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Auteur : Foucault, Michel

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This is going to hurt you more than it will hurt me

Children remain the only minority group who can legally be assaulted. After more than two centuries corporal punishment remains the traditional right of the old to beat the young in the interests of 'behaviour'.

Brian Jackson and Anne Garvey look at school punishment today

Children first rebelled against the cane in 1669. A huge crowd of them marched on the old Palace at Westminster and presented the Children's Petition to Mr Speaker. Flanked by loyal and Royal members, the children demanded an end to the "severities of the school discipline of this Nation". But the uprising was crushed and the petitioners caned.

Two centuries later little had changed in the underworld of childhood, and when the boys of Winchester revolted against barbarous punishment, the authorities called in two companies of dragoons - bayonets fixed - to reassert the traditional right of the old to beat the young. This upper-class guerrilla warfare still rages in many parts of Britain. Barrie Vaughn, who heads the campaign DOVE (Delegation Opposing Violent Education) from his beautiful Restoration home at Sandwell Manor, Devon, flew over his old public school and dropped thousands of leaflets telling the boys that they would get much more protection from teacher assault in Borstal.

But what about children now? We have been looking at school discipline and punishment, and what parents can do to reduce the risk of their children being caned. It is not at all easy. Official regulations are normally vague and evasive: legal formulae in case you kick up trouble. And parents themselves are very often firmly in favour of the cane. Some surveys (of which we are sceptical) put the figure as high as 80 per cent. But examples are common. Sergeant Brian Adams, whose son attended Leicestershire's Countesthorpe School, kept him at home because the Head banned the cane and wouldn't give his boy "even a belting". John Watts, the headmaster, refused to give way. "Our controls are based on reason and good relations, not on the cane. I regard corporal punishment as counter-productive." Nevertheless, many parents still look to the teacher to beat their children for them, to carry out the dark side of parental responsibility - even if they would never hit their own son or daughter themselves.

We also have to admit that when caning finally disappears, other nasty punishments may fill the vacuum. The survey of 203 *Teachers Talking*, compiled by Tony Gibbon, is studded with gar-



goyles. What do you do with a naughty child? - "make fun of it, laugh at it, occasionally twit it mildly, screw its ear, pick it up by the hair, and pull its leg" advises one professional teacher, highly trained and highly paid. But 'it' might be your son or daughter.

Many other school punishments may be as degrading to pupil and teacher as the use of the cane. But the cane - or in Scotland and Ireland the strap and tawse - can clearly be stopped. It legitimises violence. Ulster is the example where the child world (with its imitation guns) mirrors the hatreds of the street world. And can it be entirely coincidental that Irish children expect to be legitimately beaten during their formative years? At the other extreme, the highly privileged boy who goes to a private school may still find himself in a school where the teacher's use of cane or strap *formally* legitimises child-to-child violence: "Blast, so you are put in the prefects' room where you get two or three sadistic lashes with a primitive piece of rope. This cuts your arse and bloody hurts" - runs one boy's diary in the survey of boarding-school life, conducted by Dr Royston Lambert as part of a general inquiry into public schools funded by the Department of Education and Science.

And the cane, once permitted, can lead to

some odd situations. The connection with a teacher's sexual gratification has often been argued, and Desmond Morris boldly suggests that the redness of a beating can - to the beater - act like a displaced sexual flush. And from the child's point of view, every experienced teacher knows that there are punishment-seeking children.

There is a social class twist, too. Just as it is acceptable to beat upper-class children in some private schools, it is often the case that the child who gets caned in a State school is almost always from a working-class family. Here is an example, where a Croydon boy was ordered a caning by his Head for writing this essay on family life:

'In my house everybody is happy but sometimes there are arguments. The house we live in has three bedrooms two toilets a kitchen, a dining room, a living room and a bathroom. My father has just built a porch on the front of our house this is because in the winter the cold air comes under the door but now it won't. I would like my house to be a big one and a modern one, maybe in the country. But as you see my hopes are very low and I would like two children a boy and a girl. When I am sixteen I am going to be a bank clerk and play football go fishing and find a girl friend. But as well here you can see that also is impossible. If I get the money I will move to the continent and live in the jungle like tarzen. I will bring back animals to eat and kill lions and fight giant snakes. I will by cruisiers and sail up the jungle rivers and soon I would come back and live in England with all my trophies of lions, elephants tigers buffolo and act. But also this is a dream a dream world just a dream world so as I have had my dreams I shall go back to work as a public lavatory cleaner.'

This vulnerable, awkward little piece (condemned by the school as "obscene, flippant or derisive") appears in Chris Searle's *This New Season* and is widely used by other teachers as an educative starting point for discussion about life, reality, fantasy.

The fact is that children remain the only minority group who can legally be assaulted. Other obvious victims have faded from the scene. The right to beat sailors ended with the



How we test the warmth of Dry Ginger Ale at Schweppes.

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