

# The baby demos

Ruby Rae

Last week, babies joined parents in a sit-in at the Cambridge Senate House. They were demanding a new nursery for the university in a campaign which has also had other skirmishes. What is it all about?

It was in April 1972 that the NUS first instructed its executive to campaign for free creche facilities. The Association of University Teachers endorsed it in May 1973. Not many have been provided since. For instance, at present only seven out of 200 colleges in London have them.

The demand of the marching ladies for creches is both negotiable and sensible and is one of the practical aids required for full equal rights. Perhaps all except senile fanatics of status quo would agree to consider it. Marxists, Maoists, the International Marxist Group, communards, International Socialists, Liberals and freaks are coming together to join the "struggle."

Perhaps because the issue is seen to symbolise the inadequacy of social arrangements for women, in spite of their importance to the economy, the creche is replacing Vietnam, the bomb, and blacks in South Africa. The revolutionary left, always a minority on a British campus, is calling for support from all quarters for the creche platform. The language of the barricades has already, in fact, led to action such as the "occupation" of a telephone exchange, a sit-in at a director's office, and demos to picket the Department of Education and Science.

However, there are already about 25 campus-based nurseries in England. The most common type is based on the model of a local authority day nursery, rather than a voluntary playgroup.

The number of children ranges between thirteen and 70, although 20 is about average. The running costs are high and at least 17 nurseries have received substantial grants from various sources. All of them charge fees, mostly based on a sliding scale according to income—from £3 a day for academic staff down to 15p a day for students. The majority of them operate in university-owned and converted premises. They employ four or five trained nursery nurses, each paid about 48p an hour.

However, the benefits of being a liberated woman with access to a university creche, are not without drawbacks. A lecturer reflected: "As a liberated woman I must be a working mother. As a liberated woman I must breast feed my child. As a liberated woman I must not exploit other women." But at the nursery this lecturer used, the supervisor discouraged breast-feeding on the premises and the nursery nurses are poorly paid. In fact, most mothers seemed to find the attitude of nursery nurses difficult.

Local authority-trained nurses expected deprived children and downtrodden parents. At universities they found educated women asking questions, talking about the quality of care and making them feel inferior. On the other hand, one supervisor was worried about a little girl whose militant mother just dumped her there. The deepest disappointment came when not a single mother showed any inclination to question the desirability of leaving the child in the creche all day, from six weeks to five years. (In fact the campaign is for full-time creche facilities, but long waiting lists and the expense have so far prevented mothers from using creches for long periods.)

The changing conditions for academic women with children creates confusion about the amount and nature of freedom available to all the members of their families. Perhaps not having a child at all, or having one later rather than sooner, might be more sensible? For most research data on preschool provision cautiously recommends extended nursery education only for extremely deprived children, who inhabit a very different world from the one lived in by academic staff and students. Stand at a street corner in Brixton around 6.30 in the morning and watch streams of working mothers taking toddlers by the hand into illegal child-minding premises—dingy front rooms, crowded with a dozen or more children all day, with a paraffin heater in a corner. These are the children at risk. They need greater emphasis by students.

## Notes

### Tolmers Square

PETER HALL writes: Tolmers Square isn't exactly the desirable archetype of a Georgian Bloomsbury Square. But then, it is only doubtfully in Bloomsbury. Though Gower Street is quintessentially Bloomsbury, Tolmers Square leads off anomalously at its north end, truncated brutally from the rest by the Euston Road underpass. Instead of a leafy square garden, there is a weedgrown plot on the site of a cinema which used to boast some of the most off-beat and also the cheapest movies in London. The area is an odd mixture of derelict or down at heel houses, Indian restaurants and surplus clothing dealers.

Yet Tolmers Square is splendidly located on the fringe of London's central area, close to the university, right on top of some of the best underground connections to be found. Its present shabbiness is the result of more than ten years of planning blight, as Camden borough council fought to agree on some form of comprehensive redevelopment for the area. Much of the area is owned by Stock Conversion and Investment Company, Joe Levy's concern which a decade ago developed the giant Euston

Centre complex next to the underpass.

Those were the days when—as also at Centre Point—London local authorities worked happily hand in hand with the property giants. But things have changed. And Christopher Booker and Bennie Gray, in a celebrated article, argued that this time Camden should acquire the Tolmers Square land from Levy and do the redevelopment job themselves.

Now, precisely this has happened. Stock Conversion is selling its six-acre holding to Camden for £4 million. This, plus purchase by agreement of other holdings, plus cros if necessary, will allow Camden to go ahead with the plans that the council already approved last October. They include housing for 1,700 people, one third in rehabilitated houses and two thirds in new housing; community facilities; and offices, public buildings, showrooms, shops, restaurants and a small cinema, mainly on the Euston Road frontage.

Four million pounds for six acres means £666,000 an acre. This, apparently, is the price Camden would have paid when the Community Land Bill became law. It is the current use value of the Tolmers Square land. In a crude sense, that means that each of the 1,700 residents will be sitting on £2,350 worth of land. That seems like a bargain, but of course that is by no means the end of the land cost. To offset that somewhat, Camden should make some good pickings out of the commercial part of the redevelopment. But such prime sites, even in a typical inner London borough are the exception rather than the rule.

### Alcoholism

GRIFFITH EDWARDS writes: The Avon Council on Alcoholism whose fifth annual report (40p from 14 Park Row, Bristol) this week revealed that a mother became addicted to gripe water also proclaimed the "birth of a new treatment concept."

What sort of a baby is this? The treatment programme which has been developed is built around a structured and intensive 28-day course of day-centre care. The blend seems to be a mixture of didactic teaching and moral suasion. Meditation, confrontation and confession, are fitted between tapes and lectures. The Alcoholics Anonymous influence is evident, but the aggressive flavour of the enterprise is otherwise peculiarly latter-day American. Due acknowledgement is made to the Hazelden Foundation of Minnesota, and that may be the clue.

The idea of day-care treatment for alcoholism is not new, but this approach has certainly up to now received only scant attention in Britain. Centres in this country which provide day-care for general psychiatric patients will occasionally help with the rehabilitation of an alcoholic, but the consensus would probably be that the alcoholic doesn't fit too well into the general regime—staff become a bit leary of accepting the alcoholic referral after one or two alarming experiences of the disruption which