

BOOKS



Alix Kates Schulman

Jill Krementz

The women's liberation movement is the central source of suspense

BURNING QUESTIONS
By Alix Kates Schulman
Alfred A. Knopf, \$8.95

Burning Questions starts off as a merely intelligent and craftsmanlike novel. It's the first person story of a girl from Indiana who comes to Greenwich Village in the '50s to be a part of the scene, a part of history. Between bearded poets and routine typing jobs, she has a medium rough time of it. Admitting temporary defeat, she marries a lawyer who, in a concession to her-bohemian pretensions, settles her into a brownstone overlooking Washington Square Park.

Having turned her back just long enough to have her babies, she looks out her window one day to discover that "people who only yesterday would have hesitated to sign their names to a personal check were handing out leaflets and daisies."

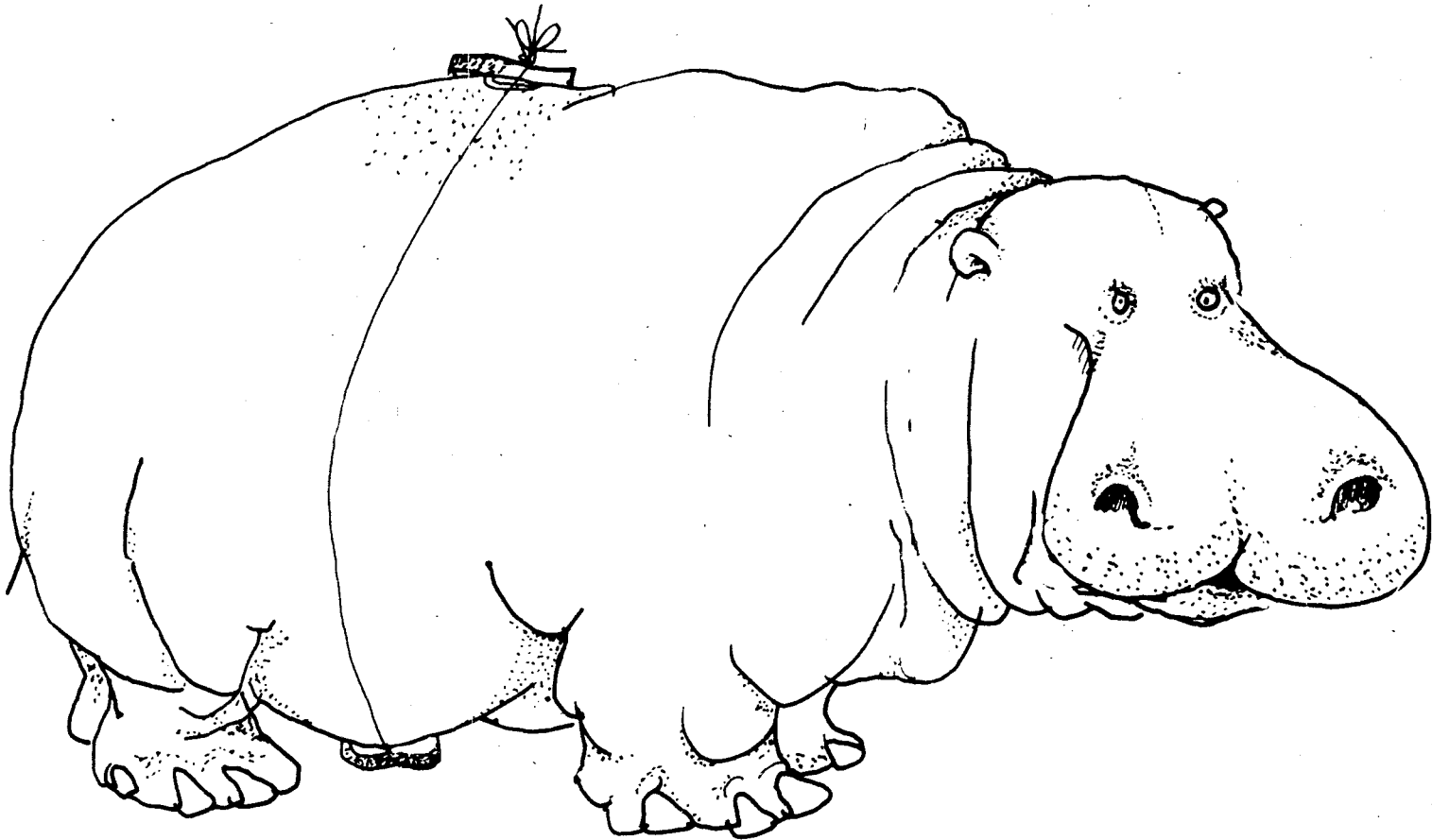
Zane, the narrator, (later called Zane IndiAnna) is a rather self-centered or self-conscious young lady, embarrassingly concerned with her image—how to appear appropriately cool, or hot, to the men in her life. The solipsism of the main character, along with what I believe is a real fault in the writing, means that no other characters are well developed, though some are rather amusing

and accurate sociological "types."

But if Alix Schulman is weak on character, she is strong on suspense and marvelously skilled at incorporating ideas into the plot of her novel. Believe it or not, the central source of tension in *Burning Questions*, the plot element that will keep you turning pages, is the anticipation of Zane's ultimate discovery of "the movement."

This is engineered through the presence over the years of a mysterious red-headed chess player, who crosses Zane's path at well-plotted points, though never a word is exchanged in 17 years. (I don't think I will spoil the suspense if I reveal that in the

Recommended reading for the young



Recipe for a Hippopotamus Sandwich

A hippo sandwich is easy to make.
All you do is simply take
One slice of bread,
One slice of cake,
Some mayonnaise,
One onion ring,
One hippopotamus,
One piece of string,
A dash of pepper—
That ought to do it.
And now comes the problem...
Biting into it!

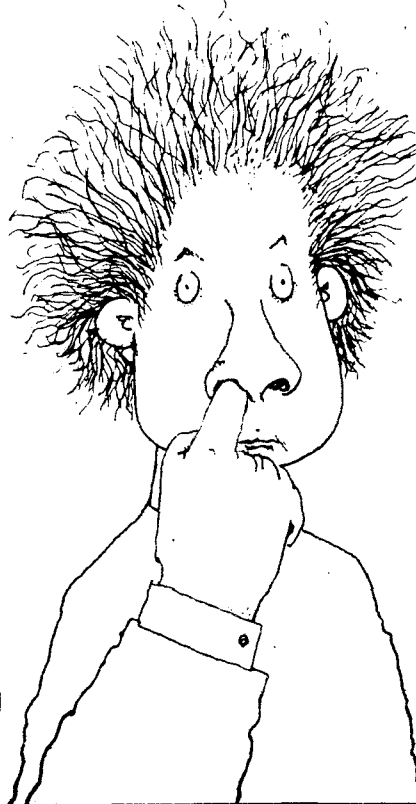
Illustrations/Shel Silverstein

- WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS** Poems and drawings
by Shel Silverstein
Harper & Row
Funny
- THE MARCH OF THE LEMMING** Educational and exciting
by James R. Newton,
illustrated by Charles
Robinson
Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- CHARLIE BROWN'S FIRST & SECOND SUPERBOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS about the earth and space...from plants to planets** Brief answers; interesting and unique
Edited by Hedda Nusbaum
Random House
- WHY AM I DIFFERENT?** Being different is good
by Norma Simon
Albert Whitman & Co.
- TALES OF A 4TH GRADE NOTHING** Paperback
by Judy Blume
Dell Yearling Book
- FIREGIRL** Non-sexist, excellent
by Gibson Rich
Feminist Press
- I HAVE A SISTER/MY SISTER IS DEAF** Gentle
by Jeanne Whitehouse
Harper & Row

- THE WAY WE LIVED, a Photographic Record of Work in a Vanished America** Beautiful for older 5th and 6th graders
Martin W. Sandler
- ABC WORKBOOK** Non-sexist
by Jean Mangi
Feminist Press
- MY MOTHER THE MAIL CARRIER/MI MAMA LA CARTERA** Bilingual
by Inez Maury
Feminist Press
- I'M LIKE ME** Unconventional poems
by Siv Widerberg
Feminist Press
- STORYPACK** 5 intriguing stories dealing with divorce, sexism, bodies, feelings, etc.
edited by Merle Frosclie
Feminist Press
- ALBERT'S TOOTHACHE** Listening to each other
by Barbara Williams
Dutton
- A CHOCOLATE MOOSE** Take-off on parents' slang
Written and illustrated by
Fred Gwynne
Dutton

—Karen Morrill

Karen Morrill teaches in an alternative school in Chicago.



BOOKS

and the important woman Zane meets is herself.)

As I read the novel, I frankly dreaded the moment when Zane would finally meet the movement. Having tried myself to dramatize the exhilaration of this kind of involvement, I feared the writing would reduce itself to inarticulate gasps and forceful, but ineffective, pronouncements. It turned out exactly the opposite. From a merely well-made novel, *Burning Questions* rises (at a few points, at least) into an inspired novel through Zane's total commitment to the women's movement.

In the most brilliant chapter, Zane, full of doubts but having already arranged for the baby sitter, wanders into an early meeting of the Third Street Circle, roughly equivalent to the Red Stockings. There the other women feed hungrily on the most ordinary details of her life as a wife and mother. The most confusing and embarrassing elements in her past suddenly make sense as the group feels its way towards a theory of "oppression."

The scene—each woman exposing her secret life—is shown

elliptically, like the most effective love scenes. Eyes meet, arms encircle, lips touch and the curtain goes down. We are awakened from this night of love by an FBI informant's report—the icy, clinical description of the same passionate meeting.

Zane becomes a militant feminist. We accompany her to the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City. And we dash back to the getaway car after spray-painting, "Death to Male Supremacy" on the women's entrance to the Harvard Club.

Despite her new militancy and new busyness, Zane never doubts the inherent rewards of motherhood. It is, I suppose, Alix Shulman's failure as a novelist that she is unable to incorporate the children as characters. Instead she has to stop the story to remind us, in a little lecture, that children are born not only demanding, but lovable.

The current co-option of the movement is epitomized in a "publisher's luncheon" in which Zane is being asked by a formerly anti-feminist male editor to write a book of "firsts": first woman astronaut, first wo-

man cabinet member, first woman jockey.

"First hangwoman," she thinks, "first Pope."

I'm quite certain that *Burning Questions* will be trashed in the *New York Times*. (I suppose that's what you get for trashing the Harvard Club.) And probably by a woman reviewer who believes liberation means a full professorship for herself. There was a time when that wouldn't have mattered, a time when we had our own means of communication and made our own best sellers. (And *Burning Questions* is at least as well written as Shulman's best-selling *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*.)

But since our own channels are jammed with static, our air waves just beginning to be cleared by papers like *IN THESE TIMES*, I feel it's my responsibility to let you know, no matter what you read in the *Times* or *Newsweek*, you'll love *Burning Questions*.

—Barbara Garson

Barbara Garson is the author of *All the Livelong Day: The Meaning and Demeaning of Routine Work*.

—the men, the union, the company and the events leading up to the Great Steel Lay-off—with the world in which he grew up: the campus revolutions of the '60s.

"I think the deepest needs of my friends here (in the mills), the things that require radical changes, are the same kind of unclear things that once made me want to wear long hair and raggy clothes, that made me rebel against the Vietnam war and ask the most basic questions about my own life."

Packard also writes well and his book/essay leaves the worker/reader with something to ponder.

Staughton Lynd's book is designed "to help you deal more effectively with the law when the law is against you, and to get more accomplished when the law is on your side." Lynd, who was a distinguished American histor-

ian until he was blacklisted for visiting Hanoi on a peace mission, is now a labor lawyer in Ohio and a regular columnist for *IN THESE TIMES*.

He has used his considerable talents not only to put complicated matters in simple, accurate terms, but also to organize his little book for maximum usefulness. His afterword is eminently worth repeating:

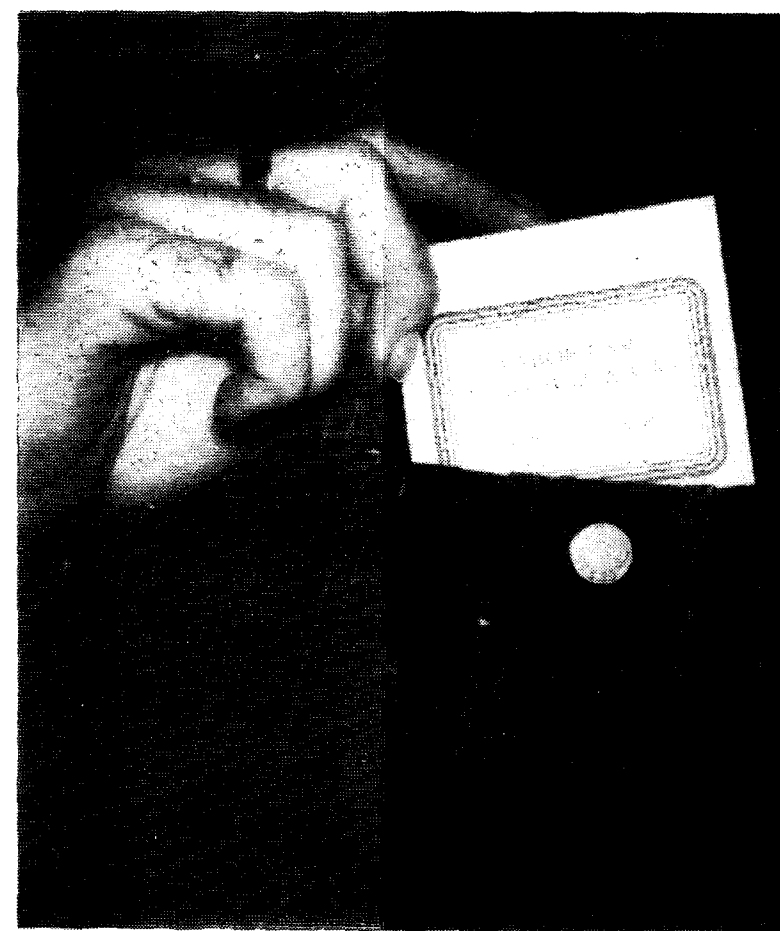
"The best way to think of the law is as a shield, not a sword. The law is not an especially good way to change things. But it can give you some real protection as you try to change things in other ways."

Singlejack Books may be ordered from the publishers at Box 1906, San Pedro, CA 90733. Their next projected publication is about telephone workers.

—J.S.

NON-FICTION

A brave new venture in the tradition of Haldeman Julius' little blue books



Ken Firestone
LONGSHORING ON THE SAN FRANCISCO WATERFRONT

By Reg Theriault, 32 pp., 75¢

STEELMILL BLUES

By Steve Packard, 32 pp., 75¢

LABOR LAW FOR THE RANK & FILE

By Staughton Lynd, 64 pp., \$1.50

One piece of good news in the gloom dark world of publishing is the appearance of a new line of small—really small!—books put out by Singlejack, a new small press in San Pedro, Calif.

They are in the tradition of the Little Blue Books, published by Haldeman Julius (editor of the *Appeal to Reason*), which were

printed in Girard, Kan., and sold for a nickel in the 1920s and '30s. There were hundreds of titles. The list included everything from philosophy to "how-to-do-its," authors from Karl Marx to Louisa May Alcott and Marie Stokes to Victor Hugo. They could be bought singly, or by subscription to a series, and the venture was so successful that it can be said to have provided self-education to the American working-class of its time.

The Singlejack Little Books are the same size, better made, higher priced (even considering inflation), and have a slightly different perspective. Here is the publishers' statement of purpose:

"We are all starved for images

of ourselves, for identity and for aids to communicate the condition of our lives and the good in them. But the millions who do the so-called unskilled, semi-skilled, craft and even professional jobs in America's workplace are seldom if ever represented fairly in the popular literature and media of the nation.... Thus, the value of the contribution made by a majority of the citizenry is robbed of visibility and recognition.

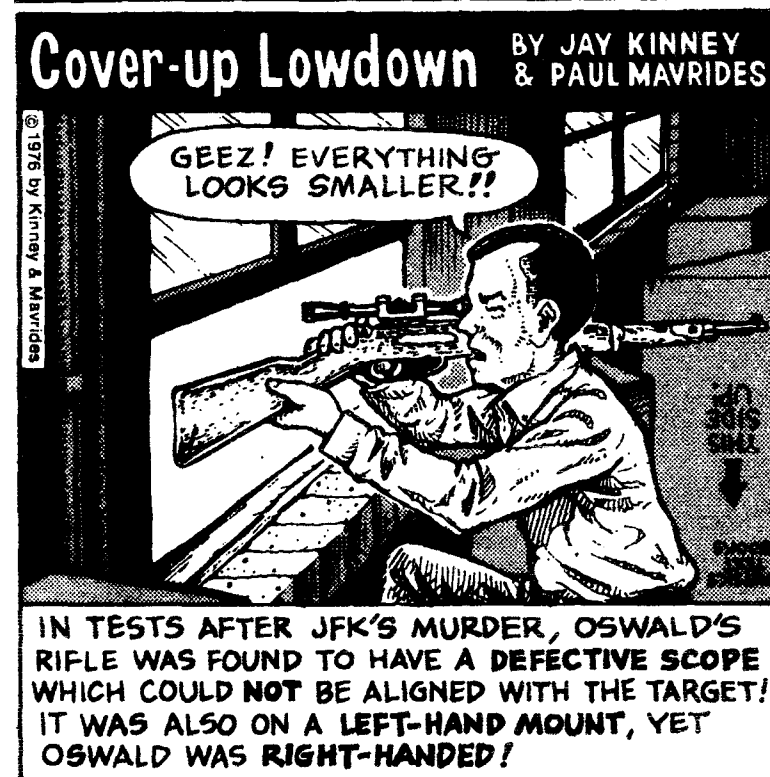
"The Singlejack Little Book effort is primarily directed at the publication of writings about work...written by the people who are doing it...and to writings designed to provide ideas that working people will find of practical use..."

"The shape and size of Singlejack Little Books is determined by the ease with which they fit into work shirt, blouse, apron or pants, and skirt pockets and purses."

Another note explains the term "singlejack" as derived from the jargon of hardrock miners in the American west and later from that of IWW organizers who "used it to describe that method of organizing where dedicated advocates are developed one at a time on a highly personalized basis—as between partners."

The first two Singlejacks are highly personalized accounts of work done by the writers. Reg Theriault has been on the San Francisco waterfront since 1959—long enough to see the industry transformed (but not reformed) by automation. He writes well and the material is absorbingly authentic.

Steve Packard, author of the book about the steel mills at Gary, Ind., was in them for only six months, observing while he worked and comparing the scene



Most ambitious upfront political comic in years

COVER-UP LOWDOWN
By Jay Kinney and Paul Mavrides
Rip-Off Press, San Francisco

Does the left have a sense of humor? Is it possible that the "underground comix" of the '60s brought forward any major satirists to the disillusioned '70s? Lots of folks who once had grand hopes for a New Left "counter" culture would be inclined to roll their eyes and moan at these questions. But not Jay Kinney. He wants to prove that radicals can be serious about their tasks without deserting either the cultural heritage of the '60s or their ability to laugh at themselves.

Still in his 20s, Kinney is an old hand in the comix field. His own series of books, *Young Lust*, is among the most durable in a field of fly-by-night publications. By Kinney's own lights, that has been a platform for a radical and feminist critique of existing sexual standards and their reproduction in "love" comic books and pulp magazines. If the results have been mixed, Kinney's own good intentions are not in doubt. He has been working in a political vacuum, finding his own way during ideological hard times.

Cover-Up Lowdown is the most ambitious, upfront political comic in years. Half reprints from a series of Kinney and Mavrides syndicated in college and com-

munity papers, *CULD* is replete with spiritualist messages from J. Edgar Hoover, a Total-World-Conspiracy Moebius Flow Chart and two lengthy tales mocking (or is it vindicating?) our own paranoid conspiracy-consciousness.

Occasionally, but only occasionally, the joke wears a little thin. Mavrides and Kinney have, at their best, uncovered the truest source of humor—the need to laugh so as not to cry—and have thereby moved beyond the light humor of the television celebrity roast, beyond the heavy-handed pathology-for-its-own-sake of the *National Lampoon*.

Cover-Up Lowdown is not only for the left. Its mixture of comedy and political critique has a wide potential audience, and may yet serve as a proto-type for a socialist agitational form to get the message across to millions as the printed word alone cannot do.

—Paul Buhle

Paul Buhle, publisher of the one-shot *Radical American Komiks* (1970), now edits *Cultural Correspondence*, a left popular culture and humor magazine.

Copies of *Cover-Up Lowdown* can be obtained for 95¢ plus 30¢ postage from Rip-Off Press, P.O. Box 14158, San Francisco, CA 94114.