies*. Not all such geography can be translated into worthwhile lessons for school pupils, but much of it warrants consideration.

A significant gap has opened up between school and university geography. It is time school geographers acknowledged the social construction of nature and the environment in the way that their colleagues in higher education have done. Academic

geographers have also been more prepared to learn from social and cultural theory.

Education for sustainability allows school geography to respond to community concerns and rediscover that tradition of urban and community education celebrated for so long in the *Bulletin of Environmental Education*. All over the country local government, business, and community groups are working together to draw up LA21s and realise these plans for sustainability. There are new opportunities for pupils to work with local people, local government, and local industry, and so develop citizenship. As they get involved they will learn lessons about democracy, power, and resources, and will recognise that in an age of globalisation, what you can do locally is strongly constrained by structures and processes at national, European and global levels. They will learn that many local governments are using the LA21 process to explore new forms of public participation and that some local politicians are highly

critical of national government.

Such criticism is often directed at the Government's erosion of local democracy and its failure to provide the legislation and resources to enable LA21s to bring about real change.

Similar criticisms can be made of the Government's environmental education strategy. If it truly believes in environmental education and education for sustainability, why did the Dearing review of the national curriculum further marginalise relevant cross-curricular themes? Why is social and citizenship education subordinated to conservative forms of history and geography? Why is the major thrust of its educational policy on the improvement of attainment in core subjects, narrowly defined? Why, when sustainability requires an ethic of care and concern, does the Government stress individualism and competition and allow inequalities in education and society to grow? Why is the Office for Standards in Education not required to inspect environ-

mental education provision?

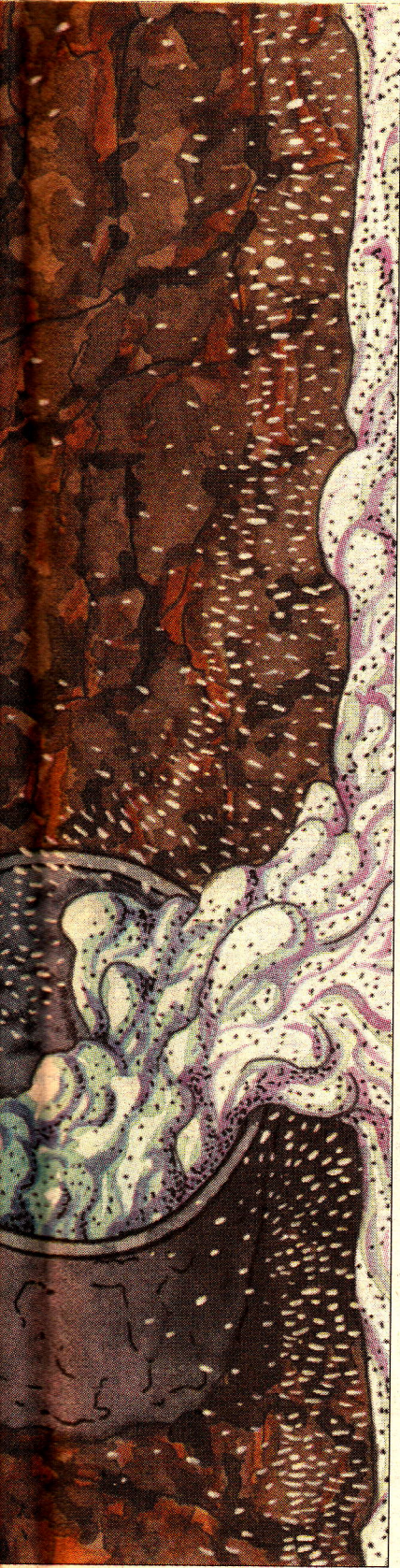
Geography teachers will have their own answers to such questions. Some will be sceptical and will recognise along with the 40 aid, environmental, and social justice groups forming the Real World coalition, that strong sustainability and education for sustainability require a significant extension of democracy.

Critical education for sustainability is the key to a challenging school geography for the next millennium. While geography teachers should exploit the opportunities which the national strategy may provide, they should recognise that the challenge of the real world requires a more radical response.

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Blue shades of green

John Huckle calls for a radical drive to recognise environmental responsibility as a key issue in geography



end of NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND, the book he wrote about his journey.

It all looked so peaceful and wonderful that I could almost have cried, and yet it was only a tiny part of this small, enchanted island. Suddenly, in the space of a moment, I realised what it was that I loved about Britain - which is to say, all of it. Every last bit of it, good and bad - marmite, villages, fetes, country lanes, people saying 'mustn't grumble' and 'I'm terribly sorry but...' people apologising to me when I conk them with a careless elbow, milk in bottles, beans on toast, haymaking in June, stinging nettles, seaside piers, ordnance survey maps, crumpets, hot-water bottles as a necessity, drizzly Sundays - every bit of it.

What a wondrous place this was - crazy as a coot, of course, but adorable to the tiniest degree. What other country, after all, could possibly have come up with place names like Tooting Bec and Farleigh Wallop, or a game like Cricket that goes on for three days and never seems to start? Who else would think it not the least odd to make their judges wear little mops on their heads, compel the speaker of the House of Commons

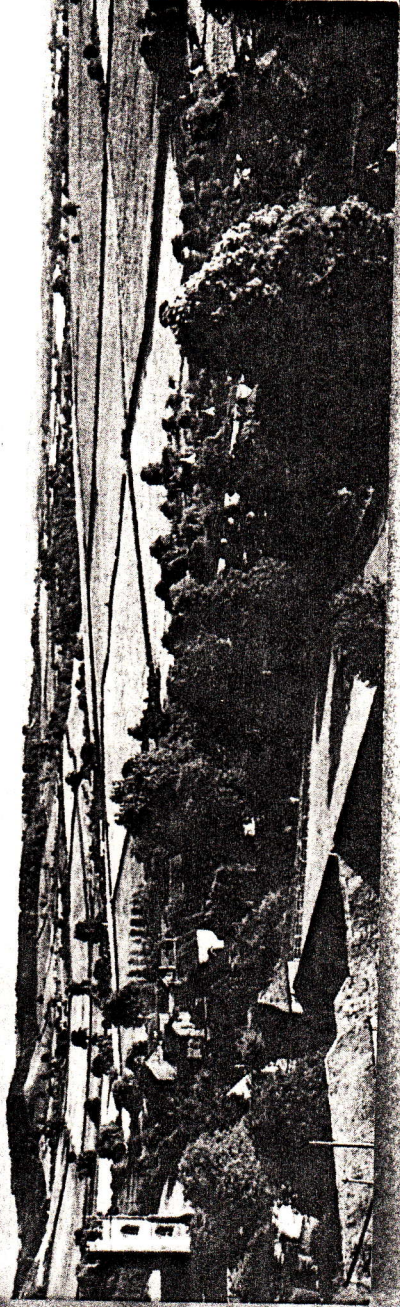
William Shakespeare, pork pies, Christopher Wren, Windsor Great Park, The Open University, Gardeners Question Time and the chocolate digestive biscuit? None of course.

How easily we lose sight of all this. What an enigma Britain will seem to historians when they look back on the second half of the twentieth century. Here is a country that fought and won a noble war, dismantled a mighty empire in a generally benign and enlightened way, created a far-seeing welfare state - in short, did nearly everything right - and then spent the rest of the century looking on itself as a chronic failure.

The fact is that this is still the best place in the world for most things - to post a letter, go for a walk, watch television, buy a book, venture out for a drink, go to a museum, use the bank, get lost, seek help, or stand on a hillside and take in a view.

All this came to me in the space of a lingering moment. I've said it before and I'll say it again. I like it here. I like it more than I can tell you. And then I turned from the gate and got in the car and knew without doubt that I would be back.

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Do cheer up, Mr. Huckle. Life isn't nearly
as gloomy as you make it sound in the TES
for young people!

TJB