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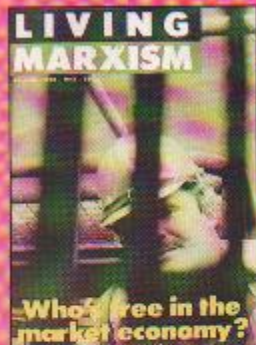
**How to make a
REVOLUTION**

Bucharest, Romania
December 1989





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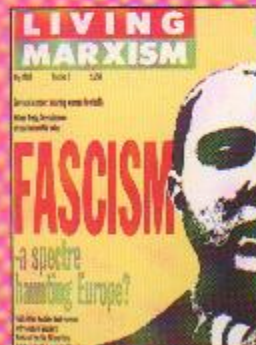
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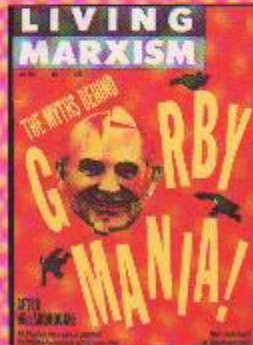
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LIVING MARXISM

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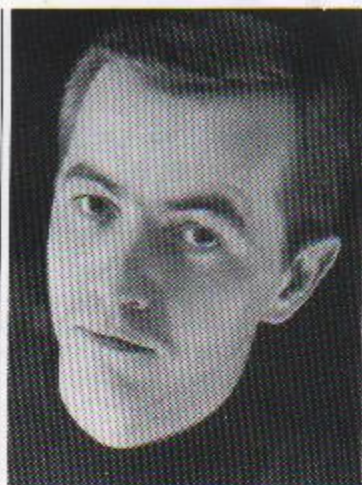
Living Marxism fully supports the revolution in Eastern Europe. We only wish that it would start.

Contrary to the new wisdom, 1989 was not the 'year of revolution' in East Germany, Czechoslovakia or even in Romania. A revolution must involve more than pulling down a wall or shooting a tyrant, positive steps though these be. Nor was 1989 the year when Marxism died. Communism and Nicolae Ceausescu are not the same thing.

The past year has been one in which we have seen the *potential* for revolution in Eastern Europe, as the Stalinist order shakes and people demand their freedom. But we still await the overthrow of the old power structures, most of which remain intact.

● The upheavals which have destroyed Stalinism have also confirmed, rather than discredited, some central propositions of Marxism: most importantly, the belief that only the revolutionary action of the majority, the working class, can liberate humanity. If the job of changing society is entrusted to state officials, administrators and parliamentarians working from the top down, as it has been so far in Eastern Europe, the result can only be a reformed version of the old restrictive system.

Romania has been the scene of the most dramatic and bloody upheaval in the East, and the overthrow of the Ceausescu has been hailed as the most complete revolution by left and right alike in the West. In fact, the pace of events in Romania has made it the clearest example of how the recent changes fall short of a revolution that could truly transform society. It is well worth reviewing what has happened in Romania, since



MICK HUME
EDITOR

MAKING A REVOLUTION

it crystallises the process at work across Eastern Europe.

The Romanian people inspired us over Christmas, as they took to the streets armed with whatever weapons they could find to fight first the army and then Ceausescu's secret police. The Securitate were beaten, but the people were denied their victory.

When the smoke of the street battles cleared, what was different about the exercise of power in Romania? The system's political façade had certainly changed. Ceausescu, the individual most strongly

identified with the past, was dead, and his corrupt Communist Party was finished. But look behind the façade, at the foundations of state power and at the state's relationship with the mass of the population. Here, nothing fundamental has changed.

The new government has been staffed by many old Stalinists, joined by some members of the professional classes. Whatever the disputed details of how this came about, it now seems certain that the nucleus of the ruling National Salvation Front had existed for some

time within the old order, waiting to assume control once the tide turned against Ceausescu. They stepped in (with no popular mandate) when the uprising began, and implemented changes which were closer in many ways to a purge than a revolution, promoting new ministers and officials from within and around the Stalinist regime.

The preponderance of 'ex-communists' in the front ranks of the National Salvation Front government has caused considerable disquiet in Romania, especially among the young. But the problem goes much

deeper than the political history of a few individuals in the leadership. With the exception of the Securitate, Ceausescu's state machine remains essentially intact.

Regardless of who now heads a ministry, the senior civil servants who really run the show are still the same people who managed Romania for the old dictator. And the army, now hailed as a liberator after its battles with the police, is commanded by the same officers as it was when it opened fire on the first demonstration in Timisoara in late December.

These institutions, the administrative bureaucracy and the armed forces, are the strongest arms of any state which serves the interests of a ruling minority. Breaking these old power structures is the key to any revolution which seeks to create a new system under the genuine control of the majority. The fact that they still stand in Romania is testimony to the limited character of the changes that have taken place.

Changing some faces and some titles (for example, replacing the politburo of the Communist Party with the executive committee of the National Salvation Front) does not alter the fact that a state machine built to protect privilege cannot simply be converted into a weapon for democracy. It must be replaced.

Of course an entire state bureaucracy could not be abolished overnight by decree. But the first step of a revolution must be to smash the authority of the oppressors' state and empower new institutions under popular control. By contrast, the self-appointed government in Romania has sought to exclude working class people from any positions of influence, and to insulate the structures of the state from any serious damage.

Old Stalinists like NSF minister Silviu Brucan have made it clear that they fear and despise the working class as a 'conservative force' and that only sympathetic intellectuals will be invited to join the machine men in the corridors of power. The NSF has introduced some tentative reforms, such as the promise of elections. But it is also employing familiar methods to help secure its hold on the state: using its control over TV to promote its own election campaign and marginalise its

the streets for 'security reasons'. These attempts to guarantee the state a monopoly on armed force and political action are the classic commandments of those who want to restrain the march towards revolution, not to lead it onwards.

The conservative character of the changes that have so far occurred in Eastern Europe is reflected in the intellectual mood of those societies. A great social revolution, such as occurred in France in 1789 or in

parties were able to exploit this backlash to gain support and take power. Today the process is working in reverse.

The Stalinist dictatorships have blackened the name of socialism and progress for decades, and created conditions in which many people will even turn to the pre-war ways for an alternative. So instead of revolutionary institutions being thrown up, we see the old king of Romania creeping back on to the stage. And instead of new forms of popular political organisation

The first step of a revolution must be to smash the authority of the oppressors' state. But the self-appointed government in Romania has sought to insulate the state from serious damage

opponents, giving new political parties just five days to register with the authorities, etc.

If there is to be revolutionary change in Romania and across Eastern Europe, it will depend upon the organised political activity of those with the biggest stake in transforming society—the working class. And it will require the power of armed workers to force it through against the powerful defenders of the past. Yet even before the sound of gunfire had died in Bucharest, the new government had ordered ordinary people to hand in their weapons. In January the regime told people not to demonstrate but to stay off

Russia in 1917, brings forth a flood of new ideas and experiments in art and culture as well as politics and society. In Eastern Europe today, however, the crisis is accompanied by the intensification of reaction: nationalism and chauvinism (such as Romania's persecution of its Hungarian minority), religion, monarchism, racism and all manner of other backward ideas are on the march.

Much of the responsibility for this lies with the Stalinists. At the end of the Second World War, the kings and capitalist governments of Eastern and Central Europe were widely discredited by their links with fascism and militarism. The Stalinist

for the nineties, we see the revival of the old National Peasant Party, pledging to turn the clock back further and rebuild Romania on the moral foundations of 'the church and the villages'.

It is possible to argue that, despite these swings from right to left and now back to right again, much has remained unchanged in a Central European state like Romania down the years. Many of the old fascist policemen and bureaucrats became Stalinists and ran the new regimes after the war. Now their heirs are turning coats once more, and changing from Ceausescu loyalists into the backbone of the new anti-communist administration. The labels

have been switched, and much turmoil has accompanied these transfers. But the essential channels of power which dominate the working class have survived. Most of the reformers in government in Eastern Europe today are trying to ensure that they survive once more, by overseeing a controlled and calm transition to a modified version of the old system.

The limited character of the upheavals, the relative stability of state power, and the rise of reaction; these are the aspects of events in

power. That's why the Western media were prepared to play up Romania as a great revolutionary struggle for freedom, while playing down the battle against the US occupation of Panama where, it now seems, at least as many people were killed. But British politicians and newspapers still had their reservations; they were not too keen on executing the Ceausescu, and not at all keen on the Romanians' demands for more executions, or on the spectacle of stropky young workers guarding the streets

establish parliamentary democracy were the order of the day 300 years ago, when the English beheaded Charles I. But today, when all power is invested in the executive state and parliament is reduced to a puppet show, who could look a Romanian in the eye and tell them that they should be prepared to die for the privilege of watching prime minister's question time on the TV twice a week? To achieve real freedom and progress in the nineties, the Romanian revolution will need to set its sights

which the Western governments found most disturbing: the way in which ordinary people rose to an extraordinary situation, organising themselves to face an armed force, taking control of streets, demanding that their enemies be ruthlessly dealt with as an example to all. These are the fighting qualities of which real revolutions and new societies are made.

The ruling hypocrites of the West whined about the violence which the people used in Romania, and no doubt these sentiments influenced many others in Britain. We, however, have no hesitation in stating that there was not enough violence. We do not suffer from blood-lust; but we are certain that it would have taken a far more sustained assault against all the forces of reaction to have truly revolutionised the Romanian system.

What was most positive about Romania was that which the Western governments found most disturbing

Eastern Europe which appeal to the Western powers. That is why Romania is the West's kind of 'revolution'. Thatcher, Bush and the rest like to see a good anti-communist backlash which they can use for propaganda purposes at home. But, at the same time, they don't really want to see unpredictable mass revolts and the revolutionary overthrow of states anywhere—especially when the state has been as useful to the West as Ceausescu's Romania.

From the point of view of the Western authorities, the Romanian events struck just about the right balance: popular anti-communism without the populace taking

of Bucharest with guns and refusing to show any respect to the foreign correspondents of the British press corps. Steady on chaps, as the *Guardian* leader put it, 'Revolutions have to be realistic' (6 January).

Marxists always take a realistic attitude towards the question of revolution. It is not realistic to believe that you can achieve liberation under the rule of the same state which has been responsible for your oppression. Nor is it realistic to imagine that reforms which create a parliamentary system in Romania are sufficient to empower ordinary people.

Revolutions fought to

considerably higher than opening a parliamentary talking shop under the watchful eye of Ceausescu's former lieutenants.

Romania and the rest of Eastern Europe need a revolution that goes much further, through which the masses can break the state, take power into their own hands, and organise themselves to control society and to stave off counter-revolution. The recent upheavals have demonstrated that the situation is ripe for such a revolution—and shown the working classes taking some inspiring steps towards establishing control.

What was most positive about Romania was that

That revolutions are violent is a fact of history, given by the refusal of the ancien regime to hand over the reins with a handshake. To oppose the liberatory use of force is to accept that there can be no escape to the future from the prison societies built by the violent rulers of the past.

The situation in Romania and Eastern Europe is a long way from being stabilised yet. Dissatisfaction with those in government is growing, and may well erupt as the shortages and restrictions intensify. When people demand more fundamental change and some meaningful democracy, they will quickly come up against those same states which pose as revolutionary regimes today. I hope that the working class heroes of Romania have ignored the orders from the National Salvation Front, and held on to their guns.



Q: What have Jason Donovan and The Man Who Owns Harrods (left) got in common?

A: Neither of them subscribes to Living Marxism.

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1978: Ceausescu's state visit to Britain

When 'Dracula' dined with the Queen

When Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu fell, the British media damned him as 'Dracula'. Yet back in 1978, Andrew Calcutt reports, Ceausescu was knighted by the Queen and feted by the British establishment

'President Ceausescu began his state visit in traditional style yesterday when he drove with the Queen in an open carriage from Victoria station to Buckingham Palace....President Ceausescu will stay at Buckingham Palace until Friday morning.' (*Times*, 14 June 1978)

Twelve years ago, Nicolae Ceausescu became the first 'communist' leader granted the privilege of a full-blown official visit to Britain ('a state visit, mind, not a head of government one' noted Bernard Levin in the *Times*). The procession in Ceausescu's honour jammed the centre of London for two hours. Police blocked off 70 roads. Labour prime minister James Callaghan, opposition leader Margaret Thatcher, and many other pillars of the British establishment lined up to shake his hand. The Queen gave him an honorary knighthood.

Freedom fighter!

With British Council exhibitions in Bucharest, 'a hundred years of Romanian art' at London's Somerset House, and talk of cultural centres and a standing committee for discussing problems of mutual interest, Britain's relations with Ceausescu were as warm as a June afternoon. So what was it that made the man whom they would later brand as a butcher so popular with the British press and politicians back in 1978?

It is ironic that the authorities in Britain and other Western nations should have singled out Ceausescu as the last bastion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe in 1989. Back in 1978, they singled out the Romanian dictator as the nearest thing to a democrat among the Eastern regimes, because of his cool relations with Brezhnev's Soviet Union.

Britain invited Ceausescu on a

state visit partly as a propaganda exercise, to demonstrate the West's support for independence from 'Soviet tyranny' (with Ceausescu cast in the role of Romanian freedom fighter), and partly for shabby commercial reasons, to seal a lucrative deal between the Romanian government and British Aerospace.

'Romania is resisting an attempt to integrate its economy more closely with the rest of the Soviet bloc', noted the *Guardian* with some glee. A leader in the *Times* commended Ceausescu's 'real courage' in refusing to join the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and refusing to break off relations with Israel in 1967 (after that state's US-backed invasion of its Arab neighbours): 'Romania has consistently championed the rights of smaller nations and provided a valuable example of how to resist unnecessary deference to the Soviet Union....Not only courage but skill too, have been necessary in judging how far and how fast to go.'

Gorby prototype

The British Labour government seemed to share this view of Ceausescu as a skilful world statesman with valued opinions. The state visit included two sessions of talks at 10 Downing Street, and various calls to Buckingham Palace by senior ministers. The disappointing progress on improving East-West relations in Europe was a main theme of the discussions between Ceausescu and prime minister Callaghan. A joint statement at the end of the talks expressed concern 'over the fragility of the détente process'. Here was Ceausescu painted as some sort of prototype Gorbachev, the lonely diplomatic peacemaker facing the more conservative, hostile forces of the Cold War.

Ceausescu gets the knighthood, British Aerospace gets the contract



Then there were the commercial considerations behind Britain's red carpet treatment for Ceausescu:

'President Ceausescu's state visit was given a seal of commercial success with the signing of agreements between the Romanian government and British Aerospace for production of more than 80 BAC 1-11 aircraft. The deal, worth over £200m, provides in due course for manufacture of the aircraft in Romania. A licensing programme is also being negotiated with Rolls Royce for their Spey engine, which could be worth a further £100m....After meeting senior staff at

Filton, president Ceausescu and his wife flew back to London for the signing of a joint statement at Banqueting House, Whitehall, with Mr Callaghan the prime minister. The statement reaffirms both sides' determination to raise the annual volume of two-way trade in 1980 by two and a half times the 1974 value.' (Times, 16 June 1978)

Royal seal

Sir John Ferguson-Smith, deputy managing director of British Aerospace, championed the agreement as an opportunity to 'extend the potential market base into many more countries and areas of the

world which BAe has not previously been able to penetrate'. With the same idea in mind, a stream of industrialists and bankers paid court to Ceausescu at Buckingham Palace. The most important signal came from the Queen, speaking at a state banquet in Ceausescu's honour.

Her majesty said that Britain was anxious to expand its trade with Romania and find new forms of commercial and industrial cooperation, having 'enjoyed excellent cooperation with your country for many years particularly in the field of aviation'. She assured the president that 'we in Britain are impressed by the resolute stand you

PHOTO: Press Association



have taken to sustain [Romania's] independence' from Moscow. The Queen concluded that, despite differences in systems of government, Britain and Romania had many interests in common.

Sir Nic

To show she meant it, the Queen conferred on the Romanian leader the Order of the Knight Grand Cross of the most honourable order of the Bath. The ceremony was accompanied by an exchange of gifts. President Ceausescu and his wife Elena presented the Queen and Prince Philip with two handmade Romanian carpets. Elena Ceausescu, who had been made an honorary professor of the Polytechnic of Central London in recognition of her contribution to science, received a diamond brooch. The Queen and Prince Philip gave Ceausescu...a rifle fitted with a telescopic sight.

Amid all the anti-Ceausescu media coverage of recent months, almost everybody seems to have conveniently forgotten about his state trip to Britain. If it has been mentioned at all, the impression has been given that Ceausescu was all right in June 1978 but degenerated sometime after. In fact the British establishment knew all about his repressive regime even then, but chose to turn a blind eye to it.

The Queen and Prince Philip gave Ceausescu a rifle fitted with a telescopic sight

'Romania takes a relatively independent line in international affairs while practising thoroughly repressive internal measures....The cult of his personality...has grown to such an extent that on his sixtieth birthday he was compared to such figures as Julius Caesar....In Budapest, Hungarian intellectuals accuse Romania of conducting a false "Romanisation". Bucharest answered the complaints with a wave of repression....One of the complaints has been that people seeking employment are sent outside the Hungarian area and Romanians brought in....The only answer that the Romanian regime could find to the miners' strikes last year was a brutal programme of relocation and suppression.' (Times, 13 June 1978)

The right-wing columnist Bernard Levin was almost alone in taking up the cudgels against Ceausescu in 1978, calling him 'the racketeer', and listing 11 of his relations who held top jobs in the Romanian administration: 'The brutal truth is that Romania has one of the harshest and most complete communist dictatorships....The Securitate are ubiquitous and the country's rulers (Ceausescu and his relations, that is) above the law, while thought control and censorship rival anything to be found in the Soviet empire.'

But the mainstream of the British

establishment was too concerned with wider political and economic matters to take note of Levin's maverick polemic. Far from supporting dissidents in Romania, the British authorities stamped on Romanians in London who protested against Ceausescu's visit.

'Police last night stopped a demonstration by Romanians outside Claridge's, where Mr Ceausescu gave a banquet in honour of the Queen...Ion Raitor, a former Romanian diplomat, was arrested, charged with obstruction and, he claims, detained in Savile Row police station until the president left the hotel....Protesters, carrying placards comparing life in Romania to George Orwell's 1984, said they were fenced off and a coach used to block them from Mr Ceausescu's view.' (Times, 16 June 1978)

Britain could not allow unruly dissidents to ruin its honoured guest's evening. A few years on, however, and the media were describing the Queen's dinner host as 'Dracula' and the relatives of the protesters outside Claridge's as 'heroic Romanian revolutionaries'.

For Ceausescu, the pomp and ceremony of a state visit to Britain was the best possible reward for services rendered to the West. Britain

was not the only Western country paying court to him at the time. He was rapturously received by president Carter in the USA. In Paris, Renault announced a £450m government-approved joint venture with Romania, while West Germany's interests were represented by elder statesman Willy Brandt's visit to Bucharest. In 1978, Ceausescu was the one Eastern bloc politician that every Western leader wanted to do business with.

The forgotten story of Ceausescu's state visit raises embarrassing questions about the British establishment's recent celebration of his downfall in Romania. It demonstrates once more that the authorities here cannot live up to their fine speeches about freedom and democracy in the East or anywhere else.

Our rulers have always been prepared to embrace any dictator as a democrat, any tyrant as a statesman, so long as it suited the strategic and commercial interests of British capitalism. The Tory government's condemnation of the Ceausescu regime today has been as hypocritical as was the Labour government's courting of him in 1978.

CONFRONTATION

CONFRONTATION 5

**The death agony of Stalinism
—a symposium
Can Europe be one?—a Marxist
perspective on 1992**

CONFRONTATION is the theoretical journal of the Revolutionary Communist Party. The new issue, out now, carries the proceedings of a recent conference on Stalinism, covering everything from the relationship between Leninism and Stalinism to the consequences of glasnost for Western Marxists.

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GILT COMPLEX

The fall of dictators always causes a good deal of excitement. The tanks surround the palace and the dispossessed masses pack the squares, egging on the soldiers. They set up barricades and intervene in the struggle, or die in the crossfire as they queue for bread, salt and cooking oil. At other times they happily set about looting the shops in the city centres. But whatever is happening the British media feel duty bound to reveal the whole truth about the private lives of the dictator, his spouse and his children. The personal habits, lifestyle and consumption of monarchs, presidents, generals and general secretaries are suddenly brought to our notice. We are supposed to be shocked by the slightly barmy opulence and folly of the fallen ruler.

Now, I do not want to sound jaundiced or world weary, but none of this does shock me. Farouk, the last king of Egypt, liked racehorses, girls, gambling and had to eat enormous breakfasts to sustain his considerable bulk. When, in 1952, the Egyptian throne collapsed under a welter of corruption Colonel Nasser laid on the royal yacht and a 21-gun salute, to speed the fleeing monarch across the Mediterranean. He sailed away to continue his entirely useless existence at a succession of resorts frequented by similarly useless people. Since then the fall of corrupt and tyrannical rulers has been a little less sedate.

The Shah of Iran had to fly rather hurriedly to the winter palace of the King of Morocco as three million people besieged his palace in Tehran, and the members of his family were hunted down by irate crowds. Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda had to scramble rather unceremoniously out of the Philippines, with only several hundred pieces of luggage. General Noriega, the Panamanian dictator, made it across town from the barracks to the Papal Nuncio's residence with his shaving tackle and an overnight bag before coming finally to rest in the cells of the federal courthouse in Miami. And, most recently, Sir Nicolae and Lady Ceausescu didn't make it at all.

The British media like these rather florid dramas irrespective of the substance of the issues involved. They like to cast our minds back to

Caligula, Lady Macbeth and any other thoroughly bad lot they can remember from their schooldays. The football stadiums, grand avenues and monuments commissioned by the fallen rulers are drooled over as evidence of their loss of touch with reality. Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Empire commissioned an enormously costly throne in Paris. Nicolae Ceausescu ordered the construction of the 700-room Palace of the People, and the rather long Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism. Ferdinand Marcos had himself done in stone and concrete, after the fashion of Mount Rushmore.

The *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Daily Telegraph* like to tut-tut about such bombastic grandeur in the midst of poverty, while we are regaled by the *Sun* with lurid descriptions of the 'elegant, heavily perfumed women' who consort with tyrants. We are

It is true that Imelda Marcos had rather a lot of shoes, held wild parties and recorded them for posterity on video. Her hubby did buy lots of real estate in New York and salted away millions of dollars in safe-deposit boxes around the world. Despite 'proletarian' credentials, Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu did keep \$400m in gold in a bank in Zurich. However, none of this is unique, or even particularly remarkable.

The Sultan of Brunei, supposedly the richest man on Earth, has many poor subjects and a personal fortune that makes Marcos look like a shopkeeper. But, as a loyal (and non-overthrown) ally of Britain, he is not subjected to having press hacks poking about in his wardrobes and post office savings account. The Sultan is closely followed by Queen Elizabeth II, whose wealth is estimated at up to £15 billion.

It is absurd to believe that the personal consumption of a Marcos or a Ceausescu could account for the poverty of millions

invited to believe that the squandering of vast treasures is the work of deranged (and always foreign) minds; men driven almost mad by power and greed.

As evidence of this, we are usually shown the wealth of the ousted potentate. Their lifestyles are exposed to the furious gaze of the public. Marble swimming pools, palatial houses, horses, limousines, Italianate gardens, silver and gold plate, and paintings by Rubens; the finest porcelain, cocaine, booze, and enough clothes to fill a department at Harrods. But why do British television and print journalists go into such detail? I don't believe that any of this shocks them. They know well that the presidential palace in Manila is not a patch on Mitterrand's Elysée or Bush's White House. They know you could lose Ceausescu's modest 40-room mansion in one wing of Buckingham Palace, not to mention Windsor, Sandringham and Balmoral.

It is entirely normal for senior Stalinist bureaucrats, and top people in 'democratic' states, to live in the lap of luxury. Even humble folk, like John Lennon and Yoko Ono, had an entire New York apartment set aside for exclusive use as a warehouse for their fur coats. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, devotes an entire floor of Clarence House to the storage of everything that she has ever worn, each garment carefully indexed and ticketed. The same rigmarole was followed by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at their chateau near Paris. Swimming pools, several houses, jewelled shoes, and a set of clothes for every day of the year is de rigueur for the rich the world over.

The surprise and dismay of the press corps when they reveal the gorgeous wealth of fallen rulers is entirely trumped up. What is more, the top print and TV journalists in London are not above owning a couple of homes themselves, or

lashing out two or three hundred pounds on a single bottle of particularly fine wine. The point that they seem to be making when they reveal the truth about a Noriega, a Ceausescu or a Marcos is that these are undeserving alien parvenus; junior army officers, peasants, or shyster politicians in the second or third world who got too big for their boots.

The implication that we British punters are supposed to draw from their revelations is that the poverty and mayhem that racks more than half the countries on earth is in some way the product of personalities who are unfit to rule. I am sure that Walter Mitty buffoons, encrusted in gold braid and medals they have awarded to themselves, do indeed build monuments to their own glory and take baths in asses' milk while their people starve. But I also think that it is entirely absurd to believe that the personal consumption, no matter how lavish, of a Marcos or a Ceausescu could account for the poverty of millions of people. It is the systems presided over by dictators that ensure the misery of working people around the world, not the quality of the linen or cutlery that grace their banqueting tables.

By giving such prominence in news broadcasts and newspapers to the personal habits and stolen fortunes of dictators and their families and friends the media rather neatly draws our attention away from the corruption and luxury that characterises life at home. The weekly sales at Sotheby's of paintings, furniture, porcelain, gold and silver objects and plate. The private jets that fly in and out of London, Paris and New York. The mass poverty and desperation that blight the lives of thousands of people on grim estates, and in cardboard shacks, within a mile or two of the Mall, St James's, Belgravia and Mayfair.

The rich have always set my teeth on edge...the British rich more than most. The truth is that Noriega's HQ probably boasted less drugs and pornography than the average US military base. He killed fewer people during his reign than an American president does in a quiet year. Let's face it, the parvenus of the third world and Eastern Europe are outclassed in every respect by the 'enchanted' perfumed coterie that run Washington and London. The ice sculptures, truffles and chandeliers at Claridge's make me just as furious as Nicu Ceausescu's little hoard of canned food and cigarettes. I know that all things are relative, that even the rich in Romania are poorer than the average British TV presenter, but I can't help thinking how much more relevant it would be to reveal the vulgar details about Margaret and Denis' gold bath taps than to harp on about unfortunate foreigners in the grip of the Imelda Marcos syndrome.

The president and the general

When Bush 'ran' Agent Noriega

Stefanie Boston thinks that George Bush and the CIA have plenty of evidence against General Noriega—and vice versa

A few years ago General Manuel Antonio Noriega of Panama was photographed chatting amicably to Mr George Bush, the former CIA chief who had 'run' Noriega as a US agent. Today Noriega can only be seen in Miami prison mugshots. Meanwhile, president Bush justifies sending more than 25 000 troops on to the streets of Panama by denouncing his former colleague as an evil narco-terrorist dictator who indulged in Hitler worship, voodoo, hard porn and child abuse.

The USA and Britain have always tried to demonise disobedient third world leaders, to create the right climate for sending in the gunboats and bombers. But Washington's black propaganda campaign against Noriega has plumbed new depths. In the hands of the US army PR men (and their allies in the American and British press), he has become a sort of identikit man of all the political, moral and sexual folk demons of our age. They have yet to explain how this pervert, who they claim wore red underpants to ward off the evil eye and kept vats of blood and animal entrails alongside his cocaine stash and sex videos, can be the same Noriega who was so recently regarded as an astute and valuable CIA agent.

General Normal

In fact General Noriega is really a rather average sort of Latin American military dictator, with a run-of-the mill career. Indeed he looks positively mundane compared to some of the dictators whom Washington has put into power and supported across the continent. The US-backed Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay turned the country into a drug haven and a showcase of repression for 34 years. Batista of Cuba ran the island like one big brothel, casino and drug den for the Americans. The list of US-backed dictators is long: the Somoza dynasty (Nicaragua), the Trujillo family (Dominican Republic), Pinochet (Chile) and many more. The argument that the USA felt obliged to overthrow Noriega to restore democracy in Panama is absurd.

The Americans condemned Noriega for staging coups and fixing

elections. Yet they are the reigning world champions at these games. The USA has sabotaged elected presidents like Salvador Allende in Chile and Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, replacing them with brutal dictators. Washington has plotted successful assassinations of leaders like General Sandino of Nicaragua, and tried to kill others like Fidel Castro. As for fixing elections, in the run-up to the Nicaraguan poll at the end of February the USA is backing the opposition parties with a slush fund several times the size of the state's entire election budget.

The Godfathers

It's a similar story with the other accusations levelled against Noriega by the USA: even where he is guilty as charged, those sitting in judgement are criminal Godfathers compared to whom he is a petty crook. The fact that he now faces trial on drugs charges is especially ironic, given that the CIA, the biggest drugs-trafficker in the world, helped to set him up in the business.

The real reason for US hysteria over Noriega has nothing to do with any love of democracy or hatred of drugs. Nor has the general undergone a dramatic personality change over the past five years. The key factor determining Bush's attitude is the defence of US interests in Central America, and Washington's increasing problems in keeping control there. When Noriega toed the White House line and helped keep the Pax Americana, whatever he did was OK with the USA. But since he began to stray, Washington has felt obliged to make an example of its rogue agent, by branding him an outlaw and finally overthrowing him.

Made in the USA

Panama has always played a particularly important part in US plans for controlling Central America. The state was carved out of Colombia around the turn of the century, solely to create a US-controlled home for the new canal. The Panama canal became an important trading channel for the USA, and Panama became the home of the US army's Southern

Command, a 10 000-strong force which stands as a permanent enforcer of US interests throughout Central America.

Anybody of influence in a Latin American state like Panama will have some connection with Washington. Although he was never the tamest of US agents, Noriega was tied up with the Americans for the best part of 20 years. Much information about Noriega's relationship with the Americans, and with George Bush in particular, is only now becoming known; in March *Wall Street Journal* reporter Frederick Kempe publishes a book, *Divorcing the Dictator*, parts of which have been published already. These are a few of the facts which Kempe and others have unearthed.

- In the sixties, as a rising army officer, Noriega completed several US-run courses on military intelligence. In the seventies, when he served under Panama's popular nationalist leader General Torrijos, Noriega was receiving \$110 000 a year from the CIA, and was also on the US defence intelligence agency payroll.

- Noriega first met George Bush in 1976, during Bush's short career as CIA chief. At that time the general was (among other things) buying secret tapes from US intelligence, but both the US army and Bush refused to act against the soldiers concerned. In 1977, after Bush had moved on, the CIA dropped Noriega.

- In 1979 Noriega played host to the deposed Shah of Iran, and also became America's most reliable source of information about the situation in Nicaragua, where the radical Sandinistas had overthrown the US stooge Somoza. In return, the US state department saw to it that Noriega was tipped off about a plan to arrest him for gun-running as he travelled through Miami.

- In 1981, the new Reagan administration put Noriega back on the payroll at a reported \$185 000 a year. When he began his rise to power after Torrijos died in a 1981 air-crash (CIA involvement

suspected), Noriega allowed Panama to be used as a conduit for arms and money en route to Reagan's favourite terrorists, the Contras. The general would soon be making regular visits to liaise with CIA chief William Casey.

● Noriega became a key figure in the covert fundraising for the Contras, which involved drug running, the arms-for-hostages Irangate scandal, lieutenant-colonel Oliver North and vice-president George Bush. He allowed North to launder drug money destined for the Contras through the Panamanian company Amalgamated Commercial Enterprise.

● In December 1983, Bush himself flew into Panama to appeal for more support against the Sandinistas—and to complain about Noriega laundering money for drug cartels. No doubt it was just a coincidence that Noriega's departure from US policy and Bush's first rebuke about drugs happened at the same time.

● In May 1984 Panama held its first presidential election for 16 years. Noriega fixed the poll for General Barletta, a former World Bank vice-president acceptable to the USA because he was willing to impose austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund on an indebted Panama. Reagan's secretary of state George Shultz attended the president's inauguration, praised the

fraudulent vote as a triumph for democracy, and challenged Nicaragua to follow Panama's lead.

● In March 1985, a bomb ripped through the Sandinistas' military HQ in Managua. It has been known for some time that this attack, ostensibly launched by the Contras, was really the work of North and former British SAS man David Walker. Now Kempe has established that Noriega's intelligence organisation was also involved in carrying out this bombing.

But Noriega was only rarely a reliable US agent. Like many other Latin American politicians, he continually walked a fine line between collaborating with the USA and responding to domestic pressure to take a more independent line. Thus he courted the Cubans and the Sandinistas at the same time as the Americans and the Contras. He upset Washington in 1983 by supporting the Contadora plan for a negotiated solution in Nicaragua. And as the eighties wore on and the USA appeared to be losing its iron grip over Central America, Noriega crossed the fine line and opposed US policy more often.

In 1985, Noriega turned against president Barletta (for whom he had fixed the 1984 election with US support) and threw him out of office. Outraged at this abuse of a man they considered to be *their* stooge, the Americans immediately cancelled

\$32m of economic aid and Admiral Poindexter, national security council director, flew down to talk Noriega round to the US way of thinking. The general refused to give in.

In March 1986 Noriega's new frontman, president Eric Delvalle, bowed to US pressure again and accepted an IMF package of harsh austerity measures in return for a \$60m loan. The trade union federation, Consato, called a general strike against this latest US diktat. Nine days later, Delvalle backed down and made key concessions to the workers. Noriega, the real authority in Panama, was now being forced to respond to working class pressure and popular hatred of the USA. And Washington was becoming more worried about its hold on Panama. With the canal due to pass to Panamanian control in 1999, Washington wanted a more reliable agent at the helm.

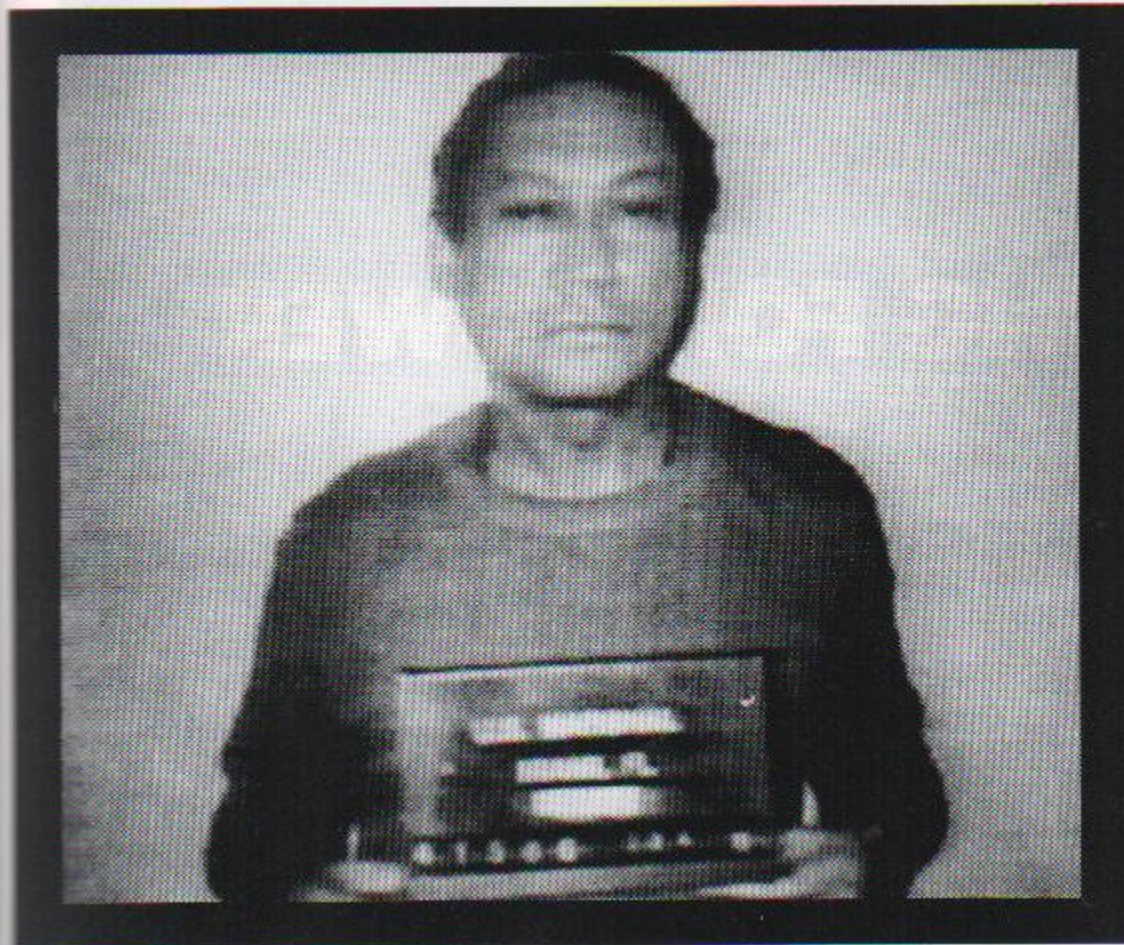
'Operation Overthrow'

By June 1986 US newspapers were accusing Noriega of being a drug-runner and Cuban agent. The CIA and state department set up 'Operation Overthrow' to get rid of him. By 1987 America was cultivating and funding a new opposition to the general. The *Allianza Democrática Cívica* (ADOC) consisted of recruits from the right-wing business community, a Panamanian version of the Contras. They were popularly known as the *Bunau-Varillas*, after Philippe Bunau-Varilla who signed the 1903 treaty with the USA asserting perpetual limited sovereignty for Panama.

Noriega's continued attempts to walk the fine line resulted in one more example of cooperation with the USA which must now seem particularly embarrassing to Bush. In March 1987 Noriega implemented a new banking law drawn up with the American drug enforcement agency, ostensibly to curb drug money laundering. He received a personal letter from DEA administrator John C Lawn, applauding his cooperation: 'The DEA has long welcomed our close association and we stand ready to proceed jointly against international drug trafficking wherever the opportunity arises.' As late as May 1987, even Reagan's attorney general Ed Meese was praising the anti-drugs efforts of Noriega's Panamanian Defence Force.

But it wasn't long before Washington was turning its anti-drug propaganda against Noriega himself again. Noriega would not entertain the USA's idea of using Panama to launch a possible invasion of Nicaragua. Nor would he use his troops against Panamanians who stoned the US embassy in July 1987. Then he appointed an administrator

From Washington's partner to Miami's prisoner



for the Panama canal of whom the Americans disapproved.

By 1988 America had imposed financial and trade sanctions on Panama. But last year the Americans were humiliated in their anti-Noriega efforts. They were behind two bungled coup attempts; their ADOC allies claimed a landslide victory in the presidential election, but Noriega simply annulled the result. When the ADOC called a general strike in protest, it flopped; Noriega's opponents might have won over most of the middle classes, but the general retained significant support among the impoverished workers who hated the USA most bitterly.

By the end of 1989 General Noriega was still standing and the USA was looking increasingly foolish and impotent. Bush had to take drastic action to assert his authority. When Noriega declared that he was at war with the USA, and an American officer was killed in Panama, it gave Washington the excuse it needed; on 20 December the USA steamed in, killing hundreds of Panamanians and levelling large areas of Panama City.

The US invasion of Panama was supposed to be a show of strength. Yet in many ways it only emphasised Uncle Sam's loss of power, even by comparison with the 1983 invasion of

tiny Grenada. Thousands of US troops armed with hi-tech weaponry failed to capture one man who wasn't supposed to have any support. The Americans deployed their top-secret, multi-billion dollar Stealth fighter for the first time, to attack a barracks which didn't even have radar—and it missed. After the invasion, triumphant US generals welcoming the press corps to Panama City were forced to hide under the table when Noriega's remaining Dignity Battalions launched a counter-attack. And then there was the pathetic spectacle of the mighty US army, in the words of the BBC news, 'carrying out its threat to play loud disco music' outside the Vatican embassy where Noriega had taken refuge.

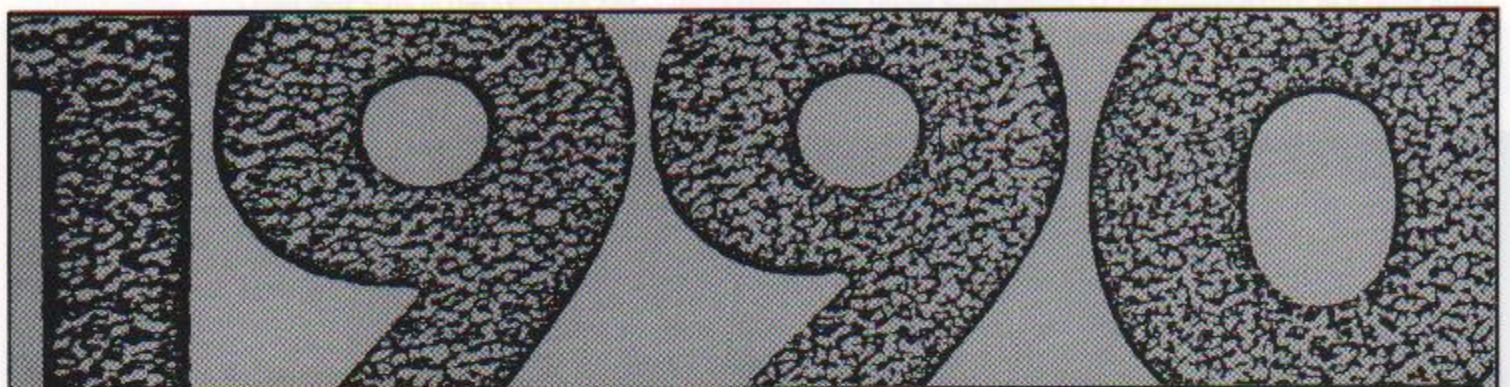
Dead and buried

Bush boasted of the invasion's success. But he will not be able to gloat for long. Bush wanted Noriega dead, and all the evidence of the old CIA connections buried with him. The moment the invading force failed to kill the general, the White House was faced with the prospect of a very embarrassing trial. The Americans may have to do some humiliating deal with Noriega to prevent him spilling the beans about his past dealings with Bush.

More broadly, the invasion

highlighted the USA's problems in Panama and Central America. It has deposed Noriega but stirred up widespread animosity among those who will accept no excuse for yet more US interference in Latin America. The new president, Guillermo Endara, has a serious credibility problem at home and abroad after being brought to office by American firepower. The US troops claimed they had come to rescue Panamanians, yet acted like colonial victors, trampling on the conquered people and razing working class districts of Panama to the ground. There is likely to be no shortage of support for any renewed resistance to the USA and its Panamanian allies.

Washington is finding its 'backyard' a less and less safe place. Who knows which US ally will be the next to do a Noriega and break away? And if the Americans find it so difficult to get rid of one small dictator whom they 'ran', in a country of only two million people which they have run since its creation, how will they deal with more powerful threats to their authority in the region?

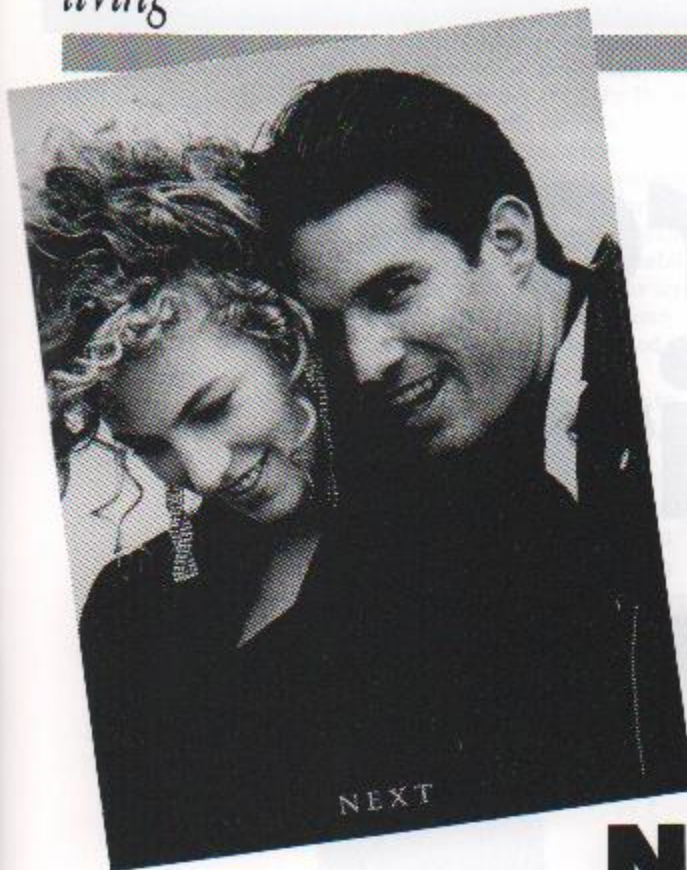


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After the selfish eighties

THE NICER NINETIES?

Joan Phillips disagrees with the fashion magazines about the shape of things to come

If you have been reading any of the upmarket fashion magazines lately, like me you will have been struck by the rapturous welcome they have given the new decade. According to *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan* and the rest, whose fashion writers evidently collaborated closely, we stand at the dawn of a bright, new, caring, sharing decade: the nicer nineties.

In their glib appreciations of the past decade, the fashion cognoscenti dismiss the eighties as an era of money and materialism, greed and selfishness, as expressed in the vogue for padded shoulders and power dressing. As we move into the nineties, however, values are apparently changing, and with them what we choose to recognise as fashionable.

Nouveau hippies

The backlash began even before the decade had died: in 1989 the writing was on the wall for the loadsamoney ethos supposedly spawned by the eighties. From black BMWs to broad-shouldered Big Bang suits and Docklands apartments to cordless telephones, all the coveted icons of the eighties are now derided not desired, or so we are told.

In place of the obsessive materialism of the eighties, an eco-friendly, nouveau hippy preoccupation with the spiritual is said to be the defining feature of the New Age. The advertising agency Leagas Delaney has been looking into the new materialistic malaise, no doubt costing the damage for its prestigious accounts such as Porsche, Revlon and Harrods. Poli-

tical scientists have found a name for the new condition: post-materialism.

How will fashion express the changing values of the New Age? According to Sally Brampton of *Elle*, 'it is presently fashionable to reject the very notion of fashion'. If the eighties were about ostentation and dressing up, the nineties will be about simplicity and dressing down. After all, now that everybody is meant to be adopting a caring attitude towards the future of the planet and of mankind, dressing up smacks of frivolity and indifference.

Alley catwalk

So out go power dressing and macho tailoring, the cult of the designer and the gilt labels, in come casual dressing and softer shapes, sportswear and street fashion. At the autumn showings of the spring and summer designer collections, styles which had been on the streets of New York and London for at least six months were given the designer treatment on the catwalks of Paris.

Karl Lagerfeld designed the world's most luxurious money belts; Rifat Ozbek had a hit with his all-white, space-age collection of sportswear shapes in fine fabrics; Jean-Paul Gaultier mixed cycling gear in block colours, parkas and bomber jackets with pin-stripe suits and shorts; Christian Lacroix teamed trainers with all-in-one cycling shorts.

Having appropriated and sanitised the exuberant and innovative styles of the streets and clubs, the fashion elite are now trying to make out that their

new collections express some deep spiritual impulse in keeping with the New Age. I somehow doubt whether the scallies of Manchester or the youth of Hackney would have much to say about the spiritual essence of track-suits and trainers. They just wear them.

But for the professional followers of fashion, there has to be something more to it than that. So, symbolising the return to innocence and purity of the brave New Age, bright white is the colour on the catwalks (as in the White collection by Workers for Freedom and in Ozbek's). The preponderance of natural, earthy tones, such as sand, stone, bark, berry and leaf, with a splash of sky blue or sun orange, reflect the preoccupation with the planet. Natural fibres: starchy linen, crisp cotton, smooth silk, rough hessian and canvas, cotton sweat-shirting and jersey loom large.

Baby boom

New Age values are being expressed in other ways too. Have you noticed how babies, children and families have become a major fashion accessory? Ozbek's collection featured a futuristic New Age family, mother clad in casual sportswear, father wearing dungarees and baseball cap, clutching the ultimate designer-dressed baby (all in white of course).

The obligatory baby also appears in Next's latest advertising campaign. With the nuclear family the centrepiece of his Eternity advertisements, Calvin Klein has come a long way from Obsession. The new obsession

with babies, families and parenthood also finds expression in the cinema (Steve Martin, Sigourney Weaver).

The problem with the glossy magazine view of the values which shaped the fashions of the eighties is that it reflects the experience of a social clique. The culture of materialism and designer mania which supposedly defined the last decade never really meant anything to most people. The few who got rich or richer on the easy pickings in the City knew what power dressing was all about, but it might as well have been an exotic new brand of mayonnaise to the rest of us.

Money talks

And who can afford to be a post-materialist in the 1990s? Only those who are materially satisfied enough to be able to spend their spare time worrying about more spiritual concerns. The people the fashion writers are talking to and about are the thirtysomethings who are comfortably off and having babies. These privileged people have nothing to worry about except themselves, their relationships, their babies and the air their babies will breathe.

This is the age group that has the money, and since it also has babies, young children and caring values, advertisers and film-makers are rushing to get a piece of the action with sentimental celebrations of yuppie family life. All this no doubt helps to explain the appeal of *thirtysomething*, the story of Michael and Hope, Elliot and Nancy, and Gary, Ellen and Melissa, their unattached friends, people with sixties caring, sharing values, reacting against eighties smash and grab Reaganism.

When it comes down to it, the truth is that the few hedonists of the eighties are a decade older. As Sarah Mower put it in *Vogue*, we are talking about 'a generation which has now grown out of Next suits and nightclubbing and started to have children and think seriously about the future'.

Nasty new world

The Henley Centre's recent market research document *Family Futures: A Life-Stage Report* also looks at the repercussions of the fact that a large percentage of the population is now having babies: 'One of the key life-stage events that makes people less concerned with instant gratification and more concerned with investing in the future is starting a family.'

Will the nineties really be nicer? The idea that our lives will be influenced by the fact that Calvin Klein has stopped being a playboy and decided to settle down and have kids is a joke. If the fashion writers opened their eyes, they would see that the world is likely to be a nastier place in the next decade. And I'm not talking about smelly nappies and baby sick, but recession, austerity, mass unemployment, repression, military rivalry and war. Let's see Calvin Klein bottle that.

Election, recession and a 'new mood'

Where is Britain going?

As British politics start the run-up to the next election, and the economy starts the slide down into recession, Mike Freeman looks at the state of the nation

'When ice breaks up it is a time of great danger'—Margaret Thatcher's cautious response to recent events in Eastern Europe reveals the fears behind the official euphoria. Thatcher's forebodings show how the end of the post-war order, at home as well as abroad, raises serious doubts about the long-term prospects of the British establishment.

Of all the major world powers Britain is the most committed to the international status quo that is now crumbling as a result of the collapse of the Eastern bloc. Despite its economic decline, Britain was allowed to cling on to its global role and its aura of imperial grandeur after 1945, under the patronage and at the convenience of the USA. Today the USA can no longer maintain the economic lead which gave it dominance during and after the Second World War. The only special relationship it is now interested in cultivating is with the emerging European superpower of West Germany. Britain enters the 1990s as one of the feeblest of the capitalist powers, more exposed to the hostile forces of the world economy, with a domestic economy gravely weakened by a decade of deindustrialisation.

At home, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Thatcher decade did not represent the beginning of a new era, but more the last phase of the post-war political order.

The Thatcher regime has presided over the abandonment of consensus in politics and institutionalised collaboration with the unions in industry. Yet, after 10 years in power, the Conservative government is in a state of programmatic exhaustion, forcing through policies, such as the poll tax, privatisation of water and electricity and health service reform, which appear irrational and provocative to wide sections of society.

Ruined disguise

Meanwhile the key factors which disguised Britain's continuing economic decline in the eighties are losing their effect. North Sea oil is running out; returns on capital exports are falling as overseas assets are sold off and the surplus spent on servicing short-term foreign loans—all to finance the burgeoning current trade account deficit; the overseas earnings of the City of London are being squeezed by Tokyo, New York and European financial centres. Financial services play a disproportionate role in the British economy, accounting for 20 per cent of output. This reflects the fact that British capitalists make much of their profit from arranging banking, insurance and investment services for wealth which has been produced elsewhere in the world. Thus Britain is particularly vulnerable to any breakdown in international cooperation in the financial sphere.

Despite all the celebrations of the triumph of capitalism over communism and the Thatcher/Lawson economic miracle of the eighties the British establishment exudes a sense of pessimism. The deep insecurity behind the official hype is constantly breaking through. It is evident in public preoccupations about impending ecological disasters and epidemics of moral degeneration (Aids, child abuse, divorce, abortion, crime, hooliganism, drugs, etc). It is also apparent in the prevalence of nostalgia throughout popular culture (from television costume dramas to Jive Bunny in the charts) and in the popularity of historical 'heritage' museums and theme parks. The resonance for these moral panics and cults of the past throughout society reflects the pervasive pessimism that originates in the lack of confidence of the British capitalist class in its own future.

What are the prospects for the British economy in the 1990s? How are the major parties likely to shape up towards the 1991-1992 general election? What are the possibilities for a new type of working class politics in the next decade? Let's take these questions in turn.

When and how hard

It is no longer a question of whether recession will strike the British economy but when and how deeply it will bite. According to the

report published by the authoritative National Institute of Economic Research in October 1989 the British economy entered the current downturn in mid-1988, when construction and consumer spending began to stagnate. Whereas during the eighties credit, both to companies and to individuals, played a crucial role in staving off recession, the scope for extending this mechanism into the nineties appears to be limited.

While German and Japanese capitalists are likely to continue to finance America's trade and budget

deficits for as long as it remains the key to worldwide capital accumulation, they have much less interest in keeping Britain afloat. The world's big players increasingly regard Britain as marginal. The recent spate of Japanese bank withdrawals from attempted leveraged buy-outs (takeovers financed by debt) at Magnet, Queensway and MFI reveals that Japanese investors are keen to cut their losses in Britain's shrinking economy. British firms and consumers are already feeling the

burden of their existing debts, particularly when new loans come only at the higher interest rates necessary to safeguard sterling.

Consumer credit has peaked. Half a million homeowners are more than two months behind with their mortgage payments. Falling house prices guarantee stagnation in house building. The slump in personal bank lending in 1989 has been followed immediately by a slump in retail sales: 'end of summer' sales became 'mid-season' sales and 'pre-Christmas' sales merged into 'New Year' sales—a

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



As the consumer credit squeeze means even bargains must go begging, many shops look set for the closing down sales

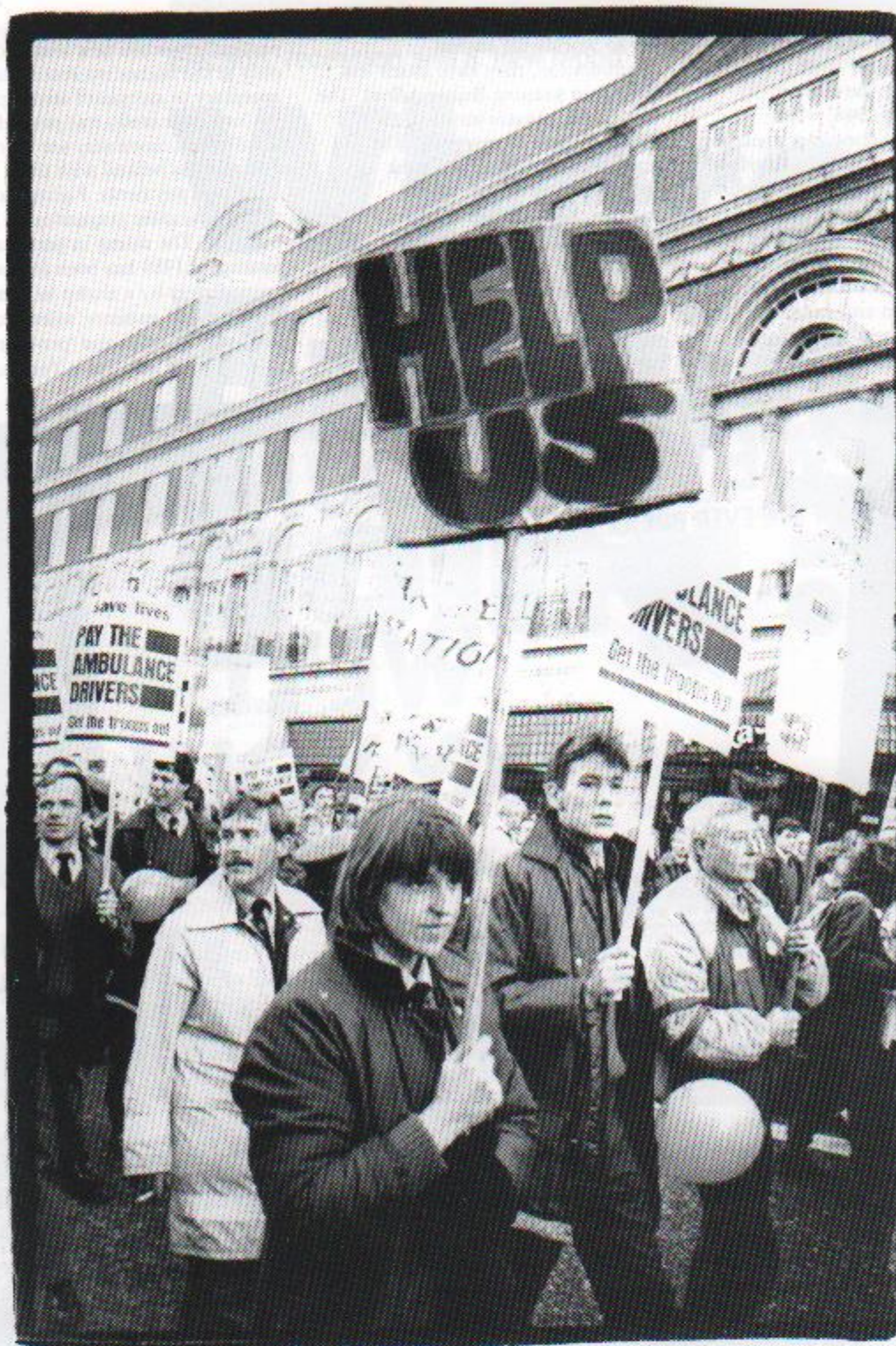


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Even when workers are provoked into action today, many are more likely to request an expression of sympathy than to demand solidarity action

process that inevitably ends for many retailers in 'closing down' sales. Woolworth's derisory pre-Christmas bid for Dixons—the world's largest specialist retailer of consumer electronics—is as much a sign of the times as the reports of half-empty new shopping malls around the country.

The consumer credit squeeze has a differential effect on different sections of society. Reviewing the pre-Christmas sales returns, the director of London's Oxford Street Association of Retailers noted that 'the Tiffanys of the world appear to be doing OK, on the basis that the very rich will always be very rich'. As for the rest of us, however:

'People this year are buying their children clothes for Christmas rather than toys, and their husbands that much-needed sweater. Necessities will be given as Christmas presents.' (Times, 8 December 1989)

In the nineties, more and more people look set to celebrate the fact that they still have clothes on their backs.

While corporate borrowing continues apace, signs of crisis are also evident in this sector, with borrowed money being directed into property speculation rather than productive investment. Companies use much of what they borrow to supplement declining cash flows, to

make sure that urgent bills, including interest payments on previous loans, are paid. The result of such 'distress borrowing' is that many firms are operating with a widening financial deficit: in 1988 such deficits amounted to £7 billion; in 1989 it will be around £17 billion. The inevitable result is, as in the early seventies, a liquidity crisis in which firms are forced into rapid 'destocking' (cutting production and selling from existing stocks) to reduce the amount of capital tied up in raw materials, semi-manufactured goods and finished commodities. This in turn leads to full-blown recession.

The key issue for the British economy is not the difference between, say, a growth rate of one per cent and a decline of one per cent—the treasury has shown itself adept at manipulating the figures to disguise such fluctuations. What really matters is the government's capacity to control such a slowdown, which in turn depends on the level of international cooperation in managing the approaching economic recession.

The co-op

The major capitalist powers have cooperated fairly successfully to contain global economic instability since the October 1987 stock market crash. The Germans and Japanese have effectively bailed out less dynamic economies like Britain and, far more importantly, the USA. If cooperation continues at this level, then Britain may get by with stagnating output, more unemployment and deeper cuts in public spending. If, on the other hand, the British recession coincides with a wider global slowdown and a breakdown in cooperation, then Britain's fragility would be fully exposed and the impact could be devastating.

The paradox of British politics as the nineties begin is that the Conservative Party is likely to maintain its pre-eminence despite growing economic instability. This is the result of the commanding position it has established over the past decade and the parallel process of depoliticisation that has resulted from the defeats experienced by the labour movement.

While the popularity of the ideology of Thatcherism has been greatly exaggerated, there can be no doubt of Thatcher's success in discrediting the policies and institutions of the traditional labour movement. Few people now believe that taking collective strike action through the unions can achieve much; since the miners' strike, and subsequent defeats at Wapping and Dover, they fear that such action can risk a great deal. Where workers are forced to react to their employers'

provocations, they are more likely to do so with the moderate methods and demands seen in the ambulance dispute.

The triumph of Tory individualism over Labour collectivism reflects and reinforces the passivity of the working class. It means that growing hostility to government policy on issues such as the poll tax fails to take a political form. At least it fails to take a collective form, as workers are assimilated into amorphous middle class forms of protest in the mould of the traditional 'angry ratepayers'.

The dominance of the Tories over British society is reinforced by their success, with the help of the media, in defining and redefining what are important political issues. The Green phenomenon is a classic example: the publicity given to Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth initiatives, campaigns against nuclear waste dumping, the Channel tunnel, etc, reflects an official willingness to promote these forms of political activity and the conservative outlook they express. Even children's television and pop music radio is saturated with features about nature conservation, lead-free petrol, saving rain forests, preserving the ozone layer, etc. The establishment is happy to indulge these preoccupations as an

alternative to more threatening forms of political protest. In the absence of any real challenge to their authority from below, the Tories have enjoyed unprecedented freedom—and constantly advancing technology—to promote their ideas on the central issues throughout society.

The most dramatic testimony to the domination of the Tories over British politics is the fact that, though their programme is now obsolete, they can still force the major opposition party to adopt its key elements. The endorsement of the policy review document, *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*, at the 1989 Labour Party conference signalled the abandonment of the radical 'Alternative Economic Strategy' promoted by the left in the seventies. It also marked the rejection of the traditional synthesis of the Liberal policies of Keynes and Beveridge and the moderate state socialism of Attlee and Morrison which formed the basis of Labour Party policy throughout the post-war period.

The reconstruction of the Labour Party has been one of the most significant developments of the Thatcher years. In the course of the three election defeats sustained by Labour since 1979, the traditional right wing of the Labour leadership

has disappeared. The combination of moderate trade union bureaucrats and upper class intellectuals which has run the Labour Party since its foundation has been replaced by a new generation of professional careerists and media managers.

Over the past couple of years the left has been effectively liquidated as a force in the Labour Party: the elimination of Ken Livingstone from the national executive at the 1989 conference completed the process which began with Denis Healey's victory over Tony Benn in 1981. The left exists today only as increasingly isolated and eccentric individuals, with no roots among rank and file union activists or in any social grouping outside the party. The demise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has further demoralised the traditional left. This is not only because of the left's long friendship with the Moscow leadership and its followers in the British Communist Party, but more importantly because the old British left's state socialist policies of nationalisation and public welfare were largely based on those of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the East.

The social and political transformation of the Labour Party has been accompanied by similar trends in the unions. The combined

The deep sense of pessimism which permeates British society from the top down is apparent in the prevalence of a culture of nostalgia

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



The new mood in Britain is the product of the crisis of the British establishment

effect of strike defeats, declining membership and the shift from consensus to confrontational styles of workplace management and collective bargaining have made the union leaders much more insecure and more remote from the working class. In the unions too middle class professionals play an increasingly prominent role in place of traditional officials with roots in the workplace. It is striking that in current controversies around trade union representation at Labour Party conference, on the national executive and in the selection of candidates, traditional left-right alignments give way to positions taken up according to more pragmatic assessments of the tactical options open to the bureaucracy which runs the labour movement.

The paradox of Labour's position is that though it now presents itself as more classless than ever before, its electoral base is more narrowly proletarian today than at any time since the twenties. Though there are signs of growing voter alienation from the Tories, there are few indicators of mounting enthusiasm for Labour's programme among the middle classes, or even among the electorally crucial sectors of the working class in the South and Midlands. While it remains unclear whether Labour can succeed in broadening its appeal, it is also uncertain whether it still has enough ties to the working class to enable it to respond in a more traditional reformist manner should working class pressure mount.

Tory Party Mark II

More and more remote from the unions and the working class, the Labour Party is increasingly a non-Thatcherite Conservative Party, a Tory Party Mark II offering its services to run the system. In the short term, the growing unpopularity of the government and the collapse of the centre parties creates new scope for Kinnock's Labour Party: hence Labour's 10 per cent opinion poll margin over the Tories in the closing months of 1989. Yet, after Labour's series of defeats, 10 per cent is a far from satisfactory margin with which to enter an election campaign.

It seems certain that Thatcher in the nineties will be unable to recapture the unquestioned authority she enjoyed for much of the eighties. Yet her emergence well ahead on points from the early televised exchanges in the commons confirms the enduring potential for the Iron Lady to beat the Welsh windbag in an election campaign. All things being equal, when it comes to the election, many voters will opt for the Tory Party Mark I, in preference to Kinnock's Mark II. In the event of accidents or economic collapse, the

Labour Party could win on its Mark II Tory programme.

While the outcome of the next general election remains in doubt, of one thing we can be certain: Labourism in the form which it has existed for most of the twentieth century is dead. Labour could win a general election, but it can no longer act as mediator between the working class and the British state, the role which defined its political identity before the 1980s.

Brother who?

The labour bureaucracy, a distinct layer that emerged from the working class movement to act as a buffer in its conflicts with the capitalist class at every level from the workplace to Whitehall, provided the social base of Labourism. Yet it lacks any coherent social role or direction in modern Britain: some union leaders like the electricians' Eric Hammond present themselves as junior personnel managers; others, like John Edmonds of the GMB, act like charity organisers; a few, like Arthur Scargill, carry on as though nothing has changed. The once mighty TUC is now a shadow; its leading officials, household names a decade ago, are now largely unknown to their own members.

At the same time there is no distinctive layer of activists in the working class, a rank and file movement capable of organising a substantial body of workers to express their collective demands against employers or government. Some such movement has existed in every decade of the twentieth century: yet we enter the 1990s without one.

The old traditions and institutions of the labour movement have been discredited and discarded under pressure from the employers and the government, rather than as a result of the emergence of a dynamic anti-capitalist alternative among the rank and file. This gives the employers an advantage, at least in the short term. Yet the disintegration of the old labour movement machine also removes a powerful bulwark from the post-war status quo and a key obstacle to the creation of a new sort of working class movement.

The depoliticisation of the working class over the past decade overshadows the growing resentment at and resistance to the consequences of continuing Tory domination. This is the context in which the 'new mood' evident in the industrial disputes since summer 1989 has emerged.

Workers, particularly in public services, are angry at having to work harder in worse conditions for stagnating real wages, particularly at a time when the government boasts of its economic achievements and companies record rising profits and

reward executives with substantial salary increases. Yet the same workers have no confidence in familiar trade union strategies and tactics achieving results. Hence they accept modest objectives and pursue highly defensive methods in the hope that they can get something or at least save face. There is a new mood of resistance, but apparently no new methods or institutions to replace those that have been discredited: in this vacuum the cautious approach of the engineers' 35-hour week campaign or the ambulance workers' action prevails.

The most significant feature of the British working class entering the 1990s is the lack of political differentiation within it. As we have seen, the old distinction between 'bureaucracy' and 'rank and file' appears increasingly inappropriate. The impulse towards collective action is weak and even those who get involved in action are characteristically hesitant. Above all, the tradition of working class solidarity has at least temporarily lost its meaning.

Today, working class consciousness appears to be most strongly influenced by the failure of collective action, the lack of credibility of Labourism and a general suspicion of any sort of politics. The working class also appears more divided than before: older workers still retain some of the old traditions, while younger people are scarcely touched by them. Within this mix there prevails an inarticulate 'us and them' attitude towards the authorities. The dominant problem at present is that there are no generalised means through which positive class instincts can be expressed. We are entering a period of flux in which there are as yet no distinct forms of working class response to capitalist domination.

The new mood in Britain is the product of the crisis of the British establishment. It is born out of a mix of resentment and frustration; it is more a reaction to what has gone before than a rejection of the existing state of affairs and the formulation of a conscious alternative. Nevertheless it is an important symptom of future trends because it indicates that the establishment has made no serious progress in strengthening its influence over the working class. Such an unstable mood may easily fall prey to populist influences, of either a left or right-wing variety. On the other hand the same volatility creates unprecedented potential for a revolutionary movement that can challenge all forms of reaction, and give wider intellectual coherence to workers striving for a better society.

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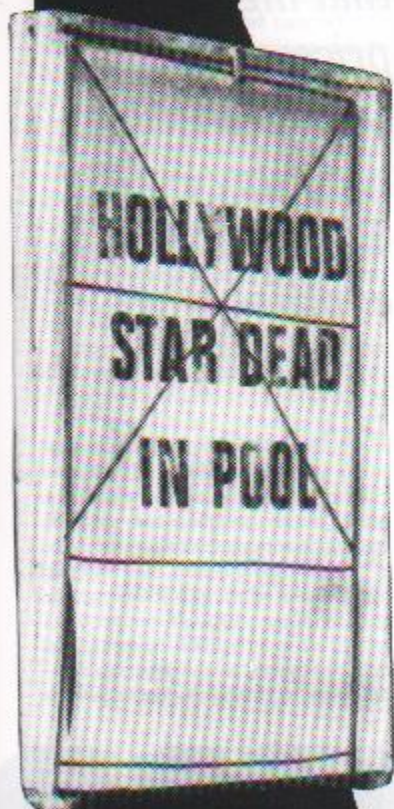
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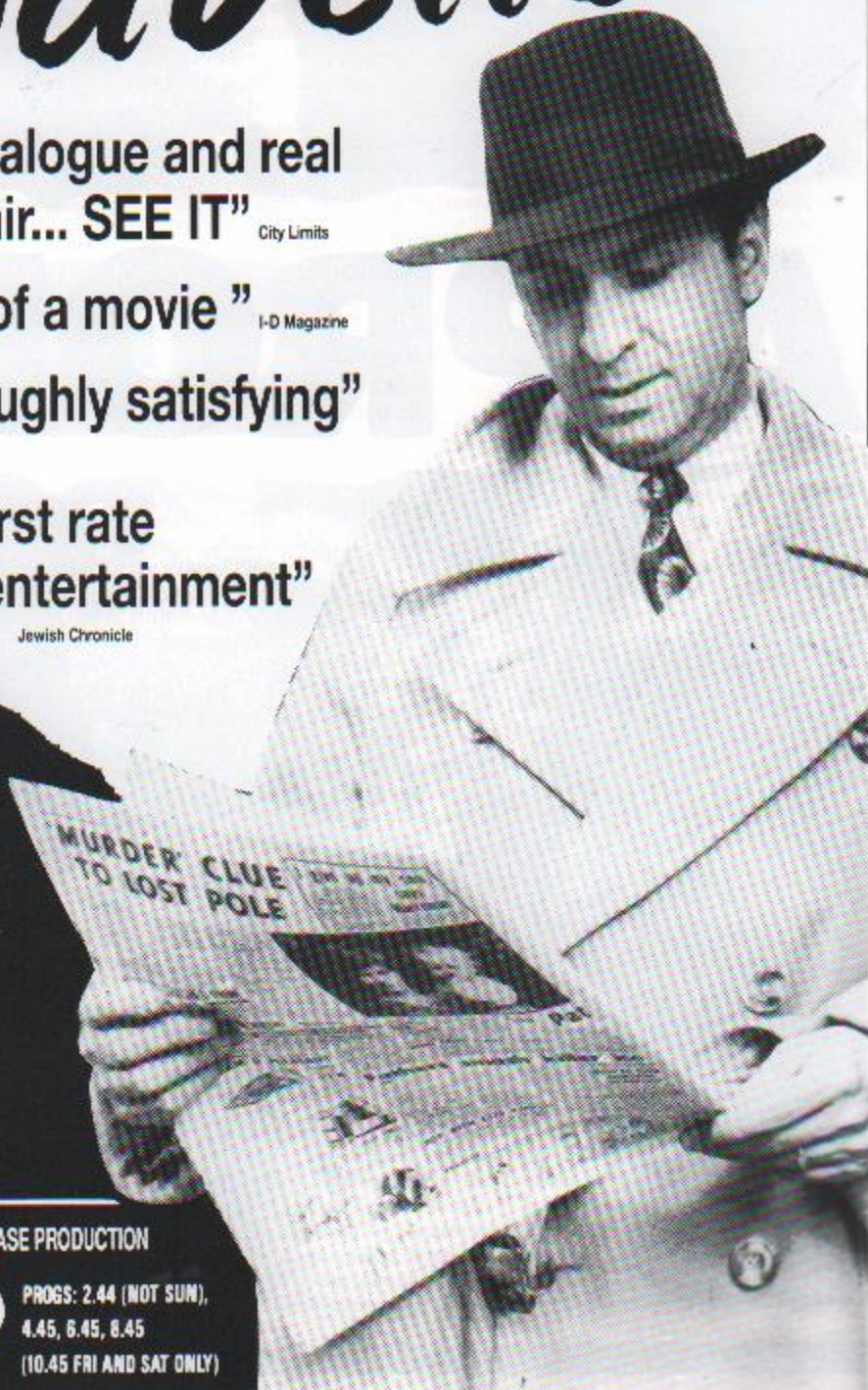
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The experts are wrong to suggest that high share prices reflect a strong British economy.

Tony Kennedy explains why

The London stock exchange opened 1990 in a buoyant mood. A 41 point rise in share prices on the opening two days of trading meant that the leading measure of stock market fortunes, the *Financial Times* index of the top 100 company shares, broke through its previous record set in July 1987. According to one commentator the upsurge symbolised a 'dramatic change in market'

A PROBLEM



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

confidence' about the future of the British economy. Economic pundits agreed that the New Year movements on the stock market showed that, despite slower growth in 1990, the longer-term prospects for the British economy are good.

It is ironic that media and City economists should use a favourable movement in share prices as 'proof' of a healthy economy. When the world's stock markets crashed in October 1987, these same experts insisted that share prices bore no relation to the underlying state of the economy. They argued that the 'real' economy was in fine shape and that the crash was solely a stock market problem, caused by overspeculation and teething problems with new computer systems. Two years on, and they turn their analysis on its head, claiming that a minor upward movement in share prices means that the 'real' economy is sound.

The stock market is closely related to trends in the broader economy, but not in the way claimed by those who now forecast prosperity. The paradox is that the booming (but volatile) stock markets of the past decade have reflected the stagnation of the productive sectors of British capitalism. Nor does the markets' apparent

recovery since the October 1987 crash indicate any new dynamism in the wider economy.

Many pundits have trouble understanding the relationship between the stock markets and the 'real' economy today, because they are still working from assumptions which became obsolete 25 years ago. In the post-war years up to the mid-sixties, the London and New York stock markets followed the cyclical fortunes of the British and American economies quite closely. When the economic cycle was in its 'upswing' phase, share prices rose steadily. In the shorter phases when economic growth slowed, share prices fell back—but only a little.

The relation between share price movements and economic trends in this period is shown in the evolution of what economists call the price/earnings ratio (P/E)—the relationship between the market price of a share and its annual financial return, based on the company's performance. If the return on a share valued at £1 is 10p then the P/E ratio is $1/0.1 = 10$. If the return falls to 5p then the ratio is $1/0.05 = 20$. So a higher ratio reflects a falling rate of return.

Between 1950 and 1964, the P/E ratio on the top 500 US company

ratios—implying a rising rate of return on shares—meant that, according to standard theories, money should have moved back into shares. It didn't. As the world economy suffered a serious loss of confidence, Western capital went elsewhere in a desperate search for profits—into cheap commodities like rubber and tin, into high-yield government bonds, and into high-interest loans to third world states.

Despite the rising rates of return on shares, stock markets were ill-equipped to attract new capital on any scale, because the big rate of return on shares did not reflect any rise in profitability levels in the 'real' economy. It simply showed that the value of shares was falling even more rapidly than the potential earnings from them. Investors avoided the stock markets because the rising rate of return on shares could not compensate for the capital losses implied by falling prices.

If economists found their old theories of only limited use in understanding stock market developments in the seventies, they became just about useless in the eighties. The current sense of confusion is summed up by *Financial Times* columnist Barry Riley, who has been speculating

Instead, the stock markets boomed in the eighties because of the poor profitability of the stagnant productive economy. Capitalists who could not make sufficient profit by producing new wealth turned to the more parasitical business of stock market speculation—trading claims on existing capital assets.

The eighties stock market boom was based on a huge international expansion of credit generated by successive efforts to stave off economic crisis. This flood of money focused on the stock market because of the exhaustion of alternative investment opportunities (such as lending to the third world), and because of the worldwide deregulation of share trading.

This tendency for the stock markets to grow rapidly, in conditions where the real economy can no longer generate greater profits consistently, has made share price movements more volatile. In the confident sixties, an economic downswing would cause only a modest fall in share prices. Today's nervy stock market operators are inclined to take fright at the slightest sign of bad news. Thus fears that little headway was being made in resolving the trade imbalances between the world's leading economies led to the 1987 crash. News that Japanese

currencies registers as higher profits when translated into pounds. In effect British profit levels, and thus share prices, have been boosted by a development—a falling pound—which is symptomatic of Britain's basic industrial weakness.

Such temporary and contradictory factors were responsible for the apparent recovery of share prices by the start of this year. The broader measures of share price performance registered much poorer results than the FT 100 index. The share prices of many smaller companies, which do not generate as much business overseas, have done very badly—a truer reflection of the state of Britain's domestic economy.

Takeover, take-off

High levels of takeover activity have also provided a prop for share prices. For example, last summer's attempt (led by Sir James Goldsmith) to take over British American Tobacco for a record £13 billion sparked a round of financial speculation and proved the major factor in sustaining some life in the market. The government's policy of spending its budget surpluses on reducing the national debt has also driven share prices up. By buying back treasury bonds from the financial institutions at a rate of £1 billion a month, the government has injected cash into the pension and insurance corporations which constitute the main players in the stock market.

Share price rises have also been exaggerated by the low levels of trading. Over the past year daily trading in shares has averaged about half the level prior to the 1987 crash. The leading financial institutions have preferred to hold on to their top-graded shares in expectation of continuing increases in their value. Such expectations have tended to become self-fulfilling, since with little stock on offer potential buyers have been forced to offer high prices to attract sellers. This trend means higher share prices, but not higher profits in the City, since dealers make their money from the overall volume of shares which they trade. Thus while the FT index reaches record levels, City firms have continued to impose redundancies.

Little comfort

Contrary to the hopes of many commentators, the state of the stock markets provides little comfort for the future of British capitalism. There were various reasons for the upward movement of share prices in the new year, but none of them were due to any new dynamism in British industry.

The stock market's credit-fuelled boom has helped to offset the stagnation of the 'real' British economy. Its continued ability to do so is increasingly being called into question. While there is no need for Chaos theories to understand this, it certainly constitutes a recipe for chaos.

SHARED

shares rose from seven to 19 (*AMEX Bank Review*, 13 October 1989). In other words, share prices were doing so well that even in conditions of economic boom they were outstripping the growth of the companies themselves and of their operating profits. Such an overvaluation of paper share prices raises the danger of market instability and even a crash. But back in the sixties, the overall strength of the major capitalist economies, and the healthy state of their profits, minimised the risks and allowed share prices to continue their steady climb.

The AMEX report cited above notes that, until the late sixties, 'standard business cycle theory describes market movements quite well'. The connection between a healthy economy and a flourishing stock market seemed clear enough. As the post-war boom ended, however, and the world economy moved into recession in the early seventies, standard economic theories could explain less and less about apparently irrational developments.

During the seventies, for example, the British and US stock markets went into long downswing. Real share prices (share prices minus the general rate of inflation) fell by 50 per cent. A more or less continual fall in P/E

on whether Chaos theory can help make sense of recent trends, by defining them as senseless. Chaos, he states, 'means a formless void, or a great deep of primordial matter'. 'Is this how we should view the stock market—and could we ever hope to make some money this way?' (*Financial Times*, 25 November 1989. See also 14 October and 21 October)

Economists now look and feel more exasperated than expert because they are trying to fit the relationship between the economy and the stock markets today into the model developed to fit the conditions of post-war boom. Thus City analysts are presently suggesting that there is still plenty of scope for share prices to go on rising in London and New York, because the P/E ratio remains low by sixties standards. They mistakenly assume that the relations and rules which held good then still apply at the dawn of the nineties. But the state of the world economy, and its relationship to stock markets, has changed beyond recognition over the past 25 years.

Unlike in the sixties, the boom in share prices in the eighties was not symptomatic of a vibrant capitalist economy. Rates of economic growth and productive investment remain far below the levels attained in the sixties.

investors were unwilling to back the buy-out of an American airline was enough to provoke a mini-crash in October 1989.

Today the stock market stands on flimsier foundations than ever. The apparent recovery in share prices since the crash does not reflect any real stability. Rather, several temporary factors have coincided to create an image of vibrancy. The City of London provides the most graphic example.

Paradoxically, the London stock market staged a notable revival during 1989 just as the British economy began showing signs of stagnation. After a poor performance in 1988 the London market bounced back and registered a higher rate of expansion than either Tokyo or Wall Street. Commentators put this down to the improved profit levels registered by UK companies over the last two years. But this is not as healthy as it might appear.

Most of the improved profitability is restricted to the largest British companies—those represented in the *Financial Times* 100 share index. These companies hold 45 per cent of their business overseas. With the exchange rate of the pound falling, income generated overseas in other

Tales of two cities

Interviews by
Andrew Calcutt

As Thatcher's credit-based economy staggers towards a recession, they're cutting jobs in the City of London and panicking about the collapse of the property market in nearby Docklands. Media attention focuses on the plight of estate agents who have not sold a property for months, and former financial whizzkids who cannot keep up the payments on the Porsche.

But there are thousands of other people working in and around the City, from steel erectors forced to travel down from the deindustrialised North to find work, to immigrant cleaners living a precarious existence between the breadline and the threat of deportation. These workers never enjoyed the benefits of the eighties boom in the City. But they will be among the first to pay the price for its problems in the nineties.

'WE'RE INDUSTRIAL GYPSIES'

In a matchbox of a canteen tucked away inside the huge steel skeleton of Docklands' Canary Wharf, Europe's largest building site, David and Tommy talked about working as steel erectors on what was supposed to be the showpiece of Thatcherism.

David: 'There are steel erectors here from Teeside, the North-west, Scotland, Wales. I'm Irish, though I'm based up North. It's a casual industry and we're industrial gypsies. You get transferred from one contract to the next. At the moment there's no shortage of work, but you don't know how long it's going to last. There's about 3500 of us organised by the inner London steel erectors' committee. But it's never the same from one week to the next.'

'In mid-summer we went out for seven weeks for better conditions and we got them. For a 10-hour day, six days a week, you now take £500 away including lodging allowance, travel allowance, the lot. They've got it in for us at the moment, though. They say the overtime rates are too high, and they want us to cut out teabreaks. There's no way we'll stand for that.'

'All the sites are on individual contracts. Rumour is rife. We have liaison between sites but it's unofficial. Management's game is to play people from different sites against each

other. Almost the whole industry is run by Trafalgar House. What they don't own through their subsidiaries is not worth having. There's a blacklist, and if your name's on it, there'll be no job in the industry for you.'

'Just now there's a dispute. UK Structures claim that they are skint, and they are unhappy with the work at one of the sites. So they put 40 men out the gate. We're supposed to take over from them. Their site committee was prepared to accept redeployment, but we said point blank no when our lads were asked.'

'Since we refused the word's been put to us that there might be redundancies on our site and we'd be doing ourselves some good by taking these jobs. But if it's true and they're thinking of getting rid of us, then we'll get sent down the road anyway. I've been a thorn in their side for 30 years and I can tell you, if you're a steel erector and you're worried about being paid off, you're in the wrong game.'

Tommy: 'On at least two occasions the site has been turned into an art gallery for visiting dignitaries in white hats. They have expensive oil paintings set up on easels, weighted down with sandbags. Artist's impression of Canary Wharf at sunrise. Artist's impression of Canary

Wharf at sunset. Where does the money come from for all this? Out of our wages. It means you can't use the lift, you have to climb up and down the steel. It's a pain.'

'Twice a week we have toolbox meetings. You can raise anything you like about safety or whatever. But the last part is a pep-talk. A Yank [Toronto-based Olympia & York are Canary Wharf's developers] always finishes it by saying "let's go to work". It's like *Hill Street Blues*.

'The Yanks can't understand our attitude to work. I went out for a drink with one once and he said "your attitude is a mystery". I said "you pay us nothing, so we do nothing". We get £4 an hour, plus £1.50 bonus. In the USA you're getting £15 an hour. But I'm working for £4 and putting my neck on the line for an extra £1.50. And they wonder about my attitude.'

'Three people have been killed here. My closest friend was killed on the steel here last year. It was the most sickening feeling I have ever felt in my life. Then they wanted us back to work after half a day. We stayed out for nearly three weeks. They're still arguing about whose fault it was.'

'There are a lot of lads here from Middlesbrough way. Management thought they wouldn't be militant, only too grateful for a job. But they are just as militant as when they got laid off years ago. A lot are from Redcar steelworks. But they're not steel erectors, although they've got it on their union card. There's a site down here where they took a half-day strike when their rabbit died. You can't blame them. Older men trying not to do too much. But we're carrying them. It slows us down and I want all that I can get.'

'I DAREN'T LOOK IN THE WINDOWS'

Roy works as a cleaner in Tobacco Dock, 250 000 square feet of nineteenth-century warehousing refurbished as a Docklands retail complex.

'Working here is not pleasant. I mean they treat you as if you've come in to

nick something, even though you work here. It's worse for me being black because of all the stories about black crime. So I walk with my eyes straight ahead not looking in windows, especially not the jeweller's shop. They look at you with suspicion and you never feel at ease.

PHOTO: Simon Nartalk



There's nothing overt. But you're made to feel unwelcome and there's too much of it to ignore. It brings home to me that I am not part of all this. I'm just here to scrape a living.

'There are five cleaners here working for a contract cleaning company and we work three shifts. We do it on a rota, you get two days off a week but your days off are always changing. The pay is £180, which means you take home £132. Nowhere near satisfactory, but that's not the worst around here. The people working in restaurants get less, even though they might have to stay until 11pm. Some of the shopworkers don't do any better.

'People working here are from working class backgrounds and we're supposed to cater for all the middle class and upper class people. I think this project will be a white elephant because the bulk of people who come in here are locals on low incomes who can't afford inflated prices. You could get better stuff than this at Woolworth's. Even when it's busy at weekends they haven't got a lot of money. They're just window-shopping.

'They've told us to look smart to encourage custom. When you work here you're supposed to fit into a certain image. You have to be careful about what you say and who you say it to. Now I've got to move on because some people have seen me talking and they're starting to wonder...'

'IT COULD HAVE BEEN ME'

In early December, cleaners at BP's Britannic House HQ at Moorgate in the City of London were arrested in the biggest immigration raid in Britain for seven years.

5.30pm. The City's wine bars are filling up with homeward-bound commuters. Meanwhile Derek is on his way to work at Britannic House. Aged about 50, he walks with small, slow steps. It is a warm night, for winter, but his head is hidden in the hood of a worn-out anorak. He is resigned to spending the next three hours mopping and wiping the floors, surfaces and lavatories of BP. If he does this for five nights a week, Initial Cleaning Services will pay him about £45. It's the price of a magnum or two at the local wine bar, but it's serious money for Derek.

Derek considers himself lucky. At least he is still in work and in Britain. In December, nearly 100 immigration police acting with full ministerial approval swooped on Britannic House, interrogated the all-black cleaning staff, and set about throwing

most of them out of the country. Police arrested 64 people: 50 from Nigeria, six from Ghana, five from Sierra Leone, two from the Gambia and one from Jamaica.

The home office ruled that 23 were 'illegal immigrants' and deported them immediately. Another 22 were served with notices of intention to deport. Fifteen were released after being cautioned for breaking conditions of entry and two were freed without charge. 'Operation Tanker', which took place within 24 hours of the first enforced repatriation of Vietnamese boat people in Hongkong, was the biggest immigration raid in Britain for seven years.

Police inspector Ernie Plumb claimed that the raid was conducted in 'a convivial atmosphere'. Derek, who was not aware of police dispensing Christmas spirit to 'aliens' like himself, sees the raid differently.


'The young men who were lifted were mainly students. Perhaps they had overstayed their permits. Anyway they knew something like this could

happen but they decided to take the risk. They had to, to get a living. I feel sorry for them.

'It's something people talk about—that there might be a raid. If there's a whisper in the air then people don't come in to work. But they had kept this one completely quiet. There was no sign of what was going to happen but once you got inside the building you could see it was full of police. Truly a big operation. And the door was locked behind you. Trapped.

'All the cleaners here are black. We were called in one by one. They asked me how long I had been here and what was my legal status. I was let out, but many we never saw after that.

'We were told to get on with our work. It wasn't easy to do that. It makes you unsettled. Because it could have been me. I was all right because I got here [to Britain] before a certain time. You look at what's happening with the Vietnamese people and it's getting tighter all the time.'



In defence of revolution

The corpse is not communism

Every British publication from the *Sun* to the *Times* and *Marxism Today* has declared the death of communism. Yet what has collapsed in Eastern Europe is something that is closer to capitalism than to Marxism. Indeed, the Stalinist system could only be created once the tradition of revolutionary Marxism had been defeated. Today there is a tendency to suggest that the Stalinist order is the necessary consequence of Marxism and Leninism. We reject any such link. But when the issues have become so confused, it is worth considering how the liberating promise of 1917 turned into a Stalinist nightmare. We reprint here the first chapter of Frank Furedi's book, *The Soviet Union Demystified* (Junius, 1986) as a restatement of the case for communism and against Stalinism.

Marx on the proletarian dictatorship

Marxism developed as a distinct alternative to the romantic critiques of capitalism that arose in mid-nineteenth century Europe. Marx was not concerned simply to attack capitalist exploitation. Exploitation had existed in previous societies: though capitalists continued it, their system was still an advance on earlier forms of social organisation. Marx's critique of capitalism was based on the recognition that beyond a certain point the social relations of capitalist society created obstacles to the development of the forces of production. This failure to develop the forces of production systematically was the main target of Marx's attack. Marx's emphasis on the forces of production did not stem from an obsession with technology or production. For Marx, the liberation of humanity was inextricably linked to the development of the productive forces of society.

Many left wingers regard Marx's emphasis on the forces of production as crude and excessively materialistic. They fail to grasp how Marx's preoccupation with the development of the forces of production arose from his commitment to the genuine liberation of mankind. Marx rejected the abstract conceptions of freedom that prevail in bourgeois society. For him freedom meant freedom from want, freedom from the struggle for survival. He noted that freedom cannot be declared or conceded as an act of will:

'It is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means....Slavery cannot be abolished without the steam engine and the mule jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and...in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity.' (*The German ideology, Marx and Engels Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 5, 1976, p38)

People may imagine doing anything, but they cannot escape the material constraints that reality imposes on their behaviour. Marx continually highlighted the objective restrictions on human freedom and the need to overcome them to achieve human liberation: 'A development of the productive forces is the absolute premise, because without it want is generalised, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means all the old crap must revive.' Only by raising the productivity of labour can society

generate enough surplus, enough disposable labour-time, to move from the 'realm of necessity' to the 'realm of freedom' (*Grundrisse*, 1973, p711). The full development of the individual—the central project of Marxism—depends on the economic development of society. To express genuine individuality people need to have free time available so that they can make choices which are not limited by material restraints. Only when the development of the productive forces of society has eliminated hardship and shortages of basic goods can individuals make decisions which are conscious choices, rather than choices forced on them by the tyranny of necessity.

Marx's material approach to human liberation inspired his commitment to communism. Marx regarded communism as a worthy goal because it would provide the foundation for the unhindered development of the productivity of labour. In his view raising productivity was the key aim of all economic activity: 'Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself.' Moreover, raising the productivity of labour was particularly important for a communist society. It was, Marx argued, 'the first economic law' of 'communal production' (*Grundrisse*, pp172-3).

Marx and Engels recognised that capitalism could not be transformed into communism overnight. A period of transition would be needed to build up the material prerequisites for communist society. They were well aware that the social system succeeding capitalism would, 'in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually' be 'still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges' (F Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy', *Marx and Engels Selected Works (MESW)*, 1968, p319). They characterised this society—popularly known as 'socialism'—as 'the lower phase of communism'. In this phase class differences would persist, because the material foundations for equality would not be completed. During this transition period the working class would ensure its political control over society through 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'.

The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat has been under left-wing attack since the sixties, especially by Eurocommunists. Most critics have focused on its allegedly anti-democratic character and have promoted various notions of 'socialist

democracy' as alternatives. According to one Eurocommunist theoretician the fact that 'Marx and Engels tended to define the state solely in terms of class domination' is a fatal flaw in their work which leads to a serious underestimation of democracy (C Sirianni, *Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy: The Soviet Experience*, 1982, p273). Such criticisms, which amount to an explicit rejection of the Marxist theory of the state, reveal a misunderstanding of the relationship between democracy and the proletarian dictatorship.

Marx argued that democracy, like any form of political rule, could not exist in the abstract, in isolation from class interests. As long as classes exist, any form of political rule means the dictatorship of one class over another. Class dictatorship can assume a variety of political forms. In capitalist society, the rule of the capitalist class may be imposed by military dictatorship or fascism; or it may be exercised in a less coercive way through parliamentary democracy. But parliamentary democracy is simply one form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. A classless democracy, without coercion and the institutionalised power of vested interests, exists only on the plane of abstract speculation.

In a famous letter, Marx summarised his views on the proletarian dictatorship, noting that 'this dictatorship only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society' (K Marx and F Engels, 'Correspondence 1852-55', *MECW*, Vol 39, 1983, p63). Until humanity has overcome want, classes will persist. The proletarian dictatorship expresses the rule of one class—the proletariat—whose aim is to abolish all classes. However, class rule by definition means the application of force, and in this respect, as Engels noted, proletarian rule can be no different than the rule of other classes: 'So long as the proletariat still uses the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries' (*Marx and Engels Selected Correspondence*, 1975, p275). Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, as under capitalism, state coercion may be mediated by participatory bodies and by consensus; but, whatever the political framework, it will be backed up by force. Under a proletarian state, force will be directed by the majority of society against the capitalist minority—the reverse of the situation under capitalism. The dictatorship of the proletariat will therefore provide a framework within which democracy will flourish as never before. It will mean the democracy of the masses, not the democracy of the slave

'Help!' by Dmitry Moor, 1921: civil war poster appealing for aid for the starving Soviet masses

In place of the market the proletarian state aims to distribute labour-time consciously, through planning

owners of Athens or the charade tolerated under certain conditions by the capitalist class.

The establishment of the proletarian dictatorship and the destruction of the power of the capitalist class open up the road to communism. But, as Engels observed, the pace at which the proletarian dictatorship moves to take control of the economy, and the measures that it implements, depend on particular circumstances:

'In general, the question is not whether the proletariat when it comes to power will simply seize by force the instruments of production, the raw materials and means of subsistence, whether it will redeem the property therein by small instalment payments. To attempt to answer such a question in advance and for all cases would be utopia-making.' (Quoted in VI Lenin, *Marxism on the State*, 1972, p41)

To sum up: in the economic sphere the proletarian dictatorship must ensure the steady growth of the productive forces; in the sphere of politics the task of the state is to ensure that the working class stays in power.

Lenin on planning

Marx and Engels considered the proletarian dictatorship primarily from a theoretical point of view. Lenin was obliged to tackle the practical problems confronting the newly formed workers' state. One of the key problems that will confront any proletarian state is that of building up the economy. The goal of the workers' state is to abolish value relations—the spontaneous distribution of labour-time through the capitalist market mechanism. In place of the market the proletarian state aims to distribute labour-time consciously, through planning. But what are the preconditions for the smooth operation of a social plan?

Even before the Russian Revolution, Lenin knew how difficult it would be to set up an effective system of planning. The backward character of the Russian economy, compounded by the low level of education, industrial skills and general culture, made it impossible for the Bolsheviks to introduce planning at once. Aware that it could easily confiscate capitalist property, but that running the economy would prove much more difficult, the new regime restricted the scope of

nationalisation. Shortly before the revolution Lenin had noted that confiscation alone 'leads nowhere, as it does not contain the element of organisation' ('Can the Bolsheviks retain state power?', *Collected Works (CW)*, Vol 26, p107). After 1917 he returned to this theme time and again.

For the Bolsheviks the first task of the proletarian dictatorship after the defeat of the capitalist class was to set up *workers' control* over the economy. 'The chief difficulty', Lenin wrote, 'is the establishment on a countrywide scale of the most precise and most conscientious accounting and control, of workers' control of the production and distribution of goods' (*CW*26, p105). Workers' control was not an end in itself: it was a precondition for successful planning—a system in which the economy came under direct *workers' management*.

Lenin identified workers' control and workers' management as two distinct stages in the battle for a communist society:

'Until workers' control has become a fact, until the advanced workers have organised and carried out a victorious and ruthless crusade against the violators of this control, or against those who are careless in the matters of control, it will be impossible to pass from the first step (from workers' control) to the second step towards socialism, ie, to pass on to a workers' regulation of production.' ('The immediate tasks of the Soviet government', *CW*27, pp254-5)

Lenin regarded workers' control as a transitional phase during which the proletariat would, through the exercise of political power, establish control over the economy. This power would then become consolidated through workers' management, which presupposed the capacity for the central regulation of economic affairs.

The Bolsheviks from the outset underestimated the difficulties involved in achieving workers' management. In 1918 and 1919, the years of 'war communism', Lenin suggested on several occasions that the Soviet Union was on the threshold of workers' management. However, it soon became apparent that simply setting up planning agencies was insufficient to guarantee genuine workers' management; in fact Lenin never lived to see workers' management of the Soviet economy. However, his awareness of the necessity for a transitional phase in which to strengthen the proletarian dictatorship is clear from the emphasis he placed on this problem in his writings. In his last years his energies were directed towards

strengthening the control of the new state over the economy.

Today Lenin's analysis of workers' management is misunderstood or forgotten. His analysis shows that planning does not arise spontaneously. Establishing a conscious distribution of labour-time requires major social, cultural and economic changes—changes which can only be achieved through struggle. Yet, as one influential document argued, the process of the proletarian dictatorship directly depends on how far it can manage the economy. 'In the economic sphere, the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship can be carried out only to the extent that the proletariat is able to create centralised organs for the management of production and introduce workers' management.' (Communist International, *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, 1980, pp43-4)

Constructing 'centralised organs for the management of production' is essential if production is to come under the conscious direction of society. Nationalisation, however, becomes progressive only in so far as the productive forces are socialised. Contrary to the widely held view, neither Marx nor Lenin regarded nationalisation itself as progressive. The communal ownership of industry is a step forward from private property in so far as it enhances the socialisation of labour and increases productivity. But apart from this, nationalised property has no special significance. Engels' witty remarks on left-wing illusions in nationalised property retain their relevance today:

'Of late, since Bismarck went in for state ownership of industrial establishments, a kind of spurious socialism has arisen, degenerating, now and again, into something of flunkeyism, that without more ado declares all state ownership, even of the Bismarckian sort, to be socialistic. Certainly, if the taking over by the state of the tobacco industry is socialistic, then Napoleon and Metternich must be numbered among the founders of socialism.' (*Anti-Dühring*, 1975, p329)

Workers' control under the Bolsheviks

Shortly after the October Revolution the Bolsheviks discovered that if they were to preserve workers' power over society they had no alternative but to

expropriate the bourgeoisie. The threat of economic sabotage by the capitalist class forced the hand of the new workers' government. Lenin regarded the confiscation of capitalist property not as an economic expedient but as a political necessity:

'The domination of the proletariat consists in the fact that the landowners and capitalists have been deprived of their property....The prime thing is the question of property. As soon as the question was settled practically, the domination of the class was assured.' (Report of the central committee, ninth congress of the RCP(B), *CW30*, p451)

The project of establishing a system of workers' management came up against a number of obstacles. The greatest problem facing the Bolsheviks was the fragmented character of the Russian economy, and the fact that it was dominated by small-scale agriculture. The country's economic backwardness limited the scope for state regulation and restricted the speed with which fundamental changes could be pushed through. Lenin recognised that Soviet society would have to undergo important changes before

planning could begin. In one of his most important articles after 1917 he summed up the difficulties of the transition period:

'Theoretically, there can be no doubt that between capitalism and communism there lies a definite transition period which must combine the features and properties of these forms of social economy. This transition period has to be a period of struggle between dying capitalism and nascent communism—or, in other words, between capitalism that has been defeated but not destroyed and communism which has been born but is still very feeble.' (Economics and politics in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat', *CW30*, p107)

In the transition period, the forces attempting to establish a planned society can expect to face continual rearguard resistance from the remnants of capitalist production relations.

In Russia the economic problems were particularly acute. The combination of backward industry and a morass of peasant holdings meant that the social weight of state-run industry was relatively small. The

failure of proletarian revolution outside Russia ensured that the new workers' state could not rely on economic assistance from the more developed countries of Europe. The only realistic option available to the proletarian dictatorship was to compromise with the peasantry and tolerate the existence of a capitalist market in agriculture. At the tenth congress of the Soviet Communist Party in March 1921 Lenin was candid: 'We know that so long as there is no revolution in other countries, only agreement with the peasantry can save the revolution in Russia.' (Report to the tenth congress of the RCP(B)', *CW32*, p215)

The compromise formulated in the New Economic Policy (NEP) relied upon the market mechanism to reconstruct the economy. Foreign capitalists were given the right to invest in certain sectors and private traders and entrepreneurs were allowed to pursue their businesses. State power was the main guarantee that the proletarian dictatorship would not lose control over the activities of the capitalist sector. Thus in the NEP period workers' control assumed a peculiar form: the workers' state concentrated, not on planning the economy, but on keeping a firm grip on the capitalists and petty commodity producers. 'Growing capitalism will be under control and supervision, while political power will remain in the hands of the workers' state', said Lenin (Report on the tax in kind', *CW31*, p298).

The Bolsheviks realised that the growth of capitalist production relations was a potential threat to the new government. But they felt that, through systematic control, the expansion of capitalism could be harnessed in the service of the working class. Lenin coined the phrase 'state capitalism' to express the regulation of capitalism by the proletarian state. Unfortunately the state was ill-prepared to take on the *nepmen*, the entrepreneurs whose activities were given free rein by the new policy. The new state even had problems controlling the nationalised industries—those directly under its own administration. One year after the introduction of NEP, Lenin was forced to admit that it had exposed the weaknesses of the Soviet state:

'The past showed quite clearly that we cannot run the economy. That is the fundamental lesson. Either we prove the opposite in the coming year, or Soviet power will not be able to exist.' (Political report to the central committee of the RCP(B)', *CW33*, p274)

Lenin's warning was to prove prophetic. The policies introduced

'The domination of the proletariat consists in the fact that the landowners and capitalists have been deprived of their property'—Lenin



under NEP did help to stimulate economic recovery. However, much of the burgeoning economic activity remained unregulated, and as the prosperous peasants, or *kulaks*, grew stronger, so the state grew weaker. By late 1927 the *kulaks* had begun to hold back food from the cities. The crisis triggered by the conflict between the peasantry and the state reached a peak in June 1928 when violence and terrorism enveloped the countryside. By April 1929 the system of voluntary food deliveries to the state distribution agencies had broken down. The NEP was abandoned as the state attempted to exert more direct forms of control over the rural economy.

The disappearing proletariat

Under conditions of proletarian dictatorship, workers' control over the economy depends on a combination of centralised administration and local initiative. The commitment and active participation of workers in economic life is essential to ensure that all aspects of the economy are run by the working class. Without this active involvement, neither the wide knowledge they have of work, nor their broader cultural and political experience, will find its way into the social plan. The creative spirit of the proletariat will be wasted and information vital to the planning process will not be forthcoming from workplaces.

The forward movement of society under the dictatorship of the proletariat depends entirely on the foresight of the working class. This was especially true of the Soviet Union in the difficult years of the early twenties, as Lenin was well aware:

'The proletarian state may, without changing its own nature, permit freedom to trade and the development of capitalism only within certain bounds and only on the condition that the state regulates...private trade and private capitalism. The success of such regulation will depend not only on the state authorities but also, and to a larger extent, on the degree of maturity of the proletariat and of the masses of working people generally, on their cultural level.' ('The role and functions of the trade unions under the NEP', *CW33*, p185)

Lenin placed special emphasis on the role of the vanguard—the most active and politically aware section of the working class—in defending the proletarian state. He argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be exercised by the whole of the working class because it was 'still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts' by capitalism that its consciousness remained uneven. Hence power could only be exercised by a vanguard that had 'absorbed the revolutionary energy of the class'. ('The trade unions, the present situation and Trotsky's mistakes', *CW32*, p21)

Both the working class and its vanguard underwent a major upheaval during the revolution and the years of turmoil that followed it. The invasion of the Soviet state by imperialist armies ranged on several fronts, and the civil war that raged between 1918 and 1921, together had a catastrophic impact on the working class. In the five years following 1917 much of Soviet industry was destroyed, economic life came to a virtual standstill and the industrial proletariat was decimated. Hunger, poverty and unemployment drove workers into the countryside. According to the British historian Carr, the number of workers remaining in the Petrograd region at the end of 1918 was little more than half that employed there two years earlier. The number of industrial workers in the Soviet Union fell from three million in 1917 to 2.5 million in 1918, then to fewer than 1.5 million in 1920-21 and finally to 1.25 million in 1921-22 (EH Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol 2, 1966, p197).

The sharp decline in the social weight of the working class dealt a hammer blow to the proletarian dictatorship. At a time when they might have hoped to extend workers' democracy through the system of soviets, the Bolsheviks were faced with the disintegration of their social base. The dissolution of the working class forced the Bolsheviks to take direct responsibility for every aspect of social life. But the party itself could not remain immune from the consequences of the liquidation of the working class.

The Bolshevik Party paid the price of defending the revolution in blood. During the civil war all party members were declared eligible for service at the front and hence a disproportionate number were killed. Although tens of thousands of workers flocked to join the party, the damage could not be undone. Indeed the influx of raw, inexperienced members, untrained in Marxism, had a tendency to lower the political standards of the party. In March 1922 Lenin pointed out how fragile the party had become:

'If we do not close our eyes to reality we must admit that at the present time the proletarian policy of the party is not determined by the character of its membership, but the enormous undivided prestige enjoyed by a small group which might be called the old guard of the party. A slight conflict within this group will be enough, if not to destroy this prestige, at all events to weaken the group to such a degree as to rob it of its power to determine policy.' (*CW33*, p257)

Even the party, the vanguard of the working class, lacked the political consciousness necessary to wield proletarian power. In practice, a few thousand individuals—the Old Bolsheviks—were charged with overseeing the transition to communism.

PHOTO: The David King Collection

The transformation of the party

The coherence of the party was the ultimate guarantee of the survival of the proletarian dictatorship. Despite the deformations of the system of workers' democracy that resulted from the civil war, despite the destruction of the proletariat, the Bolsheviks rightly regarded the party as the agency that could still overcome the crisis faced by the young workers' state.

However, party life became stagnant in the immediate post-revolutionary period. The most experienced party members were drawn into full-time military,

economic and administrative posts. By 1918 the party in Petrograd was almost bereft of experienced cadres; by the following year party and state machinery were virtually indistinguishable. A sample of party members in October 1919 revealed that only 11 per cent were still working in factories. Sixty per cent were state or party employees and 25 per cent were in the Red Army.

The need to consolidate state control drew more and more Bolsheviks into the bureaucracy. At the eighth party congress in March 1918, Zinoviev argued for large-scale recruitment into the party on the grounds that more members were required to staff the various bodies of the state. The developing fusion between the party and the state apparatus had serious consequences for the proletarian character of the

the emergence of a party bureaucracy and the abuse of position by certain individuals was inevitable. The Bolsheviks recognised these problems and, at their 1919 congress, introduced a selective method of recruitment that was weighted in favour of workers. In mid-1919 the party leadership launched the first major purge of inactive members and the pressures of the civil war also drove thousands of passive recruits out of the party. Nevertheless the trend towards bureaucratisation continued. During the period of the NEP, communists were increasingly drawn into state administration: only 12 per cent of new recruits in 1922 were genuine workers. By this time an immense party bureaucracy had emerged: more than 15 000 people—one in every 25 party members—were engaged in full-time party work.

dependent on the party hierarchy. A layer of party officials emerged made up of individuals whose position depended more on the apparatus than on their standing in local cells.

In 1920 the party leadership set up the *Uchraspred*, a new section of the party secretariat, to supervise the appointment and transfer of members. In July 1923, the central committee drew up a list of 3500 posts which could only be filled by sanction from the party leadership, together with a further 1000 posts which had to be dealt with by the *Uchraspred*. Since local secretaries relied on the central apparatus for their position, the *Uchraspred* could virtually control party life. In October 1923 Trotsky warned that the party appointment system was dangerously vulnerable to abuse:

'Appointment of the secretaries of provincial committees is now the rule. That creates for the secretary a position essentially independent of the local organisation.' (*Documents of the 1923 Opposition*, 1975, p2)

Stalin, who rose to the head of the administration in 1922, used the independence of the apparatus from the party rank and file to advance his factional ambitions within the bureaucracy. By 1923 the apparatus was strong enough to ensure that only delegates it considered loyal were elected to the thirteenth party congress—and that all representatives of the party's Left Opposition were excluded. The vanguard party of the working class had become an instrument of bureaucratic manipulation.

Southern Russia, 1921: After seven years of world war and civil war, famine devastated the revolutionary state



party. Party officials and state bureaucrats tended to merge into a new and distinct social stratum. As Zinoviev recognised, many people were now joining the party, not out of a commitment to communism but to improve their career prospects:

'There have been cases in Moscow where a man turns up at the [district committee] at 8pm to take out party membership, and when he is told to come back next day, he replies: "Do me a good turn, I am going for a job tomorrow and I need a party card right away."' (TH Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-67*, 1968, p75)

In the circumstances that prevailed in the Soviet Union after the revolution,

Lenin was acutely aware of the dangers resulting from the coalescence of party and state and the last articles he wrote before he was disabled by a stroke in 1923 were directed against this trend. However, there was an even greater problem: the Bolsheviks' preoccupation with military and administrative tasks destroyed the political life of the party. More and more local leaders were appointed rather than elected. In the chaos of civil war this was unavoidable—experienced personnel had to be posted to strategic areas at a moment's notice. But as the party apparatus expanded it assumed wider responsibilities and powers. Local officials were assimilated into the local party machine and their promotion prospects became

The administration and the old order

The disintegration of the working class and the bureaucratisation of the Bolshevik Party limited the effectiveness of the proletarian dictatorship. Another problem was the low cultural and educational level of the Soviet working class. Lenin recognised that, given the lack of skill and training, the proletariat could not do without specialists from the old tsarist regime:

'The exploiters have been eliminated. But the cultural level has not been raised, and therefore the bureaucrats are occupying their old position.' ('Eighth congress of the RCP(B), report on the party programme', *CW29*, p184)

Given the weakness of the working class, the integration of party and state machinery was inevitable

Much of the old state machinery remained intact and, as one Western scholar has observed, 'the structural changes were scarcely greater than those sometimes accompanying changes of government in Western parliamentary systems' (TH Rigby, *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom 1917-22*, 1979, p51).

The civil war and other external pressures intensified the difficulties facing the early Soviet regime. Between 1918 and 1921 the Soviet state apparatus barely functioned in the countryside. A report by national commissar Podbelsky, who was sent in July 1919 to examine the soviets in the Tambov region south-east of Moscow, summed up the situation that prevailed in most rural areas:

'Strictly speaking, there is no soviet government in the majority of the [localities]. At present soviets exist in most places only on paper: in reality, representatives of kulaks and speculators, or self-interested people, or cowards, who carry out the work without any definite direction, work under the name of soviets.' (Quoted in Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, 1970, p64)

The precarious position of the proletarian state gave rise to tensions that could only be resolved by the party assuming direct responsibility for many aspects of administration. Given the weakness of the working class, the integration of party and state machinery was inescapable.

The Bolsheviks held state power, but in practice their capacity to exert direct influence over the state apparatus was limited. Lenin put the problem starkly to the eleventh party congress in 1922:

'If we take Moscow with its 4700 communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth they are not directing, they are being directed.' ('Political report of the central committee of the RCP(B)', *CW33*, p288)

Not only were the communist officials 'being directed', they were also coming under the ideological influence of the old bureaucrats.

Lenin pointed out that the social weight and ideological influence of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois forces remained considerable.

'If the conquering nation is more cultured than the vanquished nation, the former imposes its culture upon the latter: but if the opposite is the case, the vanquished nation imposes its culture upon the conquerer. Has



not something like this happened in the capital of the Soviet Union? Have the 4700 communists (nearly a whole army division, and all of them the very best) come under the influence of an alien culture? True, there may be the impression that the vanquished have a high level of culture. But that is not the case at all. Their culture is miserable, insignificant, but it is still at a higher level than ours.' (*CW33*, p288)

In the last months of his life Lenin became acutely sensitive to the lack of control which the proletariat had over its state. In December 1922 he noted that in effect the Bolsheviks had merely taken over the old machinery of the state from the Tsar and the bourgeoisie. Little had changed: the autocratic institutions had been 'slightly anointed with Soviet oil', but 'the apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us, it is a bourgeois and tsarist hotch-potch' (*CW36*, pp605-6).

The survival of much of the old state apparatus—a concern which haunted Lenin throughout his last months—was the inevitable consequence of the material conditions that prevailed in the Soviet Union. Only assistance from a victorious revolution in Europe could have counteracted the negative effects of economic backwardness. In these difficult circumstances the Bolsheviks' only option was to launch a campaign to renew the political life of the working class that had been worn out and to fight to raise the cultural level of the masses. It was on this problem that Lenin concentrated his final efforts. In his last two articles, both written in January 1923, he proposed that the power of the party's central control commission be increased with a view to stimulating

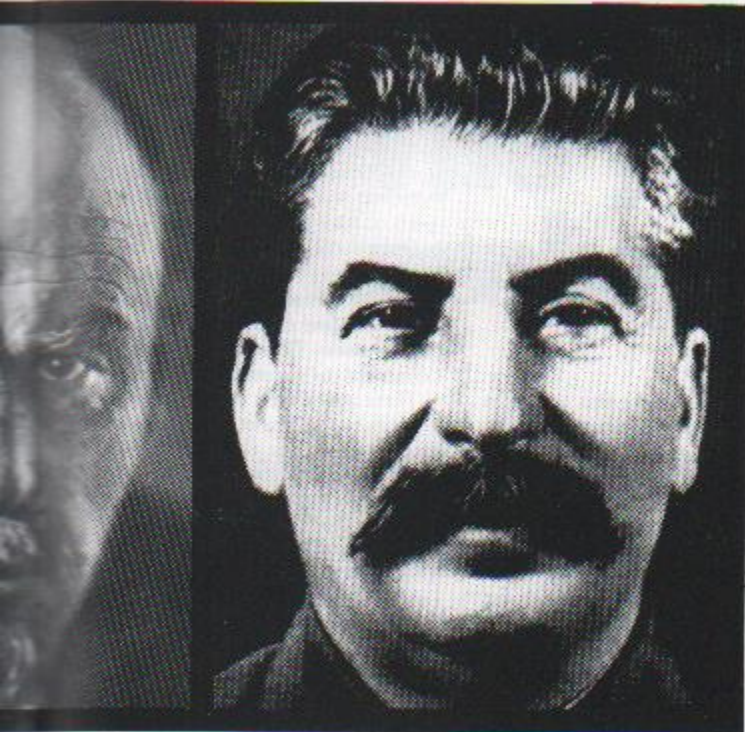
political discussion in the party. He also proposed that *Rabkin*, the workers' and peasants' inspectorate, should be strengthened to become a 'really exemplary institution, an instrument to improve our state apparatus' ('Better fewer, but better', *CW33*, p489).

For Lenin the top priority was to strengthen the institutions of workers' control so that they could counteract the pernicious influence of the bureaucracy. He also proposed more far-reaching measures that would involve 'thoroughly purging our government machine, by reducing to the utmost everything that is not essential in it' (*CW33*, pp501-2). Lenin regarded his proposals as steps towards a broad 'cultural revolution':

'This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country; but it presents immense difficulties of a purely cultural (for we are illiterate) and material character (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, must have a certain material base).' ('On cooperation', *CW33*, p475)

The last chance

Lenin correctly identified the bureaucratic character of the state and the lack of working class control over the apparatus. He also saw that the Bolshevik Party had become a fragile instrument for preserving



After Lenin's death, Stalin (right) sought to link his name to the theory of socialism in one country; but it was Trotsky (left) who upheld Lenin's project of world revolution

proletarian power, relying on the authority of 'the small group which might be called the old guard of the party'. Given the insecure foundations of the world's first workers' state, only a rapid development of workers' political coherence and the class consciousness of the working class could have prevented its degeneration.

Lenin's call for cultural revolution and party renewal came up against a formidable barrier. Even the old guard had ceased to be the true leadership of the party. The concentration of power in the apparatus meant that the top bureaucrats had become virtual masters of the situation. At the time when Lenin made his last proposals, the power of the bureaucracy was far from total. A figure of his standing in the party could well have played a decisive role in reversing the growth of the apparatus. But Lenin lay speechless and paralysed from early 1923 until his death in January of the following year. He could no longer play an active part in the struggle.

Trotsky, to whom Lenin entrusted the fight, played an undistinguished role at the twelfth congress of the Soviet Communist Party in March 1923. It was left up to isolated individuals such as Rakovsky, Kosior and Preobrazhensky to point out the grave threat to the workers' state posed by the burgeoning bureaucracy. Lenin's memorandum on the issue put Stalin and the bureaucracy he led on the defensive. But the lack of a real fight on the question meant that the apparatus escaped largely unscathed. Nevertheless the apparatus was sufficiently vulnerable to criticism to make token gestures in the direction of democracy. In September 1923, the central committee set up a

commission on the internal situation in the party.

In October 1923, Trotsky at last began to take up the cudgels against the stagnation of party life. At around the same time a joint platform criticising the party regime was drawn up and signed by 46 prominent Bolsheviks and sent to the central committee. The party leadership was still not sure enough of its position to dismiss the criticisms. Stalin's tactic was to accept some of Trotsky's strictures, draw up a joint statement with him and thus try to downplay the conflict. Accordingly a resolution drafted by Trotsky, Stalin and Kamenev was unanimously passed at a joint session of the politburo and the presidium of the central control commission in December 1923. In this way the leadership hoped to isolate Trotsky from rank and file critics of the apparatus.

The joint resolution incorporated many of the criticisms of the apparatus and listed the dangers facing the party:

'The sharp differentiation in the material situation of party members...in connection with differences of function, and the so-called "excesses"; the growth of a link with bourgeois elements and the ideological influence of the latter: an official narrowness of outlook, which should be distinguished from necessary specialisation, and the consequent weakening of the link between communists engaged in different sectors of work: the danger of a loss of a broad view of socialist construction as a whole and of world revolution: the danger already noted by the congress of a degeneration under NEP of the section of party workers in closest contact, through the nature of their activity, with the bourgeois milieu: the bureaucratisation which has been observed in party offices and the threat arising therefrom of a divorce of the party from the masses.' (Quoted in EH Carr, *The Interregnum 1923-24*, 1969, p314)

The resolution sounded good, but its only practical consequence was to give the apparatus room to outmanoeuvre the opposition.

The December resolution was a prelude to the bitter struggle that broke out at the thirteenth party congress in 1924, when Lenin was on his death-bed. In the name of the apparatus, Stalin launched a furious campaign against Trotsky and the opposition. This succeeded in isolating and decisively defeating the challenge to the bureaucracy. The conference went on to take a decision with long-term consequences for the party—the decision to launch a mass recruitment drive. After Lenin's death

the apparatus carried through the 'Lenin levy' which brought 128 000 people into the party within three months. An influx of inexperienced recruits on this scale could only make a mockery of the internal life of the party.

The revolutionary wing of the party was reduced to a small minority. According to Carr only 10 000 'Old Bolsheviks', many of whom had become inactive, remained in the party. Many of the new entrants were motivated entirely by self-interest. For the first time party membership conferred material privileges on the card holder. The growing passivity of the party membership reflected the enhanced power of the bureaucracy. The thirteenth party congress was the last chance to revive the party, but unfortunately it merely ratified the defeat of the opposition and ended all realistic hope of revitalising the party.

A full decade later, in his major reassessment published in February 1935, Trotsky finally grasped the full implications of the events of 1924, drawing a striking parallel with the reaction which followed the French Revolution of the eighteenth century:

'The smashing of the Left Opposition implied in the most direct and immediate sense the transfer of power from the hands of the revolutionary vanguard into the hands of the more conservative elements among the bureaucracy and the upper crust of the working class. The year 1924—that was the beginning of the Soviet Thermidor.' (*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35*, 1971, p174)

Back in 1924 appearances were deceptive. Stalin had not yet assumed the role of the omnipotent public figure he later became. The leadership of the apparatus had still not come together to form a stable clique. Indeed the apparatus spent the rest of the twenties in internal disputes, realignments and purges. At the time Trotsky considered that the conflicts within the bureaucracy provided considerable potential for the growth of the Left Opposition. But the spasms of the apparatus merely reflected its instability, and struggles remained at the level of skirmishes among different sections of the bureaucracy. The Left Opposition itself failed to reach the rank and file and, even in its heyday in the mid-twenties, it remained tied to the institutions of the apparatus. While the battles were raging at meetings of the central committee, the party membership was consigned to the role of passive observer.

Why Gorbachev's policies won't wash

SOVIET SOAP OPERA

Adam Eastman on a shortage which exposes the myth of 'socialist planning' and the failure of perestroika in the Soviet Union

'I am going to collect all my dirty laundry and send it to Minkhimprom, Gossnab and Gosagroprom every week. If they can't supply us with soap then let them do my laundry themselves.'—Moscow consumer, July 1989

First it was sugar. Now an even more essential commodity—soap—has all but disappeared from Soviet shops. We are not talking about Camay or Cussons Imperial Leather. Soviet soap, or *mylo*, is made from animal fats as it was under the tsars, and doesn't exactly produce a rich and creamy lather. Nonetheless, it is in very short supply. Not only do the average Soviet citizens have to make do with water, and water only, in their bathtubs, but there is no soap to wash dishes and clothes, no detergents to clean factories, and severe shortages in the hospitals.

Those who do have access to soap supplies hoard it, turning their tiny flats into detergent warehouses. Many of the hoarders are now developing respiratory diseases from living and breathing clouds of *mylo* particles. So for the average Soviet citizen, the soap

crisis is no laughing matter. Demands for proper soap supplies figured highly in the grievances of the striking miners in the Donbass and Kuzbass last July. Since then the situation has worsened, with soap being rationed nationwide. Under new regulations housewives have to wash their families, homes and laundry with a single box of soap powder issued by coupon every three months.

The ruling bureaucracy is having difficulty explaining away the soap crisis to the Soviet public. On the face of it the shortages should not have occurred. The Soviet Union has increased its own production of soap over the past three years to levels comparable to Japan, and now imports an additional three million tons a year. So where is it?

Slip of a pen

The top Soviet economist, Abel Aganbegyan, has a novel explanation for the crisis. He told an American journalist recently that the shortage occurred because a technocrat at the economic ministry, Gosplan, made a mistake while calculating soap production for the current five-year plan. The man's pen had slipped, in-

advertently slashing the national output, and he'd kept quiet about it for fear of losing his pension. Tat'yana Zaslavskaya, Gorbachev's top sociologist, argues that the soap shortage is the consequence of deliberate sabotage by hardline bureaucrats who oppose the reforms of perestroika. Citing evidence of soap-laden trains left to dissolve in railway sidings, she concludes that dark Stalinist forces have conspired to hold back supplies and embarrass Gorbachev.

Planned chaos

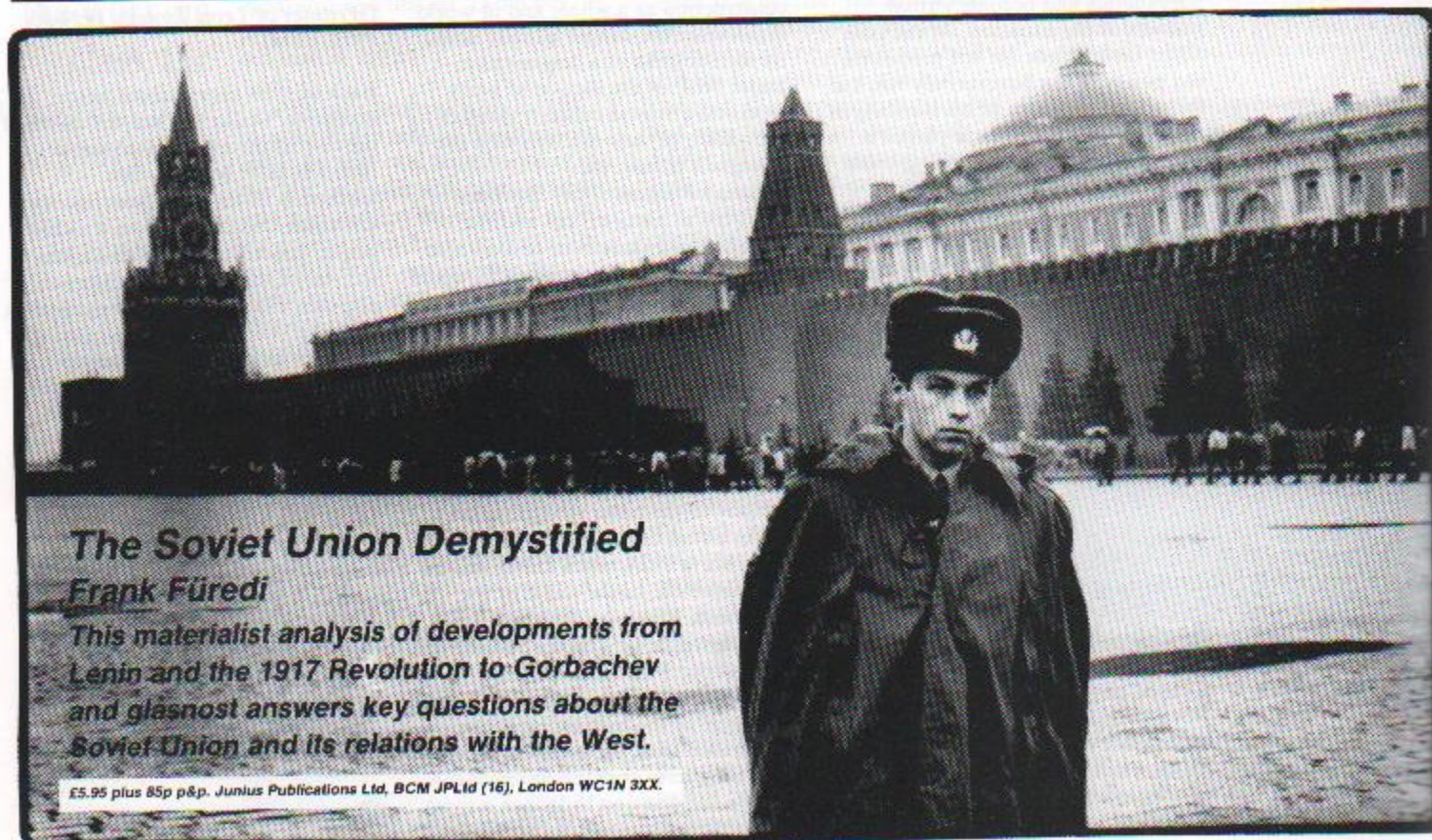
But is it possible for a huge country's sanitary conditions to be devastated by the stroke of one official's pen, or by a few consignments of soap bars being deliberately shunted into sidings? The regime's apologists like to blame incompetent or malevolent bureaucrats for the crisis to deflect criticism from the system itself. But the shortage of soap in the shops is yet another symptom of the collapse of the Soviet economy.

For all the armies of state planners, the Soviet economy is about as planned as an unwanted pregnancy. 'Planning' is carried out by pen-pushers with no popular participation.

These bureaucrats are solely concerned with protecting themselves by fulfilling paper quotas, regardless of what is needed where. There is little or no coordination between different economic sectors. As a consequence, much of what is produced is useless, and the entirely disorganised transport system ensures that few goods get delivered. The bureaucracy has proved unable to produce even a slight excess of basic necessities. The soap crisis is a glaring example of the system in operation.

There is no excess soap production capacity in the Soviet Union, claims one report on the crisis, 'any interruption in production or distribution or surge in demand empties shelves' (DJ Peterson, 'Soap in the Soviet Union: portrait of a shortage', *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, 1(46), 1989). That's not surprising when there is only one factory producing sulphanol, the essential ingredient in Soviet soap; and even that factory, the Khimprom enterprise in Sumgait, is located in Azerbaijan, now in the throes of a civil war. Very little of the soap imported from abroad gets to the consumer either. The Soviet ducks have no port and transportation facilities to handle the large freight containers the soap arrives in, so it is left on the docks while the Soviet Union goes unwashed.

A system which cannot produce and distribute a basic necessity like soap has no hope of resolving the more fundamental economic and political problems facing it today. Mr Gorbachev's squeaky clean image in the West cuts little ice with ordinary Soviet workers who can no longer wash themselves, the laundry or their homes for the lack of soap.



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The great abortion and experimentation debate

The year of the embryo?

Women need the right to abortion and society needs embryo research; Ann Bradley enters what looks like being one of the great debates of 1990

Ruling on a recent American court case concerning the ownership of frozen embryos, a judge remarked that he now knew more about the issue than he ever intended to. Over the next year British parliamentarians may well express similar sentiments, as 1990 looks set to become the 'year of the embryo'. Already two bills directly concerned with the matter are troubling the house of lords.

The much-discussed Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is a government-sponsored measure to bring embryo experimentation and reproductive technology under tighter control. It will set up a human fertilisation and embryology authority, accountable to the health secretary, to licence research centres and clinics administering techniques such as artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilisation. It will also legislate on the limits of embryo experimentation. The bill offers parliament a choice between banning embryo experiments outright, or allowing them in strictly controlled circumstances—but only up to 14 days.

Laws of science

The less-discussed Abortion Amendment Bill sponsored by Lord Houghton, which received its second reading in the lords just before Christmas, aims to alter the legal time-limit on abortion. It would remove the time-limit altogether in cases of severely handicapped fetuses and in pregnancies which pose a serious danger to the woman's physical and mental health, while lowering it from 28 to 24 weeks in all other cases.

Both bills are being promoted as attempts to deal with 'the new problems created by the developments in reproductive technology'. These 'new problems' have arisen in situations where the assumptions behind existing law have been put to question by advances in medical science.

The abortion time-limit is a clear example of a law being overtaken by science. Currently the upper time-limit on abortion in England and Wales is set by a law that was passed in 1929—the Infant Life

(Preservation) Act. While the act made it an offence to act 'with intent to destroy the life of a child *capable of being born alive*' (unless the mother's life was at risk), it went on to explain that 'evidence that a woman had at any material time been pregnant for a period of 28 weeks or more shall be prima facie proof that she was at that time pregnant of a child capable of being born alive'. In 1929, restricted technology and medical knowledge in relation to severely premature babies meant that it was unlikely that a child born at less than 28 weeks would survive. Consequently a 28-week limit on abortions gave doctors a confident margin that they were not aborting 'viable' fetuses.

Carlisle baby

Today, however, medical knowledge and technology have developed to allow for the survival of babies born considerably earlier than 28 weeks. Parliament debated this issue in 1988, after what became known as the 'Carlisle baby case'. It was claimed that in July 1987 a baby of 21 weeks' gestation was born alive and survived for three hours following an abortion at the City General Hospital in Carlisle. Anti-abortion campaigners demanded that an inquest be held and that the doctors responsible for the abortion be prosecuted. The facts of the case remain a subject of much medical dispute, and the claims made for the Carlisle baby are dubious to say the least. Yet it is true that a small percentage of extremely premature babies can now survive. Magazines like *Woman* and *Woman's Own* seldom run an issue without a heart-rending case of such a child's fight for survival.

In reality, the chances of survival for extremely premature babies are still slight. According to David Paintin, reader in obstetrics and gynaecology at St Mary's Hospital in London, a premature birth in the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy has only a five per cent chance of survival if modern intensive care equipment is available. Even today, the chances of survival before the twenty-fourth week are negligible as in a normal

fetus the lungs are too underdeveloped to breathe. Scientists are making headway in researching substances that can be used to coat the lungs and enable them to absorb oxygen, but it is widely accepted that this will improve the survival rates of births after 24 weeks rather than dramatically push back the time barriers of viability.

Although the increasing viability of premature babies is being used as an argument against late abortions, the issues are completely separate. The issues surrounding abortion are not affected by developments in technology.

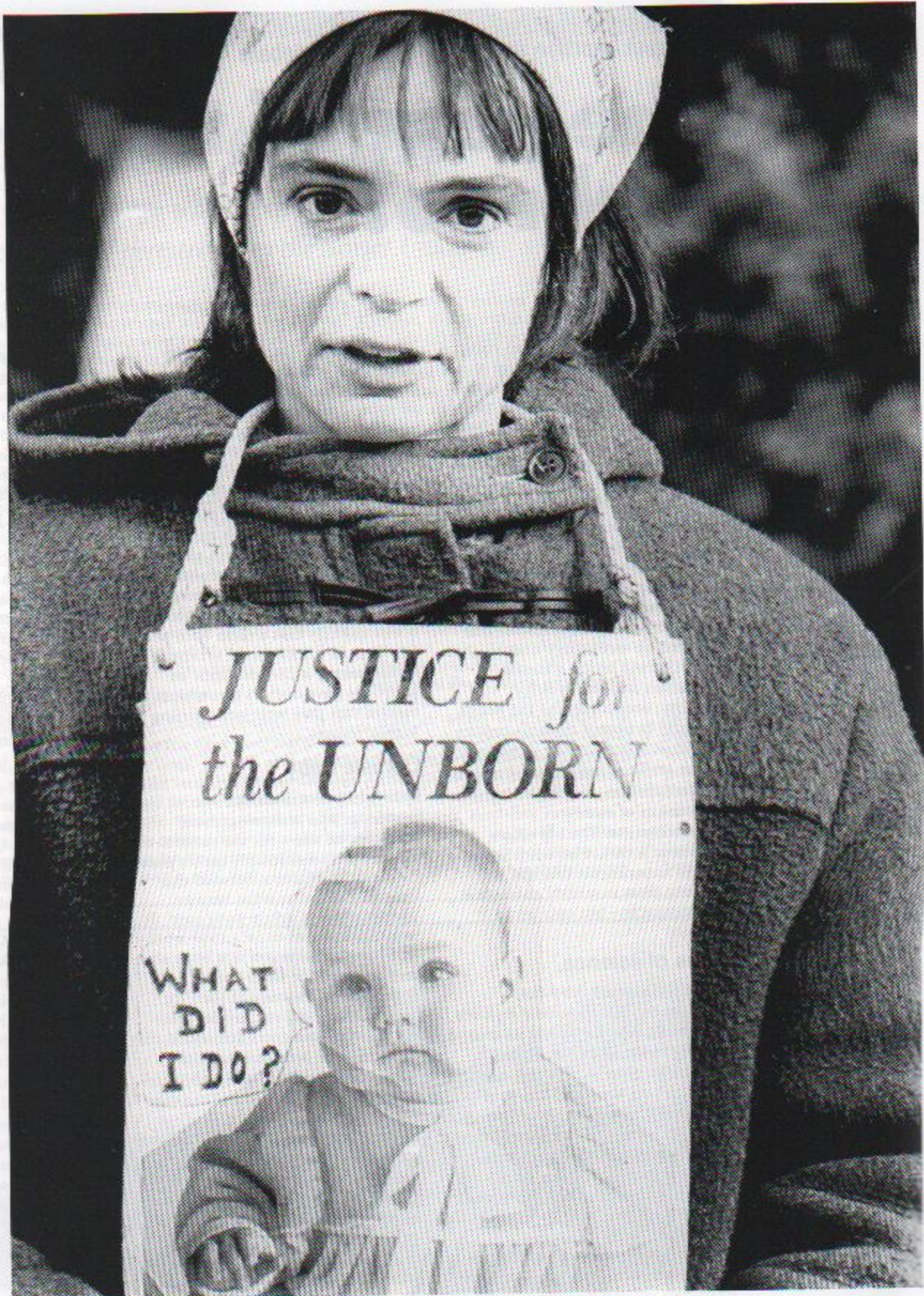
The state of the art of prenatal technology does not influence a woman seeking a late abortion. She is influenced by factors that directly affect her life. In 1988, 3113 women had abortions after their twentieth week of pregnancy including 1107 at 23-24 weeks. Of these, 352 were performed on the grounds of fetal handicap. Current techniques to diagnose fetal handicap require tests to be carried out relatively late in a pregnancy. Routine ultrasound scans at 18-20 weeks can pick up some abnormalities but have to be followed up by repeat scans and possibly further tests. Amniocentesis, the main technique used to detect Down's syndrome and other chromosomal abnormalities, as well as spina bifida, can be carried out as early as 16 weeks, but is more usually done at 18 weeks. Sometimes uncertain results mean the test has to be repeated with a result not coming back until the twenty-second or twenty-third week.

Doctors' decision

There are many other reasons why women present themselves for late abortions. The inefficiency in the health service and the complexities of the legislation on abortion mean that a woman can find herself the victim of bureaucratic delays.

Before a woman can be referred for an abortion under the 1967 Abortion Act, two doctors have to sign a form agreeing that she meets the strict legal criteria. Even if she meets the criteria, a doctor is legally entitled to refuse to sign, and even to

Now anti-abortionists are using medical science as a pretext for justifying their moral objection to a woman's right to have an abortion



refuse to discuss abortion with her, if he feels it goes against his conscience. And even if a woman has sympathetic doctors she might find that she has to wait in a queue for a bed to be made available at an appropriate hospital. A study commissioned by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the department of health and social security in 1982 estimated that, on the basis of gynaecologists' reports

from case notes, a fifth of women operated on after 20 weeks had seen their doctor before they were 13 weeks pregnant. With the deterioration in the health service since 1982, the situation is more likely to have worsened than improved.

Then there are the more subjective reasons for a woman presenting late, which no amount of improvement in the abortion laws or services could

eliminate. A woman may not realise that she is pregnant, perhaps because she has an irregular menstrual cycle, or she is menopausal. For various social and psychological reasons she may simply deny that she is pregnant until the pregnancy becomes obvious. Problems may arise in a woman's life which mean that a pregnancy which began as intentional and wanted turns into a problem that can only be solved by termination. British

Pregnancy Advisory Service records indicate that 12 per cent of women seeking late terminations did so because their circumstances had changed, often because they had been deserted by their partners.

Regardless of scientific advances in relation to lung development, women in these situations will continue to need abortions. For a woman seeking an abortion for any of these reasons the potential viability of her fetus is a matter of indifference. The ability of science to keep a premature baby alive at a similar gestation does not alleviate the problems that have caused her to decide on the abortion. She already knows that the best way to keep her fetus alive is to continue with the pregnancy, but for whatever reason she has decided that this is an unacceptable option. Once she has made that decision she regards it as the responsibility of medical science to terminate her pregnancy in the safest manner.

Medical advances in relation to severely premature babies are needed to increase the viability of those babies who are wanted. Simply because these technologies can be used on unwanted pregnancies, or the 'products of abortion', does not mean that society is under any obligation to deploy them in this way.

Life and death

Every day, in every hospital, doctors and nurses make decisions about who should continue living and who should not. They decide who should have kidney transplants, who should receive dialysis treatment, who should be put on life-support systems. To claim, as anti-abortion campaigners did in the case of the Carlisle baby, that doctors were obliged to attempt resuscitation of an aborted fetus is nonsensical in a society where every year hundreds of much loved and wanted premature babies die because of the lack of equipment needed to sustain them. It is ironic that the department of health has already issued guidelines that no abortion should be carried out on a pregnancy of 20 weeks' gestation or more unless resuscitation equipment and trained staff are on hand. In many hospitals there are not enough premature cots to keep alive those babies born by 'natural' premature birth. Is the government suggesting that these babies should be sacrificed to save viable aborted fetuses?

The issue of abortion is not one that can be resolved in the realm of medical science. Ultimately the issue is not whether medical science has overtaken the law, but whether you believe that women should be entitled to late (or even early) abortions in principle. Those who argue that a time-limit should be set on abortion concede that at a particular point in

pregnancy the interests of the fetus take precedence over those of the pregnant woman. Those who suggest that the time-limit should be reduced on the grounds that technology can keep the fetus alive are using science as a pretext for justifying their moral objection to a woman's right to have an abortion. Abortion was and remains a social problem, not a technical one.

The same is true in relation to embryo experimentation. Every year 14 000 babies in Britain alone are found to have congenital (that is 'born with') defects. About 1500 disorders are known to arise in the genes alone. Research is desperately needed to identify what goes wrong in these unfortunate cases. New methods of screening are needed to help identify fetuses that are affected, to allow the prospective mother to opt for an abortion if she so wishes or to prepare herself to cope with a handicapped child if she does not. It is estimated that between 10 and 16 per cent of couples have problems with infertility. Research is needed to discover what goes wrong in these cases. The case for research is a strong one (see 'Embryo experiments: playing God or helping humanity?', *Living Marxism*, October 1989). Yet the impending government bill sets these arguments aside, arguing that science is running ahead of morality and must be brought to heel.

14-day wonder

Anti-abortionists have also seized upon embryo experimentation to promote their case. They use embryo experimentation, like medical technology, as a pretext for attacking abortion rights. Consequently the issues surrounding the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill assume a mystical status.

The attempts to impose controls on embryo research imply that the human embryo has a different status from other human tissue, and that as such it requires legal protection. The granting of such legal status to embryos and fetuses has very serious implications for the debate on abortion.

The assumption that experiments should be banned after the embryo is 14 days old implies that there is something peculiar to the 15-day human embryo which means it should be afforded protection in law. The bill claims that 14 days is an appropriate time at which to stop research because it is at this stage that the 'primitive streak' develops. This is widely regarded as the beginning of the individual development of the embryo, since it is the latest stage at which twins can occur. It is also the stage when it becomes possible to tell whether the collection of cells will go on to develop into a fetus, or whether it

will become an abnormal growth like a hydatidiform mole.

Why this stage should have any moral significance remains unanswered by the bill and the lengthy reports and papers which preceded it. Faced with a choice between accepting a 14-day limit on experimentation or having all such research banned outright, most scientists will settle for the 14-day limit. It does not yet pose any practical restriction as no one has been able to keep an embryo alive for longer than eight or nine days. But it gives ground to some dangerous moral assumptions.

The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (Spuc) is arguing that MPs should vote to ban all embryo experiments, but it is already claiming a moral victory on the grounds that embryo rights will be recognised even if the 14-day limit becomes law. Furthermore the inconsistency between protecting a 15-day embryo from experimentation, while allowing the termination of a 15-week pregnancy has not escaped the anti-abortionists' attention. Sir Bernard Braine, chairman of the all-party parliamentary pro-life group, has argued that it would 'not only be morally repugnant but ludicrous if parliament decided to give protection to the human embryo or even limited protection beyond experimentation up to 14 days but denied any protection to a child at a later stage of its journey to life when it has become a recognisable and sentient human being and can recognise its mother's voice'.

No interference

Scientific discoveries in relation to the development of fetuses and embryos are obviously welcome. They can only be used as an argument for backward attitudes towards abortion and embryo experimentation if we allow the issues to remain confused. It is entirely appropriate that anti-abortionists should attempt to turn the clock back on embryo experimentation. Just as they oppose abortion because it gives women more control over their circumstances, so they are hostile to any scientific advance which helps to demystify their moral and religious prejudices about human life. As the debate goes on we can be sure that the issues will become more and more confused. So let us put the case clearly from the start. Women need the right to abortion as early as possible and as late as necessary, and society needs the most advanced solutions possible to medical problems; nothing can be allowed to interfere with either principle.

Nine dead in '89

Death row in Brixton jail

Why and how did Germain Alexander die in Brixton prison? asks Kirk Williams

Fifty-eight year old Germain Alexander died on 6 December 1989, the ninth inmate to die in Brixton prison's hospital wing last year. The inquest into Alexander's death has been adjourned until 2 April, but already questions are being asked about the two broken teeth found in his mouth, two broken ribs, and the bruises and cuts to his arms, wrists and face.

Statements issued by the home office suggest that Alexander died from natural causes after suffering 'breathing difficulties' consistent with a heart attack. But this version of events has now been directly challenged by a prisoner in a neighbouring cell. Her evidence raises further questions about the treatment of prisoners, especially black prisoners, in British jails.

Police records indicate that, in the early hours of 4 December, Germain Alexander was charged with assaulting three officers after police were called by 'a neighbour' to a 'disturbance at a party' in Alpha

Road, north London. He was released on bail at 4pm. At 5.40pm, police allege they were called to another disturbance, this time in Linnell Road, north London. There Alexander was again arrested and charged with assaulting another policeman. He was kept in custody at Edmonton police station until morning, when he appeared before magistrates who remanded him to Brixton prison.

Alexander's family dispute the police version of events leading to his arrests. 'Alpha Road was where my dad was living', said Alexander's daughter Vee. 'One of my Dad's friends told us what my Dad had told him: he was just lying in bed listening to his record player when the police burst into his house and piled into his bedroom. There must have been a fight for the bedroom was all mixed up.'

Alexander's arrest warrant refers to 'visible injuries' on arrival at Brixton, including bruising and lacerations to the face and lacerations

to the wrists and abdomen. The warrant also notes that Alexander was 'restrained' by police before admission to prison. When he reached Brixton he was immediately transferred to a medical room, which he shared with another prisoner, in the prison's hospital wing.

Prison authorities allege that in the early hours of 6 December Alexander became 'abusive' and started to fight with his cell mate. He was moved from the double cell. The home office has admitted that 'force was used to remove him...as he resisted'. Allegedly acting under 'approved control and restraint procedure', which included the use of ratchet handcuffs, three prison officers took Alexander to a strip cell. According to the official version of events, they left him on the floor and locked the door behind them. The officers claim they were observing Alexander through the hole in the door when they noticed he was suffering from 'breathing difficulties'. Medical staff decided that Alexander should be transferred to King's College hospital. According to the home office, he died soon after being admitted there.

'Bouncing'

On the night of 5 December Sarah Cunningham was a remand prisoner in Brixton. A mix-up put her in a men's prison. She had a clear view of the landing and the door of the strip cell to which Alexander was taken. Her version of events is quite different from the official statements.

Cunningham says she was woken by the sound of heavy boots on the stairs. She saw five, not three, prison officers running past the door of her cell, dressed in riot gear with shields and truncheons:

This is the battledress of the notorious 'Mufti' squad (Minimum Use of Force Tactical Intervention). According to Cunningham, the officers shouted at Alexander to get away from the cell door. It seems that he had barricaded himself into the cell, because they had to take the door off its hinges. Then they went in.

Cunningham heard 'noises like a beating', then she heard 'moaning and the sound of someone being

Germain Alexander (inset): the ninth Brixton prisoner last year who never saw the outside again



PHOTO: Pandora Anderson

bounced down the landing stairs'. ('Bouncing' is the practice of holding an inmate by his legs and head, and bouncing the body along the ground as it is carried along.)

Alexander was then put into the strip cell next to Cunningham's. 'I heard one of the officers say to another "You've got blood on you. Best get a shower". I know that other inmates heard this as well.'

Was this the moment when Alexander's teeth and ribs were broken? Neither the home office nor the police have yet been able to explain how that happened.

Cunningham recalls people running from the cell, one of them covered in blood. She remembers a man in a white coat running towards the cell with a kidney dish, which may have contained a syringe. Cunningham also saw a body being taken out on a trolley. Later the cell was cleaned out. By then Alexander was dead.

'My tears dried up'

Alexander should never have been locked up in prison. In 1987 he was diagnosed as a manic depressive. Two mental health orders were served on him. But he was remanded to Brixton on a number of occasions, although he never served a prison sentence.

When remanded to Brixton in July

1988, he took a real beating which resulted in the loss of four front teeth. It is not surprising, therefore, that his daughter Vee's suspicions were roused as soon as she heard about his death:

'When my sister Clem rang to tell me that Dad had died, I just cried. But when she said he had died in Brixton prison, my tears dried up. I knew it was murder.'

A carpenter by trade, Alexander came to Britain from Dominica in April 1955. His friends say he liked to party and lived life to the full. His family believe he was in 'excellent spirits' when they last spoke to him on 29 November. They do not believe that the man they knew would have assaulted five people, four of them police officers.

The Alexanders are no strangers to tragedy. John, the only son of Germain's first marriage, died in mysterious circumstances in 1987. 'He went missing for five days', said his mother Rosa. 'The police told us not to worry for he was a big boy and could look after himself. But I knew something was wrong.' John's body was eventually found hanging by one of his own shoelaces in an out-of-order toilet in Euston fire station.

The police verdict was 'presumed suicide', but the Alexander family have never been convinced by this.

'The police can't surprise me any more', said Vee. 'With John we knew something was not right but what could we prove? But with Dad the police can't run away from responsibility. He was in their hands.'

Germain Alexander's death can only add to the growing controversy over treatment of prisoners in Brixton. Eight Brixton inmates hanged themselves in 1989, six of them in the hospital wing where Alexander was held. The wing is known as 'fraggle rock' because of the large number of psychiatrically disturbed prisoners it contains. Former remand prisoner Keith Dunn commented: 'I can imagine what Bedlam was like now I've been in Brixton....The RSPCA wouldn't put up with those conditions for animals.' (*Time Out*, 29 November 1989)

There are many questions which the Alexanders want answered: questions like what were the real circumstances and manner of Germain's arrest, why was he put immediately into Brixton's notorious hospital wing, who or what bruised his arms and cut his face, was he injected with a 'liquid cosh' in his cell, and how did his ribs and teeth come to be broken? It remains to be seen whether the inquest in April will provide some answers.

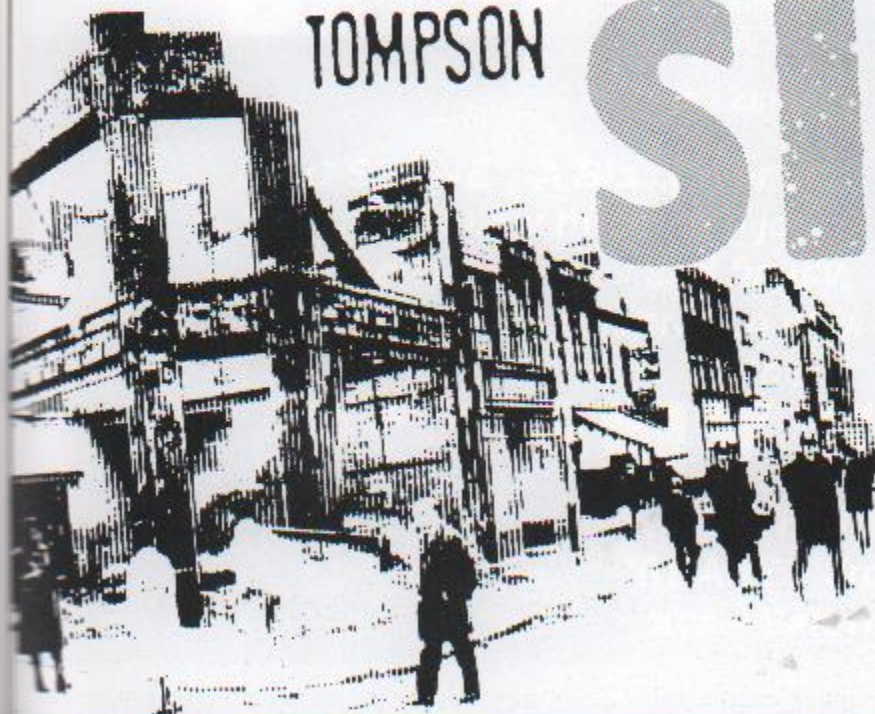
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After Bagdad Café, Rosalie Goes Shopping

CONFESSIONS OF A HOUSEWIFE

Joe Boatman
talked to
actress
Marianne
Sägebrecht
about love
and money,
and some
films by
Percy Adlon

In 1984 there was *Sugarbaby*, in 1987 came *Bagdad Café* which enjoyed commercial and cult success worldwide, and now the third of Percy Adlon's films featuring actress Marianne Sägebrecht, *Rosalie Goes Shopping*, is showing in Britain.

Adlon's films are about ordinary people, and, extraordinarily enough, he seems to have noticed that ordinary people, even though they just after life's pleasures as much as the next film star, don't all look like Robert Redford and Jane Fonda. Marianne Sägebrecht is an ordinary person, she doesn't look like Jane Fonda and she has gone after life's pleasures.

Born 44 years ago in Bavaria, she married at 19 (and has a daughter) and worked for 10 years as a psychiatric assistant. In 1974 she was a co-

founder of a cabaret club, then she created *Opera Curiosa*, a revue theatre, and that is where Percy Adlon saw her perform as hostess and entertainer; the rest is, well, showbiz.

Sägebrecht still revels (in not quite perfect English) in the fact that people liked *Bagdad Café* precisely because it featured somebody like herself. 'People told me very often, we are so happy to meet a real human being in a movie, not a plastic, created puppet from the normal production companies. It was like some of them were saying "we are tired of all this blood and action and sexual crime and all these thrillers, and we are really relaxing with this movie".'

Economic miracle

Like *Bagdad Café*, *Rosalie Goes Shopping* has a fairy-tale ending. Even though this time the sleight of hand is criminal rather than magical, both conclusions amount to the same small miracle of somebody gaining control of their destiny by establishing a thriving small business. OK, it's the conventional 'anybody can be a millionaire, so everybody can' morality, but at least it is shot through with the idea that we are entitled to want it all, are capable of enjoying it all, but can only get it all by trick or by crook.

Rosalie Goes Shopping ironically

'I think we are working against clichés'

PHOTO: Mainline Pictures



counterposes various ideals of 'the American way' to the reality of a credit-run economy. The loving wife and mother Rosalie seeks to feed, clothe and entertain her seven (strange and wonderful) kids while obeying the law and observing the commandment, Thou Shalt Not Steal. So far as the law goes she (initially at least) plays her hand of 37 credit cards more like an ace poker hustler than a cheat. And the commandment? She explains she's a Catholic with the relish of a bargain hunter who's found out where to get the cake you can keep and eat at the same time: 'You confess your sins and then they're not sins any more.'

Cupboard love

Rosalie aims to get her family what they need, and that is defined by what they want. She confesses after every shopping trip, but the only time she feels real remorse is when she doesn't take home her usual collection of gourmet ingredients for the nightly family feast.

Sägebrecth: 'We say "money alone can't make you happy" but I say "money alone doesn't make you unhappy".' Her character Rosalie goes one further; she shows us how the absence of money can make you unhappy. In a loving love scene (consisting of one shot of a shimmering blue-lit sheet) her crop-sprayer husband compares sex with her to flying, but Rosalie is preoccupied with the household finances. In another

scene she strides, silent and grim, through a bank, intent on cashing a forged cheque. She rudely ignores a stream of friendly greetings. When she leaves however, triumphant with the money, she tosses charming remarks to the bank employees as if distributing her newfound largesse. As the plot thickens, debt spirals and cash and credit dry up, so too do her personal relations.

Faced with financial crisis she struggles to restore a happy home life. On the one hand she comes to realise 'if you owe a hundred thousand dollars that's your problem, if you owe a million that's the bank's problem', on the other she learns some imaginative uses of computer hacking. 'In France', says Sägebrecth, 'they liked *Bagdad Café*, 3 700 000 came, now with *Rosalie* there is a completely new audience of young kids, women and especially the crazy computer freaks'. Indeed while credit cards are shuffled and cash is dealt, completely irrelevant computer-type sound effects pop up occasionally on the soundtrack, just like those watch alarms which beep about nothing from time to time. The manipulation of serious money is even mockingly represented as a video game when Rosalie is depicted in computer graphics doing battle with cash and credit.

Sägebrecth believes there are different reasons for the film's success in Italy. 'I think the Catholic life, the confession, is very well known there,

and also a little bit of corruption, a little bit of stealing...and the Mama. The Mamas are not very happy, but they deserve a chance like this. It worked very well.' Not all the feedback has been positive however. 'One man said to me—24 years old he was—he said "I tell you *Rosalie* is a very crazy movie. I liked it so much, but hated it for two reasons: Percy Adlon, old Percy Adlon is the director; and you, with your round body, got the main part again", and I said to him, "Thank you very much, would you have said the same to Orson Welles or Peter Ustinov?". It's crazy isn't it.'

What size desire?

In all three of their films Adlon and Sägebrecth affirm that desire and fulfilment come in all shapes and sizes and forms. In *Rosalie* it may be the son's cooking, the husband's recordings of his plane's engine noises or Rosalie's stolen perfume. Whatever it is, assumptions about 'human nature' are not of the stereotypical Hollywood variety.

Sägebrecth is particularly proud of *Bagdad Café* for doing this, and not just for her own role. 'It's not only me, it's also Sissy H Pounder, because she is not generally used to her full potential. She is a real black woman, not a white black woman, like Whitney Houston. Sissy is a deep, Brazilian black woman. I like her face so much, it can be very young, it can be very old. But in America she always

got work as a murderer, a husband killer, always things like this. I think Sissy was glad she got this chance to create this woman and this friendship in *Bagdad Café*. So I think Percy is working against clichés; we are working against clichés.'

For the most part *Rosalie Goes Shopping* does work against clichés. It is a light film, delivered with a light touch. There is a fairground, fairy-tale quality about it, enhanced by wistful snatches of music, the playful use of orange and blue filters and the even more playful vignettes starring various of the children. It is good to see a film which takes a positive attitude to our aspirations for the good times we all deserve. It is not exactly serious in its critique of the obstacles which lie in our path, but then you wouldn't expect it to be.

There is one cliché, however, whose embrace it does not entirely avoid, and that is the vacuous moralism which so often feels it necessary to frown sternly on at least some aspects of consumerism. Against the grain of the film as a whole there are moments, such as when we see (as if from inside a television) the faces of the family as they intone every word of the adverts they are watching, when Adlon seems to join the chorus of those who see the consuming masses as the simple dupes of evil admen. Fortunately such bouts of misguided maturity are few and far between, so he can get on with enjoying himself, and so can we.

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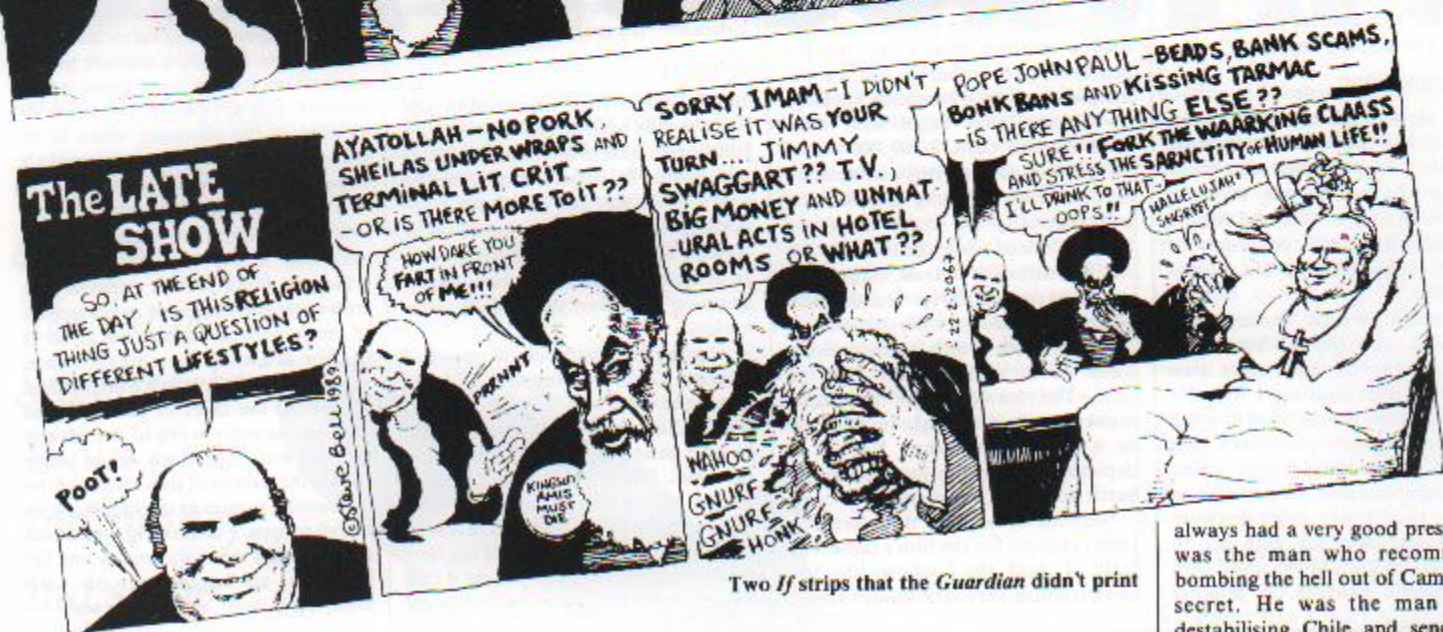
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Two If strips that the Guardian didn't print

Steve Bell's political strips

THE 'IF' MAN

Tessa Myer spoke to Steve Bell, Britain's leading left-wing cartoonist

Steve Bell started drawing as he meant to go on, defacing school books with cartoons of teachers and politicians of the day. That was the sixties, which he says rather passed him by, 'I didn't get going until the seventies. That was my decade'. Having studied fine art, photography and film at Leeds University he worked on the *Broadside* paper in Birmingham, the *Leveller*, *Whoopee* and *Jackpot* comics, and from 1979 for *Time Out* with his celebrated *Maggie's Farm* strip. It was the *If* strip in the *Guardian* which really made his name as Britain's foremost lefty cartoonist. He called it after the famous Rudyard Kipling poem. 'I heard it on the radio at the time. The *Guardian* had offered me a one-month trial doing a daily strip. It's very stirring: "If you should meet with triumph and disaster" and so on. It's actually very fundamental to Thatcherite ideology. I believe she has a copy of Kipling by her bedside. So I was taking the piss out of it, in the

sense of "if" God was a social democrat, or "if" turkeys discuss Christmas.' Bell doesn't really feel part of any tradition of political cartoonists. 'The past masters are Low and Vicky. In some ways it's a bit of a corrupt tradition. People cite Gilray who was a wonderful draughtsman. He was one of the first to establish the real punchy medium, but he also established the tradition of being bought up by the establishment. He was actually on a pension from the government when he was doing his anti-Jacobin stuff during the French Revolution.' It was comics rather than cartoons which influenced Bell's drawing. 'The *Beano* is my central influence and American underground comics. People like Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton. They were a real revelation because they were using the comic format but saying more or less anything they liked, the most outrageous and wonderful things. I took them on board, especially Crumb, and

copied his style. The stuff he's doing now is a bit obscure, not so much up my alley, but I always admire his drawing. Our house used to get the *Daily Mail*. *Flook* was running in those days which was by Trog (written by George Melly). I've always admired Trog's drawings. It was very funny even if I didn't really understand it. Illingworth was the *Mail's* cartoonist. He was an old...well obviously being in the *Mail* he was right wing, but his drawing was really wonderful.' How does he react to accusations that his own work might be racist or sexist? 'I always try and look critically at what I'm going to say. Once I was referred to the press council for being anti-Semitic because I did a cartoon of Kissinger as a turkey. A turkey with a long proboscis, a wobbly nose, the way turkeys have. I didn't really think about it. Kissinger I have always found an eminently disgusting character because he has this reputation as being a very wise statesman. In fact he's a mass murderer. He's

always had a very good press, yet he was the man who recommended bombing the hell out of Cambodia in secret. He was the man behind destabilising Chile and sending the fascists in. I did this strip about him bringing back this useless turkey, this useless bastard. 'I got a diatribe from this person saying it was horrendous, and made him think of the death camps and piles of shoes and children being burnt in ovens. I wrote a very stiff letter back saying this was complete bollocks and that was not my intention and I was attacking the man himself. A caricature is always a simplification of a face. In some ways it's always boiling down to stereotypes. You don't want to accept them, you want to append them and take them a stage further. It's not my intention to make stereotypes, or to make Irish gags, or Jewish gags. It's to make a point about a political situation. In that case it was about Kissinger.' In fact censorship rears its head at an earlier stage for Bell. The *Guardian* always gives his material special scrutiny before publishing it. 'Once during the Falklands War they didn't run one. They said they considered it to be in poor taste. There was this terrible consensus of "we must support our boys". I just happened to be doing a strip at the time when all this nonsense came along. Something like a fifth of the people opposed the war anyway, which is a lot considering how intense the propaganda was. There's been a couple of instances more recently where again the editor is worried about offending particular interest groups. If you combine

religion with bad language you're guaranteed to switch on a heavy mail bag saying "get rid of this filth".

'It's like a process of negotiation. Several times they've been worried about libel so I've had to change a couple of frames or a bubble. I did one where they actually changed some wording on a strip without telling me, and I've got an assurance from them, touch wood, that they won't do that again. I'm prepared to negotiate this. I did one about Dr Death which in some ways is quite a sensitive area for the *Guardian*. I was doing a strip about his attitude to nuclear weapons and they changed it. It changed the whole meaning of the strip which I was really cross about.'

Bell doesn't think he would get better treatment by taking his work elsewhere. 'Well, there's nowhere. There's small circulation mags, but actually I don't think they'd be more or less intrusive than the *Guardian* is. When you publish or print anything you have to be your own editor.' So he isn't just playing safe by staying with the *Guardian*? 'People read it. You can argue that you're just preaching to the converted but on the other hand the *Guardian* is read by a range of people not just muesli crunchers. Getting anything in print's important. People obviously consider *Living Marxism* to be important enough. They get it on the book stands which is wonderful. There again that's safe isn't it?' Perhaps the high salary

from the *Guardian* helps? He laughed deeply. 'I'm certainly involved in that. I don't do it for love.'

Is there any subject he wouldn't touch? 'Think of all the things that are going on at the moment and think "can you do a strip about all of them?". The answer is that there are probably some things that wouldn't be suited to it. In theory I'd like to be able to tackle anything but it's just finding a way.'

Out of bounds

Neil Kinnock has come in for a lot of stick in *If*, but the Labour Party generally seems to be out of bounds as a target. 'I'm not rude about the Labour Party. I'm a member of it, but that doesn't mean a great deal. I've never really been inclined towards Trotskyism. The first thing I really encountered was anarchism, although I wouldn't consider myself as an anarchist any more as such. I might have joined the Socialist Society. There's a whole strata in the Labour Party that I don't get on with at all.'

'I put forward my political views in the strip, but it's a comic strip so it's not just that. It's got a life of its own as well. That's the way I write...I mean I'm not a very good writer. I don't have any sort of literary finesse at all...I've become very conscious of my appalling punctuation. The punctuation determines the way you read the bubbles. I'm a bit of a slow reader, I'm not reading a book at the moment.

'Sure, the strip is useful in terms of putting arguments across. If you don't do something you don't get an airing at all. During the Falklands there were very few outlets for people to air views about the nonsense of it as it was happening. There were a few noble exceptions but generally the clamp-down was near total.' Bell was one of the few voices in the mainstream media who criticised the war. It was at this time that he invented the Reg Kipling character. 'He's the only human character in it, and he's gone to Siberia now. One particular thing I got outraged about was the Libyan bombing by Uncle Ron...I had Reg sounding off about what I was thinking, but he's not me. He's clean shaven for a start.' He's not six foot six tall either.

Kill the penguins?

On the whole he prefers working with animals. 'They're quite useful because you can do things with these animals you can't with real human characters. I've often thought of killing off the penguins. I did once and nobody noticed.' The characters are of course drawn from people he comes across in real life. 'There's a character called Ned Lagg who's now Lord Lagg. He was one of those archetypal Labour MPs who defected to the SDP. In 1981 there was this string of MPs who made this great statement of conscience and went over to the other side of the house to join the SDP with

the net result being the debacle of the '83 general election. Lagg was based physically anyway on this character who came round to the door and harangued us about what a wonderful thing he was doing for the SDP. It wasn't based on him as a person. I didn't know the man.'

Garage man

Bell is a busy man, beaver away in the garage of his Brighton home at a safe distance from his four children. He has done a lot of work for television, including animation for BBC's *Hello Mum* and Channel 4's *Beaks to the Grindstone*. At present he is working on a comic strip based on *Brideshead Revisited*, but using Leeds in the 1970s not Oxford in the thirties. He is also collaborating with his wife (who works in education), writing and illustrating a book about politics. All this, and strips and cartoons for other publications as well, including the NUJ's own paper the *Journalist*.

Journalists in fact are a common butt for his humour. 'I'm just using stereotypes again. Most of the journos you meet are ordinary people. There's Hardnose and Blockhead. There used to be at one time an earnest young reporter called Vera Leftwoods but she hasn't reappeared.' He laughed.

• Steve Bell, *The Vengeance of If*. Methuen, £4.99



Test Department

THIS IS HEAVY METAL

GODODDIN

PHOTO: Marcus Hilton

They emerged at the tail end of punk, playing anything that came to hand from synthesisers to bagpipes, from bits of scrap metal to huge oil drums (with mighty sledge-hammers). They toured Welsh pit villages during the 1984/5 miners' strike and were lionised for a while by that most fickle of friends, the music press. Now they are more popular in Eastern Europe than at home. Remember the name? Test Department.

Not our scene

Paul Jamroz, one of the musicians, is anxious to stress that they don't really feel part of the 'music scene' at all. 'Top of the Pops, never watch it. We were "in" when it was fashionable to be anti-commercial in the early 1980s. Now being commercial is all that counts. Look at the *NME*, at one time trying to be at the head of the

Kirk Williams talked to Test Department, the musicians who crossed the Berlin Wall long before it was torn down

"indie" scene, now every week their front cover is the person the major labels are pushing that week.'

Graham Cunnington, another of the six-strong outfit, is not optimistic about the prospects for the new generation either: 'That whole independent scene is now just a joke. A couple of years ago it did represent something, it showed that groups with their own labels did exist and did sell. Last week the "indie" singles chart had Kylie and Jason at No 1 and No 2.'

No member of Test Department has ever appeared in *Neighbours*. They formed in 1981, and their latest album 'Gododdin' is their sixth. In recent

years, often under the banner of their 'Ministry of Power' organisation, they have produced a series of collaborative events with other performers as diverse as Diamanda Galas and the South Wales Striking Miners Choir. Their performances, which generally feature powerful, swirling crescendos of sound, are something of a cross between an eccentric rock gig, socialist realist agit-prop and modern performance art.

They use whatever comes to hand. There is no question of two guitars, bass and drum. They use dance and movement, marrying them to instruments and sounds of every descrip-

tion: bagpipes and didgeridoo on 'A good night out'; synthesisers, including tape loops of establishment politicians, on 'The unacceptable face of freedom'; Welsh choral music on 'Shoulder to shoulder'. Bizarre National Coal Board training films from the fifties have been back-projected at their gigs.

According to Graham they take the name Test Department from a stamp on a piece of scrap metal they came across. Why? 'We grew up with the local industry [New Cross/Deptford] being smashed. Just down the road from us was one big scrapheap. Also, in 1981 we couldn't afford

instruments, so we used what we could find. The rest then grew out of exploring different sounds; the tones are unbelievable. We do use the imagery as well.' Perhaps to ward off the complaint that their muscular, heavy-industrial sessions have promoted a rather macho and cloth-cappist conception of workers, he added quickly, 'But it's not a static view of the working class. It's just to get our propaganda across'.

Unread wedge

So what is their view of the working class? Graham: 'We would call ourselves socialists. But not by the book, we've not studied or read much but we know what we think. We were not interested in joining Red Wedge which was just about promoting the likes of Paul Weller never mind Neil Kinnock.' They have put themselves at the service of those striking and struggling, although they steer clear of the conventional benefit gigs. When they do link up with a cause it is to make political propaganda as much as to make money, and they take it seriously. So when they did a benefit for the printworkers during the Wapping dispute, they first researched trade unionism in the print and in east London.

They have been well received. When they toured the collieries of South Wales and Kent during 1984 the warmth of the reception astounded them. 'I'm sure they thought we were

mad at first', recalls Graham: 'These people up from London banging bits of metal and playing synths backing a male voice choir. But really there were no barriers. We even had 60-year old women up on tables cheering us. It was really uplifting.'

Expo '86?

Alistair Adams remembers a rather more mixed reception in 1986 when they appeared in Vancouver, Canada at Expo '86. Expo '86? Test Department? 'We got this phone call from the Canadian high commissioner who had seen one of our shows in Paddington. He asked if we would like to represent Britain at Expo.' Test Department went through with it. 'In the audience were all the British dignitaries, the ambassador, the staff, even Denis Thatcher. We were there as the "Ministry of Power", we had a troupe from the Royal Ballet Company in support. I don't know what they were expecting but at the end we brought on a Kent miner who had been jailed during the strike. As well as making a speech about the miners he read out some of Bobby Sands' poems. You should have seen their faces. It was well worth the trip.'

Test Department are expensive to put on. When they performed in Cardiff in December 1988 they took over a vast abandoned car factory. It was transformed by 600 tons of sand, 50 trees, 30 wrecked cars and a set that was flooded. It attracted an audience

of 2000 over 3 nights. Their last tour of Europe cost over £30 000. The performances were based around a 600AD Welsh poem, 'Y Gododdin', which Test Department and Brith Gof ('Faint Recollection'), a Welsh-language theatre company, have worked on together. It doesn't sound that promising, but they have used the ancient work to make some points about militarism, self-determination and the erosion of minority cultures, with clear reference to the British establishment of the 1980s.

The British establishment is not exactly making it easy for them either. The arts council funding which a project like this might expect to draw on has been under the knife. Graham sees other problems too: 'With police raiding acid house parties all over the country there is no way that we could get a licence to play anywhere which is both large enough and normally inaccessible, which is how we like it. They would never let us perform.'

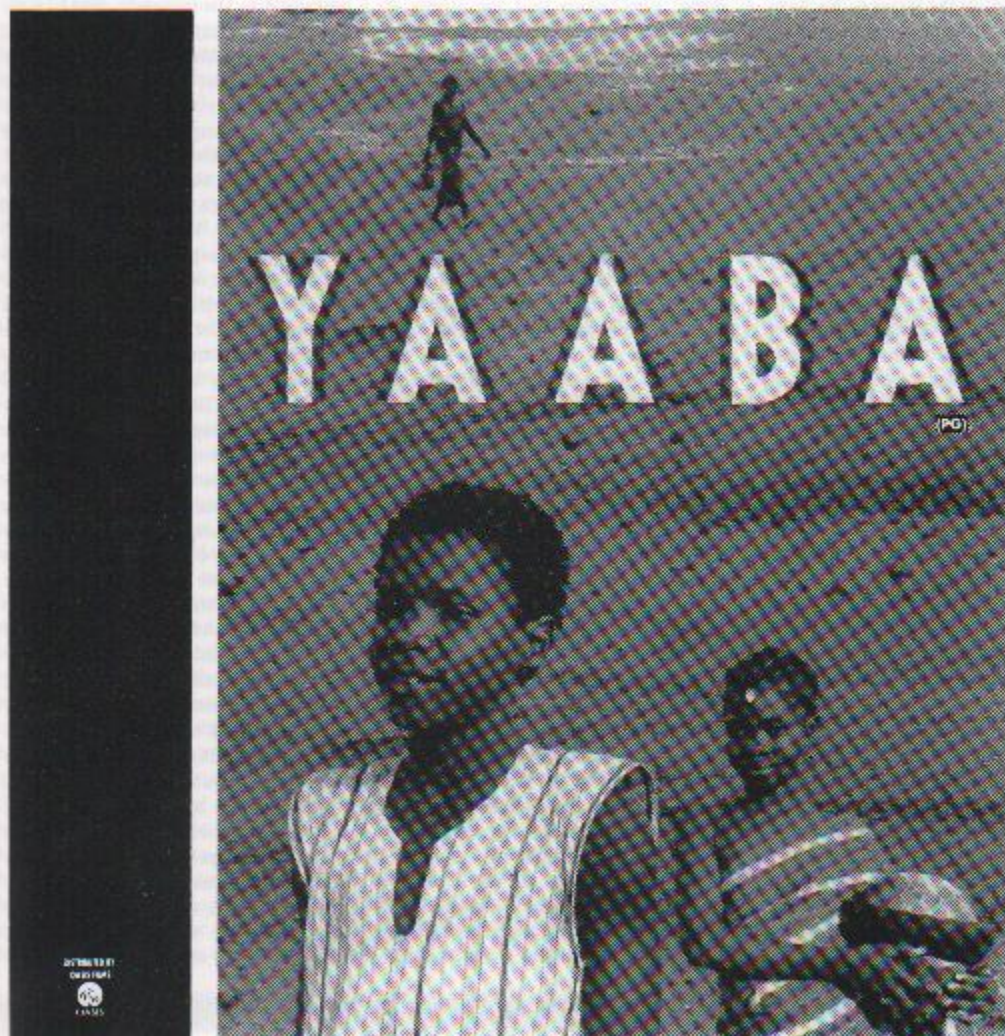
Go East, young men

One way and another they have been unable to premiere any major work in London since 1987, although they did do a special show at the Mayfest on Glasgow Green last year. They spend a fair amount of time abroad. They are presently in rehearsals down in Deptford for a 16-date, three-week tour which will take in Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia and much of Western Europe.

'We play to huge audiences all over Eastern Europe', says Graham. 'In Yugoslavia we played to over 3000 people. It's going to be very interesting to go back to Poland. Most of the Poles we came across in 1985 were very pro-Thatcher. In 1988 we were there when the elections were on. We spent a month with the Second Studio of Wroclaw performing international workshops with people from all over Europe. Politically so much had changed. There were Solidarity posters everywhere, but yet I did not get a sense of much hope. Many people could still not afford to eat.'

Back home interesting developments in music really did seem to fizzle out as the eighties drew to a close. The sounds of Manchester once again dominate the scene. This time the Stone Roses, Happy Mondays and Inspiral Carpets are the names to drop and dance to. But given their provenance, you would probably get away with dropping the names of the Byrds, Love or the Stones circa 1968. At a time when Van Morrison is successfully teaming up with Cliff Richard, there is not a big demand for the experimental and the innovatory. If there was, there would be more interest in Test Department.

- Test Department tour Europe in the spring
- Their new LP 'Gododdin' is out now on Rough Trade



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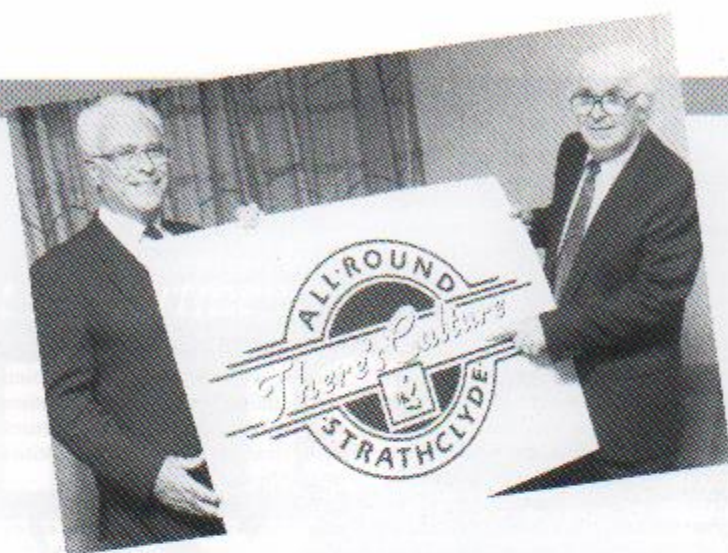
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Glasgow is Europe's official 'City of Culture' this year. Derek Owen wants to know what he is supposed to celebrate



GLASGOW: CITY OF CULTURE?

'1990. A new year, a new decade. And Glasgow is Cultural Capital of Europe. Inherited from Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, West Berlin and Paris, it's a title to be proud of and to celebrate. But what we are set to celebrate is the culture of our own city and region—its individuality, its vigour. An identity which arises from our artists and cultural organisations, all the myriad ways we express or entertain ourselves. Not just the "culture" to be seen in a gallery or bought with a theatre ticket, but what's around us on the streets and buildings, in rock music, our love of sport.' (Official brochure)

In the 'City of Culture' 1990, the most common political inscription on the walls is '1690', the date of Protestant King William's victory over Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne. 'Fuck the Pope' runs a close second in the Glasgow graffiti charts. Many Glaswegian homes have King Billy tapestries in the living room, and matching Ulster linen tea towels in the kitchen. Yet, for some reason, in all the official celebrations of the city's traditions this year, the 'vigour' of the culture of sectarianism has not had a mention.

Take the culture that's 'around us on the streets'. In 1989 Labour-controlled Strathclyde Regional Council banned marches by the non-sectarian Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland, on the grounds that anti-censorship protests would promote religious intolerance, cause violence and hinder shoppers. Loyal Orange lodges were allowed to march all over Scotland all year long—and to walk all over Catholics when they got the opportunity.

The big annual Orange walk on July 12 is the biggest day of the year for Scottish Orangemen, and the busiest for the city's casualty wards. The last time the walk went down City Road in Glasgow's southside, every

pub, except one, closed for the day. By mid-afternoon, three vanloads of police were attempting to quell a small riot between marchers and Catholics drinking in that one pub. The Orangemen smashed windows and vandalised shopfronts all along City Road. Florence was never like this.

'Our love of sport' is it? Today Glasgow Rangers Football Club has a Catholic player, Maurice Johnston. But the club's Protestant fans still chant about being 'up to our knees in Fenian blood' on the terraces. Perhaps to compensate for buying Johnston, Rangers have now taken to selling 'King Billyburgers' and 'True Blue Pies' at Ibrox Stadium. The sectarianism surrounding Rangers-Celtic football matches has created another cultural tradition—segregated pubs. Bars are either Celtic/republican, or Rangers/Orange, or 'mixed'.

In stitches

In the mixed pubs, with 'No football colours' signs in their windows, large groups of young men cluster around the bars staring at the bulging pockets of other groups of young men. This is not mere curiosity. A hint of a blue (Rangers) scarf, or a green (Celtic) shirt stuffed in a pocket can give the game away, and has led to many a rerun of 800 years of the Scottish and Irish history so celebrated in song and battle.

To mark the 'City of Culture's' anniversary, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery has commissioned a massive needlework calendar called 'Keeping Glasgow in stitches', which will be produced over the whole year. The Western infirmary next door will likewise be engaged in a year-long needlework project—on the faces of Rangers and Celtic supporters, every Saturday night. Of course, Celtic and Rangers aren't the only two football clubs in Glasgow. There's also...Partick Thistle, Clyde and Queens Park....

What else has Glasgow culture got

to offer, with 'all the myriad ways we entertain ourselves'?

1972. Our first colour TV. We were entranced by the richness of colour, the subtlety of tone and the whole cultural experience of watching Captain Pugwash on a non-monochrome set. Unfortunately STV and BBC Scotland have produced little to take me to that same cultural high. While London has *EastEnders*, Liverpool has *Brookside*, and Manchester has *Coronation Street*, Glasgow has *Take the High Road*. *EastEnders* and the others at least make a stab at touching on the realities of the area they represent. But *Take the High Road*, with its three cottages, corner shop and fish farm linked to the local castle, bears as much relation to the lives of most Scots as *Emmerdale Farm* does to the streets of New York.

1990. But wait! What's all this about TV? It's Glasgow: 'City of Culture'. Cultural events at our front door. Switch off the telly and let's go out on the town.

In May, you can go and see Pavarotti, who, our brochure tells us, has brought untold numbers of new fans to opera. Tickets are already changing hands for £250 which would seem to exclude most of us popular culturalists. The Labour council has introduced a special £25 ticket for a few lucky proletarians. The rest of us will have to make do with the Pissarro exhibition at the Burrell Collection, 70 works of art by the old Camille himself.

In 1944 Sir William Burrell donated his collection of 8000 works of art to the people of Glasgow, which was very nice of him considering that it was the people of Glasgow who worked for the shipping company that made him so rich. Burrell & Son amassed huge wealth 'acquiring' goods (and works of art) from around the world. While perusing the fine works in the Burrell Collection, it's worth remembering that they are the booty from Britain's

imperial piracy, in which Scots played their full part.

If you can't get into Pavarotti, and you don't fancy the Pissarros, how about the country music festival at the Grand Old Opry the same night? With the Judds and Dwight Yokum on stage, surrounded by gun-totin' Opry cowboys and cowgirls, you can feel the culture. It's either that or the Glasgow Open badminton tournament. Looks like I'm gonna be a country boy again.

June brings the jazz festival. But then so has every June that I can remember. Bloody racket. In July we can look forward to the international folk festival. Aran jumpers, real ale and a finger stuck in your ear. No wonder, bloody racket. August and it's the early music festival. According to the brochure the world famous ensembles will be performing the modern world première of Marazzoli's 'La Vita Humana', which was last performed in 1656. Must be pretty bad.

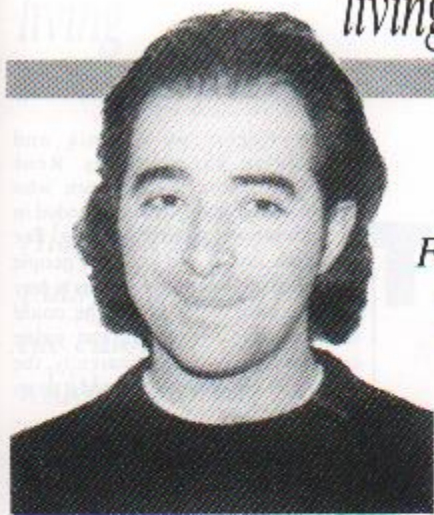
And so it goes. Event after event, all with a pretty limited audience in Glasgow. I don't wish to appear philistine but there are several barriers to the involvement of normal people in all this. For starters few of us can afford the tickets. And even if we could, if everyone in my street went to the theatre one night it would be full. So don't try to tell me that these events are open to everyone in Glasgow.

Good old Glasgow

That's another thing. My street. It's sinking into the ground—just like all the other streets in the southside. Gable ends crash to the ground, holes appear in roads, cracks race up house walls. Millions of tons of concrete have been pumped into the ground but it's still sinking. Millions of tons of concrete have also been poured into this new opera house that I can't afford to go to. What can it all mean?

A lot of Glasgow folk can see the ridiculous side of being told they live in a 'City of Culture' when they live on notorious housing schemes like Pollok, Castlemilk and Easterhouse. But too often they get sentimental about the old Glasgow: 'we were poor but we were happy', 'everyone knew everyone else—you could always leave your door open', etc. Ask older people to explain these Glaswegian cultural traditions and you get a better picture. If you complained too much the other three occupants of your room would throw you down the stairs. People who were unemployed had plenty of time to get to know their neighbours. And as you had nothing worth stealing then why lock your door?

They shared toilets in those days. Tommy, an old friend of mine, used to tell how he would have to walk half a mile to get to a toilet that worked. Any time you wanted to know about the cultural experience of the Glasgow working class, he could give you some graphic details of how he practised anal retention for days at a time. Seriously, City of Culture, geezabrek!



Frank Cottrell-Boyce

THUNDERBIRDS ARE A-GO-GO

Well, whoever said that the revolution would not be televised? The taking of the television control centres in Bucharest meant that the Romanian revolution was not just shown on TV, but directed by TV. We saw the Ceausescus cornered live by some world historic Roger Cook. The vanguard in the capital had a hotline to the living rooms of Transylvania, maybe even to the bedrooms.

Most people tend to doze in front of the telly. The telly just whispers into your most intimate dreams. It is at once a very public and a very private medium, and the slippage between the two is one of the things that makes TV so potent. I can remember watching *Thunderbirds* in a room full of people, yet feeling that what I was seeing was addressed to me personally, that no one else could understand it. I wonder if this was partly because my parents' generation tended to see the telly as something to iron, peel or read in front of, and therefore actually did miss most of what was going on.

I know that whenever that quiet, attentive oriental girl on *Thunderbirds* gasped as the phallic rockets blasted into the sky, I watched with a furtive, dreamy concentration which no one seemed to notice. And yet next day in the playground everybody had shared that dream, though when we talked about it we talked only about the derring-do of the bright-eyed, square-jawed Tracy brothers—a kind of squeaky clean, privatised CIA who jetted around the world unmasking conspiracies and defusing bombs. It was the same with *Stingray*: we played at being Troy Tempest, but we knew we were thinking of Marina.

It's a bit unsettling in retrospect to find that the first creature I ever lusted after was a maid of latex, but watching the works of Gerry Anderson now on video, it is clear that their appeal was entirely sexual. The plots are lame and repetitive; the villains dull and remote, but all the puppets are tasty. And every taste was catered for. In *Stingray* you could go for the mysterious, silent Marina, or the bubbly bimbo Atlanta. In *Thunderbirds* there was the dominating but breathless Lady Penelope. Among the males, you could have the blue-eyed blond manchild Alan; or Scott with

his huge rocket; or the kindly Virgil with his rounded, almost maternal *Thunderbird Two* (complete with womblike pods).

I can remember having stand-up rows with girls about whether Brains was better than Scott. Of course they stuck up for Scott and of course I understood that they were saying that they fancied Billy Fairclough (the school's best footballer), not me. The girl who fancied Brains remained a fantasy. But even Billy Fairclough had no chance once *Captain Scarlet* came out. I still think *Captain Scarlet* is the sexiest character ever created. A man with superpowers and stubble who was haunted by his own past. Bionic and Byronic. The first puppet ever to sweat on screen. And all the time your mother was standing there ironing.

soft maidens and uncoiling red dragons. When it was all over, he would screw his hat back on and nip home.

The image of the establishment figure in a bowler hat enjoying a fantasy life that took off from a seedy establishment just off the high street is part of Britain's received sexual geography. The fact that in this case that figure had the same name as Britain's leading radical politician is not insignificant. In fact the very name 'Mr Benn' came to sound like a sexual euphemism, like John Thomas.

All these figures gave us a sexual vocabulary and sexual role models before we knew what sex was. I still see male sexuality in terms of that trio of Brains, Scott and Virgil. But it wasn't just our sexual destinies that

In the extraordinary *Pogles Wood* Postgate celebrated the ethnic diversity of modern society (what was Tog? Who understood what he was saying? Who cared?). The green setting helped complete a parallel between the interdependence of species and social and environmental toleration. It even proposed the ultimate organic intellectual—the talking plant. Now, whenever I think of the perfect society, what I see is Pogles Wood, what I hear is the hedge pig coming.

I suppose the rise of video means that there isn't the same consensus in the playground about what was watched the night before. Parents don't trust TV like they used to, so its role as an electronic childminder has diminished. But it is still the biggest force in the mapping out of the imagination. So if you want to give yourself a real fright take a look at *Thundercats*. This is shown on the BBC (not cable, not Sky, not even ITV) and it was bought from an American company which made the programme in order to promote a range of toys (it isn't strictly legal to buy programmes of this nature but no one seems to mind if it's only kids).

The imagery of *Thundercats* is more or less explicitly fascist. Huge, distended men tower over lightly clad hourglass women. The landscape is post-nuclear. The morality is survivalist and authoritarian. There is a lot of mystical mumbo-jumbo that recalls the nasty bits of Wagner. There is a symbiotic relationship between the main characters and their predatory, armoured cats, the idea being that the brave unleash the animal in themselves. If today's children use *Thundercats* as a map of sexual possibilities the way I used *Thunderbirds*, or if this is the big word in the political lexicon, then what? When people with this in their heads take to the streets, somehow I don't think you're going to have poets rushing the TV control centres and asking for national calm and toleration. Next time you hear someone foolish enough to demand more censorship of our television, notice how they talk of sex and violence but never mention a programme called *Thundercats*. Ask yourself why.

'I still think Captain Scarlet is the sexiest character ever created. A man with superpowers and stubble who was haunted by his past. Bionic and Byronic'

The wilder shores of sexuality were also explored on children's hour. Think about *Mr Benn*. Mr Benn was a figure from a Magritte painting. A bowler hat screwed on to his head as if his desires and ambitions had physically to be repressed. He lived alone in a tight little house on Festive Road. He walked with a kind of neurotic, near goose-step. Once a week he would go into a shop, meet a mysterious man in glasses, get dressed up in some fantastical costume and step through a door into a world of

were charted by furtive TV. What Gerry Anderson was to our groins, Oliver Postgate was to our burgeoning political sense. From the city state feudalism of Noggin the Nog through the cheery anarchy of *Captain Pugwash* to the Green citizenship of *Ivor the Engine*, Postgate explored and developed a whole range of visions and alternatives. In *Clangers* he prefigured the image of the benevolent alien which Spielberg later made his own, and which played its own role in ending the Cold War.

Sexuality

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

Don Milligan reviews *From Sappho to De Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality*, Jan Bremmer (ed), Routledge, £30

For the 10 academics whose learned essays are included here no aspect of the history of sexuality is too obscure or arcane: female pederasty in ancient Greece, the mannish women of the Balkans, the sexual beliefs of eighteenth-century Holland, the sexual manners of fin-de-siècle Vienna, the lascivious rococo paintings of Jean-Honoré Fragonard, incest in the fifth century, and inevitably, the Marquis de Sade.

The one theme which emerges is the plastic and variable character of human sexual relations. That in itself is neither new nor contentious, and unfortunately because of the condensed form none of the authors has been able to develop the particular problems and points of interest raised by the subjects chosen. Each essay reveals clearly enough the historical specificity

of sexual forms. Sappho's wedding songs that celebrate the glory of the young bride, whose eyes are like honey, have little or nothing in common with lesbianism in our society. Similarly, the Greek ritual kidnapping of beardless aristocratic youth by young men of the ruling class, for a period of hunting and games and the sexual subordination of the youth, was the practice of a vanished society. It has no modern counterpart or parallel.

Sexual beliefs and attitudes have varied enormously. Two centuries ago in Holland it was believed that couples who went to bed too often would produce foolish children. If a spell designed to cause impotence was cast upon a man there was only one remedy: he had to hang the testicles of a rooster on the bed-end. One of the

worst fears of earlier times was the belief that birthmarks and deformities were caused by some disturbance of the pregnant woman's imagination. Disfigured children were explained by some brutal or disturbing act of their fathers. Today we have different myths and remedies.

And so it goes on. Sexual arrangements, beliefs and prejudices ring the changes of time and place; people even choosing their own gender. Among some of the peoples of Siberia and North American Indians it was permissible for a person born a man to assume the social position of a woman. Such individuals, while unusual, were not deemed to be deviant in any modern sense, like the transsexuals and transvestites in our communities today.

Completely different again were the

sworn virgins of Albania and Yugoslavia examined by René Grémaux. These were women who were reared as men, or who decided in their childhood to live as a boy. For economic and social reasons, people wanted sons; rearing a girl as a boy was the next best thing. She could farm in her own right, and make contracts like a man. Apparently, the locals and kin quietly accepted it as an act of necessity.

With the notable exception of Arnold Heumaker's illuminating essay on De Sade the essays tend to lapse into descriptions of purely antiquarian interest. Even in the limited space available there is too little effort to account for the phenomena described. It is overweening of the editor to assert that Freud and Kinsey would be taken aback by the book's 'intriguing questions'. This, I doubt. Freud and Kinsey at least tried to provide some intriguing answers, a quality which these 'moments in the history of sexuality' sadly lack. Nevertheless Jan Bremmer and his colleagues have added much detail to our history of sexuality; for this we can be grateful, and even, if you like that sort of thing, entertained.

In the words of an American state department official 'America wants to be best friends with Germany'. So president Bush had to snub Margaret Thatcher by publicly calling for the speedier economic integration of the member states of the European Community. Britain's 'special relationship' with America didn't seem to get a look-in, but then again perhaps it never did. Read the 26 essays in this book and discover why.

Back in 1968 a drunken secretary of state button-holed a British journalist at a Washington party. It was a bad time for Dean Rusk, and he laid it on the line. The British government had just told him that they could not go quite so far in supporting the Americans as actually sending troops to Vietnam. He turned angrily on Louis Heren: 'Let me tell you. When the Russians invade Sussex don't expect us to come and help you.' For once the bullying was not disguised by any diplomatic banter.

The 'special relationship' was always a myth. It went like this. At the turn of the century Britain ruled two thirds of the world. As its power declined and jealous neighbours tried to grab some of the action, Britain turned to America for help. Bound by ties of language and common ancestry America responded. As it did so Britain's power passed inexorably across the Atlantic. But, and this is the heart of the myth, Britain was not left out in the cold. Far from it, the countries became so close that Britain played a special role managing and shaping the friendly giant.

Anglo-American relations

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?

Adam Curtis looks at *The Special Relationship*, W Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds), Oxford University Press, £14.95 pbk

As the British economist John Maynard Keynes put it 'It's true they have the money bags, but we have all the brains'. Keynes is one of the great heroes of the myth. In his essay on the Bretton Woods conference of 1944 Richard Gardner has Keynes making sure it is Britain as well as America which decides the shape of the world economy after the war. The trouble is that this is just not true. Keynes played a large part in the conference, but everything the Americans did there, was done in the words of their secretary to the treasury 'to move the financial centre of the world to Wall Street', and nothing—even Keynes' pleas of Britain's poverty—was going to stop them.

This ruthless pragmatism is more typical of the rocky ride and vicious arguments which have accompanied the transfer of power between the two countries. Margaret Gowing writes eloquently here of the secret battles and humiliations which led to Britain being excluded from the American atomic bomb research. Bradford

Perkins is good on just how much Britain had to give away in territory and influence to get back into bed with America after the Second World War. David Reynolds provides a sharp dissection of the Churchill-Roosevelt relationship in which the latter had the whip hand, and used it. Even so these authors still assume that Britain remains 'special' to America because it is pitching in there at great moments in history (eg. helping to bomb Libya), even if it is only to receive a slap in the face (being kept in the dark over Grenada). Next time America will listen.

New empires for old

Britain is special to the USA because it is one of the few countries in the world that has not felt the full, naked force of America's power. This is partly because it has usually done what America wanted, but also because it has been less directly in America's way and retains considerable military strength of its own. Look at what happened to Cambodia, which was less fortunate in both respects,

when as a neutral country it refused to fight the Vietcong. To say, as Lord Beloff does in this book, that America failed in its role as a world leader because it didn't create an empire from everything Britain gave it, is not only arrogant but wrong. To be sure, it built up a different type of empire, but, as Edward Mortimer points out, ask anyone in Iran or most of Africa about America and they will describe a classic imperialist stomping all over them.

Mortimer is the only writer here who really tackles the question of what America made out of the decline of the British Empire. It did of course behave in the traditional imperialist way, but it also invented different ways of managing third world countries—through intermediaries such as large corporations and the International Monetary Fund—and new ways of subverting them—through the CIA and sophisticated lobbying at the United Nations. Looking at the relationship in this way is more imaginative because it is also about how the world changed. The other writers, despite a wealth of fascinating facts and sophisticated analysis, focus on events which have been of central importance to Britain, but of only peripheral concern to America as she busied herself taking over the world. In doing so they help perpetuate the myth of the 'special relationship'.

● Adam Curtis was the producer of the BBC series on the 'special relationship', *An Ocean Apart*

The appeal of Samuel Beckett

Alan Harding
puts in perspective
the eulogies
which followed
Samuel Beckett's
death

'Almost certainly the greatest prose stylist of the century... encapsulating the human condition in words that rediscover and change the chemistry of language' (*Independent* obituary, 27 December 1989); 'Unassuming genius who probed the quandary of human existence' (*Times* obituary, 27 December); 'The prose work will surely be seen as among the greatest in world literature' (John Banville, *Observer*, 31 December).

He was good, but not that good. He was so good in fact that he would have raised, as he did in life, a sceptical eyebrow at such fulsome praise. Apart from anything else it would have offended his highly developed sense of economy and proportion. Nevertheless these are just a few of the glowing tributes which followed the death in Paris of Samuel Beckett, aged 83.

Beckett did not 'encapsulate the human condition', as if that exists as a static category, or can be reduced to some essence which may then be expressed by any one artist or body of work. What he did, however, was to illuminate with uncanny beauty and wit his preoccupation with the nature of existence at a particular point in human history when such a pre-occupation has found a powerful resonance.

Nobel art

He was not well received at first. In 1955 the *Daily Mail* drama critic greeted the first London performance of *Waiting for Godot* with a potent cocktail of philistinism and chauvinism: 'This play comes to us with a great reputation among the intelligentsia of Paris. And so far as I am concerned, the intelligentsia of Paris may have it back as soon as they wish.'

For once, acknowledgement came within the lifetime of the artist. Only 15 years after the *Mail* drubbing Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. And as the *Independent* obituary pointed out, Beckett became the biggest growth industry in academia: 'The critical writing about Beckett now exceeds that of all past or present human beings written during their lifetime.' There's another one for the trivial pursuit buffs.

Samuel Beckett was born in April 1906, in Foxrock, a middle class suburb of Dublin. He got the best

THE RETREAT FROM THE MODERN

PHOTO Sheila Burnett/Young Vic Theatre



Waiting for Godot, Young Vic, 1989

education Protestant ascendancy could provide, culminating in the best first of his year in Italian and French at Trinity, Dublin and the reputation of a great sportsman in golf and swimming as well as cricket. Mind you, a bit much has been made of the reference to Beckett in *Wisden*, the cricketing bible. What about Albert Camus? He played in goal for Algeria at football.

The elements of the story do not yet add up to the austere and reclusive scribe of human insignificance that we now know and ponder. After Trinity Beckett, like many young Irish both before and after, left Dublin for Paris. The journey is both a pilgrimage and an exile, a search for a universal identity in European culture, and a flight from the parochialism of an Irish society still fettered by British interference—something which the writer could only explain using the language of the oppressor.

Beckett did not finally settle in France until 1937 but in the years before he was directly exposed to the last period of creative energy and cultural upheaval now known as the Modern movement. Like James Joyce, whom Beckett met and worked

for, Beckett brought to the experimental atmosphere of European writing the dark, pointed observation, the sense of the absurd in human experience and the obsession with the word that were the common property of the best Irish intellectuals.

The Modern movement is the last movement in European literature which believed that there were great issues and themes in human life, and that they could be elucidated through art. This it held in common with all the classical writers in whom Beckett was steeped. Beckett never lost this sense of the universal in human experience, but his major writing was done in an epoch after the Second World War when such certainty was no longer accepted.

The Great Depression, fascism and the Second World War destroyed the Modern movement, driving many of its exponents to exile, despair and death. Beckett spent the war in the French resistance and was awarded the Croix de Guerre. In 1947 he was diagnosed as having a throat tumour believed to be malignant. Over the following five years he produced the major prose trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*; the play

Waiting for Godot; four novellas; and *Texts for Nothing*. He was never to be so prolix again.

Both liberals and the establishment found much to admire in his work. His technical virtuosity was admired for itself. His acute observation of human frailty was seen to reflect if not pessimism then a proper sense of human limitations. Most of all, the obvious struggle in his work to express anything or identify anything was taken as a sign that meaning itself was an elusive not to say illusory phenomenon.

It is not hard to see how the elements of technical felicity, pessimism leavened with wit and recurring evidence of erudition combined to make Beckett de rigueur with all sections of the literary establishment. These elements are indeed to be found in Beckett but there is more besides. The sterility of the vision is so often undermined by the sheer pleasure in the use of language. The endless struggle to find and order words in order to achieve meaning is never futile. On the contrary meaning resides in every line and word and dot. Rehearsing with his favourite actress Billie Whitelaw, Beckett once interrupted to show her three dots between two phrases in the script. 'Would you make those three dots, two dots.' He then took a pen and crossed out a dot.

Little to life

What is missing in Beckett is the possibility of the transformative quality of human action and experience. There is compassion and there is pity. In the tone of resigned fortitude and gallows humour there is even a sense of the possibility of surviving the suffering that is given in life. But we feel that for Beckett meaning is possible only in art and not in life itself. In his art it is his consolation to catch or almost catch the merest possibility of communication; he gives it his best shot and then it is refined, honed, polished and renewed.

The miniaturisation and minimalism of Beckett's work reflects not only a search for exact expression. It also signifies a retreat from human social experience. If all human life is here, there is very little to human life. It is obvious that the work has struck a chord because of the bleak and limited perspectives imposed by capitalist society in the second half of the twentieth century. These are the perspectives which Beckett, a master of the craft and music of language, examined and expressed.

Few writers can ever have bettered Beckett's extraordinary renditions of the corners of the mind that assemble, dissemble, and clutch at the syntax of the production of our own perceptions, our own experience. And the fact that those perceptions and that experience were for Beckett so bleak never made him give up. 'Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.'

Letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms of *Living Marxism*. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.

BRITISH INJUSTICE

I would like to commend you on your article on the Guildford Four exposing British injustice for Irish people in Britain ('The Balcombe Street bombshell', December). When the Guildford Four were released in October a lot of people in Britain were shocked and disgusted that this miscarriage of justice should happen, and rightly so. The sad thing is that it has happened over here in many cases. This prison is full of people like the Guildford Four who were convicted on signed confessions beaten out of them in Castlereagh interrogation centre, a place that has come under many investigations for ill-treatment of suspects in the Six Counties.

Hugh McMonagle
Maze Prison
Northern Ireland

AIDS AND AFRICA

I was delighted to see the Aids article ('Reflections on the Aids panic', January) which cut through the myths about the disease in Britain. However, I was disappointed to find a casual acceptance of other scientific misinformation: 'In Africa, there is little doubt that HIV has been disseminated with devastating consequences....' Is this really true? Is Africa gripped by an epidemic? Little more than Western Europe. In Africa 19 141 cases had been reported up to October 1988, while 15 251 were reported in Western Europe. Neither figure touches the 76 000-plus reported to that date in the USA.

Furthermore, while the advantages of HIV blood-testing are fully available in Britain, they are not always available in Africa. Clinical diagnosis has been necessary in these cases. As pointed out in *Aids, Africa and Racism*, the clinical definition employed by the World Health Organisation is hopelessly wide,

opening up the possibility of massive overstatement of Aids cases. As one Ghanaian doctor is quoted as saying, 'If tens of thousands are dying from Aids, where are the corpses?'

Inadequate scientific research on Aids adds to the ease with which racist conclusions are drawn in this and other areas of science. Perhaps the excellent job started by Michael Fitzpatrick and Don Milligan could now be completed with a similar demolition job on the racist uses of the Aids panic.

Robert Lennon
Birmingham

MAKING SENSE OF CHAOS

Does *Living Marxism* really wish a return to Newtonian mechanics? Newtonian mechanics have been augmented by two major developments in the last 200 years which put the lie to your article against Chaos theory ('The science of despair', December). The first is that high-point of nineteenth-century physics, thermodynamics and statistical mechanics; the second, of course, is quantum mechanics.

Statistical mechanics never claimed to replace Newtonian mechanics but established that better understanding of some physical processes comes from a statistical approach that 'holds universally, caring not at all for the details of a system's constituent atoms' (*Chaos*, by James Gleick). Newtonian determinism was smashed not by Chaos, but by quantum mechanics over 60 years ago. As a scientist I find the description of science since Newton as 'partial speculative alternatives' frankly incredible.

Some of the article is very funny indeed, particularly the description of Chaos as merely the application of simply 'second order equations, of which $X^2 + X + 1 = 0$ is a simple example'. On this O-level style of clever dickery, Newtonian mechanics

is 'merely' the application of Schrodinger's equation: $\psi = e^{-iEt/\hbar}$. Having spent the last four years 'merely' applying Schrodinger's equation to quantum collinear reactive molecular scattering, fruitlessly so far, I look forward to having John Gibson and Manjit Singh popping around to put me straight!

Hearing of Chaos theory that 'its rise is a testimony to the general stagnation of scientific research', makes me mad. When you look around the world you see whole areas cordoned off. 'Here liveth dragons!'—things that previously could not be tackled. Advances that lead to understanding in these areas come in two sorts. Application of more sophisticated techniques based on old concepts of what is knowable, or new conceptions of what is knowable, and what knowledge is. Chaos says, as quantum said before it, that Newtonian variables and observables are not useful in some situations. It also says that chaotic variables and observables are! Chaos brings whole new concepts of knowledge. A new universal constant to rival π and e ! Vast areas of physical reality are falling to understanding. Dragons lay slain in their thousands. The excitement of it is hard to express. Epochal is the only word to describe it. Is *Living Marxism* really on the side of the dragons?

Gordon Guthrie
London

I wish to point out two inaccuracies in 'The science of despair'. Lorenz required 12 equations to map his weather system, not three as you claim. He needed three to calculate the flow of convection in a fluid.

You also claim that Chaos declares that 'natural processes are unknowable and hence uncontrollable'. This is not true. Chaos claims that all dynamic systems (a system which changes its position during a period of time) are inherently unstable, but at times they will exhibit non-dynamic tendencies, or will appear stable, and be predictable. Chaos attempts to explain what causes the change between the predictable and non-predictable states of a dynamic system, and why a dynamic system should have a predictable state at all.

J Imrie
London

NO 'SORT OF SOCIALISM'

Simon Wedge (letters, January) is clutching at straws if he believes the East German 'welfare' state protects its people. It is clear that the Stalinist states, far from being 'some sort of socialism', are organised around the denial of any participatory rights for the vast majority of the population.

What sort of socialism is that? Instead of trying to bolster the states of Eastern Europe with flimsy ideological props, we need to face up to the fact that Stalinism was a temporary phenomenon which is now coming to the end of the road.

East European states have only survived this long thanks to subsidies from both the Soviet Union and the West. Moscow's inability to carry on funding its allies, crippling debt repayments to Western banks, and the inability of the Eastern bureaucracies to turn investment into real growth, have all combined to signal the end. In East Germany, as elsewhere, it is the crisis of the Stalinist system which has opened the door to (West German) imperialism.

Simon's argument that food subsidies and employment guarantees also represent 'some sort of socialism' needs to be looked at in the same hard light. The Stalinist regimes are no longer able to sustain the meagre welfare provision which they have formerly used to compensate the population for lack of real growth. East Germany, long held up as the model welfare state, spends a smaller proportion of state expenditure on education than its Western neighbour. Life expectancy is lower. Decent food is becoming more difficult to obtain. Medical provision has been declining since the early eighties. Infant mortality has been on the increase since the sixties. Low growth leads to drastic restructuring, and that can only mean ordinary people having to make the 'necessary' sacrifice.

The failure of Stalinism to provide any alternative to capitalism has led to the emergence of mass movements from the Ukraine to Albania. It is naive to think that these movements see anything at all worth defending in their societies. While the mass of people are far from being pro-capitalist, they are likely to be vehemently anti-communist. The instinct for survival provoked by removal of food subsidies and the proposed introduction of mass unemployment in Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union, should not be confused with 'an instinct for some sort of socialism', as Simon puts it. 'Socialism' will be a dirty word for many years across Eastern Europe.

The irony is that just when both Stalinism and the market are becoming dirty words (which you would have thought was what we were all fighting for), up pop left-wingers like Simon to defend the dying Stalinist system. There is no 'welfare state' to defend in the East; there is only exploitation and oppression. The sooner these states are destroyed the better.

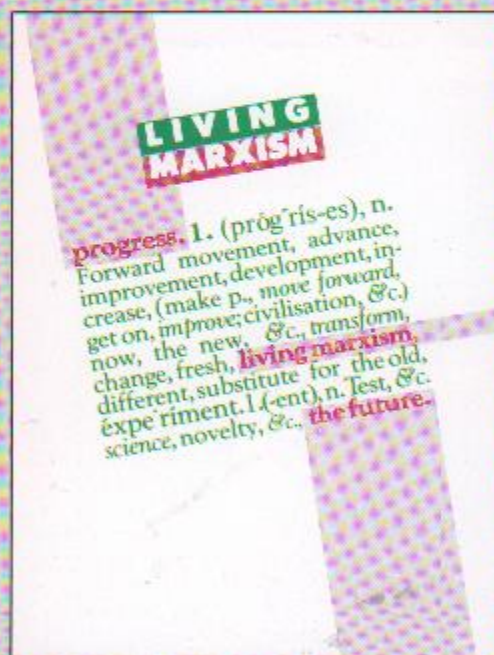
Dave Lamb
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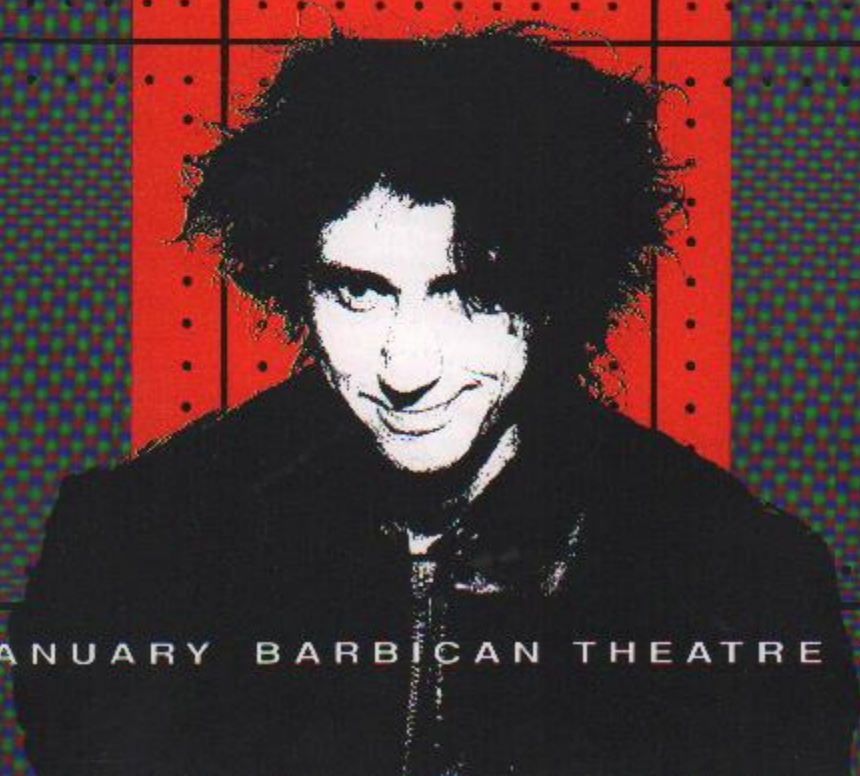
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