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# LM109

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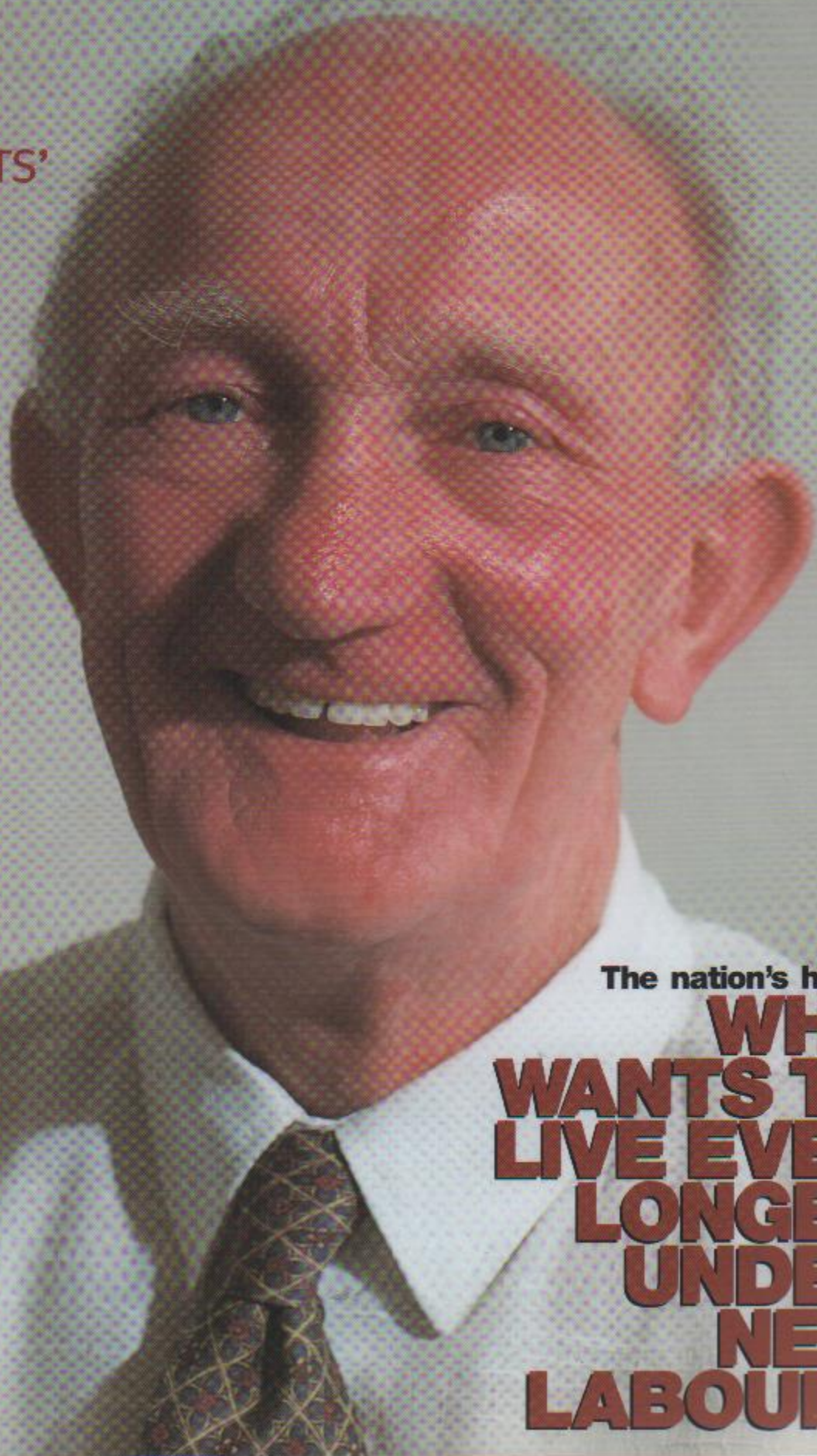
HAUNTED BY  
*THE EXORCIST*,  
25 YEARS ON

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LOBBY IS OUT  
TO LUNCH

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ALL WEARING  
RIBBONS?

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BRITAIN'S  
LOVE/HATE  
RELATIONSHIP  
WITH YOUTH



The nation's health

**WHO  
WANTS TO  
LIVE EVEN  
LONGER  
UNDER  
NEW  
LABOUR?**

**LM** libel appeal

The **OFF THE FENCE** fund

## **ITN**

is suing *LM* magazine for libel, over a story about its award-winning pictures of a Bosnian camp published in the February 1997 issue. It is a case that threatens to bankrupt *LM* and raises wider issues about the threat to press freedom.

English libel law is a censorship charter that the rich can hire to buy immunity from criticism through the courts; an American court recently called it 'repugnant' to

human rights and the principle of free speech.

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## THE TYRANNY OF HEALTH



As the government announces its plans to increase life expectancy, **Dr Michael Fitzpatrick** asks—who wants to live even longer under New Labour's grim health regime?

## AND A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM



**James Heartfield** thinks that adult society now hangs on every word from the young because it has nothing to say for itself

## WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE AND A RIBBON ON YOUR LAPEL



The rise of the politics of emotion leaves **Frank Furedi** cold

# LM109

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# MICK HUME

Editor



# NEVER MIND PASSIVE SMOKING, THE PROBLEM IS PASSIVE LIVING

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BE IN THE PAY of evil tobacco barons in order to question what is behind the near-hysteria now being puffed up around the issue of passive smoking in Britain, aka Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) in the USA.

When I switched from chain-smoking Player's No 6 to chain-sucking Polos some years ago, I too discovered that other people's cigarettes can be a drag. But even if smoke does get in your eyes, you should still be able to see that there are serious doubts over the veracity of all those proclamations about passive smoking posing a mortal threat to the public health. For instance...

- The increase in the incidence of lung cancer attributed to passive smoking is one order of magnitude lower than that used to justify regulating environmental risks in the USA; that is, it is lower than the risk from natural arsenic in water, eating mushrooms twice a week, or

eating Japanese seafood regularly. (See Professor Robert Nilsson, 'Is environmental tobacco smoke a risk factor for lung cancer?' in R Bate, *What Risk?: Science, Politics and Public Health*, 1998)

- The anti-smoking crusaders argue that those who live with smokers run an increased risk, of about 25 per cent, of developing lung cancer. Even if that figure is correct, the fact remains that lung cancer is a relatively uncommon tumour; a 25 per cent increase in a very, very low risk still means that the *absolute* risk of getting it is very low—especially for women. There is also a reasonable argument that even the increased *relative* risk of lung cancer from passive smoking is largely the result of bias and other methodological errors in the surveys cited.

- The evidence is contradictory. Some studies have shown no increased risk from ETS, while

others have shown that ETS causes *higher* rates of lung cancer among passive smoking women than exist among active smoking women! And what about the fact that women non-smokers who develop cancer tend to get adeno-carcinoma, while smokers get squamous/oat cell carcinoma; are we to conclude that cigarette smoke somehow causes one type of cancer in active smokers and an entirely different brand of the disease among passive smokers?

All in all, the issue of passive smoking and health is far from being the open-and-shut case we are often led to believe. Yet the arguments of the public health lobby have been inhaled with little or no dissent, and used to justify the kind of draconian bans on smoking in public places that are now drifting across the Atlantic from America to Britain. Why?

It strikes me that, given the hazy evidence of any threat to health, much of the panic cannot really be about ETS at all. The furore over passive smoking seems more symbolic of the wider climate in society, a kind of metaphor for the public mood.

The campaign against ETS looks like another convenient platform from which to broadcast the *cri de coeur* of our insecure age: 'My life is being messed up by other people!'—in this case, by the profit-grabbing tobacco industry and its anti-social customers.

Like too many other concerns of the moment, the panic about ETS is based on a variant of 'stranger danger', an exaggerated fear of your personal space being polluted by unknown assailants. Those sad individuals who describe themselves as passive smokers join the queue of people complaining that, through utterly no fault of their own, their future is totally being put at risk. And like all the other blameless victims, they want Somebody To Do Something About It—the government must ban it, the tobacco companies must pay them compensation, while they themselves concentrate on simply coping with the trauma.

The big problem revealed here is not so much passive smoking as passive living. The fear of being enveloped by ETS illustrates the fashion for people to behave as helpless lumps on the receiving end of life; as objects to whom things happen rather than subjects who try to do things themselves; as children in need of protection rather than as grown-ups in search of fulfilment.

Passive living is about blaming somebody/thing else for your problems, and abdicating any sense of personal responsibility for what is to become of you. Those complaining about

passive smoking are far from the only sufferers of a social affliction that is reaching epidemic proportions.

Typically for the times, many of those labelled 'active' smokers now appear just as keen to portray themselves as hapless victims. They have been trying to sue the tobacco companies for huge compensation pay-outs in the USA and the UK, on the grounds that the corporations conned them into buying cigarettes and developing cancer. The pathetic plea that 'they made me smoke against my will—40 times a day' should have been laughed out of court; yet the governments in Washington and Whitehall have endorsed it by banning cigarette adverts, presumably on the assumption that the rest of us poor gullible saps will not be able to resist lighting up if we see one more snap of the Marlboro Man's nicotine-tanned features.

Don't worry if you have never smoked or been anywhere near a fuggy bar. There are now plenty of other off-the-peg reasons why you are not responsible for your life, why whatever fate befalls you is not really your fault.

Just about any form of behaviour, for instance, can now be attributed to some kind of addiction or other. These days it seems you can be

If you think you are too old for these school-yard excuses, think again; you can still turn the clock back and blame your current problems on your childhood experiences. Indeed, with the boom in alleged genetic explanations for all manner of human behaviour, it is now possible to claim that your fate was sealed before you were even born. The DNA dunnit, m'lud.

And even if you made it into the world in one piece, contemporary wisdom has it that you may well have been scarred for life by the common experience of being bullied or abused as a child; remember, the experts insist that child abuse can be 'emotional' as well as physical, so your future could easily have been screwed up by your being shouted at or sent to bed without pudding.

The spread of passive living today, the refusal to take responsibility for anything, is well illustrated by the increase in personal litigation in the USA and Britain. People are suing each other, companies and institutions as never before, usually in an attempt to allot blame and extract compensation.

Neighbours sue neighbours over domestic disputes; students sue colleges for failing to pass them and their parents for failing to fund them;

Today that has all changed. Blaming 'society' for what happens to individuals is now a mainstream attitude, which can even be mobilised in defence of the status quo. In the age of Tina (There Is No Alternative), social change is right off the agenda. In which case, the argument that society is to blame ceases to have any real consequences. It simply becomes another way of saying that as individuals our fate is not our fault, that we are powerless, so all we can do is wallow in our alienation, seek some more counselling, and buy a ticket for the pilgrimage to the shrine of the patron saint of victims at Althorp. After all, if all of us ('society') are to blame for all of life's problems, then no one of us can really be held responsible for anything.

In such stomach-churning circumstances, it seems to me imperative that those of us who believe that it does not have to be this way should take up the banners of individual responsibility. Insisting that we are responsible adults capable of thinking and acting for ourselves has to be our starting point, if we are serious about taking control of our own destiny.

Of course, society in the proper sense of the word remains very important in shaping what happens to us all. And in our society, a lot of

## THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL TOBACCO SMOKE BROADCASTS THE *CRI DE COEUR* OF OUR INSECURE AGE: 'MY LIFE IS BEING MESSSED UP BY OTHER PEOPLE!'

addicted not just to drink or drugs, but also to chocolate, computer games, shopping, scratch-cards or sex. And since addicts can never be cured—they are only ever 'in recovery', taking their 12-step programmes 'one day at a time'—there is nothing you can do about your life but to lie back on the therapist's couch and 'survive'.

If you are not (yet) an addict, perhaps your problems are due to one of the many new medical syndromes which are apparently proliferating across society, especially among the young. With parents and schools both seemingly keen to get their excuses for educational failure in early, more and more children are finding themselves tagged with labels like 'attention deficit disorder sufferer' or 'dyslexic'. Examiners now have to wade through almost as many doctor's notes as answer papers. And woe betide any teacher who dares to write 'Could do better' on the school report of a pupil deemed medically unfit to be educated.

employees sue companies for harassment in response to workplace problems; criminals sue local authorities for not keeping them on the straight and narrow. Time was when only a crazy like the Yorkshire Ripper would claim that 'the voices' (in his case of God) made him do it. Now almost every petty crook and thug claims to have been set on the road to crime by some sinister influence, be it video nasties or a chemical imbalance. And what's more, these days their pleading is taken seriously.

Not so long ago, during the Thatcher/Reagan years in the eighties, the call for 'individual responsibility' became associated with those who defended 'popular capitalism'. Among other things, it was a way of shifting responsibility for the failings of the market economy on to the shoulders of individuals, especially the poorest. The riposte that 'society is to blame', meanwhile, was linked with radical critics of the system.

people do have the cards stacked against them; no amount of free will is going to get the poor into the boardrooms or on to the golf courses where real power is exercised.

But for all that, today more than ever we should insist upon the possibility and the importance of taking individual responsibility for our lives. People do have the potential to make their own history, albeit not in circumstances of their own choosing.

The alternative to taking responsibility is to take cover from life, to live in fear of it. All that remains is to complain about the unfairness of it all, plead for those in authority to protect us from other people and their cigarette smoke, and hope to prolong a miserable existence as long as possible. If breathing smoke-free air is enough excitement for some, fair enough. But anybody waiting for passive living to deliver anything more is advised not to hold their breath. ●

## FAREWELL TO 1848

I was relieved to find Mick Hume ('The return of Marx (& Spencer)', March) absenting himself from the celebrations over the 150th anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto*. Now that it is being re-published by Verso as 'a must-have for the sybaritic classes', it sounds like the sort of coffee-table book you would not want to be seen dead with.

Furthermore, when 'all that's solid melts into air' is the most over-used phrase in the English language (except that it was written in German), and Martin Jacques (*ex-Marxism Yesterday*) appears on Radio Four saying that now we have got rid of all the awkward stuff about historical agency, we can get right to the best bit of Marx—the analysis of capital—you are well out of it. Marxism has become a plaything of the intellectually-complacent, just as the working class is now a safe and sanitised aspect of the heritage industry.

I saw on TV recently that Sheffield City Council has started a tour of the locations used in *The Full Monty*, a film about redundant steelworkers being denuded of their labour movement tradition and turning themselves into strippers. Now must be the right time to set myself up as a tour guide for 'Marx's London'. It would be a fitting use for the old boy and I bet it would attract some big tippers.

**DES GRANT**  
Greenwich

I can understand your insistence that Marxism is not a set of eternal verities. However, in your haste to declare that everything has changed, I fear that you have lost sight of the features that constantly recur under capitalism, albeit in ever-changing forms.

As it is presently constituted, this society cannot rid itself of poverty, inequality, or oppression. As recent events have shown, it cannot inure itself from financial crises and the looming possibility of economic slump. On the other hand, these very features of capitalism continue to present both the possibility and the

necessity of transformation.

Social conflict rarely takes a class form nowadays, but this inherent aspect cannot be obscured forever; and even in these dark days, membership of unions has been climbing slowly upwards again. Take care that you are not caught napping when the tide of history sweeps back towards Marxism. It would be a shame if you were so fixated on lifestyle politics and private concerns that you miss the moment you have spent your life waiting for.

**ANN CROWTHER**  
Manchester

## HUNTING AND HORSESHIT

Ceri Dingle's account of a day out with the Beaufort hunt ('Fox hunting is fun', March) was so vivid you could almost smell the horseshit. Perhaps she was disoriented by the noxious fumes, but in any case she forgot to mention that hunting is not primarily about horsemanship or the thrill of the chase. It is yet another place where 'top' people get together to make contacts and pursue their vested interests. It is the equivalent of a debutante ball except that everyone is prancing

around on four legs instead of two. And if Ceri Dingle harbours fond childhood memories about being allowed to tag on the end of such an exclusive club, more fool her. Because she will never be 'one of us'.

**GERALD CRANSTON**  
Wiltshire

## EXTERMINATE!

I agree entirely with Dr Michael Fitzpatrick ('Exterminate the filthy smokers', March). However, the good doctor forgot to include the filthiest of filthy—the car drivers who emit millions of tonnes of pollutants into the atmosphere every year. And the over-consumers. And all the others who do not think like me and are not as perfect as me. It is their fault and they deserve all they get.

More oppressive laws, please!  
Yours ecologically,  
**PAUL ADDISON**  
Hamburg

## UNSCIENTIFIC?

After perusing some back issues, in particular the writings of John Gillott, it is apparent that *LM* tends

to use the concept of 'science' in unchallenging ways. Marxists invariably view other 'sacred cows' such as morality, religion, the family and patriotism as entirely the products of social forces and power struggles in society—why do you not do so with science?

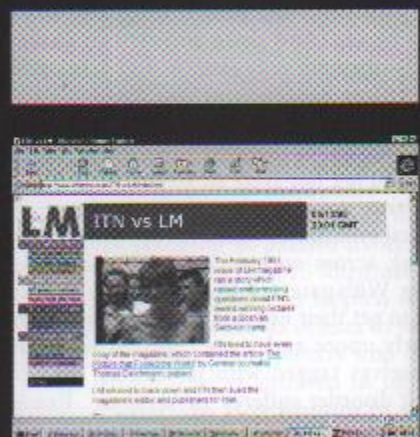
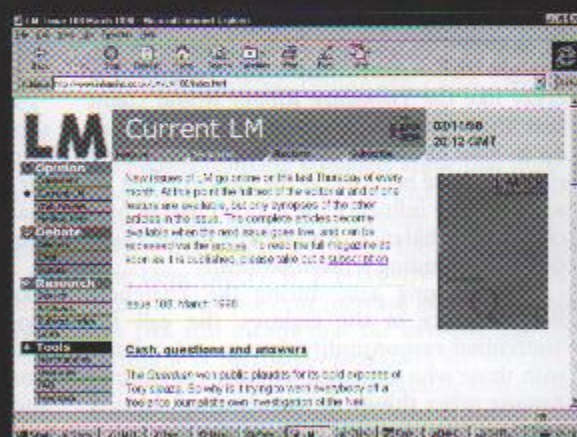
In 'Time for science to get on the soapbox' (May 1997), Gillott bluntly states 'society once believed in the value of science', and even alluded speculatively to the validity of research into the relationship between IQ and genetic inheritance. Before the Second World War, most of Western European 'science' believed in the existence of the 'hereditarily degenerate', but this was set against the backdrop of imperial competition and free market economics. An ideology which would willingly adopt eugenic policies was in the ascendancy.

More recently HJ Eysenck and the New Right geneticists have taken an entirely subjective concept, IQ (a simple, quantifiable definition of intelligence based on the logic and cognitive ability required by modern capitalism), elevated it to the level of objective 'fact', and called for disturbing public policy changes.

It is highly simplistic to speak of 'scientific progress'. Whose

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'progress'? It must be recognised that scientists exist in a society driven by competing ideologies. The distribution of research grants according to sectional interests will dictate that certain findings will become 'facts' whilst others will remain unknown to the public. If environmentalists are linked to a reactionary, scare-mongering world-view, surely Gillott must accept that he has his own political agenda, and will accept or reject the findings of 'science' accordingly.

**PHILIP SEDDON**

Luton

## WHAT ABOUT KOSOVO?

The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, which was set in motion by the US, German and (reluctant) British support for the secession of Croatia and Bosnia, now seems to be entering its death throes with the crisis in Kosovo.

It is ironic to watch the Western leaders dithering over the problem they helped to create. They condemn the Serbian regime for its repression of the Albanians in Kosovo, but are careful not to go too far in backing the separatists for fear that Serbia might finally fall apart under the pressure—which, for all their anti-Milosevic rhetoric, is the last thing the American or British governments want.

But it seems to me that Kosovo creates problems for the rest of us, too. I know that *LM* has been caricatured by ITN and others as 'pro-Serb' over Bosnia. I understand that your magazine has really been seeking only to redress the balance in the (mis-) reporting of that war. In Kosovo, however, it seems more obvious that the Serb authorities are acting as the aggressors.

Clearly none of us has any sympathy for Milosevic's police, whether they were acting on his orders or not in killing several dozen ethnic Albanians at the start of March. But neither do I want to endorse the clamour for international intervention against the Serbs, which I saw do so much damage to any hope of a just and equitable peace in the Yugoslav civil war. So what is the answer?

**JOHN WRIGHT** London

# The what's NOT on guide

**MAPPLETHORPE MEMORIES:** When West Midlands police raided a student's flat, confiscated a book of photographs by the late Robert Mapplethorpe, referred the book to the director of public prosecutions and requested permission to destroy it under the terms of the Obscene Publications Act, the vice-chancellor of the University of Central England said he had 'never known anything like this in 30 years of academic life'. He must have forgotten about the furore which followed the opening of the Mapplethorpe retrospective at London's Hayward gallery in 1996, when ChildLine's Esther Rantzen described the portrait of a semi-clothed three-year old girl as an 'utterly horrific' example of 'child pornography'. Despite the protests of the original model, who was 22 years old and running a cafe in Notting Hill at the time, the Hayward chose not to exhibit the picture, along with another portrait of two men having sex. It seems that the provincial police are merely following in the footsteps of the metropolitan *cognoscenti*, although their foot-size and their methods are much less dainty. **POWDERED:** Sony has pulled its advert for a computer game on a snowboarding theme after complaints that repeated references to 'powder' could be seen as drugs-related. The text which caused offence read: 'Powder, I need powder. My body yells, aches, screams for powder...when I'm on it I get a rush, a buzz, the blood coursing through my veins. I get really high.' Sony explained that 'the advert is written in snowboarding parlance' which reflects the 'adrenaline rush' associated with the sport. Insisting that no reference to drugs had been intended, the company dropped the advert anyway. Ridiculous; if they had been watching the gold-medallist-on-drugs debacle at the Winter Olympics back home in Japan, Sony execs would have known that snowboarders reach their highs on grass, not powder. **NAT-ED:** The National Union of Teachers (NUT) objected to an advert for Virgin Lips soft drink which took the form of a notice from a fictitious organisation, the National Association of Teachers (NAT), announcing an 'auction of adult Swedish literature, rare adult videos, magazine and erotic paraphernalia. The staff room, Friday lunchtime (pupils welcome)'. The complaint against the advert was that it undermined teachers' efforts to promote good behaviour and 'would mislead readers, especially

children, that the NUT or another major teaching organisation endorsed...the product'. If 'teachers' efforts' really were so insubstantial as to be ruined by a spoof advert for porn, it is hard to see how anything could further undermine them. **SMACKED:** Responding to complaints against the advert for the Prodigy single 'Smack My Bitch Up', XL Recordings maintained that 'bitch' did not necessarily refer to a woman and pointed out that in an earlier song the band used the word to refer to a man. With a defence like this, it is hard to fathom how XL could have lost its case and the ASA upheld the complaints made against the advert. **PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE:** Recognising that 'after the death of the Princess of Wales some people found any advertisement for alcohol, cars and even trips to Paris upsetting', the ASA recommends referring adverts to the CAP Copy Advice team which, admittedly, 'is not clairvoyant but their experience can be used to help companies using apparently innocent copy or images that might be seen in a different way when the advertisement reaches consumers'. So, even if you are sure your material is 'innocent', the advice is to get it checked by the ASA censors in case you might be sinning in some unforeseen way against non-existent public sensibilities which might become sensitised at some point in the future. That seems to cover just about everything. **KISS ME QUICKER:** Worthies in Warrington have suggested that the forecourt of the local railway station should be divided into a kissing zone and a no-kissing area, where the smack of lips would be outlawed. The reason for the zoning plan is that the flow of commuter traffic on the platform is supposedly blocked by spouses who drive their partners to the station and spend too long bidding them goodbye. **TIME, GENTLEMEN, PLEASE:** Lambeth council is proposing to ban drinking in public places in the Brixton area, prompted, perhaps, by the fact that most of the local street-drinkers seem to congregate near the town hall. But Brixton police are not keen on the proposed ban, since they are the ones who would have to go around calling time. As the summer nights approach, it remains to be seen whether the street-drinkers or the Bill lose their bottle(s) first.

Compiled by Andrew Calcutt

## WE WELCOME READERS' VIEWS AND CRITICISMS

Write to The Editor, *LM*, BM Informinc, London WC1N 3XX fax (0171) 278 9844.

Letters may be edited for clarity and length

# TABOOS

*The notion that midwives should snoop for signs of domestic abuse is an abuse of their privileged position, says Bríd Hehir*

## THE PREGNANCY POLICE

**G**iving birth is one of the most unrestrained experiences in a woman's life. There is simply no way of retaining control. Women scream, curse, abuse the medical staff, their partners and the world in general. Midwives expect it—and women need it. Labour is scary and a woman needs to know she can trust her midwife absolutely. She needs to know that whatever nonsense she prattles when she's out of her skull on pethidine, the midwife will never betray a confidence.

Midwives pride themselves on their special relationship with the women they deliver and many will be horrified—and rightly so—that their professional body, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is colluding with government in a project which cannot but undermine this relationship of trust.

The publication of the RCM position paper, 'Domestic Abuse in Pregnancy', in November 1997 was greeted with enthusiasm by the secretary of state for health. The Rt Hon Frank Dobson joined a photocall at the House of Commons to stress the government's commitment to tackling domestic abuse. He was delighted that midwives were putting themselves forward to play a role in this, and midwifery leaders were thrilled that their value was being appreciated. Nobody pointed out that this initiative transforms the midwife from a health professional aiming to support a woman through pregnancy and labour, into an undercover cop.

The RCM says it is promoting this initiative because 'domestic abuse may have a damaging, sometimes even life-threatening impact on the physical and mental well-being of a woman and her baby'. General Secretary Karlene Davis told the RCM journal that midwives are particularly well-placed to spot incidences of domestic abuse: 'Midwives will at some point in their career attend women who are suffering physical abuse

from their male partners and the move in the profession to more community-based midwifery services means that midwives increasingly see firsthand the signs of domestic violence.' The position paper aims to guide RCM members to recognise abuse from physical, emotional and behavioural signs, and provides specific guidance on what the midwife should do when she believes that abuse is taking place.

It is worth taking a look at some of the indicators of domestic abuse detailed in the paper which the midwife is encouraged to take note of. The College recognises that none of them is definitive proof of abuse, but recommends that if it is suspected the midwife 'should ask further questions, carefully and tactfully'.

The first section on the woman's obstetric history is the most worrying because within it are listed some not uncommon problems which some women may experience during their fertile years. Midwives are encouraged to consider the possibility of abuse if a woman's history reveals any of the following:

- A high incidence of miscarriage
- A high incidence of termination of pregnancies
- Stillbirth
- Pre-term labour/delivery
- Unplanned pregnancies
- Unwanted pregnancies
- Smoking, alcohol and drug abuse

This is probably broad enough to include most women a midwife sees. Unplanned pregnancy is so common (half are unintended) that most midwives would regard it as normal. There might be a whole host of reasons why a woman has a history of repeat abortions, miscarriages or stillbirth. To identify smoking as a marker for domestic abuse—given the number of women smokers—is bizarre.





'Common injuries in pregnancy and postnatally' are listed to be given similar consideration by the midwife. Included are problems such as frequent vaginal and urinary tract infections, and frequent visits with vague complaints such as reduced fetal movements or abdominal pain. None of these of course is an injury or even proof of injury, and they are not uncommon in pregnant women. Thrush and cystitis are particularly common in pregnancy.

Some of the following are cited within a long list of behavioural signs of possible abuse:

- 'Missed appointments or non compliance with treatment regimes, lack of independent transportation, access to finances and ability to communicate by

telephone.' (In other words if a woman is poor—suspect abuse.)

- 'The partner accompanying the woman, insisting on staying too close and answering all questions directed to her.' (In other words if a woman has a dominant partner—suspect abuse.)

- 'Denial or minimisation of violence by the woman (or her partner) with an exaggerated sense of personal responsibility for the relationship.' (In other words if a woman says she hasn't been abused—suspect abuse.)

If abuse is detected the midwife is encouraged to challenge it with a 'multi-disciplinary approach, in which professionals work in partnership with the woman herself, and which includes support for both the abused woman and the midwife'.

In some of the examples listed it might be reasonable to assume that abuse may be actually occurring and the midwife's alarm may be justified. These include rape, sexual assault and injury to the genitals, repeat or chronic injuries or even removal of perineal sutures post-delivery.

It is nevertheless worth asking if, even then, it is appropriate for the midwife to use her privileged position to carry out what I would call a snooping exercise and initiate a multi-disciplinary approach. I find it problematic for two reasons.

Firstly the RCM is encouraging midwives to act as though every woman on their case load is a potential victim of domestic abuse, and every male partner is a potential abuser. Real life is not like that. Most couples do not have abusive relationships and would find it insulting to imagine that a midwife was effectively using medical consultations to 'screen' their relationship.

Secondly, there is the issue of who defines 'abuse'. It should not matter a jot whether a midwife approves or disapproves of the way a couple relate to each other. What she perceives to be abusive may be acceptable to those involved in a particular relationship. No couple should face the humiliation of a health professional trying to tease out details of private behaviour—unless, of course, one of them wants action taken. A midwife may genuinely want to help a woman she sees as vulnerable. But her perspective is not the same as the woman's and they should not be conflated or confused. The woman may not want her 'help' or that of other agencies. The woman's wishes should be respected.

The midwife has been accepted and even welcomed into the lives of pregnant women at a very special time for them. She is accepted not only as a professional healthcare worker, but

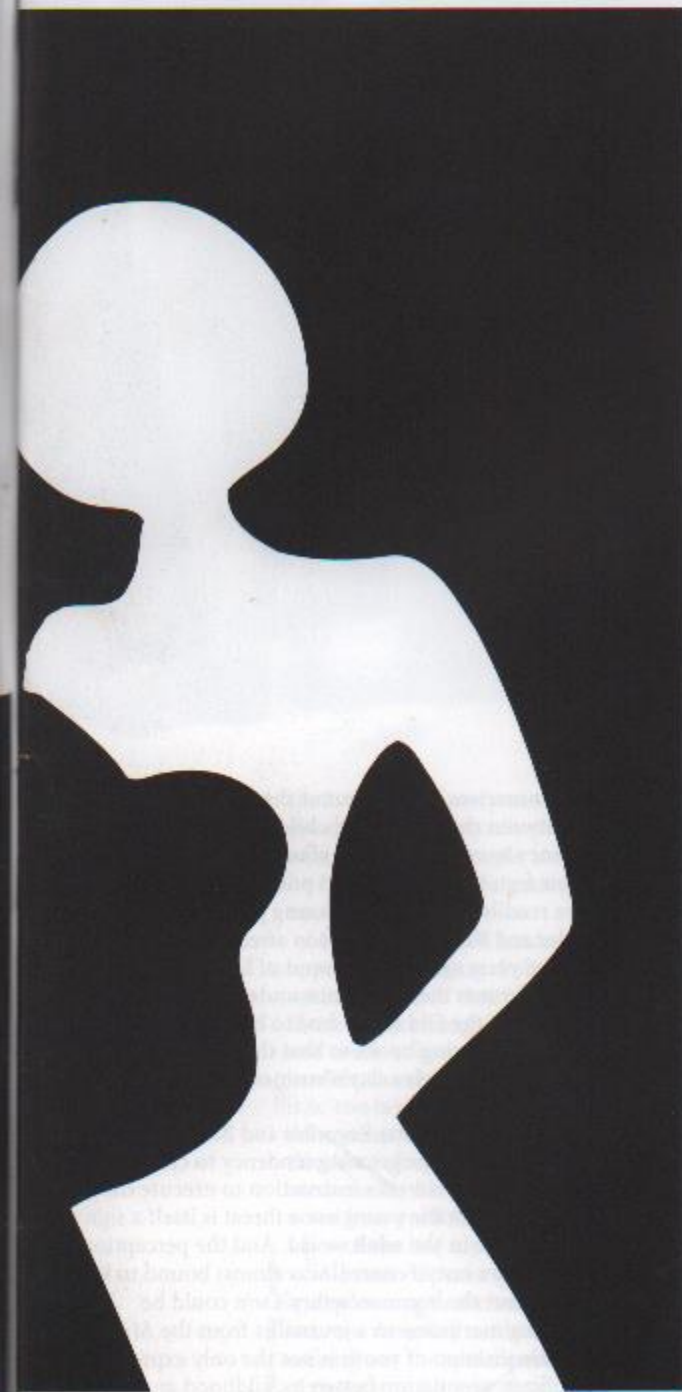
also as a confidant, a problem solver, somebody who is trusted and from whom confidentiality is expected. Is it not an abuse of that trust and a betrayal of the confidence women have in the midwife if her agenda is now seen to include probing their personal lives?

This new role for midwives could even be detrimental to the health of the pregnant woman and her baby. If women feel that their every word, symptom, or bruise is being screened by the midwife for evidence of domestic abuse the barriers are likely to go up. How many times have I heard pregnant women or women in labour say to their partners 'I hate you, you bastard, I never want to see you again', sometimes even physically lashing out at him? Was I supposed to have taken that as evidence of retaliation for abuse perpetrated on her by him, or as a release of pent-up emotion in a sympathetic environment? If midwives jump in and act on confessions, false or otherwise, pregnant women are likely to clam up, become reticent about confiding in them or may even absent themselves from antenatal care. The relationship between the midwife and the woman, which is based on the provision of healthcare, could be seriously undermined by the extension of the midwife's role to include suspicious prying.

The RCM seems to be making an assumption that pregnant women might unknowingly be waiting for midwives to help them sort out abusive relationships and would consequently welcome intervention. Most healthcare workers could cite examples of women they have come across in the course of their professional lives who are stuck in domestic situations they may not be entirely happy with and would wish to be free of. Many also know of instances where women have managed, without their help or that of social workers or the police, to extricate themselves from unpleasant situations and make new lives. Women need our help with pregnancy and labour, they are quite capable of living the rest of their lives for themselves.

Policing pregnant women is not part of a midwife's brief. They should stick to the job they are trained to do and for which we have fought long and hard to gain acceptance—that of delivering a professional and supportive healthcare service. It would also be a shame if the perceived gains of pregnancy care, exemplified by the 'Changing Childbirth Report' in 1993 which seeks to provide women-centred care, are lost in the course of midwives inadvertently acting as an extension of the police and sticking their noses where they are not wanted. ●

Brid Hehir is a health visitor and former midwife



*James Heartfield thinks that adult society now hangs on every word from the young because it has nothing to say for itself*

## AND A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

**Y**ou do not have to be a Christian to think that it is a good idea to celebrate the millennium. Two thousand years is a lot of civilisation to mark, and it is always good to look forward, too. The government should be congratulated for facing down the critics of the Millennium Dome.

It is a shame, then, that the contents of the Millennium Dome should be subjected to the 'Euan test'. That is the test proposed by prime minister Tony Blair when he said that exhibits should be the sort of thing that his son, eight-year-old Euan Blair would appreciate. Peter Mandelson has since officially recruited a substitute eight-year-old, appropriately named Christian, as a top adviser on the Dome project.

At the heart of Blair's proposal is the growing prejudice that the young have something to teach us, when the truth ought to be the other way round. Euan Blair has a lot to learn. There is no need to make the Millennium Dome into a museum, but it ought to reflect the highest points of our civilisation, rather than pandering to the lowest of all common denominators, the prejudices of a child.

The relationship between the adult world and youth is in turmoil. Our attitudes to the young are an inverting mirror

for our view of ourselves. One aspect of the more tortuous relationship between the adults' and childrens' worlds is the growing tendency to criminalise the young. Like pensioners unsure on their feet, today's awkward politicians and policemen are readily frightened by young people. The trials of Jon Venables and Richard Thompson after the killing of Jamie Bulger five years ago began a trend of legal retribution against children for acts they could not understand. Last month a rape trial at the Old Bailey had to be supplied with crayons and colouring books so that the child defendants could sit through a day's business in court without getting bored.

On pages 14 and 15, Charlotte Reynolds and Brendan O'Neill look at some instances of the growing tendency to criminalise young people. Like King Herod's instruction to execute the first-born, the belief that the young are a threat is itself a sign of a loss of confidence in the adult world. And the perception that young people are out of control was almost bound to lead to the revelation that the home secretary's son could be tricked into selling marijuana to a journalist from the *Mirror*.

But the criminalisation of youth is not the only expression of society's difficult negotiation between childhood and



maturity. A counterpart to the stereotype of the 'evil' youngsters is an equally problematic myth: the wisdom of youth. Young people are criminalised on the one hand, but they are now being sought out as oracles of the new on the other.

Institutions of all kinds are fixated by anxiety over their appeal to the young. Political parties look gloomily at the ageing profile of their membership and promise to do more to listen to the young. The major television companies are more and more anxious that they are missing out on a youth market, dumbing down serious broadcasting for fear that it is 'too boring'. Newspapers too are on the prowl for young columnists to spice up their pages, in the anxious belief that they are failing to be relevant. One Oxford undergraduate was recently handed a big six-figure advance for her first novel by a publisher desperate to find the 'authentic' voice of the late 1990s.

A hymn of praise goes up to youth for its supposed insight and relevance to the moment. The media descends hungrily on even the most modest signs of youthful rebellion, eagerly seeking out the spokesperson for the young. Consider some of those who have been singled out for the role of voice of

a generation. Some years ago now a spasm of protest rang out over the Conservative government's Criminal Justice Bill. The youthful protestors were solicited by the media, which tried to make stars of a variety of characters—from the Exodus Collective to one media-friendly, if whey-faced figure in Camilla Behrens. Behrens was flavour of the month in that summer of 1994, featuring in managed TV debates about the future of the country, with establishment broadcaster Jonathan Dimbleby goading her on to denounce the establishment politicians.

Or what about Swampy, Daniel Hooper, who, along with his sidekick Animal, became the face of the anti-roads protests at Newbury? His wild-child appearance and audacity impressed the media which volunteered him for the role of latter-day rebel. Splashed across the tabloids in mock disapproval, Swampy was taken a lot more seriously by the broadsheets who cheered the announcement that he was to stand in the elections against Manchester Airport champion Graham Stringer. Swampy was a media star—at least he was until he got on *Have I got News for You*, and was revealed not as an idiot savant, but just a childlike idiot.

Where are they now? Camilla Behrens, the weedy voice ►

◀ of a weedy generation has disappeared into the undergrowth—not of a proposed road-scheme, but of European Union funded projects. Swampy, no longer homeless, was recently busted for drugs in Brighton, a shadow of his former self.

These angry rebels owed their authority more to the desire to find the authentic voice of youth than to any intrinsic abilities of their own. The process that engulfed them was more akin to the promotion of pop music than to political activism. They were built up and dropped as quickly when they failed to deliver the desired relevance to the studio bosses and news editors. Columnists like Emily Barr, who briefly caught the public imagination when she had an affair with the Conservative MP she was assistant to, were supposed to deliver excitement and vigour to the newspapers. Today Barr's anti-sports column in the *Guardian* sports pages is a one-joke repetition. Disabled rights campaigner Nicola Scott caught the headlines by publicly disagreeing with her father the minister with responsibility for the disabled. Now he's out of office, what impact has she made on her own merits?

## Nowadays the prime minister and his cabinet can be seen DEBASING themselves before an array of terrible infants

Youthful pop stars, too, are granted extraordinary powers of public leadership that they are in no position to follow through. The Oasis brothers' songs have put them in the public eye—and the throwaway comments about drug use even more so. But you had to sympathise with Noel Gallagher's complaint about the furore over E, that they never wanted to be anybody's role model. The widespread belief that they had a duty to inform young people of anything at all is entirely misplaced.

At the heart of this neurotic need for youthful authority figures is a crisis that is to be found not among the young, but within adult society. Why would one become preoccupied with the need to be relevant? Why seek wisdom in youth? The answer is that the young are only the focal point of an anxiety whose origins are entirely adult in their nature. It is a crisis of confidence in which the adult world feels that the values it has to hand on to the next generation are worth less than the immature rebellions of pop stars and roads protesters.

Consider the irony. Every establishment institution is seeking to rejuvenate itself with the rebellious spirit of the young. So what is to rebel against? In other ages the rebellious young could expect to be dealt with harshly by their crusty old rulers. Not now. Nowadays the prime minister and his ministers can be seen debasing themselves before an array of terrible infants. At Downing Street the Gallagher boys hobnob with Alexander McQueen while hopeful cabinet ministers hang nervously on the edge of the conversation hoping that some of the glamour of youth will rub off. What a lot they have to teach us about Cool Britannia, is the message given out by the Blair government. No they don't. Not unless you yourself have nothing to say or offer.

An adult world that has no faith in its own values fêtes the young—not because it really values what they have to teach us, but because it has nothing to teach them. The political establishment seeks out the image of teenage rebellion as assiduously as Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party decorates its government offices with murals of the revolting masses. Like vampires, they suck the life out of the living to

feed the dead. Give us young flesh, they say, aware that their own is sagging. Mutton dressed as lamb.

Some commentators, like the team at the *Modern Review* or the Red or Dead designer Wayne Hemingway have reacted against the sheer crawliness of the old folks. Hemingway makes the entirely reasonable point that too much official attention will choke off any creativity, by robbing youth culture of its rebellious streak. The *Modern Review* mercilessly satirises the conceit of 'Middle Youth'. That's late twenties/early thirties 'adultescents' who just do not want to let go of the nightclubbing and the Adidas sportswear. Being young used to be a stage in your life, pretty much a natural event. Youth, said Oscar Wilde, is wasted on the young. Not any more. Now it's a lifestyle choice. And the effect of all this is that people who really are young cannot get a look-in for all the old-age swingers at the club, ('Middle Youth ate my culture', *Modern Review*, March 1998).

Fair enough. There is something creepy about the politicians hanging out at the Brit Awards, like the vicar letting his hair down at the disco. But just as ridiculous as the solicitous old-folk are the pretensions of those who play up to the stereotype by acting the part of 'young rebel' on cue—usually as a way to bargain their way into some well-paid media job. Such youth spokespersons generally turn out to be in an extended adolescence that carries them well past their twentieth year. The role demands that they act the part of *enfant terrible* to underscore the importance of what they say.

Such for example are the drunken late night television performances of Tracey Emin, who, in more discerning times would have never made the transition from art school to gallery. Today, however, Emin is sought not only to comment on the Turner Prize but also on the state of the nation. Marooned among such talking heads as Martin Amis, Michael Mansfield, Will Self and Roger Scruton, a tired and emotional Emin blurted out that they were all talking rubbish. Transfixed, her fellow guests patiently sought Emin's opinions on what to do. In vain—when put on the spot Emin's outrage was revealed as the drunkard's frustration at not having anything to say. But still the other guests treated her inarticulate rambling as good coin. Only the reactionary philosophy teacher Roger Scruton had the presence of mind to agree that he probably was not living in the same world as the drunken artist—and he was glad.

In a serious talking head TV piece Louise Weiner from *Sleeper* berated deputy prime minister John Prescott for attending the recent Brit Awards. Who do these politicians think they are hanging out with the youth, she said, what a pathetic attempt to suck up to the young, especially from a government that is imposing a whole raft of authoritarian measures against young people. It was a good point. But then she went on to congratulate Chumbawumba for dousing the unfortunate Prescott with water—a protest against the treatment of the dockworkers.

What Louise might have asked is, what qualification does Chumbawumba's Danbert Nobacon have to advise the deputy prime minister on industrial relations? Probably less than Prescott has for attending the Brits. In fact it is hard to know why Nobacon is any more out of place at the Brit awards than Prescott. At 36 years of age he is the exemplar of the 'adultescent' Peter Pans that the *Modern Review* complains of. A middle-aged tearaway today, he was, as a schoolboy Nobacon, a prefect, the sort of goody-two shoes who would rat you out for smoking behind the bike sheds.

The greatest expression of a defeated society is that it seeks its authority from the young. One thing that 2000 years of Christianity do have in common with the 'Euan test' is the cult of the uncorrupted, innocent child. Humility and naivety are the message of the cult of the child. A religion for defeated people, without the confidence to make the world in their own image, made its most potent symbol the innocence of the child, because it was childish, as its followers were childish. Now is the time to put away childish things. ●

We're all children now, says Andrew Calcutt

# POP GOES ADULTHOOD

I thought "I'm a middle-aged man now. I can't carry on making exploitation films for the youth market". And I walked away and I have no regrets.' Widely regarded as 'Britain's greatest exploitation film director', Peter Walker made a rare public appearance in London in March, to mark the publication of *Making Mischief*, a book about his life and work. During an on-stage interview with author Steve Chibnall, Walker explained how he stopped making films in 1983 when he felt he had grown too old for it. Nowadays, he added, 'every picture' is an exploitation film for the youth market.

Walker's refusal to allow youth culture to dominate his adult life makes him something of an exception nowadays. Contrast his attitude with that of Tony Wilson, founder of Factory Records and overlord of the Hacienda nightclub: nearly 25 years in the music business and still looking for the next big thing to make the kids go ape. Presiding over a panel discussion on pop at the recent LM/ICA Free Speech Wars festival, Wilson silenced somebody who kept asking why music now sounds so boring with the reply: 'Because you have grown up, sir.' The loud applause which followed suggests that Wilson is not alone in thinking that 'grown up' is the ultimate put-down.

In order to avoid the awkward consequences of Pete Townshend's rash declaration 'Hope I die before I get old', most of us seem to be acting out Bryan Adams' rock anthem, '(I'll be) Eighteen till I die'.

Youth culture is now middle-aged. It is more than 40 years since a new generation of Hollywood stars (Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Marlon Brando) attracted attention with the unprecedentedly pre-adult persona which they developed in roles like Jim Stark, the Rebel Without a Cause. Their literary contemporaries were the Beats (Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg), who also preferred to continue in a pre-adult frame of mind rather than allow themselves to be integrated into the failed models of adulthood personified by figures such as president Eisenhower, TV anchorman Walter Cronkite and Desi Arnaz, Lucille Ball's husband in life as well as in *I Love Lucy*.

Even in the sixties when people called themselves 'flower children' they knew that this would mark them out as a 'counterculture', separate from the masses and the adult roles which the masses identified with. The counterculture gave up on the world of work and the adult aspirations associated with it. The hippies, like the Beats before them and the punks afterwards, retreated to an arena of 'playpower' ('playpen' would be more accurate), and put their faith in the allegedly subversive effects of seeing the world through the eyes of a child.

With pop music as its primary medium, the childlike sensibility associated with the



Teenage angst is getting long in the tooth

counterculture is as mainstream now as it was exceptional then. The cult of the pre-adult has spread across society horizontally, and vertically through successive generations. In the four decades since the fifties, those brought up on youth culture have increasingly refused to grow out of it. In the eighties there was talk of ex-hippies making 're-entry' into the adult world; but now there is nothing to go back to. In the media today, the pre-adult persona is everywhere, and adulthood is hardly represented.

When Peter Walker started making films in the late sixties, children were hardly ever seen on TV or heard on radio. Even *Children's Hour* was dominated by avuncular adults such as *Blue Peter's* Christopher Trace. Nowadays, instead of talking down to their audience, children's TV presenters tend to lower themselves to the child's level—and they keep the same

tone of voice when they move on to adult TV. Meanwhile, on radio phone-ins designed for adult audiences, the voice of the child has acquired the status of holy writ.

The same hierarchy operates in the adverts. Cars, which used to be marketed with speed-loving, power-hungry adult males in mind, are now presented as vehicles for the safety of children and even fetuses. In an article on children's increasing influence on what their parents buy, *Financial Times* reporter Victoria Griffith quoted advertising executive Paul Kurnit: 'More advertising these days is what you'd call cross-over advertising, aimed at both parents and kids' ('Small in Size, Big in Influence', 21 July 1997).

Some adverts now invite parents to think of themselves as kids. Grown-ups are exhorted to satisfy 'the kid in you' by eating Frosties. A recent ad for British Airways comprises an image of a mother and child with the head of a middle-aged man grafted onto the baby's torso. Previous generations of businessmen would have recoiled from the suggestion that they were childlike in any way. But today's corporate culture has adopted the pre-adult sensibility which used to be exclusive to the counterculture, and in their joint adoration of the child there is no longer any distance between them.

In the past few years there has been something of a fashion for old people. After a protracted period of silence, Jarvis Cocker's Pulp released a critically-acclaimed single, 'Help the Aged'. Before his death in 1997, the geriatric William Burroughs was invited to appear in a couple of MTV-style videos, including one with the late Kurt Cobain's Nirvana. The juxtaposition of Cobain and Burroughs highlighted the similarities between the pre and the post-adult. Likewise, with 'Help the Aged' Cocker has gone from proudly identifying himself as 'imma' [immature] at 31, to worrying about getting old and helpless. In one fell swoop he has jumped from the art school dance to the old people's home, from *Rebel Without a Cause* to *Krapp's Last Tape*, leapfrogging over the adulthood in-between. Even if old people briefly become the new rock'n'roll, it will only confirm the current inability to conceptualise what used to be called 'the prime of life', and underline our readiness to identify with images of childlike dependence and vulnerability.

While so many over-21s are acting below their age, real children carry on trying to pass themselves off as adults. They are almost the only people who still want to grow up. ●

Andrew Calcutt is the author of *Arrested Development: Pop Culture and the Erosion of Adulthood* (Cassell, £14.99 pbk). Steve Chibnall's *Making Mischief: The Cult Films of Peter Walker* is published by FAB Press (£12.95 pbk)

new  
**Labour**  
new  
**Laws**

Charlotte Reynolds questions Jack Straw's  
obsession with young offenders

# JACK THE NIPPER?

**H**ave you been attacked by a gun-toting 10-year old recently? Perhaps you have been burgled by a gang of 11-year olds? Driven off the road by a bunch of 12-year old joy-riders? No? Maybe it is just a matter of time. On the basis of the overblown media coverage of juvenile crime, one could be forgiven for looking suspiciously at what little Billy next door is doing with his toy gun, or imagining that there is a potential serial killer in every classroom.

And if the media is obsessed, then Jack Straw is seriously in need of some therapy. In the past six months, the home secretary has offered us such a proliferation of schemes and proposals to deal with the problem of juvenile crime that one begins to wonder whether the poor man is getting any sleep at all. From mentor schemes and a campaign to tackle truancy, to urging GPs to inform on young offenders, Jack Straw seems to have every angle covered. His Crime and Disorder Bill, published in November, contains a list of proposals to deal with youth crime the like of which has never before been seen. And there are more to come in Straw's next law'n'order bill.

The home secretary, however, is not the only one becoming flustered about young offenders. Even those who are critical of the toughest proposals emphasise the scale of the problem and the need to do something about it. NCH Action for Children, for instance, one of the largest voluntary organisations working with young offenders in the community, states that 'The public is rightly concerned about juvenile crime. 10-17 year olds commit seven million offences a year'.

In fact official statistics show that total recorded crime fell to 4.8 million offences last year, so it is baffling how young offenders could have committed seven million. When an organisation which professes to help young offenders exaggerates the problem

of juvenile crime to such an extent, it is easy to see why the public is becoming so paranoid.

But before you start clinging on to your handbag every time you walk past a pushchair, it is worth examining the true extent of the problem. Crime statistics must always be approached with caution, but they are at least a good indicator of the relative configuration of crime, if not of the overall magnitude.

In 1995, the total number of offences for which a person was found guilty or cautioned was just under one million. Of these, 179 300 were committed by persons aged 10-17 and 37 300 by persons

When one considers the particular offences which cause most panic, such as street robbery and violent offences, it is clear that the emphasis placed upon youth crime vastly outweighs the scale of the problem. Of course, we could speculate about the problem of unrecorded crime, but attempts to do so usually result in data based upon nothing more than fear.

The current focus on young offenders also seems exaggerated when placed in historical context. Aside from the fact that little boys in Victorian England were far worse than little boys today, without causing the same level of panic, in recent times there is evidence that juvenile crime has actually been on the decrease. Between 1981 and 1995, the number of offences for which 10-17 year olds were cautioned or convicted fell by about 35 per cent (from 272 900 to 179 300) and crime committed by 10-13 year olds was down by nearly 50 per cent (from 70 000 to 37 300). So why is everybody getting so concerned about it now?

There is clearly no correlation between the level of juvenile crime and the degree of public concern about it. If the answer cannot be located in the sphere of youth justice itself, then the preoccupation with it must tell us something more about the attitude of adults today.

Adult society is suffering a loss of faith in itself and its future. As the most visible symbols of that future, children have become the focus of many social insecurities. Teachers have become afraid to teach; parents have become afraid to parent; adults have become afraid to act like grown-ups.

As our society becomes increasingly afraid of its own children, the role of youth justice is changing drastically. Youth crime has become not just a small part of the criminal justice system, but an overblown obsession of government policy and public/media debate.

In effect, the criminal law is being turned into a blunt instrument to compensate for society's inability to manage basic human relations. Where once there was adult authority and a largely informal system of discipline in the family, the school and the community, now it seems that we think we need more and more laws and orders and curfews and courts to cope with the very young. And what kind of example is that to set the next generation? ●

## WHAT THE CRIME & DISORDER BILL OFFERS YOUNG PEOPLE

Clause 8: Parenting orders

Clause 11: Child safety orders (for under 10s)

Clause 14: Local child curfew schemes (for under 10s)

Clause 27: Abolition of rebuttable presumption that a child is *deli incapax* (incapable of evil)

Clause 30: Youth offending teams

Clause 31: Youth justice plans

Clause 32: The Youth Justice Board

Clause 52: Reprimands and warnings (replacing cautioning)

Clause 54: Reparation orders

Clause 56: Action plan orders

Clause 58: Supervision orders

Clause 60: Detention and training orders

Clause 81: Remands and committals

aged 10-13. This means that 10-13 year olds were responsible for under four per cent of crime in 1995. If the thought of 37 000 knife-wielding schoolchildren running riot appears a little far-fetched, it is probably because the vast majority were crimes against property. Just 3000 offences committed by 10-13 year olds involved violence. In other words, of the total crime committed in 1995, 0.3 per cent of it was violent crime committed by 10-13 year olds.



In February five-year old Karl Fitzharris was expelled from Audley Infant School in Stechford, Birmingham, after what was described as a 'reign of terror'. Little Karl stands accused of spitting, swearing, pulling a chair from under a teacher and hitting a dinner lady in the playground. The final straw came when he allegedly attacked deputy head Carole Thomas, who is so traumatised that she is still off work and, according to some, may never recover. Teachers at the school have threatened to strike if Karl Fitzharris is ever allowed to return.

What exactly did little Karl do to overpower and traumatise his deputy head and strike fear into the hearts of his teachers? Nobody seems sure. 'I think he tripped her up', said one mother outside the school gates. 'No, he punched and swore at her', said another. According to the local education authority, Karl 'physically assaulted Thomas in a serious manner'. Chris Keates, local secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) thinks this is all semantics. 'It is not necessary to go into detail', she told me, 'suffice to say that it was a serious physical attack and it involved kicking and punching.'

For Keates this may be a cut-and-dried case of assault punishable by expulsion, but others are not so sure; after all, this is a five-year old boy we are talking about. I came across a group of women at a Stechford bus-stop, engrossed in a conversation about 'that Karl boy'. 'It's a bit odd that a teacher can't cope with a little boy', said one elderly lady, 'especially a deputy head. A few years back the kid would have been given a clip around the lughole and that would be the end of it'. 'It sounds like he was having a tantrum', said another woman. 'You'd kind of hope that a senior teacher could handle a tantrum.'

Other mothers outside the school gates agreed. 'My kids have had run-ins with Karl and some of the other kids in that family', said one mother-of-two, 'and they are little buggers for sure. But my boys either ignored them or stood up to them. I don't know why Carole Thomas couldn't have done the same'. According to another mother, 'it is a disgrace that a teacher has to take so much time off school because of one

Brendan O'Neill reports from a Birmingham infants school which has expelled a little boy for allegedly traumatising teachers

## WHO'S AFRAID OF A FIVE-YEAR OLD?

incident with a child. We've all had moments when our children lash out or throw things but we have to calm them down and get on with it. Teachers should be able to do that as well as parents'.

Most people wanted to know how a five-year old boy could overpower and apparently almost ruin the life of a mature woman whose job it is to discipline and educate young children. Chris Keates of the NASUWT has no time for those who dare to ask such questions. 'As a result of the assault a child protection investigation was launched by the school which involved social services and the police. I would like to meet the parent who could handle that and still come out of it with a smile on their face', she says, contemptuously.

Keates singles out Karl's mother Helen Lawrie for criticism. 'There are a lot of issues at the school which need to be sorted out, not least of which is the behaviour of Karl's mother who on an almost daily basis is going to school, using the excuse of taking her other two children to class, to make her presence felt on the premises. She is disrupting the school because she is being quite aggressive in her manner and quite threatening towards members of staff.' Using her other two children as an excuse? Perhaps Lawrie should be made to keep all her children at home in case they too are capable of assault and battery.

I could not speak to Helen Lawrie who is under contract with

the *Daily Mail*—presumably they want to be the only ones who can look down on her as 'jobless, single, with five children aged four to 10 by two fathers' (20 February). But whatever Lawrie's problems she seems to have devised ways of dealing with Karl, where the authorities and the professionals have failed. 'We are talking about qualified teachers whose job it is to look after kids', Helen Lawrie told the *Mail*: 'To say they can't handle him is crazy. I weigh nine-and-a-half stone and I can restrain him. So why can't they? We are talking about a five-year old, not some sort of teenage hooligan.'

Try telling that to Chris Keates. 'Age is never an issue when you are being assaulted', the union rep told me. 'It doesn't matter if the child is five or 15; unless you have been in that position I don't think you can appreciate just how much an attack by a child can undermine your confidence and cause you trauma.'

It seems that when it comes to the NASUWT stoking up fears about a nation of schoolchildren gone wild, threatening, assaulting and ruining teachers' lives, age really is never an issue.

Scares about schoolchildren have been

a depressing feature of the education debate in recent years. There was the case of 13-year old Nottingham schoolboy Richard Wilding in April 1996 whom 20 teachers refused to teach, and later that year the Riding Schools debacle with teachers running scared from kids aged 11 to 16. Each time the NASUWT complained that kids were bringing 'the law of the jungle' into Britain's schools and led calls for strike action against unruly pupils.

The Stechford episode is a particularly pathetic spectacle that takes this campaign against unruly pupils to farcical lengths. Twelve teachers and a deputy head, a local education authority and a 230 000-strong union all seem to be running scared from a five-year old boy. When Chris Keates says that age is never an issue who can tell how far this fear of children will go? Will three-year olds be expelled from playschool for throwing toys?

School is one place where we expect adults to behave as such and set an example to children. The teachers in Stechford and their supporters would appear to have shirked those responsibilities. There can be little hope for the future in a society which is scared of its own kids even when they still wear short trousers. ●



The rise of the politics of emotion leaves Frank Furedi cold

# WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE AND A RIBBON ON YOUR LAPEL

Emotion is no longer a private matter. According to fashionable notions of 'emotional literacy' and 'emotional intelligence', you have to show your feelings in public if you want to be considered a mature adult. The public confession of pain and grandiose exhibitions of suffering are no longer confined to American chat shows. Throughout Europe too, emotionalism has come to define the political style of the nineties. The art of emotional politics has been perfected by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. Their speeches are littered with the language of therapy, emphasising how much they 'feel' and 'care' and promising to 'share' and 'reach out' to the people. A misty eye is now a highly prized political asset.

The idiom of psychology now clearly dominates British politics. 'More open and tolerant, less macho and miserable' was how a major feature in the *Guardian* described the new psychopolitics. One little-noticed but significant event on the fringe of the 1997 Labour Party Conference was the launch of a campaign called Antidote, set up by 'psychotherapists and other members of the caring professions' to promote the cause of 'emotional literacy' among British politicians. Antidote hopes to encourage public figures to become more 'comfortable' with their emotions. But with so many politicians already signing up for a public session on the therapist's couch, Antidote may well turn out to be a redundant campaign.

The cultivation of an emotional style has been much in evidence of late in British public life. Since Princess Diana's funeral, politicians have been sensitive to any suggestion that they might be uncaring and unemotional. Party leaders say little about policy and even less about political principles, instead using their platforms to display

emotion. So prime minister Tony Blair gave his usual 'caring, sharing, giving and reaching out' speech to New Labour's 1997 party conference. A few days later, at his party conference, new Tory leader William Hague mimicked Blair, announcing that Conservatives were also 'caring' and 'tolerant'. The Tory Party's adoption of politically correct psychobabble was greeted with enthusiasm in the British media.

Even the Queen has joined in. In the run-up to Diana's funeral, the Queen was widely criticised for not showing enough emotion in public. Within a few weeks the palace had let it be known that the Queen's Christmas message would 'reach out to the nation' and show her as a warm human being. This gesture was appreciated by the media, as was the subsequent sight of the Queen crying at the decommissioning of the Royal yacht *Britannia*, and kissing her eldest son in public for the first time during the celebration of her fiftieth wedding anniversary.

The politics of emotion is by no means confined to Britain or the USA. During last year's Irish presidential election, all five candidates vied to demonstrate the depth of their emotion, rejecting political principles in favour of a celebration of frailty and a worship of the victim. The winner, Mary McAleese, stated that she would create 'a presidency of embrace' and of 'caring outreach' that 'holds out a hand' to victims.

Indeed, the politics of emotion is now evident throughout Europe, influencing many of the big movements of the past two years. I was in Spain last July, during the mass demonstrations to mourn the murder of a local politician by the Basque separatists of ETA. The protests made manifest a strange emotional dynamic, part tragedy, part

pop-festival. Demonstrators seemed not entirely sure why they were there, and many suggested that they too felt like victims. This reaction was self-consciously cultivated by the crowd, with the gesture of placing their hands at the back of their heads in the posture of surrendering prisoners.

But probably the most important manifestation of the politics of emotion in Europe was the Belgian White March of 1996. This, the largest public demonstration in the history of Belgium, and the subsequent growth of the White Movement, underlined the strength of the politics of emotion. What began as an act of solidarity with the child victims of a depraved serial killer, soon turned into a condemnation of the entire Belgian political system. While politicians were losing their authority, King Albert gained in strength. Why? Because unlike the politicians, Albert was quick to display his emotions on television. And if opinion polls are anything to go by, the public now positively reveres such displays of human frailty.

## Red, white and green

The most easily recognised symbol of the politics of emotion is the wearing of a ribbon. It is difficult to say when it all started. The fashion for wearing yellow ribbons was first visible during the imprisonment of the American diplomatic hostages in Tehran in 1980. People wore their ribbons so that they too could be part of the experience. In more recent times, red ribbons have been worn by people who identify with the victims of Aids. Yellow ribbons were again worn by well-wishers of soldiers going off to fight in the Gulf War. Black ribbons were worn by anti-ETA campaigners in Spain, and pink ribbons have been distributed by breast cancer charities in the USA. Sympathisers with



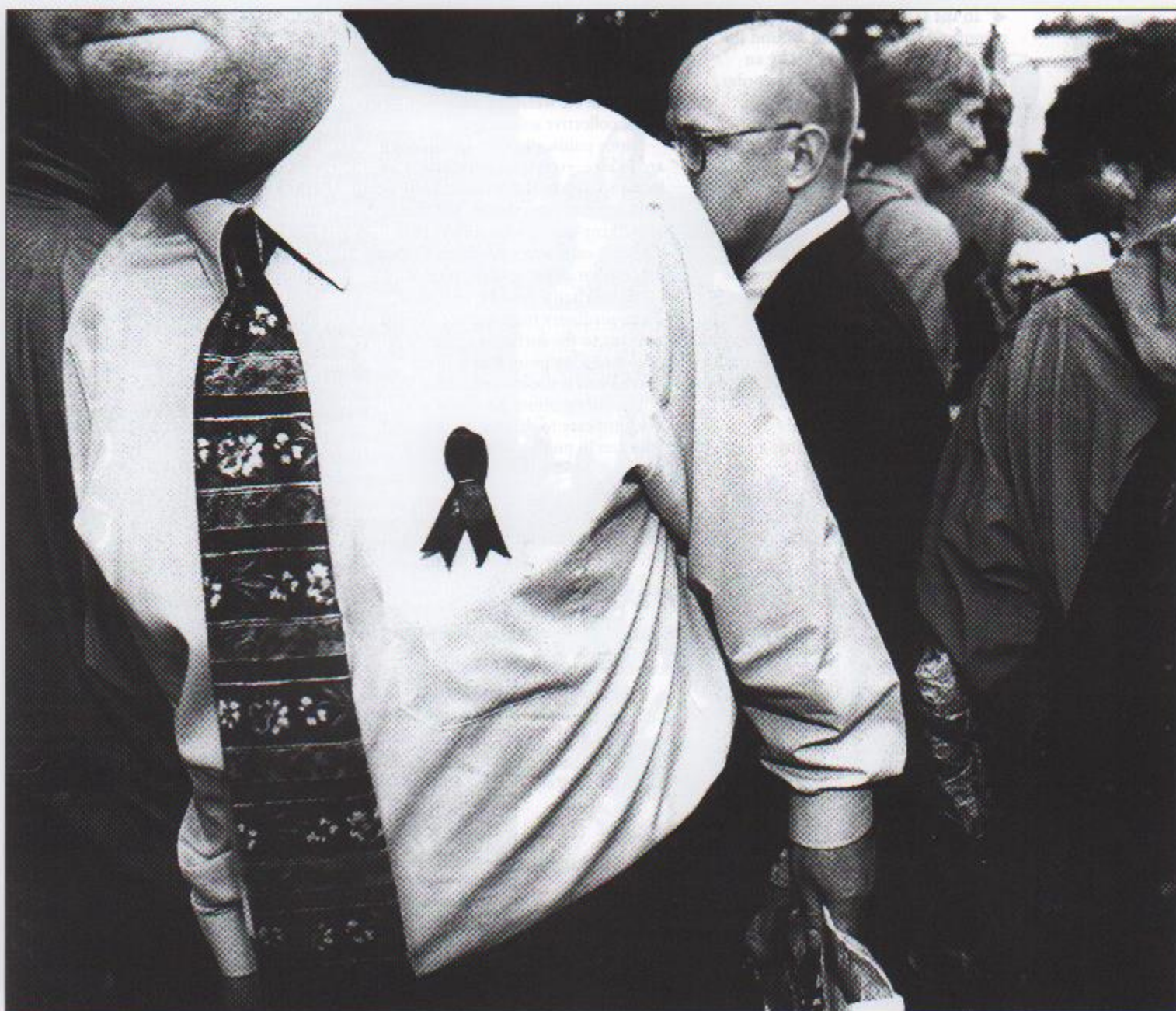


PHOTO: DAVE CONLARD

Emotions on show after the death of Princess Diana

Irish republican prisoners wear green ribbons. When the Oklahoma bomb killed 164 in 1995, Americans were reportedly offered the choice of various coloured ribbons according to which victims they wished to sympathise with most. Bill Clinton chose a white ribbon, 'for the children'. Yellow ribbons were distributed again by supporters of Louise Woodward. It is surely only a matter of time before campaigns begin to fight over who has the right to what colour in the ribbon spectrum.

What is this all about? It is hard to find a simple explanation. However, there is a clear correlation between the rise of the politics of emotion, and the experience of popular disengagement from traditional politics. For instance, public apathy and the politics of emotion existed side by side during the Irish presidential election: the turnout was the lowest ever as less than half the electorate bothered to vote.

An authoritative study of the 1997 British elections, published by Nuffield College Oxford, notes that the turnout was the lowest since 1945, and that Labour was backed by only 31 per cent of those qualified to vote. It is worth contrasting the indifference of the British public to the May 1997 general elections with its display of collective emotion for Diana and later in support of Louise Woodward.

#### Lack of patriotism

A profound sentiment of mistrust towards political institutions is evident throughout Europe. Some of the most significant public manifestations of collective emotion have coincided with a deepening suspicion of the political process. Belgium is paradigmatic in this respect. According to the Belgian sociologist Marc Hooghe, there is a 'total lack of patriotism' among his country's population. He believes

that a 'severe loss of confidence in the political system' explains why the White Movement was so suspicious of Belgium's political institutions. Surveys of the participants of the White March carried out by Benoit Rihoux and Stefaan Walgrave, indicated an intense level of popular mistrust for political parties. Clearly many Belgians regarded themselves as the victims rather than as participants of their political system.

Popular mistrust of authority is most strikingly confirmed in the widespread circulation of rumours which indict the authorities. In Belgium it was widely believed that the child murderers were protected by leading officials and politicians. During Spain's infamous Alcaccer case—the sexual violation and murder of three teenage girls—opinion polls indicated widespread support for the view that the *guardia civil* was implicated in killing the girls for the purpose of making snuff videos. ►



◀ In the same vein, it has been widely rumoured in Britain, and around the world, that Diana was killed by an officially sanctioned assassin in order to prevent her marrying a Muslim.

The corollary of the suspicion of the authorities is an intense sense of alienation and powerlessness. The icon of the politics of emotion is the victim. Public grief for Diana was partly inspired by her high profile as Britain's best known sufferer. People identify with the cult of vulnerability because they sense a shared experience of victimhood. The common bond is that of suffering, and everybody who wears a ribbon becomes part of the same drama of victimisation. Through a collective display of emotion, an otherwise fragmented society achieves a temporary moment of unity.

mobilisation last year was probably the most important all-Spanish event of recent years. For a moment, regional differences between Catalonia, Euskadi, Andalusia etc were put aside for a brief act of collective solidarity.

Since public displays of solidarity are so rare, everybody is reluctant to look too closely at the community being built around victimhood. But there is something sad about a society that can only experience solidarity through common mourning. The spirit of social solidarity must be very weak if extraordinary tragedies are needed to bring to the surface a common response. One point that is often overlooked is the intolerance of the politics of emotion. Anybody who does not care to display the required emotion in public is denounced for

possession of handguns in Britain. As a consequence, politicians can often respond to such demands and then claim to be acting on behalf of 'The People'.

The politics of emotion can thrive because it does not really threaten vested interests; even a blue-blooded aristocrat like Earl Spencer can momentarily become the voice of The People by wearing his heart on his sleeve. It also prospers because, in a complicated world where conventional political institutions appear ineffective, the sharing of emotions becomes an important form of communication. Activities like the wearing of ribbons help reconnect individuals to a wider community. It is paradoxical that, through its new rituals such as ribbon-wearing and public displays of grief, the politics of emotion may well serve to reintegrate a fragmented public into an otherwise discredited political system.

The elevation of emotion over intellect has potentially grave consequences for democracy. One myth about the politics of emotion is that the sanctity of feeling is above politics and political manipulation. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is precisely when people cast aside their critical faculties and give themselves over to the free flow of emotions that they can be enslaved by forces beyond their control. The collective display of emotion is highly susceptible to the influence of the media. This is not the fault of the media as such. But when political parties and other institutions have lost so much of their influence, the media will naturally have a disproportionate impact on public life. Television and the press played a major role in the organisation of the White March in Belgium. In Britain, the media helped to shift the focus from the death of Diana to the public reaction to it. In a matter of days the news became the story of an outpouring of public emotion, and the media was central to shaping that public response.

The tendency to judge public figures by their ability to display emotion rather than by the quality of their ideas or indeed by their actions is very disturbing. Societies that ascribe intrinsic virtues to the public display of emotion indicate that they have lost belief in the ability of humanity to act rationally. And once our private emotion becomes a suitable subject for public consideration, it is a short step for those in authority to dictate to us how we ought to feel.

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## People identify with the CULT OF VULNERABILITY because they sense A SHARED EXPERIENCE of victimhood

But the politics of emotion is not only a symptom of public alienation. It also expresses the problem of legitimacy experienced by modern political systems. At a time when collective reactions are rare, these expressions of 'suffering solidarity' are just about the only manifestation of national unity on offer, and the politicians, priests and the media have milked them for all they are worth.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, with British people feeling so isolated, the ritual of grieving over the Dunblane massacre or Diana has provided one of the few experiences that creates a sense of belonging. Tony Blair seized upon the display of national mourning which followed Diana's death as a symbol of his New Britain, declaring that the world had seen 'Britain at its best'. In the divided state of Belgium, King Albert told his people that the White March had 'impressed the whole world by its strength and dignity', and prompted 'every one of us to take responsibility for finding solutions to Belgium's numerous problems'. The huge anti-ETA

being inhuman. Even the Queen was dragged over the coals for failing to grieve for the cameras immediately after Diana's death. Those who were sceptical of the Louise Woodward campaign were viciously attacked for their lack of compassion. And to question the sentiments expressed by victim activists around the White Movement in Belgium and the Dunblane anti-gun campaign in Scotland was to court the charge of blasphemy.

### Anti-politics

Although the politics of emotion often takes a populist anti-establishment turn, directing bitter criticism against the authorities, it does not necessarily challenge the political classes. Unlike traditional politics, the politics of emotion claims to have no doctrine or dogma. In fact it styles itself as explicitly anti-political. That is why the organisers of the White March demanded that there should be no politics on their demonstration. Politics has also been eschewed by campaigns against corruption in Italy and against the

# Free Speech Wars

From 27 February to 1 March, more than 150 top speakers debated all aspects of free speech before packed audiences at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. Free Speech Wars, an international festival of talks, debates, screenings and events organised by *LM* and the ICA in association with Waterstone's, was a landmark event which started an important discussion on new erosions of free expression and how they can be resisted.

While censorship with a big C may be outdated, the debate focused on how more insidious forms of interference now curtail what we can say, watch and read. From the keynote theme of hate speech, the discussion covered a wide range of topics: the press after Diana and privacy legislation; music videos and lyrics; paedophilia and broadcasting; net porn and Carmageddon; heroin chic and smoking supermodels; horror films and the TV watershed; political satire and silencing football fans; abortion and book publishing.

Many different views were aired and *LM's* campaign for the right to be offensive and demand to 'ban nothing, question everything' found wide resonance. The debates were as intense between sessions in the bar and at the various wine receptions as in the formal debates, indicating a thirst for having the arguments out—a healthy response in Blair's Britain of bland consensus, and one which was aided by some excellent and thought-provoking entertainment.

Free Speech Wars demonstrated *LM's* commitment to widening the debate on free speech. If you missed it, or want to continue the discussions, visit the website [www.FreeSpeechWars.org](http://www.FreeSpeechWars.org) and watch this space.

**Claire Fox and Helene Guldberg**  
Free Speech Wars Festival Director and  
Coordinator, Publishers, *LM* magazine



From top, left to right: Journalist Anne Applebaum discusses the media's response to Princess Diana's death. Adam Porter (*Loaded*), Tessa Mayes (*LIRE*), Helen Searls (*LM*) and Alan Clark MP argue against privacy laws. ICA bar. Panellists Dougie Brimson, Anne Coddington (football writers) and Ed Barrett (*Esquire*) debated silencing the football fan. Waterstone's festival launch. Comic Milton Jones stands up for free speech. Q entertains. James Heartfield (*LM*) on Why Hate Speech? panel. Tony Wilson (Factory Records) leads the discussion on Lyrical Correctness. Kevin Maguire (*Mirror*), Jake Lynch (*Sky News*), Nick Irvine (IPPR), Melanie Phillips (*Observer*) and *LM's* editor Mick Hume take on the spin doctors. Nadine Strossen, President of the American Civil Liberties Union gives the keynote lecture on Hate Speech

The search for the killers of Irish journalist Veronica Guerin has turned into a national witch-hunt, reports Brendan O'Neill

# THE IRISH

In November last year 58-year old Patrick Holland from County Wicklow was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for possessing cannabis for the purposes of sale or supply. Holland was tried before Dublin's non-jury Special Criminal Court and convicted on the uncorroborated evidence of an alleged accomplice, otherwise known as a supergrass. Even in our anti-drugs age a 20-year sentence for possessing cannabis with no evidence and no right to trial by jury should raise more than a few eyebrows. But there is worse to come. Many believe that while it may have said 'cannabis possession' on the charge sheet, Holland was actually punished for a different crime entirely.

'It was a proxy trial', says *Irish Times* journalist Kevin Myers. 'Holland was tried on a proxy charge that would do for putting him away for Veronica Guerin's murder. There is no doubt that he is being punished for the killing of Veronica Guerin.' This is a view held by many in Dublin though few are willing to say it out loud. A climate of fear and suspicion has surrounded the investigation into Veronica Guerin's murder, which shocked the nation on 26 June 1996. As Ireland's best-known journalist Guerin spent her career exposing 'criminal warlords' and gang leaders and paid for it with her life. The Irish authorities are pursuing her killers with a vengeance, even going so far as to undermine their own legal system.

'Holland was brought before a kangaroo court for a kangaroo trial', says Myers. 'He was tried before the Special Criminal Court which is unprecedented for an offence which is quite clearly not a terrorist offence. The evidence was given by one man, Charley Bowden, himself a convicted felon, who said that Holland had bought cannabis from him at a time he could not specify. There was no forensic evidence; there was only worthless, unsubstantiated evidence which would have been thrown out in a normal trial.'

But Holland's was no 'normal trial', as Myers points out: 'The charge on the charge sheet was for the purchase of

cannabis, but at the trial evidence of the Veronica Guerin murder was being brought before the court as if that was what the trial was about.' Myers is certain that 'Holland was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for the murder of Veronica Guerin'.

The newspapers from the time of Holland's arrest, trial and imprisonment give credence to Myers' belief that it was a 'proxy trial'. Throughout the proceedings Holland (charged with possessing cannabis, remember) was referred to by reporters as 'the man suspected of murdering Veronica Guerin'. Such uncorroborated and irrelevant claims were also brought before the court itself, a move which would have been deemed seriously prejudicial in a trial by jury. Charging a man with one crime but sentencing him for another undermines every principle of justice.

Following the trial and imprisonment of Patrick Holland I was reminded of the court scenes in Arthur Miller's classic play *The Crucible*, about the witch-hunts in seventeenth century Salem. As the Puritan town descends further into fear and hysteria suspicion becomes equated with guilt and the local court becomes a sham as reason gives way to superstition. Miller's play is often read as an indictment of modern-day witch-hunts, particularly McCarthyism in 1950s America: today it could just as easily be an indictment of events in Ireland.

You do not have to be a friend of the drug dealers to be alarmed at what is happening. The search for Veronica Guerin's killers has turned into a witch-hunt with all the necessary ingredients for a 1990s-style inquisition: a climate of fear and hysteria whipped up by the police and media, the suspension of a fair and impartial legal system in favour of quick-fit, non-jury 'witch-trials', and the sinister absence of any critical dissent.

In the three months after Guerin's murder alone, more than 100 people were arrested and interrogated by the police, 100 firearms were seized and over 200 properties were raided and searched.

In the 18 months since, hundreds more have been arrested and effectively blacklisted by being associated with Guerin's murder. Some of those alleged to be Ireland's major drug-dealers have fled the country for fear of being framed. Currently, Paul Ward, a 33-year old from Crumlin in Dublin stands accused of Guerin's murder. Under the Criminal Assets Bureau, set up in the wake of Guerin's killing, Ward has been denied legal aid (even though he is unemployed). At the time of going to press Ward's legal team are appealing against attempts to have their client tried before the non-jury Special Criminal Court where Patrick Holland fared so badly. For legal reasons Ward's solicitor Michael Farrell could not speak to me, except to say that civil liberties in Ireland are in a 'parlous state'.

'They certainly are', says Aileen Donnelly, chair of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL). 'In the wake of Veronica Guerin's killing the hysteria has been such that the government can bring in virtually any piece of legislation on the back of the public outcry over her murder. We really are getting into a position where there are no rights for the individual in the criminal process. It is not just a gradual erosion any more, but a chiselling away in almost earthquake proportions.'

On 26 July 1996, one month after Guerin was killed, the Irish government forced five emergency Bills through the Dail (Irish parliament) in an attempt to tackle organised crime and drug trafficking. The changes included qualifying the right to silence in drugs cases, granting greater powers of arrest to the gardai (Irish police), allowing for the seven-day detention of those found in possession of drugs, appointing more judges to bring prosecutions to trial faster and the setting up of a Criminal Assets Bureau to investigate criminal wealth.

The message of the new measures was clear: as Veronica Guerin was murdered by drug dealers anybody who has anything to do with drugs is a suspect and can expect to be interrogated and harassed at the

ANN BRADLEY

# INQUISITION

authorities' pleasure. But just as McCarthyism, in the words of one historian, 'insulted all Americans, not just communists', so the post-Veronica legislation will stamp on everybody's liberties not just those of the pushers.

'It is getting out of hand', says Aileen Donnelly. 'The gardai now have greater powers of arrest without warrant for any offence which carries a minimum sentence of five years, which is virtually anything: larceny, shoplifting, anything. And they have the power to come into people's homes and offices and arrest them for relatively minor crimes.'

'Seven-day detention has been brought in for anybody suspected to be in possession of drugs with intent to supply. It is accepted internationally that the reason people are kept in prison or a police station for that long

is simply for the purpose of breaking them down. The right to silence has become meaningless: inferences can now be drawn if you don't rely on something at the time of your arrest that you later rely on in your defence. And there are plans to restrict the right to silence in all cases, not just drugs cases.'

Donnelly and the ICCL are most concerned about the increasing use of the non-jury Special Criminal Court in Dublin. 'The government feels free to use the Special Court for non-paramilitary offences', says Donnelly. 'We have got a situation where we have set up Diplock-style courts, using supergrass in a way that we were complaining about in the North in the 1980s. They are taking away one of the most fundamental rights: the right to trial by jury.'

Some say there is now a three-tier system of justice in Ireland: one for ordinary criminal cases, with juries and rules of evidence; a second for paramilitaries, without juries and with confusing rules of evidence; and a third for drug dealers suspected of being involved in the murder of Veronica Guerin, without juries and where evidence insufficient to convict a petty thief in most countries is enough to earn a heavy sentence. So much for equality before the law.

In the name of the search for Veronica Guerin's killers, civil liberties and the legal system are being severely undermined in Ireland, yet there is no public outcry. As in all witch-hunts, it seems that people are scared to speak out for fear of implicating themselves. 'Anybody who tries to stand up and say "hold on a minute here, I think we're going too far" is immediately branded as being soft on crime or, even worse, of being insufficiently outraged by the murder of Veronica Guerin', says one solicitor. 'It looks like if the government wants to implement something without criticism they do it in the name of Veronica.' As a result, there are few dissenters in post-Veronica Ireland. The journalists who have raised awkward questions about aspects of the witch-hunt can be counted on one hand: veteran commentator Vincent Browne, radical Northern writer Eamon McCann, and *Irish Times* columnist Kevin Myers.

For his part in raising questions about the trial of Patrick Holland, Myers is being sued by two of the police officers who originally questioned Holland, even though neither of them are mentioned in the offending article (see *The Irish Times*, 11 December 1997). But Myers told me that he suspects the libel writ is being 'urged and promoted' from the top of the Garda. 'This has effectively been served as a gagging order not to touch the issue again', he said. Not that such a gagging order was really necessary; for the most part the Irish media has chosen to remain silent about post-Veronica injustices. ►

Between Dunblane and Diana, Veronica Guerin's funeral became Ireland's national festival of mourning



PHOTOS: DEEKE SPENSER/RENT

# The prime minister, president and head of armed forces SAT TOGETHER in the front pew of the church AT HER FUNERAL

◀ or has even positively fuelled the suspicious climate.

One of the most disturbing cases I came across in the course of writing this article was that of Michael Hanahoe and Co, a reputable Dublin-based firm of solicitors. They represent John Gilligan, one of the major suspects in the Guerin investigation who protests his innocence but has fled Ireland, claiming that he will not receive a fair trial. (Gilligan is currently in Belmarsh Prison in south London, awaiting extradition to Ireland.) Despite the public outcry, Hanahoe and Co continue to represent their client's interests, presumably because they believe that a person is innocent until proven guilty and that everybody has the right to legal representation.

At the end of 1996 a number of gardai visited Hanahoe and Co's office with a warrant to search and seize documents, an intrusion which is 'unprecedented in the history of the legal profession in this state', according to one barrister. But what was most remarkable about the garda 'visit' was that the media turned up with them. 'In fact, the media were there before the police', Senior Counsel Donal O'Donnell told me. O'Donnell represented Hanahoe and Co when they sued the state for causing 'outrageous damage' to the firm's reputation. 'There were already media, at least a cameraman and probably a journalist, outside the offices before the warrant had been obtained from the District Justice', he says.

In the course of Hanahoe and Co's action against the state it became clear that the news editor of the *Star* had received a phone call about the search at between 1 and 2pm on the day in question, even before the warrant had been obtained, let alone before the search began. Other editors and journalists had also received anonymous tip-offs about the raid. This little-discussed incident exposes the complicity of the media in contributing to the climate of fear and suspicion around Guerin's murder. The media circus had dire consequences for Michael Hanahoe and Co: workers at



the firm received death threats and their children were bullied and threatened at school. All because the media, in league with the authorities, had depicted the firm as being in some way 'anti-Veronica'.

The search for Veronica Guerin's killers is Ireland's Salem. It has become an all-encompassing witch-hunt, where the right to a fair trial no longer exists, where civil liberties have been obliterated and where even the idea of a free, critical press is folding in on itself. Why? Is it simply that the authorities are determined to hunt down this particular gang of callous killers? I think there is more to it than that.

'Social disorder in any age breeds mystical suspicion', wrote Arthur Miller in his introduction to *The Crucible*. Like every other part of the Western world Ireland has gone through a period of social disorder (or at least social disturbance) recently, where the traditional institutions have been discredited and can no longer win people's allegiance. Every political party in Ireland has been tarnished with scandal in recent years and even

the Catholic Church has been disgraced following claims of widespread child abuse and debauchery. Ireland is suffering from what might be called 'post-traditional stress disorder'.

It is in this climate that Veronica Guerin has become an important icon. Desperate for a fresh source of authority, for something that could unite the nation behind them, Ireland's leaders latched on to Guerin's death. In March 1996, Britain's political and spiritual establishment had exploited the Dunblane massacre by turning it into a national carnival of mourning; three months later, Ireland's leaders sought to repeat the trick with Guerin's murder.

There was the laying of flowers in public places, the open displays of grief, the nationwide minute's silence, while Ireland's prime minister, president and head of armed forces sat together in the front pew of the church at her funeral service. Of course, this phenomenon of 'unity through tragedy' reached its pinnacle with the response to the death of Princess Diana last year, but the signs were already there in the wake of Dunblane in Britain and Guerin's murder in Ireland.

It is also out of this fearful and disorientated climate that the witch-hunt emerges. The tireless search for Guerin's killers provides the Irish authorities with a mission, a moral crusade, something which can give the appearance of strong leadership. Never mind that along the way legal rights and free speech have been trampled underfoot.

Like every other journalist I too was outraged by the murder of Veronica Guerin, who had come to journalism late in life and had excelled as one of Europe's best investigative reporters. But this should not blind us to the dangers of the post-Veronica witch-hunt. Indeed, what could be more insulting to the memory of a woman who committed herself to fearless investigation and reporting of the truth, than a process which ends up attacking civil liberties and undermining the idea of a free press? ●

Veronica Guerin recovering from an earlier attack. A brave investigative journalist, her memory is now being used to attack press freedom

ANN BRADLEY

# Pro (the sporting) life



Confronting a bunch of bedraggled protesters brandishing placards bearing pictures of bodies torn limb from limb, screaming that I am a murderer and entreating me to 'tell the truth about the killing', has a familiar feel to it. I have faced many demonstrations against abortion and I can understand, if not agree with, the passion with which the protesters wish to put their case. After all, if I thought abortion was murder I would be equally compelled to abuse those who support it. So I can understand why protesters against abortion feel the way they do. They see the potential life of the unborn as morally equivalent to the life of people and, mistakenly, see themselves as battling against the degradation of human life and civilised values.

The shower of protesters hurling abuse at me last week deserves rather

Foxes are animals, animals hunt and are hunted. That is what animal life is like. Justice, fairness and compassion are uniquely human values which do not apply to the animal world. Foxes do not have a concept of cruel or wanton behaviour. From the fox's point of view (or the rabbit or pheasant perspective come to that), it makes no difference whether it is hunted down by a human for sport or another predator for dinner.

I feel morally obliged to justify why I believe it can be right and appropriate to end the life of a potential human being. I cannot see that fox hunting throws up a comparable ethical issue worthy of debate. The overwhelming majority of society believes that it is acceptable to kill animals for our convenience. Butchers and supermarkets are full of bits of dead animal. The moment of death is gruesome

tied up for the day is hardly the most efficient way of despatching the odd fox.

I cannot understand why hunting with dogs should be more humane than shooting or gassing. Nor do I care, and neither—I venture—do those who ride with, or follow the hunt. They are there for a good time—for the fun of it, for the thrill of it—and why not? Fox hunting does not harm people. It does not destroy people's livelihoods, it does not damage the environment—so let the hunters hunt and let those who disapprove stay away.

The sole important principle at stake in the fox hunting debate is whether those who oppose hunting should have the legal authority to try to restrict others from enjoying it. The parliamentary shenanigans which resulted in the 'talking-out' of Mike Foster's Private Members Bill have proved convenient for all.

The government has been able to avoid the substantive issues by arguing that it could not afford the time such a bill would require. The pro-hunting lobby has managed to stave off the legislative threat while avoiding an explicit debate about why people should have the right to hunt. The anti-hunting brigade can claim the moral victory of knowing that, had it come to a vote, they would have won, without having to take responsibility for the civil liberties implications of their actions. And it is an issue of civil liberties. When all is said and done, if government is allowed to ban fox hunting because MPs have an irrational sentimental prejudice against it, what recreational activities can we expect this most intolerant and least permissive of parliaments to ban next?

One of the more perverse consequences of the anti-hunting discussion is that New Labour in supporting a hunting ban has, once again, allowed the Tories to posture as defenders of freedom. It is a strange day in parliament when former Conservative agriculture minister, Douglas Hogg (backed by those well-known civil libertarians Michael Heseltine and Nicholas Soames) can insist that he is opposed to a bill because it is 'a monstrous infringement of civil rights'.

## A picture of a chewed-up fox is not pretty but it hardly has the impact of a dead fetus

less understanding and significantly more contempt. To them I was a murderer, not because I believe that there can be good reasons for killing a fetus, but because I am indifferent to the killing of a fox. Their pictures of foxes torn apart by hounds are a rather pathetic parody of the photographs of fetal remains displayed by the anti-choice lobby. A picture of a chewed-up fox is not pretty but it hardly has the impact of a dead fetus. At least the anti-abortionist protesters are engaged in a debate about the value of human life. The anti-hunting brigade had worked themselves into a state of near hysteria over the future of a fox.

The anti-hunting lobby has garnered enormous support purely on the strength of emotional, irrational, sentimentalism.

for them too—but most of us accept it because we like the taste of the resulting meat. If we accept that we can kill animals for the pleasure of meat, why not for sport? And why don't those who indulge in hunting simply come clean and admit they do it for the fun of it, rather than trying to find spurious justifications?

It is dishonest for the pro-hunting lobby to try to find arguments about why they really need to do what they do. Perhaps it is the most humane form of pest control, perhaps it is not. It is certainly hard to sustain the argument that those who attended the meet I joined saw themselves as the rural equivalent of Rentokil. Fifty or so beautifully groomed people on beautifully groomed horses, with dog handlers and followers-on-foot

As the government announces its plans to increase life expectancy, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick asks—who wants to live even longer under New Labour's grim health regime?

## THE TYRANNY OF HEALTH

**O**ur *Healthier Nation: A Contract for Health*, the latest declaration of the government's commitment to the promotion of health and the prevention of disease, offers the prospect of a longer life—but at the cost of an even more extensive and intrusive system of state regulation of individual behaviour.

Following the Conservative government's *Health of the Nation* initiatives of the early 1990s, New Labour has set targets by which progress can be measured—in reducing rates of heart disease and strokes, accidents, cancers and suicides. Much commentary on the proposals has focused on the drastic reduction in the number of targets and the new government's more modest ambitions (no doubt influenced by its failure to meet many of its notoriously cautious election promises). But a more significant feature of *Our Healthier Nation* is that it puts forward a strategy—previously lacking—to link national targets to local initiatives and outlines plans to pursue health goals in schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods. It thus aims to supplement exhortations to behave virtuously (stop smoking, curtail drinking, take exercise, eat healthily, etc, etc) with an effective system of regulation of behaviour.

The positive response to *Our Healthier Nation*, from the medical profession and the media in general, indicates the widespread acceptance of its basic assumptions. Before considering some of the government's specific proposals, we need to question the underlying principles. We can begin by noting a striking paradox: the government's preoccupation with health promotion appears to have grown in inverse proportion to the improvement in the nation's real state of health. To put this another way: at a time when, by any objective criterion, people enjoy better health than at any time in human history, the government appears driven to ever-greater intervention to improve people's health. Why?

Take life expectancy: the commitment to increase it is the first of the 'aims' proclaimed by *Our Healthier Nation*. As this is widely taken as self-evident, it receives no justification. But why should this be the ultimate target of medical science, let alone of government policy, least of all at a time when the increasing longevity of the population has become a widely acknowledged social problem?

A boy born in Britain today can expect to live until he is nearly 75; a girl till over 80. Life expectancy has increased by more than 30 years over the past century and around a decade since the Second World War, apparently without the benefit

of New Labour-style measures of health improvement. It is clear that we have not only exceeded the biblical lifespan of 'three score and ten' but that more and more of us are moving closer and closer to the biological limit of the human species.

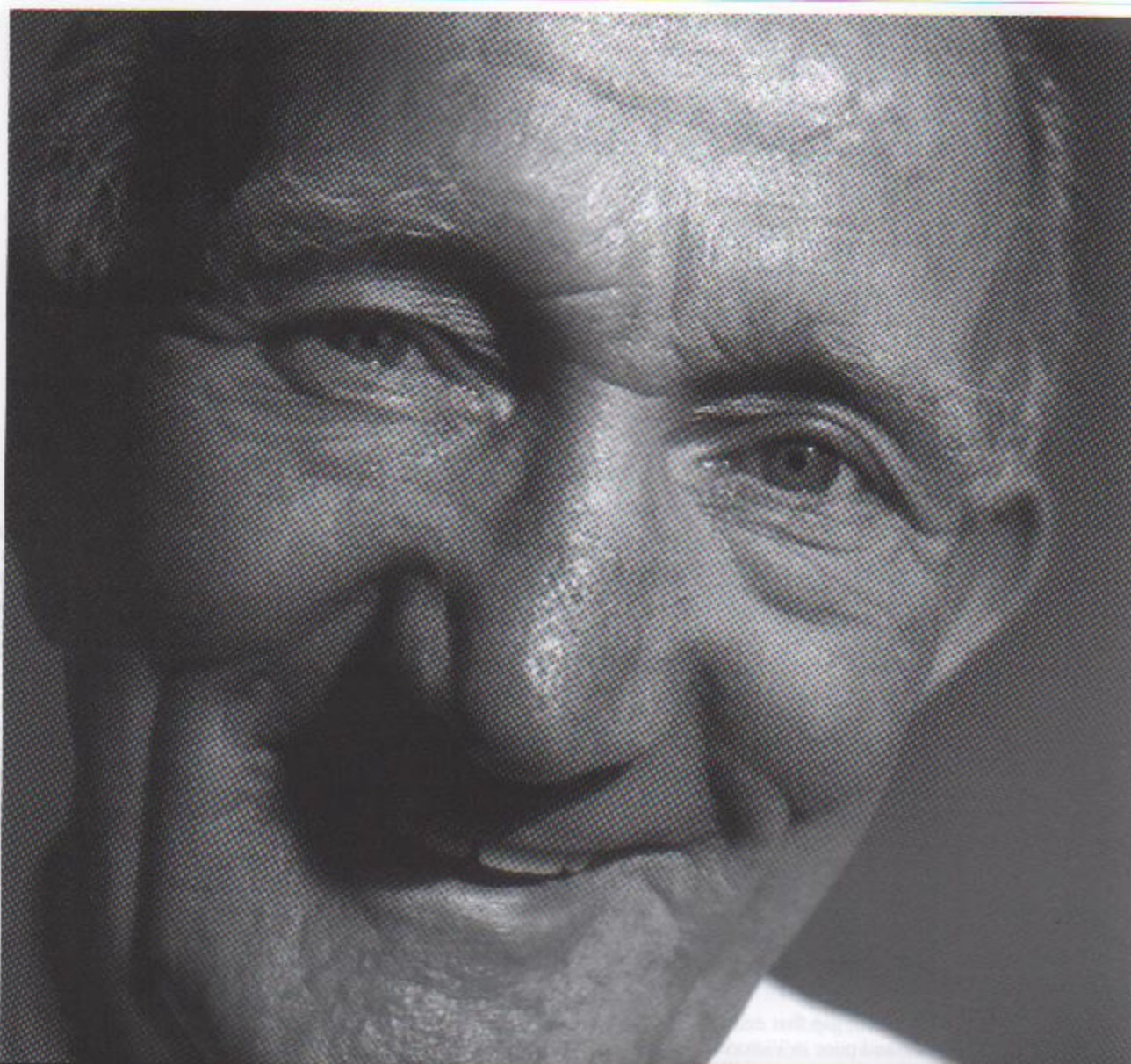
There is much scientific debate about whether further increase in life expectancy is possible. But is it desirable? The raging popular controversy over euthanasia, the romanticisation of suicide among young men (such as rock stars Kurt Cobain and Michael Hutchence) and the vogue for mass suicide among followers of millenarian cults suggest a widespread tendency to opt for a shorter rather than a longer life. The desire to live longer by taking health precautions may be interpreted as another way of responding to the perception that life in modern society lacks meaning and purpose. As Theodore Dalrymple puts it in his recent book on health scares, 'no wonder then that modern man seeks to prolong his life a little, for it is all he has' (*Mass Listeria: The Meaning of Health Scares*, 1998). For Dalrymple this explains the way that people 'react to any threat with fright—no, with existential terror'.

Advocates of the 'new public health', the medical discipline based on PC moralism and dodgy statistics which is in the vanguard of New Labour's health crusade, will object that their emphasis is not so much on ensuring that people live longer as on preventing premature deaths. They will point out that, even though there is an average life expectancy of 75–80, more than 90 000 people die every year before the age of 65. Furthermore, some 32 000 of these deaths are from cancer and 25 000 from heart disease and strokes, many of which could have been prevented. It is worth reminding our earnest friends that, in fact, death cannot be prevented, only postponed. Unfortunately, given the current state of medical science, it can generally be postponed for a relatively short time by relatively intensive preventive measures.

This is the central weakness of the new public health: the scope for significant postponement of death from the major causes of premature mortality by preventive measures is limited, though the costs are often substantial. Thus, for example, the increase in average life expectancy to be gained from a 10 per cent reduction in the level of serum cholesterol in the population at large (a much vaunted target of the 1992 *Health of the Nation* white paper, though significantly absent in the latest document) is between 2.5 and 5 months (*British Medical Journal*, 16 April 1994). However, even to achieve this degree of reduction in cholesterol would require either







Older generations are already living longer and healthier lives, without any help from the public health police

drastic dietary modification or long-term drug treatment (with its attendant side effects).

Our earnest friends will further object that their aim is not only to increase life expectancy, but also to 'increase the number of years lived free from illness'—in the words of *Our Healthier Nation*. Now it is true that the fact that old people live longer does not necessarily mean that they suffer worse health (a fact commonly denied by the new public health allies of New Labour when they cite the 'rising burden' of health care for the elderly on the exchequer as a justification for rationing resources). However, it is also true that there is a tendency for the prevalence of common chronic degenerative conditions—heart disease, stroke, cancer, osteoarthritis, diabetes, dementia—to increase with age.

What is by no means clear is the contribution of the various preventive measures favoured by the government to improving the quality—as distinct from the duration—

of people's lives. Indeed it may well be the case that an elderly person's enjoyment of a cigarette, a cream bun and a bottle of Guinness is more important to them than the extra few weeks they might spend in a life of miserable abstinence.

The second aim of *Our Healthier Nation* is to 'narrow the health gap' between rich and poor by concentrating efforts on improving the health of the 'worst off in society'. Here is another paradox: the government (and the medical profession) has become more preoccupied with the relationship between inequality and health at a time when social differentials in health are less significant in real terms than ever before.

No doubt it is true that people who are better off are healthier and that the poor are iller. A vast edifice of epidemiological data has been erected in recent years substantiating these differentials in great detail in relation to every disease and health indicator. Yet simply contrasting ►



Though  
**INFANT DEATHS**  
 may be relatively more common in  
 poorer families, they are  
**VERY UNCOMMON**  
 in any section of society



PHOTOS: DAVE DONLARD

the health gap that exists in Britain today with that between rich and poor in Victorian England, or that which still prevails between Western and Third World countries, is enough to expose the lack of historical or social perspective in the contemporary public health debate.

Take infant mortality, one of the most intensively studied indices of population health. The persistent gap between the rate of infant deaths among rich and poor has been a particular focus of the promoters of the new public health since the publication of the Black Report in 1980 (now republished as *Inequalities in Health, the Black Report and the Health Divide*, 1992). The 1990 figures reveal that the number of babies whose fathers are classified as 'unskilled workers' (social class V) who die in the first year of life is 11.7 per 1000 live births, whereas that among the professions (social class I) is 6.2 per 1000 (*Mortality Statistics 1990, Perinatal and Infant: Social and Biological Factors*, 1992). In other words, the infant mortality rate for the poor is nearly twice that among the rich.

While there can be little doubt that the persistence of this differential is a pernicious effect of Britain's class divided society, it is important to place it in a wider context. The

overall rate of infant deaths in Britain in 1990 was slightly less than eight per 1000 live births, by 1996 it had fallen below six. At the turn of the century the figure was around 150, by the Second World War it was still above 50; it did not fall below 20 until the 1960s (AH Halsey ed, *British Social Trends since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, 1988). In some Third World countries today, the infant mortality rate remains comparable with that of Britain in the early decades of this century: for example, India—94, Bangladesh—114, Egypt—61, Mali—164 (Alastair Gray ed, *World Health and Disease*, 1993).

Infant mortality has fallen precipitously among all social classes in Britain in the course of the twentieth century. In 1922 infant mortality among unskilled workers was 97; for the children of professionals, the rate was 38 (see Halsey). Over the past 70 years, the rate for the worst off has fallen further—by 88 per cent, compared with 84 per cent for the better off. The infant mortality rate of the poorest children today is similar to that of the richest in the 1970s.

As the expert statistical manipulators of the new public health are well aware, it is possible, by carefully choosing your starting point and other manoeuvres, to reveal slight increases or decreases in class differentials in infant mortality. But what all such comparisons of mortality rates obscure is the dramatic decline in the absolute number of infant deaths.

In 1990 the total number of babies dying in the first year of life in England and Wales was 3390; in 1900 the figure was 142 912, in 1940 it was still higher by a factor of 10 and in 1970 more than four times greater (*Mortality Statistics 1990 and Halsey*). The 1990 figure included 248 born to parents in social class I and 243 to parents in social class V (the rate is lower in social class I because approximately twice as many babies were born in this category). Though infant deaths may be relatively more common in poorer families, they are very uncommon in any section of society.

A commonplace event within living memory in Britain, the death of an infant has now become a rarity. Furthermore many of these deaths result from conditions such as prematurity and congenital abnormalities, which are often difficult to prevent or treat, or are 'cot deaths', the causes of which are uncertain and for which preventive measures remain controversial. Again, it seems that the level of government and official medical intervention is out of all proportion to the scale of the problem.

The more closely you examine *Our Healthier Nation*,

the more strange its focus on problems that are of vanishing significance appears. Though we have become familiar with the definition of health by the World Health Organisation as not merely the absence of disease, the conception of health put forward by the government seems to have little to do with disease at all. At the outset its new report defines good health as 'the foundation of a good life' (p7). This recalls the Victorian motto—'a healthy mind in a healthy body'—and establishes a link between physical condition and moral character. It implies that self-discipline and abstinence, the 'mortification of the flesh', can improve the quality of life, in a sense by purifying the soul. Even more insidiously and offensively, it also implies that physical impairment or disease either expresses or entails moral turpitude, a 'bad' life.

However, by contrast with the Victorian notion of a link between individual fitness and national efficiency, New Labour's interest in health is not inspired by any wider social vision. On the contrary, it reflects the outlook of a society which has abandoned any grand project, in which the horizons of the individual have been reduced to their own body: 'No matter what goes wrong in life—money, work or relationship problems—good health helps sustain us. How often have we all heard somebody say that although things

may not be going well—at least they have their health. Good health is treasured.' (pp7-8)

In this homily health is reduced to a source of consolation for people who have given up on any higher ambition. In a society of low expectations, the goal of human existence is redefined as the quest to prolong its duration.

Once health is linked with virtue then the regulation of lifestyle in the name of health becomes a mechanism for deterring vice and for disciplining society as a whole. *Our Healthier Nation* is really a programme for social control packaged as health promotion.

'Health is not about blame, but about opportunity and responsibility.' (p28) Here is a characteristic New Labour sentence, short and snappy, linking an apparently radical repudiation of old-fashioned 'victim-blaming' health promotion with a Blairite couplet adapted from the speeches of Margaret Thatcher. But what does it mean? Though at first sight this soundbite appears characteristically vacuous, in fact it repays closer examination.

The key strategic device of *Our Healthier Nation* is the 'contract for health'. This begins from the acknowledgement that past health promotion initiatives placed too much emphasis on simply exhorting individuals to change their behaviour. It explicitly recognises the contribution of the government and local agencies—councils, health authorities, voluntary organisations, businesses—towards achieving targeted improvements in health. A glance at the detailed proposals suggests that the opportunities largely fall to the government and local agencies and the responsibilities fall on the individual. Where there are opportunities for individuals, these turn out to be opportunities to fulfil responsibilities as defined by the government.

The document elaborates at considerable length the roles of different 'players' in the contract for health. For its part, in addition to providing the policy and legislative framework, the government also undertakes to evaluate the health implications of all its policies. Indeed it seems inclined to review its entire programme through the prism of health. Thus, for example, its 'tough measures on crime' may gain in popular approval by being presented as a contribution to public health.

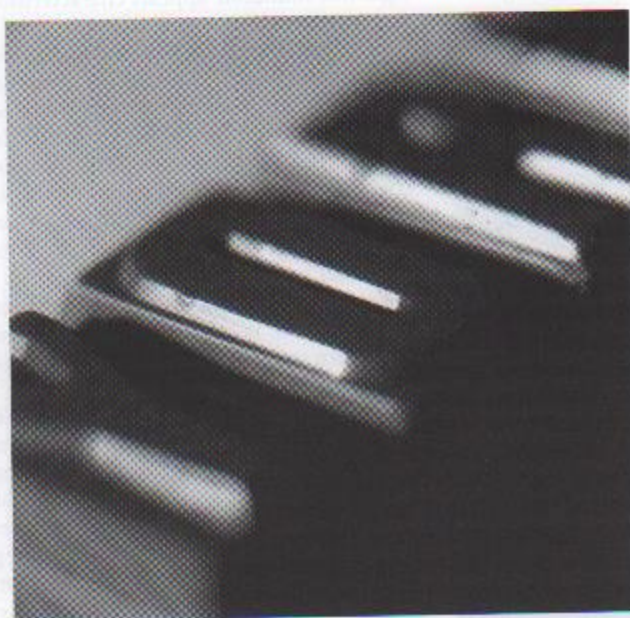
For local 'players', collaboration between health and local authorities in 'health action zones' and in the pursuit of 'health improvement programmes' is the central theme. 'Healthy living centres', financed by £300 million from the national lottery, will seek to ►



Health is reduced to a  
**SOURCE OF CONSOLATION**  
 for people who  
 have given up on any  
**HIGHER AMBITION**



While vast  
**SUMS OF MONEY**  
 are poured into projects that use health  
**TO ENHANCE SOCIAL CONTROL,**  
 real health needs are neglected



◀ 'provide opportunities for local community action to improve health and for individuals to take responsibility for improving their own health' (p46).

When it comes to the individual there is little left to be said: 'it is finally up to the individual to choose whether to change their behaviour to a healthier one.' (p48) The vaguely menacing tone is complemented by a guilt-tripping reminder that 'individual responsibility is not just about our own health', and a warning about the dangers of passive smoking and setting a bad example to others—particularly by parents to their children.

The authoritarian dynamic contained in *Our Healthier Nation* becomes increasingly apparent when it moves from the discussion of aims and targets to the local 'healthy settings' in which the policy will be implemented and contract compliance enforced. 'The contract will only work if everybody plays their part and everyone is committed to fulfilling their responsibilities', the document declares in a tone chillingly reminiscent of a headteacher's lecture, a managerial pep talk or a vicar's sermon (p29).

In 'healthy schools', children will be subjected to 'awareness raising' in matters of health, in the same

way as they are currently subjected to mind-numbing propaganda about drugs, parenting, safe sex. They will have their eating habits policed more forcefully by the chip police, to promote 'healthy eating', and will be dragooned into physical exercise. No wonder truancy is on the rise.

Meanwhile in their 'healthy workplaces', the children's parents will be doing their bit to improve the nation's health. The document provides a list of precise instructions for employees. They can 'play their part in following health and safety guidelines', 'work with employers to create a healthy working environment', 'support colleagues who have problems or who are disabled' and 'contribute to charitable and social work through work-based voluntary organisations' (p51). Why not get some extra exercise and wash the employer's car during the lunch break?

In case people have difficulty envisaging the role of the 'healthy living centre', *Our Healthier Nation* provides an example: a centre at Bromley by Bow in East London run by an evangelical vicar who has turned his church into an 'integrated community project', providing a day nursery, a cafe, education and care services and a Bengali outreach project. Such initiatives aim to provide 'an important means of raising local awareness on issues such as diet, smoking, drinking, drug misuse and physical activity'. A Department of Health circular commends the LIFE project in the Wirral, which aims to 'improve health and fitness, self-esteem and quality of life' by providing, among other things, 'mobile health screening in pubs and betting shops' (!), and health, fitness and relaxation courses.

While vast sums of money are poured into projects that use health to enhance social control, real health needs are neglected. Waiting lists are lengthening and people are suffering and dying waiting for routine hip replacements, cataract removal and heart surgery.

Instead of the 'seven deadly sins' we now have 'four targets for health'. In place of the priest, we now have the doctor, teacher, vicar, social worker and epidemiologist rolled into one public health policeperson patrolling our lives from one 'healthy setting' to another, from home to school to work, from cradle to grave, with special 'outreach' capacity to any 'settings' not currently under surveillance.

Far better to take the advice of Theodore Dalrymple: 'eat, drink and be merry, for you'll live to be 80 at least, which is a long time to worry over trifles.'

Why shouldn't older women receive fertility treatment? asks Juliet Tizzard

# THE TAINTED CONCEPTION

Elizabeth Buttle could have been the hero of the hour. At the age of 60, 41 years after the birth of her first child, she conceived and gave birth to her son Joe. Since nobody has ever had a child naturally at such an advanced age, the news of Mrs Buttle's remarkable feat caused great excitement in the press. But before the ink was dry on her £100 000 contract with the *News of the World*, Mrs Buttle was exposed as a fraud. Far from being a natural miracle, little Joe had been conceived in a test tube from a donated egg and a donated sperm—and his mother had lied about her age to the clinic providing in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment.

Immediately the media reaction changed. Excitement gave way to consternation and the talk of miracle births and wonders of nature turned into accusations that Mrs Buttle lacked consideration for the welfare of her child. Why?

When everybody believed that the conception was natural, it mattered little that the mother was a pensioner. Yet all agreed that 60 years of age was unacceptably late in life to have an IVF baby. Critics labelled Mrs Buttle selfish for paying £10 000 to have a child and irresponsible for having him so late in life that she might not live to see him into adulthood. Nobody raised concerns about an orphaned teenager-to-be when they believed the conception to be a natural one. That she had lied to the clinic about her age and was at the end of an affair with a married man only deepened the disapproval.

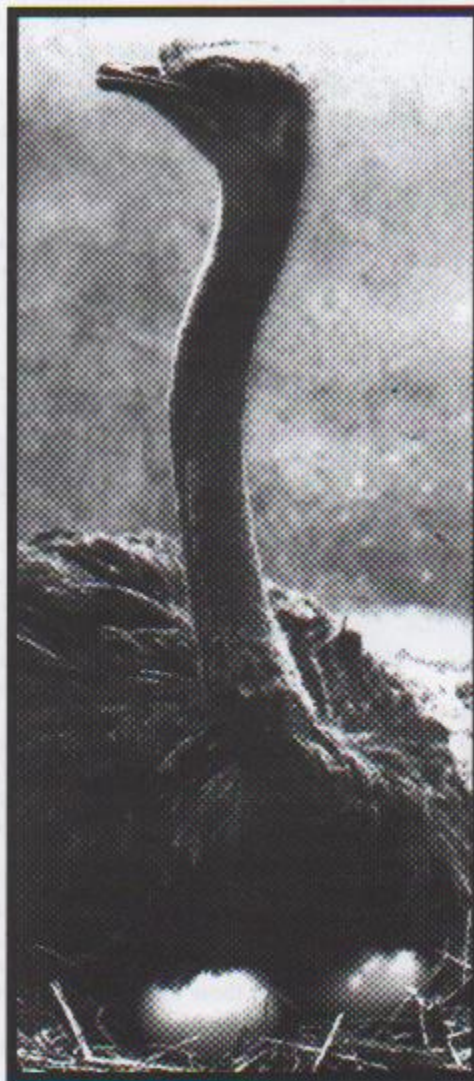
The only reason journalists could feel free to attack Mrs Buttle in this way was because anybody undergoing IVF technology has to satisfy those providing fertility treatment that they are 'suitable' as prospective parents. Unlike a natural conception, which nobody can vet in advance, clinicians often say that they have a moral responsibility to the children born as a result of the treatments they offer.

The law dictates that doctors must take account of the welfare of the future child before beginning IVF treatment. Since no child exists at the time of the first consultation with the doctor, assessing the 'welfare of the child' really amounts to scrutinising the would-be parents to see whether a child in their care would be properly looked after. The law's declared aim of looking out for the interests of children may appear an admirable one. But the consequence of the legislation is to legitimise the moral inspection of patients' lives.

You need only look at how the 'welfare of the child' is applied in clinical practice to see the real effects. Anybody who is single, homosexual, has a criminal record or, like Elizabeth Buttle, is over the age of 50 will not find it easy to get fertility treatment. One woman who

requested IVF treatment was turned down because she had once been a prostitute.

Nobody who is able to conceive a child naturally is subjected to any moral scrutiny, and nor should they be. Such considerations should be equally irrelevant in the context of fertility treatment. The way in which the considerations are applied to IVF patients shows just how disingenuous the concern for the children really is. IVF patients, who want to conceive 'unnaturally', are automatically treated as people whose motives are suspicious. The stated concern with the welfare of the child simply becomes a means for doctors to scrutinise those motives. When things occur naturally and unexpectedly it is thought to be a happy accident, a force of Nature or even God's will. But when human planning or technology is involved, the decision to proceed is assumed to be one in need of inspection by a third party.



The criteria used to assess patients prior to fertility treatment show that the authorities' real concern is to distinguish between what is deemed 'natural' and what is not. People objected to Elizabeth Buttle's advanced age because she could not have conceived without assistance (although it is worth noting the speed with which they were prepared to believe that it was a natural conception). Lesbians and single women are frowned upon for exactly the same reason: that nature says that women who do not have sex with men do not get pregnant. It is their lifestyle choice which precludes them from having a baby and their inability to conceive is, therefore, brought upon themselves.

The bizarre idea that medical technology should only be used to restore natural processes flies in the face of reality. Particularly in reproductive technology, the trend in the second half of the twentieth century has been not to mirror nature, but to override it. New contraceptive devices and abortion techniques were welcomed by women as methods for avoiding precisely what nature would otherwise impose upon them. Here, nature was considered something to be conquered at all costs, not something to be respected. Now this positive attitude to technology is becoming less widespread, with worrying consequences for those at the giving and receiving end of fertility treatment.

In the wake of the Buttle case came calls for doctors to be much more vigilant about acquiring information on prospective patients. At the beginning of March, Professor Ian Craft of the London Gynaecology and Fertility Centre which treated Elizabeth Buttle, received an official reprimand from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) because he was found to be treating older women, lesbians and single mothers. The HFEA demanded that he tighten controls at his centre in Harley Street. As Craft objected to the *Sunday Times*, 'Since when has a doctor's surgery become a court of law?' (1 March)—since those responsible for regulating fertility treatment decided that potential IVF patients should be treated as guilty until proven innocent, with the worst motives for wanting a child.

In the world of fertility treatment, it is fast becoming the case that patients have to convince their doctor that they will make good parents before receiving treatment. It shows an attitude which assumes the worst of patients and invites third party intrusion into decisions that should be private and personal, out of reach of government. ●

Juliet Tizzard is director of Progress Educational Trust

Being fat is nothing to be proud of, argues Jennie Bristow

# THE 'FAT RIGHTS' LOBBY IS OUT TO LUNCH

Janice Bhend, editor of *Yes!* magazine, is angry. *Yes!*, the fashion magazine for people who are 'larger than the norm', is, she tells me, about to go into receivership because it cannot afford to continue publishing. 'At the very time when I'm being phoned up every day to go on telly and for interviews and God knows what—at the very moment when this is all bloody taking off—we can't keep going.'

I am not surprised at Janice's frustration. The increasingly prominent American movement for 'fat rights' has finally made it over to Britain. At the end of November 1996 Diana Pollard and Tracey Jannaway of the London Fat Women's Group founded a pressure group called Size which aims, according to *Yes!*, to form a 'National Size Acceptance Coalition challenging the prejudiced attitudes of society to fat people in Britain'. The American model for this is the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), now a large and formidable pressure group. This year The Women's Press published *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size* by Charlotte Cooper. The cover blurb claims that it is 'a book that will bring about major change', one which 'represents a coming to power of the fat rights movement'.

The mainstream media has jumped on the fatwagon too, with the kind of story designed to shock. Christina Corrigan, a 13-year old Californian schoolgirl, died last year weighing 48 stone. Her mother was prosecuted for child abuse, and eventually found guilty of child neglect. An unusual and newsworthy story, no doubt. But on the back of Christina Corrigan came a host of programmes and news articles dealing with the problems faced by all overweight people—certainly not dead, and certainly nowhere near 48 stone. The *Guardian* and the BBC documentary series *Heart of the Matter* ran features called 'Fat! So?'—pinched from the name of a radical fat rights amateur publication in the States—on the plight of the overweight. In a *Sunday Telegraph* article entitled, uncompromisingly, 'It is We who are

the Abusers' (8 February), 21-stone barrister Helen Jackson used the Christina Corrigan case to promote her own campaign for a British law to 'outlaw size discrimination'.

Janice Bhend explains that the purpose of *Yes!* as a glossy fashion magazine is to promote images of fat women looking good, to increase the readers' self-confidence and give them information about where to buy clothes that will fit. 'The whole ethos behind the magazine is that there are so many wasted lives out there', she says. Larger people spend so much time worrying about the need to be thinner that they prevent themselves from getting on and living life, from swimming to buying nice clothes. 'They won't spend money on themselves because they hate themselves, and that is a miserable way to live. We're saying whatever size you are, right now, make the best of it.'

This positive approach is particularly important, argues Bhend, because of the tendency large women have to make excuses for why they let themselves go. 'Large women are very good at what I call the "yes but" syndrome': they don't make any clothes for me, here are some beautiful clothes, yes but I can't afford them, here's some on special offer, yes but I don't like the colour. There's always some other reason why they can't go out and make themselves look good.'

'I was doing a programme', says Bhend, 'and this woman stands up and says, "I want to buy some yellow dungarees in my size". I'd think okay, I know somewhere where you can go and buy yellow dungarees but why haven't you had your hair done? Why haven't you done your makeup? Why haven't you made an effort?'. She sighs: 'It's like it's always easier to blame someone else for why they can't look good.'

Well fair enough. If 'the politics of size' was no more than an admonition to put your lippy on and get a life, you would be inclined to think it was a good thing for those who are overweight and underconfident and certainly not a problem for the rest of us. But the message of the fat rights movement is

nothing like so straightforward or positive as that displayed by mannequins in the windows of Evans shops, or argued by Janice Bhend. The 'politics of size', as a campaign, is about the opposite. Size rights activists are not encouraged to 'make the effort'; they are instructed to wallow in their misery and inadequacy—and make the rest of us dwell on it too.

'Fat and proud', as synthesised in Charlotte Cooper's book, goes way beyond the straightforward business of reassuring fat people that they can still have a life. The book sets 'being fat' up as a political movement in and of itself.

'Fat oppression', 'fatphobia', 'size positive' and 'looksism' typify the kind of American jargon used throughout *Fat and Proud* to make obesity into some kind of political statement about what is wrong with the world. Cooper states in her introduction that 'being fat signifies being different, being stigmatised and discredited, being hated, feared because we are fat, and being falsely represented as fat people'; she also claims that, 'as a group that is marginalised as "other", fat people have relevancy and value' (p13). When you hear that kind of language, you know this is no self-help guide. It seems that to be fat is, in itself, to be a human rights campaigner fighting against world injustice. Those who are unhappy with their weight and want to lose a few pounds, meanwhile, are simply dupes of the system, incapable of anything more than wanting to conform.

The key argument put forward in *Fat and Proud* is that the only problem with fatness is society's attitudes towards it. 'In the end, it is society that needs to change, not us', Cooper writes on page 126. Why? Because, 'like racism or homophobia, fat hatred is part of a complex web of social power relations and hierarchies, where particular social groups are marginalised, stigmatised and discredited' (p32).

In other words, fat people cannot help what they are, and so should not be looked down upon. Not only is fatness like oppression, argues Cooper, it should be compared with disability. 'Fat and disabled people experience ►



love your  
**body**

 THE BODY SHOP

Sara  
Hinchliffe  
has just lost  
enough  
weight to  
climb on to  
the moral  
high ground

# LESS IS MORE

**Take it from** me, it is better to be thin than fat. I know. I have just lost five stone—and it's bloody great. Being a size 12 is just better than being a size 20. I can buy clothes that fit—from any shop I like—clothes which do not resemble a ship in full sail. I no longer have to order things surreptitiously from the Dawn French Voluminous Tent Company and hide

from the postman in case he laughs at the label.

I have stopped worrying that office furniture may collapse under me while I'm in a budget meeting. I can run up stairs without being out of breath. I can go swimming without most of the water leaving the pool when I get in. Drunken louts have to think of better insults than 'fat cow'. And according

to reliable sources, I've stopped sounding like a baby warthog when I am asleep.

Let's face it, fat is ugly. Having a spare tyre over the top of your 501s is just not sexy. (Note to male readers: there is no such thing as a 'love handle'. In a moment of passion, do you seriously believe we want to grab a handful of flab? Muscle is far better.) Fat does not help you

to pull. It may insulate you from the cold when you are waiting for the night bus having failed to get off with anybody. I would rather get whisked home in a taxi for a night of frantic sex.

According to the fat lobby, I am probably deluding myself that I'm somehow more desirable and attractive now I am thinner. Bollocks. If anybody knows about self-delusion it's fat people. The fatties are masters of the brilliant excuse. If you believed this lot you would think everybody fat has a low metabolic rate (in fact the

◀ many things in common', she writes, and although 'identifying ourselves as fat people as "impaired" and "disabled" requires sensitivity', she cites discrimination cases in the USA that have been won by fat people whose fatness was defined as a disability as a reason why the fat rights movement should not reject an alliance with disabled people. 'We would be foolish to let our prejudice interfere with real chances for justice and equality.' (pp123-4)

Fat people, according to Cooper, are not just disadvantaged, they are the

cannot buy clothes, get operations, walk down the street without being stared at. It is a pretty miserable existence. But conversely, Cooper rejoices in her downtrodden, marginalised status.

'Today I feel lucky to be fat', she writes. 'I am very proud of my difference, I feel like a survivor, and I think my perspective as a fat person is a benefaction that has made me special.' Self-esteem, according to this argument, does not mean taking steps to make yourself comfortable with your body, whether that be by losing weight or dressing nicely. It means wrapping yourself in your flab while cherishing the fact that society does not accept you. Precisely the negative experience of being fat in a world that likes slim people is what forms the basis of 'fat and proud'.

The argument that 'fat people are victims but it is good to be a victim' (as in 'I feel lucky to be fat') reveals just how miserable the fat rights movement is. The 'politics of size' is not only a demand for sympathy, which would be bad enough, but an exaltation of the fat person's marginalisation. Fat rights activists set themselves up as the martyrs of modern society, somehow made spiritually superior by being rejected. In this context an unfortunate teenager like Christina Corrigan, who suffered the most extreme anguish of obesity, can be hailed as a modern Joan of Arc. That is fine for the Charlotte Coopers of this world, but my guess is that Christina Corrigan would prefer to be alive and normal-sized than occupying an outside grave.

The irony of all this is that there are some genuine problems which fat people face which could, and should, be tackled. The judgemental attitude towards fat people and healthcare held by many professionals—that fat people make all their own illnesses and therefore should not have full access to treatment—is wrong and dangerous. Mild obesity certainly is not proven to

be necessarily unhealthy, and some surgeons' refusal to operate on overweight people is more indicative of their own laziness than of real medical risks.

All the wondrous 'miracle diets' on the market do not provide a magical solution to excess weight and simplistic instructions to go on a diet are not always helpful. There is no reason why fat people cannot look good, as the models in *Yes!* magazine show. But a fat rights lobby which claims that the only problem is the way others see fat people, and that there is nothing that overweight people can or should do about the way they look, is doing nothing to improve the everyday lives of the overweight. If campaigners for 'fat rights' get their way, all that will happen is that the rest of us are forced to 'recognise' the fact that fat people are, indeed, victims.

Because the fat rights lobby believes that the only problem with being fat is that society sees fatness as a negative thing, it is hardly surprising

'I feel lucky  
TO BE FAT'  
writes Cooper

worst-off group in society. They suffer from social discrimination (like black South Africans) and physical impairment (like somebody born with cerebral palsy). It's a bit cheeky, isn't it? After all, trying to squeeze your bum on to a seat on a central line train (an example she cites of society's 'fatphobia') is hardly comparable to the experience of somebody physically bound to a wheelchair trying to use any form of public transport. Nor is it at all the same thing as the political discrimination which created 'white only' spaces under apartheid. But you can see why she has chosen to use this mode of argument, and why it has become so popular.

To be fat, in Cooper's world, is to be the ultimate victim. Fat people







opposite is the case; the heavier you are the harder your body works to lug all that lard around), lives on vegetables and never looks at a bun (all the evidence suggests that fat people severely underestimate how much they eat).

Fat people all claim to have bones the size of an elephant (although they are cunningly concealed beneath the flab). They blame their parents, either for making them eat everything on their plate and inducing lifelong guilt at leaving uneaten food, or for passing on a gene for lardarse-ness. The fat lobby

is convinced that diets don't work and that they can do nothing about their weight. This is all rubbish. Diets work. But they only work if you metabolise more calories than you eat. The only way to lose weight is to eat less.

Now, eating less is not nice, especially if you are used to eating lots of delicious saturated fat. But you do have a choice. You can be fat and full, or thin and hungry. It is up to you. There's no point whingeing about how your body is out of control. If you are fat you have decided to be that way.

Here I agree with Pauline Calf's advice to the fat—shut up, you fat blobby bastards. Take responsibility for what you have done to your flabby body. It is nobody's fault but your own. Nobody held you down and poured that Haagen Dazs down your throat through a funnel. Only foie gras geese have that excuse—it doesn't wash with people.

Oh yes, I'm smug and self-satisfied. I confess that whenever I am in Sainsbury's I look at the packets of lard and do complicated mental arithmetic working out how many of them have

disappeared from my thighs. I openly sneer at fat women in leggings in the crisps aisle. But I am not complacent. I gratuitously display my fat holiday photos to anybody who will look at them (candidates need a strong stomach), and keep one attached to the fridge at all times. You can't be too careful. Fat can creep up on you unawares (as Julie Burchill knows only too well). I still worry that those 140 packets of lard are lurking somewhere waiting to smother me. But if they do, it will be nobody's fault but my own. ●

that they want a change in the law to make 'size discrimination' illegal. As Janice Bhend says, 'They made it illegal to discriminate against people on the grounds of their race, their sex and their religion. They never made it illegal to discriminate against people on the grounds of their size or their age'. Of course, if such a thing as size discrimination was made an offence of the same nature as sexual discrimination, there would be chaos. Anybody failing to get a job at an interview could argue that the decision was made because they were too fat, too thin, too short, too tall: as most people invariably are. But the unworkable nature of such regulation does not seem to bother the fat rights lobby too much; what matters is just that they have some legislation of their own.

There are many sad aspects to the fat rights movement, from the 'we can't help it' whingeing to the notion that wanting to lose weight and fit in is a bad thing, an act of betrayal to the cause. But the most pathetic thing of all is the very fact that it has defined itself as 'a movement', as opposed to a coffee morning or fashion magazine. In claiming to be a movement, the most oppressed of the oppressed, Charlotte Cooper et al are simply buying into the grubby 'me too' pleading, the kind of politics in which people line up to show how they are more badly treated by society than the person in front.

Reading *Fat and Proud*, it is almost as though the 'fat community' is made up of people who really wanted to be born literally as black one-legged lesbians but were lucky enough to have an extra few inches on their waistline, and have spent many years wondering how to make this into as big a barrier as possible to getting on with their lives. Now, thanks to the 48-stone 13-year old, it looks like they might succeed. It is the only thing that has ever made me see *Weight Watchers* in a positive light. ●

*Second Opinion by Dr Michael Fitzpatrick*

## BIG GIRLS AND HEALTH ZEALOTS

According to the handy colour chart for plotting weight and height provided by the Health Education Authority that I keep on my desk in the surgery, I fall into the 'overweight' category. This is a band of equivocal orange between the golden zone labelled 'OK' to the left and the stripes of deepening red to the right, as 'fat' gives way to 'very fat'. In another version of this chart in a recent bulletin circulated to all GPs on 'the prevention and treatment of obesity', the 'OK' category is subtly redefined as 'desirable'.

Perhaps it is my difficulty in coming to terms with this exclusion from the camp of the desirable that gives me little enthusiasm for health promotion in the sphere of obesity. Or it could be because I am in a state of denial with regard to the measures of diet and exercise required to rejoin the company of the elect.

Yet fat is such a happening issue that it is difficult even for an overweight/undesirable GP to avoid it. My call to a higher level of obesity awareness came last month with an invitation to participate in a late night talk show on BBC Radio 5 Live. With me around the table were a dietician working for

Kellogg's ('The fat controller'), a personal fitness trainer with celebrity clients, the editor of a health magazine, the broadcaster and journalist (and champion dieter) Nina Myskow, and Penny Cee, founder of Planet Big Girl nightclub. On the line from San Francisco was Marilyn Wann, editor of the magazine *Fat! So?*.

The form for these programmes is that the BBC provides a few bottles of wine (and a few desiccated sandwiches) to encourage a convivial atmosphere and the discussion flows into the early hours interrupted only by half-hourly news bulletins. But the only people drinking the wine were myself and Penny Cee...

Now I have always thought the epithet 'health fascist' rather silly. This term is commonly used by free market right wingers to denounce their more authoritarian conservative (and New Labour) colleagues for restricting individual freedoms in the name of health. But as the anti-obesity campaigners merged in a studio united front of moral outrage and dogmatism, the intolerant and coercive dynamic underlying the contemporary obsession with health was exposed. ►



GES  
MESSAGE

## NINA MYSKOW

# proclaimed that I should be struck OFF THE MEDICAL REGISTER for straying from orthodoxy on the virtues of HEALTHY EATING

◀ To avoid lazy historical analogies, I would prefer to call them 'health zealots'. They found two targets for their sanctimoniousness: the self-proclaimed fat activists, for refusing to accept their designated place on the HEA colour chart, and myself, for refusing to join their crusade, and worse, for



questioning the scientific basis of much health promotion in this area.

I was shocked at the sheer rudeness of the health zealots towards the fat women on the show and their scarcely concealed disgust at their obesity. It was remarkable that people who at first appeared quite personable suddenly turned rather nasty when faced with fat women who did not project the approved image of guilt and shame. The zealots felt free to conduct a public interrogation of the fat women about their personal habits, to advise them about the risks to their health and to tell them how they should shape up. The fact that both Penny Cee and Marilyn Wann were articulate and entertaining only intensified the animosity of their opponents.

In a way my offence was even worse. As a doctor, I was expected to provide medical legitimacy for the healthy living agenda. Instead, I questioned the validity of much of the evidence linking obesity and ill-health, particularly for people in the lower grades of obesity (that is, most people) who are the main targets of dietary propaganda—a point well-made in a recent editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1 January 1998). The same editorial notes that the argument that losing weight contributes to better health, though plausible, remains unproven, though the adverse consequences of the Western obsession with dieting (most notably the rise of anorexia/bulimia) are familiar.

The zealots were shocked as well as outraged. Though they are well aware of the scientific controversy that surrounds many aspects of obesity, a pervasive sentiment of 'not in front of the children' dictates that 'health professionals' should toe the line in public and stay 'on message'. Nina Myskow proclaimed more than once that I should be struck off the medical register for straying from orthodoxy and scandalising the public. When I said that I did not think it was part of my job as a GP to harangue my

patients on the virtues of a healthy diet, the zealots immediately concluded that this could only be explained by my ignorance of what this included and demanded, in a strident chorus, that I submit to a brief examination.

What is it about fat that brings out the gauler in people? I think the Australian sociologists Alan Peterson and Deborah Lupton are on to something when they point out that 'the "healthy body" has become an increasingly important signifier of moral worth' through which 'the individual can express publicly such virtues as self-control, self-discipline, self-denial and will power' (*The New Public Health: Health and Self in the Age of Risk*, p25).

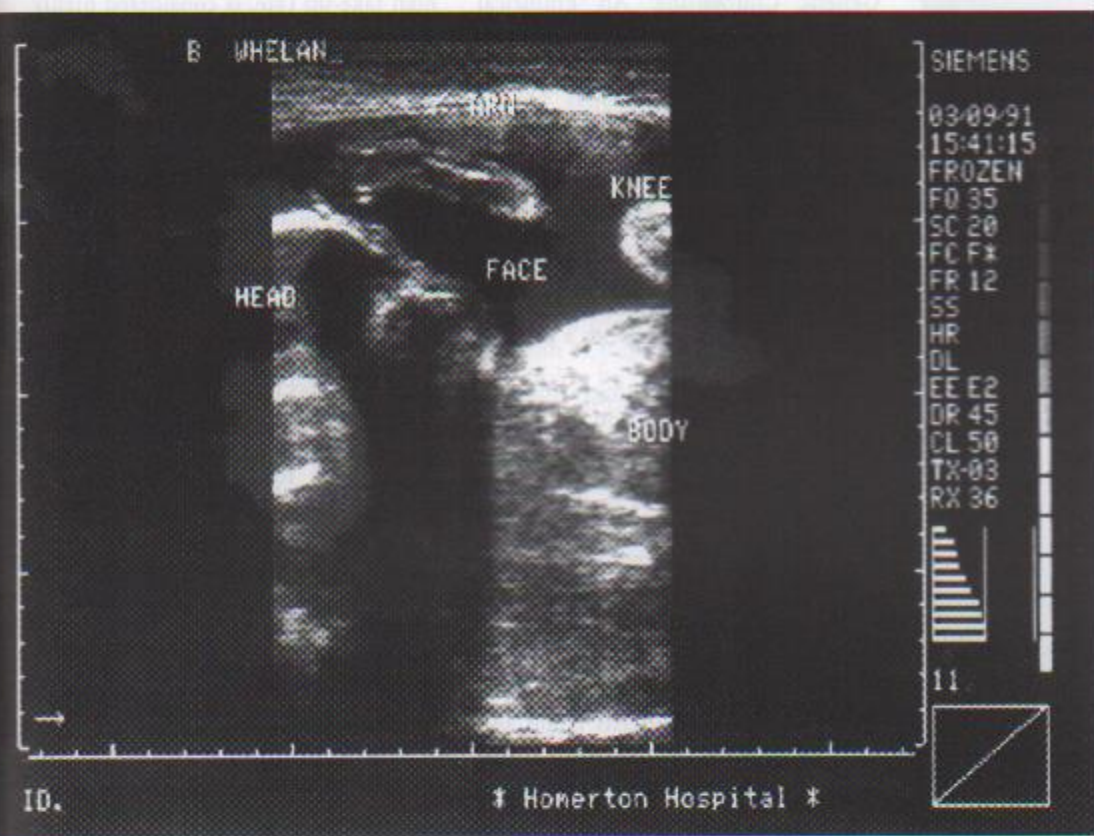
Of all the concerns of modern health promotion, obesity is the most public manifestation of private non-conformity with the approved virtues of our age. You can be a secret smoker or drinker or eater of cream cakes; but, even allowing for careful selection of clothes, your wasteline is public knowledge. Whereas only you and your doctor have access to your blood pressure or serum cholesterol level, anybody at the bus stop could place you fairly accurately on my colour chart.

Linking weight to health makes it possible to generalise a sense of risk to the whole population. If more than half the population—including even me—is defined as being overweight, this surely justifies mass campaigns to change people's behaviour in the name of health. A major investigation of links between lifestyle and heart disease last year concluded that 'nearly everyone would benefit from being a little thinner' (*British Medical Journal*, 2 May 1997). In this way the influence of health professionals is extended from the sick to the well, and it becomes clear that the obsession with obesity provides a mechanism for imposing discipline over the whole of society. I think I'll forget the exercise bike and get down to Planet Big Girl night club. ●

# FUTURES

Ellie Lee believes geneticists should stand up for 'directive' screening programmes that can help parents avoid having disabled babies

## GENETIC SCIENCE PASSES THE SCREEN TEST



choice. The National Childbirth Trust has argued that the 'right of parents not to have antenatal testing is being undermined by health professionals'. This concern was recently echoed by top medical journal the *Lancet*, which worried that 'women may feel pressured into undergoing prenatal diagnosis by physicians who feel that this is in their best interests'.

Another argument is that screening services encourage negative attitudes towards disabled people, if they are not in fact discriminatory. While only the most extreme critics of genetics would compare antenatal services directly with Nazi policies or old-style eugenic sterilisation programmes, many argue that the development and provision of these services is driven by aims which are in some ways similar. Ruth Hubbard, a feminist critic of antenatal screening, puts the case in her essay provocatively titled 'Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Who Should Not Inhabit the World?':

'I am...not drawing an analogy between what the Nazis did and what others in many of the industrialised countries are now doing. Because the circumstances are different, different things are being done and for different reasons. But a similar, eugenic, ideology underlies what happened then and the techniques now being developed.'

Once again, the *Lancet* echoes these concerns: 'where a problem has been detected in the fetus, what pressures are there on the couple to opt for termination and what does the acceptance of prenatal diagnosis say for our tolerance of "preventable" disability or disability per se?'

In response to these concerns, the professional community has adopted what is termed a 'non-directive' approach to advice-giving in the context of genetic testing and screening services. The goal, as recently defined by a ▶

One of the best adverts for expanding our knowledge of human genetics is the progress being made in genetic testing and screening services offered to women, and sometimes couples, during pregnancy. Routine screening such as an ultrasound scan which turns up an abnormality may lead on to genetic testing. Families with a known risk of having a child with a particular genetic condition will commonly seek out antenatal genetic diagnosis. Other genetic tests are specifically targeted at those who are at the highest risk for other reasons—in the UK, for example, a test for Down's syndrome is now commonly offered to older pregnant women.

New genetic findings, and cheaper, more efficient and less invasive methods of testing are continually increasing the range of conditions for which screening is possible and feasible. But rather than celebrating this possibility, many people are worried; indeed, most commentators seem to accept that these inspiring developments are actually a problem, with troublesome and ethically sensitive implications.

One argument you hear is that, in offering women antenatal tests for fetal abnormality, and counselling them about the options if the tests reveal a problem, health professionals are directing women about what would be the best outcome of their pregnancy. As a result, it is said, services conflict with

## Supporters of genetic screening are anti-disability

◀ publication of the UK geneticists' professional body, is not to offer advice on what to do following a test result, but to help 'adjustment to this knowledge'.

Uniquely in medicine, the traditional measures used to evaluate the success of services are rejected in relation to genetic testing and screening. A public health physician, for example, might think of using reduced birth incidence of the disease being tested for antenatally, or at the very least the uptake rate of the test offered, to measure the success of a programme. But for geneticist Angus Clarke, such measures are out of the question: 'when carrier screening programmes are judged by the uptake rate achieved and by the money "saved" by terminating pregnancies, rather than by the impact of screening programmes on those being offered the test, we will know that cost-benefit-based "public health genetics" (eugenics) has truly arrived.' As an alternative to the usual public health measures, geneticists offer

Consider first the question of choice. Contrary to what the National Child-birth Trust (NCT) and others argue, all the evidence suggests that patients welcome both the service and a 'directive' approach.

The NCT's own report on the subject produced last year counts against their claim that people are pressurised into testing. Only 10 per cent of women reported feeling pressurised and only one per cent refused the tests. What is more, evidence suggests that people like what is commonly called 'directive' advice. A recent research paper (S Michie et al, 'Nondirectiveness in Genetic Counselling: An Empirical Study', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 60: 40-47, 1997) found that patients expressed satisfaction with the service even when different measures indicated they were being given 'directive' advice. Broadly, women want the service to be available because they want to avail themselves of the tests that are on offer, and they want geneticists to give them clear information, including such 'directive' information as the likely impact of having a child with a particular disorder.

Rather than restricting choice, a more aggressive promotion of the service in relation to certain important genetic disorders would significantly enhance choice. In the case of families with a known family history of a condition, it is the patients, not professionals, who are pushing for a more rigorous follow-up and the offer of testing to other family members. But some genetic disorders do not typically present themselves with a clear family history, and in these instances, geneticists could and should be playing a more active role.

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is a case in point. Approximately 1 in 25 of the population carries one defective gene for the condition. Fortunately, each of us has two copies of every gene (one from each parent), and so long as the other copy is normal we do not have the condition. What this means though is that many people are 'carriers'—in possession of one defective and one normally functioning gene—without knowing it. If two carriers have a child, there is a one in four chance that the child will be born with cystic fibrosis. Because of the probable absence of a clear family history, this is likely to come 'out of the blue'.

The fact that carriers are naive to the risk, and probably also to the reality of the condition, places an onus on professionals in such situations to play a particularly 'directive' role. In Scotland, but unfortunately not so much elsewhere,

pregnant women and their partners are offered carrier testing for CF. If both test positive, the next step is to test the fetus with the option of termination if it carries both genes. The rationale for this is clear. As Mary Porteus, a geneticist in Edinburgh, put it to me: 'instinctively I am not a screener', but since CF is a serious condition 'that can totally change a family's life', raising the issue with people is a sensible measure to take.

What about 'choice' in all this? From a 'non-directive' perspective, the promotion of carrier screening is considered tricky. The fact that it is done during pregnancy, which ensures a high take-up rate, is considered highly problematic, akin to a public health, 'eugenics' approach. But from the perspective of the families it makes perfect sense. The couple who are screened did not freely consider the issue in advance for themselves, in that it was raised with them by health professionals. But it is surely clear that their choices in life have been widened, rather than restricted, by information that enabled them to avoid the birth of a child with a serious illness. Couples do not thank geneticists for dropping a bombshell on them if it turns out that the fetus is carrying the condition, but most are nevertheless glad that they found out.

Contrary to expectations then, a more 'directive' approach would widen choice. But what about the other reason for adopting a 'non-directive' approach, the need to protect genetic science from the accusation of 'eugenics', or of discriminating against disabled people? Once again, a more forceful response from geneticists would be more fruitful.

It is widely acknowledged that genetic services would not have developed if women did not on the whole choose to terminate affected pregnancies. As specialist Helen Statham puts it:

'it is unlikely that prenatal diagnosis would have been researched in the way it is, just to give parents reassurance, or, if most parents with an abnormality chose, to continue pregnancy. The "enormous potential for the avoidance of serious genetic disease and congenital abnormality" (Weatherall, 1992), can only be realised in most cases if women who conceive fetuses with such genetic diseases or malformations terminate the pregnancy.' (p157 *Prenatal diagnosis: the human side*, ed. Lenore Abramsky and Jean Chappel, 1994)

Yet this is a truth that dares hardly be spoken in public. Geneticists acknowledge that a consequence of genetic screening programmes may be a reduction



the idea of restoring 'reproductive confidence' as a measure of success. By this they mean that couples at risk can make reproductive decisions 'confident in the knowledge that prenatal diagnosis offers them the possibility of healthy children'.

Geneticists are right to reject a crude public health, cost-centred, approach. However, their own perspective makes too many concessions to the critics of screening programmes, with the potential to cause more problems than solutions. A more combative response to criticisms would be more in line with the reality of people's expectations, as well as being a more fruitful way of promoting the further development of the service and the benefits of genetic science.

## only in so far as they think it is better not to have disease

in birth incidence of genetic diseases, but they forswear this as an aim. The report from the professional body for UK geneticists is clear on this: 'preventing transmission of genetic disease is not a primary aim of genetic counselling.' Professor Marcus Pembrey puts it like this: 'a reduction in birth incidence of a genetic disorder may be the consequence of genetic counselling and prenatal services, but it depends on what the parents choose to do.'

Of course nobody would want geneticists, or anybody else for that matter, telling women that they must terminate on receipt of a positive test result. Choice in this matter is most important. But in this instance, geneticists are to a degree hiding behind choice, with the unfortunate consequences that critical points are sometimes not rebutted, while a positive case for the broader benefits of genetics is hardly ever made.

Critics of genetic screening programmes conflate the desire for health, and hence an attitude which perceives living with a genetic disorder or disability as something best avoided, with negative attitudes towards disabled people. Wanting to prevent ill health in future generations is seen by critics to be the same as demeaning the lives of those who already suffer from genetic disorders or disability in the here and now. This is an unfortunate conflation; one which does not reflect the attitudes of parents or geneticists. In fact it is the opposite of the truth: supporters of genetic screening are anti-disability only in so far as they think it is better not to have disease. They believe that people living with a genetic disorder must be given equal rights, as people, and the resources they need to lead as full a life as possible.

These points should be obvious. That they are not accepted without question today is in part a consequence of the defensiveness associated with the 'non-directive' ethos. From this perspective, critics are rarely challenged, and the positive promise of genetics, its 'enormous potential for the avoidance of serious genetic disease and congenital abnormality', is rarely trumpeted, because it is (rightly but unfashionably) seen to embody a clear value judgement. As a result, genetic science and screening programmes continue to be dogged by the comparison with eugenics and the accusation of a bias against disabled people.

Individuals do and will continue to make choices faced with genetic risk. But a more 'directive', less defensive, approach from geneticists will increase those choices, and help foster a better understanding of the positive potential of genetic science. ●



# alt.culture . film

## Signs of the times

**'It's very mentally...er...mental'**  
 The philosopher formerly known as David Beckham, explaining—and demonstrating—how mentally exhausting football can be. All that shopping with Victoria, perhaps

**'People forget that Eric Cantona is a philosopher and pigeonhole him as just a soccer star'**  
 Eric's film co-writer "Saltz"

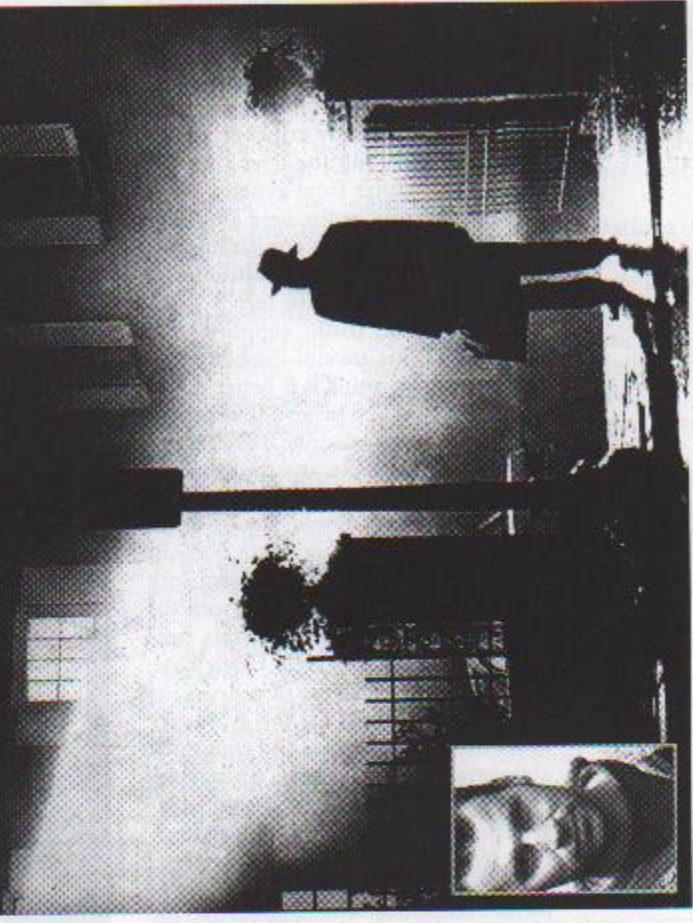
**'Roy Hodgson is adamant that we should rest as much as possible and encourages us not to rush around shopping or going out too much'**  
 England goalkeeper Tim Flowers, who is a keen gardener

**Exploring Parenthood, a counselling service, has set up a hotline for children frightened by the Gulf crisis; whether they will take reverse-charge calls from Baghdad is not known. ChildLine is similarly prepared**

Film critic and horror fan Mark Kermode told Andrew Calcutt why, as it nears its twenty-fifth birthday, *The Exorcist* still means a lot to him—and to those who have banned the video for 12 years

# HAUNTED BY THE EXORCIST

INSET PHOTO: DAVE COWARD



**T**he *Exorcist* came out when I was 11 years old. I remember being absolutely transfixed by the trailer. Here was some-

which opens at Olympia at the end of April, who insist that 'eroticism is an exploration in the mind'. Last time around, in November, Olympia was full of erotic candles, erotic wooden sculptures, erotic tattooing, erotic aromatherapy, erotic body piercing and erotic fashion. The punters, mainly young men in casual gear holding bottles of beer, remained unaroused by all this. An aerial view of the hall would have shown them converging, as though part of some pre-ordained plan, towards one tiny stall which was showing genuine pornography of the straightforward man-and-woman-on-a-bed variety. In the circumstances it seemed thoroughly subversive. But it was a terrible crush, and in the end it got a bit strong even for me—the smell of beer fumes, that is. As I was leaving a group of lads passed a peroxide-haired art student-type dressed up like a dog's dinner in PVC. 'She'd be all right if she had tits', one of them said, more in sorrow than in anger. ●

**Ed Barrett**  
 Erotica is at Olympia from 30 April to 3 May

COSTUME: VILDA LAIBER



## alt.culture . porn

# SEXILESS EROTIKA

In Europe sex exhibitions are commonplace, and all tastes are catered for: if you want hardcore, there are whole festivals devoted to it. But in Britain an exhibition cannot be about 'sex'; it has to be 'erotic', ie it has to pretend to be worthy and improving. British censorship laws also mean that we are exposed to a strange practice called 'simulated sex' in which genitals never touch, and penises, when seen at all, are safely shriveled. These laws were also a factor in the travesty known as the 1970s British 'sex comedy' (no sex, no comedy, lots of Arthur Mullard and dolly birds with nylon knickers).

Today we have something even less funny than sex comedies: a grimly cheerful 'alternative' eroticism. This means lots of tasteful bondage imagery, kinky PVC, rubber skirts, gay style, Aids ribbons and safe sex. One of the most depressing sights in early nineties Soho was when the Pussy Posse would turn up dressed in 'outrageous' gear and rush around demonstrating how to put a condom on (using an inanimate object, of course). Somehow they managed to make sex look oddly sexless. In the late nineties it is as if the Pussy Posse has taken over the world.

Anything goes except what most people get off on: heterosexual intercourse without dressing up like a plastic-skinned black pudding. Not that I am out to spoil anybody's fun. If certain costumes tickle your fancy, fine. But what about those of us who enjoy a good old-fashioned bunk-up. Who's looking out for us? Not the organisers of Erotica, the exhibition

'I was walking down Fifth Avenue, chatting to a friend. Someone walking behind us said, "Oh my God, did you hear that? Kate Moss can actually talk!" That's like, weird' Kate, like, Moss

'The old guys were playing hell that there was too much fettuccine and penne and not enough steak-and-kidney pie and stew. There are so many women in the place, the menu had got like a Kensington wine bar. They think three lettuce leaves and a spoonful of tuna is a good lunch. We don't'

Joe Ashron MP of the House of Commons caring committee. John Prescott is doing his bit by serving thick white sandwiches with margarine, ham and processed cheese to a delegation of ecological experts

However, Clare Short has insisted that the commons canteen serve only humanely produced Tiki Caffe. (The Bangladesh Observer recently referred to Short's visit as 'a significant milestone between our two countries')

thing that was new and different, that seemed shocking and dangerous, unlike the traditional Hammer horrors we were used to.

There were reports from America of people seeing the film and freaking out, fainting and vomiting. I was terrified of it and equally desperate to see it. It has always had that dual effect. It does scare me—I've never seen it and found it funny. On the other hand, it is an incredibly sweet and uplifting story about clearly defined right and wrong—which I do not believe in, but I find something nostalgically charming about it.

It is a film which is on the one hand absolutely repulsive and on the other hand deeply attractive; and it is the tension between the two which makes it so appealing.

I also think that the director William Friedkin was very insightful when he said it is a film that gives to you what you bring to it. His experience was that people would go to the movie and if they wanted to see horrible nastiness that is what they would see; if they wanted to see some spiritual dimension that is what they would see; if they wanted a political allegory about Nixon, Watergate and Vietnam in the early seventies, that is what they would see. One person wrote a famous essay saying it was about the homosexual bond between two priests who had to destroy the female in order to consummate their love—the point is that whatever you take to that film, it gives back to you. It is a lasting piece of cinema because, as very few movies can do, it reflects whatever you bring to it.

There is a genuine tension between the shocking and the enrapturing, between the vision of Friedkin who wants to make a riveting film and William Peter Blatty [author of the original novel and screenplay] who wants to make a straightforward Catholic tale. It is also like a good psychotherapy session. You go to *The Exorcist* and whatever has been welling up inside you comes out. So I think it is an infinitely interesting film and I am very depressed when people try to nail it down to one specific reading. It is like a great piece of poetry or a great pop song.

*The Exorcist* came out on video in the early eighties. Produced by Warners, it was a high quality, big-selling tape available in all the stores. It was not like *Driller Killer*, *Carnival Holocaust* or any of those, it was never considered a video nasty. In 1984 the Video Recordings Act came into effect, which

1986, and it should have been back again in six months. But it did not re-appear.

I started making inquiries to the BBFC [British Board of Film Classification]. I was told it had not been submitted for video classification. A year later: "the certification has not been activated, there is a backlog of other stuff to get through first." Another year: "it is a difficult title, we are dealing with it in a sensitive way." We got to 1989, Warners went to the BBFC and said can we have a certificate and the BBFC said no. But the BBFC were very sly. They never said they had banned it. They said the time is not right, there is satanic abuse going on—ludicrous excuses. Nine years later, the movie still does not have video certification. The BBFC has banned *The Exorcist* for 12 years, but they never liked to say so. They say it is not yet classified. The fact is that the viewers are not scared of *The Exorcist*, but the BBFC is.

The BBFC want us to wait until *The Exorcist* does not mean anything any more before they release it on video. The irony is that the longer they ban it, the more it continues to have meaning. I know teenagers who, if they had seen the film would say "well, it's all right—a couple of good bits, but not great", who think to this day that it would be the most terrifying experience they could have, precisely because they have not had it. The BBFC ban is self-perpetuating. If you say we are going to ban this movie until it no longer freaks people out, you are going to be waiting until doomsday. You ban something and you give it cache. I think James Ferman [BBFC director] has to take the bull by the horns and just pass it.

The problem they have is, when you ban something for 12 years, how do you step down? The only honest thing would be to just admit they were over-cautious. They are probably waiting for some major event, and I wonder if the twenty-fifth anniversary is the moment at which it will happen. But it is an important point: you do not sit on a certification for 12 years, you ban a movie for 12 years. And that will go down in the BBFC's records as one of the greatest political mistakes they ever made.

Mark Kermode's documentary *The Fear of God* on the making of *The Exorcist* and its lost scenes will be shown on BBC TV shortly. In August, a revised and extended version of his book *BFI Modern Classics: The Exorcist* will be published

alt.culture.Britain

# ALIEN NATION

n the run up to the thirtieth anniversary of Enoch Powell's infamous 'rivers of blood' speech on 21 April, I have been thinking about my parents and their experience of Britain as immigrants from India in the sixties. Turning to our family albums, I came across this photo of my mother and her three children (I am on the right), clustered around my father's first car. How relaxed and carefree she looks, and how healthy and content we children are. I expect my dad took the picture with his first camera, and had he been in the picture himself I bet he would have looked proud: the son of a school inspector under British rule in India, who had made a good life for himself and his family in Britain.

As a teacher in London, my father's salary of £80 a month enabled them to buy a car, a camera, a house—and also a plentiful supply of unadulterated good food, which would have been impossible in India at that time.

But a better standard of living was not the only reason for coming to Britain. My mother stresses that her motivation was to gain freedom and independence from the extended family. In India, even if they had enough money to rent their own place the social ties and traditions would have been too strong for newly-weds to break away. A separate home of their own was the biggest luxury of all.

Look at the air of ease and confidence which the photo exudes. My mother looks like she belongs. Indeed both she and my father felt at home in Swinging London. They went out and about without a second thought, even touring Europe with me (I was three) in tow. It struck me that in later photographs they rarely look as relaxed as this. Was it just that they were younger then?

When I asked them, they said they truly felt welcome in Britain then. The authorities were eager to recruit my father: there was ▶

PHOTO: VED SENGA.



# It's culture . alcohol

## Signs of the times

**'British governments have always taken a keen interest in revolutionary and radical movements'**

Press release from the Public Records Office for its

exhibition 'The Voice of the Multitude:

Uhrst and Radicalism in England 1790-1918'

**Among the fulsome tributes to Enoch Powell were some stranger**

remembrances. One person remembers explaining to Powell that JR was a soap opera character,

then having to tell him what soap operas were. Another remembers Powell coming to his parents' house. He came into the young boy's bedroom, picked up a potty from under the bed and sniffed it. When asked why, he said 'it is my job. I am the Minister of Health'

**In a documentary about the making of *Amistad*, Stephen Spielberg's film about slavery, the narrator says: 'The manacles were applied to the actors playing**

◀ no questioning the validity of either his qualifications or experience as a teacher in India. Arriving in Britain in 1963, they were excited. Isolated instances of petty racism could not spoil it for them. When they bought their first house in an all-white, respectable suburb the previous owners warned that the neighbours were against 'coloureds' moving in. But after my mother gave birth to my younger brother, one of these neighbours stopped her washing nappies by hand and insisted that they must be washed in the

neighbour's new washing machine. They still exchange Christmas cards 30 years later.

Yet London no longer represents freedom and independence to my parents. Today they feel excluded and unwelcome. Why? 'We didn't know then what we know now', replied my mother, 'which is that we are second class citizens'. I asked them when this dawned on them, half-expecting that Powell's speech might have changed their minds for them. They said the furore over Powell was not in the forefront of their thinking, even when it was happening.

The realisation that British society was excluding them did not come until later.

My father told me a story about how, in the mid-seventies, he was wondering whether to take up a teaching post in Africa and he asked a friend of his, who happened to be a Labour councillor, for advice. The councillor told my father, who by then had been made head of department at his school, that if he left Britain then he would never get such a good job again. Too true. Dad did go to Africa, and when he came back to Britain all he was

offered was supply teaching. In the intervening years the anti-immigrant culture was cemented into British society from the top down, without any need of Powell, and my parents have felt blocked out ever since.

My parents' experiences seem at odds with all the talk of Britain being a multicultural country nowadays. In spite of the plethora of anti-racist organisations they feel less confident about their position in British society now than they did in April 1968.

Alka Sehgal is an Essex girl

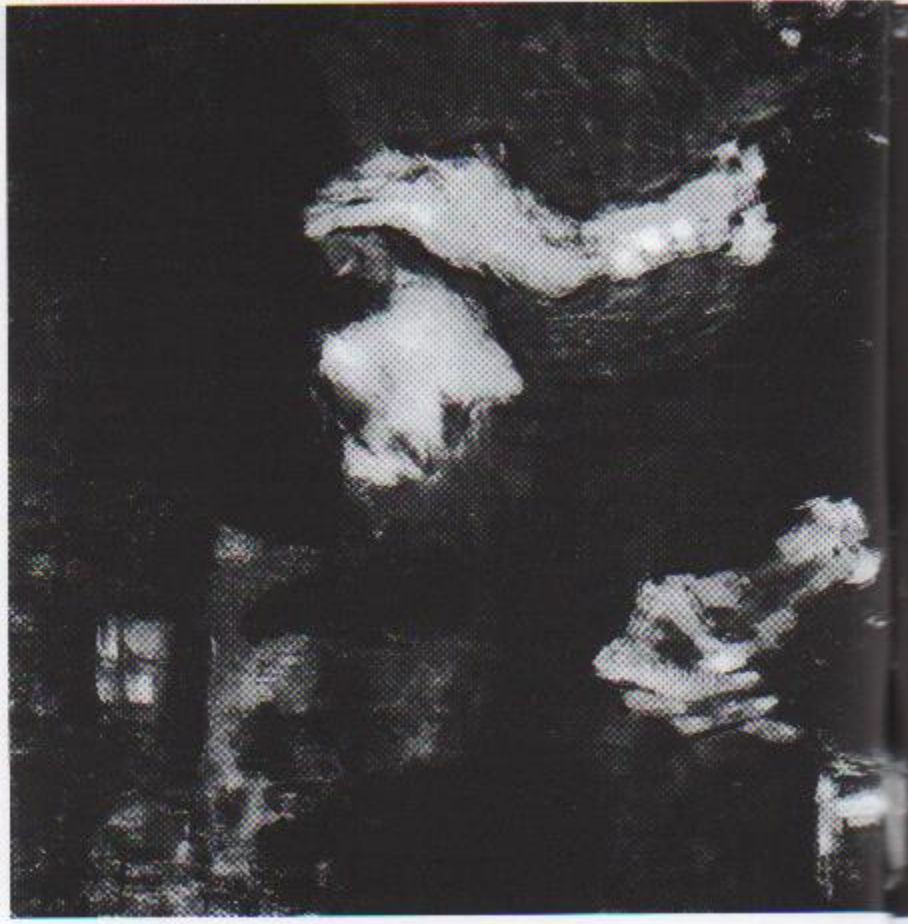
## ABSINTHE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER

**A**bsinthe. Even the name is delicious. It sounds dangerous and exotic, conjuring up images of the beautiful and the damned. Absinthe was the drink of choice for the great artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They painted it, wrote poetry about it, but mostly they drank enormous quantities of it. Toulouse Lautrec drank his from a hollowed-out walking stick. Alfred Jarry, author of the *Ubu* plays, painted himself green in homage to it. Oscar Wilde wrote that 'a glass of absinthe is as poetical as anything in the world'.

Absinthe was invented in Switzerland by the Henriot sisters and first manufactured in France by Henri Louis Pernod. After two disastrous grape harvests it became more popular—and cheaper than wine. By 1914, revenue from absinthe had risen to one per cent of the entire national budget. But opposition was also growing, led by embittered wine-makers, opportunistic politicians and a sensationalist

dis-tilled from wormwood and flavoured with anise, lemon balm, hyssop and fennel. The ingredients are soaked in ethanol alcohol and water. It has an unearthly bright green colour that holds the light, and can be drunk neat or more usually with water and sugar. The water is poured over the sugar and then stirred into the absinthe which then becomes cloudy. Better still, the sugar on the spoon can be dipped into absinthe, set on fire, and then slowly dripped into the glass.

Many drinkers report hallucinogenic effects and a heightened awareness of colours (the intense colours of Van Gogh's paintings have been attributed to his consumption of absinthe, as has the cutting off of his ear; but this is to ignore his schizophrenia and the history of mental illness in his family). If absinthe does contain a psychocative ingredient it is thujone, derived from wormwood, which has a similar molecular structure to cannabis.





slaves only by African-American crew members'

'If it's going to be a ceremonial office, I'm not interested. I've already got plenty of gold chains'

Peter Stringfellow, addressing the Oxford Union on his candidacy to be Mayor of London

press. The left criticised absinthe because it robbed the working class of dignity, the right associated it with amoral artists whose work they found offensive.

'Scientific' research carried out on animals and lunatics identified absinthe as a cause of hallucinations and criminal behaviour. When in 1905, a Swiss farmer shot dead his entire family after an absinthe binge, prohibition loomed. Absinthe was banned in Belgium (1905), Switzerland (1910), Holland (1910), and France (1914), where the demand for a sober fighting force finally tipped the balance. While all Europe was plunged into madness and savagery, it was outlawed as an uncivilised drink which could send you mad.

**Four years ago in this magazine, I wrote a review of CLR James's *Beyond a Boundary* in which I predicted the imminent decline of West Indian cricket while it was still on top. Today you cannot move for articles analysing the fall from grace. But when the pundits point to the influence of American satellite TV and the lionisation of basketball star Michael Jordan they are picking up on surface manifestations of the malaise. To reach the heart of the matter, you need to go back to James.**

CLR James was a black revolutionary and cricket lover who pointed out that the game of cricket was one of the greatest gifts of the oppressor to the oppressed—the other being the language of Shakespeare. But the great merit of cricket over Shakespeare is that alongside aesthetic pleasure there is also the possibility of humiliating the opposition. In a colonial context, this humiliation took on a particularly acute significance.

While British influence over the West Indies remained paramount, and while cricket was still regarded as the epitome of the British way of life, the triumph of West Indian cricketers over the MCC represented the triumph of the freed slave over the colonial administrator. The Windies got their own back not merely through crushing the England team but by transforming the way in which this most English of games was played.

It is very much to the point that the era of West Indian domination was ushered in by the appointment of the first ever black captain, Frank Worrell, in 1960. James himself had been in the forefront of the campaign which overturned the convention that a black team had

However, it is present in such small doses that it may not be an active agent. The reported hallucinogenic effects probably result from the high level of alcohol.

Nearly 10 years ago a Czech distiller, Radomil Hill, started producing absinthe once more. I first tasted it in Prague in 1993 (thanks to my friends there. I have had a fairly regular supply ever since). The first sip takes your head off: you can feel it burning its way down to your stomach. After the initial shock wears off, it becomes a very pleasant experience. For me at least, absinthe creates a calming mood. I read a report in *The Face* (March 1998) about 'mild mannered Canadians' getting into fist fights after drinking it, but this has probably more to do with them knocking into people

to be led by a white man. But just as cricket is no longer central to the idea of Britishness, so the idea of beating the British at cricket is no longer central to the self-image of Jamaicans, Bajans and others.

Cricket is now only another game, which must compete with the accessibility of basketball and the brilliance of stars like Michael Jordan, not to mention the sudden rise of Jamaica's footballing 'Reggae boyz', en route to this summer's World Cup finals. The downward shift in West Indian cricket is not just cyclical: it is akin to the ending of the days when the captain of the MCC could whistle down the nearest Northern mineshaft and a new fast bowler would emerge full of raw power and energy.

At the same time it is easy to exaggerate the decline of West Indian cricket. Even in the early days of their supremacy, the Windies suffered at the hands of Australian fast bowlers Lillee and Thompson. While not pre-eminent today, the West Indian team will remain competitive. Already the most gifted batsman alive (with the possible exception of India's Tendulkar), Lara will become a more astute captain. The absence of national purpose will make for a new ordinariness about cricket, which in turn will make for more tight finishes as in this year's England tour. No doubt this will prompt many more Brits to head off on expensive package tours dreaming of ice cold drinks and hot women. Ironically, it may be the beetroot British tourist and his pounds sterling who will ensure that cricket does not die in the Caribbean.

Alan Hudson

with their rucksacks. After drinking absinthe I have strange dreams: vivid, surreal and usually pornographic; and I tend to agree that it might contain something extra.

As far as I can tell, absinthe was never banned in Britain. When production stopped in France, supplies simply ran out. It is available in Barcelona if you know where to look, and I have heard that people make their own in a few other places. An original bottle of

pre-war Pernod recently went for several thousand pounds at auction, and there is definitely a resurgence of interest in this delightful drink. *Fin de siècle* madness, boredom with the same old techno-drugs, or just people fed up with being forced to stay healthy—whatever it is, I'm all for it.

**John Moore's** band Black Box Recorder release their first single 'Child Psychology' (Chrysalis) on 13 April



# ONLY A GAME

B.L.T.C.R.I.E. cricket

# alt.culture.food THE DARK STUFF

**Easter is a reminder that real chocolate is one of the most sensuous pleasures in life. I am not talking here about corner-shop confectionery, which has more to do with sugar, milk and margarine than the cocoa bean (though I do like Kit-Kats). As for the creme egg, I have to agree with Roald Dahl, author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, who described it as 'the blandest and most disgusting thing of all'. The hens which lay them must be kept in terrible conditions.**

The first sign of good chocolate is that it has not been produced in Britain. Belgium, France and Switzerland are the world powers in this field. Cadbury's were recently forced to withdraw their Swiss Chalet bar when it was held that the adjective 'Swiss' implied a quality which the product did not match. Look also for a high cocoa solid content (above 60 per cent in the case of dark chocolate). Vegetable fat should not appear in the list of ingredients. Best quality chocolate will look glossy and snap crisply when you break it. As it melts, it will coat your tongue with a rich, dark, bitter-sweet intensity, leaving you craving for more.

## Warm baked chocolate puddings (serves four)

150g best quality plain chocolate (Lindt Excellence or Valrhona), plus four small pieces

15g unsalted butter, plus extra for ramekins

3 medium eggs, separated

3 tbspcaster sugar

1 tbspcaster sugar or dark rum

Extra caster sugar for dredging

Butter four ramekins and dredge with caster sugar to prevent the puddings from sticking. In a bowl placed over a pan of simmering water, gently melt the chocolate with the butter. Allow to cool slightly. Mix the egg yolks, brandy or rum and the sugar, and stir into the melted chocolate.

Beat the egg whites until they form soft peaks. Add a spoon of the egg white to the remaining chocolate mixture to loosen, and then carefully fold the chocolate into the remaining egg white, retaining as much volume as possible. Spoon into the ramekins, cover with cling film and refrigerate for two hours. Remove from the fridge, take off the cling film, and place on a baking tray. Insert a small piece of chocolate into the centre of each pudding and then bake for 10 minutes in a preheated oven at 200°C. Allow to cool on a wire rack for 10 minutes before turning out. Serve with *crème fraîche*.

Crisp on the outside and with a molten centre, this is chocolate at its most wicked. ●  
© Neil Aspinall is a chef

# WHOSE WAR IS IT ANYWAY?

The Dangers of the  
Journalism of Attachment

MICK HUME

'a fierce and trenchant

pamphlet...Hume makes

a devastating attack on the

"journalism of attachment",

especially as applied to

the war in Bosnia'

JOHN SIMPSON,

BBC WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR

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# READING

## BETWEEN THE LINES

AIDAN CAMPBELL challenges the view that if slaves helped build civilisation it is not worth having

## WHY SHOULD SLAVERY DAMN MODERNITY?

### THE SLAVE TRADE: THE HISTORY OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE 1440-1870

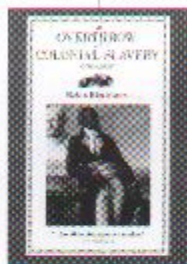
Hugh Thomas  
Picador, £25 hbk

CAN BEING A SLAVE EVER BE 'A GOOD THING'? Not since the French Revolution of 1789 made freedom a reality. We find it easy to choose between the options of slavery or freedom. Yet in pre-Revolution times, the choice was frequently between being enslaved and being killed. In fact selecting slavery is the better option here. When mankind lived like an animal, only bestial methods were available to lift humanity out of the mire. And that made slavery a more progressive option than being slaughtered. Moreover, history shows that slavery can take many different forms: from the slave who labours all day and night in the mines until he dies, to the Mameluke soldier slaves who ruled Egypt and dominated the Middle East in the fourteenth century. Would the world be a better place without the scientific and cultural achievements of ancient Greece and Islam? Without slavery we would not have had them.

Yet increasingly these days the conclusion is drawn that, if they involved slavery, then we would have been better off without the immense contributions to human culture made by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. This is why, for example, Debbie Allen, the producer of the recently released anti-slavery film *Amistad*, can state that African culture is 'far beyond and centuries ahead' of America's. African culture is assumed to be far more modern than America's

### THE OVERTHROW OF COLONIAL SLAVERY 1776-1848

Robin Blackburn  
Verso, £17 pbk



### THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY: FROM THE BAROQUE TO THE MODERN 1492-1800

Robin Blackburn  
Verso, £15 hbk

because the continent was the main victim of the Enlightenment's institution of slavery.

It is indeed true that slavery during the embryonic stages of capitalism was far more barbaric and extensive than under any previous system. As Karl Marx said, the market system came into life dripping in blood from head to foot. But its ferocity was a product of its vastly greater dynamism. For the same reason it was also more civilised than any previously existing order. Most significantly, for all its ghastly crimes, capitalist society at least held up the prospect of humanity advancing to a consistently civilised world. Even when viewed in its most romanticised light, no pre-modern society ever remotely offered that possibility.

In a weak reply to the prevailing anti-modern temperament, Hugh Thomas makes the point that slavery had been an institution in Africa for millennia before Portuguese explorers began to venture down the African coast early on in the fifteenth century, and he points to evidence of the enslavement of bushmen in Lower Egypt in 8000 BC (p25). One can go much further back than this, since humanity originated in Africa and slavery was one of the first instances of the division of human labour.

However, this rational point does not justify Thomas' claim that the anti-slavery policy pursued by Britain from 1815 to 1832 was the most humanitarian foreign ►

## THE VERY FACT OF THE CIVIL WAR INDICATES THAT CAPITALISM IN AMERICA COULD NOT ONLY SURVIVE WITHOUT SLAVERY, BUT THAT AMERICA COULD GO ON TO BECOME THE WORLD'S MOST PROSPEROUS COUNTRY EVER

◀ policy ever conducted. Evidence of African slavers from that period seems to make Thomas' point that Britain was a force for good in the eradication of slavery. But in truth abolitionism only served as a pretext for colonisation—to the point where Britain seized most of Africa to set it free.

Thomas acquits Europe of responsibility for slavery by saying that everybody else was just as bad, but Robin Blackburn relishes the special culpability of the European Enlightenment. For Blackburn, 'the Enlightenment was not so antagonistic to slavery as was once thought' (p590). Whereas Thomas sees no connection between free market industrial capitalism and slavery, Blackburn is determined to prove the link since, for him, the intensification of slavery as capitalism developed places a question mark against the whole project of modernity.

Blackburn carefully lists those features of capitalism which he associates most closely with its slave plantations in the Americas: the growth of instrumental rationality; the rise of the nation state; the spread of market relations and wage labour; the development of administrative bureaucracies and modern tax systems; the growing sophistication of commerce and communication; the birth of consumer societies; and, finally, the 'individualist sensibility' (p4). He then demonstrates the persistence of slavery 'well into the nineteenth century', argues that 'the spread of philosophical enlightenment, the advent of industrialisation and the eruption of revolution was, for a time, compatible with a continuing growth of slave populations and a mounting total of slave produce' (pp590-1) and adds a footnote for good measure that records the existence of 'many millions' of child labourers in the mid-1990s, which is a form of 'thinly veiled slavery' (p593). His book concludes that 'anti-slavery could not make substantial advances until the sacred rights of private property were challenged' (p591). Contrary to Thomas, Blackburn's aim is to show that modernity achieves its most perfect form in slavery, rather than under free labour, and therefore modernity itself must be rejected.

*The Making of New World Slavery* is Blackburn's second book about slavery. His first, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, was published 10 years ago. It was a record of the anti-slavery struggles instigated by the example of the French Revolution and in particular emphasising the vanguard role played by the slaves of the Caribbean island of St Domingue in creating the free republic of Haiti in 1804. *The Making of World Slavery* was supposed to be the sequel to this legacy, considering 'the character and dynamic of the new slave systems and of the new anti-slavery challenges they faced' (*The Overthrow*, p548). But in fact the final date in the title of the latest book only goes up to the year 1800. The expansion of slavery in nineteenth century America and

its abolition in the aftermath of their 1861-1865 civil war is not dealt with by Blackburn. The very fact of the civil war indicates that capitalism in America could not only survive without slavery, but that America could go on to become the world's most prosperous country ever. It is pointed that Blackburn's original focus on the resistance to slavery must now take a back seat to the more pessimistic focus on the problems of modernity.

While Thomas imagines we already live in a free society, Blackburn develops his anti-modern critique by trying to locate who is interested in abolishing modern society and who wishes to maintain it. He warms to the alternative routes to development suggested by small producers 'including farmers and manufacturers' (*Making of New World Slavery*, p515). On the other hand, he constantly blames the dynamism of the 'modern' plantation slave system on the rapacious demands of mass consumers of 'drugs and stimulants' like tobacco and coffee, and purchasers of cotton for popular apparel (p19). In Blackburn's eyes, smokers and other greedy consumers are part of the problem of slavery, too. Under the rubric that everything is connected, Blackburn is laying a complaint against everything modern, from smoking to mass consumption. To this extent slavery is made the exemplar of everything that has gone wrong in the modern world.

Aidan Campbell is the author of *Western Primitivism: African Ethnicity* (Cassell)

ADAM HIBBERT finds that evolutionary psychologists and their critics share some prejudices about humanity

## NURTURING NATURE

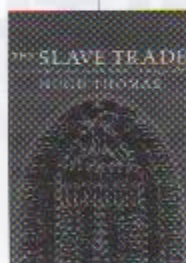
### HOW THE MIND WORKS

Steven Pinker, Penguin, £25 hbk

### LIFELINES: BIOLOGY, FREEDOM, DETERMINISM

Steven Rose, Penguin, £20 hbk

EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY EXAMINES THE psyche through Darwin's spectacles, treating our mental complexity as another of those little marvels of natural selection. As Steven Pinker puts it, 'The mind is a system of organs of computation . . . their operation was shaped by natural selection to solve the problems of the hunting and gathering life led by our ancestors in most of our evolutionary history'. Just as evolution explains the pincers or bat sonar by finding fitness conditions to select



**FOR ROSE, IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH DNA AND THE WORD WAS DNA...ALL THINGS WERE MADE BY DNA; AND WITHOUT DNA WAS NOT ANYTHING MADE THAT WAS MADE. IN DNA WAS LIFE...**

the genes for them, evolutionary psychology wants to explain our minds by the mental fitness conditions of our Stone Age past, and their genetic bequest to us.

*How the Mind Works* is a sophisticated and accessible survey of this young science, from MIT's top cognitive scientist, Steven Pinker. It is a hefty, highly-readable book, the author moving engagingly between the roles of populariser and boffin. Scientifically correct academics have reacted venomously: Pinker's account of the genetic calculus of infanticide among hunter-gatherers has been interpreted, in the press and in the rhetoric of sociologist Tom Shakespeare, as an argument for murdering disabled babies.

Yet Pinker is not easily dismissed as an old-style Social Darwinist. In the past biological inheritance was used as a pseudo-scientific justification of social inequality, on the grounds that income differences could be explained by genetic differences. Pinker is different: the emergence of his discipline is inexplicable without reference to rather more contemporary insecurities than those of racial supremacists. As sociologist Howard Kaye has noted, far from excusing the status quo, 'the aim of current efforts is instead to transform the human self-conception by translating our lives and history back into the language of nature, so that we might once again find a cosmic guide' to steer us through our insecure times. It is the promise of such a totalising account of human society that drives Pinker and company; and it is this aspect of evolutionary psychology that most offends his relativist critics.

In this regard, evolutionary psychology should be understood as a reaction to sociology's retreat from any big picture. Pinker and colleagues are easily identified by their rejection of what they term the Standard Social Science Model (SSSM). The SSSM (while variously attributed to Marxists, the New Left, or feminism) is most succinctly stated by that seminal theorist, Emile Durkheim; that human nature counts in sociology as merely the indeterminate material that the social factor moulds and transforms.

Pinker's attempt at an assault on the SSSM deploys two main analytical tools; first and best is the computational theory of cognition. This method has revolutionised the cognitive sciences, previously confined to studying inputs and outputs of the mind (behaviourism), enabling psychologists and neuroscientists to model the inner mechanisms of cognition and the brain. The mind is treated functionally as a set of modules which employ simple rules to process information, like subroutines in a program. The excitation of neurons is treated much as the on/off bits of computing science.

It is the extraordinary power of the computational theory that makes *How the Mind Works* such a

compelling book. For one example, Pinker successfully lays bare the operations that together perform the incredibly complex task of vision, by which humans and other animals translate stimuli to their retinal cells into basic internal models of the world around them.

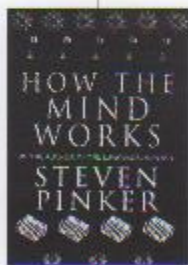
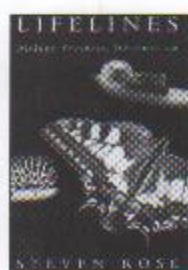
But despite many such masterful and rewarding analyses in the opening chapters, Pinker's evolutionary psychology is no alternative to the flawed Standard Social Science Model. In fact, in so far as Pinker seeks to give an evolutionary account of social relationships, he only repeats the worst deficiencies of the sociological approach.

What Pinker and the SSSM have in common is a tendency to take human subjectivity out of the picture, and see men as the mere puppets of forces outside of them. In the one case those forces are impersonal sociological factors, in the other natural forces. Pinker just gives a better account of what Durkheim's indeterminate material runs on. The computational theory is not, almost by definition, a study of consciousness: it traces how information might be processed in neural networks in the brain, not what relation subjectivity might have to such processes. On its own, it says nothing about whether a 'program' is built by nature or by nurture, nor to what extent a subject or a society may intervene to 'rewrite' that program.

PINKER'S SECOND ANALYTICAL TOOL, 'REVERSE-engineering' is meant to carry us over the dead end that faces any experimentation into the line between nature and nurture. 'In forward engineering, one designs a machine to do something; in reverse-engineering, one figures out what a machine was designed to do.' This seems fair play at first glance; but to work adequately, one needs first to answer the question of what features the machine has, and Pinker begs it: 'The mind is an exquisitely organised system that accomplishes remarkable feats no engineer can duplicate. How could the forces that shaped that system, and the purposes for which it was designed, be irrelevant to understanding it? Evolutionary thinking is indispensable...in the form of careful reverse-engineering.'

The difficulty is this: the forces and purposes that have shaped the human mind (and brain) are assumed to be just exactly those forces and purposes which apply in biology, the natural selection of genes. In other words, the mind that Pinker sets about reverse-engineering already stands defined as the product of genetic evolution. Pinker assumes from the outset that the mind is a genetic product and, amazingly, that is what he concludes too.

Despite disclaimers, Pinker actually reinforces his reductionist project in the modestly entitled closing chapter, 'The Meaning of Life'. Anything that reverse-engineering must strain to encompass can be chalked ►



◀ up to unselected side-effects of adaptive capacities. Here may sit the gay gene, otherwise something of a contradiction in terms (think about it). Pinker is keen on research into whether the 'gay gene' is an artefact of one that is 'for' something else, perhaps early puberty in females. Since whole chunks of human experience can be swept under this carpet, including subjectivity itself, this is less than satisfactory.

It is to just such misapplications of the evolutionary sciences (and of the reductionist method) that Steven Rose's book, *Lifelines*, is addressed. Rose, as much as Pinker, is engaged in a polemic against the orthodoxy, though his target is the gene-centrism of contemporary biology, and so also the alleged gay gene or IQ gene discoveries that regularly infuriate sociologists. Rose gives a neat caricature of such theory by inviting us to replace God with DNA in the first verses of St John's gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with DNA and the Word was DNA...All things were made by DNA; and without DNA was not anything made that was made. In DNA was life...

THE MAIN ARGUMENT OF *LIFELINES* IS TO expose the heart of genetic determinism's logical weakness: its abuse of the reductionist method. Rose thinks it wrong to imagine that all higher levels of description to be in some sense captured within or reducible to more fundamental ones: as one molecular biologist puts it, 'There is only one science, physics—everything else is social work.'

This deconstruction of levels of description into their lower building blocks is not universally useful: 'at each level new interactions and relationships appear between the component parts—relationships which cannot be inferred simply by taking the system to pieces.' (p93) The Grand Unified Theory quested for in modern physics will not explain the objects of 'higher' sciences. Unhappily, Rose indulges in some cosmic guidance of his own. With his version of autopoiesis (from the Greek self-construction), he smuggles in a peculiar metaphysics. This version of autopoiesis is to explain why it is in the very nature of life and living processes themselves that we, as living organisms and specifically as humans, are free agents.

The irony of this excursion is that, against every other principle Rose holds dear, it radically undermines any distinction between humanity and the natural world; perhaps more effectively than Pinker ever could. Where Pinker unintentionally confesses to a sort of Dualism, that natural and ethical realms remain 'two self-contained systems played out among the same entities in the world', Rose's autopoiesis transplants something like human subjectivity into nature. By conflating the natural world with the social Rose obscures the workings of both. ●

HENRY JOY McCRACKEN peers into the Underworld

## THE AFTERMATH OF PARANOIA

UNDERWORLD

Don DeLillo, Picador, £18 hbk

'The missiles remained in their rotary launchers. The men came back and the cities were not destroyed'. So writes American novelist Don DeLillo near the beginning of *Underworld*. The book stretches from one fateful summer afternoon in the 1950s to the deserts of the American west at the beginning of this decade; from the beginning of the Cold War to the aftermath of paranoia.

*Underworld* starts with a famous baseball game—a match that seemed certainly lost until striker Bobby Thomson hits a last long shot which wins the game. This, we are told, was 'the shot that was heard round the world'; and in the stalls watching is J Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI. Midway through the match an agent comes to him with the news that the Soviet Union has exploded an atomic bomb. Both events appear on the front page of the next day's *New York Times*, side by side; the end of post-war certainty and the beginning of the long cold winter of threats and counter-threats. DeLillo sees the importance of the game as something that 'binds.. to a memory with a protective power', which 'keeps us safe in some undetermined way'. DeLillo's *Underworld* is history in the miniature, the secret histories of individuals bound together in crowds.

Bobby Thomson's ball catapults into the stands and into the hands of a black kid who has sneaked into the game—and from there the ball drills through pages of the novel.

The feeling hanging over 'Underworld' is not the nervous claustrophobia of his earlier works—it is a different feeling, a sense that this has passed and we are now entering a new period. One of his characters describes the Cold War as 'greatness, danger, terror, all those things. And it held us together, the Soviets and us. Maybe it held the world together...violence is undone, violence is easier now, it's uprooted, out of control, it has no measure any more, it has no level of values'. DeLillo does not judge this change, he offers no pronouncement on it. But it is clear from his work that at its heart there is a deep and fundamental love of language and words, a yearning to divine reason and order, a belief in the miracle of the everyday—a belief that can even survive the aftermath of paranoia. ●





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