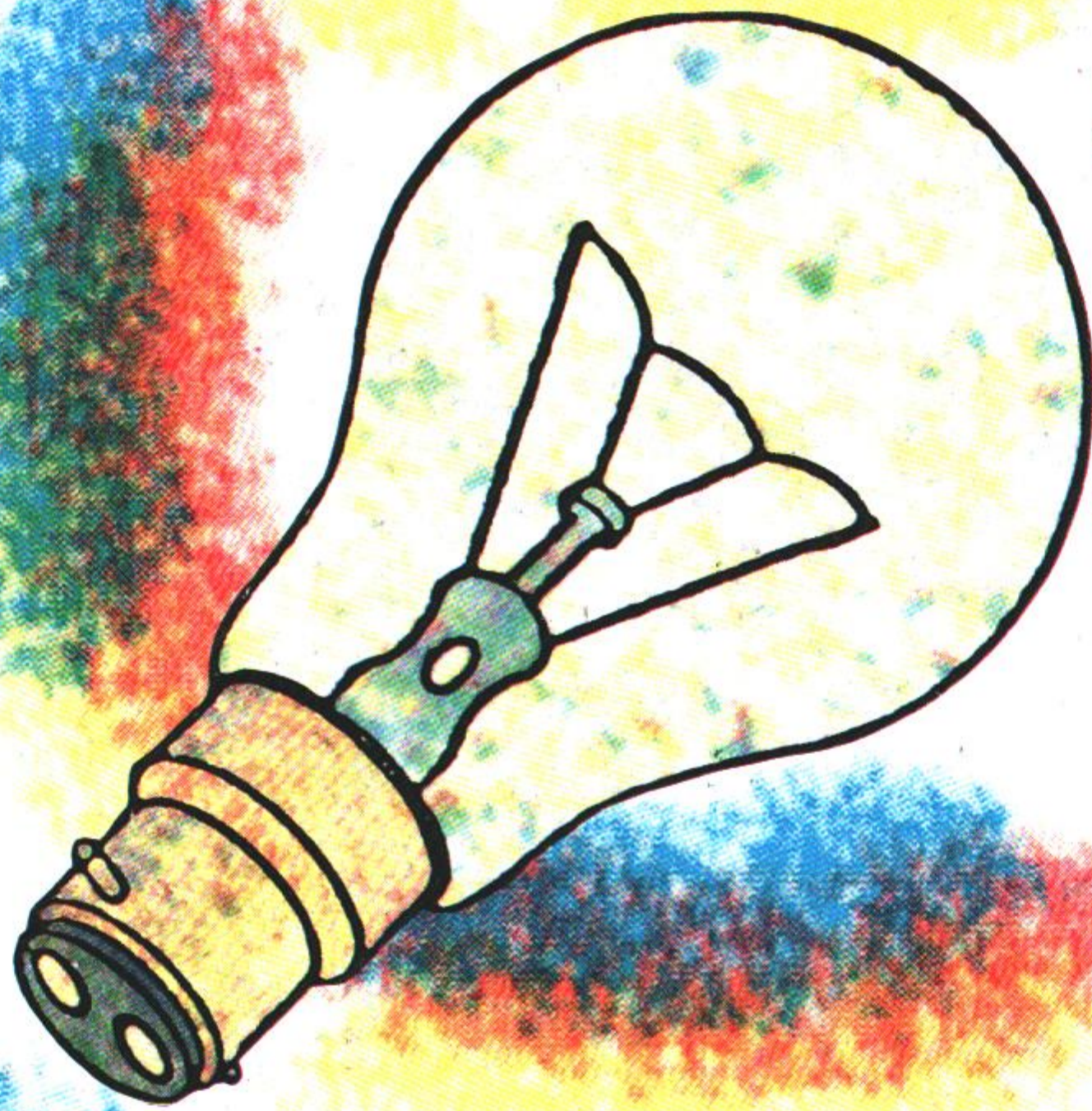


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Towards 2000: a time for revolutionary ideas

Africans starve while their best land is used to grow flowers for export to Europe.

The remains of Iraq crumble into a bomb-blasted, disease-ridden cemetery, while its destroyers march in ticker-tape parades down Broadway.

The market economy brings the people of Eastern Europe neither jobs nor homes, but *Benny Hill Shows* and unaffordable Big Mac hamburgers.

And even in the wealthy heartlands of the West, unemployment soars while real wages plunge.

Capitalism is stumbling towards the year

2000 dripping blood and dirt from every pore. Yet the lack of alternatives on offer means that it is now widely believed that the bankrupt market system will be the only way of running the world in the twenty-first century. The nineties are crying out for some revolutionary ideas.

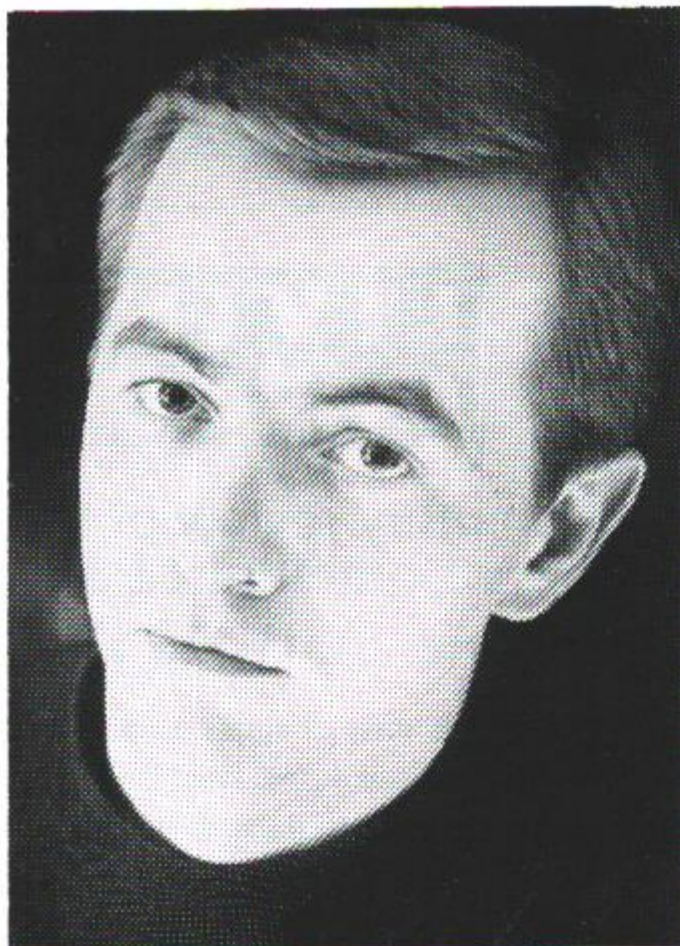
For too long, the governments of the Western world and their press officers have been allowed to monopolise political debate. They have been able to shift the blame for the global crisis on to the backs of others, to find scapegoats for the failures of their system. Their excuses are often childishly transparent. But their distortions of the truth have gone

virtually unchallenged.

Look at the way in which the Western powers have branded the third world as responsible for many of the ills facing humanity, be they dictatorship, disease or drug abuse. This argument is not only racist, it is ridiculous. It accuses the most downtrodden people on Earth of causing the planet's problems, and turns the victims into the criminals. It reflects the outlook of a fat businessman eating at the window table of a plush city restaurant, who believes that the hungry homeless on the street outside should be arrested for spoiling his dinner. Yet today such prejudice against the third world passes for insightful political analysis in some of the most prestigious ivory towers of the Western intelligentsia.

Or take another successful exercise in scapegoating—the carefully cultivated uproar about the big British banks charging extra high interest rates to smaller businesses. This is a blatant attempt to divert the blame for the recession on to a handful of bankers, and to take the heat off other capitalists by casting them in the role of victim. The endemic crisis of the system can thus be reduced to the greed of a few financial institutions.

What the debt crisis in the small business sector today really exposes is the parasitical character not just of the banks, but of British



**editor
mick hume**

capitalism as a whole. It confirms that the much-hyped enterprise culture of the eighties was an illusion, sustained not by entrepreneurial drive but by cheap credit, a 'revolution' financed on tick. Far from being the black sheep of British capitalism, the banks have been the system's saviours, allowing it to keep up an unreal appearance of dynamism for the best part of a decade. Now the debt crisis has come to a head, it provides an ideal opportunity for exposing the truth about an entire economic system in slump. Yet when Tory MPs and newspapers set up their diversion by blaming the big banks, the opposition meekly followed them down that sidestreet to nowhere.

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The scapegoating charades staged on behalf of Western capitalism are having a far more impressive impact than they deserve, because many who would once have been numbered among the system's harshest critics now accept its arguments. So Soviet spokesmen have stopped pointing to mass unemployment in the West as an indictment of the market economy, and started suggesting that a similarly sharp rise in joblessness in the East is a price worth paying to get a bit of free enterprise going there.

The moral collapse of one-time left-wing critics of capitalism is just as obvious in Britain. The most blatant piece of anti-communist claptrap I have seen broadcast for a long time is Channel 4's *GBH*, written by ex-radical Alan Bleasdale. His last major TV work was about the scourge of unemployment. As unemployment sweeps the country once more, this latest one is about the scourge of militant socialism.

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When nobody seems willing even to ask questions about whether capitalism is the way things should be, never mind coming up with any new answers, the system can carry on dragging us through one thorny crisis after another. Many people are bitter about what is being done to them in the present recession, and you would be hard-pressed to find much genuine enthusiasm for the market economy. But it is at least as hard to find firm belief in an anti-capitalist alternative, given the *GBH* job done on it by turncoats calling themselves socialists.

Where do we begin to turn things around? We have to start with ideas. Contrary to the view put about by our enemies, Marxists have no need to conspire to create a social crisis. We are surrounded by evidence that capitalism is quite capable of doing that without any assistance from us. What is required is a way of convincing people that the crisis points towards both the possibility and the necessity of changing the way the

affairs of society are run.

Of course ideas alone are never enough. Only a dreamer could be satisfied with nice thoughts. We need a practical alternative to capitalism. However, that aim cannot be realised immediately. And before we can hope to achieve it, we must come to terms with some home truths which too many on the left have tried to dodge.

Until more people accept the *intellectual* case for change, a *practical* alternative to capitalism will remain out of reach

There is no country to which we can turn as an example of a practical alternative to the market. Those in the West who have tried to do so in the past, choosing the Soviet Union, China or some other corner of the Stalinist bloc as their own little socialist heaven, have now come thoroughly unstuck. The fall of the regime in Albania finally closes the option for Western socialists to worship a Motherland from afar. And in our opinion, that is entirely for the best. These states have been used as crutches, and shaky crutches at that. Those who could not win the argument for fundamental change in the West were able to sidestep the problem by pointing to the existence of the Stalinist countries as 'proof' that socialism was possible. Their fantasies only served to confirm the popular view that the left was removed from the real world, and to discredit socialism by associating it with the corrupt regimes of the East.

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Nor is there any ready-made practical alternative available in Britain today. There is no semblance of an anti-capitalist movement which we could simply call on people to join. All of the old labour movements and radical campaigns are finished. Too much time was wasted chasing around after trade union bureaucrats and Labour Party bosses even when the notion of a mass working class movement led by them meant something in Britain. Now that it means nothing, when the old unions are in their death throes and Kinnock's Labour

Party is living on the other side of the railway tracks, such an orientation would be a bigger waste than ever.

It is time to forget all of the failed short cuts of the past, and accept that we need to forge a new alternative of our own. But that cannot just be declared. It has to be fought for first and foremost in the battle of ideas. Until more people accept the *intellectual* case for change,

a *practical* alternative will remain out of reach. Which is why we need to concentrate on building up and popularising the intellectual case against capitalism today. There is no shortage of evidence upon which we can call. The success of *Living Marxism* over the past couple of years gives us a glimpse of the potential.

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To be effective, revolutionary ideas for the nineties need to focus their fire against the dominant political themes of our conservative times. This month's issue of *Living Marxism* confronts the racist assumptions behind the new consensus supporting Western imperialism in the third world, and exposes some of the myths about the success of the market economy. These are the sort of debates we intend to pursue in the period ahead, and at the Towards 2000 conference which we are sponsoring in London this month (see p25). By disposing of the key arguments associated with the modern capitalist class, we can take the first step towards disposing of their system.

There may not be a practical alternative that we can put into operation tomorrow. But if we start by raising the questions that point towards the need for one, we can shake the complacent assumption that the miserable state of affairs capitalism has created today is the best humanity can hope for towards 2000 and beyond. The battle to determine the destiny of the twenty-first century has already begun.

Letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms.

Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or fax them on (071) 377 0346

Greens for zero growth

John Gibson's critique of the Greens ('The Greens: eaten up', May) was most admirable. Though he should have said that Green 'zero growth' policies would mean a return to the Stone Age rather than zero.

Environmentalists tend to conflate two separate issues. One is genuine, the other is bogus. They are rightly concerned about environmental damage. Ultimately, more and better technology can handle this. They are wrongly concerned about the conservation of natural resources. The historical data shows long-run decreasing prices of virtually all natural resources, thus indicating that resources are becoming less, not more, scarce.

But so-called 'zero-growth' environmentalists display both an ignorance of economics and a disregard of scientific and technological advance. They ignore the fact that previously valueless resources become valuable and currently valuable resources decline in value or become obsolete. Progress increases our available options. If anything, we should use more resources now because future generations will have better technology.

Socialism has traditionally been a pro-growth, pro-material progress doctrine. Its main complaint has been that capitalism fails to distribute the rewards of this progress equitably and, in Marxist idiom, 'does not make full use of the productive forces'. Zero-growth environmentalism is in profound conflict with genuine socialist ideals and can only make third world famine conditions universal.

Kevin McFarlane *Milton Keynes*

A Green sees red

Jim Edmonds' emotional response (letters, June) to the article 'The Greens: eaten up'

(May) does not tackle *Living Marxism's* main criticisms of the Green movement. The magazine's inaccuracies over party membership and the poll tax are a symptom of its greater misunderstanding of Green Party thinking, including the debate over growth.

Massive investment in energy-efficient technology—one of the Greens' main energy policy initiatives—would not result in lower living standards (probably the reverse). Only a prejudiced mind—or a mind conditioned by outdated thinking—could see 'no growth' on Green terms as regressive and backward-looking. In my view, Green politics are progressive.

The extent to which *Living Marxism* ascribed anti-growth and anti-technology attitudes to the Greens mirrors only their ignorance of Green thinking as a new world view. The fact that the RCP's leading writers should use right-wing prejudices and stereotypes to undermine the Green movement indicates how it too can stoop to cheap opportunism—rather than propagating the dialectical method—to win supporters.

Until we examine properly the economic analysis of the Greens we will continue to use outdated and anachronistic terms in our discussions. More importantly, we will ignore a whole body of knowledge that can contribute to ending 'Midnight in the Century'.

Rory Ridley-Duff *Ashford*

A Red sees Green

'"No growth" is not about a cut in living standards', says Jim Edmonds (letters, June). But the Greens have never, in the recent period at any rate, spelt out what they considered to be a decent standard of living. Their latest manifesto says that their 'basic income' scheme would offer amounts 'similar to the supplementary benefits'. One can only assume that they consider poverty-level

supplementary benefits to be reasonable. And my suspicions that the Greens were planning a crackdown on the low paid were confirmed by their statement that the present system discourages people from working: '[our] remodelled tax structure...would remove the disincentive to work which is associated with the payment of supplementary benefits'. The words 'on yer bike' spring to mind.

While they are coy about openly advocating a cut in living standards, the Greens do believe that our current levels of world consumption are too much for the planet to take. In *A Green Manifesto* of 1988, leading Greens Sandy Irvine and Alec Ponton argue that 'humanity as a whole has already transgressed the planet's carrying capacity'. Now, rather than openly advocating mass poverty, they suggest a dramatic reduction of the human numbers instead—including a 50 per cent reduction in Britain's population. How, I wondered, might this reduction be achieved? My worst fears were confirmed when I found them warmly recommending the writings of the American biologist Paul Erlich—who opposed food aid to India in 1976 on the grounds that it would 'artificially [allow] more people to live on the land than live from it'. Starvation and the dole? I rest my case.

Sharon Savvas *Leicester*

Lord King a wage-slave?

Mike Johnson (letters, June) suggests that the 'much-maligned' Lord King is a worker because he earns a wage, although Marxists dare not admit this point because of his 'privileged background'. In fact there's no reason to feel shy about Lord King's proletarian credentials—he doesn't have any. Lord King is nothing more than a parasite who feeds off the profits reaped from the labour of others. He might receive a salary, but he is no more exploited than the Queen, John Major, or Robin Leigh-Pemberton.

The comparison between Lord King and factory-owning Frederick Engels is equally misplaced. Neither could be described as proletarian, but the similarity ends there. Engels devoted a lifetime to the workers' movement: Lord King to the interests of the capitalist class. And King would certainly never have followed Engels' example of frittering away the company profits on an impoverished family in the East End—particularly if the family name was Marx.

Steve McMahon Birmingham

Pseuds' corner

I am disappointed with the Marxist Review of Books, which I find dull, confused and at times, an outside candidate for 'Pseuds' corner—in other words, the sort of thing you read in any 'quality' newspaper. I thought the aim of Marxist criticism was to produce ideological clarity and place 'art' in its class context, not erect a hierarchy of literature. I suspect you would claim that James Joyce was a better novelist than Stephen King—I certainly know who I prefer!

Danny O'Dare Devon

Food before politics

I agree with Mick Hume ('The myth of the White Man's burden', June) that the West is a major cause of the problems in the third world. But I reject his conclusion that 'those who call for more Western intervention...can only increase the burden on the backs of the wretched of the Earth'. I disagree for one overwhelming reason—the plight of those wretched today.

At this very moment, millions of Kurds, Bangladeshis and sub-Saharan Africans face death. Even as you read this letter, dozens of people will have died—of exposure, of typhoid and diarrhoea, and of malnutrition. Hume's prescription of non-intervention offers no solution to this silent holocaust. The Bangladeshis and Africans themselves are begging for Western aid—not because they are secret imperialists, but because they understand that airy principles won't fill a malnourished belly.

So let's have the food first and the politics later. I don't like what the West has done to the third world, but I dislike the prospect of mass starvation even more.

Jackie McKay Plymouth

Midnight in the Century

Frank Richards's 'Midnight in the Century' (December 1990 and April 1991) makes a significant contribution to understanding the daily experience of our political lives. In Australia, after eight years of Labor government the situation is much as Frank describes it in Britain.

The achievements of the years of 'successful' Labor government have been a massive hike in corporate profits, a sharp decline in the wages share of GDP, the erosion of social services, deregulation and privatisation—policies

similar in intention and effect to the Conservatives in Britain. The Australian Labor Party is now completely discredited. Membership of the New Zealand Labour Party fell from 100 000 in 1983 to 7000 in 1990. The union movement is seen to function as an arm of the government, and union membership is declining fast.

The result has been demoralisation, cynicism and apathy. Reformism has been discredited, but along with it has been a loss of belief in the possibility of making gains for the working class. The most radical of the ex-Laborists talk in terms of defensive action—'protecting' living standards, etc.

I would like to raise a few points, though, more in the way of question than criticism. First, there has been little mention of the non-working sections of the working class, especially the unemployed. This group seems set to be a permanent feature of capitalist society in this period (here, youth unemployment is conservatively estimated to be well over 20 per cent). Second, in the discussion so far, heavy emphasis has been placed on the role of ideas and the need for theoretical development. This is clearly necessary, but what about practice? And third, how can an organisation like the RCP avoid the destructive consequences of a prolonged period of isolation from the mass of working people?

Ian Bolas Freemantle, Australia

Throughout the debate concerning 'Midnight in the Century', *Living Marxism* has insisted on the necessity of reformulating Marxism in order to make it relevant to a contemporary class politics. And yet it simultaneously insists on giving absolutely no credence to post-modernism. This, I think, is a grave mistake. What seems to have been ignored is that Marxism is a 'modernist' project, and post-modernism is nothing more than modernism's self-critique. In this respect, postmodern thought, or at least some aspects of it, deserves to be treated with respect.

I refer especially to the influence of the poststructuralist Michel Foucault. He emphasised *difference*, as all postmodernists do, and yet never denied the possibility of radical change. His importance lies in his assertion that capitalism can only be fought by challenging local power/knowledge relations. Of course, this means that the totality of the capitalist system cannot be overthrown by one group, namely 'the workers', but it does mean that capitalism can be overthrown. Man can dominate his environment as long as he recognises its diversity. In an age of increasing social fragmentation this strategy seems to me to be the best Marxists could adopt.

Darren Webb Blackpool

A Orgill's criticism (letters, June) of Geoff Pilling's intellectualism and lack of attention to 'mood' ('Stalinism and the crisis of leadership', April) underestimates the importance of intellectual thought and overestimates the importance of 'mood' or activism. For Pilling, restating past left (Trotskyist) traditions is ample to win over class-conscious workers previously misled by Stalinism. Whereas

Pilling sees these workers as still politically active (in the anti-poll tax campaigns, etc) and assumes recession will draw in the rest of the class, Orgill states that there is little activity and until there is, the left can have little influence.

The reality—blurred by their narrow militancy of the seventies and the temporary successes of the radical left—is that no class-conscious section of the working class exists and that Marxist thought has become a sect-like debate in which even the present is discussed in relation to the past. Whereas Pilling does not see the necessity for further developing Marxist ideas, Orgill denies the possibility in the current conditions of inactivity. Today, the re-establishing of Marxism is very much an intellectual project—activity in itself will provide no solutions. The pressing task today, denied by both Pilling and Orgill, is the establishment of a new intellectual foundation by appropriating and criticising current perceptions of reality and reality itself. Only then can we effectively intervene and use any resurgence of activity to build a wider audience.

Dave Chandler Newcastle

According to A Orgill, Geoff Pilling is patronising towards the working class because he fails to take into account their moods. Orgill believes that mood is critical to the potential of revolutionaries to influence workers. Therefore, we can only safely conclude that this potential is now at a minimum because working class experience of Stalinism has made it hostile to anything anti-capitalist.

That might be true for workers in the East, but what of workers' experience in Britain? Here, the labour movement was never anti-capitalist. Are we then to assume that the working class in Britain is now in the right mood to be influenced by anti-capitalist politics? I think not. So whether Pilling is patronising or not about 'mood' is irrelevant.

Orgill says that Marxists cannot engage the working class until the 'objective conditions of capitalism are more exposed', but does not mention how this exposure will take place. Is it through capitalism itself? Or will the working class suddenly realise that not all is what it seems under this system? The point is that it will have to be Marxists, through everyday struggle, who expose the conditions of capitalism.

D O'Donovan London

Bushed

In his rush to answer Frank Cottrell-Boyce (letters, June), Alan Harding mistakes the year of the US presidential election between Bush and Dukakis in his own main article, 'The death of parliamentary politics?'. He claims the election was in 1990, however research has shown that it actually took place two years earlier. Could this mistake be a consequence of the lack of dynamism in the politics of the Western world which Harding's article looked at?

John Marsh Newcastle

Is socialism fini



The twentieth century began with the battle cries of socialist revolution and working class power striking fear into the heart of the capitalist order. It is ending in a deafening chorus from both right and left of obituaries for socialism, Marxism and class politics.

Still reeling from the collapse of the Stalinist world, many socialists are abandoning an anti-

capitalist outlook and taking refuge in pleas for a socially responsible, ecologically sensitive capitalism—just as recession in the West and war and famine in the third world are exposing capitalism as a bankrupt system which is sensitive and responsible only to the demands of profit.

Here, Mike Freeman takes issue with the

Budapest 1991: Stalinism failed to deliver the goods, but the market has delivered only empty promises to the people of Eastern Europe

ished?



view of both the past and the future of socialism put forward by two of Britain's leading socialist rethinkers, Eric Hobsbawm and Robin Blackburn, and argues that the crisis conditions produced by capitalism today make Marxism the most relevant revolutionary idea for the nineties

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

In the first great post-war backlash against Stalinism in the fifties, many of its erstwhile supporters looked back to critics within the Marxist tradition, to Sartre, Lukacs and Korsch, and attempted to rebuild a humanistic Marxism around Marx's early writings. Faced with the apparently complete disgrace of 'Marxism-Leninism' over the past two years, today's radical intellectuals are retreating much further. They are seeking to discover a new identity in the works of hostile critics of Marxism—reformers, renegades and reactionaries—from the nineteenth century onwards. The attempt to achieve 'socialism with a human face' has given way to the more limited goal of humanising capitalism.

Radical rethinkers

Two leading left-wing intellectuals have recently summed up the current trends in the rethinking of socialism. Historian Eric Hobsbawm quotes with evident approval the view of 'an intelligent anti-socialist of the 1880s' that socialism was 'at bottom a demand for social justice' ('Out of the ashes', *Marxism Today*, April 1991). The ambition to replace capitalism with a more advanced form of society is thus reduced to a campaign for the reform of the existing order.

Elsewhere Robin Blackburn ('Fin de siècle: socialism after the crash', *New Left Review*, 185, 1991) quotes from the German social democrat Karl Kautsky's 1918 attack on Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks: 'Socialism as such is not our goal, which is rather the abolition of every kind of exploitation or oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex or a race.' In fact Kautsky repudiated socialist revolution only to support the German state in the First World War and to endorse social democratic participation in the post-war regime that slaughtered Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and many more and prepared the way for fascism. Yet, while ticking off Kautsky for his lack of eco-consciousness, Blackburn approves his redefinition of socialism as a programme for universal improvement and echoes his evasion of the problem of how to get rid of capitalism. He concludes with similar flourish that 'the future belongs to a "socialism without guarantees", or even to some new concept more adequately embodying the goals of the left and the creative impulses of anti-capitalist movements'. In attempting to elaborate this new concept Blackburn goes back beyond Kautsky to early critics of Marx (Bakunin, Proudhon and Mill), forward to the influential Austrian

anti-Marxists of the inter-war period (von Mises and von Hayek) and ends up endorsing the notion of a 'socialised market' upheld by moderate reformers through the ages.

In trying to rescue socialism from the heap of ashes to which it has been reduced in the last decade of the twentieth century, both Hobsbawm and Blackburn freely acknowledge the failure of the Soviet experiment and extol the virtues of the capitalist market. Yet the restoration of market forces across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union seems so far to have created unemployment, poverty and prejudice rather than prosperity and stability. Indeed it is worth recalling that it was the incapacity of the capitalist market to promote systematic development in the more backward regions that created the opening for the Russian Revolution. The failures of the capitalist market gave the Soviet model widespread appeal in Eastern, and even in Western, Europe in the crisis-stricken interwar period and in the third world well into the post-war years. However, there can be no doubt that the Soviet system has turned out to be incapable of providing sustained economic advance. But why?

Bismarck, a socialist?

For Blackburn, Marxists cannot disclaim responsibility for the degeneration of the Soviet Union, because 'the Soviet system has appeared to implement key aspects of the classical Marxist and socialist programme, implicating, in some degree, any politics that chooses public ownership as a means and popular welfare as a goal'. In fact, the responsibility is not that of Marxism, but of socialists like Blackburn and Hobsbawm who have reduced their programme to the demand for nationalisation. As Engels observed as early as 1877, if state ownership of industry was socialistic, then Napoleon, Metternich and Bismarck could be numbered among the founders of socialism. It would have been a shock to Mussolini and Roosevelt, Beveridge and Adenauer, all bourgeois patrons of the welfare state, to learn that Marxists were implicated in 'any politics' that supports public ownership and popular welfare. Contrary to the widely held view expressed by Blackburn, neither Marx nor Lenin regarded nationalisation in itself as progressive. The Bolsheviks enforced public ownership of capitalist property as a political necessity after the 1917 revolution to prevent economic sabotage by the capitalist class. It marked merely the first step towards establishing workers' control over the economy.

Unlike their radical critics, the Bolsheviks never equated nationalisation with socialism, nor public ownership with effective planning. Their first priority was to secure workers' control over the production and distribution of goods. But 'workers' control was not an end in itself: it was the precondition for successful planning—a system in which the economy came under direct *workers' management*' (F Füredi, *The Soviet Union Demystified*, 1986, p11). Workers' control was regarded as a transitional phase during which workers would develop the skills, mechanisms and institutions through which the central regulation of economic affairs could take place. Workers' management presupposed major social, cultural and economic advances in Soviet society which would have facilitated the engagement of workers' expertise and initiative in the planning process.

Backward Russia

The problems of the Soviet Union, already recognised by Lenin before his death, began from the backwardness and fragmentation of its economy, the small size of its industrial sector and of the working class. All these problems were exacerbated by the failure of revolutions in more advanced neighbouring countries, the decimation of the Soviet proletariat through war and civil war, famine and disease. The consequent weakening of the revolutionary Bolshevik Party, and the strengthening of the emergent Stalinist bureaucracy, reinforced the drift away from popular control and conscious direction of the Soviet economy, towards the useless bureaucratic 'planning' of the state socialist system.

Who rules?

Whereas the Bolsheviks were preoccupied with the difficulties of developing the levels of knowhow and awareness necessary to make workers' management a reality, for their critics the problem was that the market had been abolished. Hobsbawm notes the lack of any criterion of economic rationality which has led to a continual trend to introduce elements of the market, though he fails to note that this compounded the irrationality of the Soviet system rather than overcoming it. Blackburn insists that 'economic planning requires the law of value' and surveys the use of mathematical models to demonstrate the impossibility of centralised planning. These one-sided emphases on the technical aspects of the planning process ignore the political

question of which class controls society, the crucial social relationship which is the key to workers' management and effective planning.

Stalin worshippers

Now that radical opinion is so unequivocally contemptuous of the Soviet Union it seems strange to recall that an earlier generation of British socialists celebrated every achievement of Stalin's regime. Until quite recently even many who condemned the crimes of Stalinism would still speak in respectful tones about the 'socialist countries' and applaud their healthcare programmes and lack of unemployment. Now not only Stalin, but Lenin and Marx too, are out of favour. It is ironic that much of the radical enthusiasm that was once reserved for the latest five year plan or tales of the siege of Leningrad now appears to have become displaced on to the capitalist market. Blackburn goes so far as to claim that the market 'broadens the potential scope of human solidarity'. But how? The ideologues of the capitalist order from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman never claimed so much for their most revered institution. Could this be the same market that is currently throwing people out of work in every corner of Britain? The same market that has put thousands of people on the streets of London and other cities?

Blackburn is not the only socialist with rose-tinted spectacles fixed on the capitalist marketplace. Hobsbawm boldly states that 'it has become clear that capitalism has produced an abundance of goods and services' and that 'the argument that socialism is needed to abolish hunger and poverty is no longer convincing'. Of course Blackburn and Hobsbawm are aware of famine and want in the third world, but they seem to regard this as a marginal or residual problem which the magic market can resolve, perhaps with the help of some minor modifications. Their gaze is concentrated on the West, where the problems that merit attention are those fashionable causes: consumerism, the advertising industry, the media and the environment.

Triumph of capitalism?

In a world in which there are today more people starving than the total population at the time when Marx wrote *Capital*, and unemployment, poverty and degradation are everywhere increasing, even in the Western centres of abundance, these are extraordinarily narrow and partial perceptions and preoccupations. The people of Bangladesh are little troubled by the

pressures of 'consumerism' or advertising, nor are those who live on social security or state pensions in the West. A recent survey in Britain showed that one in 10 children under the age of five from families on low incomes goes hungry at least once a month (*Guardian*, 4 June 1991).

The notion that the market is an efficient regulator of the resources of society is now accepted without question among British socialists. Hobsbawm merely acknowledges this popular prejudice in half a sentence before moving on to plead for some consideration for the extreme inequalities it generates. Blackburn takes for granted the advantages of the market in stimulating competition and innovation and notes the constructive role of 'internal market' relations within enterprises. In his childlike enthusiasm for the market, Blackburn sees only the positive, dynamic aspects of the capitalist system and turns a blind eye to the regressive features. It seems to have escaped his notice that the global system of market relations is now in deep recession. Factories, workplaces and offices are being closed down and people are being thrown out of work—not because there is no need for the products of these enterprises—but because it is not profitable to produce them under current market conditions. While millions starve in the third world, Western farmers are paid not to produce foodstuffs and more is stockpiled. Protectionism and monopoly frustrate competition and deter innovation. The growth of internal markets reflects the inability of capitalist enterprise to organise rationally without artificially simulating the market mechanism.

Grime and blood

Blackburn is so mesmerised by the sphere of commodity exchange that he entirely ignores that of commodity production, the sphere in which capital exploits the labour-power of the working class in order to extract surplus-value. By comparison with the world of commerce, the stock exchange, the bank and the shop, the world of the factory remains a grimy, bloody, dangerous place. In the world's leading capitalist nation, the USA, 200 000 workers have lost their lives on the job and 1.4m have been disabled in the past 21 years. Marx observed that the capitalist marketplace is 'a very Eden of the innate rights of man', a place 'where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men'. This contrasts sharply with 'the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face "No admittance except on business"'

In the last decade of the twentieth century socialists are abandoning anti-capitalist perspectives in favour of limited measures to reform the capitalist system that were already exposed as futile in the 1840s

—an injunction fully respected by socialists like Blackburn (*Capital*, Vol 1, 1974, p172).

So captivated are today's socialists with the superficial appearances of capitalist society that they also take at face value its claims to offer freedom, equality and democracy. They now fully endorse the old Cold War prejudice that the Soviet Union was a totalitarian regime, an experiment in social engineering that produced a system far worse than the one it replaced. They accept the sober conclusion that the risks of embarking on ambitious programmes of social change are too great to justify overturning the status quo. It is ironic that the Western left has taken up the myth of Soviet totalitarianism at the very moment when the internal disintegration of the Soviet bloc revealed the system's lack of any controlling mechanism once the bureaucracy had lost its moral authority. It is difficult to imagine any capitalist military dictatorship or fascist regime surrendering power in the absence of a major social upheaval, with scarcely a bullet fired, in the way the Stalinist elites collapsed in Eastern Europe in 1989-90.

Work or starve

As it happens, notwithstanding all the purges and the gulags, the Soviet Union made major achievements in the past in terms of freedom and democratic rights for the majority of its people, notably for ethnic and national minorities and for women. By comparison with tsarist Russia or with most of its neighbours in the early decades of its existence, or indeed with much of the third world to this day, the Soviet system marked a significant advance—hence its longlasting prestige in the eyes of the oppressed around the world.

While Western socialists may have been impressed by bourgeois myths of individual freedom, millions of people experienced the fact that the only choice they had in capitalist society was to work or starve, and that their only freedom was the freedom to sell their labour-power to the capitalist. The masses too were less impressed by the charade of parliamentarianism, behind which the capitalists tolerated democracy only within the constraints of profitability.

Taking a global view of capitalist society over the past 200 years it is evident that democracy is exceptional, confined to particular regions, for limited periods. Yet socialists like Hobsbawm and Blackburn see only post-war social democratic Sweden and Austria (ignoring the fact that even these enlightened states appear rather less

democratic from the point of view of immigrant workers), rather than Peru, Sudan and Pakistan, which are in fact more typical capitalist regimes. Given the chronic stagnation of Eastern Europe under Stalinism it is not surprising that the myths of capitalist prosperity and democracy have won widespread credibility in these societies. Yet while they aspire to follow the Scandinavian model, the Poles, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks are finding out that what capitalism has in store for them bears a closer resemblance to the Latin American model of polarised wealth and poverty, corruption and savage repression.

So what's left of socialism? For the socialist rethinkers all that can be hoped for is some attempt to curb the worst excesses of the capitalist system, its ecological destructiveness, its third world poverty and its inhuman brutality. Hobsbawm concludes that 'socialists are there to remind the world that people not production come first'. But generations of reformers and clergymen have preached this message, with spectacularly little success. The fact is that for capitalism people are always subordinate to the exigencies of making profits, exigencies deeply respected by the European social democratic parties which Hobsbawm concludes are 'the best sort of governments at present available'. Thus the moralism of the early socialists comes to rest with the pragmatism of Kinnock, Mitterrand and the rest.

Fantasy land

Blackburn scorns discussion of socialist programmes or strategies at a national level in favour of drawing up agendas for global socialist planning agencies. Such bodies could carry out all sorts of grand schemes: they could 'promote, even create, purchasing power in poorer countries and penalise rich nation protectionism'; they could 'devise effective but socially less disruptive and painful substitutes for bankruptcy and unemployment'; they could promote 'social equality, ecological responsibility and civic fulfilment'. As to how such bodies could come into existence and how they could enforce their plans on capitalist enterprises, Blackburn is silent. He insists however that 'both nationally and internationally, democratic institutions must be used to check on market performance', despite the abundant evidence of the vigorous autonomy of capitalist enterprise from public accountability in even the most advanced parliamentary democracies. His one practical proposal is that funds for an

international planning authority could be raised through 'exploitation of the seabed, to be conducted with rigorous ecological safeguards', of course. Perhaps the planners could sharpen their acumen by eating seaweed?

Though Blackburn's schemes have an air of utopian fantasy, in fact they encourage acquiescence to existing international planning agencies of an imperialist character—such as the EC, the OECD or the IMF. Thus his perspective of ultimate global transformation is linked to the day-to-day pursuit of piecemeal reforms quite consistent with the survival in perpetuity of capitalism, in the traditional manner of social democratic movements. Blackburn's vision of a planned society is not so much that of the utopian socialists as that of a Green Harold Wilson.

More than 150 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels already identified the trend of 'conservative, or bourgeois, socialism' which arose from 'a part of the bourgeoisie...desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society':

'They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary or disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The bourgeoisie naturally conceives the world in which it is supreme to be the best; and bourgeois socialism develops this comfortable conception into various more or less complete systems. In requiring the proletariat to carry out such a system, and thereby to march straight away into the social New Jerusalem, it but requires in reality that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of the existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie.' (1848)

In the last decade of the twentieth century socialists are abandoning anti-capitalist perspectives in favour of limited measures to reform the capitalist system that were already exposed as futile in the 1840s. What is most extraordinary is that this retreat is taking place at a time when worldwide capitalist recession confirms the urgency of transcending the restrictions it imposes on human society. We cannot allow the fact that the one attempt to make this transition failed to deter us from this project. The conclusion of Marx and Engels' manifesto is as true now as it was in 1848: 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.'



Kill or cure?

The Tories say that the recession and unemployment are 'a price worth paying' to cure the economy of inflation. But, asks Phil Murphy, who takes the medicine and who gets the benefits?

Chancellor Norman Lamont and his predecessor at the treasury, a Mr Major, spent months assuring us that, despite all the evidence, Britain was not really experiencing an economic recession. When business collapses and rising unemployment made it impossible for the government to keep up that pretence, Lamont turned to the next chapter of his fairy story. He tried to reassure us about the recession by insisting that, like the housemaid's baby, it was only a small one, and that recovery was just around the

corner. However, as more and more businessmen and economic experts express the view that Britain is in serious recession with no respite in view—a deeper and longer recession than in any other large industrial country was the recent verdict from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research—Norman has had to change tack again. Yes, there is a recession he now says, but not to worry, it's good for us.

In May, as another set of booming jobless figures were released, Lamont declared in parliament that 'rising

unemployment and recession have been the price that we've had to pay to get inflation down'. Warming to his theme, he told us straight that this 'is a price well worth paying' for our future well-being.

The official line today is that recession and two or three million on the dole are necessary correctives to the over-indulgence of the eighties. Britain had the good years of spend, spend, spend which caused the inflation; now the country has to endure some hard times to restore the balance. Or, as the current cliché has

it, we enjoyed the party, now we're suffering the hangover, and we've got to take the cure. We have only got ourselves to blame, you can't have your cake and eat it and so on.

Listening to the Tories endlessly churning out this argument, two questions come to mind. Who exactly was it that over-indulged at this party which was allegedly the eighties? And who is it that is expected to swallow the bitter medicine in the nineties?

The second half of the 1980s were certainly good years to be a capitalist. They made millions by making nothing useful at all. The British economic miracle was like all good miracles, a trick. The 'enterprise culture' never got much beyond the enterprising idea of borrowing huge sums of money here to trade paper shares with those who had borrowed huge sums of money there. Through junk bond trading, takeovers, asset stripping, property investment and other forms of financial speculation, the men and women held up as Britain's star entrepreneurs amassed fortunes on the strength of credit notes and not much else. They borrowed the billions that now weigh the company sector down with a record level of indebtedness. Even the more respectable of the shortlived eighties success stories, like Sophie Mirman and her Sock Shops, only made it thanks to the boom in consumer credit which allowed her customers to keep buying her overpriced goods.

Hardly hedonism

These were the people who had a party of sorts in the eighties. Most of us didn't even get invitations, apart from the junk mail from financial institutions exhorting us to borrow, borrow, borrow so that we could buy, buy, buy and help prolong the good times for them. And our reward for this service? Record levels of personal debt.

The most that we got from the 'good years' of the eighties was a few more household goods, perhaps a collection of videos or CDs. It hardly qualifies as a wild outburst of hedonism. Certainly it wasn't enough to cushion us against the parallel deterioration in our quality of life. Crumbling, underfunded schools, hospitals with long waiting lists and insanitary conditions, dirty, overcrowded and delayed public transport: these were just a few of the benefits we enjoyed in the eighties. Listening to our personal stereos may have provided momentary solace on a packed and filthy commuter train, but it hardly compensated for this collapse in the economy's infrastructure.

They enjoyed the warmth of the

party. We were kept outside in the cold, catching occasional glimpses of how the other half—or more like the other twentieth—lives it up. Yet today, we are the ones expected to take the biggest dose of hangover cure in the shape of unemployment and real pay cuts.

Just as they have rewritten the eighties as an era of common prosperity, so they tell us that in the nineties everybody is sharing the nasty medicine. After a few gross examples of top establishment figures and company executives taking large pay rises were recently made public, other business chiefs went out of their way to publicise the fact that they were taking pay cuts. The message was that the few selfish sorts in high places are the exception. Yet it hardly seems churlish to point out that the more tactful bosses are able to afford pay cuts a bit better than the rest of us.

Too poor to eat

Many working class people are now having to endure below-inflation increases, pay freezes or even cash wage cuts. Such measures mean that we have to cut back on necessities; a fifth of low-income families are already officially described as 'too poor to buy food'. It is beyond the experience of most of us to imagine what the top people can no longer afford after their salary cuts. Rolls Royce chairman Lord Tombs took a 10 per cent pay cut to only £150 000; pay for Lord King, British Airways' chairman, fell by a similar proportion to a paltry £415 000. Maurice Saatchi of the advertising agency has taken a whole 50 per cent reduction, which he complains is 'a painful cut for an individual'. But who can feel any sympathy for a man who now has to get by on just £310 000 a year? He may have to sell some more of his fine art collection, but he is unlikely to have to sell his car and television to pay the mortgage.

Walker's crisp

'I am quite satisfied', said Saatchi, 'that in voluntarily accepting a 50 per cent pay cut I have done the right thing'. His statement should remind us not just that they have the financial luxury to take pay cuts, but that they are the ones in control. For them it is a *voluntary* decision to restrain some of their high society living, for the rest of us there's little voluntary about it. We pretty much have to like it or lump it. It's either take a pay cut, or voluntarily accept your place in the dole queue.

We are always being told how many of the prominent party-goers of the last decade have now gone under or are feeling the pinch. Many came

a cropper when their multi-million pound empires crashed, revealing that they had little of substance behind their flashy office fronts and inflated share values. British and Commonwealth, Polly Peck, Brent Walker—the list grows every week. But the setbacks suffered by the businessmen and women involved are of a different order to those endured by the employees whose jobs are wiped out in the process.

Take former boxer and East End minder George Walker, who rose to prominence and great wealth in the eighties as chairman of the Brent Walker group. He was recently deposed by the banks as part of their plan to salvage something of his debt-ridden empire, and the papers were full of his return from riches to rags. However, despite the decimation in the asset value of his company, his 27 per cent shareholding is still worth a good few million. When we lose our jobs we face the repossession of our homes; Walker simply sues the banks for £20m in lost investment and another few million for 'injury to his reputation and feelings'. If the two million on the dole tried to sue their ex-employers for their depression about not having a job, they would be laughed out of court.

The BT experience

The reality of who has to take the recessionary medicine required to 'cure' capitalism is a long way removed from John Major's talk of a classless society. It demonstrates that society is divided between a capitalist minority and an exploited majority—and when their system gets into trouble, they try to make us pay the price for rescuing it.

Perhaps the experience of British Telecom best illustrates the truth about who got what in the 'good years' of the eighties and the recession of today. Back then, the privatisation of BT was hailed as one of the great successes of 'popular capitalism', another stride towards the creation of a share-owning democracy. In fact the majority of ordinary punters who bought BT shares sold them straight away for a couple of hundred quids' worth of holiday money. The big financial institutions got most of the shares at knock-down prices—and they have reaped the dividends of the board's bid to maximise profits in the recession. Over the past year, BT implemented 18 000 redundancies—many small shareholders will have lost their jobs—and plans to push through 10 000 more over the next year. The chairman got a 43 per cent pay increase in 1990; this year, the workforce has been offered 6.1 per cent. For their own good, naturally.

STEAMRO

The cry 'everybody out' is once more being heard in British industry—only this time it is coming from management, not the trade unions. Two major employers recently sacked their entire workforces as a way of steamrolling through worse working conditions and

Freeze or you're fired

'One has to do what one has to do', said Rolls Royce chief executive Sir Ralph Robins in May. Responding to a 25 per cent drop in profits, he launched a rationalisation programme to 'take out all non-value-added activities'. Which means taking out thousands of jobs, and taking something out of the remaining pay packets.

Robins announced 6000 redundancies and the closure of sites at Parkside in Coventry and Leavesden near Watford. Rolls Royce chairman Lord Francis Tombs threatened to shut down the company unless the redundancies are carried out and the entire workforce accepts a six-month pay freeze. Lord Tombs announced that he would be taking a 10 per cent pay cut, reducing his salary to a mere £150 000. If Rolls Royce workers had got a 50 per cent increase last year, as Tombs did, they would probably not object to a freeze this year.

Rolls Royce imposed the measures in dramatic fashion, formally sacking the entire workforce of 34 000 and then handing out new contracts including the pay freeze. Panicked by the company's action, the unions agreed to the pay freeze, as long as management goes through the motions of consulting them—that is, as long as they are given a chance to agree to management's terms in person rather than reading about them in the newspapers. Once the unions had given in on the key issues, management withdrew the new contracts and even apologised for its earlier ultimatum. Tombs and Robins could afford to be gracious in victory.

Rolls Royce workers have discovered that there is no such thing as a safe berth even on the flagship of British manufacturing. In Bristol, there is concern that 'the whole plant could go. This area will be like the shipyards in Sunderland. It's going to be our turn now'. Management is asking for voluntary redundancies but there are few takers because there are no other engineering jobs. 'We've been in aircraft all our lives' said two middle-aged workers, 'We'll never get another job'. A young blade-polisher thought there were clerical jobs going in Bristol, but his mate pointed out that his girlfriend had just been laid off by the Prudential.

Rolls Royce workers with mortgages admit to being depressed or desperate. They are treating this year's summer holiday as their last, and some have gone back to cycling to work to save petrol. They are gradually being stripped of the possessions which were supposed to be the symbols of success.

Rolls Royce workers are bitter about being 'treated like babies treat their potties'. The company

These days the engineering unions' idea of industrial action is to lobby the company's annual meeting, pleading with Rolls Royce shareholders to take pity on their members

video motivating the rationalisation programme was universally reviewed as 'bollocks'. But there seems little prospect of their anger being turned into action. The most their union officials could do was to lobby the annual shareholders' meeting dressed in plastic bowler hats, as a symbol of their moderation and respectability. In mid-May all the Rolls Royce conveners met at Leavesden to formulate their response to compulsory redundancies. They invited the media to hear their decision. After a buffet lunch at the social club, the conveners filed out in silence and left. They had nothing to say. Whatever gestures they might make in the coming months, the unions have already made it clear they have no intention of fighting to defend jobs and conditions.

Union officials were always prepared to negotiate away jobs and conditions in return for recognition. Over the last 10 years they agreed to 26 000 voluntary redundancies at Rolls Royce. But they have now sunk even lower. They have shown

that if the company goes through the motions of meeting them, they are ready to negotiate anything—from the tearing up of 34 000 contracts to the imposition of a pay freeze. And for 'negotiate' read 'accept'. It seems reasonable to ask whether such organisations should even be called trades unions any longer.

Rolls Royce workers certainly do not see their unions as combat organisations representing their interests. They regard them as 'a foreign body in London', unconnected to members and powerless against management. In Bristol, semi-skilled, skilled and white-collar workers agree that the unions 'don't have the strength any more'. One skilled worker admitted to being a shop steward, 'but I know the unions can't do anything'.

Since Rolls Royce workers can see no obvious way to resist, their anger is mixed with resignation. 'The threat of redundancies means they have us by the balls', said one white-collar worker. And they are squeezing—hard.



COLLATERED

real pay cuts—the most dramatic example yet of how capitalists are trying to make us pay the price for their recession. Andrew Calcutt went to the Rolls Royce works in Bristol; Kerry Dean and Simon Kray report from the Kvaerner shipyard, Govan



PHOTO: The Guardian

'They've taken everything'

On Friday 10 May, 1600 manual workers walked out of Kvaerner shipyard on the banks of the Clyde in Govan, Glasgow, in protest against the imposition of new conditions: compulsory new shifts, an extra night shift for no extra money, and

a derisory pay award. As they stepped outside the gates, the strikers were sacked. They received letters informing them that they would only be re-employed on management's terms. At a mass meeting the following Monday, officials from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions recommended acceptance. The strikers were furious. Only four of them supported the union proposal.

Kvaerner threatened to close the yard and refused to talk to the unions. Union leaders had nothing to offer their members, not even strike pay. After a week of the strike going nowhere, there was another mass meeting. More than a third of the strikers didn't bother to attend. The vote was 3:2 to go back on management's terms. 'I'd rather be in there moaning and earning than out here just moaning' said one.

When they went back, the strikers faced atrocious working conditions. Management can now alter shift times at its whim. It is talking about a shift from 4.30pm to 1.15am. The new contracts could mean that years of previous service will count for nothing. Take home pay is around £160—after this year's wage rise. Sunday working is paid at time and a tenth.

'They've taken everything off us', said Kenny. 'The only thing we've got left to give them is blood.' Ian, Tam and John explained how conditions have gone from bad to worse: 'You bend over backwards and they take your teabreak. You sit in your heavy gear, in your own dirt and drink your tea. You have to walk maybe half a mile to a toilet. They've screwed us and screwed us. Demarcation's gone. If you are welders like us, now you do everything—sweeping, grinding, caulking. You get through four overalls a year easily, and boots. Now you get given two and then you buy your own.'

Another worker saw management getting stricter on discipline but more lax on safety: 'It's been getting worse for years. They use cyanide-based foam on the ships, for some sort of insulation. It's really hot stuff—one sniff and you're gone. If the reading on the air monitor is five, you're supposed to get out—that's danger level. One guy was working when the reading was 31. He refused to work overtime when asked, so they got someone who didn't know about the danger level. He came out after a while puking and coughing. For us safety is a joke. But they are paranoid about security. There are cameras all over the place, it's like a jail. What do they think we are going to steal—a ship or something?'

The Kvaerner board appointed a new managing director to whip Govan workers into line. No doubt he will receive a big performance-related bonus for his efforts in hammering the workforce.

Outplaced execs and sponsored suits



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Managers don't get sacked—they just fall foul of critical human resource restructuring. Kate Lawrence on the boom in executive counselling, outplacement and donating top staff to charity

The current economic slump is getting to the parts of British capitalism which other recessions didn't reach. Those who rose on credit and hype to be the stars of the Tory enterprise culture in the eighties—the banks, the finance houses, the privatised corporations—are finding the going tougher in the indebted, downbeat nineties. They are cutting thousands of jobs—and those on the hit list today include some of yesterday's highfliers. The white-collar recession, concentrated in the south, is cutting swathes through management in sectors that have previously been untouched by redundancy notices.

The patriarchal employer who offered a job for life with a cheap mortgage thrown in for good measure has disappeared in the world of banking and finance. Top City firms are shaking out staff, while tens of thousands of job cuts have already been announced in the banking sector as Barclays, Midland, NatWest and Lloyds all take an axe to their operations. Other big firms are also cutting white collar staff. Last year British Telecom implemented a programme of job cuts which included 5000 managerial and professional posts.

For the first time on this scale, capitalists in Britain are faced with the prospect of having to sack some of their own. It is a highly embarrassing situation for the employers, and they are busy inventing devices to hide their blushes.

Employers have developed a new vocabulary of personnel-speak to soften the blow of redundancy; it helps if you use the right language as you show your executives the door. So managers never get sacked, they fall foul of exercises in critical human

resource restructuring, or they leave to pursue other business interests, which is the City equivalent of an MP leaving the government in order to spend more time with the family.

Employers are also directing soon-to-be redundant managers towards executive counselling and outplacement services, designed to console the kind of people who don't know their way around a P45 and have been instructed to return the keys to the BMW to the personnel department by 5pm.

Outplacement businesses rake in lucrative profits by acting as glorified careers advisers to sacked—outplaced—executives. Employers offer free individual counselling sessions to ease unwanted managers out of the company and on to new pastures. Or, in the soothing language of corporate redundancy: 'We feel the need to put a little distance between the company and you, why not have a word with the consultants about how to manage this new challenge in your life?' The traumatised executive reject gets the kid-glove treatment while sacked 'junior' staff get a group CV-writing session and a stress pack if they are lucky, and dismissal at dawn if they are not.

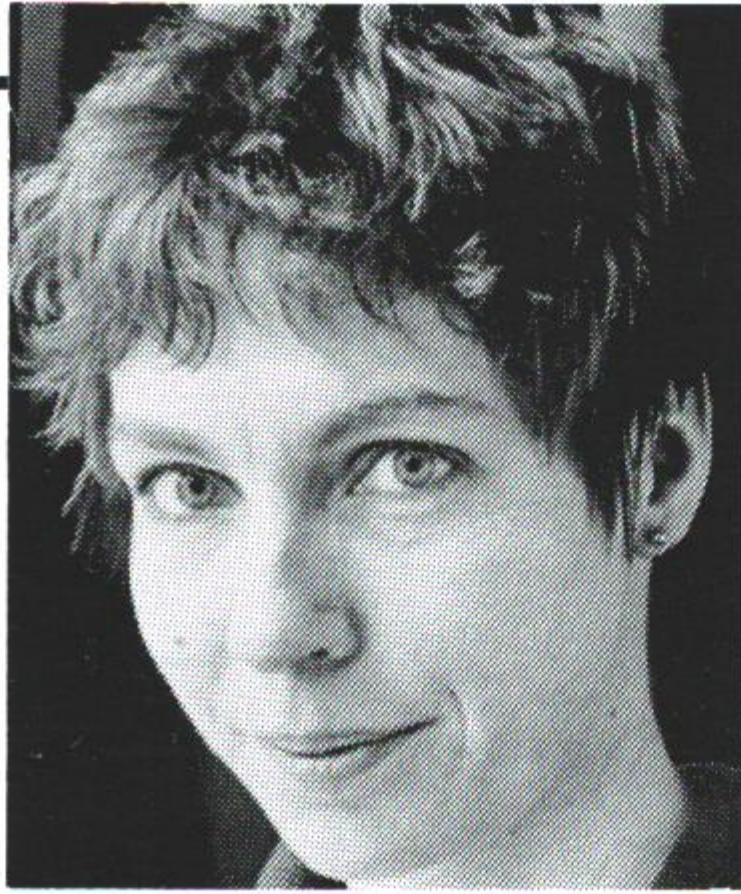
Last year, while the British economy stagnated, the redundancy counselling business grew by 30 per cent; some firms recorded an 80 per cent increase in managerial counselling. Most executive consultations took place in the finance and banking sector, followed by the computing business, another relative newcomer to the ravages of recession.

British firms have developed ingenious ways to ease their top staff out of the boardroom and into

the retirement home. Some senior executives have been encouraged to work for a charity for a year, all expenses paid by the company, before the old firm takes scissors to their contract. In this game everyone wins. The employer gets an image boost in the community, and the executive can retire in the sound knowledge that they have finally done something useful with their lives before being put out to grass. And it is all done in the name of that most esoteric of personnel management goals—employee relations. Who can complain about cuts in senior managerial posts when their previous encumbants are being donated to charity? The concept of sending used suits to Oxfam takes on a whole new meaning.

The personnel-speak, the managerial counselling sessions and the sudden charitable impulses can disguise only partially the bloodletting in British boardrooms, as targeted executives lose their long lunches, their carphones and their cheap mortgages. It is a telling testimony to the bankruptcy of British capitalism today that it cannot even keep its lieutenants and most enthusiastic supporters in the manner to which they became accustomed over the past decade.

However, unlike the millions of working class people now swelling the unemployment figures, the outplaced high-profile executives can expect high-profile help and a golden handshake before leaving the office suite. After all, which corporate chairman wants a picture of their former head of marketing staring at them from the pages of a Sunday magazine captioned 'How I coped on the dole after £50 000 a year'?



Ann Bradley

A Tory shaggy dog story

Just when you thought it was safe to go power-walking in the park, the mad dogs are back. 'Devil dog savages toddler' stories now make headlines every year, usually when MPs have gone off for their summer holidays and the press has nothing better to write about. This year, the dog-baiting season started early when a pit bull terrier called 'Dog' savaged six-year old Rucksana Khan. While the nation reeled from pictures of a mutilated little girl, John Major seized on the issue as a rare chance to look decisive. Within a week he announced that such dogs 'have no place in our homes' and promised to outlaw all dogs specifically bred for fighting—namely pit bull terriers, bandogs and Japanese tosas. To demonstrate that killer dogs are a national issue which allows no room for wavering, Major scorned calls for the mere castration of pit bulls, and demanded a mass round-up and execution. Then, facing flak from dog owners, vets and the RSPCA he wavered and settled for mere castration plus muzzling and expensive licenses.

The Tories couldn't sell a 'canine holocaust' to a nation of dog lovers. Liberals protested at 'canism' (discrimination against dogs) and 'specism' (discrimination against breeds of dog).

Pit bull owners picketed parliament, referring to their salivating beasts as their 'children'. The spectre was raised of dogcatchers wrenching much-loved pets from tearful children. Tosa owner Yvonne Wilson declared that 'they' would have to put her down first—since her dog 'Ish' weighs in at 11 stone and stands five foot nine on its hind legs, this might well be easier.

Threats by owners to let their dogs loose rather than have them destroyed launched a *Sun* scare about 'killer packs of pit bull terriers [bringing] terror to the streets when the government orders the dogs' slaughter'. Once loose, the paper warned, the dogs would breed in the wild and hunt for food in the cities. This apparently happened in Ohio when the US government imposed a similar ban. But while journalists have jockeyed to reveal how many victims have died in the jaws of killer packs of pit bulls in the States (the *Independent* kicked off with 27, the *Sun* upped the bid to 29 and the *Guardian* topped it with 34 in the last five years), nobody discovered one pit bull killing in Britain.

Only a fool would deny that pit bulls, bandogs (a 12-stone combination of a pit bull and a Neapolitan mastiff) and tosas are dangerous. Pit

bulls weigh up to six stone and have a jaw strength of 2000lb a square inch. The dog that savaged Rucksana had never shown any aggressive tendencies before the attack—but inexperience didn't limit its savagery. It crushed Rucksana's left lower ribs in its jaws, and chewed up her back inflicting serious muscle damage. The dog's weight broke four of her right ribs, and her left lung was lacerated. She also has a broken nose and will need extensive plastic surgery to her face. The pit bull, described by the *Sun* as 'the dog world's answer to Norman Bates—a canine Psycho', mauled Rucksana for 15 minutes while four men battered it with their fists, boots, clubs and a car door. Some vets claim pit bulls have an inbred resistance to pain.

If ever a dog deserved a bullet in the brain then 'Dog' does. And I must admit I wouldn't shed any tears over the other 10-30 000 pit bulls in Britain. But the government can't for one minute imagine that castration, muzzling or licensing—or even the extermination of the so-called 'fighting dogs'—will make the parks a safe place for kids. The *Mail* reports that in one day alone a collie stripped a boy's flesh to the bone in Manchester, a labrador bit off and ate a woman's finger in Stourbridge, and a rottweiler savaged two coppers in Stratford. Alsatians put more people in hospital each year than any other breed—and there are 10 alsatians for every pit bull. Bandogs are numbered in their hundreds and there is only one tosa in the whole country.

For the government the great pit bull scare came at just the right time to serve its own cynical purposes. It has acted as a welcome distraction from the Tories' discomfort over the economy, opinion polls, the NHS, the transport system and all other aspects of Britain's economic and social crisis. Furthermore, pit bulls are just the right kind of dog for the government to take issue with. Well, to be specific, it's not so much that they are the right type of dog, more that they have the right type of owner—usually working class, often unemployed and uneducated. A lot of working class people may own alsatians, but so do readers of the *Daily Telegraph* and lots of policemen. When you think of a pit bull you don't think of a respectable family man buying Winalot and Pedigree Chum in Safeways—you think of a brainless lout.

Until a month ago I didn't even know what a pit bull looked like. I'm still not sure if I have mastered

the fine distinction between pit bull terriers, Staffordshire bull terriers, and English bulldogs. But I certainly recognise 'pit bull man'—he's featured in all the papers.

According to Mary Keenan in the *Sun* he's 'white, under 26, a failure with women and socially inadequate'. She doesn't actually say what his job is, but you are unlikely to picture him as the chairman of ICI or a university lecturer. A vet called Nigel from Holloway told the *Telegraph* that pit bull owners are 'between 18 and 25, with short hair and tattoos, dressed in shell suits and trainers. They're the usual Jack-the-lads'. Further up the publishing ladder, *GQ* magazine looks down upon pit bull men from an even greater height, seeing them as 'pallid, no-hope housing-project kids—and older men, too, with wife-beating mutton-chop sideburns and loose dead-fish faces, like Arthur from *EastEnders*'.

The pit bull terriers that so concern John Major have become a metaphor for the 'underclass' of brutalised, long-term unemployed. It's these people that worry the establishment and their petit-bourgeois supporters, not simply their taste in dogs.


The *Times* has shrewdly noted that the discussion about dangerous dogs 'offers an opportunity to have a hard look at what is festering in the most deprived and brutalised corners of our cities', and warned of 'the takeover of the streets by juvenile thugs with or without their canine armoury'. The implication is clear—the authorities should deal with the canine armoury first, and then start on the people who arm themselves with loaded pit bulls. Inner-city thuggery is the scaremongers' theme for this summer, killer dogs is just a subtext within it.

Whatever we might think of the sort of tosser who wants to show off his tosa in public, the government is in no position to lecture anybody about thuggery. After all, Tory policies have already helped to bring inner-city communities the benefits of mass unemployment, rat and cockroach-infested council estates, hospitals without doctors, schools without teachers, and riot police with plastic bullets. Yet we are now supposed to believe that the same government is seriously attempting to protect those same people in the inner cities by having a go at a few weird dogs.

The government has made certain that dogs will run in and out of the headlines all summer long. The Tories have promised yet more dog laws in the autumn. These will doubtless be welcomed by many people who (like me) are sick of crossing the road to avoid packs of scavenging mongrels, and who (like me) carry scars from close encounters of the canine kind. But we should always be wary of going along with a government that has a hidden agenda. If the Tories could castrate the people they call pit bull men along with the terriers, they surely would.

The pit bull terriers that so concern John Major have become a metaphor for the underclass

The deutschmark



On the first anniversary of German monetary union, John Gibson examines how capitalism has failed to live up to the promises it made the people of east Germany.

On 1 July 1990, the act of monetary union made the deutschmark the official currency in the East as well as the West, and made Germany one country again in all but name. The West German government of chancellor Helmut Kohl looked forward to formal unification later in the year, and projected a confident image of a new and prosperous Germany achieving successes in which all of its citizens would share.

A year on Germany remains the economic giant of Europe. Yet the events of the past 12 months have shown that even this most dynamic economy in the Western world cannot deliver on its promises. The people of what was the German Democratic Republic are suffering soaring unemployment, poverty and homelessness. Their hopes of enjoying a west German lifestyle have been dashed, and they are bitter about it; in polls, two thirds of east

Germans express disappointment at the results of reunification so far.

In east Germany a year ago, capitalism was presented with a unique opportunity to prove its superiority as a way of running society: socialism had been discredited by the experience of 40 years of Stalinist rule, working class people were crying out for the market economy, and the West was cast in the role of messiah. It says much for the stagnant character of modern capitalism that, even in such advantageous circumstances, its progress has proved so unimpressive and its policies so unpopular.

The old east German industries are collapsing, and there is precious little investment from the West with which to replace it. In the old west Germany too, the economy has slowed significantly. The leading architects of German reunification have had a bad year. Detlev Rohwedder, boss of the Treuhand,

the agency responsible for the privatisation of east German industry, was shot dead at a time of increasingly bitter protests against the cuts in the east. Bundesbank president Karl Otto Pöhl resigned in the spring over the future of German monetary policy, not long after he had described the handling of monetary union as a 'disaster'. And while chancellor Kohl may still be alive and in office, the hero of unification has seen his popularity collapse. His Christian Democratic Union trails behind the opposition Social Democrats across Germany as a whole, and in east Germany the CDU's opinion poll rating is down by a third to just 28 per cent (*Der Spiegel*, 13 May 1991).

The German authorities insist that the disaster facing people in the east is not their fault. Instead, they claim, it only goes to show that the old Stalinist regime was even worse than they had imagined, and that it

of failure



Leipzig, March 1990: the banners hail 'Helmut the hope for millions'. Today chancellor Kohl's government is leaving the millions unemployed and hopeless

wrecked industry and weakened the economy even more than was thought before unification.

'The abrupt systematic change', argued the Bundesbank in its March report, 'exposed the fundamental structural deficiencies and competitive weaknesses of the former regime to a hitherto generally unexpected degree'. More bluntly, the right-wing paper *Die Welt* asserts that the crisis in the east today is still 'rooted in the ruins of socialism' (23 March 1991).

These arguments sounded convincing enough a year ago. However, they are beginning to wear thin after 12 months of monetary union, in which the deutschmark rather than Marx has been the symbol of power in the east. The past year may have confirmed that Stalinism held back and distorted the development of industry and society, but that should not be news to anybody. What's new is that one of

the most dynamic capitalist powers in the world has shown itself incapable of improving matters for millions of its own citizens to whom it offers little more than mass unemployment. Let's look at how the collapse in the east has come about, and how the west has responded to it.

Immediately following monetary union, industry in the east began to grind to a halt as cheaper and better western goods flooded the market. By August 1990, just a month after monetary union, eastern industry was producing half as much as it had a year earlier. From then on things got steadily worse. For example, output in January of this year was a staggering 24 per cent down on the previous month. By this July, around half of the nine million workforce in the old east Germany will either be unemployed or else registered as part-time workers (on 68 per cent pay), but doing no work.

In open competition with the west,

industry in the east just can't survive. The high price of hammering the east into the shape which the market economy demands is being paid by working class people. In May, the Treuhand estimated that the chemical industry would have to shed 80 per cent of its jobs in order to leave a rump industry that just might make it on the market. The Treuhand is supposed to cut credits to state-run industries in the east from July. Even if this drastic step is postponed for reasons of political expediency, the consequences will be devastating soon enough. In the depressed area of Saxon-Anhalt, for example, most people are employed in the chemical industry. Other regions are equally dependent upon large industries which are due to be decimated. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 55 000 jobs related to shipbuilding are all threatened with the chop.

Thousands of Germans have spent the last year trying to escape from the

brutal market economy which is being created in the east, to find the more civilised market which they hope exists in the west. It is estimated that 200 000 citizens of eastern Germany will migrate west this year alone, while a further 300 000 will be commuting to work in what used to be west Germany.

The situation in the east reflects the fact that private capitalists are singularly unenthusiastic about investing much in the former German Democratic Republic. In 1990, they invested DM5 billion there, and the figure is expected to creep up to DM20 billion this year. That might sound like a lot, but it is nothing compared to what would be required to regenerate an entire economy; in 1989, by contrast, private firms put DM400 billion of new investment into the west German economy. Although more than 200 000 new companies were formed in the east last year, most of them were one-person operations such as snack bars. Foreign firms are even slower to get involved than the west Germans; only a handful of foreign firms bothered to set up a publicity stall at this year's Leipzig trade fair, never mind set up a production plant.

On the cheap

The main interest which Western capitalists have shown is in buying up factories in the east very cheaply, to get hold of the land on which they were built. Their aim is to close down the old works, then set up new operations employing far less people that can take advantage of the lower wage levels in the east. This crude exercise in maximising profits has been particularly evident in the car industry. Volkswagen bought up a plant near Mosel. A new plant is presently being built there by east Germans working 12 hours a day at wages that are about half the going rate in the west. In the meantime, Volkswagen has got the old factory workforce assembling western-made car parts, again for wages less than half of western pay levels.

The agency responsible for privatising the eastern industry, the Treuhand, has no strategy. From month to month it keeps switching its emphasis between the need to restructure industry prior to privatisation, and the benefits of using privatisation as a means to restructure. This is just flannel. The fact of the matter is that no private capitalist is interested in buying the majority of the large industries unless they are pretty much given away, and the Treuhand has little capital with which to start any meaningful restructuring itself. So the real choice is simply about when to close eastern

industry down. July 1991, one year after monetary union, was the original date set by the government for this drastic 'restructuring', which is set to destroy the livelihoods of millions.

Despite the Kohl government's grand rhetoric about revitalising the old east, its policy there has been far less impressive. Economics minister Jürgen Möllemann has set up an apparently high-powered Strategy Forum on east Germany. But so far the only practical new initiatives he has launched seem to be a campaign to get workers in the east to accept low wages, and a scheme to give a little financial assistance to small businesses there.

Critics of the CDU government's policy, like former Social Democratic chancellor Helmut Schmidt, argue for more radical action. Schmidt wants to see a publicly funded modernisation of the infrastructure in the east, as a means to encourage more investment from the West. The cost of doing this properly has been estimated at DM500-1000 billion. The fact that it hasn't been initiated indicates the limits of the dynamism of mighty German capitalism today.

West German output grew by five per cent last year. By the falling standards of the capitalist world, that was pretty impressive. However, growth rates this year are projected at a less impressive 2.5 per cent according to the Bundesbank or 2.8 per cent according to the International Monetary Fund. The Bundesbank expects better figures next year due to a projected recovery in the USA, while the IMF (which is less optimistic, and probably more realistic about American trends) predicts that German growth rates will fall further to less than two per cent.

Spreading slump

While Germany was celebrating monetary union a year ago, Britain and America were entering a recession. This has now developed into an economic slump, and has spread to other parts of Europe. The recession is having a knock-on effect in Germany, through a decline in exports. In March 1990, west Germany had a trade surplus of DM13.4 billion; a year later the figure was down to DM2.6 billion. At the moment, much of German industry is working to full capacity, but only because of a short-term stimulus from state credit, as government subsidies to the east are spent on western-made goods. German industry feels it has already paid a high price for reunification through higher taxes and interest rates. It is resistant to paying more to

finance a state-sponsored programme of infrastructure repair in the east.

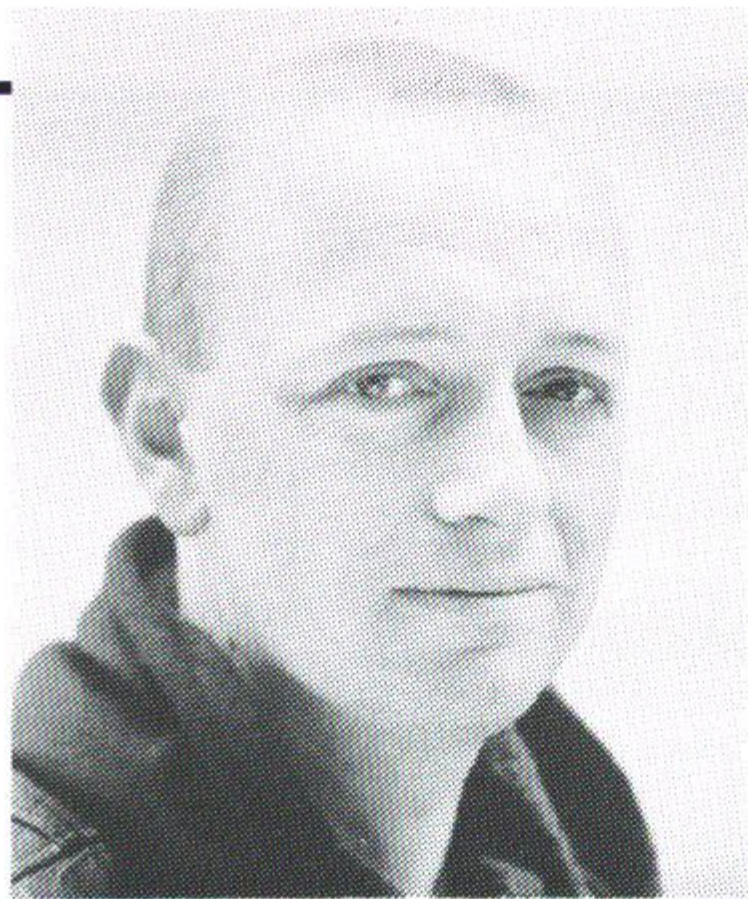
Nor are the trends in the world economy, which point to a long period of stagnation, propitious for a bold policy of government investment in the east. Reunification has already turned the Germans into net borrowers of capital on the world money markets, and increased tensions with the Americans who need easy access to international credit to cover their massive budget deficit.

No panacea

None of this should suggest that reunification was a bad move for German capitalism. In the longer term it is the key to the re-emergence of Germany as a great economic empire, whose businessmen and bankers will be well-placed to exploit the whole of Europe. But it should be clear by now that the market provides no panacea for the problems facing the vast majority of people in what was east Germany. Indeed, any progress which German capitalism makes towards its goals in the near future is likely to take place at their expense. The east is set to be a pool of unemployed and cheap labour, which employers in the west can use to exert downward pressure on pay levels throughout Germany.

A year ago chancellor Kohl and the CDU were still popular in east Germany, especially among the working class; the people who had suffered most under Stalinism were, not surprisingly, the most keen on a fast switch to the market. In the December 1990 all-German elections, the CDU took a massive 57.1 per cent of the vote in a working class district of Dresden, and its coalition partner, the FDP, took a further 10.4 per cent. This kind of support was the first to collapse as the grim reality of the transformation to a market economy became clear.

However, the immediate response of most people in the east is characterised by apathy rather than active opposition. The legacy of Stalinism means that there is no support for anything associated with socialism. Nobody wants a return to the past, and nobody can see an alternative to what is happening in the present. But the genuine enthusiasm that existed for the market in July 1990 has gone already. The people of east Germany welcomed west German capitalists as their saviours. It has taken less than a year to demonstrate that their heroes' feet were not only made of clay, but were made for walking all over the workers of the east.
(Thanks to Alex Ewald for material and ideas)



Toby Banks

A right circus

Whenever I watch TV in foreign company, something comes on about the Second World War or the 1966 World Cup final. Nothing odd about that, of course. Normally I would switch off the telly or settle down with my World Cup Willie doll and a drink, depending on which of the two was on. But the foreign eyes remind me just how tatty and faded is England's glory.

Foreign inspection of British life shows it up in a harsh and unflattering light. Few British things 'travel well'. There's little demand abroad, beyond the expats working in Bahrain and tax exiles in Bel Air who telex urgent requests for Wall's sausages and videos of *George and Mildred*. Consequently, most foreigners have their British experience in Britain itself, and it is usually an expensive and unpleasant one. A friend of mine met an Italian tourist who was paying £200 for 'full board' in a Basildon council flat. He displayed the contents of his packed lunch (Sunblest sandwich with Dairylea spread, Blue Riband 'chocolate' biscuit, can of Koala Cola or some such quality brand) with growing incredulity. 'Is *this* what you eat?', he asked in disgust.

These thoughts crossed my mind as I stood in Piccadilly Circus and watched the tourists sitting around the world-famous hoardings that hid the statue of Eros, hemmed in on every side by the most congested roads in London. A while ago, a clever man realised that there was money to be made by organising something for Swedish hippies to do during the afternoons. He hired a theatre where they could bring their musical instruments and sing along to Beatles records. It was a great success, and paved the way for Rock Circus, its hi-tech successor. Rock Circus is a tour de force by Britain's leisure industry. In its way, it is as

symbolic of British prestige today as the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace was in 1851: a waxworks full of American stars and British has-beens, sponsored by Fuji film and reliant on foreign tourists. I went there to gauge the spirit of British tourism 1991.

You would expect a rock waxworks show to be tacky and slightly creepy. It would be easy to imagine, say, an Elvis museum in America, with gushing tributes piped through loudspeakers. But this is Britain, chum, and we do things differently here. Rock Circus has been organised by DJ Paul Gambaccini and Tim Rice ('world renowned lyricist and rock expert'). Between them they have created an atmosphere that is somewhere between a public information film from the ministry of pop music and a school disco where the teachers take off their ties and 'join in'.

There's a lot of this sort of thing going on. If I were a sociologist, I would call it the *Crimewatch*-DJ interface. DJs front police shows and charity appeals, and they also bring the special constable role to their entertainment duties. Rent a video with an 18 certificate and you have to sit through a gentle but firm warning from Simon Bates before the film starts: 'Enjoy your film, but remember it's not for all the family. And hey, thinking of having a beer...*or two*? Hope you're not thinking of driving later...And don't forget, it's work tomorrow, so go easy, eh? Anyway, enjoy the film, but enjoy it the right way.' Half of Britain's dope-smoking video-watching public probably collapses in laughter at this point, while the other half sweats with paranoia as Simon's beady eye fixes on their ashtrays. I would strongly advise the latter half to give Rock Circus a miss.

As any serious rock fan will tell you, nothing beats listening through 'cans', and the Rock Circus tour is conducted entirely via huge padded

headphones, allowing no conversation between punters. The first half is a walkaround tour through rock history, and Paul Gambaccini is your recorded guide, offering a polished summation of each figure in his mellow transatlantic tones: Bob Marley ('when we listen to him, we believe in a world united by love'); Rod Stewart ('started as a serious folk singer but became the Benny Hill of pop, revelling in his own sexuality').

Jeff Bridges shot to fame with one ill-judged line—'Phew! Rock'n'roll!'—in a second-rate pop documentary. Paul Gambaccini could well achieve similar heights: 'Johnny Rotten...he's *terrifying!* Look at him sneer at you! Look at him tell you your life is built on hypocrisy! For one terrifying year punk frightened a nation and gave rock a shot in the arm....' Then on to Sting and Mark Knopfler before climbing Robert Plant's 'Stairway to heaven' into the Travelling Theatre.

Here 'animatronic' robots bring rock legends to life before your very eyes. The Beatles appear in full costume to perform 'Sergeant Pepper', and as Paul sings 'So let me introduce to you, the one and only Billy Shears...', the weirdness really begins.

'No, I'm not the one and only Billy Shears', chuckles an avuncular voice, 'but just one of the millions of Beatles fans around the world who tuned in and turned on during that beautiful summer of love'. A huge consul appears, emblazoned with the words 'Tim Rice', and sitting behind it is a grey-haired man in a cardigan who creakingly turns to face us. The lips move: 'The greatest songwriters since Schubert, said some'—a smile—'and how many number ones did Schubert have?'

Suddenly the stage moves. 'It's the King! Elvis Presley!' shouts Tim. But no, 'Peaches' by the Stranglers is played instead, for no apparent reason, as it is between every subsequent performance. A bow-legged Janis Joplin introduces David Bowie, dressed in a space suit for 'Space oddity' (phew!); a bow-legged Bruce Springsteen (rock'n'roll!) and so on.

A new Tim Rice appears, in grey slacks, to introduce the Sex Pistols, tapping his foot and nodding at the audience throughout. 'Our man Sid. He met a messy end. How else could he top the Sex Pistols? Meanwhile Phil Collins did wonders for the forgotten men of rock. The guys at the back! *The drummers!*' On to Madonna ('so slick!'). More 'Peaches', the Beatles again and then out into the Rock Shop to buy Winnie the Pooh souvenirs and soldier dolls in bearskins.

'To create lifelike robots has long been the stuff of science fiction', says the souvenir brochure, and it looks likely to remain so for a long time. Nevertheless British technology has achieved a miracle of sorts, in the eyes of one satisfied customer: 'Stevie Wonder was the first star to visit Rock Circus publicly. His verdict on his figure was "amazing".'

Amen.

Rock Circus is symbolic of British prestige today: a waxworks full of American stars and British has-beens, sponsored by Fuji film and reliant on foreign tourists



PHOTO: AIM/Atapix

The meaning of the Winnie Mandela trial

Rehabilitating the apartheid state

The trial of Winnie Mandela demonstrated how the South African regime is trying to split and subdue the black liberation movement. And, says Charles Longford, the fact that the townships did not erupt when she was given a six-year jail sentence by a white judge sitting in an apartheid court suggests that the De Klerk government's strategy is succeeding

The conviction for kidnapping and the six-year prison sentence handed down to Winnie Mandela have shocked many people, but the significance of her trial has generally been underestimated. The trial was not about discovering the truth of what happened to 14-year old Stompie Moeketsie at the hands of the 'Mandela United Football Club'. Nor was it simply an attempt to tarnish the personal reputations of Winnie Mandela and her husband Nelson, vice president of the African National Congress. The apartheid authorities had their eye on a far bigger prize. This was a political trial in which black militancy was in the dock, and the right of the racist state to intervene in the internal affairs of the liberation movement was at stake.

The notion that the white rand supreme court was concerned to obtain justice for Stompie Moeketsie and four other abducted youths would be laughable if it weren't so dangerous. When was the apartheid state converted into a social work agency for township teenagers?

During the time that the alleged incidents involving Winnie Mandela took place, at the end of 1988, the apartheid regime was detaining, beating and torturing many hundreds of black youths involved in the countrywide uprisings against the state. When it comes to conspiracy to kidnap and beating black youth, defence minister Magnus Malan is a master criminal; he is head of the CCB, a clandestine military unit responsible for death squad raids into neighbouring countries to kidnap and murder anti-apartheid activists. As chief of the state police Adriaan Vlok, South Africa's minister of law and order, bears ultimate responsibility for thousands of deaths and acts of torture. While Winnie Mandela was standing in the dock, Vlok was sitting in president

FW De Klerk's cabinet meetings.

The apartheid authorities have always tipped the scales of justice in one direction. Despite all the talk of a new South Africa and an end to apartheid, the events surrounding the Mandela trial demonstrate that this remains as true as ever. Truth and justice have nothing to do with the South African way. What really went on trial was the right of black people to take forceful action in the fight against their oppression.

Militancy on trial

Winnie Mandela has long been publicly associated with the militant youth in her township of Soweto. Her expressions of support for the violent tactics they used to deal with collaborators—from 'people's courts' to necklacing with burning tyres—earned her a reputation as a hardliner. She was an obvious high-profile target on which the state could focus its campaign to crush and criminalise black militancy. By singling out Winnie Mandela the apartheid authorities were doing far more than cast aspersions on her character. They were attacking the liberation struggle itself, and challenging the right of the resistance movement to decide by what methods black people should fight for their freedom. These broader issues were obscured during the course of the trial. Instead Winnie Mandela's personal reputation became the point of contention within the liberation movement.

On one side stood those for whom the case highlighted disturbing questions of opportunism, expediency, corruption and nepotism within the ANC. They accused Mandela of becoming Africa's Imelda Marcos, and of abusing her name for personal gain; the 'mother of the nation' was renamed the 'mugger of the nation'. On the other side stood those who simply branded these charges as slanders, and declared that anybody who was not 100 per cent with Winnie Mandela was against the liberation movement.

In this bitter debate, nobody raised one central point. The question of whether or not Winnie Mandela was involved in corruption, kidnapping or anything else was a matter to be resolved by the black liberation movement itself, not by the police and courts of the apartheid state. It should never be acceptable for the South African authorities to interfere in the affairs of the black community. They will do so only to disrupt and disorient the liberation struggle.

Whatever their attitude towards Winnie Mandela as an individual, every opponent of apartheid should have united behind the demand for her immediate release, on the grounds

that the resistance movement and its members are accountable only to the black community, and not to white judges or the De Klerk government. Instead, both sides of the debate about Mandela looked to the apartheid state's courts to sort out their problem. This is what made the trial such a political disaster for the liberation movement, and such a triumph for the regime.

A state of murderers

In court, Winnie Mandela sought to distract attention from the accusations against her by arguing that she had tried to save Stompie and the other youths from alleged homosexual assaults by a white priest. The defence demanded that the courts should protect the youth of Soweto by putting this priest in the dock instead of Mandela. The homophobic content of Mandela's case was bad enough. Even worse was the way in which she called upon the apartheid state's brutal police and courts to go into Soweto and 'save' the black youth. Yet radicals like Chris Hani, leader of the ANC's military wing, who rightly denounced the trial as a political attack on the liberation movement, went along with her disgraceful line of defence.

When Winnie Mandela was found guilty and sentenced to six years, Nelson Mandela appealed to the people of the townships not to protest on the streets, but to rely on the courts to dispense justice by putting their faith in an appeal. It was a breathtaking concession from a man who has spent more than 20 years in jail on the receiving end of apartheid 'justice'. In its attitude during and after Winnie Mandela's trial, the ANC leadership transformed the South African courts from the strictest upholders of apartheid oppression into impartial institutions capable of dispensing justice to the oppressed. By thus endowing an arm of the apartheid state with legitimacy, they have left the liberation movement open to further interference and attacks.

When Judge Stegmann labelled Winnie Mandela a 'criminal', he was passing sentence on all those who have used force in the struggle against apartheid. The regime's aim is to criminalise the militants, isolate them, and establish the apartheid state as the arbiter of black affairs. Its success can be judged by the fact that, while ANC leaders publicly disagreed with Stegmann's sentence, they did not dispute his right to pass it.

The Mandela trial was one more step in a well-planned political offensive by the South African ruling class, which has been discussed at length in *Living Marxism* over the

past 18 months. We have pointed out that the South African authorities are seeking to intensify the political divisions within the black population to facilitate the imposition of a 'post-apartheid' settlement favourable to the white ruling class. The regime is not only encouraging conflicts between the ANC and the traditionally more conservative Inkatha, it is also seeking to split the ANC along radical/moderate lines. Courting Inkatha and allowing blacks to join the ruling National Party is one side of this process. Prosecuting Winnie Mandela as a symbol of militancy is another. The regime's aim is to consolidate a relationship with a new black elite and isolate hardline opposition, thus turning the conflict between the apartheid state and the black majority into civil strife within the black community.

The regime has pursued its strategy pretty effectively so far. It is now accepted that the conflict between Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha and the ANC has taken on the proportions of a civil war with a rising death toll and countless incidents of carnage. Although the authorities certainly had a major hand in provoking this conflict as a means of putting pressure on the ANC, today the violence is under nobody's control. However, the only beneficiary from the bitter infighting remains the De Klerk government, as demonstrated by the debate over the 'traditional weapons' used by the Zulus of Inkatha, and the hostels from where many of their attacks on ANC supporters are launched.

Arms and the ANC

The ANC has demanded that the state ban traditional weapons and dismantle the hostels. Having given up its own armed struggle, it now has to look to the state to disarm Inkatha. The ANC ends up strengthening the idea that the racist state has a monopoly on the legitimate possession of arms and use of force, and has the right to decide who can live where. The ANC is virtually blaming Zulus for living in hostels, forgetting that the state which it wants to dismantle these hovels built them in the first place as one of the pillars of the apartheid economy—the migrant labour system. All this has helped to scapegoat the black struggle as the problem in South Africa, while vindicating the apartheid regime and its treatment of black people.

In every debate which arises today, particularly if it concerns post-apartheid South Africa, the government is putting the liberation movement on the defensive. So when it was revealed that 150 000

black school students had failed their matriculation exams last year, the criticism was directed not at the apartheid education system, but at the resistance of the black youth in the townships. From the *Financial Mail* to the Pan Africanist Congress, responsibility for this state of affairs was laid at the door of the ANC: the slogan 'liberation before education' and the school boycotts of the eighties are blamed for the shortage of graduates that South Africa will have in the years ahead. Inkatha's contribution to the debate spelt it out: 'If all the kids come out and fight for liberation, the next step is uneducated blacks. We will be barbarians.' So the apartheid education system becomes a civilising influence, while fighting for liberation is the road to barbarism. Reality is turned on its head, and everybody nods in agreement.

Apartheid vindicated

Encouraged by the direction of the education debate, the *Financial Mail* went further and suggested that 'a comparison could be made with the degeneration of township services: by forcing black councillors to resign, the ANC has succeeded in making daily life more miserable and more uncertain for ordinary residents' (11 January 1991). The argument that the struggle against apartheid has made things worse than the racist system itself is now reaching the point where the apartheid state, which institutionalised ethnic and racial divisions in South Africa, is being congratulated for previously preventing the black civil war which is taking place today.

South Africa is changing; but as the collapse of the Stalinist bloc undermines belief in the socialist transformation of society, the regime has been able to dictate the pace and direction of change. The fact that the ANC boycotted De Klerk's 'peace conference' is of little moment, since it remains tied to negotiating the future of South Africa on terms which will inevitably be set by the apartheid butchers. There can be no such thing as even-handed negotiations between an oppressor state which retains its repressive machinery, and a liberation movement which is disarmed and in disarray.

The Winnie Mandela trial has established the idea that ANC militants are common criminals and liars. It has strengthened the hand of moderates inside the ANC. More importantly, it has boosted the moral authority and legitimacy of a state which, despite its talk of justice and peace, remains nothing more than the armed dictatorship of the white capitalist class.

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The importance of b



Being anti-imperialist

Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Algeria, Mozambique, Bangladesh...every day now, another third world country seems to be making headlines about its political turmoil or economic ruination or both. In Britain the press and the political parties all agree that the third world has become a total disaster area, where the people are incapable of feeding themselves or sustaining democracy. The accepted wisdom is that more intervention by the Western powers is the way to save Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In Britain and the West today, imperialism is being rehabilitated as a legitimate, civilising force. The old notion of the White Man's burden is openly discussed once more. These ideas are set to be key themes of international affairs towards the year 2000. Confronting them is the most pressing task facing those who want to free the world from the threat of famine and war.

Imperialism is not the solution to the third world's problems—it is the cause of them. The political and economic crises afflicting whole continents cannot be put down to 'natural' disasters or the 'native psyche'. These crises are first and foremost the consequences of more than a century of Western exploitation and oppression.

Britain, the USA and the handful of other great powers bear ultimate responsibility for reducing large parts

of the third world to deserts ruled by despots. They encouraged, indeed they often invented, the bitter ethnic and religious divisions now tearing many countries apart. They have imposed and sponsored dictators around the world. They have bled the third world and stunted its economic development, condemning millions to starvation and leaving many more defenceless against the kind of natural disasters that the West can cope with.

Over the past few years, the Western powers have made things worse still. The banks have forced third world countries to slash their already desperately low living standards in order to pay the interest on massive debts. The international finance system now takes two or three times as much money out of Africa each year as the total aid effort puts in. The USA and its allies have sent in terrorist gangs to destabilise third world countries from Mozambique to Nicaragua. And as the Gulf War illustrated at the cost of a quarter of a million Iraqi lives, the Western powers have opened a new era of direct gunboat diplomacy.

The Western authorities are seeking to criminalise the third world for the global problems which they have created. Their success in this propaganda campaign can be judged by the

increasing call for the West to play a bigger part in sorting out the mess in the third world. This is a recipe for real disaster.

Nobody should be fooled by the charitable and humanitarian facade behind which the Western powers are disguising their foreign interventions. Anything that advances the role of imperialism in the third world can only bring more suffering to the peoples of those regions. The creation of a new imperialist culture in the West is also intensifying racism and strengthening other reactionary ideas over here. None of us can escape the consequences of allowing the imperialists to go unchallenged.

Anti-imperialism has to be a key revolutionary idea for the nineties. It must mean opposing every instance of Western interference in the affairs of the third world—be it economic, political or military—and exposing the racist assumptions of the White Man's burden which underpin imperialism. These will continue to be major themes in *Living Marxism* towards 2000. Over the next few pages we examine various aspects of the debate about imperialism. It all points towards the conclusion that there can be no salvation for the masses of the third world until the burden of Western domination is removed from their backs.

Frank Richards looks at how Western imperialism went out of fashion—and how it is being rehabilitated today

We are witnessing a highly successful campaign to rehabilitate the term *imperialism*. This is one of the most dramatic developments in international political discourse for decades. Yet it has so far passed almost without critical comment.

There was a time, not so long ago, when Western intervention in the third world—economic, political or military—would be denounced as imperialist or neocolonialist. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union as a superpower, and the containment of third world liberation movements, denunciations of Western intervention have become rare indeed. For some time now the West has enjoyed a new freedom to intervene in the affairs of the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. This trend culminated in the war against Iraq. The Gulf War revealed that, as a movement and as a source of political inspiration, anti-imperialism has lost most of its influence in the world. By the time the war ended, and the plight of the Kurdish people became widely known, even former anti-imperialists were demanding that the West should hit the Iraqi regime harder still.

Turning point

The ability of the Western powers to promote themselves as the protectors of defenceless Kurds facing a third world tyrant marks a critical turning point in international affairs. It demonstrates the general acceptance of the assumption that the problem facing the world is that of third world dictators, and that the solution lies with more interference from a caring, democratic West. With the adoption of this perspective by even liberal and left-wing opinion, imperialism had retaken the moral high ground. A series of so-called 'natural' disasters, from the cyclone

in Bangladesh to the famine in Africa, reinforced the impression that a third world which is incapable of looking after itself requires the benevolence and protection of the West.

The uncritical attitude towards Western interference has become so pervasive that there was no serious questioning of the manner in which negotiations over the ending of the Ethiopian civil war were conducted. Nobody seemed to find it curious that the negotiations were conducted in London under the management of an American diplomat. Why London? Why not in Ethiopia, or at least somewhere in Africa? And who gave the American state department the authority to organise a conference which could decide the future of Ethiopia? Why an American diplomat? Where was the Organisation of African Unity during the proceedings? The fact that the future of an African country is decided in a European capital by American diplomats and without any international criticism illustrates the extent to which imperialism has been rehabilitated. And the Ethiopian experience is not unique. Negotiations over the post-civil war destinies of Angola and Kampuchea are following a similar pattern.

There is nothing new about the Western powers interfering in the affairs of third world societies. What is novel is that they can now do so openly and with a degree of moral authority. As a consequence, a political culture traditionally associated with the imperialism of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries is making a comeback.

There is a perceptible change in the attitude of the Anglo-American ruling class. Many of its heartfelt values, particularly its more imperialist and racist assumptions, could not be aired in public during the past two or three decades. Since the elites on both sides of the Atlantic never lost their own belief in the legitimacy of imperialism, they were frustrated by the anti-colonial political culture that prevailed through the post-war era.

During the past year the situation has altered dramatically. Now it is anti-imperialism which is on the defensive, and the West which has the moral initiative. Come back Kipling, all is forgiven, the White Man with his burden is back in business. Peregrine Worsthorne, high Tory imperial ideologue, celebrates the revival of the morality of the White Man's burden:

'Since the last war anti-colonialists have occupied the high ground. To want to see Asia and Africa rid of

white control has been the mark of a progressive. The Kurdish tragedy is bringing home, even to progressives, that there may be another side to the coin: that the West getting out of Africa and Asia may have put the clock back rather than forward.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 17 April 1991)

Worsthorne enthuses over the misery of the third world because it appears to vindicate the civilising mission of the West. After the Kurdish tragedy, anti-colonialists must cede the high ground. It is an occasion for opening the champagne bottle to celebrate the destruction of the post-war anti-colonial dream.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd noted with a sigh of relief that 'we are slowly putting behind us a period of history when the West was unable to express a legitimate interest in the developing world without being accused of "neocolonialism"' (*Financial Times*, 1 November 1990). Now that 'legitimate' Western interests can be publicly aired, the next task is to revive the culture of imperialism.

Civilising mission

The first tentative steps in the revival of an imperialist political culture are already evident. The aim is retrospectively to reinterpret imperialism as an essentially moral, noble and altruistic force for civilisation. It has become common to see contemporary charity campaigns used as present-day illustrations of what imperialism was really about in the old days. The activities of Victorian imperialists who pillaged whole continents are thus presented as the forerunners of today's fund-raising pop concerts for famine or flood relief in the third world.

The retrospective idealisation of imperialism generally involves minimising the negative side of colonialism and inventing a positive past. According to the journalist Edward Mortimer, 'imperialism had its noble side' (*Financial Times*, 15 May 1991). Mortimer and his colleagues are prepared to concede that it also had a less than noble side, but on balance the benefits outweighed the losses. The editor of the *Independent on Sunday* adopts a righteous tone to argue the point:

'Not everything which the West gave to Africa was misplaced. The early Christian missionaries were often absurd, sometimes even cruel. But when the imperialists retreated, the missionaries did not. Indeed, they continued to multiply, and Africa is perhaps the only continent where the

number of Christians is increasing, often in strange new African permutations of religion. One does not have to be of their number to see these African Christians as a source of hope and civilised values, an antidote, even, to despotism.' (31 March 1991)

The message is that, even at its worst, the West is better than the best that Africa can offer. In similar vein, 'A duty to intervene' is the title of an editorial on Africa in the *Independent* (1 May 1991). This emphasis on duty aims to recast imperialism as a moral obligation.

The revival of imperialist culture is closely linked to the attempt to construct a new international balance of power, or 'new world order'. The idea of the West having a duty to intervene obviously justifies interventions like the recent invasion of Iraq. As contributors to *Living Marxism* have argued over the past year, targeting the third world also has the effect of endowing the Western Alliance with a semblance of coherence and purpose—something it has sorely lacked since the Cold War ended. It is through the criminalisation of the third world that the USA stands its best chance of perpetuating an international alliance under its control. The recent decision taken by Nato, to reorient its military strategy towards rapid deployment, has been justified on the grounds that there are many other Saddam Husseins waiting to happen in the third world. Without such a perspective, Nato and all of its institutional paraphernalia would have no reason for existence.

Moral revival

There is also another side to the revival of imperialism: its moral rearmament. This is of crucial importance, since it not only affects geopolitical affairs, but also influences the political culture at home in the West. Let us now turn to consider the background to this issue in a bit of detail.

A century ago, the development of the intellectual and political confidence of the Western capitalist powers was closely linked to assumptions about their own superiority and the legitimacy of imperial expansion. This was particularly the case in the Anglo-American context. It is often forgotten that Rudyard Kipling wrote his poem 'The White Man's burden' while residing in the USA, to inspire his hosts in their war to replace Spain as the colonial power in Cuba and the Philippines. Both the British and the American elites then had a strong sense of destiny, of

their own right to rule the world. The fact that they believed that imperialism had a moral purpose gave their expansionary project coherence and strength.

The term imperialism had a positive connotation well into the 1920s. It was accepted in the West as a legitimate political conviction on a par with being a conservative, a liberal, or a socialist. Beyond the relatively small communist movement, there was as yet no anti-imperialist tradition in the West. In those days individuals could proudly describe themselves as imperialists, in the certain knowledge that their belief was recognised as morally legitimate. As late as 1927 Leo Amery, the British colonial secretary, was talking of the 'true imperialist' in the most positive terms (*Times*, 3 September 1927).

By the late forties nobody would call him or herself an imperialist in public. Even those who wrote from an imperial point of view did not dare to claim outright legitimacy for imperialism

Things began to change in the thirties. During that decade, the capitalist system experienced a worldwide crisis, the imperialists lost confidence and liberation struggles escalated. These events combined to discredit colonialism. It was at this time that the term imperialism began to acquire a negative connotation with the European public. All of a sudden what had hitherto provided the British ruling class with a sense of destiny and confidence became an acute source of embarrassment. Imperialists were shocked to discover that their whole way of life was being held up to ridicule and scorn.

'Is it not time that some protest should be made against the misuse of the word imperialism', wrote one correspondent to the *Times* on 1 April 1940. He was concerned that 'increasingly in speeches, in the press, and in conversation it is used only as a synonym for ruthless aggression', and asked 'what is the position with a

name honourably linked with some of the most famous and beneficent men and women of our history?'. Three days later major general Sir Frederick Sykes, chairman of the Royal Empire Society, entered the discussion:

'The perverted meaning that has been fastened upon "imperialism" has given rise to perverted ideas about our own Empire. There are many who think that it is a product of "imperialism" of the smash-and-grab variety, and that as "imperialists" we have no moral right to condemn and resist others who are possessing themselves of *Lebensraum*.' (*Times*, 4 April 1940)

Sykes was concerned that British imperialism, which was already on the defensive, would be further

lie....The very essence of empire, which is not the authority of a slave-owner but a trusteeship for the bodies and souls of men.' (22 April 1940)

It was the last stand of an explicit, unapologetic imperialism. After the Nazi experience it was no longer possible publicly to promote imperialism with all its racist implications of superiority and domination.

A European Affair

Even a casual inspection of the files of the ministry of information reveals that justifying the British Empire had become the main problem for government propagandists in the forties. One official actively involved with dispensing propaganda in the colonies warned in 1944 that 'as soon as the war is won imperialism is going to be a major talking point'. He proposed a 'fact recording blitz', a kind of pro-imperialist propaganda campaign. Other officials working for the foreign office in different parts of the world confirmed the same point.

The collapse of the imperial ideal was brutally swift. By the late forties virtually nobody would call him or herself an imperialist in public. Even those who wrote from an imperial point of view did not dare to claim outright legitimacy for imperialism. Instead, they tended to argue that the good side of imperial expansion neutralised the bad aspects. This is the time when the word imperialism disappears from polite conversation in good society and from journals and even school textbooks.

Today it is easy to forget that it was only in the forties that the term imperialism lost its neutral or positive connotations, not only in Britain, but in the USA. According to one account of American education, school texts in the forties adopted a new emphasis: 'The word "imperialism", which was once freely used to describe US adventures in Asia and the Caribbean at the end of the nineteenth century, no longer applies to the United States. According to these books, imperialism is a European affair.' (F Fitzgerald, *America Revisited*, 1979, p55) In Britain it was not possible to deny that imperialism was a European affair. The trend here was to suggest that imperialism was a problem of the remote past, which had been reformed until it finally became the happy family of the multiracial Commonwealth.

One of the clearest manifestations of the collapse of the imperial ideal was the crisis of confidence suffered by the British ruling class. One

discredited by the odium that surrounded German imperialist expansion under Hitler. Others, including the future prime minister Anthony Eden, expressed the same concern.

The editor of the *Times* devoted an entire leader to dissociating British imperialism from the German variety. In a reaction characteristic of the times, he blamed Marxists for perpetuating the 'propaganda' that represented the Second World War 'as a struggle between rival imperialisms'. The editor protested at the fashion for using imperialism as a term of disparagement, and staged a splendid rearguard action to praise the moral virtues of the British and French empires:

'All history cries out against this base interpretation of human motives, and the visible policy of the two greatest imperial powers, Great Britain and France, gives it the

former colonial governor warned in the late fifties that 'we are, indeed, beginning to be a little ashamed of our position as a colonial power and inclined to pay undue attention to the self-righteous attitude of other nations' (Sir Alan Burns, *In Defence of Colonies*, 1957, p5). This crisis of confidence was not nearly so pervasive as the sense of 'shame' afflicting the post-war German capitalist class, discredited by its links with Nazism. But it did express a concern that the British establishment had lost its sense of moral certainty.

The loss of confidence of the British establishment was rarely linked in public to the discrediting of imperialism. But it has been a

continuous theme in recent political discussion. The British ruling class took strong exception to the sentiment that grew in the sixties about the moral superiority of anti-colonial movements. Although it could not then come out and defend the morality of imperialism, the British establishment has consistently sought to denigrate the moral claims of the third world, and to blame it for every crime and tragedy that afflicts humanity. Through attacking and criminalising the third world, the British establishment has sought its silent revenge for the collapse of the imperial ideal.

The ease with which imperialism is morally rearming itself today indicates the beginning of a new era. The collapse of the Soviet Union and

of nationalist third world regimes has allowed the West to regain the initiative. It can, for the time being, turn almost any event to do with the third world into an argument for reclaiming the moral authority of imperialism.

The moral rearmament of imperialism is the predictable consequence of the new facts of international affairs. The Western powers have inevitably been boosted by the outcome of the Cold War and the Gulf War. At the same time, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the ease with which the West has regained the moral high ground has been made possible by the weakness and incoherence of anti-imperialism in the West. In historic terms, this is a young tradition which has not been able to sustain a practical and an intellectual alternative to imperialism.

Into the trap

Anti-imperialists have always seemed to be hobbling along, afraid to take a consistent attitude of opposition to Western intervention. At times, they have even fallen into the trap of calling for the Western powers to intervene and pursue anti-imperialist ends. So it was common to hear British and American anti-imperialists demanding that their governments impose sanctions on South Africa in order to weaken apartheid. It never seemed to occur to the anti-apartheid people that by calling for Western sanctions they were legitimising imperialist intervention in the affairs of the oppressed. If the West could do some good in South Africa, what was to stop it from doing the same in Nicaragua, Vietnam or Grenada? Indeed that was the conclusion which many soft anti-imperialists drew in relation to the plight of Kurdish refugees in Iraq. In sanctioning a US-British invasion of Iraq, they became complicit in burying a school of Western anti-imperialism which had honourable aims but always lacked intellectual and political coherence.

The moral rearmament of imperialism will dominate political discourse in the West well into the next century. It is a development that requires an energetic political response from those who remain committed to the cause of human liberation. In the nineties, the development of an anti-imperialist political culture has to become a veritable obsession for people like ourselves. The first step in the right direction is to recognise the scale of the problem. The next is to develop an up-to-date critique that can tear the imperialists' moral claims to shreds. In the present circumstances, that is no small task to tackle.



Britain's bloody legacy

Andy Clarkson recalls how the Raj created the culture of violence and sectarianism in India which led to Rajiv Gandhi's death

British commentators depicted the assassination of Congress leader and former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi as a consequence of India's endemic communal violence or even of the 'flawed Indian psyche'. They wistfully looked back to the halcyon days of the Raj when decent standards of civilisation and law and order were maintained by the British. In fact, every savage feature of present-day India was created during 200 years of British colonial rule.

No sooner had the British conquered India in the 1750s than they began to lay waste to the country. When 10m starved to death in Bengal in 1770, Britain's East India Company responded by raising taxes. 'Were we to be driven out of India this day', wrote Edmund Burke in 1787, 'nothing would remain to tell that it had been possessed, during this inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the ourangotang or the tiger'. The pattern continued up to the last days of the Raj. British policy left over 1.5m Indians to die during the Great Bengal Famine of 1943.

'The culture of violence' in Indian politics, which the media here view with such disgust, is a very British invention. The British responded to the 1857 mutiny of Indian 'sepoys' soldiers by sacking Lucknow. 'There is no army in Europe or America', Frederick Engels remarked, 'with so much brutality as the British. Plundering, violence, massacre—things that are everywhere else strictly and completely banned—are a time-honoured privilege, a vested right of the British soldier'.

The British way

Violence was an everyday feature of life under the Raj. But the bloodiest examples stand out. In April 1919 General Dyer massacred 380 innocent civilians and wounded a thousand more in Amritsar, and got off scot free. In 1921, 2339 people were killed by British troops putting down the Malabar rising. That November, 70 out of 97 rebel prisoners died of suffocation when they were locked in a train between Malappuram and Bellary. After British troops surrendered to the Japanese in Singapore in February 1942, the humiliated Empire came under pressure in India as the 'Quit India' movement took off. The RAF responded by bombing insurgent villages; a thousand Indians were killed and three times as many injured. By the end of 1943, there were 92 000 Indians in British prisons.

The small community of British administrators and soldiers could never have controlled the teeming millions of India by direct violence alone. After the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the British pursued a calculated policy of divide and rule, cultivating religious and ethnic divisions. British

administrators invented the bitter religious rivalries between Hindu and Muslim which have torn the Indian subcontinent apart since independence.

The Hindu religion was characterised by its millions of gods and absence of a priesthood. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, the British sought to institutionalise the religion as a powerful force for conservatism among rebellious Indians. The Raj encouraged Hindu revivalists, mainly from the Brahmin caste, to weld together the mass of local rituals into a single hierarchical religion. Religious campaigns to sponsor child marriage and encourage *suttee* (the ritual suicide of widows) were just two of the benefits which India gained from this particular intervention by the civilised British.

Divide and rule

By dispensing job reservations and selected privileges, the British also encouraged the formation of 'martial races' from among those groups—the Sikhs, the Gurkhas and the Dogas—which had backed them during the mutiny. The Raj created the Scheduled Castes, the 'untouchables', and the category of the Indian Princes. The colonial authorities thus made everybody a member of one minority or another, to fragment the forces of Indian nationalism and allow a few thousand British to manipulate millions.

In 1905 Lord Curzon, viceroy of India, partitioned Bengal into Hindu and Muslim sections; the Muslim League was formed the following year. Though the division was officially revoked in 1911, East Bengal later acted as the basis for the stunted state of Bangladesh. 'No one with a close acquaintance with Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that, on the whole, there is a predominant bias in British officialdom in India in favour of the Muslim community', wrote Lord Oliver in the *Times* in 1927, 'partly on the grounds of closer sympathy but more largely as a make-weight against Hindu nationalism'. In March 1940, the Muslim League pledged to campaign for a separate Muslim state, Pakistan.

Through encouraging communal and religious divisions, the British hoped to prevent the emergence of any powerful anti-colonial movement. Congress, the modern party of the Gandhis, was itself set up as part of this process. In 1885, retired civil servant Allan Octavian Hume formed the Indian Congress as an association of loyal Indians who had received an English education. Hume closed the founding conference with a rousing three cheers for Queen Victoria, who had been made 'Empress of India'. After the First World War, when Congress was converted into the vehicle for nationalist opposition to British rule, it

had to combat the influence of Hindu fundamentalists and Muslim separatists, both of whom had been cultivated by the British.

Even when Whitehall was forced to make concessions on independence during the Second World War, it took the opportunity to intensify hatred among the Indians, ensuring that an independent India would be weak and malleable. In 1942, the British sent radical MP Sir Stafford Cripps to offer Congress dominion status as an alternative to outright independence. At the same time, however, the British mission stirred things up by offering every Indian province the right to secede in order to 'force Congress to compromise with the minorities'.

The Cripps mission failed and Lord Louis Mountbatten was sent as the last viceroy to preside over the independence negotiations in 1947. After nearly a century of British efforts to foster divisions, Mountbatten was able to promote the spurious assumption that communal hatreds were inherent in the Indian character. Indeed for him it was the unity of all Indians that needed to be justified. While posing as 'bitterly opposed' to the partition of India and creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan, Mountbatten told a meeting of Indian princes on 3 June 1947 that it was inevitable: 'It was no good appealing to logic or reason. The only way whereby the peoples of India could eventually live together would be to split them now and start afresh.'

Blame the victims

While Britain refused to grant independence until Congress accepted partition, the bloodbath deepened as communalists fought to secure the most favourable terms in Mountbatten's settlement. Thanks to his machinations, a quarter of a million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were killed by the time that India became independent in August 1947. From then on, Britain declared that India's continuing communal tensions were its own responsibility.

As the only national party, Congress ruled a truncated India for many years after independence. But Indian politics remained trapped within the sectarian boundaries established by the Raj. When, as prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi signed his own death warrant by bloodying his hands in Kashmir, the Punjab and Sri Lanka, and sought to play off Hindus against Muslims, he wasn't displaying 'the Indian psyche'. He was following a long-established British tradition, set by such eminent representatives of the Empire as Lord Curzon and the Royal family's 'Uncle Dickie', Lord Mountbatten.



Renamo gangs, sponsored by Washington and Pretoria, have turned Mozambique into a slaughter-house

The making of Mozamb famine

The West likes to blame African governments for the famine. But the case of Mozambique, says Barry Crawford, shows it is turning the truth on its head

Africa is starving, but Western food relief is being cut. In April, the only transporter making daily airlifts of food and medicine to Somalia was transferred to the Kurdish relief effort. Last October, 300 000 Mozambicans were condemned to certain starvation when relief flights to the country's Zambezia province were terminated. In Sudan 7.7m face starvation; in Ethiopia 6m. Seven other African countries have over a million famine victims within their borders. Throughout the continent, 30m people face starvation: the death toll is expected to exceed the million that perished during the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine.

Blame Africa

The trend among Western commentators is to blame the Africans themselves for their plight. The *Financial Times* points the finger at 'dictatorships and uncaring rebel groups [who], blinded by pride and lust for power, have prepared the ground for the crisis'. It identifies the worst culprits as callous African dictators who inflict famine and misery on their own populations, be they the 'tribalist' dictators of Liberia, Sudan or Somalia, or the more doctrinaire 'Marxist-Leninist' dictators of Angola, Mozambique and lately of Ethiopia. The *Financial Times* quotes, with approval, a senior UN official in New York on the choice facing the 'international community':

'Should we save 500 000 Sudanese people this year, and give the government another five years of power, where every year there will be another disaster. Or should we let them die and hope to get rid of the government? Which is the better in the long term?' ('Cry, the unloved continent', 8 May 1991)

The self-appointed judges sitting in the USA and Britain have found the African regimes guilty, and are now deliberating over whether to 'save' millions of starving people or sentence them to death. Yet the truth is that by far the biggest criminals in that ravaged continent are the imperialists of South Africa and their Western allies.

Mozambique is a case in point. All strands of Western opinion now agree that the famine there is not simply a natural phenomenon; it has been brought on by political intervention. That much is true, but not in the way that they mean. Mozambique has plentiful rainfall and an abundance of rich soil. Today, however, two million people are starving in what has been dubbed 'a green famine'. The misery inflicted on the Mozambican people is no natural disaster—it is the entirely *unnatural* force of imperialism which has wreaked havoc since the country gained independence from the Portuguese in 1975. The civil war conducted by Renamo terrorists sponsored by Pretoria and Washington has killed 500 000 of Mozambique's 14m people, and reduced a potentially rich country

ique's

to the poorest nation in the world.

Foreign disruption of agricultural production goes back a long way in Mozambique. The Portuguese colonists press-ganged subsistence farmers into forced production of export crops. By the 1940s a third of the population was involved in forced cotton production in the north. Elsewhere, peasants were dragged off their land and subjected to the *chibalo* system of six months' forced labour each year on plantations, railways and harbours. In the south, the colonial authorities guaranteed a quota of 85 000 able-bodied men to South Africa's gold mines. South Africa paid the wages to the Portuguese in gold. The Portuguese paid the workers pennies in local currency and sold the gold on the world market.

Exploit the natives

At the turn of the century, a Portuguese official, Mouzinho de Albuquerque, expressed the colonialists' view of the people of Mozambique: 'What we have to do to educate and civilise the *indigena* is to develop his aptitude for manual labour in a practical way and take advantage of him for the exploitation of the province.' (Quoted in J Saul (ed), *A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique*, p159) Over the next 75 years the Portuguese perfected this policy of exploitation.

After independence in 1975, Walter Rodney, the Guyanese writer, totted

up the Portuguese achievement in Mozambique: 'At the end of 500 years of shouldering the white man's burden of civilising "African natives", the Portuguese had not managed to train a single African doctor in Mozambique.' (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, p206) When Mozambique finally rid itself of the Portuguese, the literacy rate stood at just five per cent. The ministry of education had only five staff who could read and write. There were 30 doctors for a population of 12m.

Early gains

Compared to the colonial experience, Mozambique's advance during its first five years of independence was impressive. Primary school enrolment doubled to 1.5m; secondary school enrolment nearly quadrupled. For the first time the needs of the people were being addressed. But these early gains were soon impeded and then reversed.

The radical Frelimo regime in Mozambique expressed support for the liberation struggles against the racist regimes in neighbouring Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South Africa. The Rhodesian army first carried out reprisals against Mozambique. Then the Rhodesian secret intelligence service began to recruit black Mozambicans to spy on the Zimbabwean guerrilla forces. In the late seventies the terrorist Mozambique National Resistance Movement (Renamo) emerged from these mercenary gangs.

Apartheid stooges

When Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980, the South African regime took charge of Renamo and tried to use it to cripple the fledgling Frelimo government in Mozambique. Renamo gunmen were trained by the South African special forces before launching their campaign of terror attacks inside Mozambique in 1981.

American imperialists also had a hand in Renamo's dirty war against Mozambique. From 1985 onwards, officials of Ronald Reagan's Republican Party and the powerful Heritage Foundation gave public backing to the Renamo 'freedom fighters': in 1986, three Renamo representatives were received and photographed in the White House gardens with Reagan's communications director, Pat Buchanan. Back in Mozambique, meanwhile, there is strong evidence that the Americans gave Renamo military and logistical back-up in the mid-eighties.

Renamo's dirty war has plunged Mozambique into anarchy. By 1989,

more than half a million had been killed in the fighting; 494 000 children had died from hunger created by the war; 3m people had fled their homes. Renamo are infamous as brutal torturers who have kidnapped tens of thousands and forced them into slave armies to porter arms and food. Starvation is endemic because crops have been systematically torched by the anti-government forces. The economy is on the verge of collapse: healthcare and education facilities have been obliterated by Renamo attacks, debt stands at \$5 billion, and a quarter of Mozambique's population is dependent on international food aid.

The attempts by South Africa and the USA to bring Mozambique to heel have paid off. The desperate government has been forced to seek South African investment on terms that it would have thrown out a decade ago. Maputo's prestigious Polana Hotel is once more under South African management, with Castle Lager-swilling businessmen from Cape Town at the bar, and the giant Anglo-American Corporation is waiting in the wings with \$200m for new mining projects that will shovel even more of Mozambique's wealth into the pockets of foreign exploiters.

Charnel-house

Pretoria and Washington have tightened the screws on the Frelimo government to reach a settlement with the Renamo gangs which have turned Mozambique into a charnel-house over the past 10 years. Once, the government refused to refer to Renamo by any other name than 'the bandits'; last year, it was compelled to draw up a joint communiqué stating that 'the government and Renamo recognised one another as compatriots and members of the great Mozambican family'. In December 1990 the government signed an accord with Renamo. Although more Renamo attacks on civilians have caused the talks to break down this year, the writing is on the wall.

Mozambique (and most of sub-Saharan Africa) has been forced to accept the International Monetary Fund's 'structural adjustment' programme in return for the IMF rescheduling its debt. The programme dictates the privatisation of state enterprises and severe cuts in public spending, which will make chronic unemployment worse, and force millions closer to starvation. A decade of imperialist-sponsored Renamo terror has brought Mozambique to its knees. Now Western financiers have moved in to finish it off. As one Caribbean commentator wryly remarked, 'the IMF is the economic wing of the armed bandits'.

The disasters that struck Africa and Asia in recent months have led to calls for more Western aid to the third world. The case for aid seems straightforward. The USA, Japan and the nations of Western Europe are among the richest countries in the world; Africa and Asia are desperately poor. The transfer of aid from 'North' to 'South' appears to make sound moral and humanitarian sense. In fact the issue is not nearly so clear cut.

Nobody could argue against the provision of food to the people of Ethiopia, or the granting of technical assistance to help third world countries develop their economies. But Western aid is not about charitable donations or the transfer of resources. 'We are not a social welfare agency committed to making transfer payments to solve the problems of misery or poverty', argued a vice president of the World Bank a few years ago; rather, he said, the bank's role in third world development is to provide 'unmatched protection and strength for creditors and shareholders'—that is, for Western governments and banks (see EH Rothberg, *The World Bank: A Financial Appraisal*, 1981).

Aiding the USA

David Coffin, deputy administrator of the official US government aid agency in the seventies, was even more upfront about the function of aid. 'Our basic, broadest goal is a political one', he noted: 'The aid programme planning process recognises that the programme is an instrument of US foreign policy.' (Quoted in S George, *How the Other Half Dies*, 1976)

Far from developing third world countries, the purpose of aid is to reinforce their subordination to the West and prolong the enslavement of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Humanitarian considerations are important only in giving a positive gloss to what are acts of naked self-interest by Western governments and bankers.

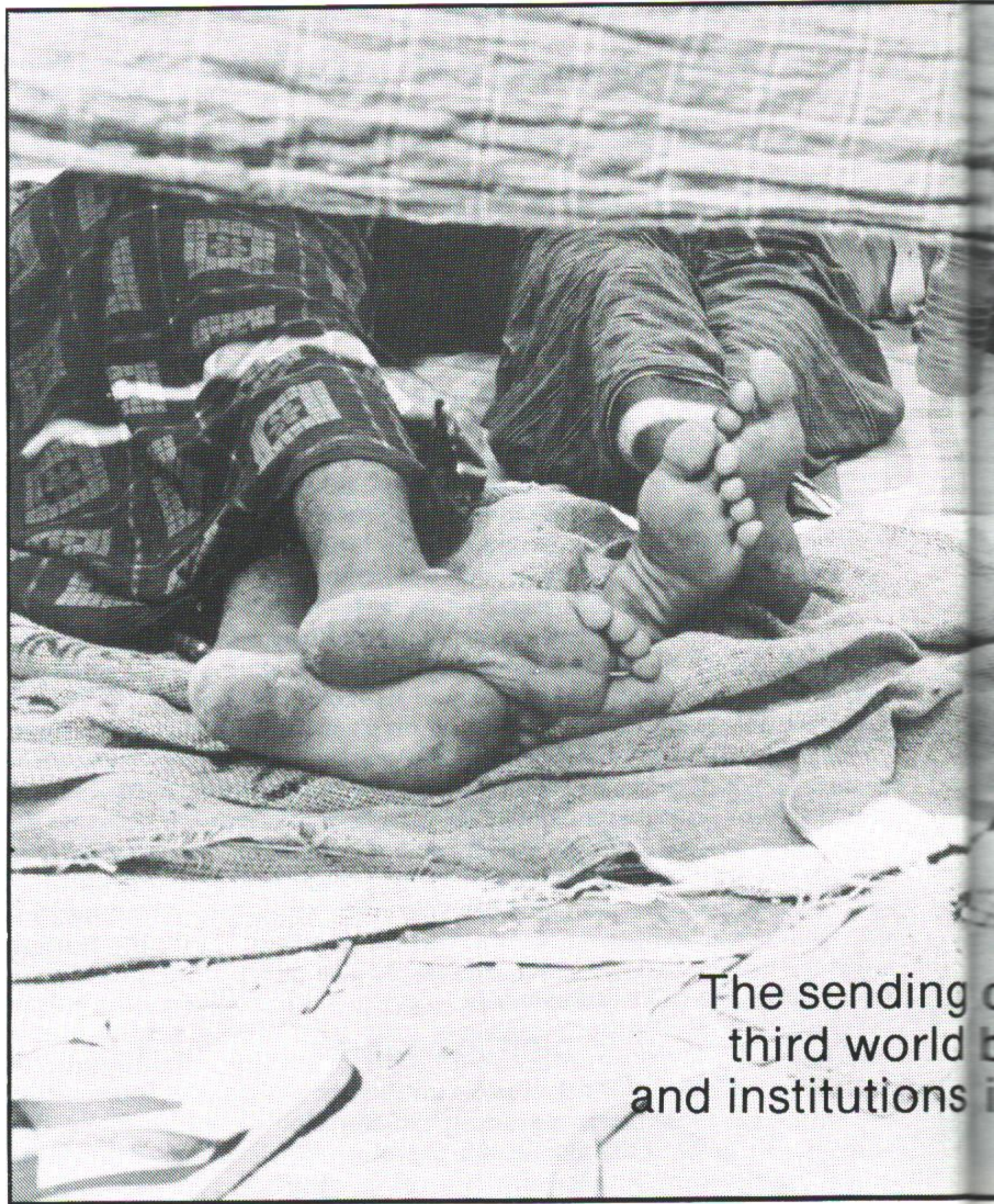
The concept of aid was invented by the USA after the Second World War. Washington emerged from that conflict as the dominant global

power, but faced serious problems in the third world. The old colonial empires were crumbling, national liberation movements were rising in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the Soviet Union was gaining influence. The Americans needed new ways to control the world without appearing to be openly imperialist. One method they adopted was to set up the United Nations as a front for US power. Another was to invent the aid programme.

The aim of the post-war aid programme was to stabilise international affairs under American control and halt the spread of Stalinist influence in the third world. As one recent study notes, 'the ultimate objective was to create a

new international economic order based on Western economic principles', and 'the incorporation of the third world into the new economic system' was largely achieved 'through the aid relationship' (E Conteh-Morgan, *American Foreign Aid and Global Power Projection*, 1990). Economic aid took its place alongside military force and diplomatic bullying as a weapon in Washington's armoury.

The pattern of US aid confirms its function not as a means to alleviate poverty or hunger but as 'an instrument of US foreign policy'. The greatest beneficiary of US aid has been Israel, America's 'strategic asset' in the Middle East. Of the top 10 recipients of US economic aid in 1981, just four—India, Bangladesh,



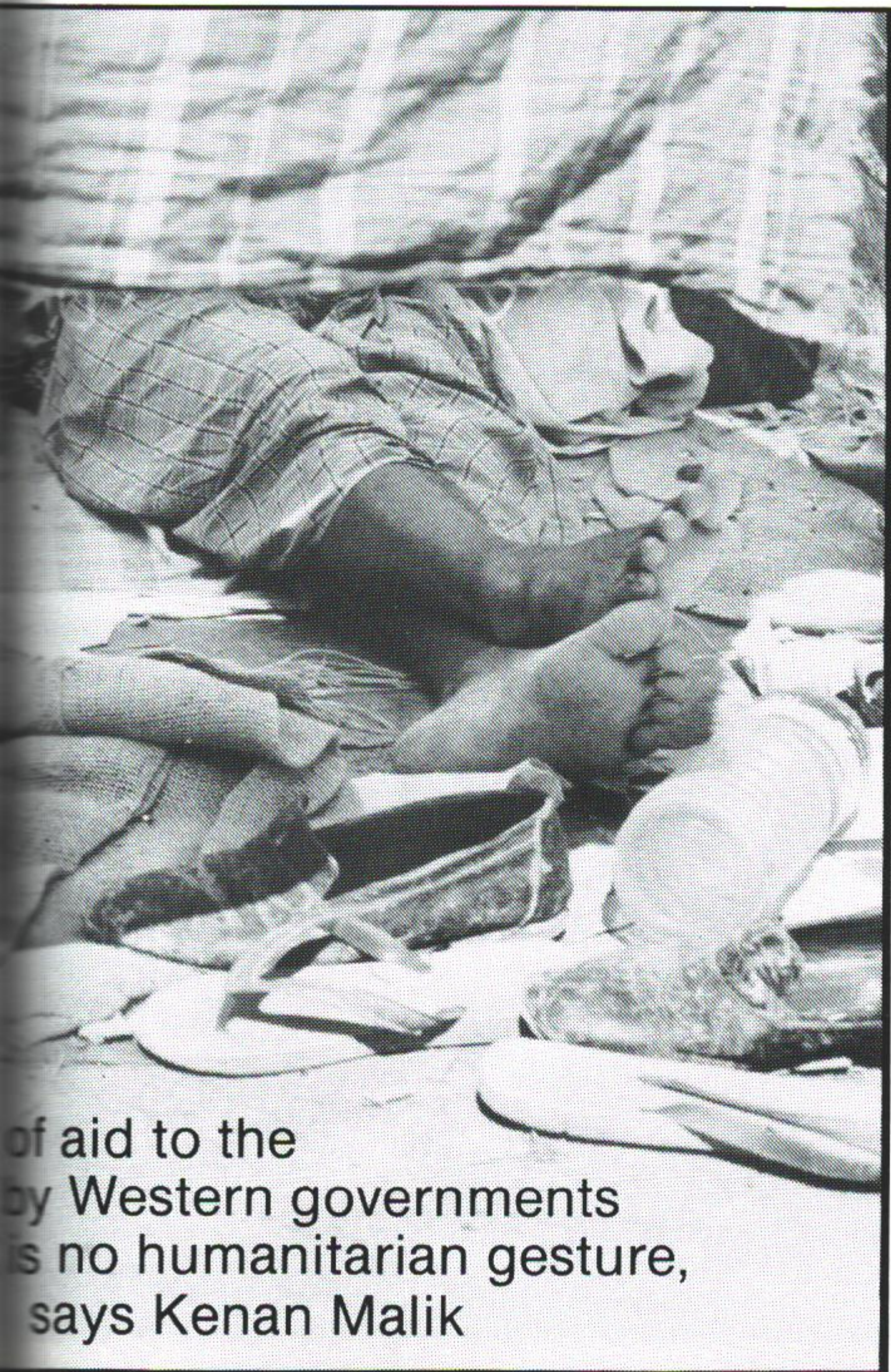
The sending of aid to the third world by governments and institutions is

Aiding the

Pakistan and the Philippines—were defined as 'low income' countries by the World Bank.

Washington has always distributed aid on a political basis, prioritising third world dictatorships which support US interests—the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos, Chile under General Pinochet, Nicaragua under the Somoza dynasty. Countries which challenge American authority have faced swift retribution—Vietnam, Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique all had their aid cut off, sometimes with devastating results. The famine in Cambodia is a result of Washington cutting off aid to the region and ensuring that Cambodia became the only country on Earth to be refused UN relief aid. Britain has followed the US lead in giving aid on

Footing the bill for imperialism: the third world starves while the West calls in its debts



of aid to the by Western governments is no humanitarian gesture, says Kenan Malik

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

West

the basis of Western interests rather than third world need.

Aid has been used to secure US economic interests, especially through opening up new markets for American goods. Most people conceive of food aid as a donation to third world countries by generous Western states. Nothing of the sort. Less than 20 per cent of US food aid is donated free. The rest is either bartered for strategic materials which America needs or is sold for cash. The act which inaugurated the food aid programme in the fifties announced that its aim was 'to increase the consumption of agricultural commodities in foreign countries, to improve the foreign relations of the United States and for other purposes'.

'The great food markets of the future', noted senator George McGovern, 'are the very areas where vast numbers of people are learning through Food for Peace [the food aid programme] to eat American produce. The people we assist today will become our customers tomorrow' (*War Against Want*, 1964, pp24-25). The policy has helped to create markets for everything from American soya beans to Coca Cola across the globe.

Since food aid was sold for local currency, the money was not repatriated but deposited as 'counterpart funds'. These were then used to provide loans to US companies which wanted to set up abroad. Everything from cattle ranches in Mexico to the Hilton Hotel in Bombay have been funded through the food aid programme which, Washington would have us believe, is a humanitarian gesture towards the third world.

Robbery in disguise

The real intentions behind Western aid are still better disguised when it takes the form of 'multilateral' aid, distributed by international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The growth of multilateral schemes has not changed the function of aid in promoting Western interests. A US treasury report on multilateral aid noted that 'because of the recipients' perception of the impartiality of the MDBs... [multilateral development banks] are better placed to advise LDCs [less developed countries] of the benefits of an international system based on trade and capital flows and to elicit market directed changes in recipients' economic policies' (quoted in T Hayter and C Watson, *Aid: Rhetoric and Reality*).

The World Bank withdrew loans from Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, Grenada, Algeria, Peru, Brazil, Egypt

and Jamaica when they defied Western authority. The bank's key function has been to press third world countries to adopt economic policies which meet Western needs. It has opposed the creation of new industrial capacity in the third world on the grounds that such plants would compete with established industries in the West. Instead the bank has encouraged developing countries to rely on their 'natural resources'—promoting the use of the third world as a vast Western plantation. The consequences have been disastrous.

Most third world countries rely on a single export commodity for their survival. As world commodity prices have plummeted, they have become increasingly impoverished and indebted. The production of cash crops for sale to the West has led many third world countries to cut cultivation of food crops. This is a principal cause of famine in Africa. While millions face death in the Sahel for want of a handful of grain, World Bank projects there are growing carnations for export to Europe.

Western Godfathers

The third world's debt problem is a striking illustration of the dangers of looking to the West to support third world development. Thirty years ago the third world owed \$7.6 billion. Today the figure is approaching \$1.5 trillion, almost all of it owed to Western banks, governments and multilateral aid organisations. This is not evidence of the West's selfless generosity. At every stage, the debt crisis has been managed to suit Western interests at the expense of the peoples of the third world.

Third world debt took off in the seventies. Western banks recycled billions of 'petrodollars' from the Middle East as loans to Asian and Latin American countries, creating new markets which helped to pull the West out of recession. It also helped create a debt mountain which the third world could not climb. When the debt crisis threatened to destroy countries like Mexico in the eighties, the Western financiers took steps to 'reschedule' repayments—at far higher interest rates.

The result of the debt crisis is that, since 1983, there has been a net transfer of resources from the third world to the West, amounting last year alone to a record \$42.9 billion. Far from a benevolent West supporting the third world, the most impoverished parts of the globe are now 'aiding' the richest capitalist countries. The PR about aid has allowed the West to look like the Good Samaritan while acting like the Godfather.

Socialism for scabos



John Fitzpatrick takes exception to Alan Bleasdale's vision of socialism in *GBH*

I thought there must have been a mistake. This couldn't have been written by Alan Bleasdale and directed by Robert Young. Surely this was written by Peter Mandelson and directed by Hugh Hudson, and I was watching the Kinnock party political broadcast for the summer campaign. Here is socialism smelling of roses again: a decent, strike-breaking schoolmaster socialist vanquishing a bullying left-wing councillor loony type of socialist. It takes you back to the heady days of 1985 when Kinnock kicked Militant around the Labour

Party conference. Bring on the Brahms.

The late Eric Heffer was so moved that he strode out of the conference in protest. Alan Bleasdale was so moved that he decided to make a drama out of a crisis. But why has it taken him so long? A week is a long time in politics, and it is six years since the Neil Kinnock-Derek Hatton bout. I admit there will always be something grimly enjoyable about recalling the fight between Militant and the Labour leadership, so richly did they deserve each other. But this is stale stuff now, and

neither old nor instructive enough, like the marvellous *Monocled Mutineer*, to justify excavation at this stage.

For satire to have bite the target should be contemporary and powerful. Bleasdale kicking a limping man is not an edifying spectacle. He lived on Merseyside in the days when Militant did control the council. But he has waited until its leaders have been drummed out of the Labour Party and Hatton is helping police with their enquiries before sticking the boot in.

More importantly, when were left-wing



Labour councillors ever a force to be reckoned with? Even in the days of the GLC (abolished in 1985, Alan) the 'loony left' municipal socialists were a figment of tabloid imaginations. These days *Private Eye's* 'Rotten boroughs' column is just as likely to focus on voting scams in Liberal or Tory councils as it is to follow Militant's unofficial Labour councillors. In 1991, Labour councillors, in Liverpool as much as anywhere, are doing what they've always done—what the government tells them to do. A minority used to make gestures ('going to the brink' it was called), but Kinnock put a stop to all that years ago.

The real bullies are of course the Labour leaders who stomp around imposing candi-

dates, expelling activists and suspending local parties whenever anybody speaks out against them, which, let's be frank, is not very often in the Labour Party. Bleasdale, however, in his battle of the two socialisms, has inverted reality. Representing the socialism of Neil Kinnock is a meek and mild schoolmaster with an Oxo advert family, who is wonderful with children. In the other corner, representing socialism which wants to fight, is a thug of a council leader, whose gang smashes photographs of Harold Wilson and does other unspeakable things.

This is such a fraud that it makes it difficult to enjoy the superb performances of Michael Palin and Robert Lindsay. A heightened

caricature must be difficult to play without forever appearing to be over the top, but Lindsay gets manic energy and even emotional depth into the part, and there is no doubt that he makes the character extremely entertaining and irresistible to watch.

The most objectionable thing about the series, more than the irrelevance and dishonesty of its argument, is the way it portrays ordinary people. Those who strike to defend their jobs are yobs who intimidate mentally handicapped children. On the other hand, a respectable schoolmaster who pedantically refuses to support his colleagues (in defence of his own pay and conditions), unless specifically requested by a picket line, is a



PHOTOS: Channel Four

socialist hero, cheered on by a chorus of cardboard working class characters cut out from a Hovis advert. *I'm Alright Jack: The Sequel*.

Bleasdale won acclaim for the way in which *Boys from the Blackstuff* gave such raw voice to the pain, anger and despair of the unemployed. The characters (especially 'Gissa Job' Yosser), the dialogue and the formal innovations showed talent at work, even if the sentimentality and fatalism which afflicted later work, like the film *No Surrender* and the musical about Elvis, were already evident.

What has carried over from the early work into the present series is not the Scouse wit, nor the dangerous dialogue, but his tendency to want the working class to be victims. Bleasdale can relate to victims. He can pity them, and help them cry. Both of his protagonists are psychologically frail characters, and even the council leader ends up a victim, in penitent tears. In *GBH* we see the fear of the petit-bourgeois playwright for the

working class as fighters, the distaste for ordinary people who don't want to turn the other cheek and cry into their beer.

In Bleasdale's world, ordinary people aren't even capable of taking action on their own initiative. They are manipulated by sleazy journalists, drunken, dreaming Trotskyists and most of all by sinister secret service agents. He uses the familiar smear that left-wing activity is the work of secret agents. The argument, if you can call it that, suggests that militant activity only provokes a right-wing backlash, so militant activity is right wing (and probably the work of right-wing agents) and is thus to blame for police repression and right-wing governments. The Irish in particular have been getting this for years—you're just provoking the British state, so cut it out.

'If you fight you'll make it worse.' Bleasdale recycles the scabrous old alibi for not fighting at all, and dresses it up as a plea to fight in a more reasonable way. He adds a further banality, expressed at the end by his council

Charles Shaar Murray

It's only rock'n'roll,

Charles Shaar Murray has been writing about pop music since the late sixties. Toby Banks talked to him about the rock'n'roll myth.

I came, as somebody once said, for the half hour argument, but I got the two hours. Once Charles Shaar Murray gets going there's no stopping him: a stream of opinions pours forth, interrupted only by a neat aphorism here to tie things up, a smart-arse put-down there, to nail some tiresome folly. He talked about everything from racism to nostalgia, but my brief was rock and journalism—just the facts, please.

Charlie Murray was let loose on the British public while still a teenager, in the celebrated *Oz Schoolkids' Issue* which became a cause célèbre when it was prosecuted for obscenity in 1971. A spell at *Cream* led to a call from the ailing *New Musical Express*. His job was to 'transplant a rock sensibility' into the horn-rimmed spectacled old organ, which he did with the help of underground press chums like Nick Kent and Ian MacDonald.

Today he is still writing about pop music, unlike most of his contemporaries. And unlike them he has never seriously blown his cool or lost his bearings, thanks to his firm grounding in black music (unusual for rock critics in the early days), his social and political insights, and his sense of humour. He may have an anthology of his work in the shops, but he isn't yet ready for the role of Grand Old Man of Rock Letters: 'Get this. I was "20 years ago today-ed" by the *Sunday Times* the other day. They were doing a thing on the Oz trial. After I hung up I remembered that 10 years ago *Harpers* rang for a "10 years ago" Oz trial article. I was thinking, fuck! Does this mean that in the year 2001 somebody's going to ring me up and say, "It's been 30 years since the Oz trial..."? I suppose it's vaguely of public interest and the best thing about it is I only have to discuss it once every 10 years.'

I crossed out my Oz questions and went straight for the big one: the death of the sixties rock'n'roll myth. For a brief period pop music had been dominant. There were few alternative pastimes and 'playing records' was still a big deal. Toddlers, freaks and mums and dads all listened to the Beatles. Then came the big split between pop and 'serious rock', which aligned itself to the underground movement of the late sixties. Out of this pond came the first rock journalists, a select band of predominantly white, middle class, college-educated critics who wrote the official history of the rock world. As Murray put it in his earlier book *Crosstown Traffic*, 'rock is a "youth" music defined in perpetuity according to the terms of those who had their "youth" in the sixties'.

In the seventies, rock became institutionalised as the music of 'the kids' and 'the scene', at the very time that the alternative scene was disintegrating, and appealing less than ever to 'the kids'. Rock critics looked to the music to carry the torch for their sixties dreams, becoming preoccupied with searching in vain for the next Dylan/Lennon. Meanwhile, 'the kids' were flocking to discos or listening to Status Quo, oblivious to the arbiters of taste in the rock press, who remained oblivious to them.

'By the time people realised pop music was worth discussing, the sixties consensus had disintegrated', says Murray. 'The listening station had been set up, but the transmitter had stopped transmitting. In the sixties most stars identified openly or codedly with the idea that there was a vast community that wanted social change. By the early seventies everybody had retired hurt, but rock was claiming an importance it was no longer prepared to earn. It wanted its importance taken on trust.'

The pace had slowed down, there weren't great singles released every week. There was time to take stock and make sense of it all. In the sixties it was too new for a critical consensus to emerge, and people who wrote about pop didn't know what "critical consensus" meant.

'There were various retreats, including a separation of the rock and soul audiences, which had overlapped in the sixties. Whites were scared of blacks, and blacks were disgusted by whites. More or less by mutual consent, white businessmen got out of black music, and white audiences stopped listening to it. Black music has always been treated with a sort of snobbish 'real ale' attitude. Whites into blues in the sixties were contemptuous of Stax, Motown and James Brown, whom they regarded as a watering down of the pure milk, or pure bourbon, as the case may be. The Campaign for Real Blues then became the Campaign for Real Soul when disco came along. Personally, I loved the *Shaft* era, the Temptations with Norman Whitfield, Curtis Mayfield, Miles Davis and that stuff, Sly to an extent. It's deeply groovy, it's about something and it's musically sophisticated. I can't imagine weeping tears of regret for times past over Disco Tex and the Sex-o-lettes. I appreciate that it means something to people who had experiences around that music, but it doesn't do a hell of a lot for me. I was resentful when James Brown started squiffing out.'

A big question mark was also hanging over the youth myth. What would happen when the stars reached 30? And where was the young blood? Things were pretty dire. The *NME* tried to bring things to a head, comparing the tax exile stars touring the football stadiums to the idle rich aboard the *Titanic*. 'Until punk, I only

leader who has seen the light: that the more left wing you get the more right wing you get. This presumably is because everybody gets fanatical and authoritarian when they stray far from the straight and narrow road between Conservative Central Office and Walworth Road.

Again, the message is the same. There's nothing you can do: they're not only watching you, they're pulling your strings. This is the well-hacked path of political paranoia from David Drury's *Defence of the Realm* to Chris Mullin's *A Very British Coup*. The British have never produced political thrillers of the calibre of Francesco Rosi's *Illustrious Corpses*, but at least some of those eighties works, unlike *GBH*, had a dramatic edge.

Part of the problem is that the conspiracy in *GBH* is so preposterous. Unlike Ken Loach in *Hidden Agenda*, Bleasdale cannot underpin his far-fetched tale with hard, detailed references to facts. *GBH* wants to be funny as well as thrilling, moving as well as hammering

home a political message. It spreads itself too thinly, however, with its story of secret agents propping up left-wing groups and stirring up race riots—all to keep the Tories in power.

You could forgive it perhaps if it was funny, but beyond Lindsay's wild and wonderful Hatton figure, *GBH* is grievously short of laughs. The one-liners are weak and the 'deadpan farce', as Bleasdale calls it, as subtle as a bedpan. A doctor in his surgery unexpectedly strips off and his male patient assumes he is being sexually propositioned. What could have been (and was probably meant as) a quick quip at homophobia's expense turns into a laboured schoolboy snigger, indulging all the old reflexes.

There was more wit in 20 minutes of *House of Cards*, but that series had the advantage of not taking itself too seriously. With a plot (and several characters) which would have done the *New Avengers* proud, Bleasdale would also have done well to have kept his tongue firmly in his cheek. Unfortunately, he can't

keep his proselytising author's mouth shut. The schoolmaster hero tends to speak in Peter Mandelson-type press releases. 'I'm more of a socialist than you'll ever be', he tells the council leader; and just in case anybody is missing the drift, 'don't ever claim what you are doing has anything to do with socialism'. He doesn't hate the workers however, 'They're not bad men, just stupid, misguided, insensitive'. On cue, one of the good Hovis-type workers reassures him, 'Eee lad, we're in t'majority, you know. These young snots, they're not Labour'.

With dialogue like this, who needs a megaphone. In the final episode, however, Bleasdale lets us have it full blast. It's the teacher again: 'We have to behave with dignity and honour and above all without corruption.... Socialism is the redistribution not only of wealth but of care and concern and equality and decency and belief in humankind.' This, from a mealy-mouthed scab.

but I write it

knew three musicians who were younger than me. Then there was Quo and "The Sabs" [Black Sabbath]—lumpen hippy, the dandruff-laden stuff left at the bottom of the saucepan after everything I like about sixties rock had evaporated. Of course there were people like Alex Harvey and Ian Hunter, who were popular with rock critics because they shared their interests. But my view was that we didn't need a stylised representation of nasty kids performed by intelligent sensitive 35-year olds, we needed some actual nasty street kids. And remember, they were both killed stone dead by punk. At *NME* we believed that rock had the potential to be more than great entertainment, but also had an obligation to be great entertainment. We wanted a spitting mad rock band in every basement!

"When punk came along, people said, "But this isn't what we ordered!" I thought, fuck it! This is it! It's here! What was the alternative? Being bored rigid by Rick Wakeman's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves on Ice...*"

After a period of disorientation, the rock press threw in its lot with The Sex Pistols and The Clash, to the dismay of 'True Zep Fan' and other 'betrayed' readers. In retrospect, the journalists' conversion isn't surprising. Although punks claimed to shit on the hippies, they were the last gasp of the sixties crusade for rebellious pop music. By that time, though, the 'us and them' was merely a music business family squabble: 'selling out' meant nothing more than whether you went on *Top of the Pops* or not.

'I had a lot of arguments with hippies at that time. They were going [adopts yokel accent]: "When oi were a la-ad I didn't let people yell at me for moi hair then, and I won't let them yell at me now." And I was thinking, Jesus, these people are short-sighted....Punks thought they were in revolt against the sixties, whereas in fact they were in revolt against the first part of the seventies. Punks and hippies had a lot in common. It was time to ask the old sixties questions again, in a different accent and clothes. Art v commerce is about as near to a

genuine ideological argument as rock has ever got. Is music the property of the people who listen to it? Is it something you do for yourself, or a leisure service you contract from a corporation?"

From the *NME* onwards, rock critics have chronicled the demise of the old myths. Iconoclasts like Julie Burchill relished the task and lambasted the 'boys' club' of the rock press into the bargain. Some (notably Lester Bangs, who literally died for rock'n'roll) beat their chests in anguish. Others have carried on regardless. But anybody writing about rock music shares the problem of how to address a subject which becomes more ridiculous the older it gets and the more seriously it is taken. How to avoid academic intensity or moronic enthusiasm?

The *NME* of Murray and Kent forged a distinctive and much-copied style, borrowing from jazz criticism and the experimentation of Mailer, Wolfe and others to enlarge the scope of rock journalism. At its worst, an *NME* interview would start with a half-page description of the writer's bus journey. At its best...read Murray's new book, *Shots from the Hip*, and enjoy. Sometimes brevity is just as effective, as in Murray's one-word review of Lee Hazelwood's album 'Poet, fool or bum?'—'Bum'.

The *NME* also developed its own distinctive argot, a curiously florid blend of stylised American street slang and high-falutin olde English, in which words like 'scuzz' rubbed shoulders with 'scribes', 'doyens' and 'platters'. The *Sunday Times* credited the paper with the destruction of the English language, yet the *NME* acquired a reputation as a writers' paper (unlike the *Sunday Times*).

'We wanted to have as much fun with language as the people we admired were having with music' says Murray. 'It was a rococo combination of old slangs, a platonic ideal of colloquial speech, like Damon Runyon or Chandler. Or Wodehouse, for that matter. We also played around with the idea of a paper, and the half-way intelligent reader

identified with the in-jokes and felt involved, as the letters page showed.'

Today *Q* magazine has refined this approach, as it addresses much the same audience, now older and with big CD-buying market power. What was slightly ridiculous 20 years ago is now very ridiculous. The distancing inverted commas loom large in *Q*'s sophisticated, self-deprecating formula. Old rock fans can indulge openly once again, under the cover of a wry smile at their lip-biting, head-shaking pasts.

'It's affectionate self-mockery. What *Q* comes down to is: you know there's something ridiculous about being a rock nerd, we know there's something ridiculous about being a rock nerd, we both acknowledge there's a slightly ridiculous rock nerd in us and you. It's like digging out a picture of yourself in the worst trousers in the world and showing it to somebody who's probably also got a picture of themselves in the worst trousers in the world at home.'

• *Shots from the Hip* by Charles Shaar Murray is published by Penguin, £6.99 pbk





Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV

An English Heritage Bilko

bet you already know what this month's column is about. Not since the days of 'Dalek' and 'Tardis' has a word passed so quickly from the TV screen to common speech as Pop Larkin's 'perfick'. It's a great catch-phrase, the self-satisfied pronouncement of a man who has life sussed. He pays no taxes and does no work. He is the common man triumphant in the face of the system—a sort of English Heritage Bilko.

Of course as soon as you make that comparison a crucial contrast between the two series becomes apparent: where *Bilko* was blisteringly witty and oddly moving, *The Darling Buds of May* (Yorkshire) was passionately, zealously, evangelistically crap. The plots were puerile. The language was culled from fifties English grammars—the sort where you fill in the blanks with clichés: 'as plain as a ...', 'as daft as a ...'. The overall effect was as charmless as England. The production values, usually masturbatively high in this slot (see *Inspector Morse*), were distinctly Australian.

In the closing episodes, a director clearly head-hunted from a wedding video firm tried (but not very hard) to evoke the drowsy headiness of a French summer with the help

of a couple of goose-pimplly non-speaking extras and some shiveringly naked trees. To speak kindly, it looked bracing.

In the countdown to the franchise auction, many ITV companies launched flagship drama series, chest-beating on the quality issue. *The Darling Buds* was Yorkshire's pitch. When I first saw it, I reached for my cheque-book, thinking I could probably get YTV without stretching my credit card. Then I saw the ratings. *The Darling Buds of May* was watched by 20m people. It was more popular than *Coronation Street*. The most inexplicable success since Margaret Thatcher. Questions were tabled about it in the House. John Major asked to see tapes of it. The leader writers of middlebrow tabloids dubbed it, imaginatively, 'perfick'. How did it happen?

A very kind euphemism appeared recently in a L'Oreal advert: 'volumise'. It means make thin hair stick up so it looks thick. Yorkshire volumised HE Bates' hacky little novelettes in a particularly crafty way. It shot them on film; stuffed them with David Jason and Anna Massey and played up the fact that they were adapted from books. In short it made them look like quality TV so

that the audience need not feel guilty about spending their Sunday evenings watching the *Beano*.

The Darling Buds was pitched at the kind of people who are quite snobby about TV as a whole. They prefer their drama to look like coffee-table books—*Brideshead*, *Morse*, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. It's a good audience to go for because it is almost totally lacking in discrimination, so once you've got it you will never lose it. It consists of the kind of people who regard David Lodge as a novelist and LS Lowry as a painter. Happily for Yorkshire TV that includes a lot of television reviewers.

It was hard to keep the *Beano* out of your mind when Pop was around. His sensuality was very Roger the Dodger, focused as it was on the slap-up feed. The big joke of the last two episodes was a *Beano* standard—foreigners are funny. The French in fact seemed to be incapable of speaking their own language. Where *Bilko* is subversive and smart, Pop Larkin is childish and regressive.

Now a lot of mainstream TV drama is regressive. Its heroes are the heroes of the playground—cops and robbers, doctors and nurses. The best of it, however, contains some sort of critique of its own immaturity. *Boon*, for instance, is about a motorbike courier who likes to play cowboys. And you can do a lot with childishness. You can tie it up with innocence (*Last of the Summer Wine*) or idealism (*Citizen Smith*). *The Darling Buds* tied it up with patriotism.

In 'A breath of French air', Pop Larkin's refusal to conform is presented as though it is typically British—an extension of the Englishman's-home-is-his-castle idea. This is very flattering to its target audience—people who like to think they are eccentric because they sing in the bath; the kind of people who usher you into their deathly boring offices with the phrase, 'we're all mad here' as though they were nests of dada culture terrorists.

This Little Englandism reached its fullest expression in the final episode in which the Larkins served up roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (with jelly to follow) and the French fell upon it like wolves, salivating before this revelation of 'proper food'. Pop Larkin had no need to don a Union Jack waistcoat. He was figured forth unmistakably as John Bull: daft as a Gazza, and dangerous when roused. It was a chilling moment. A smiling dad, an image of nineties man, standing up for a new, pally fascism. Plain as a pikestaff, Dad.

This Little Englandism reached its fullest expression when the Larkins served up roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and the French fell upon it like wolves, salivating before this revelation of 'proper food'

the marxist review of books

Eve Anderson takes issue with those who see Saddam Hussein as a new Hitler, and explains the real dynamic at work in Iraq

The cult of Saddam

Books discussed in this article include: John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, **Saddam's War: The Origins of the Kuwait Conflict and the International Response**, Faber & Faber, £13.99 hbk; Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, **Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War**, Victor Gollancz Ltd, £9.99 pbk; Committee Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq (Cardri), **Saddam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction?**, Zed Books, £9.95 pbk; Dilip Hiro, **The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict**, Paladin, £6.99 pbk; Pierre Salinger with Eric Laurent, **Secret Dossier: The Hidden Agenda Behind the Gulf War**, Penguin, £4.99 pbk

Since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last August, the British public has been fed on a strict diet of anti-Saddam Hussein propaganda. We have had it drummed into our heads from all quarters that this Hitleresque figure rules Iraq with a rod of iron, the massacre of the Kurds being only the latest episode in a long history of evil deeds. Surrounded by spineless acolytes, Saddam apparently indulges in fantasies about his military prowess, feeding off the cult of personality which his regime has carefully constructed.

Ironically, the cult of Saddam spreads beyond the borders of Iraq to the West itself. Nowhere is the cult stronger than among Western academics and media commentators. In the preface to *Saddam's War*, John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, journalists from the *Independent* and the *Daily Telegraph*, put forward the thesis that, 'One man, Saddam Hussein, was responsible for all the consequences of the aggression' (pxiii).

If one man is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and the slow torture of the Iraqi population through starvation and disease, then it is but a small step to argue that this omniscient figure must be some kind of demon. The most popular metaphor for the modern-day secular hell that is Saddam's Iraq is the genocide of six million Jews by the Nazis in the Second World

War. Predictably, Bulloch and Morris go on to draw the parallel: 'The Baathist doctrine which Saddam espoused shared ideological roots with European fascism. Its totalitarian pan-Arabism was a mirror image of Hitler's pan-Germanism. Under Saddam the Baathists adopted a cult of violence which was closer to Nazism than to the arbitrary despotism which had been practised in the Middle East. With hindsight it might seem obvious that Baathist Iraq was a threat to world peace.' (p5)

The conflation of Saddam and Hitler has become the standard explanation of the Gulf crisis and justification for the US and British invasion. Although *Unholy Babylon* has a wider remit and is well researched, Darwish and Alexander commit a similar error in promoting the myth that Baathism is identical to fascism. They assert that Saddam inherited from his uncle 'an admiration for Nazi principles' (p199). No evidence is provided to substantiate this thesis. The authors also describe Saddam as 'Big Brother' running the perfect 'Orwellian' state.

The Saddam=Hitler analysis is shared by radical commentators, who have valiantly done their bit to make this crackpot theory respectable. *Saddam's Iraq* is a compilation of essays by left-wing writers, including supporters of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). Given the left's current demonisation of Saddam, it is worth recalling that the ICP joined the Baathist-inspired Patriotic Front in 1974 and did not leave until 1979, despite the fact that the regime closed down the free press and executed and exiled thousands of ICP members. The dogma at the time was that the Baathists were the leaders of the democratic revolution. Lacking any political initiative of its own, the ICP became so degenerate that it collaborated with its own suppression.

In his contribution, 'Political developments in Iraq 1963-1980', U Zaher explores the notion that the Baathist coup against the Arab nationalist Qasim in 1963 was a 'fascist coup' (p30). His thesis relies heavily on the crass parallel between the Baathist national guard and Hitler's 'shock troops'. Since both organisations were brutal and merciless in their dealings with their opponents and both hated communists, then, according to Zaher, they must be the same. By this logic, the USA's prosecution of the war in Vietnam must have been the work of fascists of truly demonic proportions.

A more sophisticated version of the same myth is presented in the essay by 'Isam al-Khafaji, 'The parasitic base of the Baathist

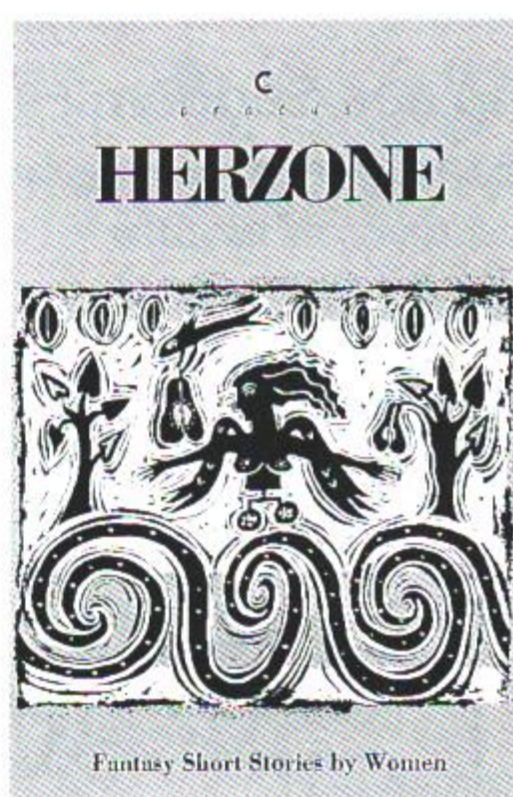
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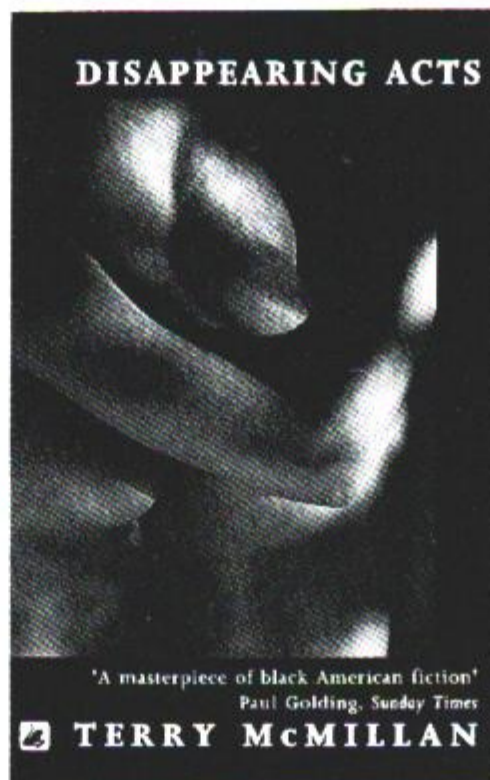


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regime'. He argues that the Baathists 'attempted to play the part taken by the Nazis in Germany, to try to win over the mass movement after attempting to paralyse the left and simultaneously putting forward slogans which appear superficially similar to those of the democratic movement' (p85). Al-Khafaji is redeemed only by the fact that he tries to deal with the developmental dynamic peculiar to Iraq as a backward third world country. More of this later.

The origins of the myth that the Arabs are Nazis comes from the British and French experience of decolonisation during and after the Second World War. With the fall of France to the Germans in 1940, both imperialist powers in the Middle East suffered a crisis of legitimacy. Their authority was called into question by the Arab nationalists of the day. The latter realised that the enemy of one's opponent can sometimes be a useful ally—a tactic used by countless national liberation movements over the years. If the Arabs looked towards Germany, it was only because they preferred the imperialist who was not standing on their neck to the imperialists who were. Support for the Nazis was no more profound than this.

The idea that Saddam and the Baathists are Nazis turns history upside down. The victims become the oppressors and the oppressors become the victims

The Arab Nazis myth was given a fillip by the creation of Israel in 1948. From then on, Israeli propagandists began to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism in order to head off the Arab challenge to their oppressive and undemocratic project. Like the British before them, the Israelis discovered that accusing the Arabs of Nazism was a useful way of garnering sympathy and legitimising colonial rule.

The idea that Saddam and the Baathists are Nazis turns history upside down. The victims become the oppressors and the oppressors become the victims. The poor Europeans are now at the mercy of the imperialist, expansionist Arabs. Sadly, the boot is still on the other foot, as the outcome of the Gulf War has demonstrated all too clearly. Bulloch and Morris state that 'Baathist Iraq was a threat to world peace'. Yet Iraq's devastation at the hands of the Western allies proves it to be a backward third world country, incapable of standing up to the major international powers.

The key to understanding what Saddam and the Baathists represent lies in an examination of Iraq's development and its relationship to Western imperialism. Despite their absurd parallels between Iraq and fascist Germany, all the books under review indicate, if only inadvertently, that the crucial relationship is one of domination and subordination between Western imperialism and Iraq.

For example, Bulloch and Morris are initially at pains to blame the carnage of the Gulf War on Saddam. But a few pages later, the real reason for the war surfaces: 'In the final analysis, the strength of the international response to Saddam's challenge was not about Kuwait or the future security of Israel or even about oil; it was about the status of the existing powers—particularly of the United States—in the new world order.' (p17) So, it wasn't all down to Saddam after all: the Gulf War was fought by the Americans to bolster their position as the leading imperialist power by militarising international relations in a third world arena. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was the pretext, not the cause, of the biggest military mobilisation since the Second World War.

Elsewhere, we are reminded of Iraq's subordinate status to imperialism. Under the British mandate in the 1920s, we hear that the RAF deployed 'effective time-delayed bombs which would explode after fleeing peasants had returned back to their gutted

villages' (p61). We are reminded that the West initially backed the Baathists because they were regarded as a 'useful counterweight to the spread of communism...and the pressure from Nasserism in Egypt' (p54). Furthermore, the shortlived Baathist coup of 1963 was directly promoted by the US state department and the CIA (p55). The authors provide damning evidence that Saddam started the Iran-Iraq war at the behest of Zbigniew Brzezinski, president Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, in order to contain the threat to US interests after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran (pp75-76).

Darwish and Alexander go further in divulging the pernicious impact of the West on Iraq by looking at the case of oil and the arms trade. They detail how Iraq was for most of its existence bled dry of its oil-wealth, and illustrate Iraq's total reliance on Western technology—hardly a sign that Saddam was on the threshold of world domination. The cynicism of the West is brought into focus, especially in the light of the present Kurdish crisis, by evidence that the West collaborated with Iraq in persecuting the very same Kurds less than two years ago.

Both *Unholy Babylon* and *Secret Dossier* deal with the events leading up to the outbreak of war and show what many of us already suspected. Saddam had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia and Bush was aware of this. Saddam was eager to do a deal with the USA, but was stonewalled by an American administration with its own hidden agenda. In *Secret Dossier*, Salinger and Laurent reveal the lengths to which the Americans went to prevent a diplomatic solution: the pressure put on Mubarak of Egypt to condemn the invasion and scupper an Arab dialogue; the seven billion dollar bribe given to Egypt to make good Mubarak's cooperation; and much more besides. The highlights of *Secret Dossier*, however, are the transcripts of Saddam's interviews with April Glaspie, the infamous US ambassador in Baghdad, and with Joseph Wilson, the US chargé d'affaires. Translated in full by Adel Darwish, they provide a real insight into the Iraqi rationale for the invasion. Above all, they show how Saddam believed he had American backing for his actions and reveal his incredulity at the US response. He wanted to be an American stooge, not an American bogey.

If Saddam is not Hitler, then who is he? *Saddam's Iraq* and *The Longest War* provide an analysis of the peculiar development of Iraqi society which gets away from the cult of Saddam-type approach. Al-Khafaji explains the excessive reliance on the state, politically and economically, as a common characteristic of 'the bourgeoisie in...third world countries which have arrived at the capitalist stage relatively late' (p85). Although the Slugletts subscribe to the Nazi parallel, in their contribution to *Saddam's Iraq* they show that the Baathists were essentially pragmatic anti-communists. Their programme was a mishmash of ideas stolen from everyone else. One day Saddam might promote pan-Arabism, the next he would promote Iraqi nationalism and pour scorn on the idea of uniting the Arab states in one nation.

Unlike the Nazis in the 1930s and the Iraqi communists in the fifties and sixties, the Baathists lacked a mass base. Hence in 1963 they were quickly ousted from power after their coup d'état. Following their next coup in 1968, it took them 10 years to consolidate their grip on power. Several factors allowed them to survive: oil revenues enabled them to modernise and raise living standards, and political alliances with other groups helped broaden

their base of support. Typically, the spinelessness of the left allowed a political vacuum to emerge which the Baathists exploited to the full. By supporting the Baath Party in the 1970s, the ICP demoralised its own supporters. By the end of the decade, Saddam could get rid of it without fear of any comeback.

Through a study of the Iran-Iraq War, Hiro provides an insight into the nature of Saddam's regime and the fragility of Baathist political power. Unlike many other writers, who stress one-sidedly Saddam's rule of violence, Hiro reveals the weakness of the regime and its lack of control over society. His analysis anticipates the current problem of civil war and the fragmentation of Iraq along ethnic and religious lines.

Hiro examines the unrest among the Shia Muslim majority in the early stages of the Iran-Iraq War. Groups like al Daawa, a militant Muslim guerrilla organisation, sprang up. Assassination attempts were made on Saddam's life. Fearing the Shias would become a 'fifth column' inside Iraq, Saddam began to promote Islam as an official ideology of the regime. Key government appointments were given to Shia Iraqis. The Baath Party adopted a new stance on Islam at its ninth congress. Saddam began to portray himself as a devout Muslim and made well-publicised pilgrimages to Shia shrines and mosques. The regime was under so much pressure that

it even started a mosque building programme.

At the same time Saddam began to campaign around the theme of Iraqi nationalism, over and above the traditional Baathist rhetoric of pan-Arabism. It was a bid to engender Shia loyalty to the Iraqi state and make their religious identity secondary. Ironically, Saddam was aided by his regime's military failures. With Iran's invasion of Iraq and the threat of foreign occupation, the Shia masses were galvanised into defending Iraq and al Daawa was put on the defensive.

The artificial character of Iraq as a state pieced together by imperialism after the First World War is amply demonstrated by its current fragmentation. If further evidence is needed to illustrate its third world status, we have only to look at the noose strangling Iraq into dire poverty and degradation even now, after the Gulf War is over. Western sanctions are still in force, preventing basic food-stuffs and medical aid from reaching a population in the throes of a cholera epidemic. Scores of Iraqi children are dying every day for want of clean water, due to the systematic bombing of sewage works and water treatment centres. Forget about Saddam for a minute: imperialism is wreaking havoc on the lives of the people of the Middle East and the third world.

The recent events in the Middle East have raised questions about Israel's role in the region. **Alistair Ward** surveys the work of two of Israel's most important writers and finds in their novels a parallel concern with the problematic nature of Israeli identity in a period of change

From the land of Oz

Books discussed in this article include: David Grossman, **See Under: Love**, Picador, £6.99 pbk; David Grossman, **The Smile of the Lamb**, Jonathan Cape, £13.99 hbk; Amos Oz, **Black Box**, Flamingo, £3.99 pbk; Amos Oz, **The Slopes of Lebanon**, Vintage, £5.99 pbk; Amos Oz, **To Know a Woman**, Chatto & Windus, £13.99 hbk

The revival of the debate over the possibility of an independent state for the Palestinians, as well as recent events in the Gulf, have thrown into relief the question of the future of Israel and no doubt encouraged the present international interest in Israeli writing. This year has seen the first English translation of David Grossman's earliest work, *The Smile of the Lamb*, in the train of the success of his latest novel, *See Under: Love*, and the publication of Amos Oz's new book, *To Know a Woman*. Both of these authors express through their writing a concern with the contradictions that underlie Israeli national and cultural identity at a time of political transition, and provide valuable insights into the changing reactions of the intelligentsia to the upheavals of the past decade.

The intellectual tradition in which Grossman and Oz are working is characterised by a contradictory discourse of union and separation from wider Jewish history. Literature has always played an important part in providing peoples with the representative symbols that demonstrate national continuity. The literary canons of Western nations are treasured as the spiritual record of a shared

pool of values which binds a people together and expresses its common aspirations. The Jewish people have experienced this attachment to common myths in an unusually accentuated form. The Jews are the People of the Book: without a single language or nation, their principal bond has been the related cultural experiences based around Jewish religious and secular texts. The Zionist project of a return to the promised land claimed to be a fulfilment of the myths of the Jewish people. But it was at the same time a separation from and a negation of the rich cultural heritage of the Diaspora—the Jewish religious and literary continuity of 'exile' which, from the Zohar to Yiddish and Jewish-American literature, has maintained the Jews' distinct identity.

In *See Under: Love*, David Grossman approaches the problematic nature of this connection between Israeli identity and the wider Jewish tradition through a study of the Holocaust. The historical destruction of European Jewry has been the central plank bridging this growing gap between Israel and the wider Jewish community. The Holocaust, the apotheosis of millenia of persecution during the 'exile', became in the ideology of the Israeli state the clearest demonstration of the soundness of the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem: the monument to the nemesis of an older tradition redeemed by the return to Zion and the gathering together of the Jewish people in a land free of anti-Semitism. Grossman, in his confrontation of the horror of the Jews' wartime experience, attempts to revitalise our tragic sense of this dark period of twentieth-century history by going beyond the official commemoration of the Holocaust, which usually presents the genocide as incomprehensible in its barbarism, to an understanding and celebration of the Central European Jewish heritage destroyed by the war.

In the novel, Momik Neuman's attempts to personalise the Holocaust and rediscover the human tragedy behind the statistics entail a reattachment to the tradition of the Diaspora. The young Momik's uncomprehending fascination with the damaged refugees from Europe becomes a determination to write about 'his family and what the Beast did to us. And about being unable to understand my life until I have learnt about my un-lived life Over There' (p109). His reinvigoration of the refined but insipid artistic style that characterises his barren and cowardly relationships—through the bold appropriation of the luxuriant prose of Bruno Schultz (promising surrealist writer and victim of the Warsaw ghetto), and the extravagant unfolding of the untold last tale of the children's master storyteller, Grandfather Wasserman—enables him to go beyond the 'language of reality' which is unable to translate the experience of the Holocaust.

Amos Oz, in *The Slopes of Lebanon*, describes the Lebanon War of 1982 as the turning point at which the lie at the heart of Israeli dealings with the Arab world became unsustainable. Among its victims was 'The land of Israel, small and brave, determined and righteous'. It died in Lebanon perhaps precisely because, in Lebanon, its back was not to the wall. It was the wall and they, the Palestinians in Lebanon, had their backs pressed to the wall. From underneath the "ponytail and pinafore" of the myths, the claws peeked out' (p22). All previous acts of aggression could be justified to the satisfaction of most intellectuals, including Oz, as acts of self-defence. Oz's latest novels reflect the uneasy maturity of a society bereft of many of its unifying principles; the early pioneer ideals which had served to justify the initial expropriation of the Palestinians have decayed.

The Zionists' dissociation of themselves from the Diaspora

The Lebanon War of 1982 is the turning point at which the lie at the heart of Israeli dealings with the Arab World became unsustainable

For the Holocaust cannot be described but only relived through the imagination in the 'White Room'—the space between reality and illusion, where 'Nothing is explicit. It's all merely possible. Merely suggested. Merely liable to materialise. Or likely to. And you have to go through everything all over again, by yourself' (p124). The result is a tapestry of overlapping fables, with the expansiveness to evoke the scale of the historical catastrophe, while salvaging from the enormity of the disaster the tragic proportion of human responsibility and choice which can only derive from an individualised presentation of the circumstances.

In Grossman's first novel the ambiguity of fiction, which in *See Under: Love* enables him to discover or invent a mythic sustenance of human endurance and nobility amid the carnage of reality, becomes a treacherous refuge for self-deception. In *The Smile of the Lamb*, Grossman plays upon the problematic at the root of fictional mimesis, the fine line between imitation and deceit, to evoke the way in which the occupation of the West Bank has exposed the lie behind the Israelis' presentation of themselves as the upholders of humanistic morality and democracy in the Middle East. Towards the end of the novel, Uri declares that: 'There everyone was lying to me, while here—how shall I put it—we share a lie, which changes it from a lie into a more tolerant kind of truth. Because a lie one person alone believes in is a cruel and deadly deception, while a *kan-ya-ma-kan* (once upon a time) like mine and Kilmi's is full and vigorous.' (p141)

The Smile of the Lamb is about the power of lies to infect relationships, and the capacity for oppression to erode the shared ideals which sustain a society's belief in itself. The friendship of the naive Uri and the cynical Katzman is grounded in their common experience as volunteers at the earthquake disaster at Santa Anarella. When Katzman attempts to rediscover the altruism of that time in Italy by inviting Uri to take part in his administration as military governor of Juni on the West Bank, the inability to realise their hopes for the application of a more humane occupation in the Territories poisons their relationship. Uri tries to mediate between the Palestinians and the military, but finds that his efforts represent a lubrication and legitimisation of the machinery of oppression. Kilmi, the crazy Arab storyteller who befriends Uri, indulges in a different kind of self-delusion. His embroidered fables evoke a spiritual connection with the past of his land, which contrasts with the sterile disillusionment and estrangement from their environment of the Israeli protagonists. But fiction becomes for him an escape from the anguish of oppression. And his attempt to shelter his son, Yazdi, in a deliberately cultivated idiocy, in order to protect him from the knowledge or even language of national humiliation, proves unsustainable in an environment in which resistance is an inevitable side-effect of oppression.

tradition of coexistence meant that many of the values which were to define the new state had to be drawn from the process of colonisation itself. Thus on the one hand, the rebuilding of the land through application of agriculture and other kinds of manual labour, enshrined in the self-sufficient settlements of the early Jewish community in Palestine, was celebrated as a reforging of the ties between the Jews and the land, after generations of wandering with its concomitant restriction of the Jews to parasitic forms of employment. On the other hand, the colonial enterprise was represented as a civilising mission, bringing the modern and progressive European values of an open and free society to the backward and reactionary societies of the Middle East. In contrast, the Israelis of Oz's latest novels inhabit a more complex industrialised society in which self-sufficiency has been transformed into financial and military reliance upon the USA, the values of equality and welfarism are restricted by lines of race, and the principle of the open and tolerant society has come up against the dilemma of survival through oppression.

The organising principle of Oz's latest works, *The Black Box* and *To Know a Woman*, is a rigorous enquiry from a position of pervasive self-doubt. In the former, a bitter and painful exchange of letters rakes over the ashes of a burnt-out marriage in an attempt to make sense of the self-destructive and irretrievable passion at its core. In the latter, a recently widowed and retired Israeli secret agent looks back upon his past from the dead end of his life, applying his professional expertise of observation and analysis to uncover the truth behind his personal relationships. Both are very consciously detective stories of the inner life which, in the crisp and laconic prose of Oz, poignantly evoke the uncertainty underlying the modern Israeli identity.

In *The Black Box*, the struggle over the future of the marriage's progeny, Boaz, becomes a vehicle for an exposition of the tensions afflicting Israeli society. The divisions raised by the conflicting demands of the secular and the religious, the moderate and the new fanaticism of the right, and the expanding Sephardim and the traditionally dominant Ashkenazim sections of the population, are personified by the dialogue between Alexander Gideon and his ex-wife's new husband, Michel Sommo. Neither Gideon's cynical detachment nor Sommo's pompous messianism represents a credible solution to the problems facing their society; while all the next generation can offer is the flaccid and empty idealism of Boaz, which amounts to little more than 'I'm against hating'. Meanwhile, in *To Know a Woman*, Yoel Rabinovich—in turning his back upon his work and his responsibility to the state—finds the leisure to analyse the substance behind the various attachments that make up his life, and discovers an emptiness which can only be mitigated by resignation and self-sacrifice.

Read on

Deterring Democracy

by Noam Chomsky
Verso, £19.95 hbk

The casual cynicism of the American diplomat who mentioned in passing that the USA's coalition could 'turn Baghdad into a parking lot'; and the bald effrontery of the Reaganite who admitted that the USA had 'installed democracies on the style of Hitler Germany (sic)' in El Salvador and Guatemala are all too rarely called to account. In *Deterring Democracy*, radical US author Noam Chomsky sets out to explain the almost seamless domestic consensus behind the USA's pursuit of interventionist and often genocidal policies in the third world.

Chomsky argues that the elites of the advanced capitalist powers promote a facade of formal democracy to manufacture popular consent for policies which shore up their own entrenched and exclusive interests. To support the thesis, the author shows how the ideology of the Cold War has been used to mobilise domestic support for America's interventions abroad, and traces the USA's search for alternative bogeys to justify more recent military assaults on third world regimes in Panama and the Gulf.

Chomsky rightly predicts that the end of the Cold War will lead to greater instability in the international arena: 'The United States remains the only power with the will and the capacity to exercise force on a global scale...[But] military power not backed by the comparable economic base...may well inspire adventurism, a tendency to lead with one's strength, possibly with catastrophic consequences.' (pp2-3) The American-British carpet bombing of Iraq is immediate confirmation of this analysis.

Kirsten Cale

Amongst Women

by John McGahern
Faber & Faber, £12.99 hbk,
£4.99 pbk

John McGahern's novel *Amongst Women*, shortlisted for the Booker McConnell prize last year and now out in paperback, is a bleak tale of blighted lives. Its central character, Moran, is an old Irish republican guerrilla leader who fought in the War of Independence. Now, years later, he is embittered, feeling that the country has been sold out by the politicians, that the war was a 'cod'. Although passionately resentful of any mention of the past, it emerges that his guerrilla days were the happiest and most satisfying of his life. Now, as he ages, he is restricted to a life of domesticity amongst the women at Great Meadow.

The narrative is deceptive in its pacing. Life at Great Meadow is a series of rituals and repetitions: domestic (Moran's daily evening recital of the rosary); agricultural (the annual haymaking); linguistic (Moran's refrain 'Who cares? Who cares anyway?'); celebratory (weddings, births). On this

level, life at Great Meadow is assured, comfortable, certain. But this almost hypnotic pattern is punctuated by outbursts of violence provoked by Moran.

Intensely confrontational by nature, Moran continues the 'war' in an attritional struggle for dominance with his family and potential in-laws. This urge to dominate emerges particularly in his relationships with men. His elder son, Luke, is a conspicuous absentee for the greater part of the novel. Having suffered unendurable (and unspecified) slights from Moran, Luke has detached himself from the family and seemingly lives only for his work in London. The second son, Michael, cowed by Moran, escapes by means of sexual relationships with older, maternal women. Moran soon establishes that his two sons-in-law pose him no threat.

Ultimately, the threat to Moran's authority comes from the women—his second wife, Rose, and his three daughters. Moran is presented as a brooding and intimidating presence within the household (although at times charming and lovable). However, although browbeaten, the women have never been isolated, forming a sort of defensive coalition. As a result, the situation that develops is a reversal of the earlier one: Moran grows to fear his daughters.

The struggle that takes place within the novel has no victors. None of the daughters fulfils her potential: Maggie marries a feckless drunk; Sheila, deprived of a glittering university career, drifts into the civil service; Mona lives alone, measuring every man she meets against Daddy. The complex nature of relationships—the mixture of love and fear, the importance of family and of self—is subtly and powerfully conveyed, the book deserving of the critical plaudits it has received.

Christine Heaney

Ideology: An Introduction

by Terry Eagleton
Verso, £32.95 hbk, £10.95 pbk

Terry Eagleton's *Ideology* sets itself apart from his previous books by its pugnacious opposition to the latest fad in academia: postmodernism. Where Eagleton did so much in the eighties to promote structuralism in literary theory, today he is staking out an almost orthodox claim for socialism as the guide to today's ideological stew.

Despite a slow start—bogged down in definitions—*Ideology* is a racy and partisan guide to a variety of intellectual traditions: 'From the Enlightenment to the Second International' takes us from Napoleon to Marx; 'From Lukacs to Gramsci' deals—too generously—with the Western Marxist tradition; 'From Adorno to Bordieu' and 'From Schopenhauer to Sorel' deal with the two sides of modern theory, the obsession with ideology and the celebration of the irrational.

Eagleton is scathing about the 'curiously monistic' pluralism of postmodernism. Against the postmodern claim that rationality must be part and parcel of capitalism, he establishes the possibility of a rational critique of the system that gave us rationality: 'Postmodern thought would seem to have fallen for the sterile antithesis that "reason" must either stand wholly on the inside of a form of life, guiltily complicit with it, or lurk at some illusory Archimedean point beyond it. But this is to assume that this form of life is not somehow inherently contradictory.' (p171)

James Heartfield

SHORTLISTED

• **Dictionary of Political Biography, Business Books** in association with the Economist Books, £19.99 hbk

The *Economist's* who's who guide to the world of international politics is a useful reference source, containing more than 2000 entries encompassing politicians from every country in the world. Organised in A-Z order, it provides succinct portraits of all those alive and active (although that may be stretching a point for some entries: Deng Xiaoping springs to mind) on the international scene on 31 December 1990.

• **Intifada**, by Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, Simon & Schuster, £8.99 pbk

Acclaimed when it was published in hardback last year, *Intifada* is set to become a definitive work on the Palestinian uprising. The authors are well placed to tell the inside story of the intifada: Schiff and Ya'ari are highly placed media correspondents with close links to the intelligence service. They freely cite what are obviously the results of Shin Bet interrogations and tapped telephone conversations. The book downplays Palestinian oppression, but *Intifada* is required reading for students of the modern Middle East.

• **The Thirties and the Nineties**, by Julian Symons, Carcanet, £14.95 hbk

Crime writer Julian Symons' cutting portrait of the literary intelligentsia of the thirties, reissued with a diatribe against the deconstructionist nineties, pits a red decade against a grey one. The literature of political commitment compares favourably with the 'politically correct' in Symons' postscript, but the strength of the original work is its unwillingness to take Auden and Isherwood's commitment too seriously.



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