

NOVEMBER 30, 1973
60 CENTS

Murray Kempton on
Rockefeller, Reagan and Connally

NEW TIMES

**The Republicans:
Is there a way out?**



A black and white photograph of a young man with dark, curly hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. He is wearing a plaid button-down shirt. In his right hand, he holds a large stack of US dollar bills, fanned out. A cigar is in his mouth. He is wearing a ring on his left hand. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

48 NEW TIMES

I had been teaching a fifth-grade class in a New York City ghetto school for three months, and the children and I had spent virtually all that time waging war. After trying many things and getting nowhere, I came to school with a plan, some materials and a question that eventually altered everything.

"How many of you are poor?"

There was no response.

"How many of you are poor or come from poor families?"

Still no response. Nearly every student in the class was from a family that depended on public assistance to survive. Yet, asking for an admission of their condition violated the social and economic anonymity fostered for so long in school.

The lack of an answer to my question didn't deter me. Their silence was so unusual I knew there were vibrations.

"How many of you want to know how the rich get rich?"

Everyone raised a hand.

"How many of you have played Monopoly?"

Seven students raised hands.

"That's very few. I'll have to start from the beginning. Monopoly is a game that teaches us how to get rich buying and selling property. Our version of that game has a different name, Micro-Economy."

"That word you said, *Micomony*, whasit mean?" asked Juan.

"Micro means something small. An economy is a system of stores, jobs, goods, things you wear, eat, or drive, houses, factories, movies, everything. An economy makes it possible for you to be housed, fed, go to school, find a job, and be entertained. Micro-Economy means small economy. We are going to make a small economy in this room."

"Shooooe, I thought you wuz gonna give us mini-comic books."

Soul dollar teachin' beats preachin'

How a classroom game teaches ghetto kids about the real world

By George Richmond

"Sorry, Juan. If it makes you feel any better, Micro-Economy may turn out to be more fun than a comic book. I've got an idea. If you write your own comic book, I'll buy it from you."

"How much you pay?"

"Four hundred *soul* dollars."

"Soul dollars? Whatsa soul dollar?"

"From now on, I'm going to buy compositions with this." I held up a bundle of paper money that I had mimeographed the day before. "These are soul dollars. They come in ones, fives, 20s, 100s and 500s. You'll also get a dollar for each point that you score on a spelling or math test."

"You mean ya gotta be smart to get that money?"

"You'll have to work hard, Rosa."

"Hey, Mr. Richmond," Sandoval called. "You expect us to get rich off that

phony stuff? Man, if I take that phony-baloney down to the candy store, all it gonna buy me is a kick in the ass."

Everyone laughed.

"At the end of each month," I said, "I'm going to bring books, brownies, cookies, soda, and other things to school and auction them off to the highest bidder. That means that the people with the most of this phony-baloney get what they want."

"You mean this money buys things, real things?"

"Yes, I'm going to pay you for your work because it's valuable to me. Then I'm going to bring stuff—candy, soda, and other things—and you'll trade your work for food just the way your parents do."

"There are several kinds of auctions," I continued. "One kind is a place where I sell you cake, but there's a second kind of auction in Micro-Economy. Instead of buying refreshments, you buy land."

"What land? You gonna bring land to sell, too?"

"The actual land is located on those shelves and tables and on top of that clothing closet. When you build houses, we'll put them on the land you buy. Do you see these pieces of paper? These are deeds to the land. When you buy and sell land, you use these pieces of paper to do it, to exchange land for money."

Sandoval raised his hand. "What good is this land? It just wood."

"Once you own land, anyone who lands on it pays you rent."

"Do we throw dice like in Monopoly?" asked Barbara.

"No, a transportation manager moves you."

"What's that?"

"It's a job and I'll hire two people for it."

Ten hands went up: "Me, me, me."

"What does it pay?" asked Rosa, the hardheaded businesswoman.

"Fifty dollars a week."

Ten more hands shot up.

From the book, The Micro-Society School: A Real World in Miniature, to be published by Harper & Row, Inc. Copyright © 1973 by George Richmond.

Whenever the scores are posted, all the youngsters race to the board to see where they stand.

"I only need two people for the job. Those of you who are not chosen today will be offered other jobs in a week or two, so don't worry about finding work."

"Well, how do you play?"

"Okay, listen carefully. Every move has four parts: assessment, transportation, marketplace, and auction. During assessment you bring me your houses and anything else you want to put on your property to make it more valuable. I'll assess it. That means I'll tell you how much it's worth."

"How can you tell?" asked Juan.

"Well, I look at what you've built. If you make a beautiful house, it's worth more than an ugly one. If you put a lot of work in—build furniture, make windows, hang curtains, put in wallpaper, anything—it will be worth more. The second step is transportation. Everyone finds out where he's landed during transportation. It only takes a minute. Then comes marketplace. During marketplace, you may walk around the room, talk to whomever you please, make deals, borrow money, sell land, buy houses, form partnerships, visit the bank, or pay and collect rent you owe or are owed."

"How do you know how much to collect?" asked Raoul.

"Rent is 10 percent of the assessed value. That means if the property is worth \$100, the landlord collects \$10 from anyone who lands on it. Let me teach you a trick for figuring the rent when your property rents for 10 percent of its assessed value. To get 10 percent of \$400, all you do is cross out the last number." I went through several examples until they all had the idea.

"If you ain't got no land, can you build a house?" asked Raoul.

"You can build, but if you have no place to put the building, you can't collect rent. But you can sell your house to someone else or sell it at auction. Model builders have a very good chance of becoming millionaires in this game."

"This is gonna be cool!" said Man-



nie, "'cause I love makin' models."

"Try to figure out an answer to this question. Say you landed on property number five. Say it costs \$400. You have \$200 and need another \$200 to buy it. How do you get the rest of the money?"

Mannie thought for a moment and then looked at me with a winning smile. "Geez, Teach, I couldn't buy it, could I? Maybe you would let me have the property on credit. You know, I could pay you maybe next week when I get some more money."

"Sorry, Mannie, I don't give credit."

"Teach, you got no heart. You hard like a rock." Mannie groaned and hammed. "Hey, Sandoval, baby, you got soul and money, right? You make me a loan of two hundred, won't you?"

"Sure, anything for a friend."

Mannie smiled triumphantly.

"Sandoval, would you charge Mannie interest for the use of your money?"

"No, Mr. Richmond, Mannie's my best friend."

"Shooooe, I wouldn't let him get away with payin' nothin'," Rosa broke in.

"I'd make him pay me 20 pesos to use my money. I don't care what kind of friend he is. If a bank can loan-shark \$10 on every \$100 you borrow, then why not me? Answer me that. I ain't rich like no bank. Man, I would even charge you more. I ain't stupid like Sandoval."

Rosa's words were having their effect on Sandoval. He looked at Raoul. I read both their faces.

"If Raoul were in his shoes," I said, "would Raoul do the same for him?"

If it was the first moral dilemma raised in the Micro-Economy, it would not be the last. Admitting society to the classroom seemed charged with potential.

The next day we began actual play. After what seemed an awkward introductory period, the game ran smoothly. The pace continued to pick up as more and more currency was pumped into circulation. Every student who wanted a job found one. Those who took jobs performed enthusiastically. Students doubled their academic output. A week later I began teaching the students in 308 the fundamentals of accounting. They kept records of income and expenditure, and these records provided them with ample

arithmetic exercises. A month and a half later, several students began showing signs of leaving their comrades behind in the race to acquire the consumer goods I was supplying.

Ramon became 308's banker. Frankly, I would never have predicted that Ramon would get the job. When I first began teaching the class, Ramon was quiet, well-mannered, but uncoordinated; he played only a nominal role in the daily skirmishes that claimed our energies. In the order of selection for a punchball team, Ramon was often the last to be chosen. Sometimes team captains refused to let him play.

In one respect, Ramon's passivity was an effective strategy for survival. As every hack in the schoolhouse knows, if you keep to yourself and take few gambles, teachers and other students don't bother you. Ramon made no challenges, so few calls were made for him to defend himself in the brutal infighting that went on in 308. At least, this description fitted Ramon until we started playing Micro-Economy.

After I introduced money to the classroom, all that multiplying, adding, and subtracting began to make sense, and Ramon's life began to change. He was unanimously chosen to be banker. He became rich by getting 100 on his math tests, and after I began paying for points on spelling tests, he scored perfectly there, too. Instinctively entrepreneurial, Ramon turned a part of his cash holdings into property; the rest he loaned to his classmates. Both investments earned him enviable returns.

As Ramon got richer and richer, he began to pay a price for his success. The cloak of anonymity came off; he became important and powerful; his advice, previously ignored, was now sought by other children. At first he continued a policy of avoiding conflict, but he found himself inevitably at the center of things. Choices were inescapable. As banker, he had emerged as a figure on whom the fortunes

of others depended. Since Ramon had no physical resources, it came as no great shock to anyone when he hired Raoul to protect his interests, to collect his debts, to run his errands. No one but me saw the significance of that seemingly inconsequential reversal of the student hierarchy. Muscle had surrendered to commerce. Soon after this development I persuaded Raoul and Ramon that it might be better for everyone if Raoul performed police duties for the whole class, and I began paying Raoul to protect and to enforce the as-yet-unwritten laws. There were other signs of change. The first indication of Ramon's emergence had been a line of children waiting to see him with their financial problems. The second sign, however, really shocked me. Ramon was now among the first to be chosen for punchball.

Late in June the Selective Service System ended my work in the New York City schools by assigning me to the Transitional Year Program (TYP) for a stint as a conscientious objector. TYP provided young men and women from minority groups with a 13th year to prepare for college, and me with employment in a 24-hour-a-day position as assistant director, instructor, and dormitory resident. TYP was affiliated with Yale. During the course of my first year there, I met Tom Edwards, the dean of one of Yale's colleges, who left to become the director of Broad Jump, and Tom became interested in my ideas. When TYP recessed for the summer he urged me to join his staff at Broad Jump's Trinity School campus in New York City. I agreed.

Nine months of the year, Trinity is a private school for boys. But during the summer, Trinity School rents its facility to Broad Jump. Every weekday, 130 boys between the ages of nine and 13, predominantly black or Puerto Rican, come from the Lower East Side, Harlem, East Harlem, and the South Bronx by subway and by bus to the school.

The prospect of implementing the

Micro-Economy game here excited me. Along with six other teachers, I implemented the real-estate game; we played in the afternoon. The staff also used the currency in the academic program to compensate students for their work. It gave the program focus and excitement. And while the impact of the incentives on the students was uneven—some reacted strongly and positively, others only weakly—everyone agreed that on the whole it was positive. One black teacher went further: "It's time black kids knew this. It's time they learn how to run institutions. My people have always been run by institutions."

Teachers paid students a week's wages on Friday. Students earned that money in a standard academic program offered in the morning. Each teacher developed a wage scale for the students in his classes. On Friday the teachers filled out a form listing the earnings of each student and sent it to the office to be inscribed in individual student bank accounts.

Students spent their "soul dollars"—scrip—or invested it. Some spent their earnings at two auctions, one held the third week and the other held the sixth. Educational games, books, athletic equipment, photographic equipment, comic books, records, food and other items were offered at these auctions. Others discovered that their soul dollars could be exchanged for commodities on an informal basis. For instance, Emil Jackson reputedly sold Afro-combs for \$200 in Broad Jump currency. Tom's announcement that the program would no longer supply students with free pencils but would sell them for two soul dollars each inspired another student to stay after school and collect stray pencils—and then undercut the established price by offering two for three dollars.

Every teacher paid wages differently. Some teachers paid five dollars for attendance. Others refused to pay children for merely being somewhere, insisting that they do something for it. One teacher paid \$10 a week for neatness. However, the

majority of the staff used the allocation of \$100 per student per class to encourage extra work, to reward effort or originality, and to ensure completion of assignments. One teacher who had been somewhat worried that she might be contributing to a "capitalist" mentality stopped me in the hall at the end of the summer to tell me she had changed her mind. "Your system helps people like me to get at moral issues. Beats preachin' anyhow."

"As simply as I can say it, our job is to create a society in this school! We will start by generating an economy." I had accepted an invitation to return to Trinity for a second summer and was now talking to the new Broad Jump staff. "We want to expose students to fundamental economic concepts. We also want to integrate each activity in the school with every other—we want to make what happens here a bit closer to the real world."

"Every time I do this program something different happens. I'm not sure I know why. Perhaps it's personality differences, the size of the class, age, teacher—it isn't clear. When I think of last year the first person who comes to mind is Worthington. A big kid. Muscles in his fingers. Not a tough kid. He did his work. Well, he got excited by the money, the game, got excited by just about everything. In his own quiet way he made an impact on everyone. He stood outside school in the morning making deals and talking to his partners. He invented it—the partnership, that is. That may not seem important to you; it may seem obvious, but it wasn't. Not to anyone. You might say he discovered the principle of cooperation. Within a week everyone else in the school learned it from him—discovered that by joining together in an enterprise, by pooling resources and talents, they could create something very powerful, something more effective than when you work alone. That principle revolutionized everything. One minute everyone's on his own. A week later everyone's in a group.

Imagine what happened inside people's heads.

"You don't look astounded. All right, think—what if children learned the principles of cooperation and organization in school? Imagine how different their world might be. Mind, they learned it without sermons."

"One teacher used soul dollars to bribe students to be good. He paid five dollars if you stayed in your seat, 10 dollars if you kept quiet. Whenever a crisis came he'd offer to raise the ante. It took the kids maybe a week to run him to the liquor closet."

"Another teacher fined one student \$500 for getting up on a chair. Well, it infuriated the kid. If he paid up, it would have meant that he was knocked out of the game for the rest of the summer. He vowed to wreck the school. Don't use a tank to kill a mosquito. Small fines work just as well as large ones. We're not in the business of fining and bribing students, we're trying to get 'em moving, to build their possibilities for action. When incentives are misused, we risk setting the whole thing back."

"What happens to children who can't pay their bills?" said Judy Perez.

The others in the group chuckled.

"First, understand we have an inflationary economy. We pump new money into circulation all the time, so everyone usually has some money."

"But some children will be poor, won't they? Do they go on welfare? What happens?"

"Last year a teacher in this program proposed a one-percent tax on income to help poor children."

"And?"

"His students refused. Many of them came from very needy circumstances, parents and relatives on public assistance; no one wanted any form of welfare. Their teacher said everything he could think of to get them to reconsider. Nothing doing."

"They hate El Welfare," said Judy.

"They hate what it does to them. I'm not surprised. This program allows them to separate themselves from the lot of their parents. You expect them to give that up?"

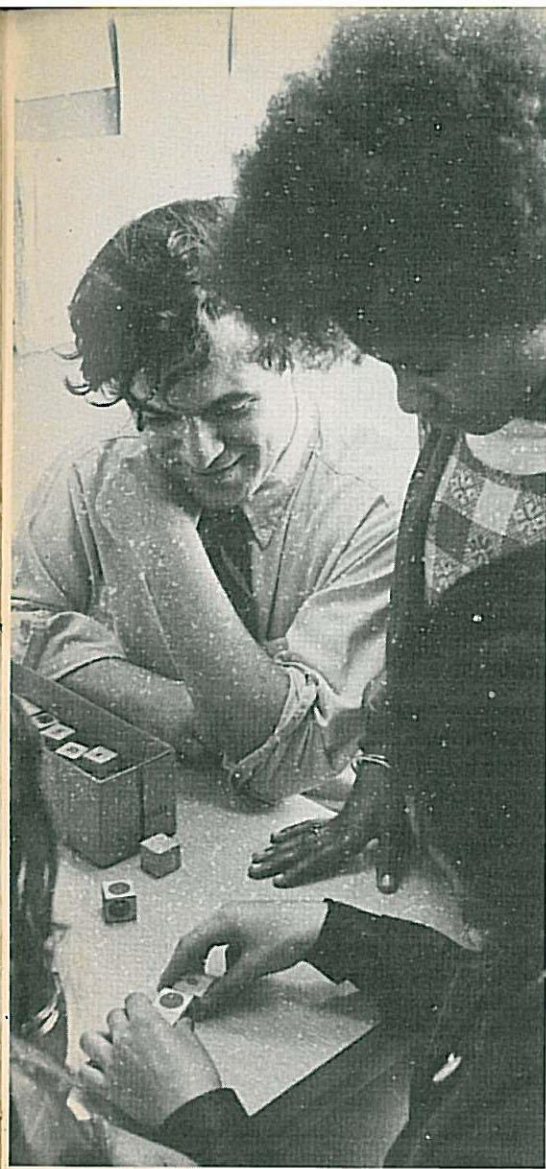
For the first three weeks of the second summer, the Micro-Economy program unfolded predictably. We introduced the currency. We taught everyone the game. Students began learning their roles, and teachers began delegating responsibilities to them. But then side effects began to show. Many of these could be related to the differences in mental and social age between the 10-year-olds and the 14-year-olds. Older students were using a variety of devices to extract funds from younger children in the program. The techniques varied from extortion to pickpocketing. By encouraging all students to secure their money in savings accounts, we were able to cut down the outright theft.

But by far the most dramatic defense against the hustle was initiated by the fourth-graders themselves. They talked Bob Forest, a counselor, into helping them recoup their losses. With his guidance and their perseverance, they formed the first corporation to evolve in a Micro-Economy setting, and within two weeks they were dominant, owning as much as 30 percent of the property.

The finale came at the auction. Everyone looked forward to it. There were several hundred items: basketballs, educational toys, games, T-shirts, candy, cake, soda, notebooks and other school supplies, a couple of watermelons, and hundreds of paperback books donated by a children's-book publisher. Groups were formed. Brothers were pooling money with brothers. Kids from the same block were going in together to buy something really good that they could share. Bob Forest donated a camera to the sale. It was snatched for 7,000 soul dollars. No kid went home empty-handed.

As I left Trinity that day, I ran into two students who were sometimes lugging, sometimes rolling a huge watermelon

It didn't matter what kind of commercial-world game Richmond started, the kids got involved—and learned.



down the sidewalk toward the subway. They got to a hill and it started to roll. They started after it, tackling it just before it reached the street. They picked it up exuberantly. Another boy passed me dribbling a basketball. Every third or fourth bounce, he'd stop dribbling to spin his basketball on his forefinger.

After Broad Jump there were other projects, each more elaborate than the last, but the basics remained the same: the children would earn money by completing various classroom assignments (extra credit work, tests, homework, attendance); they would buy, sell, mortgage and rent "property;" declare bankruptcy; they would and did learn double-entry book-keeping; set up a postal system, newspapers, a comic book industry; and, as a not inconsiderable by-product, learned reading and arithmetic as well. Each classroom had its own micro-economy, and the economic system led to law and order. Students sued instead of fighting over claimed injustices. In one class, Julia ran out of money the fourth week. The amount she spent exceeded the total amount she took in selling goods in her

own store and from other sources. Her creditors, caught unaware, reacted as merchants would anywhere. They screamed. They tried to repossess articles they had sold. They ran to the teacher for justice.

The teacher suggested a trial. It was determined that Julia owed \$150 and had only three dollars. It was also determined that she no longer had most of the goods she had bought. "What do we do?" the judge asked the teacher.

"I can tell you what big people do. When someone goes broke, the people owed money ask a court to declare bankruptcy. If the court does, it usually orders the sale of any property the bankrupt party owns. They set up an auction. The money from the sale gets divided up among the people she owes. Sometimes a court will garnish wages. That means a certain amount of the salary a bankrupt person earns goes to his creditors—to the people Julia owes money—until the debt's paid off.

Julia's lawyer spoke up. "Your honor," he said. "Julia is the poorest kid in the class. Now, I admit, she did wrong. And it would be wrong for her to get away free. But it wouldn't be so good either if she got made to pay—or maybe got fined. She'd be poorer. Wouldn't be nice to her feelings. She always lose—and it don't help nobody for her to lose more."

The judge pounded her gavel on the table. "This is the court's decision. Julia owes \$150. She pay \$75 future money. What do you call it?" the judge asked the teacher.

"Garnish."

"Garnish Julia \$75. Toward the other \$75, the whole class pays one dollar each. That's \$31, which leaves \$44. That means that the four people she owe money to, you lose \$11 each. I decided this way because it's not fair you be the only ones Julia don't pay. But I also think you should remember not to let people who have no money charge it. I also think Julia has a little money. It's not good that one person be so poor."

In addition to adjudicating breaches of credit contracts, many classroom courts paid considerable attention to torts—cases in which some injury was done by one student to another. Appellate courts heard appeals from convictions. Student professionals (judges, bankers, tutors) were paid extra for their work.

Three times a year the soul dollars earned were redeemable for goods at a classroom auction. Students pooled resources to make major purchases. Students began to offer checking accounts, interest, loans and credit for a consideration. One borrowed from another class and discovered he had caused deflation in his own. Commerce and learning flourished.

The economic and judicial systems led to a political system with a constitutional convention (democracy won by a hair's breadth over a police state), a general referendum to ratify, an election and a student legislature. And these, in turn, led to a Children's University, with student-employed professors, a catalogue of courses and a reading tutorial program.

I left the New York City school system last year, because I wanted more commitment to the experiment. I want to build the Society School, not to continue a pilot program year after year. In an effort to launch a serious research-and-development effort, I have now established the program in Boston, where I hope to train teachers, administrators and parents for what I hope will be a sustained effort to develop the possibilities of the idea. I have visions of extending the program into the secondary schools, and a Children's Income Plan with money earned in school redeemable for advanced education. School, I believe, has too long been a custodial enterprise for millions. I propose to connect students with real-world careers outside. With the teacher as guide and support, I want to give children the skills and knowledge to change their schools and make a world I want to live in. ●