

LIVING MARXISM

March 1990 No17 £1.50

**GERMANY:
REUNITING ALREADY**

**GORBACHEV:
GOING, GOING...?**

**COMMUNIST PARTIES
CRACK, BUT STALINIST
STATES STILL STAND**

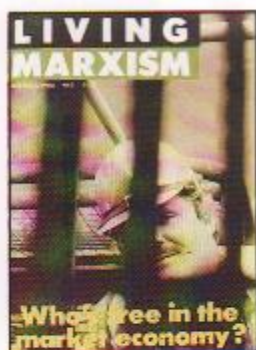
**WHO
RULES
BEHIND
THE
WALL?**



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RISES DON'T CAUSE INFLATION • AND MUCH MORE**



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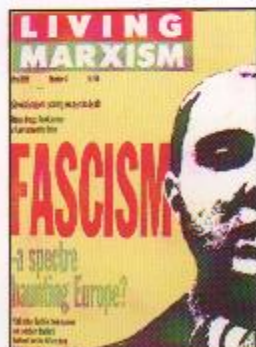
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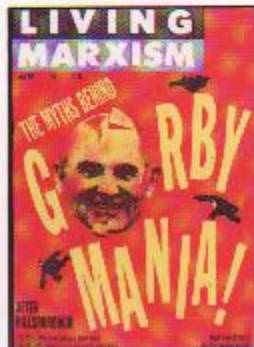
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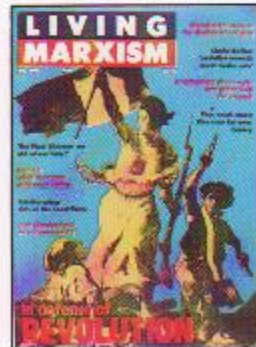
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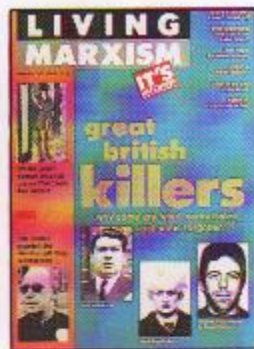
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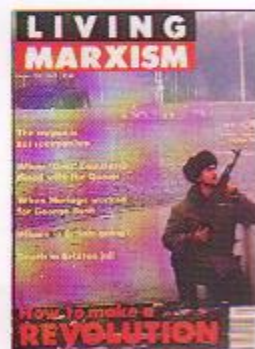
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**LIVING
MARXISM**

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Revolutionary Communist Party

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This is the question of the moment. With all of the changes taking place in the East, there seems to be a general idea that if you still want to be associated with Marxism you must be stuck in the past.

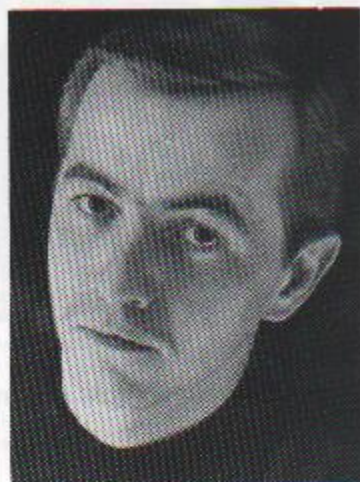
But I am a Marxist because I have had enough of being stuck in the present.

I am a Marxist because I believe in the liberation of humanity from its present state of semi-misery. No doubt many liberals or even conservatives would pay lip-service to the same thing. But which other political current favours the sort of thoroughgoing liberation which Marxism desires and demands?

● Marxists believe in the liberation of society from the domination of an oppressive minority. So we support the much-celebrated revolts against the dictatorial committees of bureaucrats, generals and spies which have run Eastern Europe. The difference is that we also favour rebellion against the clique of cabinet ministers, civil service mandarins, police chiefs, judges and cronies who boss Britain.

Marxists are the most uncompromising opponents of state repression and militarism employed in the service of reactionary regimes. We are all for the exposure and abolition of secret police forces like the East German Stasi and the Securitate in Romania. We would only point out the need to do away with all the other undercover gangs of state agents while we are at it: like the dirty tricksters of MI5 and MI6.

● Nor do Marxists shed any tears over the removal of Soviet troops and tanks from Eastern Europe. We would, however, be much happier if the US forces were leaving the Panama Canal and the



MICK HUME
EDITOR

'HOW CAN YOU CALL YOURSELF A MARXIST?'

British Army of occupation pulling out of Ireland at the same time.

Marxists also stand for the liberation of humanity from material want. Those who produce the wealth of society should control and benefit from it. We are opposed to exploitation and the parasitism of living off the labour of others.

Thus we will join in the chorus condemning Stalinist rulers like Honecker of East Germany and Ceausescu of Romania, who led luxurious lifestyles and accumulated

hunting lodges at their people's expense. But we will ensure that we save enough voice to start an outcry about the inequalities of the British system, in which five per cent of the population own getting on for half of all the wealth, and a Queen accumulates far more fabulous assets than any East European ruler for doing even less productive work.

We will stand alongside many others in the West in calling for an end to the inefficient Stalinist command economy in the East, which

leaves goods rotting in railway sidings while people go short. Yet we will put no more faith in the anarchy of the profit-driven market economy, which creates record levels of homelessness in Britain while more houses stand empty than ever before, and institutionalises starvation in the third world while destroying tonnes of surplus food in the West.

Perhaps you need not be a Marxist to support some or even all of these liberatory aims. But Marxism finally parts company with its

contemporary critics over the matter of how to achieve them.

It is a fundamental tenet of Marxism that progressive change does not come about by accident, or through the actions of important individuals with a social conscience, or because governments feel guilty about the way they have treated their people.

The motor for liberation is the political action of the masses, bringing pressure to bear from below. And for those seeking fundamental change, it is not enough just to pressurise the government to introduce reforms. The goal of our action must be to bring the majority section of society—the working class—to power. For we can only be sure that change will serve our interests when we introduce it ourselves.

By contrast today, East and West, the fashion is for the authorities to introduce change from the top down, instigating a 'revolution from above'. Such is the path embarked upon by presidents Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and FW de Klerk in South Africa. Both of these reform-minded rulers have won fulsome support from the British government for showing the way to a new world. But who are their changes intended to benefit?

Gorbachev was groomed for high office by the KGB. De Klerk came to office with a past reputation as a hardliner in the Nationalist Party of apartheid. These are unlikely backgrounds from which to hand over power to the oppressed in the Soviet Union or South Africa.

The true aim of their revolutions from above is to prevent revolution from below. Both men have proved prepared to introduce superficially important changes—formally breaking the Soviet Communist Party's monopoly on power,

formally legalising the ANC—to contain popular unrest and give the impression of progress. But Gorbachev's military intervention in Azerbaijan showed that his softly-softly approach ends at the first sign of a serious challenge to the authority of the Stalinist state. De Klerk is even less inclined to reform away the institutions of apartheid: as he reportedly told Margaret Thatcher, 'Don't expect me to negotiate my way out of power'.

system of which they are so proud came into being. It was not created through the democratic inclinations of the aristocracy, but through civil war, mass agitation and the threat of insurrection.

From the execution of Charles I by the parliamentary forces in the seventeenth century, to the extension of the suffrage in the nineteenth century in the wake of Continental revolutions, the British voting system was constructed in the shadow of violent struggle.

pull off a similar stunt today—abolishing their party monopolies, holding elections, but hanging on like grim death to the levers of state power.

Thus the events in Eastern Europe have served to confirm, rather than refute, some basic propositions of Marxism: most importantly, that mass struggle for change is the only reliable road to a better future. Reforms introduced from the top down seek instead to restrain the cause of progress, as they

Events in Eastern Europe have served to confirm a basic proposition of Marxism: that mass struggle for change is the only reliable road to a better future

This was ever the way with revolutions from above. They are not to be trusted. The praise which the Western powers heap upon the top-down reformers today is intended to distract attention from one fact of history; that every change worth having was introduced only because of mass action from below—or the fear of it.

When the government lectures us about the illegitimacy of mass action in a democratic country like Britain, they conveniently forget how the parliamentary

Electoral reforms from universal male suffrage to votes for women had to be forced upon the reluctant authorities by further protests.

Yet because ultimate authority was left in the hands of the ancien regime, even these democratic reforms have proved inadequate. The ruling class has used them to give people a stake in its system, while it retains real power via the machinery of the state. The old Stalinist bureaucracies of Eastern Europe are trying to

have done so far in the countries behind the Berlin Wall.

Of course there is never any guarantee that a struggle will succeed. And even if it does so, nobody knows how long its victory will last. When the Russian proletariat, led by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, brought off a successful revolution in 1917, their attempt to construct a new society was sabotaged by Britain and the other Western powers, who sent 130 000 troops to invade the fledgling Soviet state. The

These 'official' Communist parties which we are now supposed to feel responsible for have acted as the gravediggers of Marxism

Red Army finally won the war, but the devastation wreaked on the working class destroyed the revolution and paved the way for the rise of Stalin.

Stalinism was thus a consequence of the defeat of revolutionary Marxism, with the able assistance of the great capitalist democracies. As such, we need feel no guilt over the crimes which the Stalinists subsequently committed, nor any compunction to abandon Marxism because of the upheaval in Eastern Europe. Indeed, if anybody should feel uncomfortable about their links with the discredited regimes of the East, it is the rulers of the West. After all, no Marxist ever gave Nicolae Ceausescu a knighthood.

Of course the crisis of Stalinism presents some temporary difficulties for Marxists, since many people will see it as a refutation of our own arguments. But we would far rather face this problem than the full force of the old Stalinist regimes.

These 'official' Communist parties which we are supposed to feel responsible for have acted as the gravediggers of Marxism. In the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Spain and the third world, revolutionary Marxists have been among the first victims of Stalinist terror. They have done a far better job of discrediting the Marxist project than any capitalist propagandist could do, because they have done it in the name of communism itself. As a Marxist, I cannot see them fall too soon or too hard.

When we are free of the shadow of Stalinism, we will be better able to re-establish the relevance of Marxism as a modern theory of society and revolution. We need to forget any notion of being apologetic or defensive, and begin to put the case for revolution East and West in the nineties.

The collapse of Stalinism has helped to distract attention from the approach of yet another international crisis of the capitalist order.

People in Britain are set to be hit worse than most, with rising unemployment to add to already pressing problems like record personal debt. Meanwhile, all the celebratory talk about introducing the market into Eastern Europe plays down the brutal impact this is already having on the living standards of ordinary people there.

If the best alternative to Stalinism which the West can offer is a McDonald's in Moscow, why should anybody be proud to call themselves a capitalist?

Many people will say that the Marxist vision of a revolutionary society is an impossible one today. But the past few months have proved that anything is possible. Who could have predicted, for instance, six months ago, that Germany would be moving so fast towards reunification? Or that Margaret Thatcher, in her attempts to retain the stable arrangements of the Cold War in today's unstable world, would have become a supporter of maintaining the Warsaw Pact?

Marxists have always allowed for dramatic change. Our theory is not a dogma set in stone, but an open-ended method of analysis. It is our enemies who have tried to declare the 'end of history', asserting that the status quo was a permanent fixture. As history unfreezes, their ideas are in danger of being found woefully outdated. But those of us who have had enough of being stuck in the present have our eyes fixed firmly on the future, and on the revolutionary action necessary to get us there.

April's Living Marxism

IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM

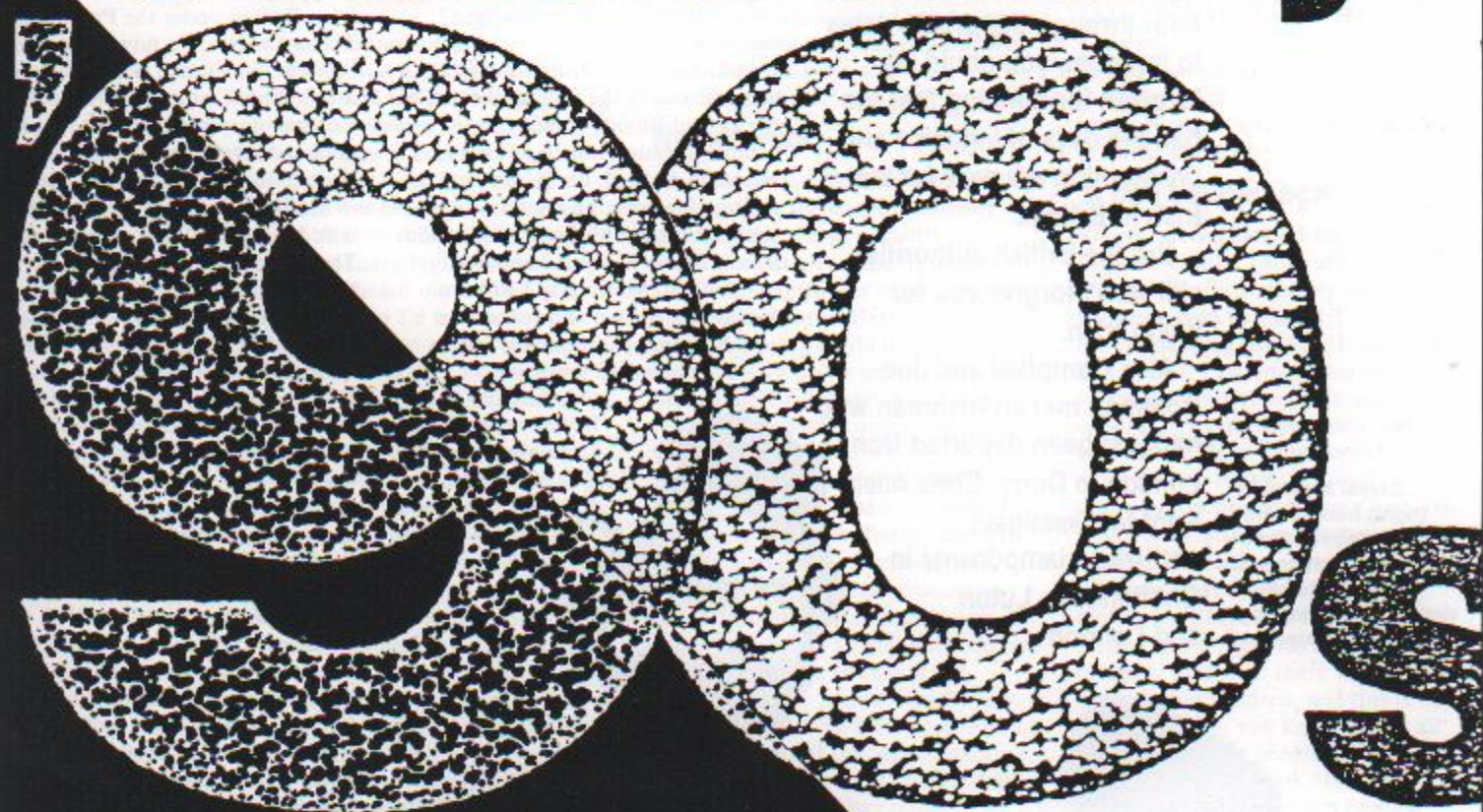
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After the Guildford Four

The Irish are still in the frame

With rumours flying around that the Birmingham Six are about to follow the Guildford Four through the prison gates to freedom, you could be forgiven for thinking that the bad old days of injustice and persecution are over for the Irish in Britain.

But the British authorities still won't forgive you for being Irish.

Alex Campbell and Joe Boatman met an Irishman who had just been deported from London to Derry; Chris Allen went to investigate anti-Irish clampdowns in Cheltenham, Luton and London

'I don't want you to be sorry, I don't want you to be sad, I don't want you to be sympathetic, I want you to be angry, I want you to make sure it doesn't happen to anyone else ever again.'

Paul Hill of the Guildford Four was addressing the rally at the end of the annual Bloody Sunday commemoration march in Derry, Northern Ireland, on 28 January. Among the listening crowd was 36-year old Daniel McBrearty, to whom it very nearly had just happened.

Like Hill, McBrearty had been arrested in Britain and framed on bombing charges. Hill had to spend 15 years in

jail before the British authorities finally admitted that he

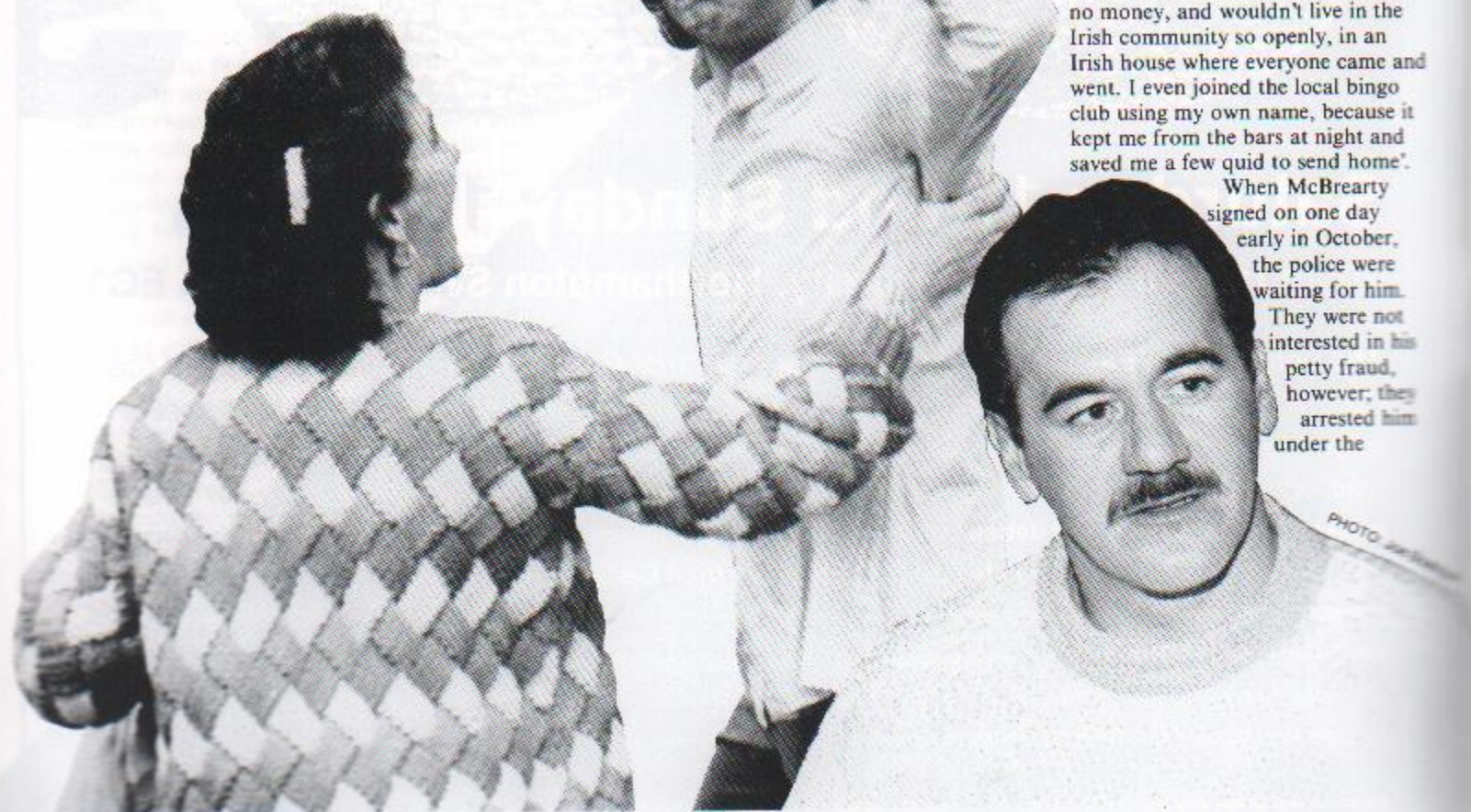
was not responsible. In contrast, McBrearty spent three months behind bars before the charges were dropped; but he was then excluded from Britain under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He now considers himself 'imprisoned within my own area'. What's worse, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has told him that his personal details are among those 'leaked' to Loyalist murder gangs.

McBrearty lives in Derry with his wife Moira and three young children. Their home is on the republican Creggan estate, and his brother George was an IRA volunteer shot dead in 1981 in a gun battle with undercover British soldiers. But Daniel denies any active involvement with the republican movement. He went to Britain last September not to make bombs, but to make some money for Christmas presents by getting a job—and signing on at the same time.

'That was my only crime', says McBrearty, 'I presume an IRA man wouldn't work and sign on with his own name, wouldn't get stuck with no money, and wouldn't live in the Irish community so openly, in an Irish house where everyone came and went. I even joined the local bingo club using my own name, because it kept me from the bars at night and saved me a few quid to send home'.

When McBrearty signed on one day early in October, the police were waiting for him. They were not interested in his petty fraud, however; they arrested him under the

Daniel McBrearty (right) believes only the release of Gerard Conlon and the other Guildford victims saved him from the same fate



Prevention of Terrorism Act. It was just after the IRA bombed the marines' barracks in Deal. 'As soon as they scooped me I said, "What's happening here, boys?". They said, "Well, we have to be seen to be doing something about the marine bombings". Those were their first words to me. They knew I wasn't involved at all.'

Paper overall

McBrearty was held at the top-security Paddington Green police station for seven days, and interrogated about Deal. 'They removed all my clothing, wedding ring, watch and handed me a white overall made of paper. That's all I had for seven days. They put it to me that I was connected with an active service unit that had carried out the bombings, and for seven days I continuously denied, denial after denial, that I was ever involved in anything to do with explosives.'

'Then I was charged with having some substance called RDX on my hands, a military high explosive I hadn't even heard of. Before I left work to sign on I'd washed my hands. I wanted to make sure they were clean. Then they swabbed my hands and there was this military high explosive, a constituent of Semtex. It wasn't on my wedding ring or my watch, or my shoelaces. It wasn't on my jumper or in my pockets. It was only on my hands which I had scrubbed half an hour before because I was going to the dole. So it was obviously a set-up. They also swabbed my hands again on the second morning, which was very odd. My forensic scientist has never seen their reports because they refused him access.'

'The house that I was in, they raided it and searched it. And I found it very strange that all the other men in the house weren't

swabbed or arrested. Now if I was an IRA active service man they would all be scooped as part of it. Either they were grossly incompetent or intent on setting me up.'

Like almost all men from a nationalist area of Northern Ireland, McBrearty had seen the inside of a British cell before. 'Because I have been through Strand Road and Castlereagh interrogation centre years before, I knew how to handle seven days of interviews. But for somebody who hadn't handled seven days' interrogation it would have been very hard. If it had been a younger man of 18 or 19, or somebody a wee bit weak, no way could they have handled it. They could easily have signed statements for something they hadn't done, like the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six.'

No answers

On 8 January, after three months in detention, the Crown suddenly dropped the charges against McBrearty at a remand hearing in Lambeth magistrates court. Crown prosecutor Martin Heslop announced that McBrearty could have picked up the explosive traces accidentally, but immediately ruled out any police malpractice. McBrearty's lawyer Gareth Pierce asked why this possibility had not been raised before. 'I don't intend to answer questions' snapped Heslop, and the magistrate agreed, dismissing the charges without further discussion.

McBrearty believes that he was on the conveyor belt to jail, until the row that followed the release of the Guildford Four in mid-October put the pressure on the British authorities and put them off the idea of another immediate frame-up. 'I think it was an ongoing plan. They thought, we'll put him in there, and then find something else to connect him with

A, B or C. Only for the Guildford people being released I think they would have gone on and stitched me up. Had this happened to me last year, I would be sentenced now and that would be it. But it all fell apart after the Guildford Four walked out. I believe they saved my skin.'

When the charges were withdrawn, McBrearty and his family were elated. But as he stepped from the dock he was re-arrested, and later that day he was served with an order excluding him from Britain for three years under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. 'When they re-arrested me the police said "Waddington [home secretary] should sign the order this afternoon and we'll fly you home". He couldn't be found until seven that night, so he just signed without looking into the case. He could have signed it on anybody at all, and that's it—you're branded a terrorist.'

'It can happen again'

'On my arrival home I learnt that Loyalist murder gangs are in possession of my security files which had been held by the RUC. That's always hanging over me. I can't enter Britain and I am scared for my own safety and that of my wife and three children. The unemployment here is upwards of 70 or 80 per cent. No work and no future, just sign on the dole and live on the poverty line. I'm imprisoned within my own area, all because I'm Irish.'

'I went over to earn some extra money for Christmas time, and it turned into a nightmare. I was just an ordinary man over there working for my wife and children, and this is how it all ended up, you know? After all these years some people, including myself, began to think "It won't happen again". But it can happen again. It happened here, it happened to me.'

FORTRESS CHELTENHAM

Anyone with £4.50 to spare can take tea in the four-star Queen's Hotel in Cheltenham. You can sprawl on the Laura Ashley-style sofas, sipping Earl Grey tea underneath a portrait of her majesty. But remember to smile...you're on candid camera.

As I left the hotel, two plainclothes policemen stopped me and wanted to know what I was doing there. It soon became clear that they had been watching me on closed circuit TV all the time I was in the hotel. I understand that the Securitate had a similar set-up in the major hotel in Bucharest. I showed them my press card. They were not impressed. They demanded my home address, told me to expect a 'visit' from my local

police if I didn't cooperate, and informed me that they were 'sensitive' about the security arrangements at the Queen's, and did not want the details publicised. I was then followed around Cheltenham by two plainclothes officers using walkie-talkies disguised as personal stereos.

The surveillance at the Queen's is part of large-scale preparations for the conference of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, which will take place in Cheltenham town hall on 30-31 March. Newly installed equipment in the hotel includes two video cameras above the main reception desk, one of them trained on the tea drinkers. Three plainclothes police officers

patrol the hotel. Somewhere in the building there is a control room. All new arrivals are asked to provide personal details. When Patricia Wheeldon, who was accompanying her husband on business, refused to comply, she too was quizzed by two plainclothes police.

The likelihood of prime minister Margaret Thatcher and other senior ministers attending the conference, and dropping in for a cup of tea at the Queen's nearby, has prompted Gloucestershire police to mount the biggest operation ever seen in the West Country. The police have made a particular fuss about the fact that the Tory conference will take place less than three weeks after thousands

'It seemed to me there was a racist overtone to the whole thing'

of Irish race-goers arrive in Cheltenham for the racing festival, which includes the Gold Cup on 15 March.

'Anti-terrorist' policing involves directing suspicion against anyone in Britain who is Irish. In the aftermath of the Deal bombing in September 1989, for example, five Irish building workers in Cheltenham were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. They were subsequently released, but not before the press had whipped up hysteria against them. In the run-up to the Tory council conference, local media coverage and the distribution of 20 000 'anti-terrorist' leaflets have combined in an attempt to make Irish race-goers the object of suspicion even before they set foot on English turf.

Positive thinking

The *Gloucestershire Echo* got the ball rolling with an article entitled 'The loneliest walk in the world' on the Royal Army Ordnance Corps bomb squad based in Hereford. The men of 721 company stressed that 'constant public awareness is a vital weapon in our battle against the terrorist'. 'There is a threat from terrorists but that can be nullified by people thinking positively over the next few weeks', echoed assistant chief constable Hubert Reynolds.

A leaflet issued to 6000 hoteliers and boarding house landladies called on them to look for 'furniture or carpets that have been moved, panels unscrewed or unusual marks on panels, walls and furniture'. A further leaflet appealed for the public to act

as the police's 'eyes and ears' against 'the terrorist threat': 'Do not hesitate if you are aware of anything or anybody suspicious...the police will respond with specially trained officers.' For 'anybody suspicious', read 'anybody Irish'.

The *Gloucestershire Echo*, which has given front-page treatment to every available story from Northern Ireland during the past few months, ran a double-page feature on 'Fortress Cheltenham'. Based on hand-outs from chief inspector John Bond, press officer for Gloucestershire police, the article explained how 'a ring of steel', including Special Branch surveillance and armed police on surrounding rooftops, will be drawn around the conference venue in Imperial Square. Such measures were regrettable but necessary 'in these troubled times', concluded chief constable Albert Pacey.

According to Pacey and his colleagues, it is regrettable but necessary to enlist the resident population of Cheltenham as unpaid spies and informers on Irish visitors to the town. Yet it is a sign of 'these troubled times' that even in respectable, sleepy Cheltenham the 'anti-terrorist' campaign has been received with more than a little scepticism.

'I am shocked and embarrassed at the extent of the security', said one hotelier, who asked not to be named. 'Irish people are wonderful customers and now I am being asked to spy on them.' Shop-owners and restaurant managers are worried that the

security cordon will deter Irish people from coming to the Cheltenham races, and that they will lose business. The *Echo* has received a series of letters calling on the Tories to 'take your conference away' and 'hold your weekend beano somewhere else'. These sentiments are echoed by many people who work in Cheltenham town centre.

Derek and Anne were tidying the flower beds in Imperial Gardens. At 4pm on a January afternoon, they were bathed in light from newly installed floodlamps. Even the drains in front of the Queen's Hotel are now fitted with searchlights. Derek thought that the security operation was 'crazy'. He objected to the fact that during the conference weekend no one will be allowed to walk through the town centre without a pass. Anne thought it 'unfair' that so many Irish people will be under surveillance.

Tony was laying paving stones outside a local building society: 'Police have been in these offices today to check them out, and they'll want to know what's under the manhole covers. They'd better not ask us to lift the concrete we just put down. I could have put Semtex down there, couldn't I? There's too much money spent on the security. I could live on that money for a good many years. And it's not right that everyone Irish will be looked at. In any case I don't think they'll do it to her down here.' He sounded almost disappointed.

LUTON: NO HOUSE IS SAFE

'Bedfordshire police and anti-terrorist officers raided a number of addresses on Friday 22 December....A spokesman for New Scotland Yard was not prepared to discuss the number of people detained, their sex or the locations that were searched.' (*Luton Herald & Post*, 29 December 1989)

Luton's Irish community was shocked when police arrested several people under the Prevention of Terrorism Act shortly before Christmas. All were later released without charge. But by then Luton was gripped by the climate of suspicion directed against all Irish people in the area.

According to Scotland Yard detectives, they had reason to believe that the IRA had a 'safe house' in the Luton area, possibly used by the Deal bombers. They set out to ensure that no house was safe for Irish people. Two weeks after the initial arrests, police announced that 15lbs

of Semtex explosive were found during the pre-Christmas raids. Nobody was charged, however, with possession of explosives or anything else, which makes this police 'find' more than a little suspect.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the first week in January, Bedfordshire police appealed to landlords and hotel proprietors 'to contact the police immediately if Irish men or women suddenly vacated premises around the Christmas period leaving behind all or part of their belongings'. This description could have applied to hundreds of young emigrants travelling back to Ireland for the holidays. 'Suspicious may not have been aroused', said a police spokesman, 'because it was thought the tenants had returned home for Christmas'. The fact that this was precisely what the tenants had done didn't matter to the police; their concern now was to 'arouse suspicion'.

According to Scotland Yard, there

was 'an excellent response' to the appeal. But at least one landlady, who preferred not to be named, wanted nothing to do with it:

'I don't agree with it. I had an Irishman here who left just before Christmas but I believed his circumstances were as he told me and I didn't want to get him hassle from people I know would not be sympathetic to him. Since then I've had lots of Irish people here, and I know that suspicion has been put upon them. It's a bit of excitement—someone comes to the door and the other guests are saying "is this the one?". That kind of thing has been going on in the town, to some extent. Anyone with an Irish accent is suspected. So I wouldn't do it. It seemed to me there was a racist overtone to the whole thing—it really meant, tell us about anyone who is Irish.'

GUN LAW IN LONDON

'A' and 'B' are two Irishmen charged with explosives offences. Their arrest on a Welsh beach in December 1989 was the culmination of Operation Pebble. Since then they have made repeated appearances at Lambeth magistrates courts. Reporting restrictions prevent the publication of anything said in court—except that the defendants have been remanded in custody until their next appearance. The security cordon around the court is supposed to be beyond the scope of official censorship. But who knows these days? The judiciary has already warned *Times* journalists for describing what the prisoners wore when they first appeared on Boxing Day 1989.

Police marksmen from the crackshot blue beret squad looked down from rooftops and the

balconies of nearby flats. They carried rifles and revolvers. Officers wearing heavy-duty bullet-proof vests patrolled both ends of the street. There were so many police that a 30-foot catering trailer was needed to feed them. The phone box outside the courthouse had no phone in it: police had ripped out the whole unit. A police helicopter flew over the prison van which brought 'A' and 'B' to and from the court. Throughout the hearing, officers on the courthouse roof trained powerful binoculars on all approach roads. When the hearing ended, no one was allowed on to the street until the prison van and its escort had left the vicinity.

In the lobby of the court, police were having trouble with a new metal detector. They had to resort to old-fashioned body searches on some

journalists. All visitors to the court were required to give their names and a contact address. Male police officers joked about making a private note of the addresses of women journalists.

The courtroom boasts £30 000 worth of newly installed bullet-proof glass which separates members of the public from the well of the court. The bullet-proof glass extends from ceiling to floor: it is even fitted inside the wood panelling which rises from floor to waist-height. It is said to be impregnable.

The cordon around 'A' and 'B' is a show of strength which reveals all the paraphernalia of a police state. It symbolises the status of the Irish in Britain as an 'enemy within'.

Would you ask them
for the time of day?

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



A moderate politician?

The Mandela myth

We are all for the release of Nelson Mandela. But what is the ANC leader for?

During his 27 years in jail, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela has become a symbol of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, saluted from many sides of the political spectrum. The songs of the impoverished masses in the black townships ask him to 'Show us the way to freedom/ Freedom is in your hands', while even the staid Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group has fallen under the Mandela spell, describing him as 'a living legend'.

The legendary status which Mandela has acquired seems to make it difficult for opponents of apartheid to view him objectively; Mandela the man has become inseparable from the mythology which surrounds him. But to assess what role he might play in the attempt to find a political settlement in South Africa, it is necessary to unravel the myth.

To survive the best part of 30 years in the prisons of the apartheid state and maintain your dignity is no mean feat. But neither is it in itself proof of political reliability. In Africa, many nationalist leaders have spent long periods in prison, and their credibility has increased accordingly. Yet how many have repaid the faith invested in them once released?

Jomo Kenyatta made a triumphal exit from a British colonial jail when Kenya gained its independence. He went on to found a repressive and corrupt ruling dynasty. Hastings Banda of Malawi was also imprisoned and harshly treated by the British authorities; he became one of the most brutal rulers in post-colonial Africa, and an open collaborator with the apartheid regime. There are several similar examples.

It is important, then, not to get carried away with applauding Mandela's resilience in prison, but to ask what are his political perspectives for South Africa today? Of course, he has had little opportunity to air his views over the last 27 years. The policies which he proclaimed before and during his trial, however, reveal him as an essentially moderate lawyer turned politician. If any of his views have altered while he has been isolated in prison from his forties through to his seventies, the drift is unlikely to have been to the left.

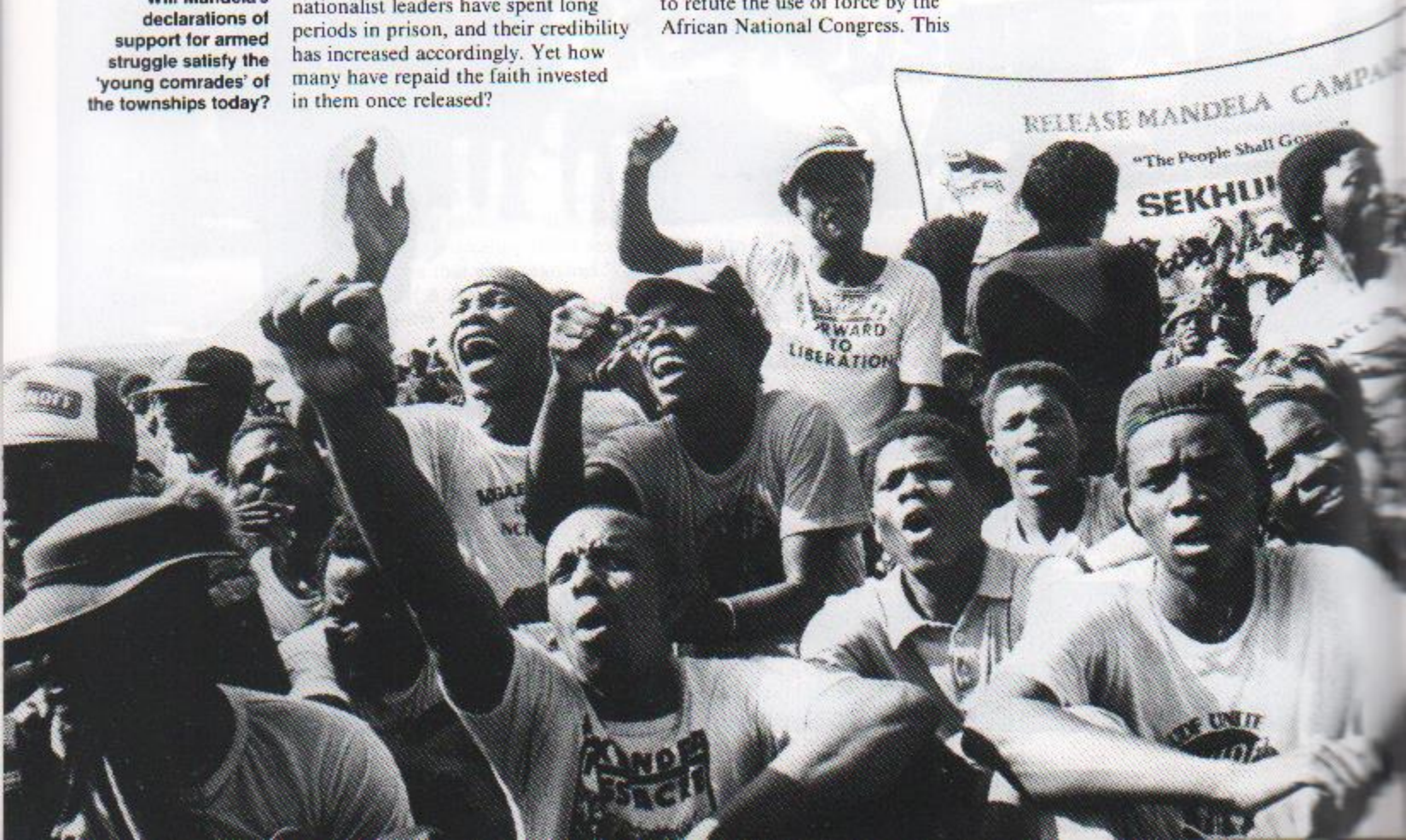
Mandela has consistently refused to refute the use of force by the African National Congress. This

position was at the heart of a widely publicised document, published in January this year, which Mandela wrote and submitted to the then president PW Botha before their talks last year. His support for armed struggle has been crucial to maintaining Mandela's reputation over the years, especially among angry young blacks. But what does he mean by it?

Mandela has never believed in the forcible overthrow of the South African state. Since the fifties, he has continually sought a negotiated settlement with the white supremacist regime, as he explained in a letter to Botha in 1985:

'I am not a violent man. My colleagues and I wrote in 1952 to [prime minister] Malan asking for a round-table conference to find a solution to the problems of our country, but that was ignored. When Strijdom was in power, we made the same offer. Again it was ignored. When Verwoerd was in power we asked for a national convention for

Will Mandela's declarations of support for armed struggle satisfy the 'young comrades' of the townships today?



all the people in South Africa to decide on their future. This too was in vain. It was only when all other forms of resistance were no longer open to us that we turned to armed struggle.' ('Mandela speaks', ANC pamphlet, p7)

Mandela was one of the founders of the armed wing of the resistance movement, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) in 1961. It was a desperate response to the legal crackdown on all peaceful forms of protest. Even then, Mandela and his comrades made clear that Umkhonto would use the least violent form of armed struggle available—sabotage, with no threat to life. In the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the forces of apartheid had shot dead 69 black people in cold blood; Mandela's response was to blow up some buildings and electricity pylons.

'Disturbing ideas'

At his trial in 1964, Mandela explained that the sabotage campaign was intended to head off demands for more forceful action, at a time when events like Sharpeville meant that 'our followers...were developing disturbing ideas of terrorism'. He did not believe that the campaign would overthrow the ruling whites, but hoped that it would scare them into negotiations by suggesting that worse violence would follow if the lack of concessions encouraged less reasonable black leaders to emerge.

'We were aware that the effect of the pressure was not so strong as to get a regime like the South African regime to change', said Mandela's ally Walter Sisulu, 'but at least it was going to educate white people that danger was coming. This is what we wanted to highlight: that danger is coming, and unless something is done, an ultimate conflict—actually a shooting war—will take place' (quoted in J Collinge, 'Comrades in arms', *Work In Progress*, 62/63, November-December 1989, p9). Thus the sabotage campaign which led to the long imprisonment of Mandela, Sisulu and others was conceived as an educational initiative for whites as much as an act of war by blacks.

Alongside his attitude to armed struggle, another issue of controversy is Mandela's support for the ANC's Freedom Charter, which calls for the nationalisation of mines, banks and other 'monopoly industries' in South Africa. This too has played an important part in sustaining his support among black militants over the years. However, in January Richard Maponya, Mandela's old friend and a black millionaire businessman, emerged from a visit to Mandela's prison bungalow and announced that the ANC veteran had changed his position: 'He said he did

not believe in nationalisation because such a policy ran counter to the need to keep the South African economy growing to provide jobs and so that we can generate resources for training our young people.' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 21 January)

Maponya's claims caused a stir among radical ANC supporters, and Mandela almost immediately issued a handwritten statement confirming that he still supported the nationalisation policy. This prompted groans of disappointment from South Africa's businessmen. But there is evidence to suggest that they need not be so downcast. Maponya is sticking to his version of Mandela's views. And even if he is wrong, statements Mandela made before his conviction show that he interprets the nationalisation and anti-monopoly policies as fairly modest initiatives.

The Freedom Charter was written in 1955, and immediately came under fire from the right for advocating revolutionary socialism. Mandela replied that the charter was 'by no means a blueprint for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes'. He described the anti-monopoly policies as a boost for black entrepreneurs:

'The break-up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous, non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country, the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before.' (N Mandela, 'In our lifetime', 1956, reprinted in R First (ed), *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, 1965, p58)

A few years later, in his speech from the dock during the Rivonia sabotage trial, Mandela provided further reassurances that, while nationalisation would dispossess some individual white mineowners, it was not intended to threaten the capitalist economy. Just as the ruling National Party had supported nationalisation as a redistribution measure back when the mines were all owned by British capitalists, so the ANC supported it as a way of breaking the racial monopoly on the ownership of capital:

'Under the Freedom Charter, nationalisation would take place in an economy based on private enterprise. The realisation of the Freedom Charter would open up fresh fields for a prosperous African population of all classes, including the middle class.

'The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic

structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.' (Quoted in F Meer, *Higher than Hope: The Authorised Biography of Nelson Mandela*, 1990, p249)

Mandela's recent declarations of support for the traditional ANC policies of armed struggle and nationalisation were clearly aimed at reassuring the rank and file of the black resistance movement. But a glance back at his motivation for endorsing these policies in the first place suggests that his true priorities lie elsewhere.

Contrary to the impression given by the Mandela mythologists, he is not able to call the shots at will within the black resistance movement. There are radicals of a younger generation, schooled in the struggles of the last 15 years, who mistrust older ANC leaders like Sisulu and Mandela and want to see more militant action. The wider balance of forces in South Africa will decide which path the movement takes.

As Nelson Mandela takes his place in the unfolding political process, he should be judged as a nationalist leader rather than a living legend. Much of Mandela's career suggests that he is essentially a mainstream politician who has been forced to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances of black politics in South Africa. Had he been born in Britain instead, it seems he could have sat quite happily on the benches of the house of commons.

Indeed, while seeking to refute the allegation that he was a communist during the sabotage trial, Mandela hinted that his aim was to recreate within South Africa the relatively civilised capitalist environment of British politics:

'From my own reading of Marxist literature and from conversation with Marxists, I have gained the impression that communists regard the parliamentary system of the West as undemocratic and reactionary. But, on the contrary, I am an admirer of such a system....

'I have great respect for British political institutions, and for the country's system of justice. I regard the British parliament as the most democratic institution in the world, and the independence and impartiality of its judiciary never fail to arouse my admiration.' (*Higher than Hope*, p252)

• Fatima Meer, *Higher than Hope: The Authorised Biography of Nelson Mandela*, Hamish Hamilton, 1990, hbk £15.99



PHOTO: Living Marxism

Asian cabbies attacked from West London to West Yorkshire

Taxi drivers on mean streets



In Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, Robert De Niro blazed away at the 'scum of the streets'. In Britain today, the scum are getting their own back. Asian taxi drivers are the victims of spiralling racist attacks.

● On 31 January, Asian taxi drivers joined the cortège through Southall, west London, for the funeral of Kuldip Singh Sekhon, stabbed to death in his cab. Similar attacks are being reported around the country. Police do little or nothing to stop the attackers. But if the drivers try to defend themselves, the police are quick to move in against them. Asian cabbies are, as one of them says, 'out there on our own'. Andrew Calcutt and Jane Wilde report from London and Yorkshire.

Minicab drivers formed a guard of honour for Sekhon's body (above) before the Southall community marched to mark his funeral (right)

On the evening of Friday 10 November 1989, after finishing work at SDS airport caterers, Heathrow, 35-year old Kuldip Singh Sekhon called in at his Southall home before clocking on for the night shift at nearby Aregal minicabs. Sekhon had a wife, five daughters and a mortgage to support. He needed extra money and so for the past two months he had been moonlighting as a part-time minicab driver. Soon after midnight he answered a call from the Golf Links estate, Southall. At 1.30am Sekhon's body was found about three miles away on the Redwood estate, Cranford, near Hounslow. He had been stabbed 54 times. Unemployed Steven Coker, a white 20-year old, has been charged with his murder and is now in custody awaiting trial.

A gold watch and £80 in cash were found on Sekhon's body. Robbery was not the motive for his murder. It seems certain that the brutal attack on Sekhon was racially motivated.

Southall's Asian drivers agree that verbal abuse is 'part of the job'. That

is the least of their worries. Apart from Sekhon, two more black minicab drivers (a Sikh and an Afro-Caribbean) have been murdered in the west London area during the past 18 months. The body of one of them was left to rot in the boot of his own car. In December, a cabbie was hospitalised for four days after a near-fatal stabbing. Asian drivers are as vulnerable as Catholic cabbies in Northern Ireland. They now face the same kind of physical threat.

Racism in Southall first hit the headlines when Abdul Malik was murdered in 1974. Today racist violence is an everyday occurrence which hardly qualifies as news. In the London borough of Ealing, which includes Southall, 2276 incidents of racial harassment were reported to the police last year. Many more went unreported. The Golf Links estate, where Sekhon picked up a fare shortly before he died, contains a social club and tenants' association which are said to have barred Asians from membership.

SOS code

The ferocity and frequency of recent attacks has led to the formation of the West London Minicabs Association (WLMA), which organised a 24-hour minicab strike on the day of Sekhon's funeral. Scores of drivers walked behind the coffin in the longest cortège seen in west London. 'We want people to know it's got to the stage where our drivers are frightened to work the night shift', says WLMA chairman Gaswinder Singh Sidhu: 'If they're late getting home, their wives are ringing up the control room asking what's happened. We are on our own out there and anything could happen.'

WLMA now circulates a list of no-go names and addresses ('N Holt, skinhead, 32 Constable House'). It provides commonsense information ('don't pick up from a phone box without having a look at the caller first'), and issues driver-to-base secret codewords for 'I'm being robbed' and 'I'm in trouble—this is an SOS'. Basic self-help of this kind is essential, because drivers, especially Asian drivers, cannot get protection from the police.

It is not unusual for Southall police to accuse Asian cabbies of stealing their own cars. If a fare refuses to pay, they say it is 'a civil offence', and advise 'an exchange of addresses'. The WLMA wants to know 'what chance has a driver got of obtaining a correct address? If he's been robbed, he might have lost £80. The last thing he needs is to lose three hours in a police station filling in forms. The best thing is to get back to control and take the next fare out'.

According to WLMA, Southall

police are just not interested in the dangers faced by Asian cabbies. Senior officers say they lack resources. But they have time to harass drivers for parking on single yellow lines or forecourts in front of minicab offices. They found the manpower for Operation Shampoo last year, which was said to be a crackdown on Southall's 'Asian mafia' but turned out to be an attack on all Asian youth in the area. Eleven years ago, police swamped Southall to protect a National Front election meeting. The Special Patrol Group

out the trouble before the police arrive'. The police know that 'sorting out' can mean more than a polite conversation, and they are not happy about it. When a Hounslow driver sped away from an attack on his cab office, he was arrested and jailed for knocking over one of the attackers. Any Asian driver who defends himself or comes to the aid of his colleagues risks being hammered by the full force of the law, regardless of the provocation he faced. It's the same story from west London to West Yorkshire.



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

killed Blair Peach, an anti-fascist demonstrator. Southall's Asian community has not noticed any change in police priorities since then.

Community police visited Sekhon's family, presumably to ensure that the public procession which accompanied Sekhon's funeral would not cause any trouble. Then they put the problems of Asian drivers back at the bottom of their agenda. As a WLMA spokesman commented, 'Politicians make speeches, the police say they investigate, but it's still drivers like Sekhon who have to go out and face the thugs'.

Yet Southall police soon take an active interest if drivers start defending themselves. On the record, WLMA's spokesman would only say that 'sometimes we find drivers have already got to an incident and sorted

On 19 December 1989, Andrew Brown, 26, died in Huddersfield Royal Infirmary while undergoing treatment for stab wounds to the stomach. Brown was fatally wounded at about 5.45pm, when a fight broke out at the premises of the Asian-owned Three Star minicab hire in the centre of Huddersfield. When police were called to the scene they arrested 24-year old cab driver Mohammed Iyas Ahmed. He is now held at Armley jail, Leeds, charged with murder.

Later that evening, a group of white men attacked the Three Star office and the adjoining Asian restaurant. They damaged windows, phones and cars, and assaulted several people. One driver needed eight stitches after they threw a gas fire at him. Police made five arrests.

'One policeman said "What are you doing with a Paki bastard? Can't you get one of your own?'"

All five men are out on bail awaiting trial for violent disorder. After the events of 19 December, Huddersfield police mounted extra patrols in the town centre.

Huddersfield's Asian community believes that the fight at the Three Star office and the subsequent attack were part of the ongoing campaign of racist harassment in the town, and that whoever stabbed Brown was acting in self-defence. Cabbies mounted an immediate 24-hour protest strike against Ahmed's murder charge. Fellow drivers have attended Ahmed's remand hearings. All the Three Star drivers have visited him in Armley. They see Ahmed as the latest victim of a wave of attacks on drivers—a victim who is accused of murder for fighting back. Tahar, a cabbie at Three Star, says the level of attacks is so intense that 'you could see it coming'.

On 11 December, an Asian driver was called to the Rose and Crown pub in the white suburb of Grolcar. According to a fellow driver from Station Taxis, 'the whole pub jumped on him'. The driver managed to radio for help, and a dozen or so Asian cabbies came to his assistance. The driver was severely injured, however, and his colleagues called a 24-hour protest strike.

'You have to accept racial abuse as part of the job', said Tahar. Julie, a

cab controller, says it is common practice for 'big lads full of beer and Yorkshire pudding to have a go at a skinny little Paki. All the drivers get hassle and they never do anything to provoke it'. Linda, a controller at Three Star, agreed: 'It is a regular thing on Friday and Saturday nights. This place has been attacked before. About five years ago it wasn't so bad, but it's been getting worse for a good few months. Now it's worse still. They make sure you can hear them from the car park. "Don't go there, it's where the Asian murdered him..." 'It's a tense atmosphere' said Tom, a controller. 'The drivers don't know what they're picking up.' A Station Taxis driver believes that 'it's getting worse. You can hear them all the time—"Paki bastard". And now a driver has been killed in Leeds'.

Responding to protests from the Asian community, Huddersfield police say they are 'here to protect all sections of the community'. But the cabbies do not believe it.

'If there's trouble, they say they can't do anything' said Tahar. 'If it's a minor incident we don't bother to report it', said a spokesman from Station Taxis: 'If we report something, they say they haven't got enough information.' In December the police community involvement unit set up a 'hotline' for drivers, but according to controller Tom it takes

'10-15 minutes to get through. If it's an English-based taxi firm, they'll stop the trouble. If it's Asian they'll stand there and let it happen. The coppers certainly won't break the speed limit getting there'. Linda was even more sceptical: 'Half of them are racist anyway. My boyfriend is an Asian driver. One night they stopped us twice. One of them said "what are you doing with a Paki bastard? Can't you get one of your own?". There was one who used to come down and ask if everything was all right. But he didn't last long.'

If Asian drivers defend themselves, however, Huddersfield police respond immediately. The cabbies who assisted their colleague at Grolcar were arrested and charged with violent disorder. A spokesman from Station Taxis sees this as par for the course: 'If a driver hits someone the police are round here before he gets back. We get the trouble.' The fact that Ahmed has been charged with murder, not manslaughter, is seen as the clearest example of the tough police attitude towards Asian drivers. In Southall and Huddersfield, the official message seems to be that Asian taxi drivers should accept racist violence like poor tips—as just another part of the job on the mean streets of modern Britain.

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NOTHING NAZI ABOUT IT

As the debate about the government's Embryology Bill hots up,
Sara Hardy answers the scaremongers

Lady Ryder of Warsaw believes that British scientists who experiment on embryos are following in the footsteps of the Nazis. 'It is not only the pro-life movement that sees a sinister re-emergence of the Nazi movement on the quality of human life', she told the house of lords during a recent debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill: 'We must not be taken in by the idea that such horrendous experiments could not occur in this day and age.' The Duke of Norfolk agreed: 'We are now being asked to cross the Rubicon in legalising experiments using human beings which inevitably result in mutilation and destruction of human life at its earliest stage.'

The idea that the spectre of Nazism stalks the embryo experimentation lab is not confined to the dusty minds of the house of lords. Roger Scruton, leading new right ideologue and professor of aesthetics at London's Birkbeck College, has called embryologists 'the children of Mengele' in the *Evening Standard*, and the letters pages of quality newspapers have attracted correspondence in a similar tone from right across the political spectrum.

Nobody seriously believes that scientists engaged in research on embryos and genetic engineering are members of a closet fascist organisation, creating a master race behind closed doors. But many people do fear that experimentation on what they consider to be a tiny human being is the start of a slippery slope, at the bottom of which lies the sort of barbarism practised by Nazi Germany.

'To improve on nature'

Fears of 'embryonic' Nazism seem to be based on a couple of assumptions which crop up time and again. First, that the attempted use of genetic engineering to eliminate handicap and 'improve' the human race is inherently fascist. And second, that experiments carried out on embryos are morally equivalent to the experiments on Jews and others carried out by Nazi doctors like Mengele in the concentration camps. Other opponents of embryo experimentation will concede that they are not yet the same thing, but argue that one thing will lead to the other. Each of these assumptions is fundamentally misguided.

It is certainly true that, as the international science journal *Nature* wrote in 1983, the aim of human embryo research is 'to improve, so to speak, on nature'. But why should this have sinister implications?

The potential benefits of embryo experimentation are undeniable. The possibilities include new contraceptives, medical help for infertile couples and for women prone to miscarriage. The human fertilisation process is notoriously inefficient, and any improvement that science can make on it should surely be welcomed. Research into the genetic material in embryos holds the promise of new breakthroughs on all manner of physical and mental disabilities.

Every year thousands of babies are born with genetic disabilities, some so severely handicapped that they stand little chance of survival beyond a few weeks, and no chance at all of an independent life. Some doctors and scientists believe that, with adequate research facilities, it may be possible to

find ways of screening to detect many genetic defects at an early stage of a fetus' development. This would give a woman an informed choice about her pregnancy, allowing her to opt for an early abortion or to prepare mentally for the ordeal to come. This seems a major improvement on the 'blissful ignorance' which cushions many women through their pregnancy, and is shattered only by the unexpected birth of a severely handicapped baby.

Opponents of embryo research argue that using genetic screening to facilitate aborting handicapped fetuses smacks of the Nazi programmes to 'purify the gene pool' which began in the early thirties. Under the Nazi programme, more than 225 000 people were sterilised in an attempt to stop 'undesirables' procreating and thus help to create a master race. This act of genocide has nothing in common with the aims of genetic screening today.

'It is illogical and insulting to compare scientific experimentation on embryos with the genocidal experimentation on Jews'

Today's investigations into genetic screening are motivated by a desire to alleviate the suffering caused by handicap. The fact is that, given a choice, women would choose to give birth to a non-handicapped baby rather than a handicapped one. Current research into genetics aims to give women this choice. As such it is advantageous to women, and to society as a whole. Nazi eugenics, on the other hand, was a chauvinist excuse for mass murder, based upon twisted notions of the genetic purity of the Aryan race. It had nothing to do with the desire to alleviate the problems of handicap.

To clarify this distinction, take the example of Lesch-Nyhan syndrome, a genetic disorder only affecting boys, which involves spasticity of the limbs, involuntary movements, gross mental retardation and a compulsion towards self-mutilation. Who would not agree that eliminating this disorder is a good idea? But that would not mean proposing euthanasia or compulsory sterilisation for sufferers, to prevent them passing it on. Instead, using genetic technology, scientists are trying to develop ways for carriers of the gene to have children who are neither affected nor carriers. There would seem to be every rational reason for moving in that direction. To compare this attempt to eliminate a disorder with the Nazis' elimination of certain types of people is absurd.

Similarly, it is both illogical and insulting to compare scientific experimentation on embryos with the genocidal experimentation on Jews in the death camps. The Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, communists and others who suffered and died at the hands of Mengele and other Nazi scientists were living, conscious human beings. An embryo is not a human being. It is a potential human life, but it can only fulfil that potential by being born into the world. An embryo cannot be 'killed', since it has no independent life of its own to lose.

Dr Patrick Steptoe, pioneer of in-vitro fertilisation (test-tube babies), put it straight when accused of murdering embryos which he did not return to the womb: 'Those that are not replaced are not condemned to death, just as sperm that is spilt on the floor is not condemned to death.' This is a thoroughly appropriate way to view the issue. Just because an embryo has the potential to become a human being does not mean that we are obliged to afford it the respect which humans are due. To compare the destruction of embryos with the genocide committed by the Nazis is to trivialise the suffering of Hitler's victims.

Finally, does experimenting on embryos put us on an unnegotiable 'slippery slope' towards destruction? A similar argument has been used against almost every scientific advance of the past 200 years. The ethical philosopher FM Cornford lampooned this prejudice, which he called 'The Principle of the Dangerous Precedent', at the turn of this century:

'The Principle of the Dangerous Precedent is that you should not now do an admittedly right thing for fear you, or your equally timid successors, should not have the courage to do right in some future case....Every public action which is not customary either is wrong or, if it is right, is a dangerous precedent.'

'It follows', Cornford concluded, 'that nothing should ever be done for the first time'. Almost a century on, we are having to re-run the arguments in favour of experimentation and against the forces of reaction.

We know that we cannot trust scientists, the medical profession or any wing of the establishment. But current research provides immediate benefits which we would be foolish to dismiss. Of course the potential benefits of science are often corrupted by governments and capitalists for financial or military gain. Yet that is an argument against the authorities and their system, not against science. For example, eugenic programmes involving oral contraceptives were developed with disastrous consequences for women in third world countries. But few women would conclude from this abuse that the contraceptive pill should never have been developed.

It is not inevitable that scientific advance should be put to ill use. Science is used for corrupt purposes in a corrupt society. It can equally be used as a tool of liberation in a liberatory society. The fact that we do not trust those who run society to use scientific discoveries is no reason to reject the breakthrough; it is an argument for taking control away from those whom we mistrust.



JUDGING GAYS

There is no truth whatsoever in any allegation that he has engaged in homosexual conduct, associated with homosexuals or otherwise behaved in a manner unbecoming a judge. Thus did Lord Weir instruct his solicitors to tell the world a few weeks ago. This rather paranoid not-never, not-no-how outburst was prompted by rumours in Edinburgh that a quarter of the judges in Scotland are 'as queer as nine-bob notes'. The Lord President, Lord Hope, reportedly felt obliged to ask one judge, Lord Dervaird, to resign, and to give a stern dressing down to several others. The message is that judges must not be seen cruising Edinburgh's gay scene in the company of young barristers.

Doddering old Lord Denning, former Master of the Rolls, wrote an article for the *Sun* saying that homosexuals should not be judges at all. Predictably, the gay press with the able assistance of Bernard Levin and sundry other right-thinking folk, said that homosexuals make just as good judges as anybody else. Their point was that every part of the British establishment has its complement of homosexuals doing their duty as well as the next man.

This, of course, has been true for a very long time. I am sure that the spiteful rumours that Bertie Mountbatten and his friend, Noel Coward, enjoyed rogering the ratings on HMS *Kelly* did not prevent either man doing a bloody good job. From the security service to the foreign office, from the Bank of England to the police staff training college, homosexuals are as busy ruling Britain as their heterosexual colleagues.

I am also sure Bernard Levin is right: homosexual men make just as good judges as anybody else. Lesbians could do so as well if they were only given the chance. But this is hardly the point. The arcane rules of the British establishment are not open to arguments about justice and equity.

Some homosexual experience almost seems de rigueur for the members of the ancien regime—just as the capacity to spend £2000 to engage the company of a 'himbo' for the weekend is 'just the thing' for arriviste businessmen and Thatcherite newspaper editors. The former editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, Peregrine Worsthorne, can tell the public that while at Stowe school he wore a floppy black hat and a cloak to attract the attention of senior boys. He can tell us that he was seduced 'with incredible despatch' by George Melly on the sofa in the art room. Melly swears it was the other way around. It's all jolly good banter about their school days at Stowe.

However, the treatment of homosexuals in ruling circles has never been even-handed. Some fall and others do not. Some flourish; others are disgraced, broken financially and professionally, and even driven to suicide.

In the fifties Tom Driberg had very little difficulty as an MP and a senior Labour Party manager while being a close friend of the gay spy, Guy Burgess—Tom even visited Guy in Moscow. Driberg's homosexuality was well-known. It even landed him in Bow Street, but he survived to become Baron Bradwell. Actor Sir John Gielgud

was given a rapturous reception by audiences following his arrest and conviction in 1953 for indecency in a public toilet. It was also widely known that Winston Churchill's private secretary, Sir Edward Marsh, was homosexual. Similarly, the attorney general knew that Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe, was homosexual 10 years before he was destroyed by scandal.

Homosexuals can do well in the establishment. If they have good and powerful friends, do not make too many powerful enemies, and are discreet, they can aspire to run the government, the church and the army. You can rise, like Maurice Oldfield, to head MI6 or, more modestly, to the management of the Labour Party's public relations department. With the right connections, and appropriate political prejudices a gay boy can go far; you can

emulate Solomon. They are hired to preside, in tights, wigs and buckled shoes, over the law and to maintain the ritual and mystique of the monarchy and its courts. The ratification of popular prejudices against homosexuality and other forms of sexual 'misconduct' is an important part of any judge's brief.

Hatred of homosexuals is deployed by the authorities because they believe that the foundation of stable households by heterosexual couples is the only desirable sexual arrangement for the mass of ordinary mortals. It has never been the case that the rich and powerful are expected to live like this—but it is useful to keep up appearances. Just as the boss tells the worker, 'I never ask anybody to do anything I'm not prepared to do myself', so the ruling class feels compelled to promote the myth that they too live in the warm embrace of family life.

Accordingly, gay judges and government ministers usually marry, have children, and make sure that the gay bars they attend are of the exclusive sort in Bond Street and Mayfair. They avoid garish proletarian discos and the attention of the police. If they were frequenting the favourite haunts of ordinary homosexuals, gay Scottish judges would be considered guilty of a serious lapse of judgement.

I believe that we should defend anybody who is attacked for being gay, irrespective of their position or politics. The uproar in Edinburgh was initiated by the police. They alerted the Lord President to the hanky panky. By making an example of Dervaird they served notice on the whole of society: homosexuality is unlawful even when no law is broken.

It may offend Bernard Levin's sensibilities, but the people who run this country know that casualties are inevitable and brutality is necessary to uphold the conservatism of the British way of life. They have long been prepared to organise periodic witch-hunts against homosexuals in positions of authority, to demonstrate their determination to keep society on the straight and narrow.

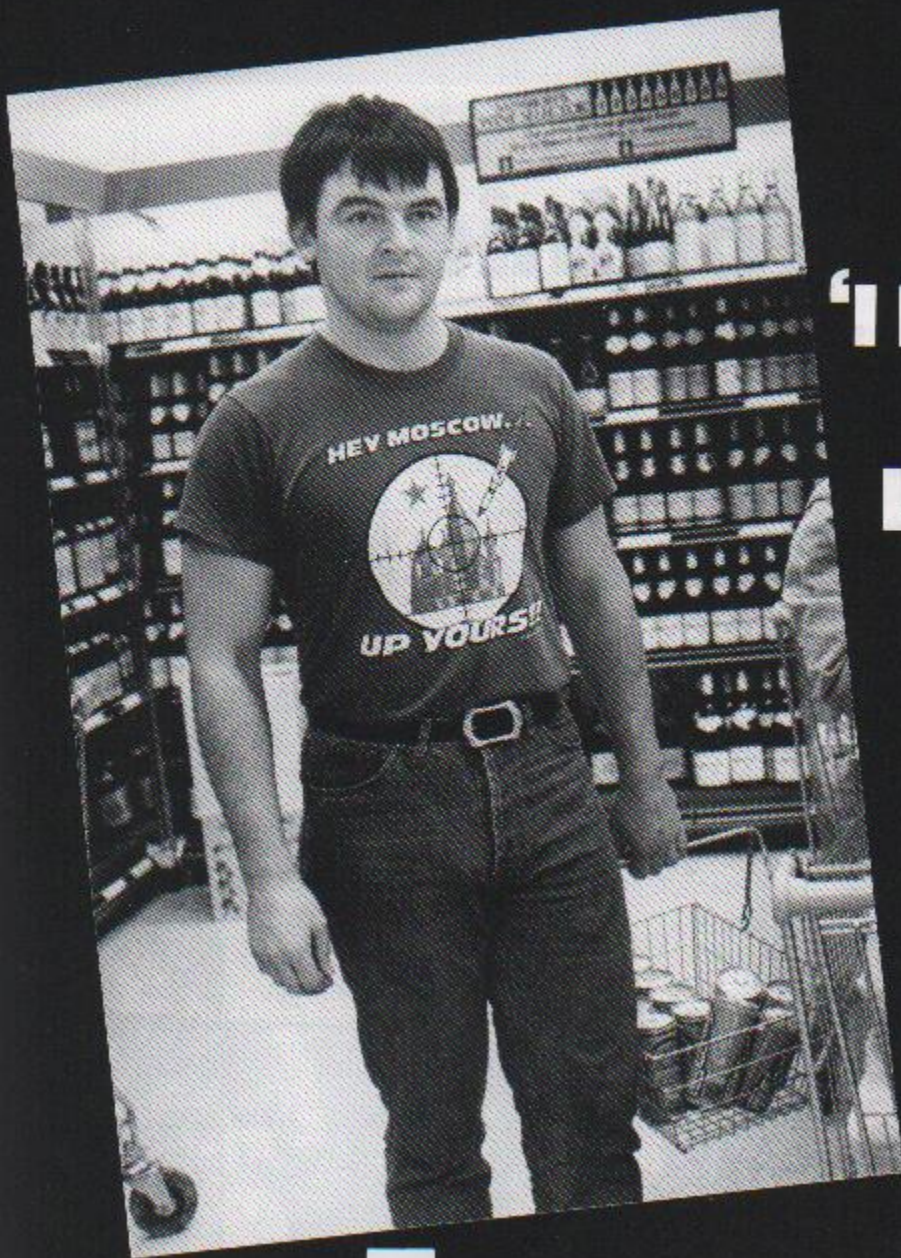
This practice was built into the administration of British justice in the early nineteenth century when, fearing that the 1789 revolution across the Channel had been partly caused by the sexual excesses of French aristos, the British establishment sought to promote a more puritan image for itself. The witch-hunts continue because the ruling class still regards the founding of families and the strengthening of family values as essential for the maintenance of stability and discipline among the lower orders. Dragging a few powerful homosexual men through the gutter is a popular and efficient way of teaching the public this lesson. ●

'I believe that we should defend anybody who is attacked for being gay, irrespective of their position or policies'

even get caught with your trousers down and survive to tell the tale. Alternatively, you can just as easily be thrown to the wolves. It's a dicey business.

If you're a judge, a police chief, a member of the house of lords or a cabinet minister, decorum and the avoidance of rentboys is advisable, though not essential. If you're a banker or industrialist the closet is optional. But whether deeply closeted or not, one false move and down you come.

Bernard Levin's faith in the capacity of homosexuals to be good judges cheered me up. I was glad that somebody of his ilk didn't think that we are all decadent, corrupt and effete. However, his argument is extremely foolish. Judges are not appointed to



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Pay and prices

Inflated opinions

Pay rises don't cause inflation, argues Tony Kennedy

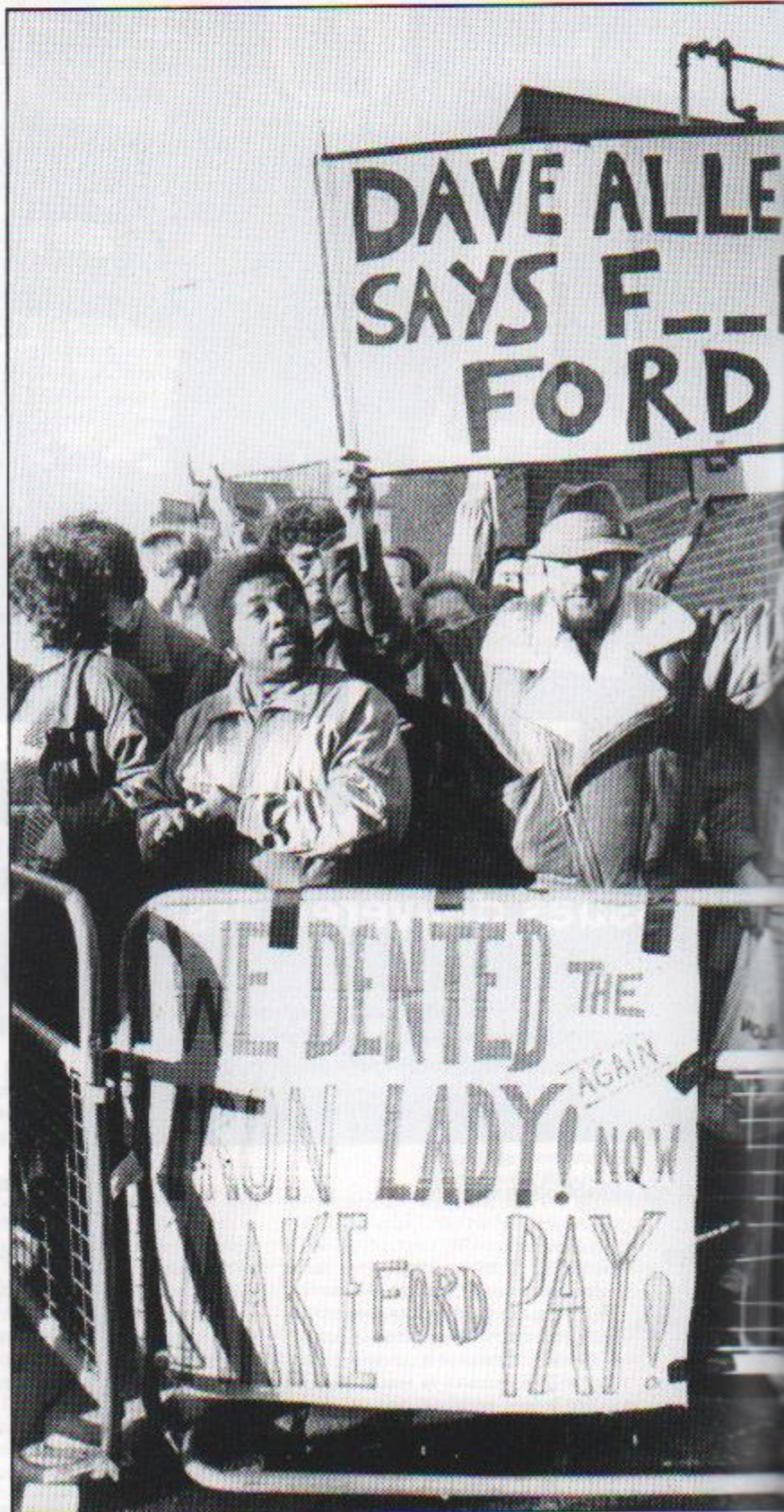
The government is trying to blame greedy workers for the economic crisis enveloping Britain. The message from Tory ministers is that wage rises, not government policies, are responsible for pushing up inflation, sending the economy into recession and undermining Thatcherite free market policies.

The Tories' claim that inflation originates in rising wages is designed to justify cuts in our living standards that will benefit the employers. Of course they don't put it so bluntly. Instead, the Tories and their pet experts try to argue that wage restraint will really serve the best interests of workers.

The government points out that money wages are rising faster than output per worker. The implication is that the cost of the labour in each product is rising, forcing employers to inflate their prices. This makes British business uncompetitive and forces employers to cut costs—by shedding labour. In other words, if you want to keep your job, you have to accept that your pay rise cannot outpace the rate of increase in productivity.

Looked at in isolation from broader trends in the economy, the claim that wage rises cause inflation can seem convincing. Latest figures show earnings growing at an annual rate of around nine per cent. This compares with output per person rising by less than two per cent for the economy as a whole. The cost of the labour in each unit of output in the British economy is therefore rising by seven to eight per cent a year—a trend which will necessarily be reflected in inflated output prices.

Even taking this narrow view, however, does not justify the government's focus on the inflationary effects of wages. The rate of increase in unit labour costs today is just two per cent higher than in 1988 when the Tories were celebrating an economic miracle. Over the same period the cost of imported raw material and semi-finished goods used in production in Britain rose by nearly eight per cent. So British employers have experienced more pressure on production costs from imports than from wages.



RIGHT: An alternative analysis of the relationship between productivity, profits and pay

If the Tories wanted honestly to identify the main pressures forcing employers to raise output prices, they would look at imports. However, this would raise questions about government policy stoking up inflation. The main cause of rising import costs has been the reduced purchasing power of the pound resulting from the Tories' softer line on defending the pound against other currencies. In effect, UK employers have had to pay more for imports because the government has given up its fruitless attempts to sustain a weak pound.

The weight of evidence suggests that the Tories have turned the truth on its head: it is inflation which exerts upward pressure on wages. A comparison of trends in productivity and real wages over the Thatcher years, for instance, shows that workers have more or less practised what the Tories preach; real wage increases have been in line with productivity increases.

Output per hour by workers employed in manufacturing has grown by around 50 per cent since 1979. For the economy as a whole the figure is about 22 per cent. In that time the real earnings of male workers in the whole economy have increased by an average of 28 per cent. For male manual workers in manufacturing, mining, construction, power and transport the figure is just 13 per cent. For the lowest-paid 10 per cent of manual workers earnings have increased by a paltry four per cent in the last decade. And women workers—who now make up nearly half the UK workforce and are concentrated in poorly-paid part-time and temporary work—have fared even worse than the men.

Every penny

Even an unfavourable interpretation of these figures suggests that workers have paid for every penny of higher wages in increased productivity. In other words, the wage paid to workers for each unit of output has fallen in real terms; real wages have grown simply because workers produce more units.

The figures for productivity and earnings confirm that the source of inflation does not lie in wage increases. Much of the increase in money wages over the last decade has been necessary just to keep pace with inflation and prevent a fall in real income. And real wage rises have been quite modest in comparison to productivity increases. Money wages have effectively been forced up by inflationary pressures outside the labour market.

The Tories' lectures about the evils of inflationary pay rises do not extend to enquiring about the productivity of the likes of British Airways chairman Lord King, who

awarded himself a 117 per cent rise last year. The government's hypocrisy is clearer still in its benign attitude to other types of inflation. Nobody has mentioned the boom in 'profit-taking', whereby companies raise their prices by more than the rising costs of production and take the difference. Meanwhile the inflation of share and property prices in recent years has been positively celebrated, since it registered as increased profits in company balance sheets.

Many commentators have pointed to inconsistencies in the government's arguments about wage inflation. They have accused the Tories of trying to cover up their own role in boosting inflation through the impact of high interest rates on mortgage payments and of a lower pound on import prices. They cite the poll tax as another policy set to add to the cost of living, and conclude that wages are simply one inflationary pressure among many. While it is always legitimate to expose the lies of Tory ministers, such criticisms are inadequate.

Profit pressure

Simply listing various instances of price increases does not explain the source of inflation. It reduces the debate to the tautological notion that inflation—rising prices—is caused by price rises. In effect the government's critics repeat its approach, simply offering a broader set of indices of price rises. Within this, they concede that wage rates are a problem and that the health of the economy requires wage restraint.

Inflation can only be understood as a symptom of the general economic tendencies within the capitalist system—a system governed by the law of profitability. Inflationary pressures tend to emerge in the context of a growing crisis of profitability. These pressures do not result from an attempt by greedy workers to grab more wages, but from a bid by employers to boost flagging profits.

Credit short-cuts

Over the past decade, the British capitalist class has had to face up to the stagnation of its industrial base. But it has not been in a position to, engage in the large-scale restructuring of industry needed to transform productivity levels and revive profitability. Individual capitalists have less confidence in future industrial prosperity and are inclined to seek alternative means of maintaining profits. The short cuts which they have taken to make a profit, mainly based on the use of credit, have created the major inflationary pressures.

Easy credit conditions have enabled capitalists to sustain profit-taking practices. They have been able

to push up the prices of, for example, retail goods and property, only because the massive extension of consumer credit and mortgage loans provided the 'new money' necessary to match the inflationary increases. Credit also provided the conditions for a boom in the financial markets. Capitalists who won't invest in new industrial capacity have been able to sustain profits through inflationary gains from buying and selling shares in existing assets.

Dodging the issue

None of these profit-taking activities, however, confronts the fundamental weaknesses of the profit-making system. In fact, they reflect a lack of resolve for tackling the real economic problems. While individual capitalists can become very wealthy, the productive foundations of the system continue to stagnate.

Inflationary credit expansion cannot work forever. For example, inflated share prices bear less and less relation to the real wealth-generating capacities of the productive assets which they represent. This has promoted greater volatility in the stock markets in recent months, with huge losses becoming as common as the rich pickings. Industrial and retail capitalists also find that, while revenues rise in the inflationary climate, so do costs. Firms can charge inflated prices, but they are also being charged inflated prices. The net gain is nil or, as happens in reality, some capitalists benefit more, others less or not at all.

The British disease

As the weakest of the major global economies, British industry is especially vulnerable to the swings and roundabouts of international credit expansion. British capitalists rely on credit more than their rivals. Particularly over the past decade, British capitalists have made their money not from industrial production, but from credit-fuelled speculation in the share and financial markets, and by borrowing billions to buy up property and companies abroad.

At the same time as it is more dependent upon credit, however, Britain is less able to deal with the domestic inflation generated during the credit binge. Throughout the eighties UK inflation has been higher than in other major capitalist countries. Higher prices have led to a loss of international competitiveness with imports replacing British products and exports remaining relatively stagnant. The resulting multi-billion pound trade deficits and the threat of a run on the pound in the foreign exchange markets testifies to the failure of the credit card trick that the Tories have tried to pass off as economic rejuvenation.



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

The fact that unit labour costs in Britain are rising faster than elsewhere does not indicate the rise of inflationary wage demands. It reflects the unwillingness of British capitalists to engage in the levels of industrial investment necessary to raise productivity at rates comparable to those elsewhere. Having relied on inflationary props rather than investment to keep the profit and loss accounts looking good, the employers and the government can hardly be surprised that workers have reacted to increases in the cost of living by demanding money wage rises sufficient to sustain existing living standards.

The Tory sermons about how wages should rise in line with productivity—which is growing at less than two per cent a year—amount to saying that workers should accept reduced living standards while producing more for their employers. With inflation edging towards eight per cent, a wage rise of anything less means working harder for less. Indeed, wage increases in double figures are about the rate needed to ensure that workers get some return for their increased productivity.

Inflation in Britain has been caused by capitalists attempting to take paper profits which their

economy cannot back up with material wealth. The rising statistics should be seen as proof that capitalism cannot ensure the consistent growth of production. Those who blame wage rises for inflation and recession are saying that the future production of more wealth depends on the producers, the workers, consuming less of it. That is irrational. A more rational anti-inflationary strategy would be to remove the profit motive from the economic equation, and establish a system in which the material demands of the whole of society become the motive for wealth creation.

Lifestyles of the rich and infamous

A rise, Sir Ralph?

Liz Bradshaw on British bosses' pay

Lord Hanson is Britain's most highly paid boss. Last year he awarded himself a 24 per cent rise, taking his salary to £1 534 000 a year. At the recent Hanson Trust annual meeting in London one shareholder asked why, as an ardent supporter of Mrs Thatcher, m'lud had disregarded her admonitions about pay increases. Another director rose, explaining that Hanson's 'modesty' prevented him from answering himself, and announced that 'Lord Hanson would find it possible to exceed his annual earnings by a substantial amount elsewhere'. So, far from being overpaid, Hanson was really taking a salary cut out of loyalty to Queen and company.

Who wants them?

The argument that British bosses could earn a lot more if they defected to a foreign competitor is often used to defend their big salary increases. Lord King, chairman of British Airways, resorts to this defence when anybody raises the awkward issue of his 117 per cent rise which, when added to his other salary as chairman of FKI Babcock, gives him a 'basic' of £782 000 a year. But why should Hanson, King and Britain's other directors be coveted by big-paying foreign corporations? German and Japanese firms are sweeping all before them on the world markets; they seem unlikely to be desperate to discover the secret of Britain's £20 billion trade deficit. The fashionable management technique of recent years has been 'Japanisation', not 'The Spirit that built the British Empire'.

In any case, according to the lectures which the Tories give the rest of us, loyalty is no excuse for pay increases. A rise, we are told, can

only be justified with reference to the company's performance. In which case, salary increases like King's 117 per cent are a little off the mark; the average British manufacturing firm increased productivity by about four per cent last year, and the average service sector company by less than one per cent. Other top British bosses boost their salaries even when their companies do badly.

At first glance it appears that Burton's chairman Sir Ralph Halpern took the retail group's poor performance on the chin. Halpern had his pay cut—by £97 000, leaving him with just £899 000 a year to scrape by on. Reading the fine print, however, it seems that Ralph hasn't been that heroic. His salary was supposed to be determined by a formula based on Burton's profits, which would have reduced his pay by considerably more than £97 000. So Sir Ralph simply ditched the formula.

Some directors don't bother with Halpern's figure-juggling. They just give themselves rises that fly in the face of disaster. Take TVS, the independent television company, and its chief executive, James Gatward. Profits may be down by nearly 50 per cent, but Gatward received a 112 per cent salary hike to £250 000. The losses were mainly due to TVS' misguided purchase of MTM, the US television company, which lost millions last year. Why, then, did Gatward get such a big rise? Because, said Gatward, the board 'were aware that the MTM acquisition had brought increased pressure'. Poor thing.

The fact that some of the biggest salary rises were in the finance and other service sectors, which have now been hit first as the recession

approaches, confirms that there is no connection between the health of a firm and that of the boss' bank balance. Indeed, management seems to float away into the sunset even if the company goes under. James Gulliver, Scotland's best-known tycoon, stands to survive another day despite the collapse of Lowndes Queensway, the furniture company he bought with £450m worth of bad IOUs. But if the last-minute refinancing deal with the banks falls through, 5000 people will lose their jobs. 'Wee Jimmy' (who coined the phrase 'money is the object'), will be able to retire, as the *Times* puts it, 'in some comfort', with a handsome pay-off for going quietly.

Last November Cray Electronics admitted that it had been cooking the books with cowboy accountants. Price Waterhouse accountants went over the figures and swiftly slashed the company's profits by two-thirds. The directors are going to pay for this one, right? Wrong—they will get paid. The Cray board gets rid of the top managers, but the chief executive stays on an annual salary of £225 000 until mid-1991, and the finance director gets a pay-off of £125 000 plus an extra £40 000 to boost his pension.

On top of all this, Lawson cut the top tax rate from 60 to 40 per cent (giving Halpern an extra £5000 a week), and new share ownership schemes during a period of soaring market prices have allowed top directors to make fortunes (Hanson £3.5m). Meanwhile Lawson himself, architect of this orgy, has taken a £175 000 part-time job at Barclays. They have truly never had it so good.

With the world changing at a dizzying pace, it has never been more important to get to grips with trends and events. The place to do it is at ***Preparing for Power 1990***, our annual seven-day summer school.

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As East Germans
prepare to go to the
polls, Frank Richards
finds Eastern Europe
still awaiting its
revolution. The old
Communist parties
may have cracked,
but the Stalinist
states remain
standing

Who rules behind the wall?





The drama unfolding in Eastern Europe has been widely acclaimed as the dawn of a new era in world affairs. These changes are usually interpreted as a victory for freedom and democracy, and as a clear vindication of the Western way of life. Sometimes the enthusiasm of the media gives way to more sober insights about the danger posed by the emergence of irrational nationalist forces. And applause for change in East Germany is tempered by fear of reunification and the birth of a powerful Fourth Reich. But the general tone in which East European events are reported over here is one of euphoria.

Superficial interpretations of developments in Eastern Europe are quickly overtaken by events. On closer inspection the changes that have taken place are far from self-evident. What are we to make, for example, of a pro-Western government in Poland with a prime minister who is a Catholic intellectual and a president who is a Stalinist army general? Who rules Romania after its bloody Christmas? Is there a common pattern to the changes from country to country, or are there divergent forces at play in Eastern Europe? Most importantly of all, how far-reaching have the changes been so far?

East European societies have long been waiting for upheaval to happen. It is difficult for people in the West to appreciate just how unpopular these Stalinist regimes were. Lacking any base of support at home, they depended for their existence upon the firepower of the Soviet military. For decades it was an open secret that if the Soviet Union withdrew from the scene the governments of Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia would crumble overnight.

Although Western observers often commented upon the unpopularity of the East European regimes, most were taken aback by the speed with which these regimes collapsed. In particular, many left-wing writers continually credited the Stalinist regimes with some positive features, and underestimated the bitter popular hostility in East European societies. For example the editor of *Labour Focus on Europe*, Gunter Minnerup, wrote late last year that the East German Communist Party, the SED, is 'not only a mass party, but one with considerable political roots in the East German masses' (No 3, 1989). To some extent the right-wing media repeated this myth; right up to the fall of the old hardline ruler Erich Honecker in October 1989, Western observers tended to argue that, unlike in Poland or Hungary, the ruling bureaucracy in East Germany would survive the challenge from below.

Today, after the demise of

Honecker's replacement, Egon Krenz, and the disintegration of the SED, it is fairly clear that the East German bureaucracy was no less isolated than its colleagues in Poland or Bulgaria. It is also evident that East European peoples despise all of the old Stalinist governments, yearn for change and need only the slightest encouragement to challenge the status quo. The reason why change had to wait until last year was the widespread fear that the Soviet military would stamp on any experiment. Once the Soviet leadership signalled its new hands-off policy towards Eastern Europe the local regimes could no longer carry on in the old way.

Since the beginning of last year, experts have tended to fall behind events. Initially they were sceptical about Gorbachev's undertaking to allow East Europe to go its own way. When General Jaruzelski promised free elections in Poland last year, most observers believed he was lying as a manoeuvre to buy time. All the promises of reform in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany were at first interpreted as cynical delaying tactics. Experts and observers have consistently lagged behind events because they expected these regimes to fight for their survival. Instead, contrary to expectations, after a little prodding the East European bureaucracies conceded one reform after another, even allowing their political opponents to assume important governmental office.

Self-disbelief

If this chain of events was unleashed by the new policy orientation of the Kremlin, it was facilitated by the willingness of these ruling East European bureaucracies to make all the necessary concessions. Although at the start this was not widely understood, *the East European bureaucracy had simply stopped believing in itself.*

Gorbachev's hands-off policy underlined the isolation of the East European puppet states. In these new circumstances the regimes were confronted with the challenge of continuing on their own. Most thinking Stalinists in Eastern Europe quickly concluded that this was a non-starter. Indeed in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia at least, most Communist Party members understood that their policies were directly responsible for the crisis facing their countries. The majority of bureaucrats had accepted that there could be no return to the old ways of their regimes. The debate was not about whether there should be reforms or whether the market should be introduced—these points were more or less accepted. The discussion within the bureaucracy



concerned how to bring these changes about with a minimum of disruption and instability.

The sight of hundreds of thousands demonstrating on the streets of Leipzig, Prague, Timisoara or Budapest lends weight to the view that popular protest has been primarily responsible for the present phase of political transformation in East Europe. The role of protest and street demonstrations should not be underestimated. The forcing of the pace of events in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania, were all contingent upon the intervention of the masses on the streets. However, without detracting from the contribution of popular protest, it would be wrong to suggest that it provoked the present cycle of change in East Europe.

To anticipate one of our central arguments: it appears that the initial impetus behind the change in East Europe came from within the old regime itself. The realisation that it could no longer continue in the old way forced the Stalinist bureaucracy to adopt a survival strategy based on political and economic reforms. This process began in Poland and Hungary. The reforms implemented from above in those countries then stimulated mass protest first in East Germany, then Czechoslovakia and finally in Romania.

Despite militant popular resistance, the survival strategy of the old regimes has proved relatively successful so far. In all but name, the institutions of Stalinist bureaucracy remain intact. We need to retain a measure of objectivity, otherwise the heroic actions of the Romanian

masses can blind us to the fact that the country is still run by individuals with strong links to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The main initiators of political reform in Eastern Europe were the Stalinist rulers of Poland and Hungary. When these bureaucrats began to address the question of political reform back in 1988, their rule was not threatened by opposition movements. Solidarity had been a threat to the Polish bureaucracy almost a decade earlier. But by 1988 this mass movement had turned into an organised pressure group which was not inclined to raise the stakes. Nor was there any direct challenge to the regime in Hungary. Since Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the Stalinist regime had never faced any major demonstrations of popular



PHOTO: Living Marxism

Silesia, Poland: the wreckage left by Stalinism meets the chaos caused by Solidarity's market economics

resistance. Of course, both of these regimes were deeply unpopular and widely resented. They lacked legitimacy and any significant support. But when they embarked on the path of political reform, it was not a desperate response to pressure from below.

The main impetus behind political reform came from within the ranks of the bureaucracy itself. The rulers of both Hungary and Poland recognised that, with the changes taking place in the Soviet Union, they could not carry on for long in the old way. Economic life had reached a dead end. The Stalinists recognised that if they were to survive, they needed to transform their own system before pressure for change from below built up and exploded. The programme of political reforms was thus part of a strategy designed to pre-empt

popular protest through winning a measure of support for the bureaucracy.

In Poland a carefully devised framework of gradual transition was put in operation in late 1988. In February the so-called round-table discussions involving the representatives of the Jaruzelski regime, Solidarity and the church were initiated. These tripartite discussions provided a controlled environment within which change could take place. By April there was agreement on the legalisation of Solidarity and on elections.

Poles apart

Jaruzelski and his colleagues probably underestimated the speed with which one concession gave way to demands for more. They were certainly shocked by the scale of the defeat of the Polish Communist Party in the June 1989 elections. The fast pace of change showed that, despite its reforming initiatives, the Polish bureaucracy had failed to win any credibility with the population. One part of its survival strategy—the attempt to renovate the image of the party—had flopped.

Nevertheless, despite the setback of the electoral defeat in June 1989, the Stalinist leadership pressed on. The bureaucrats could live with the demise of the party, so long as they remained in a position to manage the gradual transition of the political system. They were aided by the fact that Solidarity and the Catholic Church shared their objective of maintaining stability.

In July, with the aid of the Solidarity leadership, Jaruzelski was elected president. A week later Solidarity was invited to join a coalition government. After intense negotiations, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a top Solidarity personality, became the first non-Stalinist premier in Poland for 40 years. The new 24-member coalition government confirmed on 12 September contained only four Stalinists. Thus we have what appears at first sight to be a paradox: a pro-Western government headed by a Catholic intellectual presiding over the future of a state machine which retains its Stalinist character.

From the top

In Hungary, even more than in Poland, it is obvious that the regime itself was the initiator of change. The Hungarian Stalinists did not even have a Solidarity with which to negotiate. The so-called opposition consisted of isolated groups of intellectuals without a constituency. It can be argued that the main opposition movements, the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Association of Free Democrats, were at least indirectly created by the

bureaucracy itself, since it was only through the round-table talks with the regime that the Hungarian oppositionists gained national prominence. The Hungarian bureaucracy led by Imre Pozsgay carefully cultivated the main opposition personalities in an attempt to create a broad consensus supporting Pozsgay's initiatives. Pozsgay then undertook a rehaul of the Hungarian Communist Party. In October 1989, its name was changed to the Hungarian Socialist Party and the regime took every opportunity to advertise its conversion to respectable social democracy.

As in Poland, the attempt to give the Hungarian party a facelift has not been too successful. The Communist Party lost a crucial referendum in November 1989 on the timing of the election for president and it has been defeated in every by-election so far. Nevertheless the regime is pressing ahead with its reforms and the first open general elections are scheduled for March 1990. It is not yet possible to give a verdict on the outcome of the bureaucracy's survival strategy. It is clear that individuals associated with the old regimes have not been able to use the reforms to boost their reputation. However, despite the many setbacks, the Stalinist state machine survives intact and political conflict has been contained through the mechanism of an institutionalised dialogue—the round-table discussions—with the opposition.

The pre-emptive actions of the Polish and Hungarian bureaucracies provide the background to the spectacular events and the intervention of the masses in Eastern Europe from August 1989 onwards. Until August the scenario was one of gradual step-by-step change. Then the transformation suddenly begins to accelerate.

East Germany, supposedly the sturdiest of the East European states, was the first to feel the change. It is worth recalling that until October 1989, street protest in East Germany was sporadic and involved small numbers of people. However, the cumulative effect of changes in the Soviet Union and reforms in Hungary and Poland had a major impact on East Germany. After Gorbachev's visit to Berlin on 7 October, the mass demonstrations began.

'Nuff SED

The East German regime's response to mass protest did not follow the expected course of repression. In Leipzig and Dresden the local authorities offered dialogue. Soon, the old leadership of the SED resigned, travel restrictions were lifted and elections were promised. What took over a year's hard work in Poland and Hungary was achieved in

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six or eight weeks in Germany. In contrast to Hungary and Poland, political reform in East Germany was clearly a response to mass pressure. But the speed with which the Stalinist leadership ditched its old leaders and offered one concession after another indicated that it too had decided to secure its survival by changing with the times.

From East Germany the focus moved on to Czechoslovakia's 'velvet revolution'. After the repression of students demonstrating in Prague on 17 November, the Czech bureaucracy had no more stomach for fighting. It followed the East German example and initiated a dialogue with the Civic Forum opposition. Without much ceremony the old leadership was purged, and new faces appeared from nowhere. The parliament voted to strip the Communist Party of its 'leading role' and on 10 December 1989, elected a pro-Western non-Communist government. Soon afterwards the prominent dissident, Vaclav Havel, was elected president. In a few weeks the face of political life in Czechoslovakia had been transformed.

And finally we come to Romania. Here there was a genuine popular uprising. In contrast to the experience elsewhere—from Hungary to Bulgaria—the leadership of the regime was not disposed to make concessions. Instead of opting for reforms, the Ceausescu clan decided to fight.

What Ceausescu and his relatives failed to understand was that the rest of the Romanian bureaucracy was attuned to developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe; at the first sign of resistance, most state officials would desert the old dictator. With the exception of the Securitate, the institutions of the state lined up against Ceausescu. While the fighting was still going on, individuals with strong links to the Stalinist regime constituted themselves as the Front for National Salvation, and assumed power.

Romanian purge

In a sense Romania provides the clearest illustration of our argument that political change and reform, even if accompanied by violent upheaval, do not necessarily mean the end of the Stalinist state.

In Romania, as elsewhere, there has been the usual change of personnel and even the disintegration of the old governing party. And yet Romania is run by a coalition of army officers and former Stalinist bureaucrats now preaching the virtues of democracy and freedom. So much has changed; and yet it seems that the main result of the popular revolt has been an old-fashioned purge of the political elite.

Even if the interpretation of events



PHOTO: Don Reed/Select

outlined here proves too pessimistic, it is worth asking a few questions about the meaning of the term reform in the East European context.

Two ways out

Reformers associated with East European Stalinist parties now recognise that the old system is doomed. It will either be overthrown through violent revolution or it will be reformed out of existence. To secure their survival through the difficult times ahead, most Stalinists prefer the option of reform.

The main objective of reform is to create the institutional framework for the restoration of the market and the introduction of capitalist social relations. Many bureaucrats positively welcome the market because they believe that their privileged access to resources will give them a head start in a capitalist-oriented economy. In Poland and Hungary many senior bureaucrats are already 'privatising' themselves and becoming entrepreneurs in anticipation of the changes. These individual Stalinists believe that through reforms they can transform themselves into a class that will benefit from the market. Other bureaucrats are not so sanguine about future prospects but

instinctively feel the need to push through reform before the old system explodes in their faces. The current fashion for changing the name of Stalinist parties well expresses this mood. It expresses the hope that a change in name will make invisible those who rightly fear the yearning for vengeance that is never far below the surface of working class life in Eastern Europe.

Going steady

The bureaucrats' narrow definition of reform is in many respects shared by the leaders of the opposition movements. They do disagree on one point. The intelligentsia and the petit bourgeoisie, which constitute the most prominent opposition forces, are bitterly opposed to the monopoly of influence that the Stalinist parties used to enjoy, and in some cases still do. Thus the opposition leaders want the most far-reaching measures directed against the Communist parties and are committed to separating these parties from the institutions of the state. In other respects, however, opposition groups like New Forum share the bureaucracy's interpretation of the meaning of reform. In particular they welcome the market and expect to be the main beneficiaries of such an economic system.



After the heroism of Romania's Christmas, the people don't have power in Bucharest

On one issue the bureaucrats and the new leaders of the opposition movement stand shoulder to shoulder. From the old Stalinist General Jaruzelski to the sensitive liberal playwright Vaclav Havel, there is a strongly held conviction that change should not be at the expense of stability. This of course means that change is always subject to the higher cause of stability—endowing reform with a very conservative orientation.

This concern with stability also means that the Stalinist bureaucrats and the new opposition leaders have a common distaste for popular mobilisation and the activities of the working class. Highly ritualised demonstrations are tolerated but outbursts of anger leading to direct action are frowned upon. Thus the New Forum strongly supported the prime minister, Hans Modrow, in condemning demonstrators who broke into the headquarters of the Stasi (secret police) in Berlin in January. There seems to be an unstated agreement that political differences should not be conducted on the streets in case this should encourage popular action to go beyond the existing political framework.

The televised drama in Eastern Europe has strengthened the

impression, especially on the left, that something like a political revolution is taking place there. Without a doubt there is considerable potential for Eastern Europe to be entirely transformed. But despite all of the impressive mobilisations in Leipzig, Prague and Bucharest, the changes so far have been relatively superficial. Individual politicians have come and gone and parties have changed their names, but *the old Stalinist state structures have remained intact.*

There seems to be a lot of confusion about the relationship of the old Communist parties to the Stalinist system. It has often been suggested that where a Communist party loses its monopoly on political power and the constitution no longer upholds its 'leading role', then the Stalinist regime stands defeated. In fact, the importance of the role played by the East European Communist parties in propping up the Stalinist order has always been exaggerated by Western observers.

Affair of state

The Stalinist bureaucracy did not rely primarily on the party to enforce its rule, but on the machinery of the state. The parties acted as adjuncts of the state. The leading Stalinist bureaucrats can live without their party so long as they retain access to the machinery of the state. That is why the demise of the old Communist parties does not automatically mean the end of the Stalinist bureaucracies.

The Communist parties only provided the political façade for Stalinist regimes. The administrative and repressive arms of the state—the armed forces, secret police and civil service—provide the power. Thus examining what damage has been done to the old state, rather than the party, is the key to deciding how far real change has gone in Eastern Europe. Such an examination quickly makes clear the limits to the transformation process so far. The Stalinist states are largely intact, and even at the level of personnel there are some striking examples of continuity. Miklos Nemeth was until recently a leading member of the ruling Hungarian Communist Party. After the party abolished itself, he joined the new Socialist Party and became prime minister of a caretaker government. Now he says he will stand for election as an independent. Through all these superficial alterations and label swaps, Nemeth and the state which he fronts have remained essentially unchanged.

The absence of qualitative change in East Europe is to a considerable extent explained by the faint-hearted attitude of the opposition movement. While the bureaucracy cannot handle popular protest it can manage and live with opposition movements like

New Forum in East Germany or Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia. These movements, which represent the intelligentsia and the urban petit bourgeoisie, are always ready to cooperate with the state authorities in exchange for the promotion of their own interests. The nature of these groups makes them reluctant to force matters to a head. Their political programme is that of the lowest common denominator. There is no call for liberation or social transformation. In some cases, such as the Front for National Salvation in Romania, it is not even clear if they stand for anything distinct at all.

Despite a mutual dislike for each other, the bureaucracy and the liberal opposition are ready to collaborate. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, the old opposition now runs the government and has assumed responsibility for managing the existing social order. In undertaking this role the intelligentsia of Eastern Europe announces that it is more interested in winning a privileged relationship to the state than in changing society.

A matter of time

It is unlikely that the relationship of collaboration established between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the liberal intelligentsia can endure for too much longer. All those who are party to this arrangement face isolation and the loss of popular support. Half-hearted gestures are unlikely to deceive the masses for long. Thus movements like New Forum, Civic Forum and the Association of Free Democrats in Hungary are transitional ones. Once the limits of change within the existing framework become evident, these groups will lose their relevance. It is only a matter of time before the next cycle of protest breaks out.

As Eastern Europe edges towards the market, so the carefully worked out plans for reform are threatened by popular resistance and revolt. The new non-Communist regimes allow for the relaxation of repression and a few more civil rights. But the economic reforms necessary to introduce the market also threaten further to drive down the living standards of impoverished workers. Already sections of the Polish working class are beginning to rebel against the Solidarity government. Other East European countries are heading towards an explosion.

With the assistance of the liberal intelligentsia, the old bureaucracy has managed to survive in East Europe. But only just. We would not like to bet on the Stalinists surviving past the next cycle of social upheaval.

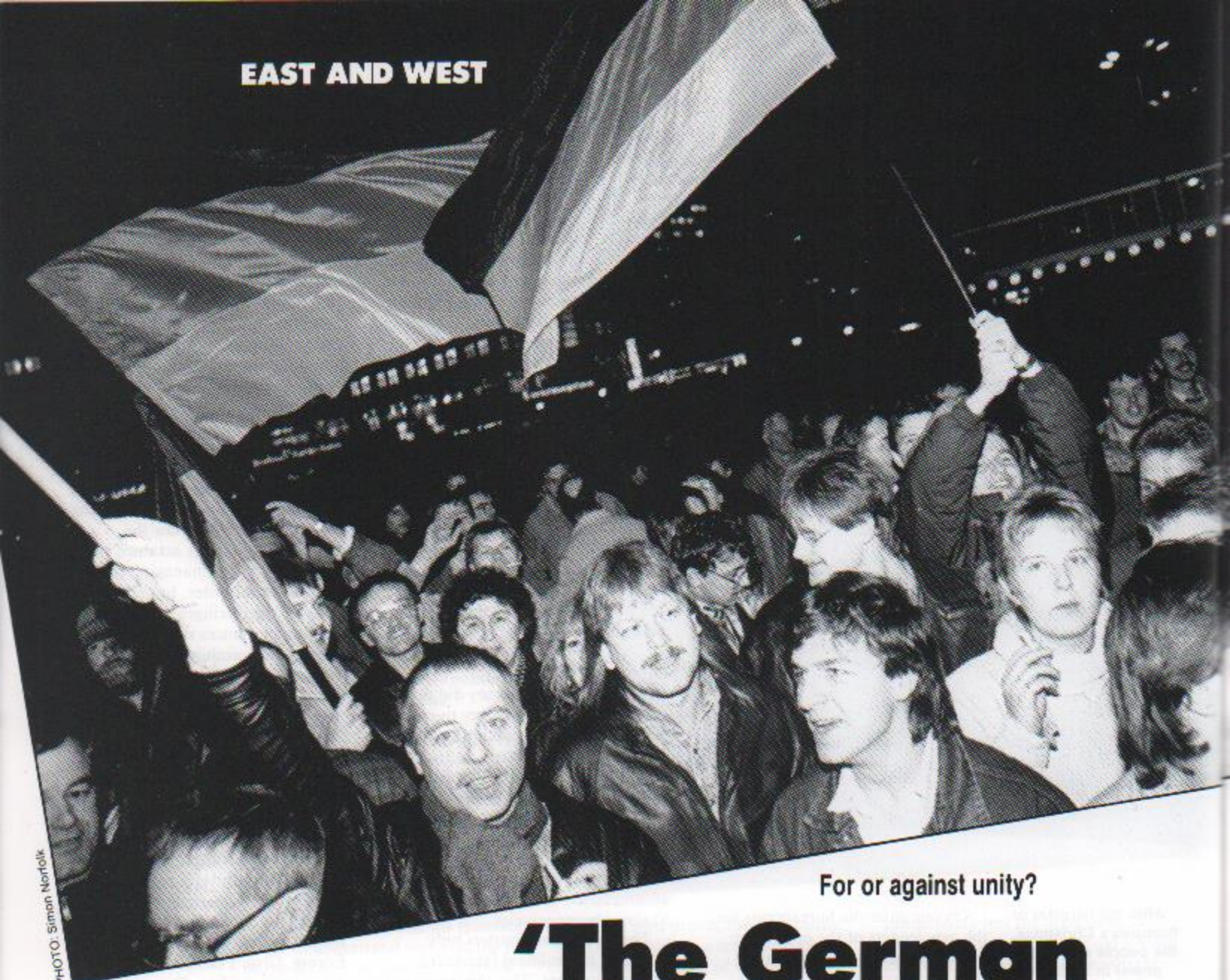


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

For or against unity?

'The German question': an answer

Sharon Clarke asks: who's afraid of reunification?

It seems as if you cannot pick up a newspaper or magazine these days without finding a lengthy discussion of the implications of German unity. The implicit assumption behind most of the coverage is that a united Germany would constitute a problem for the rest of the world. A sense of fear about 'the German question' appears to influence left and right alike.

Until very recently it was possible to pretend that German reunification was a question for the future. Western diplomats and politicians self-consciously emphasised that not even the Germans were demanding unity in the here and now. Left-wing observers agreed, writing of the East German people's residual faith in socialism and distaste for the commercialism of the West. Even after these same East Germans had danced on top of the broken Berlin

Wall and begun a mass migration through the gaps, Western observers deluded themselves with dubious opinion polls which apparently showed that the majority of the East Germans did not want anything to do with the so-called 'Mercedes Benz culture' of the West.

Of the moment

The truth is that reunification is a burning issue right now. Recent events confirm that East Germany is an artificial creation which cannot continue to exist for long. It is ungovernable in its present form because it lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the population. This absence of any popular support for the East German regime forced prime minister Hans Modrow to bring forward the elections to 18 March. German reunification will be the major issue behind that election.

It is a sign of the times that every party has now felt obliged to endorse the principle of German reunification. Even the Stalinists of the old Communist Party, who staked their existence on partition, now accept reunification as inevitable. And the New Forum group, which initially favoured the continuation of two sovereign German states, changed its position in January for fear that it would be swept away by the pro-reunification tide.

Many observers have sought to compare the widespread support for reunification in Germany with the rise of malevolent end-of-Weimar nationalism. The old Communist Party has encouraged this interpretation, constantly warning about the impending rise of fascism.

This scaremongering is a ploy by Stalinist politicians who, lacking any



Marching for unity in Berlin: an unstoppable tide

shred of credibility, have sought to win legitimacy through encouraging a panic about the Nazi threat. Events have certainly encouraged the German right and boosted the appeal of the old-fashioned reactionaries, but there is no evidence of a Nazi revival in East Germany.

It is even questionable whether there has been a genuine explosion of nationalism in the East. Of course there is a greater degree of national assertiveness. But the widespread support for reunification in East Germany has little to do with a new-found emotional attachment to the Fatherland. Rather, most East Germans want unity for hard-headed material reasons: it appears to them to be the fastest way of sharing in the apparent prosperity of the West.

Far from being repelled by the 'Mercedes Benz culture', most people who are used to a life of shortages and deprivation in the broken-down 'Trabant culture' of East Germany naturally yearn for the consumer-oriented society of the West. People who have had little choice about what they consume are in no position to be critical of the gross and corrupt aspects of West German society.

The crisis of legitimacy in East Germany means that it is only a matter of time before reunification becomes a practical reality. The political conflict and the outcome of the East German elections can only influence the *timing*, but not the inevitable movement towards reunification.

Of course unity will not happen overnight. It is not possible to bring together two systems with different problems by decree. Many West German politicians are concerned that their state will be called upon to subsidise their poorer Eastern brethren. Others are concerned that East Germans should not move Westwards and create problems for the Bonn government.

The world turns

The domestic obstacles to reunification are relatively trivial compared to the international ones. After all, the entire post-war world order is inextricably linked with the division of Germany. The global equilibrium of power has assumed a divided Germany, a divided Europe and the bipolar system of military alliances built around Nato and the Warsaw Pact. West European integration through the European Community has assumed that this division will be perpetuated.

A united Germany would, at the very least, upset the existing balance. It would clearly dominate the EC and ensure that the deutschmark dominated the European market. It would raise new questions about security in Moscow. It would also mean the end of Nato and a direct

challenge to American leadership of the Western world. This explains why diplomats and political leaders in the old powers, from Washington through London to Moscow, are so distinctly unenthusiastic about German unity.

The certainties of the post-war order are now threatened by a new global system which is still under construction. At the very least, the major players in the world system are going to do their best to make sure that German reunification happens later rather than sooner.

Living Marxism wholeheartedly supports the end of the division of Germany. This attitude has nothing to do with a positive assessment of German nationhood or nationalism. Nor should it imply that unity is, especially in the short run, likely to benefit the working class; indeed West German capitalists are reaping the immediate benefits of the move towards reunification.

The main reason why we support reunification is because we recognise that the partition of Germany has tended artificially to freeze history. After the Second World War, the stability of both the capitalist and Stalinist worlds was founded upon the partition of Germany. Previously, the inability to integrate Germany into the world order had been a major source of instability and conflict. Now the German question was finally contained by dividing the nation into two states.

Divided class

Partition did more than eliminate Germany as a threat to the world order. It also divided the European working class and prepared the way for the long Cold War. The Cold War proved to be a major asset for Western imperialism. Under the pretext of waging an international crusade against the totalitarian forces of Stalinism, Western powers were able to neutralise dissent at home. Anti-capitalist forces in the West could be attacked for wanting to turn their society into a Russian colony, and thus were easily discredited. The Stalinist system acted as a permanent reminder that change would lead to circumstances that were worse than the conditions which prevailed in the West. The Berlin Wall confirmed this view; the fact that people had to be bricked up in the East suggested that, if given a choice, anyone in their right mind would opt for Western capitalism.

The division of Germany and the Cold War thus created an environment where conservative views could dominate across the world. This division gave anti-communism a special appeal and force because it seemed to be based on reality. It didn't matter that Eastern Europe was no more

communist than the West; so long as the Stalinist system could be so portrayed as communism, it naturally fuelled a right-wing reaction.

Anti-communism became so effective that even the West German establishment, which had been completely discredited through its links with Nazism, could regain a degree of legitimacy by promoting it. That is why the Bonn government turned anti-communism into a state religion. The legitimacy of the West German state is based on its claim to represent a positive alternative to the dangers of Stalinism. The division of the country has thus allowed the German capitalist class to construct a state that need not be embarrassed by the Nazi links of its elite.

German unity will eliminate the fiction that there exists a negative communist model in the East. It will also help to overcome the artificial division of the German working class. And unity will contribute to the demise of the international balance that has benefited only capitalism in the West and Stalinism in the East. These are good arguments for supporting unity.

Many leftists oppose German unity on the grounds that such a move would strengthen nationalism and create a power that would be a danger to world peace. This approach is fundamentally flawed. Nationalism is already strong in West Germany, as evidenced by the widespread hostility towards third world immigrants there. It is not clear why unity should further Western nationalism. What is clear is that if Germany remains divided and if nationalist ambitions are thwarted, then nationalism will increase. A divided nation will always be susceptible to nationalist ideology. All the more reason for removing partition.

The fear of German power is not entirely misplaced. A united Germany would inevitably become the strongest nation in Europe. But what is so special about German imperialism? Why should it be treated differently than British, French or American imperialism? In picking out Germany for special consideration there is a danger of whitewashing the imperialist tradition of our own rulers. Marxists living in Britain ought to be concerned with the power of Whitehall more than that of Bonn.

A united Germany cannot pose any more of a problem for us than a declining and vicious Britain or an assertive and aggressive France. On the contrary, the process that leads towards a united Germany has the potential to unfreeze history, and to undermine the coherence and power of the entire capitalist world order.

Economic reunification is under way

Deutschmark über alles?

**Helen Simons
finds capitalism
crossing the
wall**

Whatever dates and conditions the politicians may set, in practice German reunification is already under way. Economic cooperation is a powerful magnet pulling East and West together.

Since the Berlin Wall began coming down, the governments in Bonn and East Berlin have been negotiating over a *Vertragsgemeinschaft*—a collection of economic, cultural, scientific and technical agreements between the two states. In the run-up to the March elections in the East, West German chancellor Helmut Kohl launched his bid to set up a currency union and promised a multi-billion deutschmark aid package. West German businessmen have already jumped the gun, and the scramble to get a commercial foothold within the GDR is well under way.

West German companies have proved far keener to move into the GDR than to follow their government's suggestion that they should invest in Poland or the Soviet Union. Eager employers explain that 'this is Germany, the workers are German, they speak the same language and they understand how we think'; in other words, these are skilled German workers who will do the job at cut-price rates. Even more attractive is the prospect of a unified Germany with an industrial base to take on the world.

Many major companies justify their move into the GDR by pointing out that they used to own extensive interests in the east before Germany was divided in 1945. Giants such as Daimler-Benz, Siemens, Volkswagen, Bayer, Hoechst and BASF had many plants throughout the old Germany. 'Middle Germany' (an area roughly corresponding to the GDR) was an

important part of the pre-war German economy, home to the chemical and textile industries and many other industrial sectors. The western areas of Germany were dominated by heavy industry like steel production. This was a natural division of the economy since hard coal and water power were scarce in the east.

The two parts of the German economy had a complementary relationship, within which an effective division of labour had evolved. This tradition ensured that, even after partition, there remained a striving towards some form of economic cooperation. But throughout the post-war years, these economic relations were subject to the shifting political considerations of the Cold War. Both the East and West German regimes, and their respective Soviet and American backers, desired to maintain partition as a source of stability.

Hot and cold

Ironically, during these years East Germany was often under the most pressure to establish economic links, as the stagnation of the Soviet bloc created a pressing need for Western technology and aid. Yet to justify the existence of East Germany as an independent state, the Stalinists had to denounce any steps towards reunification and keep their distance from the capitalist West. During the Cold War crisis which led to the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, East Berlin even tried to sever all economic links with Bonn—a disastrous move which plunged the East into crisis.

West Germany, meanwhile, voiced formal support for reunification, yet if anything used its economic

relations with the East to endorse partition. Throughout the Cold War years, economic cooperation was threatened by the prospect of West German trade sanctions being imposed in response to any new political restrictions in the East. Bonn governments used this economic device to help bolster the legitimacy of the artificial West German state, by emphasising the relative prosperity and freedom which capitalist Germany enjoyed compared to its 'communist' neighbour.

Today the changes in the East and the declining credibility of the Cold War have transformed the character of East-West economic relations. Now the talk is of reunification and one German economy. And Bonn is using its economic power, not to punish the East, but to bring it closer under the Western wing.

By the start of the eighties there were already signs that the inter-German relationship was starting to change. For the first time, the old Cold War assumptions which had shaped East-West German relations for the past three decades were being put to serious question.

In 1981 Cold War tensions had escalated once more, with the imposition of martial law in Poland after political unrest in the Gdansk shipyards, and the introduction of the US Cruise and Pershing missiles in Western Europe. The Reagan administration froze relations between Moscow and Washington, and again the USA tried to exert pressure on the East and pull its allies into line by imposing trade sanctions against the Warsaw Pact countries.

In the past, Bonn had always complied with calls for Western solidarity against the Eastern bloc. But in 1981 the West Germans

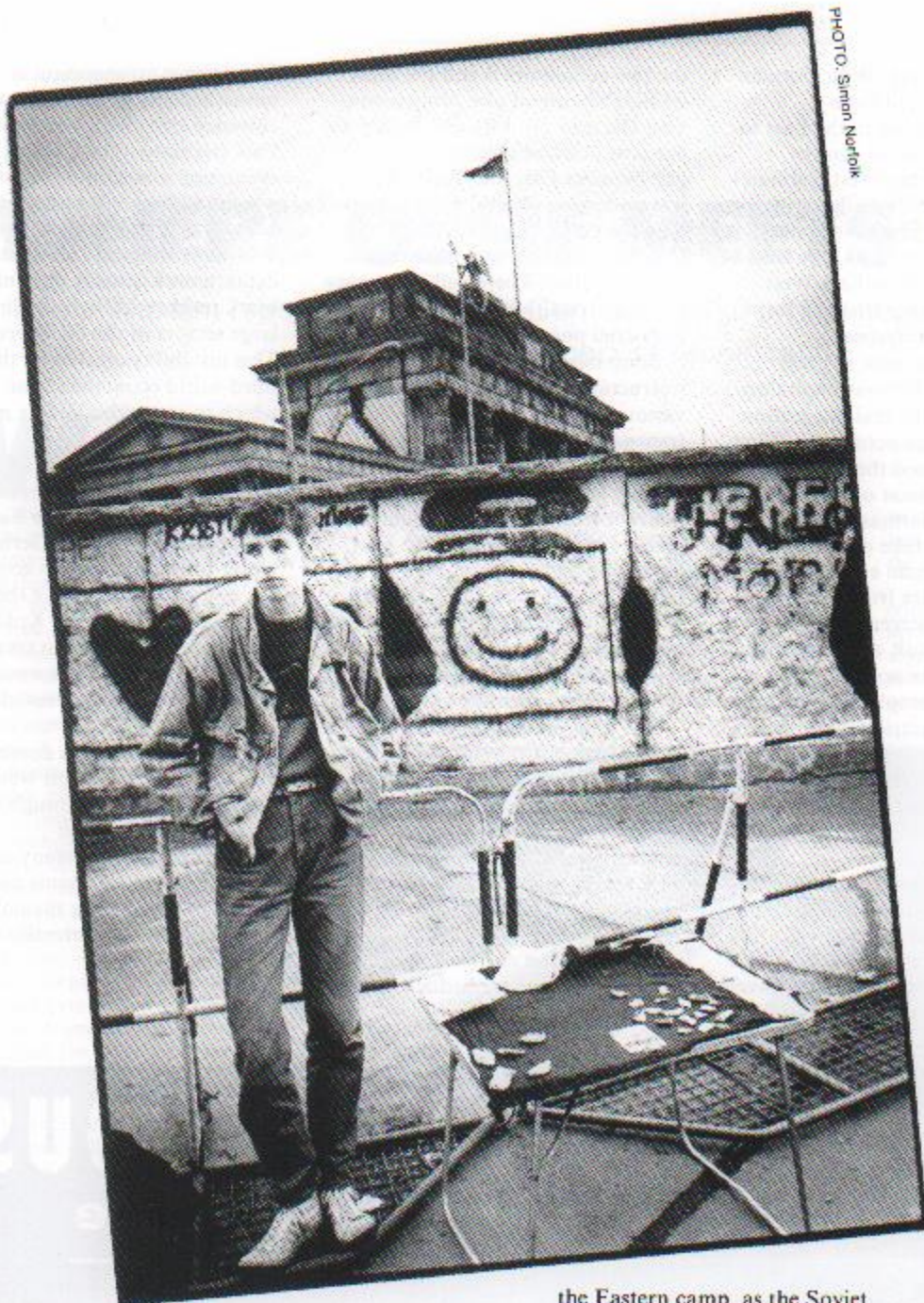


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

While East Berliners travel West to sell wall splinters to tourists, the serious business goes the other way

refused to jump through the American hoop. Even at the height of the military crackdown in Poland, Bonn refused to cease the supply of technology to the East. The major Soviet-backed project of the day—the construction of the trans-Siberian gas pipeline—continued with West German support throughout the whole of this period.

The pipeline row reflected the shifting balance of power within both Cold War blocs. Within the Western camp, the economic decline of the USA had undermined its position of unquestioned authority. As America had slipped, so the FRG had re-emerged as an industrial power and a major player in the world economy. As such, the West Germans began to develop their own economic interests, which did not always correspond to the interests of the USA. Bonn was no longer willing to obey every command to back Washington against a mythical Soviet threat.

Things were also changing within

the Eastern camp, as the Soviet Union suffered a more dramatic decline than the USA. The increasingly chronic economic crisis in the Soviet Union had a considerable impact on inter-German relations. Unable to manage its own economic affairs, the Soviet Union was in no position to subsidise its East European allies. The GDR thus became more dependent on the West for aid.

Debt problems

At the start of the eighties East Germany's Western debt was estimated at \$11 billion and rising; 10 years earlier it had been just \$1 billion. The political unrest in the Polish shipyards added to East Berlin's problems. At first the East German leadership feared unrest might spread across the Polish border. Martial law ensured that Solidarity was contained, but for the GDR the resolution of the political crisis caused another economic headache. Stability in Poland was dependent upon economic aid being

given. When the state could least afford it, the ruling bureaucrats in the GDR had to bail out the Polish government to save their own skins.

The final straw came in 1982, when the Soviet Union reduced oil shipments to the GDR by 10 per cent and raised oil prices at the same time. The GDR was thrown into a balance of payments crisis. In spite of the heightened Cold War tensions on the international stage, West Germany stepped in to keep the East afloat. When the GDR's credit worthiness was at rock bottom on the international markets, Franz Josef Strauss, leader of the right-wing Bavarian CSU, negotiated a DM1 billion loan with no strings attached that pulled the GDR back from the economic brink. Once the short-term balance of payments problems were alleviated, East Germany quickly set about introducing an austerity programme that the International Monetary Fund would have been proud of.

Ein Volkswagen

The new mood of cooperation brought with it a plethora of financial ties and agreements that slowly pulled the two Germanies closer. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, travel restrictions between the two states had been eased. As early as 1980 Bonn agreed to pay DM2.5 billion for the electrification of five railway lines through the East to Berlin. A further DM2.1 billion was earmarked in the same year when Bonn agreed to pay for the construction of a soft coal plant near Leipzig. The GDR repaid these investments by supplying the West with electricity.

The Kohl administration has since extended the GDR's 'swing' credit limit considerably, handed out loans and aid worth billions, and committed its hi-tech resources to a joint environmental project in the East. More recently private capitalists have proved keen to develop their concerns in East Germany. The Volkswagen corporation, flagship of German capitalism, was the first major company to announce its plans for the East, signing an agreement back in 1984 to build VW engines in Karl-Marx-Stadt for the Wartburg model. Since then most of the other West German manufacturing giants have moved Eastwards.

An estimated 7000 West German companies had a stake in the GDR last year. In the first eight months of 1989 alone, imports from the FRG to the GDR rose by 14 per cent while exports to the FRG rose by six per cent. This year the value of inter-German trade is likely to exceed DM15 billion (about £5 billion).

The collapse of the Berlin Wall has once again transformed the inter-

There will be
no easy or
cheap road to
a united
German
industrial
powerhouse

German relationship. West German interests have shifted from establishing some ties to the East to pursuing the explosive issue of reunification. Today West German capital is no longer satisfied with just trade and credit. Since November Bonn has been feeling its way tentatively towards an East-West German relationship that can form the basis for reunification.

Three issues are now of great concern to West German capitalism. They are key to the real integration of the two German economies. First, the FRG has forced the GDR to scrap its ban on joint economic ventures. West German companies can now hold a stake of up to 49 per cent in East German enterprises. Mounting pressure from the West means that this percentage is likely to increase. As a result all the major manufacturers are now investing in the East. For example, Siemens, the West German electrical giant, is now forging an agreement with Robotron—the GDR's largest electronic company—to manufacture compact discs in Dresden for sale in the West.

Second, the Bonn government is taking responsibility for redeveloping East Germany's crumbling infrastructure. This promises to be a major undertaking. The gap between

the two economies is still the most striking feature of any comparison. East German productivity is only 40 per cent of its neighbour's. And the gap between East and West has widened in recent years. One estimate puts the cost of restructuring the East German economy at a quarter of a trillion dollars. There will be no easy or cheap road to a united German industrial powerhouse.

Bonn has begun the task of restructuring by agreeing to fund various projects: improving transport, communications and healthcare, backing construction and forging links between the two state police forces. West German interests seem to be everywhere in the East, launching a seven-point plan to rebuild half of the GDR's railways, while setting up a fund to restore the buildings of Dresden to the splendour they enjoyed before the RAF bombed them.

The final pressing concern for West German capital is the issue of export guarantees and currency convertibility. At present the ostmark (the East German currency) is not officially convertible into foreign currencies. This makes it hard for Western capitalists to repatriate their new Eastern profits.

Resolving the currency issue is becoming Bonn's immediate priority.

The present arrangement is unsustainable, as the threat of a currency crisis looms ever larger in East Germany. The GDR is now swimming in a surplus of ostmarks which can buy nothing, while the country is crying out for 'hard' Western currency. The Western deutschmark already dominates the black market and is becoming key to large sectors of the GDR economy. This instability created by this sort of third world economics is no basis on which to start rebuilding a major industrial power.

Yet, far from putting the West Germans off the idea of reunification, the threat of chaos in the East is today drawing the two Germanies closer together. Western economists are now trying to resolve the crisis next door. In February, Kohl launched his initiative to create a currency union which would effectively extend the deutschmark into the East.

Any deal to create a common currency East and West would be highly significant. Through such measures of economic standardisation, Germany could become one to all intents and purposes long before the political map is finally and formally redrawn.

MEDIA EVENTS AT CORNERHOUSE Manchester's Visual Arts Centre

Saturday 10 March 2.00-5.00pm

THE BODY IN EXTREMIS

Four film-makers screen and discuss their work looking at the body as a location of desire, fantasy, feeling and taboo. With Kathleen Maitland-Carter, Jean Matthee, Jayne Parker and Moira Sweeney.

Friday 16 March at 7.30pm

INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR OF RADICAL, BLACK & THIRD WORLD BOOKS

Man of Iron

A special screening of *Man of Iron*, Andrzej Wajda's film, shot during the tumultuous birth of Solidarity at the beginning of the 80s, will be followed by discussion. Speakers including essayist and publisher John La Rose, will focus on the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the 80s.

Saturday 31 March 1.00-5.00pm

BARING THE FACTS

A debate on pornography
in the 90s in two parts

SATELLITE SEX

Are the British too prudish about sex on TV or is there already too much? Can, and should, we control the importing of sex by satellite?

OFF THE SHELF

Dawn Primorolo MP discusses her new bill to limit the sale of pornography with Gill Hudson (Editor of *Company* magazine), Isabelle Koprovski (Managing Editor of *Penthouse*) and others.

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WHERE OSSIE MEETS WESSIE

Daniel Nassim reports from the old German capital on the hopes and fears prompted by the prospect of reunification

What do you mean we've got the power now? Nothing has changed!" Siegfried was exaggerating, and he knew it. But he was clearly annoyed by what he saw as the complacency of the West Germans sitting opposite when they talked about the changes in the East.

The fact that the West Germans were in the crowded East Berlin bar at all was a sign of our post-wall times. It was becoming clearer, however, that there are still serious political and psychological barriers to bringing the two Germanies together.

Michael, a 17-year old East German steelworker, expressed a typical sense of confusion. 'Communism's finished, socialism's finished, nobody knows what's going on.' His neighbour voiced the near universal hatred for the corrupt old Communist Party: 'The SED [Socialist Unity Party] talked water and drank wine.'

The bar scene captured the tensions that have grown between the 'Ossies' from the East and 'Wessies' from the West since the wall was breached on 9 November. Ossies resent the Wessies who cross the wall to take advantage of the East's economic collapse. Even the poorer Wessies can afford to fill the pubs and restaurants of the East. *Zitty*, the West Berlin listings magazine, has included events in the East since the wall opened. The Wessies in turn are worried that subsidising East German reconstruction could drain the West German economy.

Despite the tension and irritation, however, there seems to be little serious hostility. One couple even turned out to be 'mixed'—an Ossie man and a Wessie woman—a relationship that would have been impossible before November.

People in East Berlin may be on edge but most are for reunification. A group of scaffolders from Kotpus, a town 100km north of Berlin, are unequivocal about it. For them, reunification will mean the chance to earn more—and then to enjoy it. 'We want more money for working harder. We want to work hard and then be through.' After a few years they would like to have the money to take it easy. 'You can't do it here. Even if you work every day.'

Looking at their wages it is not hard to see why they favour reunification. The scaffolders are paid six ostmarks (East German marks) an hour—the equivalent of one Western deutschmark at the black market exchange rate. West German workers get 15 times as much. The East Germans particularly resent the impossibly high prices of consumer durables like electrical goods and furniture. At 5000 ostmarks a television costs five months' wages.

The scaffolders, together with other construction workers on the same site, are already experiencing creeping reunification. The building they are putting up is a joint venture between the East German state and a West German company. If they do overtime they get paid half of their money in deutschmarks. When they moonlight for private individuals they ask to be paid in the West German currency.

Two young women shop assistants were equally straightforward about their desire for reunification. 'We're not earning enough to match living

creche facilities could be dismantled. Carola, who works as a film developer and has a four-year old son, favours German unity but is emphatic that 'most women here want to work. Here you can do that. I never want to stay at home and look after the kid'.

The minority of workers who are against reunification share the same concerns as those who are for it. Chris, a 30-year old caretaker, knows the arguments about higher living standards. But he is more concerned about rising rents and inflation in general. He also does quite well out of moonlighting

as a mechanical engineer in the East—mending goods belonging to people in the flats he looks after.

The striking thing is how working class people always weigh up economic factors to determine their position on reunification. I spoke to 25 workers, and all of them cited economic rather than political reasons for their view. There was no talk of the rights of Germans or the need to build one German nation.

No doubt nationalism lurks beneath the surface. Racism is certainly there. A Mozambican immigrant was recently thrown out of a train and Vietnamese have been refused service in shops and restaurants. Yet the more strident political forms of nationalism appear absent among most.

One group staunchly opposed to reunification is the intelligentsia. Jochen, a film-maker, expresses a contempt for the workers who want to unite that is common among intellectuals. 'The workers have a choice between freedom [a reformed version of the Stalinist regime] and bananas. And they want bananas!' He detests the popular desire for consumer goods. 'I can live without a car.' Few ordinary East Berliners envy him that ability.

Berlin still bears the marks of a divided city. Before the war the city had a highly integrated transport system incorporating an underground (U-bahn), an overground (S-bahn), trams and buses. The division of the city means that the two halves of the same system run independently of each other. There are also two independent phone systems, which are virtually impossible to connect. But the dominant mood among Berliners, whatever their doubts, is to finish the job that was begun in November.

As their March elections approached, many people in East Berlin expressed a belief that the changes had not gone nearly far enough. 'We haven't had a revolution', says Thomas, a tool-maker. 'You can only have a revolution with guns.'



PHOTO: Thomas Klein

It's little wonder these East German scaffolders favour reunification, when they can earn 15 times as much in the West

standards in the West.' Crossing the border to visit the other side brought home just how poor they are in comparison. Like most people the shop assistants favour reunification even though they know the difficulties which the introduction of a market economy could bring. Unemployment is a particular concern.

East Berliners express these concerns as a fear of the 'elbow society' (*Ellenbogengesellschaft*), a sort of 'unacceptable face of capitalism'. They seem acutely aware of the possibilities of unemployment, inflation and harder work. 'But if you've lived in the East then of course the West looks good', says Peter, a trendy young East Berliner.

Women are particularly concerned about the dangers the introduction of the market could hold. The government has played on their fears that

March 1985: Gorbachev comes to power

Is he on the way out?

...and, asks Rob Knight, will it make any difference if he is?

Mikhail Gorbachev came to power five years ago this month amid promises of economic renewal. Today just about the only growth industry in the Soviet Union is the rumour machine speculating about how long he will last. Observers returning to the West report that their Soviet contacts give Gorbachev two, four, or six months at the outside. Gossip about alleged plots and manoeuvres keeps the Western press and governments occupied; a rumour that Gorbachev was about to resign as head of the Communist Party was enough to knock millions off American share prices at the end of January. Every major event is now interpreted from the point of view of whether it weakens or strengthens Gorbachev.

In a sense, this preoccupation with Gorbachev's career prospects is a diversion from the real issues. Gorbachev is one individual, albeit an important one. What happens to him is not the same as what happens to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev is part of a political leadership which represents the interests of the ruling Soviet bureaucracy. During the five years that he has run the Soviet Union, he has enjoyed the active support of his colleagues. Should he go, they will still push his policies. A look at the Gorbachev years reveals that perestroika has not been the personal crusade of one man, but the pragmatic response of the Soviet bureaucracy to its system's crisis.

Western hero

Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 11 March 1985. During his five years in power, his most remarkable achievement has been to achieve hero status in the West: he has been complimented by Thatcher, feted by Reagan and Bush, hailed as a visionary from Bonn to Pretoria. His predecessor Leonid Brezhnev was treated as a pariah after the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan; a decade on, Gorbachev even enjoys Western support for the military crackdown in Azerbaijan.

Gorbachev has bought his popularity with the capitalist world by making major concessions. The

Kremlin has proclaimed the virtues of a market economy, adopted a hands-off policy towards Eastern Europe, and encouraged third world liberation movements to make peace with the Western powers.

One place where Gorbachev is a lot less popular is within the Soviet Union. His perestroika policy has failed to alleviate economic hardship, and he now risks being heckled on the rare occasions that he goes on his famous factory walkabouts. When Gorbachev visits a republic he is confronted with demands for independence. A recent opinion poll found that only 12 per cent of people in the Soviet Union think perestroika will succeed.

These attitudes suggest that we should not take the glowing Western image of the Soviet leader at face value. To get at what he really represents, it is worth examining some of the myths promoted by the Western 'Gorbymaniacs' since March 1985.

Machine man

Gorbachev has gained the reputation of being a radical new thinker who, having struggled to overcome the old guard, has personally forced the Soviet Union on to a new path. In fact he is a

product of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and his appointment five years ago reflected a widespread recognition among the bureaucrats that things could no longer go on in the old way.

By 1985 the annual growth rate of the inefficient Soviet economy was just about zero. Six consecutive poor harvests had forced the Soviets to import 30m tonnes of grain a year from North America. And while the world economy went increasingly hi-tech, the Soviet Union had trouble turning out the most rudimentary computers. The economic future looked grim.

Meanwhile, opposition was stirring in the Eastern bloc. In 1981, the economic crisis in Poland led to mass strikes and the rise of Solidarity. The unrest forced the Polish regime to impose martial law and sent shock waves through the Kremlin. In the international arena, things looked just as bleak. In Afghanistan, the Red Army was bogged down in an unwinnable war that enjoyed no support at home, had incurred the wrath of the Western powers and had isolated the Soviet Union. Worse, the USA under Ronald Reagan had launched the New Cold War and another arms race. The end of détente dashed the Kremlin's hopes of negotiating arms cuts; by the early

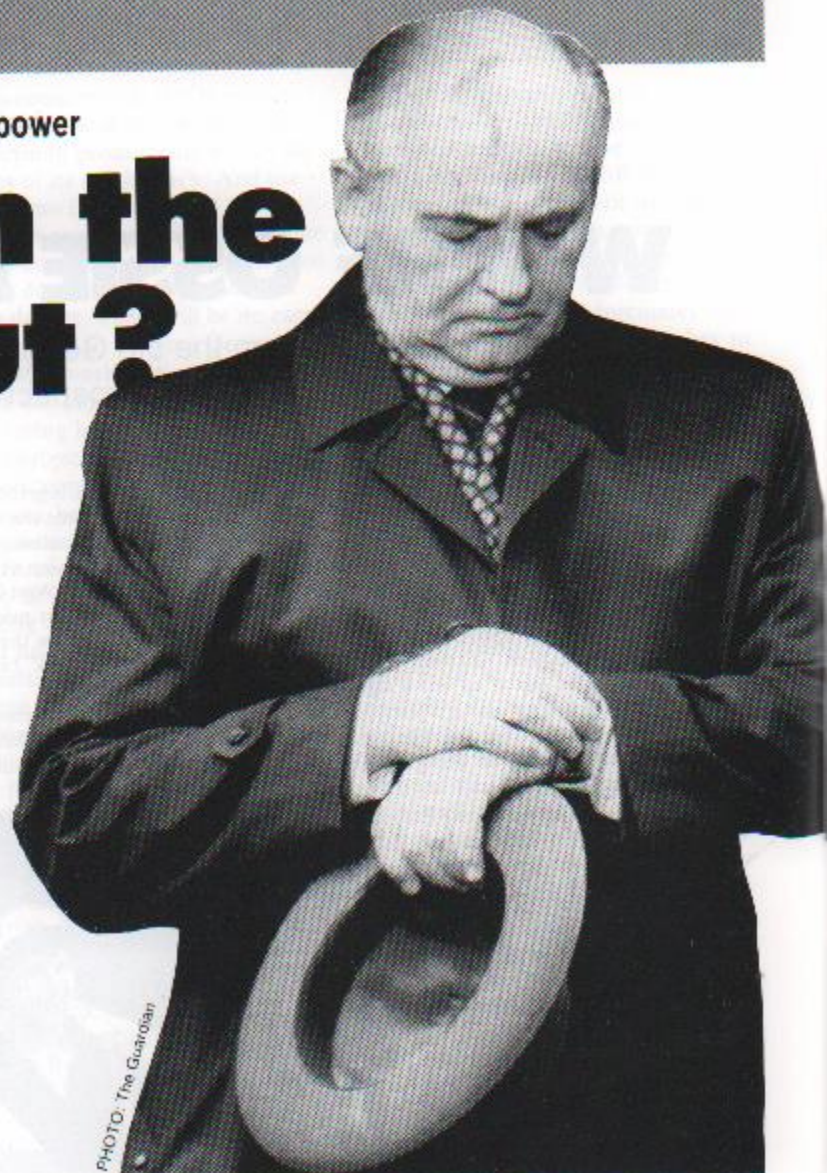


PHOTO: The Guardian

For five years he has blamed conservatives for the failure of perestroika, and initiated purges that Stalin would have been proud of

eighties Soviet defence spending had risen to nearly 20 per cent of national output, imposing another crippling burden on the economy.

The bureaucracy knew that something had to give. No changes were made while the half-dead Brezhnev ruled. But when Yuri Andropov succeeded him in 1982, a more open debate began. Andropov initiated tentative economic reforms, including the labour discipline and anti-alcohol campaigns that Gorbachev was to step up in his first year of office. But just when things began to move in 1984 Andropov died. The now-forgotten Konstantin Chernenko came and quickly went, and then Gorbachev took power.

Those who present Gorbachev as a radical visionary who cut through the staid old politburo forget that, at the crucial meeting which elected him leader, his strongest advocate was the arch-Stalinist, Andrei Gromyko. And it was Viktor Chebrikov, then head of the KGB, who tipped the vote in his favour. In short, Gorbachev was the bureaucracy's man. He was put into power as a protégé of Andropov, who had himself been KGB chief under Brezhnev. The Western powers' favourite Soviet reformer owed his career to a man whom they reviled as a torturer and murderer.

No young radical

Until he became general secretary, nothing in Gorbachev's career suggested that he was a radical reformer. All reports on his early working life cite his real talent as being the consistent ability to support the majority view whenever conflicts arose in the bureaucracy. Mr Perestroika certainly had no proven success in managing the economy: he ran agriculture during that run of failed harvests. He was expert only in the combination of sycophancy and back-stabbing that is the prerequisite for career success in the Soviet bureaucracy.

Gorbachev has never been a

committed ideologue of change. He is a pragmatist, a product and member of the bureaucracy who sees the need to change in order to survive but fears the consequences. The economic restructuring of perestroika is a pragmatic policy agreed upon by the Soviet leadership in a desperate bid to offset the collapse of their economy. Policies like ending the party's formal monopoly on power are pragmatic attempts to win a measure of popular support for the Stalinist system. The diplomatic offensive in international affairs is a pragmatic policy designed to win friends, ease tensions and thus allow the Soviets to cut defence spending while gaining access to Western aid and technology.

Backing off

From the start it was clear that economic restructuring could only be successful at the expense of working class living standards. Yet whenever the working class has reacted against the effects of the reforms Gorbachev has backed off. The market-oriented cooperatives were, for example, the most dynamic, if still marginal, sector of the Soviet economy; but when workers protested against their high prices, the bureaucracy began to crack down on these enterprises. Such pragmatism has guaranteed the survival of perestroika so far, but it has also ensured that it has had little impact.

The prospects for Gorbachev's reform programme are bleak. Fear of social upheaval means that the main economic reforms have not been implemented. And the political liberalisation has led only to growing demands for more far-reaching change. The new difficulties which the regime faces have taken their toll, threatening the unity of the bureaucracy itself. Collectively, the bureaucracy wants change. But as individuals, the bureaucrats don't want to lose out as a result of it. Thus the bureaucracy remains both

the agent of Gorbachev's reforms, and the barrier to their success; it has begun to fragment under the pressure.

With the aid of the Western media, Gorbachev has presented the tensions within the Soviet bureaucracy as a battle between himself, the beleaguered reformer, and entrenched Stalinists who oppose democracy and reform. For five years he has blamed conservative elements for the failures of perestroika, and initiated purges which Stalin would have been proud of at all levels of the party. This is largely a smokescreen. Far from being isolated, it would not have been possible for Gorbachev to make so many enemies and survive had he not, until now, retained the support of the majority of the top-level officials. Nor can the crisis of the system be blamed on minor individual bureaucrats forever; after all, Gorbachev has now replaced many of the old-timers with his own men, yet the situation has deteriorated even further.

Come back Brezhnev?

After five years Gorbachev has run out of excuses. Perestroika remains a farce, the economy is facing a monumental crisis and the integrity of the Soviet Union is being questioned from Baku to Riga. Not only has Gorbachev failed to deliver, but many believe that he has made the situation worse. He is fond of reminding his critics of the 'stagnation' of the Brezhnev era; yet those years look positively prosperous in comparison to today.

It is always possible that Gorbachev will be scapegoated for the failure of his system, and replaced by another politburo member or even by an army general. That would mean a change of face, but not of policy. At present no section of the Soviet bureaucracy has come up with an alternative programme. As foreign minister Genady Gerasimov told journalists when Gorbachev's leadership was questioned during the fighting in Azerbaijan, 'There are no alternative leaders, there are no alternative policies'.

The big issue is not whether or when Gorbachev goes, but how far the bureaucracy is prepared to go to preserve its rule. Before too long the Soviet leadership will be confronted with the alternative of leaving the stage of history or trying to survive through repression. The bloodshed in Baku was a sample of the future of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. It would be a fitting irony if the man whom the West hailed as a champion of democracy were to be remembered for fighting a rearguard action to preserve the Stalinist system.

- 3 March 1985: NUM calls off miners' strike.
- 21 March 1980: Underhill report reveals plot to take over Labour Party by unknown Trotskyites called 'Militant Tendency'.
- 29 March 1975: Da-Nang, South Vietnam's second city, falls to North.
- 9 March 1970: Oxford premiere of Samuel Beckett's 'Breath', lasting 60 seconds.
- 21 March 1960: Sharpeville massacre, South Africa. 69 killed.
- 3 March 1950: Alaska bought from Tsarist Russia in March 1867, becomes 49th state of USA.

5, 10, 15, 20...

- 11 March 1940: Meat rationing introduced.
- 14 March 1930: British government approves Channel Tunnel (again).
- 31 March 1920: Parliament passes Government of Ireland Act, laying down British plans for partition.
- 30 March 1915: King George V offers to abstain from alcohol as an example to wartime workers.

Joe Boatman reviews *Born on the Fourth of July*, the latest Vietnam epic, and John Fitzpatrick wonders when a filmmaker is going to remember that war's real victims and victors

Born on the Fourth of July is based on the autobiography of paraplegic Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic. He took his patriotism to Vietnam and brought it back intact, despite the fact that he returned wheelchair-bound and impotent. The film is about his fight against his disability and against the indifference and hostility which he received back home. His personal triumph and reconciliation operates on a dramatic level to redeem America too, not so much on account of the war and what they did to Vietnam, which so often is a side issue, but for what they did to their own veterans by way of suspicion, denial and guilt.

America fought, America lost, but God Bless America it's still got its pride. It's not as bad as that sounds. Tom Cruise proves himself a great actor here, and Oliver Stone confirms himself as a great director. Stone takes us on a smoothly guided tour of our emotional reactions allowing no time to ask questions. Ron Kovic was born on the Fourth of July, and a series of skilfully manipulated childhood episodes establish him as a hero-to-be. Stone delivers a sequence of user-friendly key sentimental moments that we identify as the culmination of some bitter-sweet tale (an audience accustomed to emotional impact delivered in 30-second TV ads makes easy work of it). He plays soldiers in the mud, he salutes the veterans at the Fourth of July Parade. He wins at baseball and wins the girl's heart. There's a flag on the lawn and Kennedy on the TV: 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask rather what you can do for your country.' It's very effective.

All-American boy

Not only are his all-American roots established but so too are the seeds of future conflict. At the parade the veterans wince at the fire-crackers. His mother's narrow-minded morality (strong disapproval over a *Playboy* mag) foreshadows her difficulties in



Tom Cruise as Ron Kovic, with Willem Dafoe

PHOTO: United International Pictures

Born on the Fourth of July

YANKEE DOODLE DO-OR-DIE

copied with his later dilemmas. Worst of all, in the one scene of failure in a high school wrestling match, both his mother and his girl have disappointment and disillusion verging on disgust written all over their faces.

Stone doesn't dally in Vietnam. Just long enough to encapsulate with slick efficiency the requisite traumas, on which he doesn't stint: Kovic, a brave and loyal soldier unwittingly massacres a group of women and children, accidentally and blamelessly shoots one of his comrades GI Wilson, then he's badly injured himself, and the real war begins.

Colostomy overflow

First stop the field hospital, and we get the bloody picture. The camera that ran with him as a child and danced with him at the prom, now scoots across from one patient to another zooming in on their wounds like a panic-stricken doctor who doesn't know where to start. From here Kovic's journey from degradation through despair continues in a long and intense incarceration at the Bronx Vets' hospital. Here Kovic gets his first taste of the ugly welcome home. Underfunding means the hospital is rat-infested, the equipment doesn't work and patients are left to watch their colostomy bags overflow. Kovic's battle to regain his legs is doomed.

When the Fourth of July comes around again, this time the news shows anti-war demonstrators burning the flag. Kovic cries out in frustration and anguish that he's a veteran and all he wants is to be treated like a human being.

Bitter in defeat

Stone is relentless. The Fourth of July Parade again, back home. This time it is Kovic who winces at the fire-crackers from his wheelchair. He observes bitterly that people resent the very sight of him since it reminds them of America's inexplicable failure. His childhood sweetheart is now a student who, busy organising an anti-war demo, has little time to talk to him. In a scene that alone justifies all the accolades Cruise has received for his performance, he is forced to leave home after a furious confession of his sexual frustration. He takes his heart to rock bottom at a brothel in Mexico frequented by disabled Vets who can't get respect back home for love nor money.

The only way is up. He attends an anti-war demonstration, this time as an active participant: 'One, two, three, four; we don't want your fucking war.' The Veterans Against the War try to get a hearing at a Republican convention. As Nixon's voice is heard saying 'Let's give those who served in

Vietnam the honour and respect they deserve', Kovic is unceremoniously wheeled and tipped out by security guards. Stone emphasises the second war being fought here with a visual parallel—the rifle-wielding silhouettes of GIs against the orange Vietnamese sky are echoed by the baton-wielding silhouettes of the police against a blue city night-light; where a black GI had carried a wounded Kovic away from the firing line, a black protester carries a crippled Kovic out of reach of the riot police. Restored to his chair Kovic finds his voice: 'We're going to take the hall back.'

It is a virtuoso epic from director and actor. Punctuated by news items and superbly orchestrated crowd scenes we are swept along through the life of Ron Kovic, and whether you see this soldier as villain or victim, you can see why America wants to unite behind him now. Kovic and Stone, veterans both, are convinced the war was a terrible mistake, and now they want to make it good. They want to join the healing process to which much attention is now given. *Casualties of War* ends with the reassurance that 'the dream is over'. *Born on the Fourth of July* ends with Kovic approaching the podium at a Democratic Party convention. He makes a peace sign and tells the press, 'maybe we're home'. If only it were so easy.

HOLLYWOOD VETS VIETNAM

In 1945 Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party, declared an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam, following the collapse of French and Japanese authority. The French were soon back, but did not survive their military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Geneva conference of that year 'temporarily' partitioned the country along the seventeenth parallel, and thereafter it was the Americans who directly propped up the corrupt regimes in the South, first headed by Ngo Dinh Diem and later by General Nguyen Van Thieu.

Two million troops

President Kennedy increased the involvement of the American military in the early sixties to cope with the newly formed National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The US bombing started in 1964 and in 1965 US troops were routinely deployed in action. In all 2 150 000 Americans were sent to Vietnam, the highpoint being 1969 when 542 000 were over there. By April 1973 the last troops

had departed, and in April 1975 the last Americans scampered out of the country as the communists took Saigon.

According to American scholar Gabriel Kolko, 'the United States in Vietnam unleashed the greatest flood of firepower against a nation known to history'. Between 1965 and 1972, even the underestimated US figures concede that 415 000 civilians and 850 000 'enemy' were killed in South Vietnam alone. Around 60 000 US troops were killed in the whole affair. The mass bombing and defoliation turned seven million into refugees. And the US bombing campaign in neighbouring Cambodia killed over a million more.

Viet victory

Yet, for all their firepower, the Americans were defeated. The army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the People's Liberation Armed Forces, the army of the NLF in the South, combined to defeat the Americans and their stooges, even though they were outnumbered four to one. Between

1965 and 1972 95 per cent of their attacks were by units smaller than 300 men. A rare exception was the famous Tet offensive of 1968, when they attacked every major city and 36 of 44 provincial capitals simultaneously, while 1000 communists in the capital Saigon held off 11 000 American and South Vietnamese troops for three weeks. It was a battle which broke America's resolve.

No Pontecorvo

Surely, somewhere in all this there is a film to be made about the Vietnamese. But Vietnam still awaits its Gillo Pontecorvo. *Welcome Home, In Country, Casualties of War, Born on the Fourth of July*: the films still come thick and fast (after a long initial pause) but nobody seems to want to tell this astonishing, moving and world-historical story from the point of view of the real victims and the real victors. I await with interest Oliver Stone's promised follow-up to *Born on the Fourth of July*, which, he says, will focus on the Vietnamese.

Many of the Hollywood films are

honorable enough (drawing a veil over *The Green Berets*, and *Rambo*), and powerful too, although none have really improved on Michael Cimino's *The Deerhunter* (1979) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1981) in documenting the depravity of soldiers dislocated and unhinged by a war they had no stake in, and the psychological burden carried by America in its wake. *Good Morning, Vietnam* deserves to be mentioned for introducing an unusual, and welcome, note of irony.

Even the most liberal accounts, however, such as Stone's earlier work *Platoon*, focus on the damage the war did to America and Americans. In that film the hero sums up the prevailing Hollywood attitude: 'We didn't fight the enemy. We fought ourselves. The enemy was in us.' Well, yes old chap. I see what you're getting at: but don't forget those B-52s dropped 27 tons of bombs every time they went out.

Celia

NOT SO FUNNY BUNNY

A disturbing new film opens in London on 16 March. Pat Ford talked to the director Ann Turner in Melbourne

Celia is an unusual film, an impressive debut feature from a young Australian director, Ann Turner. It is about a little girl growing up, or rather being propelled into adulthood by some disturbing events one long sunny summer in the suburbs of Melbourne in 1957. First, her pet rabbit Murgatroyd is rounded up with all the other pet rabbits in the city as part of a panicky response to the real threat posed by the wild rabbit infestation of the countryside. Secondly, the new neighbours, as well as having some friendly children for her to play with, turn out to be communists. When their politics are

discovered the Australian version of McCarthyism causes the family considerable damage.

Like me, you may think all this sounds rather coy and contrived, and don't like films about children anyway; but if you go down to these woods today you're in for a big surprise. 'Politics start young', Ann Turner told me, and if these nine-year old Australians are anything to go by she is undoubtedly right. This film understands the difference between innocence and ignorance. Celia may not know a lot but she is very canny about what she does know, and sheds a very knowing light on the unpredictable,

duplicitous world of adults, where rabbits are locked up at random, nice progressive people inexplicably hounded, policemen throw their weight around and sexual passions keep looming into view, a law unto themselves.

Turner got the idea from a newspaper report about the rabbit fiasco. It really happened. She saw the event as a 'neat way' into other issues, like the anti-communism that flourished in Australia. 'There was a referendum in the early fifties to ban the Communist Party, make it illegal, and it was narrowly defeated. Then I discovered a friend of mine had been forced to

leave Victoria in 1958 because her father had been working for the government in communications and they discovered he was a communist.'

What Turner calls the 'insane scare' about communism is background. The film is about Celia coping with other children, with the figments of her imagination and, of course, with adults. Neither does Turner make the mistake of lumping all adults together. How she copes at the end has been controversial in Australia. 'It has deeply divided audiences. Conservative critics have called it immoral. One person at the Australian Film Commission (which partly financed the film) argued strongly for one of the key final scenes to be cut.' He lost and the ending packs a real punch. As Turner puts it herself, 'when it comes down to a question of surviving, Celia quickly acquires everything she is quietly against in the rest of the film'.

Turner stands by her decision, as she sees it, to leave things open. 'One of the reasons why a lot of films don't have my sort of ending is because of pressure from producers. Some people can't cope without a simple message to take away. Well that was absolutely deliberate. I did want people to feel unsettled.' In this she has certainly succeeded, and not just in the denouement, but by conjuring up throughout the film the strange world of childhood in an uncannily convincing way. Watch out for *Celia*.

Clockwork Orange

Toby Banks reviews
the Clockwork Orange
phenomenon, and the
new stage version
at the Barbican

In 1945, back from the army, I heard an 80-year old Cockney in a London pub say that somebody was "as queer as a clockwork orange". The "queer" did not mean homosexual; it meant mad. The phrase intrigued me with its unlikely fusion of demotic and surrealistic. For nearly 20 years I wanted to use it as the title of something. (Anthony Burgess, Warner Bros *Clockwork Orange* press book, 1972)

Burgess got his opportunity when he wrote a novel about brainwashing. The orange came from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, where Stephen Dedalus refers to the world as an 'obliterate orange'. Burgess developed the metaphor. Man was a microcosm of the big orange: 'A growth as organic as a fruit, capable of colour, fragrance and sweetness; to meddle with him, condition him, is to turn him into a mechanical creation.' His subject was the most hated and feared enemy of respectable society, the teenage hooligan Alex, whose gang of 'Droogs' knife and rape for sheer fun. An authoritarian government pledged to deliver law and order sentences him to an aversion therapy called the Ludovico Technique. Alex is 'cured' by the brutal treatment, but unwittingly becomes a *cause célèbre*, as the state brainwashing provokes an outcry. The treatment is undone and Alex's free will restored: he can choose to be evil, or not.

Clockwork cult

Little did Burgess know, when his clever little parable was published to favourable reviews in 1962 and quietly forgotten, that it would become his most famous work. Nor did he realise that his 'demotic and surrealistic' catchphrase would become a byword for juvenile delinquency and social malaise. A whole generation that had hardly heard of *Ulysses* knew all about *A Clockwork Orange*. Its unlikely cult status was delivered by Stanley Kubrick's notorious 1971 film, which looms over the careers of both Kubrick and Burgess to this day.

The film portrayed hooliganism through the eyes of the hooligan. Alex was stylised and glamorous, the adult world was caricatured and satirised. It was very funny, and hooligans loved it. The image of the Droogs was potent, their 'look' so calculated it could have been concocted by a committee of ad men and sociologists: a bit of skinhead (white trousers rolled

up to reveal what the papers used to call 'bovverboots'); a touch of 'glam' (big false eyelashes on one eye). Lastly, the masterstroke. Every fashion from teds to skinheads subverted a traditional form of dress: Alex's outfit was topped off perfectly with that symbol of the British gent, the bowler hat.

Confected 'teen' images usually end up looking like Cliff Richard in *Espresso Bongo*. This was different, the Droogs looked like *evil bastards* and there was uproar. The hysterical press reported copycat 'Clockwork crimes'. Gangs of kids stalked the streets sporting bowler hats and rolled-up brollies. I remember one such crew swaggering through the startled shoppers in Lewisham High Street. No doubt they looked a bit silly; but to an 11-year old trying hard to look like Rod Stewart in a school uniform, they were an impressive sight.



Ludovico against
the old
ultra-violence: Alex
(Phil Daniels)
undergoes the
aversion therapy

The barrage of abuse forced Kubrick to withdraw the film, and keep it withdrawn in Britain ever since. This has only enhanced its cult status—and a lucrative trade in crummy bootleg copies of the original video nasty. Addicts make pilgrimages to Paris. There have been rumours and denials about its reappearance, but I am reliably informed it will be released again this year.

Ron Daniels' RSC production (adapted by the director and Burgess himself) is essentially a one-man show. Alex is not just the central

character, he is the only real character; the others are ciphers. Phil Daniels as Alex pulls it off, and deserves praise. The others, even given their parts, are disappointing. The Droogs, Dim and Pete, sound more like school bullies from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* than street louts. The set is good. In place of the film's sixties kitsch (and sets which resembled the Barbican complex), Richard Hudson has created an ingenious series of locations from a construction resembling the inside of a gigantic oil drum. The music by U2's *The Edge* is reminiscent of Copland's *Rumblefish*, but none the worse for that.

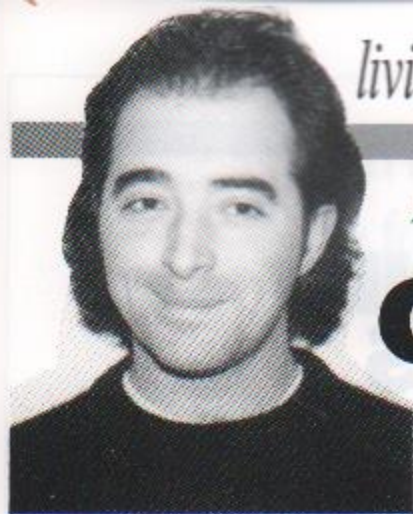
There are two basic elements to the story: the psychology of the hooligan, and the political satire. The second element is the most straightforward: as Burgess admits, it is very didactic. I need only add that the passing of time has transformed his nightmarish

criminal argot Alex narrates the tale. In the book, the effect is to distance the reader from the grisly reality of the succession of rapes and beatings which he describes. In the film and the play the audience sees what is happening, and the effect of Nadsat is to gloss and glamorise the criminal action. The worried consensus has been that this undermines the novel's message, and turns the violence into gratuitous titillation.

But the point is that Nadsat distances Alex, as well as the reader, from his actions. He is both the subject (the evil-doer) and the narrator (the sensitive eloquent commentator). He is the football hooligan who trots out sociological jargon as soon as a camera is pointed at him. In the film the scenes of violence were deliberately stylised, with fights choreographed and set to music. Thus we see it Alex's way, as exhilarating and joyous. The stage play is the same. In Alex's words, we see 'some getting knifed and others doing the knifing'. When the Droogs are doing the knifing it is a flamboyant dance routine, with jumping and tumbling like circus clowns. But when Alex himself is getting battered to a pulp by the police, these exciting gymnastics are replaced by a savage, nauseating realism. We are in Alex's world throughout.

To sustain this effect, we have to be persuaded to sympathise with Alex, as a charming and witty rapist and murderer, against his maltreaters. Malcolm McDowell triumphed on the screen with a *tour de force* of devilish exuberance, delivered in an abrasive northern accent. Following that is like doing Hamlet after Olivier. Phil Daniels has never seen the film, and gives a less theatrical interpretation which emphasises the contradictions and vulnerability of Alex's character. The film ends with Alex back to his evil self, set to resume razoring and hell-raising. The play restores the final chapter of the book, in which Alex tires of the Droog life and yearns for a wife and son. I was left wondering why a 73-year old has written the most successful 'youth' art of the last 20 years.

• *A Clockwork Orange 2004*, by Anthony Burgess, directed by Ron Daniels, is at the Barbican, London on various dates until 13 March



Frank Cottrell-Boyce

GUILTY LOOKS

The Roman practice of using bread and circuses to keep the people quiet is well known. But did you ever hear of Gaius Julius, who aspired to be Roman governor of Egypt and put on extravagant games to buy public support? He hired so many gladiators, however, that his political opponents accused him of stationing a private mercenary army in Rome. They rushed in a law limiting the size of such gatherings and Gaius had to send his boys home.

Stories similar to this one about a palliative that nearly became a putsch, about the simplest escapist entertainment turning into some kind of silent invasion, crop up frequently even today. The *Gremlins*, for instance, is based around a similar idea, and when Space Invaders first appeared a theory was advanced that the Japanese had produced these fiendish devices as a way of sapping our intelligence and creativity—not to mention our small change—with a view to crippling our minds and our economy. All these stories kept coming into my mind while I was reading Sean Day Lewis' book *One Day in the Life of Television*.

This is the official report of an exercise carried out by the British Film Institute on 1 November last year. They asked people to record their feelings about that day's television. They got 18 000 replies, including over 2000 from within the industry. Sean Day Lewis reproduces extracts from 800 of these and collates the results of the rest. The usefulness and timeliness of the project goes without saying. The material is deftly organised and Day Lewis' connecting paragraphs are incisive and slyly funny. There are plenty of fascinating glimpses of the minds and habits of the programme-makers—for example, very few of them seem to watch TV, and Gordon Honeycombe calls Nicholas Witchell, Twatchell. Day Lewis' closing attack on both the liberal TV establishment and its authoritarian enemies is the first intelligent contribution to the great television debate I have read. End of book review.

In fact, television is so much a part of our lives now that the book is useful as a picture of the state of the nation. This is partly because the editor has found space for the voices of those on the margins—physical as well as

political; the lighthouse keepers and the kilted islanders as well as the single parents and the doleites. The result is a cheery celebration of our island diversity, along the lines of the old Dulux advert (may the walls of Fife have a long life, may the window sills of Winchester shine).

In fact our mental state is revealed as less cosy and more alarming than a Dulux ad would suggest. Everyone in Britain—even brave and selfless lighthouse keepers—seems to live in an agony of guilt. Viewers write about TV the way a slimmer might write about food. The food analogy crops up time and time again. Women who work in the home approach the box the way they do the fridge—grazing there throughout the day—while men

a hidden box of sweets.

You really feel the depth and force of this guilt when you reach the section on *Neighbours*. Here the dam bursts. Before this people struggle hard to justify the telly, insisting that they can handle it, view it with some detachment, learn a lot from it (nature programmes again), etc. On *Neighbours* the effort is dropped and the relief is almost tangible as they start bingeing. Most people love *Neighbours* because it is crap. They love watching the sets wobble, the lines fluff, the storylines twist out of orbit. It is the box of cream cakes after the weight-watchers' meeting, the pig that shoves two fingers up at the diet, the venal sin you know you can be forgiven.

Why do people feel so bad about the telly? Probably because they know

'Mr Lindsay compared his relationship with the telly to that of a furtive puritan with a hidden box of sweets'

expect their favourite programmes to be on the table waiting for them when they come home. They lap them up and then they fall asleep. Nearly everyone thinks they consume too much TV and of too low a quality. Nature programmes are like greens—you always mean to have more of them and less of *Coronation Street* but somehow it never works out.

There is a constant struggle to break or tame the habit, but most people feel themselves in the grip of a hopeless addiction. Mrs Bryant of Southampton would have time to relax, go out with the family, read a book if she could just beat the box. She'll never do it, she says, unless controllers help her by closing down two days a week. The guilt is of a religious intensity. In fact religion comes up just as often as food. Rebecca Swinfield of London said watching *East Enders* was like going to church in that it meant half an hour's peace and quiet in the house. Mr Lindsay compared his relationship with the telly to that of a furtive puritan with

they watch so much dross. But people watch soaps because millions of other people watch soaps, so they have something to talk about the next day at work, so they can be normal. Nothing wrong with that. It's just a pity that the common denominator is so low. The truth is that those who have escaped the attentions of the ray do seem odd, even cranky. What do they do with all the time they save? Well, according to this book, they practise the bagpipes and hold prayer meetings.

More basic than this, though, is the fear of passivity. There is the frustrating feeling that you could and should be *doing* something, intervening or at least participating in the world you see on screen. Also, viewers (as opposed to readers, say, or even listeners) seem to regard the act of watching as something only a cuppa away from a coma. They are in the grip of a dominating, fascinating, draining

intelligence, like mice in the coils of great snakes. Paradoxically, this feeling of impotence comes over most strongly from people who confess to jeering and shouting at the box. This therapeutic mime of political activity is described most poignantly by Mrs Henery of Glasgow who calls *Newsnight* her chance to have her say on the political front; but it is provoked most strongly by *Kilroy*. Nearly every entry that dealt with the silky one gibbered with vicarious anger. One woman went so far as to switch off her Hoover.

There is no reason why people when they do watch television should watch in a passive way. Apart from the fact that so much television itself actually encourages them to do just that. In this context the guilt reflects a quite positive resistance to the demand for total compliance. I don't think that this demand comes simply or only from television, but from a society that values its citizens not for what they can do but for what they can eat, watch and waste. Television is a medium that offers endless extravagant entertainments, that places wonders at your feet which your friends and lovers could never rival, and which demands in exchange, nothing. You are too puny to offer it anything substantial. All it wants from you is your attention. For now. It is worth remembering that Gaius Julius grew up to be Julius Caesar I, and the last thing he did before crossing the Rubicon was to go and inspect the gladiator school he had built in Ravenna.

An afterthought. Do the programme-makers feel just as paralysed by doubts? *Drowning in the Shallow End*—a Screen Two play starring Paul McGann—was the third major TV drama in three weeks to have a blocked writer as its central image. Programmes about people with nothing to say, for people who have lost the art of conversation. The awful thing is, oh God I don't know how to say this, I feel so guilty, but I really quite like plays like that. I mean if it was good enough for Fellini, it should be good enough for me. After all I hardly ever watch the bloody thing. Only got it for the kids. And the nature programmes.

● Sean Day Lewis, *One Day in the Life of Television*, Grafton books, hbk £12.95

Tom Wolfe meets Martin Amis

NEW REALISM AND NOVEL REALITIES

Andrew Calcutt compares *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and *London Fields* in the light of Tom Wolfe's recent pronouncements about the modern novel

There is a fair amount in these novels to put you off. They are chock-full of racial and sexual stereotypes: black 'babymamas' called Lilette, black criminals who learnt to walk the 'pimp roll' before they could crawl, women whose legs are only there to be forced open. Anti-working class? You bet. In *London Fields*, Martin Amis reduces the working class to an amalgam of darts-obsessed, wife-battering, child-abusing sentimentalists endlessly swigging from cans of 'Peculiar Brew' and bottles of 'Porno'; while Tom Wolfe is so wary or contemptuous of working class people, especially of the female or black variety, that they are strictly background material in his would-be slice of New York life, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

But, before you deposit them in the circular file, remember that the prejudices of the author have not always got in the way of a good novel. So it is here. Wolfe especially has delivered a telling portrait of a society, or a section of it, buckling under intense pressure. That pressure partly takes the form of the black and Hispanic population of New York insistently asserting itself. But it is on the ethnicity which divided and still divides the white Americans—the Wasps, the Irish, the Jews, the Italians and the rest—that Wolfe is so good. Amis hasn't got the grasp, nor the same ambition, but he has a keen eye and a keen phrase for the meanness and squalor of living in London now.

From the safety of his exclusive apartment on Park Avenue and bond trading room on Wall Street, Wolfe's protagonist Sherman McCoy considers himself omnipotent, a 'Master of the Universe'. But, cruising along in his Mercedes sports, he is only a wrong turn away from the other side of New York, 'the third world' which was once the South Bronx. McCoy is in the passenger seat when his mistress Maria hits a black high school student, and runs. Press, 'boss' politicians, lawyers and black radicals all close in for a piece of 'the great white defendant'.

Meanwhile in Amis' 'slum and plutocrat London', in the 'afterglow of Empire', four characters are carrying out a predetermined ritual. There is Nicola Six, who is what Amis calls a 'murderer'—she who is destined to be murdered; Guy, the fall guy; darts

champion Keith, who seems destined to be Nicola's murderer; and Sam, the author who begins *London Fields* by revealing what will happen to all four characters, including himself, and then sets off to tell the story in detail. Amis' characters are locked into an unchangeable plot, just as they are imprisoned in the unalterable decline of late twentieth-century London.

If decline in the Western metropolis is a theme common to both authors, they have markedly different ways of talking about it. The novelists are champions—in Wolfe's case, self-proclaimed; in Amis' by default—of two very different schools of writing. Following up the success of his novel Wolfe recently published a 'Literary manifesto for the new social novel'. Its watchwords are realism and journalism. Wolfe made his name in the sixties, with Hunter S Thompson and others, in forging a 'new journalism' which wasn't coy about combining investigative journalism, social comment and creative writing. More than 20 years later, Wolfe is turning the tables by calling on fiction writers to reinvigorate the novel through the use of journalistic techniques.

Wolfe calls *The Bonfire of the Vanities* 'a novel of New York City, in the sense that Zola had written novels of Paris'. He then indicts the novelists of the last 30 years for turning away from realism and towards absurdism, magic realism, radical disjunction and other assorted forms of self-indulgence. He who is tired of realism, argues Wolfe, is tired of life—and art. Fiction writers must stop treating the novel as a literary game and re-discover the real world. The novel really will be dead unless you get out there with notebooks in hand, commands Wolfe. If you writers are not prepared to get your hands dirty, modern fiction will be all washed up.

Amis would pass this muster in some respects only. *London Fields* is basically a dirty book, so that's alright, and it is not as labyrinthine as, say, Borges. But he does play many of the literary games which Wolfe so despises. The use of a fourth protagonist in *London Fields*, who purports to be the 'author' of the book, allows Amis to play off art and reality like facing mirrors: 'always the simulacrum, never the real thing, that's art'; Nicola, the murderess—'I am a male fantasy figure. So they [the

readers] will think you [the author in the book, and Amis the author of the book] are just a sick dreamer; lumpenprole Keith ('his life is on fast forward or picture search) becomes Keithcliff. As if mocking Wolfe, Amis jokes that 'the novel is dead', and that the USA is the subject for novelists to tackle. He ridicules the idea of the novel 'unfolding' by giving a synopsis of the whole story in the first chapter. He makes jokes about literary jokes. When it comes to literary gamesmanship, Amis is a star player.

Wolfe may have some good points about the introversion and complacency of contemporary writing but he shouldn't wrap them up in all this cod theory about realism. It is an inflated claim, even if we accept his loose use of the term to include practically all pre-modernist novel writing. For Wolfe realism is the true form for the novel. 'The introduction of realism into literature in the eighteenth century by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett was like the introduction of electricity into engineering. It was not just another device. The effect on the emotions of an everyday realism such as Richardson's was something that had never been conceived of before. It was realism that created the "absorbing" or "gripping" quality that is so peculiar to the novel.'

This is a very static view of literary form. The way in which Smollett, Richardson and Fielding developed the novel was the way in which literature kept up with a developing society. Society and the novel both developed further throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The omniscient author with a comprehensive vision presenting fully rounded, historically typical characters was the hallmark of classical realism. But well before the twentieth century dawned, Western writers were losing confidence in their own ability to describe things in such a way, and their novels began to reject the realist mode. Admitting that they could no longer offer a coherent view of reality, novelists offered us splinters of a vision and even celebrated its fragmentation. The new form of the novel was again very much the product of its age.

In his own turn Wolfe is a child of his times, and his work proves it. He can strip his writing of the outward

signs of degenerate modernism, but he cannot rid himself of the combination of uncertainty and self-consciousness which is its content. What Wolfe comes up with is a style which purportedly rejects artifice, but which in fact is as affected as the most artificial modern fabulist. All the brand-name detail and verité dialogue ('Geddoudahere'), not to mention the newspaper report epilogue, which make up the super-realism of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, are in fact most apt, whether Wolfe realises it or not, to convey the obsessive insecurities of late twentieth-century society. The fact that his novel does not even try to depict the way in which many sections of society experience the modern city, both reveals the limitations of any attempt to remake a classical realist novel and at the same time assists quite effectively the sense of isolation and paranoia it sets out to describe.

It is striking that Amis, with his tricky literary techniques, is far more successful in getting to grips with a wide range of Big City victims. He goes into areas where Wolfe with his notebook wouldn't dare venture. Even as he is playing word games with his characters' names and toying with notions of authorship which would have amused Flann O'Brien, he claims to be writing a 'true story', a 'documentary'. It doesn't mean that his work is more entertaining or even successful in dealing with the forces at work in the Big City than Wolfe. He isn't. It shows that form considered in the abstract (Wolfe's new preoccupation) is an unreliable guide in these matters.

The content of *The Bonfire of the Vanities* is nervousness. The nervousness which is now reaching epidemic proportions in bourgeois circles, but which is never openly admitted. 'Business as usual' chorus the world's rulers, the Masters of the Universe, studiously ignoring the chasm beneath their feet. Wolfe has reproduced in fiction the real discrepancy between the crisis of modern society and its confident self-image. This is what makes *Bonfire of the Vanities* such a striking novel.

- Martin Amis, *London Fields*, Jonathan Cape hbk £12.95
- Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Picador pbk £4.99

In defense of the poor in El Salvador,
he fought with the only weapon he had...
the truth.



ROMERO ¹⁵

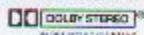
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Books about environmental issues are big business today, and none is bigger than *The End of Nature*. Bill McKibben's first book is already into a third edition in the USA and is being translated into 13 languages. *The End of Nature* has touched thousands of fearful readers by bringing together traditional conservationist concerns and the modern theories of eco-doom—particularly fears about global warming.

McKibben believes that modern changes to the environment are a bigger threat to the Earth and its people than world war. By changing the atmosphere and hence the weather, he says, humanity has created the threat of rising sea levels, crop failures and, ultimately, social collapse. He warns that we have passed, or are on the verge of passing, the point of no return because we have brought about the 'end of nature':

'By changing the weather, we make every spot on Earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us.'

McKibben is very pessimistic about the future. The only solution he sees is for there to be less people on Earth, consuming less, and ultimately abandoning humanity's ten thousand-year long attempt to control 'nature'. He concedes that these changes will take a few generations to achieve since 'the terrible truth is that most of us rather like the rut'. His only hope is that future ecological disasters might shake people up and force them to face the inescapable facts of what needs to be done.

So what does *The End of Nature* represent: a scientific insight into the inevitable consequence of such trends as global warming, or another example of 'eco-hysteria' bordering on millenarianism?

McKibben's book is similar in many respects to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, written back in 1962, which painted an equally gloomy picture of how nature was being devastated by DDT in pesticides. Almost 30 years on, the world has comfortably survived that threat and Carson's theory looks laughably dated. In *The End of Nature*, however, McKibben repeats Carson's mistakes: he exaggerates the problem, fails to see how the development of society enables it to tackle problems it created, and he has a misplaced reverence for the sanctity of nature.

'The salient characteristic of this new nature is its unpredictability', asserts McKibben, 'just as the salient feature of the old nature was its utter dependability'. This just doesn't stand up. Nature has never been static or utterly dependable. It has evolved through a myriad of constantly changing states and no doubt will continue to do so. For example, by all

The End of Nature?

ECO-DOOM DAY BOOK

John Gibson reviews *The End Of Nature* by Bill McKibben



expert accounts we are due for another ice age within the next few centuries. There is no basis for believing that the changes brought about by human activity will lead to more dramatic changes than those nature itself might cause.

Progress and survive

The advance of today's scientific and technological capabilities has not made catastrophe inevitable: on the contrary, it has raised the possibility of humanity influencing natural changes to its own benefit, or at least of living with the consequences of a major change such as an ice age. In this respect, McKibben's concern that 'we have ended the thing that has, at least in modern times, defined nature for us—its separation from human society' is misplaced. A defining

feature of 'modern times' is that our knowledge of natural processes, and ability to use and control them, have expanded in parallel—inevitably so, since knowledge of nature requires transformative action upon it.

McKibben's utopian solutions reflect his naive notion that human society could have developed and could continue to survive without simultaneously transforming its natural environment. All we need, he suggests, are our own timeless natural attributes: 'As birds have flight, we have the special gift of reason.' And if we returned to the kind of relationship humans had with nature ten thousand years ago 'we would still be so young, and perhaps ready to revel in the timelessness that surrounds us'.

In fact we only have the capacity to reason because of the development of civilised society on the basis of technical progress. Ten thousand years ago there could be no conception of 'reveling in nature', since people were little more than savages, brutalised by the way that nature dominated their lives.

McKibben romanticises, even deifies, nature. He points out that 'nature is as much an idea as a fact. And in some way that idea is connected with God'. He wants to be closer to nature, yet he recognises that nature is much more attractive as a romantic idea than as a rude fact which only modern society makes comfortable; 'we like to camp, but for the weekend'.

What binge?

So he looks at nature as an idea, or an ideal; an ideal in keeping with the laments of the introspective Western middle classes. From the comfort of a modern house in the Adirondak mountains in upstate New York, McKibben confesses that we are all guilty of living it up at nature's expense: 'We, all of us in the first world, have participated in something of a binge, a half-century of unbelievable prosperity and ease.'

Even ignoring the fact that his 50 years of easy living includes the Second World War, things look a little different sitting here in the south side of Glasgow. But McKibben needn't cross the Atlantic for the alternative view; the ghettos of New York City would serve even better. The most characteristic feature of modern capitalist society is stagnation, not unchecked growth. The vast majority of people in the Western 'first world' (not to mention the third) do not experience life as an orgiastic binge, but as a constant struggle to secure the basics. McKibben might have grown tired of 'unbelievable prosperity and ease', but that is what the rest of us aspire to enjoying. To fulfil that aspiration, we need far more economic growth and technological progress, not less.

The view McKibben expresses is very much akin to the romantic movement of two centuries ago; and in many ways the practical response to

such views should also be the same. Chastellux, a supporter of the Enlightenment in France circa 1790, put it simply: 'In conclusion, let us say that to regret "the good old days" one must not know what they were like.'

Unfortunately, however, it is not enough just to dismiss McKibben's romantic view of the past. His popular appeal is rooted in the widespread contemporary fear of eco-doom in the future. So are we really facing an environmental calamity? And is the only solution, as McKibben claims, to curtail economic growth, or even to regress? Let us answer these questions with reference to global warming, which McKibben considers the greatest environmental problem facing humanity.

McKibben tends to exaggerate the problem compared with any rational investigation based on current knowledge. In addition, he imposes absolute limits on our ability to deal with global warming; from the observation that society as it is seems unable to solve the problem, McKibben concludes that this is how it must always be. What are the facts?

Hot potato

As a by-product of many modern industrial processes and forest clearing, society is increasing the amounts of various gases in the atmosphere—gases which trap the warmth of the sun by preventing its total re-radiation from Earth into space. At present carbon dioxide is the main culprit, though in the future methane may become the biggest contributor.

Most scientists believe that global warming has already begun, and some believe that between now and the year 2050 average world temperatures will rise by between three and five degrees centigrade. If this were to occur it would lead to a major change in weather patterns, a shift in the areas suitable for agriculture—the American grain belts would move into southern Canada, for example—and a rise in sea levels.

McKibben takes this temperature rise as the minimum we can expect, explaining various 'positive feedback' mechanisms that might cause a further increase. He fails to mention the 'negative feedback' mechanisms which might reduce warming. In particular he insists that the oceans could not soak up much of the extra carbon dioxide; yet his view is based on research done back in the fifties, and most scientific opinion now accepts that far too little is known to make such sweeping judgements.

Contrary to the impression given by McKibben, there are increasing doubts and debates about whether the Earth is definitely set for a significant increase in temperatures, and about how dramatic the effects of such a rise would be. He assumes that sea levels will rise by about two metres, and that this would destroy property and farming some way inland. Yet latest estimates issued by the American

Geophysical Union at a meeting in San Francisco last December suggest a more likely rise of 0.3 metres, since in the short term a warmer world would be a wetter world which would lead to a build up of continental ice sheets rather than their diminution.

However, the big question remains, what would the consequences be even if the sea did rise by as much as two metres? Yes, it would be a major change, and the concomitant rise in temperatures would be as rapid as had occurred at any time in the history of the world. But there is no reason to believe that this would inevitably be a terrible thing, any more than a good one.

Advance to go

Environmental change presents a serious problem only if a society lacks the technical resources to cope with it. For example, over the past few years drought has hit both sub-Saharan Africa and the American Mid-West; but only one of these areas has suffered large-scale starvation. In the age of Star Wars and micro-computers, we should be more than able to cope with global warming even on the scale which McKibben envisages. The barrier to doing so is the capitalist system, with its restrictive profit laws, national rivalries and hoarding of technology.

For example, dealing with a genuine global warming problem would require global cooperation and coordination. But the fact that ministers from 65 countries meeting in Holland last November couldn't even agree on measures to regulate, never mind reduce, carbon dioxide emissions, doesn't encourage optimism about their ability to handle the demographic changes a warmer world would bring. And if warnings that the Maldiv Islands will be submerged were to prove correct, imagine the debate that would follow about whether their inhabitants were 'genuine refugees' or just climatic ones.

A more advanced and rational social system would be able to deal with these changes, if they occurred. The problem is not a potential global warming as such, but the limitations imposed on our ability to deal with it by the present social system. And, by the by, when we come to looking at the problems thrown up by that system, global warming comes well behind such mass killers as malnutrition and war.

The uncertain prospect of global warming in no way validates McKibben's yearning to turn the clocks back to a mythical golden age of simple societies and harmony with nature. If it does become a significant phenomenon, it will be one more incentive to advance to the greater mastery of nature which only an expanding, planned economy would bring.

• Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, Viking, £12.99



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

ROMANIAN REVOLUTION?

Contrary to Mick Hume's editorial (February) 1989 was a year of revolution in Eastern Europe. The great changes were brought about by the actions of millions on the streets of every capital, and tyrants like Honecker and Ceausescu fell. That adds up to a revolution in my book. The fact that those involved did not follow the model of the 1917 Russian Revolution is not surprising, seeing as they believed they were revolting against communism.

You say that a revolution must involve more, a struggle to smash the state and create new institutions of power. That sounds good, but how realistic is it? It is easy for revolutionary purists to criticise those who took to the streets against repressive dictatorships for not going far enough. But surely our time would be better spent trying to emulate them; after all, we live in a country where you can't even mobilise a decent march against Margaret Thatcher, never mind overthrow her.

John Mason
London

MUCH MORE CHAOS

In editing my letter on Chaos theory (February) you made a bit of a slip. The line 'Newtonian mechanics is "merely" the application of Schrodinger's equation $\Psi = E\Psi$ ' should have read 'quantum mechanics is "merely" the application of Schrodinger's equation $\Psi = E\Psi$ '. This unfortunate slip makes me appear like a dickhead.

Gordon Guthrie
London

Gordon Guthrie's main point is that modern physics, in particular quantum theory and Chaos theory, represents a revolution compared with Newtonian mechanics. But even Albert Einstein, one of the

originators of quantum theory, saw it as only the best available theory on the basis of Newtonian concepts: 'No one must think', he wrote, 'that Newton's great creation can be overthrown in any real sense by this or any other theory'.

Quantum theory is undoubtedly a very powerful computational tool, but the very fact that it is, at its core, speculative, idealistic and inconsistent with other accepted physical theories (after more than 60 years of attempts to overcome the problem) indicates a deficiency. Richard Feynman, Nobel prize winner, recommended that people stop trying to fathom out the basis of the theory and just settle for using it: 'I think I can safely say that no one understands quantum mechanics.'

This is why the article on Chaos that Guthrie found so offensive ('The science of despair', December 1989) referred to quantum as 'partial speculative alternatives'. When we turn to Chaos we see all the same points and more. Firstly, Chaos is very much a re-jigging of classical mechanics and Newtonian concepts. Secondly, unlike quantum there is certainly no consensus that it should be accepted, even as a useful computational tool. And thirdly, the point that Guthrie missed: while Chaos may well capture the essence of some physical systems, its rise to popularity is based on speculation and is connected with the prevailing political climate. Check out December's issue of the *Face* to see how Chaos is used to justify pessimism about the future of mankind.

Julia McGarn
Durham

Gordon Guthrie asks: 'Is *Living Marxism* on the side of the dragons?' My answer is no. One of the great developments that came out of the Enlightenment was the development of science, not as some mystical alchemy, but as a study of the physical and natural world. And further—the Enlightenment introduced the idea that science

should explain as well as simply describe, although in no sense should explanation be equated with some simplistic determinism.

Chaos theory takes a big step back from this development. It appears to find justification in abstracted patterns, and comfort in their recurrence at different sizes and applications. In the book *Chaos*, James Gleick approvingly cites Mandelbrot's experiment of pumping cotton-price data through the computer, and draws the following conclusions:

'Each particular price change was random and unpredictable. But the sequence of changes was independent of scale: curves for daily price changes and monthly price changes matched perfectly. Incredibly, analysed Mandelbrot's way, the degree of variation had remained constant over a tumultuous 60-year period that saw two world wars and a depression.'

So cotton-price variation (a man-made effect) becomes a certain pattern when the numbers are sifted through a particular equation...but to what use? This pattern not only fails to reflect factors we might expect to be important (two world wars and a depression) but celebrates their very disappearance.

This is not science to me, but a retreat from the outside world to some mystical apparition. At this rate, I wouldn't be surprised to find a Chaos theorist 'rediscovering' the Platonic numbers and having the gall to shout 'Eureka!'

Suke Kurey
London

One area in which Chaos theory shows great promise is in helping our understanding of global environmental fluctuations. Here, a large number of different pressures combine to cause weather patterns to change, very rapidly, from one relatively stable, predictable situation, through a 'chaotic' intermediate period, to settle into a quite new, but also stable situation. It is thought that a combination of environmental factors could have driven the Earth out of the last ice age in this manner and provokes the fear that human activity might be forcing us into an 'unstable' chaotic period, after which the Earth's weather patterns will settle into an unknown, and possibly unsuitable for us, climatic state.

Now consider the economy of a nation, subject to the abrupt and often violent forces provided by the capitalist marketplace, and lacking strategic planning. This economy truly behaves in a chaotic manner and prediction of future trends in economic development becomes fraught with problems.

In contrast, consider a well-regulated economy in which the

health of the industrial base of the nation dictates the state of the market and the violent dominating influence of an unregulated market is removed. This system is now much more stable and, with the right guidance, can be kept on the 'attractor' of Chaos theory where prediction is, to a reasonable degree, possible. Deviation into the chaotic realm of market dominance is guarded against, and everybody, particularly Marx, is kept happy.

Dr Stuart Green
Birmingham

ARE YOU WHAT YOU WATCH?

I always find Frank Cottrell-Boyce's articles on TV fresh and funny. But I do notice a slightly worrying concession to the you-are-what-you-watch theory creeping in. In the February edition he warns us that watching the militaristic *Thundercats* cartoon could be turning children into little men and women of violence. But no child needs *Thundercats* to teach them about 'survivalist and authoritarian' attitudes—they're surrounded by them in everyday life. If they relate to violence on television, it's only because it reflects a brutish reality—of the sort which Frank himself depicts so well in some of the grittier episodes of *Brookside* which he has written.

In suggesting that TV shapes people's behaviour, Frank is getting worryingly close to the arguments used by an old reactionary like Mary Whitehouse in support of censorship. Of course I am not lumping him in with her. But, contrary to what he says, there are misguided left-wing supporters of censorship who will use precisely programmes like *Thundercats* in support of their wrong-headed case.

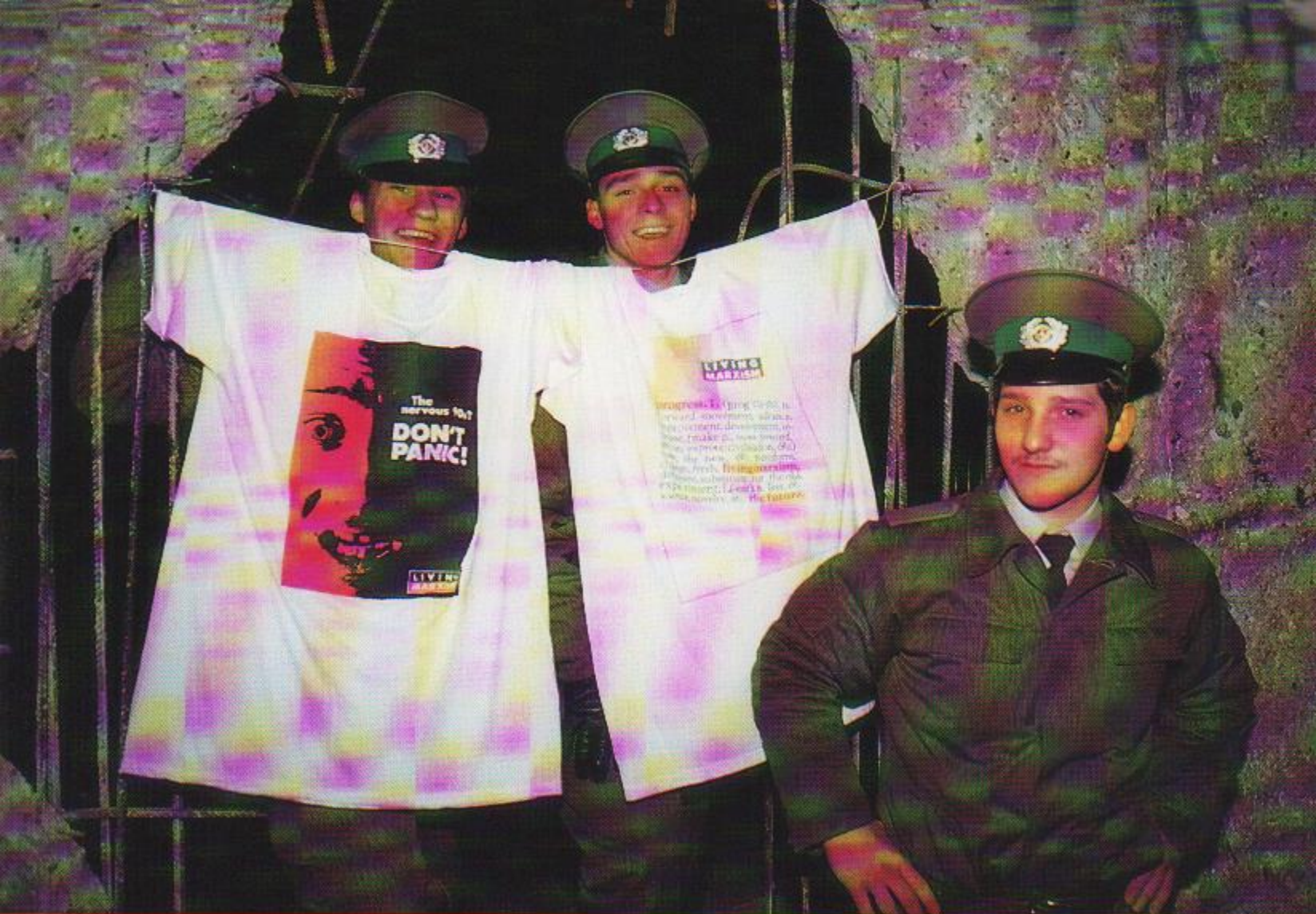
Kathy Savvas
Southampton

'MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M FROM CREWE...'

Mick Hume's 'Confessions of a communist' (January) reduces the successes of the GLC to 'trimming tube fares'. Is that the most positive comment you can make? I would not suggest that the GLC struck a mighty blow for socialism. But Ken Livingstone and the GLC did more to unite rank and file Londoners around left-wing radicalism than any party on the left.

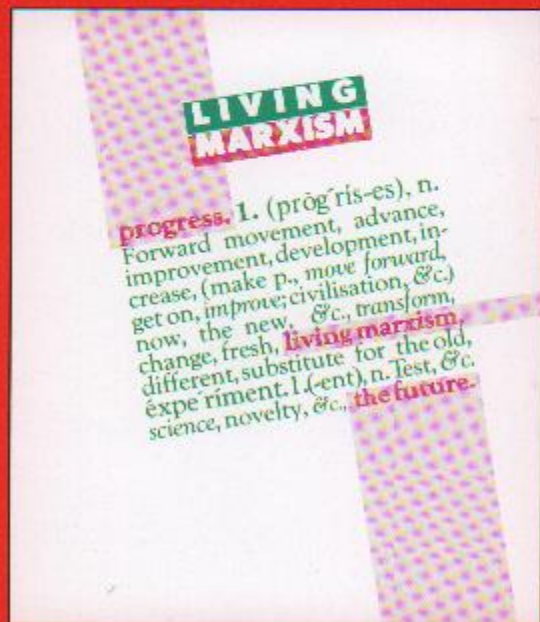
The GLC's success which you scoff at was halted by its abolition, in the same way as your much-feted acid house parties are being stopped—and by the same dictator. Do not give more credibility to acid house than the GLC of 1981-86.

Roger Bromley
Crewe



Berlin Wall, January 1990

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