

A message to all opponents of imperialism
See centre pages

LIVING MARXISM

August 1991 No 34 £1.80

**After the
victory parades**

**THE
OTHER
WAR
GOES
ON**



**Liverpool: the left lets the Tories get away with GBH
Yugoslavia: the dangers of secession • Plus: Shakespeare,
serial killers and much more**

Irish Freedom Movement

**The twentieth anniversary of the
introduction of internment
without trial**

**TROOPS OUT
OF IRELAND**

**March led by republican flute bands
Assemble 1pm Islington Town Hall (rear),
Upper Street, London N1
(Highbury and Islington tube)**

**PRISONERS
OUT OF JAIL**

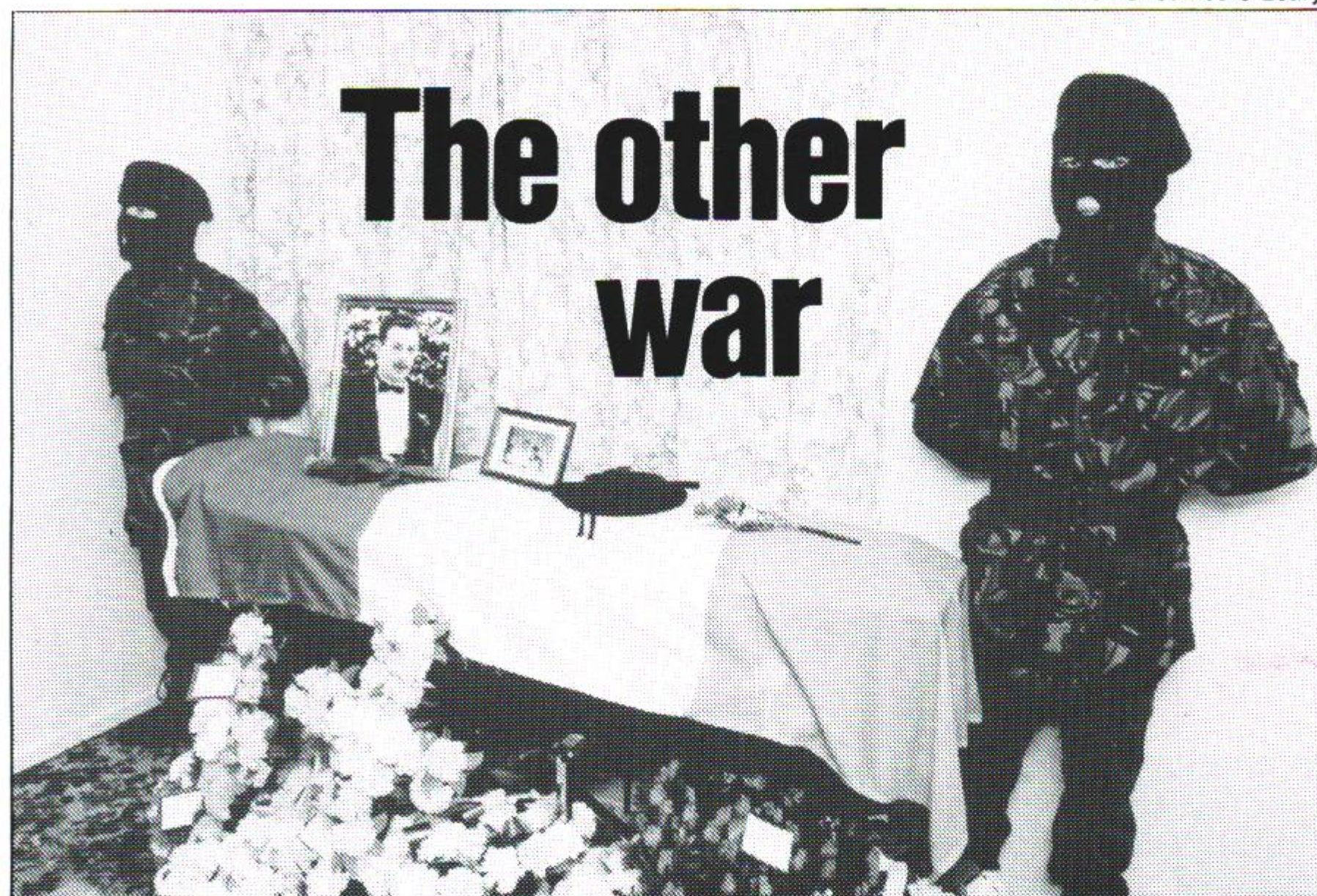
Saturday 10 August 1991

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The escape of two alleged IRA men from Brixton jail in July was a reminder that, even as the Gulf War victory parades march past, another war still rages right at the heart of the 'United Kingdom': Britain's colonial war of occupation in the North of Ireland.

August 1991 marks the twenty-second anniversary of the reappearance of British troops on Irish streets, and the twentieth anniversary of the imposition of internment without trial. But there are also more pressing reasons why we should raise the issue of Ireland this month. At a time when opposition to Western imperialism appears to be crumbling around the globe, it is doubly important for those in Britain who believe in liberation to show solidarity with the freedom struggle on our doorsteps.

On the centre pages of this issue of *Living Marxism*, we reprint an open letter from the Revolutionary Communist Party to all opponents of imperialism, calling upon them to support the Irish freedom march in London on 10 August. There can be no better reply to the warmongers' Gulf victory parades than a demonstration against imperialism in the capital city of the country where it was invented.

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**LIVING
MARXISM**

Monthly review of the
 Revolutionary Communist Party
 Telephone: (071) 375 1702

Subscription rates: Britain and Northern Ireland £15 • Europe (airmail) £24 • Outside Europe (airmail) £33 • Overseas (surface mail) £19 • (Institutions add £7.50) • Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX; Fax: (071) 377 0346 • Distributed by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE. Phone: West Drayton (0895) 444 055; Fax: (0895) 445 255; Telex: 881 3787 • Typeset by Junius Publications (TU) © copyright Revolutionary Communist Party • Printed by Russell Press (TU), Nottingham • ISSN 0955-2448 August 1991. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed

editorial

Scumm politics

Good evening, here is the news. Liverpool is a slum city populated by slum people. Manchester is a drug-den full of gunmen and gangsters. East London is inhabited by the dangerous owners of devil dogs. And in Scotland today, Glaswegians were drunk while Edinburgh was full of smack addicts. In short, North and South, working class people are scum.

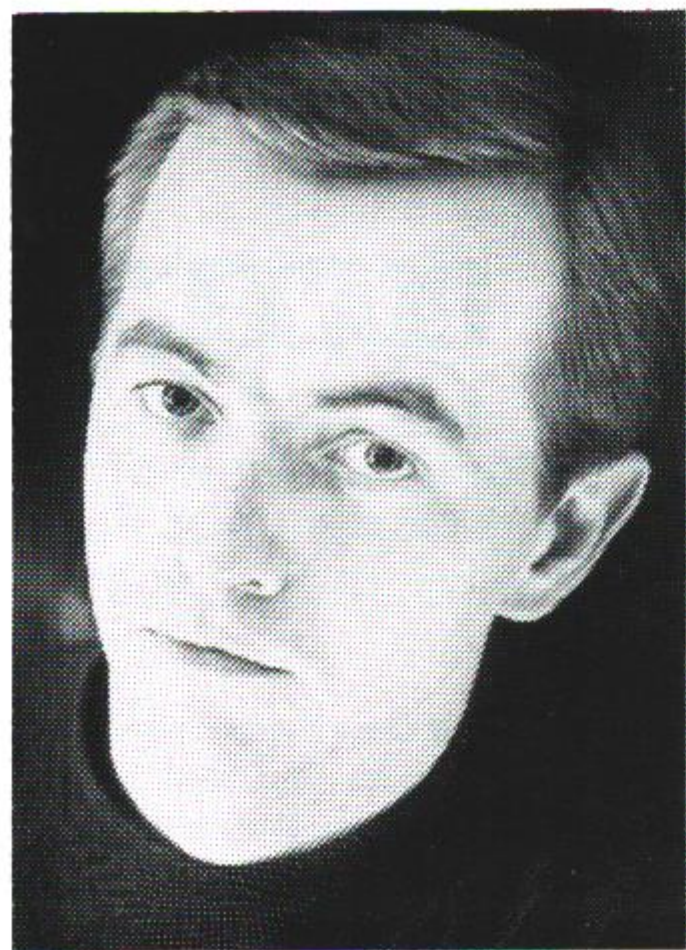
You can hear or read a version of this story in the media almost every day. Heaping abuse upon the worst-off working class people is nothing new; those whom the authorities now label as 'the underclass' used to be branded as 'the great unwashed'. It is a long time, however, since these ideas were as widely aired and accepted as they are today. The attempt to depict the unemployed and impoverished as shiftless and violent is now a

subplot in public discussions on everything from crime in the inner cities to left wingers in the Labour Party.

The effect of all this is to distract attention from the true causes of brutalisation in British society, and to pin the blame on those at the bottom. To make their accusations stick, the press and the politicians have had to rewrite the recent history of our cities.

In relation to Liverpool, for example, their aim has been to blame left-wing activists and striking workers for the crisis in the city. To listen to their tirades, you would think that everything there was rosy until Militant managed to get control of the city council in the mid-eighties; that Liverpool was some sort of urban Eden which has been corrupted by socialist serpents in donkey jackets.

The long-term devastation of Liverpool by the decline of the capitalist economy is passed over. The way in which unemployment, bad housing and the miserly social security system have reduced parts of the city to the level of a third world shanty town is ignored. The message is that the 40 per cent of people in Liverpool who live below the poverty line must be members of an idle, Militant-



editor
mick hume

inspired 'gissa' generation. 'Liverpudlians', says ex-Liverpudlian Edwina Currie, 'are skivers'. Which is another way of saying that Scousers are scum.

Manchester, meanwhile, is being targeted as 'the capital city of violence today'. The media have inflated out of all proportion the importance of a handful of drug dealers and a few shooting incidents in the city, using them to smear whole working class communities, especially in predominantly black areas such as Moss Side. The impression given is that life in Manchester has suddenly been brutalised by these people.

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We are supposed to forget the way in which, over many years, the authorities have created a culture of violence and desperation in a slum like Moss Side by treating the inhabitants like prisoners of war. Worse still, in presenting the social problems of the area as an issue of law and order, they expect us to see the police as the solution; the same police force which, in the 10 years since the riots of 1981, has shown the people of Moss Side violence on a scale which makes the much-hyped 'Cheetham Hill gang' look more like the gentlemanly lags of the Lavender Hill Mob.

Broadcasting the image of working class people as scum is very useful for the establishment. It helps to justify the class structure of society, especially at a time like today when the capitalist economy is in a slump. Mass unemployment in depressed areas can be explained away as the result of the inadequacy of the jobless, rather than the inability of the system to provide jobs. Of course, the authorities will assure us, the market economy provides equal opportunities for all; it's just that people have an unequal ability to take advantage of what's on offer.

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The anti-working class images also help to lend legitimacy to the way in which power is exercised in modern Britain. If society is truly threatened by an unruly mob of militant thugs and drug addicts, then it stands to reason that the police chiefs and the judges require more and more powers to protect civilisation. And if whole sections of the population are semi-literate and virtually sub-human, it is only right that, democracy or not, the running of the country should be left in the hands of those with the benefit of a public school education. By criminalising working class people, the powers that be seek to endorse their own standing as the nation's 'natural' rulers.

Seen in this light, it becomes clear that the stories about scum amount to capitalist propaganda, and crude propaganda at that. Yet these arguments have now achieved the status of commonsense truths, which can

pass unchallenged anywhere from the *Sun* editorial office to a university seminar. Many former critics of capitalism now accept the case against the working class. Indeed some of them have been responsible for formulating that case in the first place. The so-called soft left around the Labour Party, for instance, lent credence to the right's campaign by arguing that any display of aggressive militancy by workers should be condemned as 'macho' and 'stone age'. And

victims, they are fighters. They have to struggle simply to survive; organised together, they could have the strength for a struggle to take control over society away from the capitalists.

The fashionable view is that the working class is too aggressive. The truth is that where it matters, when it comes to defending themselves and their living standards against the government, working class people are not being nearly aggressive enough.

The fashionable view is that working class people are too aggressive. The truth is that, where it matters, they are not being nearly aggressive enough

radical academics who once concentrated on making critical studies of capitalism now spend their time pontificating on 'the problem of the underclass'.

A consensus has been created around the idea that working class people are a major problem. So while many will object to the stigma society attaches to a group like the disabled, and support the idea of promoting 'positive images' of them, nobody objects to the insults which are now being heaped upon the heads of millions of ordinary men and women. It is crucial that this consensus is confronted, if capitalism is not to escape taking the blame for the crisis it has created.

The discussion needs to be turned around. Who are the real scum responsible for brutalising life in Britain's cities? We have no wish to celebrate the anti-social behaviour of pushers, pimps, petty hoods and others who leech off the working class. But even at their worst, these characters cannot hold a candle to the capitalist authorities when it comes to screwing up people's lives. The crooks and thugs who need to be dealt with far more urgently are those at the top, responsible for running a system in which banking scandals and police corruption are considered less of a crime than an overtime ban against job cuts by binmen in Liverpool.

Far from being the cause of the crisis in society today, the working class is potentially the solution. Too often, those who try to defend ordinary people against attack do so by pleading for mercy for them as innocent victims. But working class people are not just

The decisive thing is politics. It is the conservative, anti-left political climate of the moment which allows the press and the politicians to step up their attacks on the working class without facing serious resistance. We cannot stop the Murdoch and Maxwell-run media calling people scum. But we can set about creating a new political culture based upon the working class, which can give our side the arguments and the ideas we need to resist the tide of abuse and hit back.

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There is a lesson here in the experience of the hardcore republican communities of Northern Ireland. In return for resisting the British occupation of their country, they have been called scum, and treated worse than that, for more than 20 years. It has not altered their determination to be free, because they understand that these are politically-motivated attacks from their enemies. And they have a coherent outlook of their own to insulate them against the media and government lies.

As the campaign to brand the working class as criminal scum gathers force, the creation of a comprehensive anti-capitalist outlook in Britain becomes an ever-more pressing necessity. Without it, working class people will remain vulnerable to attack from the scum system which wrecks cities and then tries to blame it on those whom it leaves to live in the ruins.

Letters

Midnight in the Century

I would like to raise a problem that is troubling me about the 'Midnight in the Century' articles (December 1990 and April 1991). They argue that the decrepit nature of the Western nations has exposed the limitations of their ability to develop in a way beneficial to humanity, leading to the decline in the belief in progress and human advancement. The life and death of Stalinism, it is proposed, has contributed to this fear of the future by illustrating the dire consequences awaiting those who attempt to organise society in a 'better' way. The articles therefore conclude that the project of building a working class movement in the 'Midnight in the Century' is very difficult.

My problem is this. In a still dynamic economy such as Japan, it is not apparent that capitalism throws up barriers to human development, so the need to build an independent anti-capitalist working class movement is hidden. And in decrepit capitalist societies such as Britain, it is not possible to build a working class movement because there is no concept of progressive change and development. One could therefore conclude that whether capitalism is dynamic or decrepit, it is not possible to build a working class movement. Without this agent of change, is the project of Marx actually as utopian as that of Owen?

Adrian Stevens London

To tie in with your 'Midnight in the Century' articles, how about an overall survey of the Marxist left in Blighty? If Marxism is to be rejuvenated in the twenty-first century then the left has really got to thrash it out so we can get on with the job at hand. Come on! You know it makes sense.

By the way, what happened to the Personal Column? Oh yeah, and why do you rarely print replies in the mag?

Jim Williams Staffordshire

Whilst I understand how Darren Webb (letters, July) can see a link between the arguments contained in the 'Midnight in the Century' (December 1990 and April 1991) and post-modernism, it remains a link forged through confusion.

Postmodernists like Lyotard argue against the Marxist project because it is based on a historical 'grand narrative' of class struggle. Instead, importance is given to the diversity which modern capitalism generates. Foucault

points to developments in mass communications promoting the 'information society' forming individualised 'power structures'; Lyotard is impressed with the diversity of contemporary social life from multiculturalism to consumerism. In such conditions the collectivism of class becomes obscure. It is possible to place some of Frank Richards' arguments in 'Midnight in the Century' in the same context: 'for the first time this century there is no real sense of a working class movement with a political identity anywhere in the world'. However, there is a major difference between the two outlooks.

Richards' article is an assessment of the collapse of the Stalinist and Labourist institutions worldwide, and its effect on the working class—the latter being difficult to pinpoint politically in these conditions. The postmodernist perspective is that of an assertion of changes purported to have occurred in the mode of production which promotes diversity and the assimilation of class identity.

It is precisely because there has not been, nor can there be, a fundamental change in the mode of production without a change in the social relations of production that such claims can be given no credence. The present conjuncture demands that we overcome the atomisation illuminated in 'Midnight in the Century'. For Nietzsche 'there is no beyond'. We must face the future.

Robert Fletcher Dudley

Out of the armchair

I have just wasted the last three years studying sociology and have read so much trash from 'Marxists' writing about the class struggle and the end of capitalism from their ivory tower armchairs.

What I read in *Living Marxism* is not like this. But I was alarmed to see someone espousing this form of 'Marxism' in July's letters page. Here Dave Chandler suggested that 'the pressing task today...is the establishment of a new intellectual foundation by appropriating and criticising current perceptions of reality and reality itself.'

Let's cut these fancy phrases. Capitalism is very good at dealing with them. It has had

decades of experience in ideologically subverting the working class, and loves that sort of thing. What it cannot handle is class action. Action speaks more than a trillion volumes of fancy phrases like Chandler uses. Action forces capitalism to use force. And bourgeois force communicates bourgeois brutality to the working class, turning ideologically subverted workers into vanguard activists in the class struggle, as their true material interests come sharply into focus.

Come on armchair 'Marxists'. Let's see if you've got any guts for action.

Jill M Waverly Langwith College, York

Unity and the ANC

I read Charles Longford's article 'Rehabilitating the apartheid state' (July) with interest. However, as someone active within the movement in South Africa, I would like to draw your attention to some of the practical problems we face today. These are immediate life and death issues which we have no luxury to study from afar.

Since Mandela was released and the ANC unbanned, we have faced physical and political attack. De Klerk and Buthelezi have attacked our communities and activists. Sections of the security forces are assassinating local leaders while thousands have been made homeless as a result of Inkatha-provoked massacres.

On top of this, there are many confusions about negotiations and the armed struggle. There is much political debate but an overwhelming desire by our people for a peaceful political transformation. Longford is right to point to the dangers of De Klerk dividing our movement but he seriously underestimates what has been achieved and what will be achieved.

Longford appears to have overlooked the fact that almost all apartheid legislation has gone. He seems to be arguing that the movement has not achieved anything other than falling into a trap. At a time when we face both great dangers, and huge possibilities, the need for unity and support has never been greater. It appears that *Living Marxism* is only interested in talking about divisions and future dangers. Shouldn't you be concentrating on solidarity with the struggle now rather than criticising us?

I agree that the movement should have dealt with the Winnie Mandela issue without the involvement of the Pretoria regime. But at this time I, like many of my fellow comrades, stand united with our leaders.

Simon Mabuse Natal, South Africa

The Red-Green debate

Thank you for printing (most of) my letter ('A Green sees red', July). However by cutting the last paragraph and giving the letter that particular heading, you implied I am a Green. I am in fact an RCP supporter arguing for a better critique of the Green Party's non-growth argument. Cutting the letter's second paragraph denied your readers the rationale on which the letter was based. Let me, therefore, repeat it.

Green Party writers like Guy Dauncey have rightfully exposed the bankruptcy of the way growth is measured by contemporary economists. GDP, for example, measures consumption per capita. The more we squander and waste the earth's resources, GDP rises and gets interpreted as an increase in wealth. Conversely, efficient use of resources (eg planned collective provision of transport, major investments in energy efficiency, scrapping of bomb-making etc.) makes GDP drop.

So as long as we use terms like GDP and GNP as valid measurements of wealth, we also accept a false logic about what constitutes growth and progress. Once the Green no-growth argument is properly understood, arguing against it can be seen for what it is—an argument against planned, rational use of the world's resources. Consequently, the many submissions to *Living Marxism* on the growth debate, all bidding to be more rabidly anti-Green than the next, sound absurd not just to Greens but also to Marxists like me.

Rory Ridley-Duff Ashford

Your recent analysis of Green politics contains some common misconceptions often found in discussions by the left. This seems to stem from a failure to appreciate the diversity of political thought in the Green movement. Those who have merely read the writings of the liberal wing of the Green Party (Porritt and Co) and organisations like Friends of the Earth will no doubt feel that whilst the environmental problems outlined are worrying, there is something severely lacking in their analysis of root causes. One cannot merely focus on an issue such as tropical rainforest destruction without an analysis of the class interests, the role of capital and the political system involved.

The fact remains, however, that organisations such as the Revolutionary Communist Party have done little to address the ecological issues such as the limits to industrial and economic growth, loss of species diversity, global warming etc. I feel that a more conciliatory approach to discussion and identification of common objectives would be

much more useful than the isolationist tone of your article ('The Greens: Eaten up', May)—which helps to maintain the fragmentation of the people looking for a post-capitalist alternative.

Nick Sofroniou Wales Green Party

Sharon Savvas' letter ('A Red sees Green', July) was a timely reminder that exposing the reactionary nature of Green politics is best done by quoting their ideas themselves. I can only conclude that those who plead for *Living Marxism* to adopt the Green cause (how flattering), or accuse it of ignorance (eg Rory Ridley-Duff on the same letters page) are so worried about pollution that their minds are unpolluted by ideas from Green Party manifestoes.

At the same time though, I think Sharon Savvas' letter shows the need for a more thorough expose of Green politics. With the racist myth of the 'White Man's burden' re-emerging, I think the Green's neo-Malthusianism is a particularly important theme to be challenged. I have recently met several people who have argued quite unashamedly for global population reductions of up to 75 per cent. And this from people who would claim sympathy with anti-capitalist politics.

A final point. I attended an Enterprise Allowance training course a few months ago and every single one of the cheerfully budding capitalists there agreed with Green politics. Although the Gulf War was raging, I didn't have the heart to ask them whether they supported the cormorants or the Iraqis.

John McLennan Glasgow

John Gibson's cheap cracks at the Green Party were way off the mark ('The Greens: Eaten up', May). You couldn't resist the picture of David Icke, could you? Your pathetic attempt to condemn the Greens by association with a madman cannot disguise your inability to deal with environmental arguments.

Carolyn Perriman Oxford

Daily Mail sophisms

NJ Hollow's comments (letters, June) left me in exasperation rather than 'growing incredulity'. Hollow is void of all powers of observation if he/she can argue that 'Marxism/communism or a near form of either' has ever existed at all, never mind whether or not it can 'put things right'.

The point is since 'civilisation' began, there is absolutely no evidence of any society free of rank. To my knowledge, there has always been the dominated and the dominating. Thus, any reference to a communist society in the context of claiming that one has existed even

in 'near form' is a *Daily Mail* sophism of the highest degree. The communist model has never worked because it has never been properly implemented. The ridiculous notion that it has or nearly has does not belong in a Marxist publication.

DC Munro Liverpool

The unfree market

In your July issue both Mick Hume (editorial) and Mike Freeman ('Is socialism finished?') rightly condemn the flight from socialism that leads many to complacent blindness to the devastation that capitalism brings to humanity. However, they mistakenly use the term 'market system' as interchangeable with capitalism.

In fact, Marx showed that a 'free' market and capitalism are mutually incompatible. Private ownership of the means of production is what negates the free market and forces workers to sell their labour-power at less than its market value. In a genuine free market there could be no surplus-value since any workers who were exploited could become entrepreneurs and by-pass their boss. The capitalist market is therefore the antithesis of the theoretical free market.

A communist market system is just as much a possibility as a capitalist market system. It would also not be a 'free' market because the limited supply of production resources means that there would have to be political control over their use. However it would have one distinct advantage: since there would be no private ownership of these production resources there could no longer be an owning class. It seems to me at least to be a feasible proposition, therefore, that workers' control could be exercised via collective control of resources within a communist market. Hence the theoretical advantages of a market system ('self-regulation' with regard to supply and demand and 'economic democracy' through how you choose to produce and consume), which is negated by capitalism's demand for surplus-value, might become a reality.

Mike York Launceston, Cornwall

Written by a robot?

Congratulations must go to Toby Banks on his elevation to columnist and an amusing first piece on the pathetically British experience of Piccadilly's Rock Circus. But surely there must have been a terrible mix-up at the printers? Has not his mug-shot been supplanted by the androgynous features of one of the Rock Circus' 'animatronic' robots?

The real Len Scap London

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

The left has let the Tories off the hook

Rubbish piled on the streets, *GBH* on the TV, the council forcing through cuts and redundancies, and recession sweeping the city once more: this summer, all eyes have been on Liverpool. It has become a political battleground as right and left seek to blame each other for the crisis.

On 4 July, the Walton by-election brought the arguments to a head as the Militant-led Broad Left stood its own 'Real Labour' candidate against the official Labour man. Labour retained the seat but suffered a big loss of support; the Broad Left received just over 2600 votes. It was a result which revealed the lack of popular enthusiasm for either Kinnock's new Labour Party or Militant's old one, and demonstrated the left's decline in a city where, a few years ago, the Militant-led Labour council could bring thousands out in strikes and protests against the Tory government.

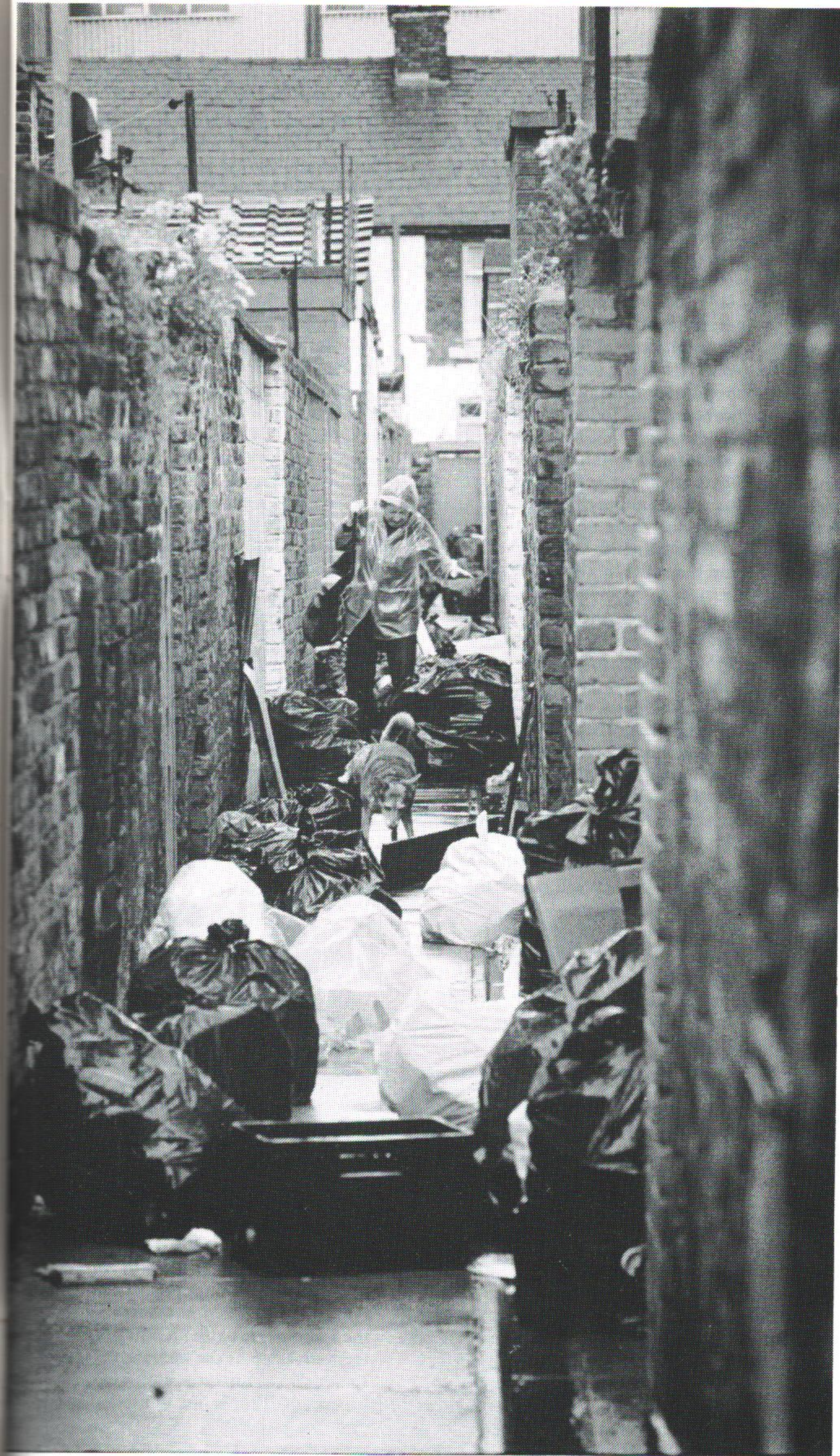
On the day of the Walton by-election, *Living Marxism* editor Mick Hume went to Liverpool to address a meeting called 'Liverpool: Who's to blame?' Here, we reprint edited extracts of his speech. We welcome other contributions to the debate

The question of who's to blame for the crisis in Liverpool is a matter of great concern, not only to the people of this city, but to anybody interested in the future of working class politics in Britain. Events in Liverpool are now the focus for a campaign to criminalise socialism. The message is that the Militant Tendency, and

militant trade unionists, are to blame for the serious problems facing the people of Liverpool.

This message has been dramatised by Alan Bleasdale in *GBH*, and echoed by both Tory and Labour Party leaders. It has gained considerable resonance in the city; in one poll, 58 per cent blamed Militant for Liverpool's problems, and

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



another 17 per cent blamed the unions. But the message is a nonsense.

How can Militant be held responsible for the crisis in Liverpool? Was it Militant which cut £650m from central government grants to the city over the past few years? Was it Militant which created 20 per cent unemployment in Liverpool, or caused the capitalist recession which

is now prompting yet another shake-out of jobs at factories like Ford Halewood? How can Militant be blamed for the fact that, according to a recent survey, 40 per cent of the people in Liverpool live below the poverty line?

Perhaps a mind like Bleasdale's could create a conspiracy in which Militant makes all of these things

happen. But to a more rational observer, it is clearly ridiculous to hold Militant responsible for the heavy social problems afflicting Liverpool today. The blame lies with the Tory government and the capitalists whom they represent. They have squeezed spending on cities like Liverpool, and cut the jobs and living standards of working class people, in an attempt to maximise their profits.

In their offensive against Liverpool workers, the Tories and the employers have been ably and enthusiastically assisted by Labour leader Neil Kinnock and his local henchmen, such as Walton candidate Peter Kilfoyle and 'moderate' council leader Harry Rimmer. These people now seem proud to pass on Tory cuts to the working class, declaring that recent measures such as the cuts in binmen's jobs are 'for the good of the people of Liverpool'.

Militant and the Broad Left are not to blame for the crisis in Liverpool. But they *are* to blame for creating a climate in which left-wing politics and striking workers are being held responsible for what is happening. They are to blame for the way that socialism and the class struggle have been discredited in Liverpool. They are to blame for letting the Tory government get off the hook, by deflecting attention away from its own crimes and on to the left.

Broad Left liars

We all know that the Tories love to caricature the left; look at how the Conservative press swooned over the early episodes of *GBH*, lapping up the images of left wingers as dishonest, manipulative careerists and crooks. The trouble is that Militant and the Broad Left seem to have done their best to match up to the caricature, to bring to life the Tories' cartoon lefties. They have lied to working class people in Liverpool and consistently tried to manipulate them. They have done serious damage to the credibility of left-wing politics in Liverpool.

Take the famous house-building programme which the city council was said to have implemented when run by Militant in the eighties, and which they have boasted about ever since. Two things are now clear. First, that the council built far fewer houses than were promised at the time. And second and more important, that while these few were being built the rest of the city's housing stock crumbled. The thousands of tenants living in the sprawling, infested estates around the city can hardly have been impressed by the Broad Left's boasts of what their socialist council had achieved. Yet even today, Militant still tries to keep the myth of its housing

miracle alive.

Militant have been lying to the people of Liverpool again during the Walton by-election campaign. They have claimed that their Broad Left candidate, Lesley Mahmood, stands for 'No cuts, No poll tax'. Yet in reality she stands for nothing of the sort. When Mahmood and the other Broad Left councillors put in an alternative budget for the city council this year, it included plans to set a poll tax rate £22 *higher* than that proposed by the Labour council leadership. It also included proposals to stop overtime, freeze more than half of the council's job vacancies, and restructure working practices. In the language of the Broad Left, this is a policy of 'savings' rather than cuts. From the point of view of the council workforce, however, it is more likely to look like a pay cut, the loss of jobs, and a punitive efficiency drive.

Stage army

This sort of dishonesty fits into Militant's general approach of trying to use working class people, trying to manipulate them for its own narrow ends. The Broad Left talks the language of class struggle and workers' power, but it has never practised what it preaches. Instead, it has seen politics as something which is conducted primarily in the Labour Party committee and the council sub-committee. It has allotted the working class outside the role of a stage army, to be brought on and sent off stage as required, to act as passive lobbyists supporting the major players—Labour politicians.

In the mid-eighties, Militant certainly led big strikes and demonstrations in Liverpool; more than 35 000 strikers closed the city down on budget day, 1984, and a huge march on the city hall demanded 'No cuts in jobs or services'. But those who went on strike and marched behind the council were never consulted about the campaign or given a say in running it. Instead, they were treated as extras, there to provide a show of support for the star actors, the Labour councillors, who were wheeling and dealing behind their closed committee room doors.

Witless victims?

One minute, the Militant-run council told the workforce to prepare for a fight to the finish to get more money out of the Tory government; the next, they were told not to worry, the council had done a deal with Swiss bankers. First it was supposed to be a struggle to defend every job; then the council pulled another financial stunt, sending redundancy notices round to all 31 000 council workers and handing Neil Kinnock the opportunity to launch his most

famous attack on Militant at the 1985 Labour conference. The experience of being used and let down has left thousands of people in Liverpool with a deeply jaundiced view of the benefits of socialism.

Militant has something in common here with its arch-critic Alan Bleasdale. In *GBH* he portrays working class people as a hapless collection of stupid victims, who can be turned this way and that by the machinations of left-wing activists and right-wing secret agents. He views the working class with contempt, as fodder for demagogues. The irony is that Militant's politics are infused with much the same patronising attitude towards workers, a belief that they can be manipulated time and again.

For example, Militant have acted on the belief that working class people can somehow be tricked into supporting revolutionary socialism without realising it. In the past, they stood for election in Liverpool as the Labour Party. Even now, when the Broad Left has stood its own candidates in the local elections and the Walton by-election, it has done so under names like 'Anfield Labour' or 'Everton Labour', and now 'Real Labour'. The idea is that if you can con workers into voting for you on this basis, then through 'the experience' they will realise the need for revolutionary socialism. Unfortunately for Militant, the working class is not stupid and cannot be fooled in this fashion. The trouble is that we all have to cope with the way in which their antics have discredited socialism.

Not just Degsy

The result of Militant's record is that today, at a time when the working class in Liverpool has a desperate need for political solutions, there is a widespread cynicism about politics in the city—especially left-wing politics. The Broad Left's rump of support in Liverpool today is a dramatic decline from those days, in the eighties, when Liverpool was a uniquely politicised city where 55 per cent of Labour voters said that they would support a general strike against the Tory government. Now, instead of that sense of solidarity, we see bitterness and infighting among working class people. So when the binmen took industrial action against job cuts, and rubbish piled up in the streets, people vented their anger against the binmen rather than uniting against the council responsible for their problems.

The blame for this state of affairs lies with Militant's bureaucratic brand of politics, not just with corrupt individuals. There is a tendency in Liverpool today to blame what happened in the past on former

deputy council leader Derek Hatton. The much-publicised police investigation 'Operation Cheetah' and Hatton's forthcoming trial on corruption charges have confirmed popular suspicions. Militant supporters themselves have been keen to try to off-load the blame on to Hatton. We have no wish to give a character reference for the charmless Degsy. But this is just scapegoating. Hatton was a leading member of Militant in Liverpool, carrying out their policies. Why should he be singled out for blame? After all, Tony Mulhearn, who stood on the same platforms, said the same things and even wore the same suits as Hatton, is still a leading Militant supporter, and their politics remain unchanged despite Hatton's departure. The real crime which we should be concerned about has nothing to do with supermarket construction contracts; it is the criminal waste of a rare opportunity to lead a working class rebellion of which Militant has been guilty over the past decade.

Lessons of Liverpool

What are the lessons of all that has happened? The crisis in Liverpool exposes the miserable reality of what British capitalism has to offer working class people today, behind all the Tory talk of an 'enterprise culture' and a 'classless society'. It also reveals that both wings of the Labour Party which have stood in the Walton by-election—the new Kinnockites and the old Broad Left—are useless to the working class.

The new-style Labour Party of Kinnock and Kilfoyle has transformed itself into a centre-ground, openly pro-capitalist organisation which accepts the need for mass unemployment, pay restraint and anything else which the ruling class requires. The lack of popular enthusiasm for it is revealed by the fact that it cannot establish a firm lead in the polls, despite the Tories' manifest unpopularity. In opposition to this dominant wing of the Labour Party, the left have set themselves up as the guardians of Labour's 'socialist traditions' in Liverpool. That is just as useless and even less popular.

The cling-ons

Contrary to the impression given by the Broad Left today, the 'old' Labour Party was always a problem for the working class. Eric Heffer, the veteran left-wing MP whose death caused the Walton by-election, is now spoken of in near-reverential tones. No doubt Heffer was a nice man. But his politics were a disaster. Heffer's role, as a militant trade unionist turned Labour MP, was to urge workers to contain their protests

Both the new Labour Party of Kinnock and Kilfoyle and the 'old' one of Lesley Mahmood and Militant (bottom), have proved themselves useless to the people of a city like Liverpool



PHOTOS: Simon Norfolk



within limits set by the Labour Party. In the seventies, the last Labour government imposed pay restraint which led to the biggest drop in living standards since the Second World War. It could never have sold such a scheme to trade unionists without the involvement of left wingers like Heffer and Tony Benn in the government.

The left's myopic preoccupation with the Labour Party was bad enough in the past; today it is even worse. Labour is being transformed into an imitation of the Tory Party, and launching new witch-hunts against the left. Yet they still cling on, calling on us to vote Labour and declaring their determination to return the party to its old socialist traditions. Out of desperation at being driven from their positions of influence in the Liverpool Labour machine, the Broad Left has taken the rare step of standing its own candidates against Labour in elections. But Militant has made it clear that it considers Walton to be a one-off, and that it will not stop campaigning for all it's worth to get a Labour government led by Neil Kinnock elected. Most of the rest of the left have pursued the same line. If this were a general election rather than a by-election, they would all be out canvassing in Walton for Peter Kilfoyle, the Labour candidate whom some of them have called a fascist!

What 'tradition'?

The left's narrow focus on the Labour Party acts as a barrier to the development of working class politics. In the Walton by-election, for example, the central issue has been 'who is the real Labour candidate?' But what can it matter who the 'real' Labour candidate is, when the real issues confronting people in Liverpool are not being properly discussed?

Even unemployment, the most pressing issue, has been relegated beneath the internal squabbles of the Labour Party. Other important issues have not been discussed at all. The Broad Left is so busy swearing its loyalty to 'the socialist traditions of Liverpool' that it seems to have forgotten about the somewhat unsocialist traditions of the city: traditions like racism in Toxteth, or Orange sectarianism against the Irish, or the Catholic anti-abortion lobby. In its desperation to justify clinging to the Labour Party, the left has invented a socialist tradition. It has side-stepped the task of confronting the reactionary currents created by Liverpool's long history of right-wing politics.

In different ways, the crisis in Liverpool has demonstrated that both wings of the official labour movement represent a barrier to the

working class and a bonus for the capitalists. The new Labour Party echoes Tory ideas, ensuring that, whoever wins the general election, government policies will be more or less the same. And the left-wing rump of the 'old' Labour Party serves as a reminder of the failures of the past, helping to discredit any alternatives to capitalism in the present.

We need to break out of this stalemate and create a new culture of anti-capitalist politics. Which is why, in a contest like the Walton by-election, the Revolutionary Communist Party has refused to take sides in what is an internal Labour Party battle, and advised people not to vote for either wing.

So what is the alternative? What can we say when people ask for a practical proposal on how to fight the cuts and redundancies? No doubt we could sit down and work out proposals for an all-out strike under workers' control, linking up the council workforce with others in Liverpool. But what could such a paper plan mean in the context of a city dominated by anti-union, anti-left sentiments, where 75 per cent of people think that socialists and strikers are responsible for their problems?

A clear idea

Our practical proposal is this. Before people ever achieved anything in the past—be it votes for women or the right to form trade unions—they required a clear idea of what they were fighting for and against. Such a vision is entirely absent today. Which is why we must begin with the battle of ideas; establishing the case against contemporary capitalism and clearing the decks of all the old left-wing rubbish which has discredited Marxism. Through *Living Marxism* we emphasise the need to develop a new generation of anti-capitalist ideas, not because we are erudite academics, but because we recognise that such an intellectual breakthrough is the precondition for making practical progress.

After the experience of the last few years in Liverpool, the task is to recreate revolutionary Marxism as something which is relevant to the real concerns of working class people today. Ours must be a Marxism that locates the power to change society in the organised strength of the working class, not in the committee room manoeuvres of the Labour Party or the city council. A Marxism which recognises that you cannot con people into supporting revolutionary politics as has been tried in the past. You have to convince them that the cause of a better future is still something worth fighting for. (Thanks to John Cable for ideas and material.)

Burying the truth

The crisis in Liverpool gave the Tories another excuse to dredge up their favourite anti-trade union myth, about how striking gravediggers and the last Labour government littered Britain with unburied bodies. Andrew Calcutt unearths the real story

When Liverpool council workers recently threatened to take industrial action which could affect the digging of graves, the Tory media machine went into overdrive. For the umpteenth time, the press and TV news reran the story of the public service strikes during the 1978-79 'winter of discontent', when, according to legend, militant trade unions and a soft Labour government combined to ensure that 'the dead went unburied' across Britain.

The cracked pictures of a small pile of unburied coffins from 1979 have been used many times over the past 12 years. They are now the Tories' favourite emotive symbol of the bad old days when Britain was mismanaged by Labour and the unions, before the May 1979 general election brought in Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government to save the nation. John Major's Tories seized upon recent events in Labour-run Liverpool to suggest that, if Labour were to win the next election, the country would quickly be covered in decaying corpses once again.

Body snatchers?

If we ignore all the breast-beating for a moment, and take a glance back at the facts of what happened during the winter of discontent, two things become clear. First, the story of the unburied dead has been grossly amplified and distorted over the years, as part of the Tories' campaign to put striking trade unionists on a par with body snatchers. And second, it was the Labour Party which paved the way for the Tory campaign by branding the gravediggers as evil in the first place.

Contrary to the popular impression, the gravediggers' dispute of 1979 did not bring Britain's cemeteries to a standstill. It was a

local strike, concentrated in Liverpool, involving just 50 workers and lasting little more than a week.

24 January 1979: 52 Liverpool gravediggers and crematorium staff came out on strike. The diggers, members of the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU), demanded £60 a week as part of a national campaign to end low pay for public sector workers doing 'dirty jobs'. Local authority workers and NHS staff were out to break the Labour government's guidelines which restricted wage rises to five per cent plus a £3.50 supplement at a time when inflation was running well into double figures.

25 January: Liverpool diggers picketed Springwood crematorium. City medical officer Dr Duncan Dolton announced that bodies would be embalmed and taken to a disused factory in Speke, on the south side of Liverpool. The authorities encouraged the rumour that the cadavers at Speke constituted a health risk.

31 January: After consultation with Labour ministers, GMWU officials announced that the union would prevent workers in key jobs taking strike action for more than a week. Any strike which broke the new code of conduct would not be made official and strikers would get no strike pay. The house of commons heard that the Labour cabinet was ready to send troops into Liverpool if the diggers rejected the code of conduct.

1 February: Liverpool diggers voted to return to work, warning that they would resume their action if a 'substantial' pay rise was not forthcoming within four weeks. When the diggers went back, there were 300 bodies at Speke awaiting burial. Dr Dolton admitted 'there is now no hazard to public health'.

27 February: The diggers had been

back nearly a month when the Labour government made a new offer to public sector manual workers: nine per cent plus £1 subsidy. Convenor Ian Lowes (who still remains a key union leader in Liverpool) said that GMWU members in Liverpool were 'absolutely disgusted' by the offer. **4 March:** Diggers and other 'dirty jobs' workers met at Liverpool Stadium to consider taking action for more pay, even if union leaders accepted the government's offer. **7 March:** Public sector unions voted to accept the offer. **8 March:** Liverpool gravediggers voted to accept. A series of rolling strikes involving small numbers of gravediggers in neighbouring boroughs was called off.

There were no piles of bodies in the streets of Liverpool. The local strike committee agreed to bury 'emergency cases' and the Liverpool diggers went back to work after little more than a week. There was never any threat to public health. Like much of the legend of the winter of discontent, the horrors of the gravediggers' strike were invented after the event.

The Tory version of the winter of discontent has the Labour government in cahoots with union militants across Britain. In fact, Labour ministers vilified low-paid strikers and started the process of demonising workers like the gravediggers.

Labour chancellor Denis Healey, pre-empting some of his Tory successor Norman Lamont's recent speeches, warned that higher pay would lead to longer dole queues: 'if all local authority workers got a settlement of 15 per cent there would be 100 000 fewer people at work in local authorities.' On the day the Liverpool diggers walked out, Labour prime minister James Callaghan declared that 'everybody in

this country is entitled to cross a picket line if he disagrees with the arguments put to him'. A few days after issuing this licence to scab, Callaghan added: 'we have got to practise a little self-discipline in this country.' Norman Tebbit could not have put it better.

Labour ministers also set the tone for the Tories by singling out the handful of striking Liverpool gravediggers for attack. 'I deplore this action' said environment secretary Peter Shore. 'I understand the deep offence caused to the overwhelming mass of our people.' Referring to the possibility of sending troops into Liverpool, home secretary

gravediggers, the official labour movement treated them like pariahs. Labour politicians from Callaghan downwards helped create the myth that strikers are cruel and heartless thugs. But the bogeyman image of the Liverpool diggers bears little resemblance to reality.

When the strike began, convenor Ian Lowes explained: 'we deeply regret having to take this action...but we have no choice. Our employers are refusing to negotiate.' The body of the father of one of the diggers was among the 300 corpses awaiting burial. A fellow-striker asked 'how do you think he feels? We want the public to know we are not against

life consisted of 'a pint once a week on my way home'. Writing in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, Harold Brough was forced to conclude: 'their mood seems not one of outrageous militancy or anger, but of quiet resignation that the battle must be fought... [they] literally cannot afford to lose.' His piece was published on the day the Liverpool diggers went back to work.

Echoing the words of Labour minister Peter Shore, the Tories have always insisted that the gravediggers' week-long strike caused 'deep offence' to the vast majority of decent British people. It is true that some passing drivers gave V-signs to pickets. But



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

The Tories have tried to smear Liverpool council workers today by printing lies about how they desecrated the dead in the past

Merlyn Rees warned 'we will do something. I am not prepared to have dead bodies in a disused factory'. Junior minister Gerald Kaufman, now shadow home secretary, found the strike 'totally unacceptable'.

Local Labour politicians were equally critical. Bootle MP Simon Mahon compared the unions to Hitler. Eric Heffer, left-wing MP for Liverpool Walton, expressed mixed feelings. Anxious that gravediggers should receive a living wage, while 'deeply concerned' at the distress to relatives, he offered to act as a mediator.

Far from supporting the

them'. 'We do feel very sorry for everybody concerned' said another striker, 'but sympathy does not put a loaf of bread on our tables'.

The diggers' wages were so low it's a wonder they could afford a table to put the bread on. A 36-year old digger with 15 years' service received £35 take-home pay for a 40-hour week. Many of those hours were spent digging in 'body water'. His two children often asked about the powerful smell which their dad brought home with him. After £6 rent, he was left with £29 to support a family. 'It's five years since I took my wife out' he said. His own social

contemporary accounts in the local press suggest that public opinion was divided. Two elderly widows thought that 'being piled up in a factory is no different from being piled up in a grave', while others expressed support for the diggers. 'Nobody in their right minds would be prepared to take home £40 a week' said one man, 'yet people belly-ache about indecency and "respect for the dead"'. Like every other aspect of the story, the tales of public outrage at the little gravediggers' strike of 1979 grow taller as the years pass.



The West can't save the Soviets

While US experts and the Gorbachev government propose a 'Grand Bargain' of economic aid to the Soviet Union, Rob Knight examines the grim reality of what Western capitalism offers the Soviets today

After much shilly-shallying Mikhail Gorbachev was invited to the G7 meeting of top capitalist countries in July to make his case for more Western economic assistance. In preparation for this event Grigory Yavlinsky, an unofficial envoy from Gorbachev's government, joined American experts in a bid to work out a new scheme to push through market reforms in the Soviet economy with Western assistance. The deal they proposed has been labelled a Grand Bargain. From the Soviet point of view, the 'bargain' amounts to Gorbachev saying to the West, 'You give us some money, or we fold up'. Like the dustmen at Christmas Gorbachev threatens to leave a nasty mess on the West's doorstep unless he gets a big tip.

Islamic threat?

Graham Allison and Robert Blackwill are two of the US experts working with Yavlinsky to define the Grand Bargain. As they put it, failure of reform could lead to 'instability in various republics' which 'could spill into Eastern Europe to the west and Muslim nations to the south....Under these circumstances nuclear and chemical weapons could fall into the hands of renegade groups prepared to use them for blackmail or to offer them for sale' (*Guardian*,

7 June 1991). The message is clear: if we don't help the Soviets the world will be overrun by atom bomb-toting Muslim fundamentalists. Thus the authors manage to demonstrate that the Soviet Union, while no longer posing the threat of communism, is now the potential home of the new nightmare of the American establishment, militant Islam.

Food for thought

Having established the necessity for the USA to maintain the Soviet Union in something like its current form, Allison and Blackwill then go on to suggest how this can be done. Their view is that the USA should reward its friends, those who wish to 'bring democracy and a market economy', and punish those who 'wish to dismember, violently if necessary, the Soviet Union'. The reward should come in the form of 'printing presses, copying machines, personal computers, fax machines and satellite dishes'. This should come in very handy in a country where basic foodstuffs are rationed, where cigarette shortages cause riots, and where production of all consumer goods is predicted to fall by 15 per cent this year. Let them eat faxes.

In fact Allison and Blackwill are just as sceptical as the Washington authorities about the prospects of Western aid saving the Soviet economy. 'It may well be', they concede, 'that a large and coordinated Western effort would fail because of Soviet bureaucratic resistance or incompetence'. Thus even these supposedly pro-Soviet experts end up endorsing what the *Economist* calls the 'not bloody likely' school of Western aid.

Allison and Blackwill's message is really directed at the Soviets themselves. They are effectively repeating what the West has been telling the Soviet Union for some time: raise prices, introduce mass unemployment and generally put the screws on your people, then we might think about investing in what is left. The total amount of financial assistance that the authors propose is \$15-20 billion a year, spread among

the Western powers. This is very little in global terms—Germany and Japan gave \$17 billion to the USA during the Gulf War, for example—and it is a fraction of what would be required to restructure the Soviet economy. But it is still likely to prove too much for the West.

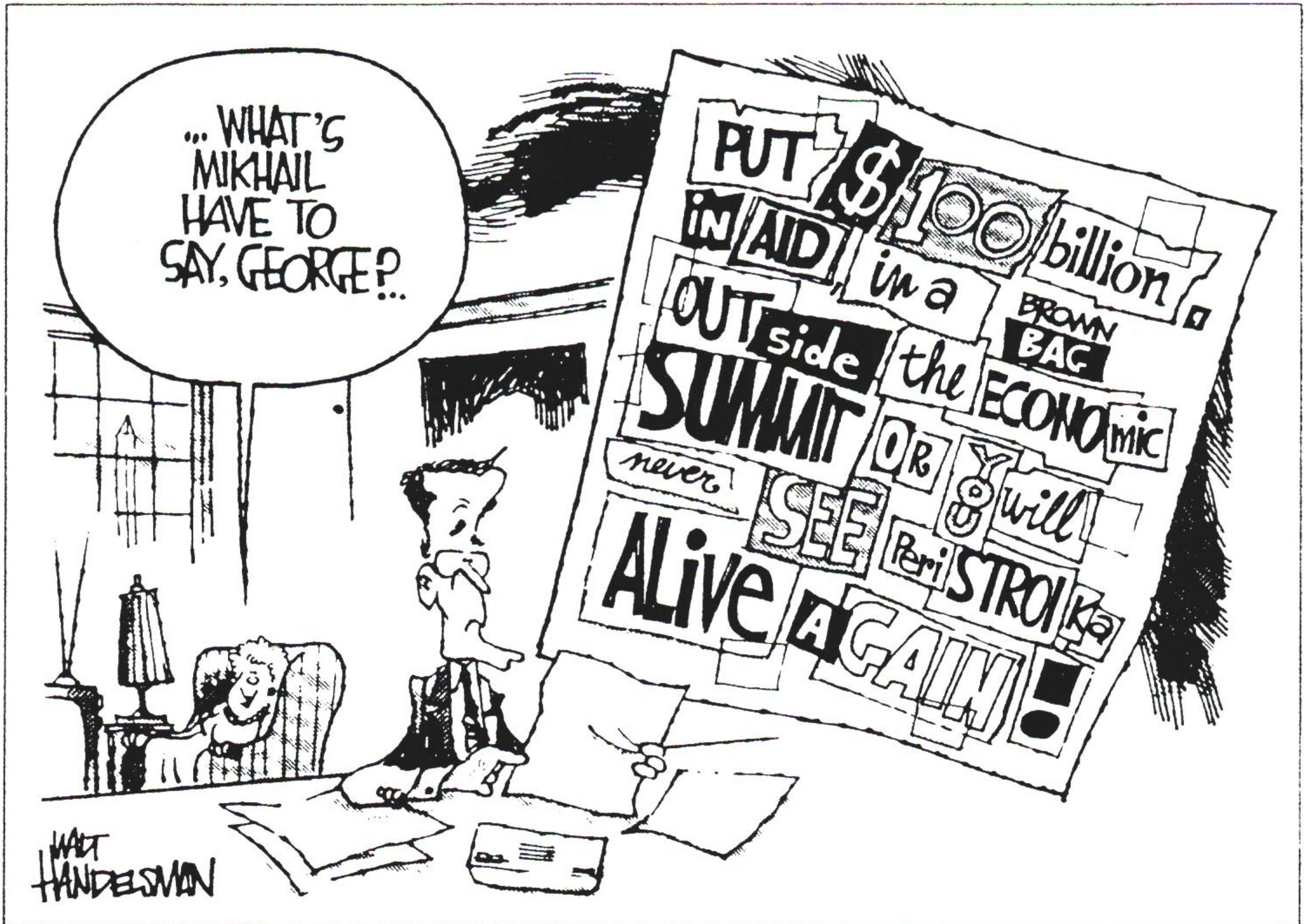
The USA, as the biggest debtor on Earth, is in no position to bail anybody out. To finance the Gulf War, Washington had to squeeze \$37 billion from the Arab states on top of the multi-billion dollar hand-outs from Japan and Germany. With its own economy in slump, its infrastructure crumbling and its massive budget and trade deficits dragging it further down, the USA is in no position to finance the reconstruction of New York, never mind rebuilding the Soviet Union.

Strapped for cash

Nor are the more dynamic capitalist economies capable of coming to Moscow's rescue. Germany is keen enough to put something together for Gorbachev. It has most to lose from the Soviet crisis destabilising central and Eastern Europe—and most to gain from the eventual opening up of the Soviet market. However, the costs of reunification have already turned Germany into a net borrower on the world finance markets. The deutschmark has no magic solutions to the Soviet crisis.

Japan, which has the strongest economic growth rate of any of the capitalist powers, has shown the least interest in aiding the Soviet Union. The Japanese too have financial problems of their own at home—and any spare capacity they have is directed towards expanding their influence in Asia. The Tokyo authorities have little enthusiasm for an aid package which will cost them the most, with little prospect of a return on their money.

The result of all this is that whatever package is finally put together is likely to be long on rhetoric and short on cash. The only effect of the proposals put forward by the American experts can be to cover the Western powers' blushes,



The view from Washington as seen in Newsweek © 1991 HANDELSMAN—TIMES-PICAYUNE

by making it look as if they are trying. The alternative would be to say to the Soviet Union, 'sorry, capitalism can't help you'. It is far better from the West's point of view to erect a purposeful facade, to conceal the fact that capitalism cannot deliver on its promises to the peoples of the Soviet Union.

Allison and Blackwill understand that Gorbachev and the Soviet bureaucracy will find it difficult to restructure their economy on the mere promise of Western jam tomorrow. They conclude, 'Would Gorbachev or a successor strike such a bargain? Perhaps not today. But as conditions worsen, the beacon of substantial Western assistance could indeed come to concentrate the minds not only of reformers but of stragglers as well'. The image of a beacon is appropriate, since the promise of substantial Western aid will remain a small light flickering a long way off.

Of course Western capitalists are interested in investment opportunities in the Soviet Union—so long as the price is right. Look at the lucrative sphere of mineral extraction, where

America's Chevron Oil company recently agreed a deal with the Soviets to develop the oil and gas industry in the Tenghiz area of Kazakhstan.

Tenghiz is estimated to have the potential capacity to provide 10 per cent of Soviet oil production—and given that the Soviet Union is the world's biggest oil producer, that is a lot of potential. Chevron has signed a deal which gives it exclusive rights to these immense oil reserves for 25 years.

The terms of the deal are weighted so far in favour of the US oil corporation that even the aggressively pro-market newspaper *Moscow News* has started a campaign against it. The deal is that the Soviets borrow \$850m from Chevron to develop the field, while Chevron contributes just \$20m. When the oil is on stream the Soviet side will pay back the \$850m, plus interest, out of the oil revenue.

Then Chevron and the Soviets each get access to the oil. However the Soviets are only allowed to spend their petrodollars on goods approved by Chevron, that is cigarettes and

other stockpiled goods from the world market. 'Delving into the history of oil concessions,' concludes the author of the *Moscow News* story, 'I realised that this is how former mother countries treated their colonies at the beginning of the century, however—at gunpoint'. The Soviet bureaucracy is so desperate to deal with the West today that the capitalists can extract the wealth of the Soviet Union without resorting to the threat of gunboats.

Behind all the talk of a Grand Bargain, such super-exploitation is the reality of what the market means for the Soviet Union. It is set to become part of the world market system alright, but alongside Mexico and Brazil rather than France or Sweden. As the official Soviet government report on the Tenghiz affair concluded: 'The project's economic substance is perfectly clear. The Soviet Union and Kazakhstan are losing control over the country's richest oil deposit, while being promised absolutely nothing in exchange.'

Some bargain.

The dangers of secession



Joan Phillips explains the origins of the crisis in Yugoslavia, and warns of the dangers of Balkanisation

The significance of the Yugoslav crisis has not been lost on the leaders of the West. Yugoslavia is not Romania. The tanks and troops on the streets of Ljubljana and Zagreb are only an hour or so away from Austria or Italy. The conflict is a threat to

stability in the heart of central Europe. The fear that it could spill over the borders of Yugoslavia has had EC ministers scurrying from Brussels to Belgrade trying to engineer a deal.

There is considerable confusion about the origins of the Yugoslav

crisis. According to most Western observers, the past is returning with a vengeance and simmering historical nationalist enmities have set Yugoslavia's diverse ethnic groups at one another's throats once again. This approach locates the source of the current conflict in the attempt to

subsume a myriad of ethnic groups, dozens of cultures, several languages, three major religions and a plethora of historical vendettas in the unified federal state of Yugoslavia. The assumption is that this project was doomed from the start, that Yugoslavia was fated to fall apart.

But it was not inevitable that Yugoslavia would come apart. In fact the creation of a unified Yugoslav state, after the collapse of the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires at the end of the First World War, offered a more viable existence to its component parts than had been the case in the past. The problem in Yugoslavia today is not the result of age-old nationalist hatreds but of the backwardness of the economic and political system established by Stalinism after the Second World War.

Autarky rules

The origins of the present crisis lie in the competition among the six republics and two provinces of Yugoslavia for access to scarce economic resources. Yugoslavia has a federal government, a common currency and a national football team, but economic and political autarky has long been the order of the day.

Competition for resources among the eight constituent elements of the federation has been exacerbated by the extreme inequalities between the regions. The northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia and the province of Vojvodina resemble their western neighbours in Austria and Italy in terms of living standards. The tiny republic of Slovenia accounts for only eight per cent of Yugoslavia's population but for 25 per cent of its gross national product and 30 per cent of its hard currency exports to the West.

Dusty Kosovo

The affluent lifestyles of the Ferrari-driving elites of Slovenia and Croatia are beyond the wildest dreams of the downtrodden inhabitants of the southern republics of Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia and the dusty province of Kosovo. Comparing north to south, the per capita income ratios are about six to one. In the province of Kosovo unemployment is more than double the national average of 20 per cent.

The republics of Slovenia and Croatia have long chafed at shouldering the burden of subsidies to their poorer southern neighbours. Quarrels over the redistribution of resources among the republics have been a source of conflict among the competing regional bureaucracies.

Local party and state officials in Slovenia and Croatia objected to the transfer of resources to the southern republics in the form of development aid, budgetary supplements, federal projects and natural disaster relief. They accused the other republics of being laggards and pursued a host of protectionist measures to keep revenues and investment at home. Periodically, trade wars erupted between the republics, especially in the eighties as the economy slumped and competition for resources became more intense. The local ruling bureaucracies organised 'buy national' campaigns, urging their populations to boycott firms and goods from outside their republics.

The conflict over resources came to focus on the financing of the federal budget. There were disputes about whether the richer republics should continue to provide monies for national defence, and for development aid and agricultural investment to the poorer regions. The conflict divided the republics between those who were resisting redistribution and those who were demanding more.

North v South

Increasingly, Slovenia and Croatia sought greater autonomy so that they could hold on to their own 'earnings' and prevent them being redistributed elsewhere. They began to insist that they should have sovereign control over their own budgets, legislation and territorial defence forces. By the mid-eighties Slovenia and Croatia were refusing to pay their share towards the federal budget, and by 1989 they were threatening to secede unless they got a confederal constitution that gave them full sovereignty.

In the eighties, the competition for resources acquired a pronounced nationalist form. The impetus for this development came from within the Stalinist bureaucracy which began to pursue a survival strategy of creating a popular base by appealing to nationalism. The pursuit of survival strategies based on an appeal to nationalism was encouraged by the shift within the bureaucracy towards economic reform and pro-market policies.

By the start of the eighties, Yugoslavia was in the throes of a severe economic crisis. The federal state was liable for a debt of \$20 billion, productivity was plummeting, inflation was out of control and confidence in the dinar had collapsed. The Yugoslav bureaucracy turned to the market for salvation. There were few disagreements about the reforms

needed: an end to government subsidies, a restructuring of enterprises, currency reform and efforts to attract foreign investment. The debate was only about how the reforms should be implemented.

Predictably, the western republics wanted more economic and political decentralisation while the southern republics favoured more centralised control. Slovenia and Croatia read Serbia's enthusiasm for the market as a devious plan to impose a strong central government. They claimed it would lead to a redistribution of the profits made by Slovenia and Croatia to the impoverished and inefficient republics in the south. The fight was on.

Power bases

In order to survive the shift to the market, the bureaucracy set out to win popular support. The party bosses already had a power base. In Yugoslavia there had never really been a single communist party. The Yugoslav League of Communists was in effect eight national parties with different interests. Under its founder, Josip Broz Tito, the federal state allowed the republics a wide measure of autonomy in how they ran their economies. As power was devolved from the centre, control came to be vested in state and party officials who ran the republics like personal fiefdoms.

To consolidate their positions, each regional bureaucracy began to articulate its interests in the language of nationalism. In Serbia, the fear of losing control led the bureaucracy to fight for its survival by channelling economic resentments in a nationalist direction. In Slovenia, the party sought to secure its future by demanding more control over economic resources. For all sections of the bureaucracy, in Slovenia as much as Serbia, nationalism was seen as a lifesaver.

Party tricks

The bureaucracy's survival strategy enjoyed some success at first. In Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic's chauvinist campaign against the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo, and his championing of the poor south against the prosperous north, brought the Serbian party back to life. Meanwhile in Slovenia, the party's demands for greater autonomy transformed its position from one in which it was widely hated to one in which it was held in high popular esteem.

The explosion of nationalism in Yugoslavia is the product of a fight for survival between bureaucrats who are all as bad as each other. But if any section of the bureaucracy is to

The West's concern is to contain the destructive effects of Yugoslavia's disintegration

be singled out for special blame, it should be the Slovenian rather than the Serbian party. Without exception, mainstream commentators have placed the blame for the escalation of the conflict squarely on the shoulders of Serbia's party boss Slobodan Milosevic. But Slovenia's former party leader and present president, Milan Kucan, was the first to up the stakes by wrapping himself in national colours and pressing for more autonomy for his republic.

Autonomy or else...

The rise of nationalism in recent years began in the more privileged republics of Slovenia and Croatia. It first became the vocabulary of politicians in the northern and western republics long before Milosevic accomplished his putsch in the Serbian party in 1987. It was the Slovenian and Croatian bureaucracies which first began to make nationalist noises in the eighties and which threatened to secede unless they got their way.

Serbian nationalism has its roots in the economic backwardness of the region and has played on popular resentment against the richer northern republics. When Milosevic became leader he promised workers a higher standard of living and economic security as Yugoslavia moved towards the market. He put himself forward as a man who understood the problems of ordinary people and who spoke their language, in contrast to the colourless bureaucrats of old who had always caved into the demands of the other republics.

Two mafias

The only difference between Kucan and Milosevic is that the former has survived because Slovenian nationalism has been seen to deliver on its promise of economic prosperity, while the latter has lost his power base because Serbian nationalism has failed to deliver economic improvements. Western commentators who suggest the difference is one of politics, between the pluralism-loving people of Slovenia and the centralism-disposed people of Serbia, have got it wrong. The conflict was never about politics; it was about power and privilege and how to hold on to it. It was a bureaucratic in-fight, fought under the banner of nationalism.

It does not make much sense to discuss the present crisis in Yugoslavia as if there were a genuine national question involved. There is nothing progressive about the nationalist movements in Slovenia and Croatia. They do not even express a striving for democratic

rights. They are simply concerned with seeking more local power and autonomy for their own administrations at the expense of the central authorities.

In fact it is questionable whether national aspirations exist in the way that has been suggested. Although Croatian nationalists go to great lengths to deny their close bonds with the Serbs, the two nationalities have much in common. For example, the Croats insist on the linguistic superiority of Croat over Serb. The two languages are in fact the same. There are regional differences but to call them dialects would be an exaggeration.

While the events of recent months have fuelled nationalist passions, there is no evidence to suggest that secession is embraced enthusiastically by the people of Slovenia or Croatia. According to recent opinion polls, 44 per cent of Slovenes favour immediate secession and 34 per cent want continued negotiations on confederation; in Croatia, the figures are 50 per cent in favour and 45 per cent against. There is clearly a significant body of opinion in both republics which is not swayed by the arguments of the nationalists.

To the brink

Even as the fighting broke out at the end of June, it was clear that Slovenia and Croatia did not want to go the whole hog and secede; they would have preferred to negotiate some sort of confederate arrangement. They want the best of both worlds: to remove the burdens of federation and yet to retain the benefits of federation. Their declarations of independence were probably designed to strengthen their hand in the confederacy negotiations rather than to force the issue to a conclusion.

It makes no sense at all to talk about self-determination for Slovenia or Croatia on the basis of them operating as independent economic entities. The nationalists argue that their relatively efficient, export-led economies could handle the rigours of harmonisation with the EC. But although Slovenia and Croatia are streets ahead of Serbia and Montenegro, they lag far behind the Western economies in their infrastructure, in the quality of their goods and in productivity levels.

The two republics are more dependent on the Yugoslav market than they admit. Their economies are so integrated with the Yugoslav economy—30 per cent of Slovenia's goods are exported to other parts of the country—that secession would cause grave damage to living standards. They also rely on the

other republics for raw materials as well as consumer markets. Serbia, Yugoslavia's largest producer of electric power and raw materials, supplies the developed regions with energy at below market prices.

Secession would be a retrograde step from the point of view of the peoples of Yugoslavia and the Balkans as a whole. If Slovenia and Croatia secede from the federation they will unleash a process of fragmentation which can only have divisive and dangerous consequences. It will act as a spur to national conflict elsewhere in the country, antagonising minorities such as the Serbs in Croatia and provoking ethnic tensions throughout the region. It would also serve to confuse and obscure the struggle between working class people and the bureaucracy by pitting one national group against another.

Where will it end?

Ultimately, the disintegration of the federation can benefit nobody. Even the Western powers appreciate that the collapse of the Yugoslav federation could destabilise the international order. It would give rise to such instability that it could threaten the peace of Europe. The West does not support the unity of the federation for altruistic reasons. It recognises that once the borders of Yugoslavia are called into question, then the status quo across central Europe is under threat.

The West's concern is to contain the destructive effects of Yugoslavia's disintegration. It may even sanction secession if it minimises the disruption. But the spectre of Balkanisation is something that fills the West with dread. The situation in Yugoslavia is an extreme case of the social disintegration which threatens all of eastern Europe as economic catastrophe generates frustration and ignites nationalist passions. This is the downside of the Western triumphalism that greeted the collapse of the old Stalinist order in 1989.

Against secession

We are against the secession of Slovenia and Croatia from the Yugoslav federation as a threat to the interests of the working class. We would favour an all-Balkans federation as the best solution to the nationalities problem and the best way to focus attention on the real problem in the region: the arrival of the market system and the transformation of the Stalinist nomenklatura into a new capitalist class.



RU for the abortion pill?

From the autumn, the RU486 abortion pill will be ready for use in Britain. The powers-that-be have granted the manufacturers a product licence, and guidelines on use have been agreed. Finally British women can have the advantages of a non-surgical abortion method that has been available to French women since the end of 1988.

This is good news for women with unwanted pregnancies. Since the controversy began we have argued in *Living Marxism* that, subject to the usual drug safety standards, RU486 should be made available.

Roussel has been extremely tardy about launching the abortion pill in Britain—I suspect because its launch in France was dogged by controversy. Within a month of the pill going on the market the manufacturers withdrew it and issued a statement announcing that, 'faced with the emotional response from part of the French and foreign public' they had 'decided to suspend immediately its availability in France and abroad.' The 'emotional response' that so upset Roussel's chairman involved death threats, made by anti-abortion campaigners, to company employees and their families—an interesting development for groups that call themselves 'pro-life'. The company also faced an international boycott of its products by anti-abortionists.

The French situation was resolved when the government stepped in. With a suspiciously uncharacteristic display of concern for the rights of women, health minister Claude Evin formally requested that production be resumed. French feminists fell over with shock when he declared that the 1975 law authorising abortion must be applied and women must have the right to abortion. To their further amazement he argued that 'once this new discovery existed for the women of this country, the product became the moral property of women.'

Call me cynical if you will, but I believe that women's rights to abortion were rather lower down the French health minister's priorities than he would have us think. The advantages of the abortion pill for the French authorities were and are enormous. And not only because they own a third of the manufacturer's shares. For the French government, RU486 means abortion on the cheap. It means an end to the involvement of surgeons and anaesthetists, and to abortion cases taking up valuable bed space. It also means an end to the administration of growing waiting lists.

I'm sure that RU486 has won the approval of the British authorities for economic reasons. A year ago Tony Newton, Roussel's 'corporate communications man' (press officer?) told me it could be years before the licence was cleared. Yet it is being pushed through already. Have the government decided RU486 is the moral property of British women? Shall we see bumbling Waldegrave declaring on our right to abortion? I think not.

In a paper to a recent Birth Control Trust conference, Mr Ian MacKenzie, the leading consultant at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford, let the proverbial cat out of the bag. He argued that the introduction of RU486 could 'result in a saving to the NHS of £10-15m annually with ward and theatre time and personnel released for other uses.' Mr MacKenzie has costed it all up. Women having early abortions with RU486 need only six hours of bed time, so they can all be day cases. Mr MacKenzie estimates that, with RU486, half of late abortions could be done as day cases and the other half would only need a one night

stop-over rather than the two or three nights needed with current techniques.

I'm all in favour of fast turn-around, day-case abortion, but I'd rather the assessment was made on the grounds of medical benefit likely to accrue to the patient than the cost of the bed. That goes for the method of abortion used too. I want RU486 on offer as an *additional* method to supplement existing techniques when it's medically appropriate. RU486 should be used to increase abortion options, not as a cheapo replacement.

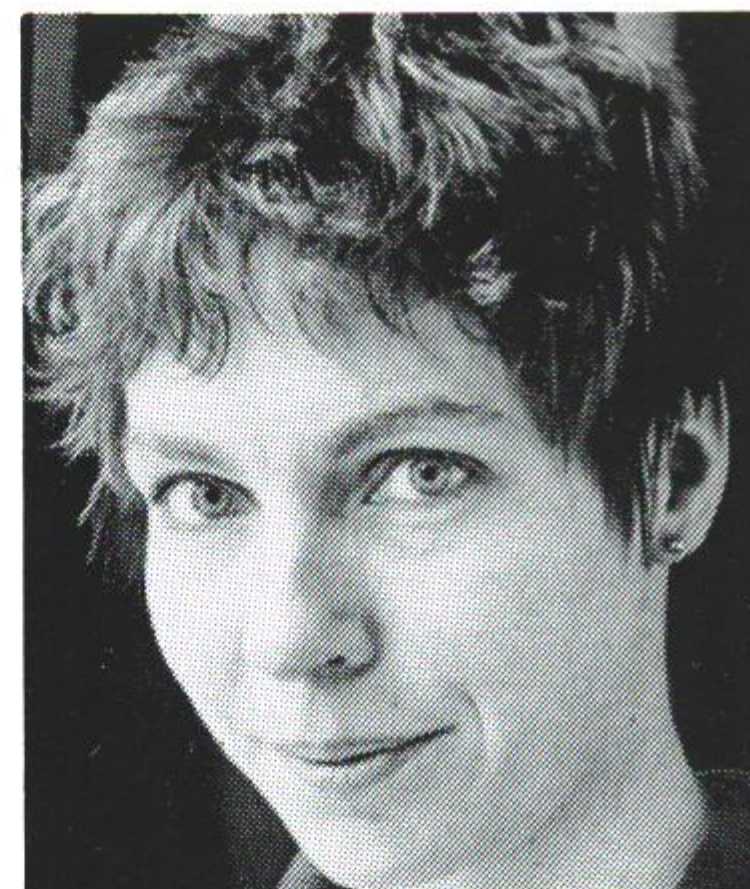
No doubt over the next few months we'll hear a lot about the need for abortion on the cheap to cope with the rising number of unwanted pregnancies. A recent article published in the *British Medical Journal* drew attention to the fact that almost a third of pregnancies are unplanned. It implied that the number of pregnancies as a result of contraceptive failure is on the increase as lower-dose contraceptive pills strip hormone doses to a bare minimum. But it singled out a steep rise in teenage pregnancies for particular attention. This follows on the heels of last summer's panic about the growing number of single mothers.

The British establishment has always had an ambivalent attitude towards abortion. In principle it disapproves of an operation that goes against the traditional role of women—the happy mother at the centre of family life. But this disapproval is tempered by the belief that sometimes it's better for women to remain childless. The current abortion law expresses this ambiguity perfectly. Abortion is available, but only when a woman meets strict legally defined criteria. These criteria roughly correspond to the circumstances in which the authorities would rather women did not reproduce. So, a woman carrying a handicapped fetus can be referred for abortion; the disabled are seen as socially undesirable and expensive. If a doctor feels a woman can't 'cope' with having a child, he can refer her for an abortion; unstable women are judged to be unsuitable mothers, as are teenagers.

At present the government has every interest in making sure that abortion services are provided for the pregnancies that it sees as a problem. The launch of RU486 is timely from their point of view. It allows them to increase the 'throughput' of necessary abortions while they continue to strip down health services.

The anti-abortion activists in Britain have predictably tried a rerun of their French campaign. Keith Davies, the national coordinator of Life, has labelled RU486 'chemical warfare' and 'an anti-human pesticide for use against women and children'. An organisation quaintly called the 'Campaign for the Complete Welfare of the Woman and Child: Psychological, Spiritual and Physical' is urging a 'conscientious boycott' of Roussel's products. They have produced a form to give to your doctor, dentist or surgeon instructing that no such products are to be used in treatment 'except in the event of grave danger to my life, wherein this requirement is waived.' Roussel's laboratories have already hosted small demonstrations, and there have even been a few death threats.

It seems unlikely that a major campaign against the abortion pill will take off. There is no real resonance for it in society at large. But we have to be on our guard: against the moral reactionaries who want to deny us a useful scientific advance, *and* against the authorities who want to use it as an excuse to cut health facilities. In this case our enemy's enemy is definitely not our friend.



Ann Bradley

RU486 should be used to increase abortion options, not as a cheapo replacement



A mockery of democracy

The Western powers are using the lack of democracy in the third world as a pretext for further interventions in the affairs of African, Asian and Latin American countries. Kirsten Cale suggests that this is hardly likely to improve matters, since the Western imperialists are responsible for the lack of democratic rights in the first place

The Western powers claim to have embarked upon a new crusade to convert the third world to democracy. Western propaganda now emphasises the virtues of the ballot box, multi-party democracy, civilian rule and the popular vote. Already, the lack of democracy in the third world is being used to justify more extensive Western interference in the affairs of countries there.

The major Western powers now link aid to democracy. British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd argues that famine-stricken third world countries should be forced to introduce political reform before the West provides financial support: 'we should use aid', he says, 'as a lever for better government'. President Mitterrand has warned that 'France would link its financial contributions to efforts designed to lead to greater democracy'. And Herman Cohen, the US official for African affairs has

bluntly stated that 'there is no longer any place in Africa for authoritarian and non-democratic governments...no democracy means no cooperation'.

The West's calls for democratic reform in the third world are not what they seem. Democracy has always been a politically loaded term. In the Reagan era, US official Jeane Kirkpatrick made the infamous distinction between 'authoritarian' (pro-American) and 'totalitarian' (anti-American) regimes in the third world; the distinction currently being made between 'democracy' and 'dictatorship' in the third world is likewise determined by the relationship of the regimes to the Western powers.

In the language of Western diplomacy, a dictatorship resists the West, a democracy supports it. The level of political freedom in third world countries is an entirely peripheral matter. The main criterion

All those in favour? US troops give the Iraqis a lesson in democracy

Kong is a British Crown colony run by Whitehall. Important posts are filled by appointment from London; the electorate for lesser bodies is restricted to property-owning, English-speaking residents. Britain's commitment to multi-party democracy in the third world stops short of Hong Kong, where political parties were only unbanned after Tiananmen Square. And the Vietnamese boat people who escape to the Free World get a first-hand taste of freedom, British-style, in the internment camps before being deported.

Thailand is another Western showcase of free enterprise in Asia (main industries: heroin and prostitution). Wedged firmly under America's thumb, Thailand has played an important strategic role in the USA's wars against Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Since 1932, and the abolition of the absolute monarchy, Thailand has been governed by martial law: every leader has been drawn from the ranks of the military or the intelligence services. Last February the army, led by General Sunthorn and General Suchinda, installed a new military junta after overthrowing the three-year old 'civilian' government—run by General Chatichai and General Arthit. The latest coup brings the tally up to 17 coups and putsches since 1932, an average of one coup every 3.5 years.

Terror in Kuwait

And what of the Gulf sheikhdom of Kuwait? George Bush claimed that the US-led invasion was a 'war for democracy', to liberate Kuwait from Iraq. The democracy which Desert Storm achieved was the restoration of the dictatorship of the Emir and his al-Sabah clan. They immediately imposed martial law and began rounding up, torturing and executing Palestinians, Kurds, other migrant workers and anybody else suspected of opposing their rule.

The Gulf War also helped to throw some more light on the West's real attitude to democracy in Africa. Before that conflict, Washington announced a freeze on assistance to Kenya, ostensibly because of president Daniel Moi's civil rights violations. During the US-British invasion of the Gulf, however, the Kenyan port of Mombasa assumed new importance to the Western powers. As America's strategic interests shifted, so Moi was miraculously and immediately converted from a tyrant into a friend of the Free World, and granted £10m in US aid.

Where the Western powers have encouraged or endorsed a change from dictatorship to elected civilian government, their aim has been to

for the appellation of 'democracy' to a third world regime is its willingness to dance to the West's tune. Consequently, a thug like Turgut Ozal of Turkey, who runs a police state responsible for the massacre of thousands of political dissidents and Turkish Kurds, is toasted as a democrat, while Saddam Hussein, who has a similar record but has crossed the West, is branded as the world's worst dictator.

Western statesmen who sermonise about democracy have little concern for the oppressive realities of life in the third world. Indeed, many of the Western-approved showcases of democracy are more repressive than regimes labelled as dictatorships. Last year, for example, George Bush cynically described the government of Honduras—home of the Contra gangs—as 'an inspiring example of the democratic promise that today is spreading throughout the Americas'. Bush omitted to mention the rather

less inspiring activities of the busy Honduran death squads who murdered scores of people before the election, and left the mutilated corpses of labour leaders on roadsides as a warning to others brave enough to test the 'democratic promise' of Central America.

The White House also classifies Colombia as the 'oldest constitutional democracy in Latin America' because it is run by an elected civilian government. American spokesmen avoid talk of the annihilation of the only legal radical opposition party or the murder of three presidential candidates before the recent elections. Nor are they likely to stress the 'dirty war' conducted by government troops against the radical guerrilla forces, which has claimed the lives of 14 000 people in the past three years.

In Asia, Hong Kong has traditionally been presented as the beacon of democracy in the shadow of communist China. In fact, Hong

PHOTO: Gamma/Frank Spooner

restrain, rather than give rein to, a popular movement for democracy. Take the Philippines. For decades, the corrupt and repressive regime of Ferdinand Marcos was one of the USA's closest allies; as American

PHOTO: MEAN



Child victim of the Gulf War

The rise of racism in the West should serve to remind us that imperialism is a problem for us all

vice-president, George Bush even told Marcos that 'we love your adherence to democratic principles'. However in 1986, when the opposition to Marcos' rule grew too strong, Washington changed horses and became a fan of

Corazon Aquino and 'People Power'. This manoeuvre kept the Philippines in the US camp and ensured that the people were denied power. If anything, ordinary Filipinos are worse off now than under the old dictatorship. There has been no land reform in the countryside where the population is still terrorised by the landowners' murderous vigilante gangs, and the conditions of both rural and urban labourers have deteriorated markedly.

Blame 'tribalism'

Behind the labels, it is clear that there is no popular democracy in the third world. How do we explain this conspicuous absence of political freedom? Western commentators predictably ascribe the lack of democracy to tribalism, autocratic traditions and 'the native psyche'. These arguments tell us a lot about the racism of the Western establishment but explain nothing about the undemocratic nature of the third world. The lack of democratic rights can only be rationally explained by locating the relationship between the West and the third world in the context of the modern age of imperialism. A major feature of the global economic system which has developed through the twentieth century is the division between the advanced capitalist countries of the West and the backward third world. This imperialist relationship is sustained by, and in turn perpetuates, the mechanisms of economic domination and political oppression.

Window-dressings

Colonialism was the classic expression of Western oppression in the third world. But even in the post-colonial era, the nominally independent states of the third world remain subservient to the West. Imperialist domination and exploitation has prevented the third world from generating an economic base capable of sustaining even the window-dressings of democracy. The ruling classes are too unstable (and unpopular) to allow democratic rights: even a capitalist showcase like South Korea can only achieve economic growth with the frequent assistance of Darth Vader-style riot police. And in the more impoverished 'fourth world' economies of Africa and Latin America, the pro-Western juntas, the one-man states and the death-squad democracies are there to stay.

When the global system goes into crisis, there is a tendency for the Western powers to revert to more direct forms of political oppression in the third world. This is what we see happening in the conditions of international recession and instability

today. The irony is that the imperialists are using the lack of democracy in the third world as a pretext for exerting even more dictatorial control over these societies. The West has no interest in promoting popular democracies in places like Thailand or Colombia. The demand for democracy is the crowbar to prise open third world countries, especially the old pro-Soviet regimes, to more extensive Western supervision.

A recent report by the United Nations Development Programme proposes that political strings such as cuts in military spending and changes to political and social policy should be attached to the aid programmes of the future. And the World Bank has issued warnings that third world leaders 'become more accountable to their peoples' before applying for loans or rescheduling services. This may sound fair enough, but in practice it means they must become more accountable to Western institutions. Under the new strictures, officials of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund will become *de facto* ministers in the governments of third world countries, wielding power unparalleled since the colonial era.

Colonial capitals

Already, the Western powers are seizing opportunities to play a more prominent role in third world affairs. Thus the negotiations over the fates of the old 'Marxist' regimes of Ethiopia, Angola and Cambodia have all been conducted in Western capitals. The future of Ethiopia was determined in a London meeting presided over by an American official, and negotiations over Angola and Cambodia are being carried out in Lisbon and Paris respectively—capitals of the old colonial powers in the countries concerned.

The demand for democracy is simply a lever to secure greater third world accommodation to Western control. The real consequence of the changes is to give the peoples of the third world even less control over their own lives, and to leave their destinies more firmly in the hands of Western financiers and governments. President Chissano of Mozambique's Frelimo government has explained how one American condition for aid leads to another:

'The USA said, "open yourself to...the World Bank and IMF". What happened?...we are told now: "Marxism! you are devils! change this policy." OK. Marxism is gone. "Open the market economy." OK, Frelimo is trying to create capitalism...Now they say, "if you don't go to a multi-party system

don't expect help from us". (Quoted in JS Saul, 'From thaw to flood: the end of the Cold War in Southern Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, No50, 1991)

The West has tightened the economic screws on Mozambique while the terrorist gangs of Renamo, sponsored by South Africans and Americans, have waged a bloody war that has wrecked the economy. Half a million Mozambicans have been killed and many more face starvation in what is now arguably the poorest country on Earth. All in the name of encouraging democratic reform.

Those living on the frontline of the third world are feeling the full, oppressive weight of imperialism today. But even in its Western heartlands, the imperialist system is proving itself incapable of sustaining democratic rights.

Democratic facade

The existence of formally democratic systems of government in the West is no more 'natural' than the lack of them in the third world. Each is a product of imperialism. Western domination of the globe denies democratic rights to the third world; and the profits and the power which the imperialists gain from their control of the world economy have given Western rulers the scope to erect a facade of democracy.

In the West too, however, the extension of democratic rights is conditional upon the strength of the international capitalist system. In periods of prosperity and stability, civil rights and liberal legislation can be tolerated. But if the capitalist world economy is weakened, democratic rights are instantly revokable. Today, the trend towards more direct imperialist oppression in the third world is paralleled by the tendency to restrict democratic freedoms in the West itself.

Perhaps the clearest example of this trend is the intensification of racism across Europe and America. Racism in the West is a direct component of imperialism: as undemocratic third world countries are being criminalised as the 'enemy without', so third world immigrants in the West are treated as the 'enemy within'.

In France, mainstream conservative politicians compete with the fascist Front National to condemn 'smelly immigrants', while riot police go on the rampage against North Africans in and around Paris. In Britain, the Tories propose even tighter immigration restrictions on third world refugees, and racist attacks increase in the press and on the street. A recent EC paper hints that aid to the third world should be

conditional on halting immigration to Europe. Failing that, the EC proposes to 'encourage the economic reinsertion of immigrants to their country of origin'. In plain language, that means deportation. And even in Eastern Europe, Vietnamese and Mozambican immigrants have discovered that intensified racism is being imported along with the market economy.

True colours

The rise of racism in the West should serve to remind us that the way in which imperialism denies democratic rights is a problem for us all. Throughout the West, civil liberties have been badly eroded in recent years. The Western establishment has armed itself with batteries of anti-union laws, immigration controls, anti-abortion amendments and legislative attacks on lesbians and gays. And it seems likely that there is worse to come, as the economic and social crisis facing the capitalist system worsens. The rulers of the Western world have shown before that they have no compunction about dispensing with democracy and enforcing 'national government', states of emergency, censorship and internment as and when required.

In times of severe political crisis and war, imperialism reveals its true colours by abolishing the formal trappings of democracy at home. Even the top imperialist powers have been unable to sustain unbroken democracies.

In Britain, the 'cradle of democracy', the authorities suspended elections for 10 years from 1935 to 1945. In the post-war period alone, governments have declared five states of emergency—in 1948, 1966, 1970, 1972 and 1973—during strikes by dockers and miners. They have imposed almost complete press censorship on Britain's numerous military campaigns (most notably during the Falklands conflict and the Gulf War).

Send in the tanks

The French establishment collaborated with the Nazis in the Vichy government and survived the collapse of the fifth republic in 1958 by sending the tanks on to the streets of Paris. They repeated the exercise in May 1968. For the first half of the century, German capitalism was ruled over by the Kaiser, then the Nazis and then the American military, with only a brief flirtation with a democratic republic in between. The Italian ruling class supported fascism from 1922 to 1943. The Spanish ruling class only replaced the Franco dictatorship with a constitutional monarchy in 1975.

And post-war Japan has been run as a virtual one-party state under a constitution imposed by American General Douglas MacArthur after the Second World War.

The United States of America is the sole Western power to maintain the trappings of electoral democracy without a break since the beginning of the century (unlike Britain, the USA did not suspend elected government during the war, although it made no bones about interning its sizeable Japanese population). But even the mighty USA has been unable to provide political freedom for its people. The American constitution, which embodies the rights of man, was drawn up during the era of slavery. In modern times, the land of the free has remained the land of the racist lynch law, the anti-communist witch-hunt and the electric chair. There may no longer be official colour bars on voting rights, but informal barriers still disenfranchise millions of blacks and Hispanics living in the USA. Democratic America has little to learn from the dictatorships it now to claims to oppose.

Racist poison

The West's new crusade for democracy coincides with the escalation of Western militarism overseas and the increasing regimentation of society at home. As Britain, France and America harped on the theme of democracy and human rights in the third world, they were carpet-bombing Iraq. On the home front of the Gulf War, they censored the press, deported Arabs, imposed a curfew on some immigrant areas and stationed tanks at major airports.

Imperialism is the barrier to the exercise of democratic rights in both the third world and the West. The precondition for the expression of genuine democracy, of a kind that could give the majority control over their lives, is the removal of that barrier. Opposition to imperialism is not just a matter of offering solidarity and sympathy to the victims of repression in Latin America or Africa. It is the most pressing issue for anybody concerned about the politics of liberation anywhere in the world today.

In a country like Britain, taking a stand against imperialism has to involve opposing every Western intervention in the third world. The first step is to challenge the chauvinist belief that imperialism can have a civilising role to play and to fight the racist poison that is seeping more quickly into the Western system as a domestic consequence of intensified imperialist domination.

Open letter to all opponents of imperialism from
the Revolutionary Communist Party

Challenge Britain's

Throughout the world the forces of imperialism are advancing and those of liberation are in retreat. The march for Irish freedom in London on the 10 August provides an important opportunity to take a stand in solidarity with all those confronting Western imperialism around the world.

The Gulf War marked a turning point in the relations between the West and the third world. For three decades after the Second World War the Western powers conducted tactical retreats from their colonies in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. In a long series of conflicts with national liberation movements—in China, Algeria, Cuba, Angola, Mozambique and many more—the big powers suffered outright defeats.

In the Gulf the concerted forces of the major imperialist nations were deployed

to destroy a third world country. Not only were some 200 000 people killed in this exercise in hi-tech barbarism, but the wider trends of the post-war years were thrown into reverse. More than 20 years after Britain's withdrawal from 'East of Suez', the Middle East has been recolonised. Kuwait is now a US protectorate, Saudi Arabia is under military occupation and Iraq has been carved up and garrisoned.

Elsewhere, national liberation movements that advanced in the seventies and eighties are now on the defensive. The collapse of the Soviet Union as a counterweight to the West in the third world has given the imperialist powers unprecedented scope to pursue their interests. In South Africa the ANC has been forced to negotiate from a position of weakness, while its supporters are slaughtered on the streets. In Palestine the intifada continues, but the PLO has lost momentum and direction. In Central America, the Sandinistas have been driven from power in Nicaragua and in El Salvador the rebels are being forced to come to terms with the regime.

Once the world's major imperialist power and still a second-rank force, Britain continues to play an important role in the new world order. The fact that the recent negotiations over the formation of the new regime in Ethiopia took place in London illustrates Britain's continuing role as mediator and lieutenant to the American generals and officials who decided which of the rival factions would be allowed to form a provisional government.

Despite all its attempts to disguise the fact, it is important that we continually remind the world that Britain is itself engaged in an imperialist war. This war has raged in Ireland for more than two decades and has claimed some 3000 lives. The upsurge in bombings, shootings and killings in recent months provides a useful reminder that while the world's attention is focused on the Kurds, the Iraqis and the Ethiopians, the Irish liberation struggle is still locked in mortal conflict with Britain's military machine.

The 10 August 1991 is an important anniversary: it marks 20 years since the British state introduced internment without trial in the occupied Six Counties, transforming a relatively small-scale and episodic conflict into an all-out war. The fact that this twentieth

**Demonstration
Saturday 10 August**

**Troops out of Ireland
Prisoners out of jail**

Organised by the Irish Freedom Movement
See inside front cover

colonial war

anniversary falls in the first year of the new imperialist world order makes it an even more important occasion on which to rally the crowds and raise the standard against all forms of Western interference in the third world and all violations of national rights. It is an occasion on which to show solidarity with the cause of Irish freedom and with all resistance to imperialism around the world. It is an opportunity to show Ireland and the world that London is not merely a place where Western fixers meet to carve up other people's countries and to appoint rulers over them, but it can also become the focus for those ready to take a stand against the enemy at home.



The peace of the grave

'They can't stomach seeing so many people come to pay their respects. There's more courage and dignity in that coffin up there than in the whole bloody lot of them.'—Woman at the wake of IRA volunteer Tony Doris, where the British security forces abused the bereaved and threatened mourners.

In June, while the media got excited about the prospects of a political settlement in Northern Ireland, the SAS got out their guns and executed three members of the IRA. It was an episode which said more about the reality of British rule in Ireland than all the hype concerning Tory minister Peter Brooke's 'peace talks'.

Fiona Foster went over for the IRA men's funerals. Simon Norfolk took the photographs

Coalisland in County Tyrone is the sort of town that Irish republicans call 'staunch', and the British security forces regard as enemy territory. The village police station is a military barracks, with a new concrete fortress to protect the Royal Ulster Constabulary from members of the local community. The concrete is covered in pro-IRA graffiti.

Coalisland is arguably the place where the 'troubles' began, 23 years ago this month. On 24 August 1968, the first civil rights march went from Coalisland to Dungannon. It was the start of a campaign to end sectarian discrimination against the minority Catholic community in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland—a campaign met by vicious repression from the Loyalist authorities and the RUC. A year later, in August 1969, British troops arrived on the streets of Northern Ireland. Catholics who welcomed them as protectors soon found that the British forces were an army of occupation. Two years on, in August 1971, the authorities imposed internment without trial. It convinced many Catholics that the only way they could achieve the basic rights demanded by the Coalisland-Dungannon marchers was to remove the British-built Border entirely, bring down the sectarian statelet of Northern Ireland and create a united Irish republic. The IRA emerged as a popular guerrilla army fighting for national liberation.

Coalisland was the home town of Tony Doris. He wasn't even born when that civil rights march set off. But his experience of life in Britain's

war-zone led him to join the IRA. In June 1991, Tony Doris and two other IRA volunteers—Pete Ryan and Lawrence McNally—were executed by an SAS shoot-to-kill squad. The soldiers fired 200 rounds into the car until it burst into flames, then left the occupants to burn. Tony was 21, with a three-month old daughter.

Driving into Coalisland the day before Tony Doris was due to be buried, it was obvious that this would be no ordinary funeral. Black flags hung from bedroom windows all around the town. Those who didn't have flags used black bin liners. Others flew the Irish tricolour as well. At the wake and the funeral, locals came out in large numbers to pay their respects. And the RUC and the British Army were out in force to do the opposite.

Killing IRA men is only the start of an operation for the Crown forces. They will go out of their way to degrade the dead and maximise the suffering of the families. It is meant to teach a ghoulissh lesson to the republican community about the folly of resistance. The events leading up to the funeral of Tony Doris provided a prime example of this vindictive policy.

Within an hour of the June shootings, the security forces had issued the dead IRA men's names to the media. Yet they hung on to the badly burnt bodies for three days, claiming they needed to identify them. In one case the parents were forced to give blood samples to identify their son. Throughout those three long days and nights the deafening noise of British Army



Coalisland pays its respects to Tony Doris, the man the British state called a criminal, but who was known to local people as a freedom fighter



An IRA guard of honour led thousands of mourners at the funeral of Lawrence McNally in Monaghan (left), while British troops came dressed to kill and military helicopters drowned out the graveside oration at the burial of Pete Ryan by Lough Neagh (below)

helicopters, circling low above their home, kept the Doris family from sleeping. Policemen urinated in their garden and the authorities threatened to send the coffins home via hostile Loyalist areas—including Coagh, the town where they were shot.

Grisly jibes

The RUC stopped Tony's only brother on his way to Pete Ryan's wake, broke two of his fingers and gloated that he wouldn't be able to sit the medical exams he was due to take. Locals going to Tony's wake at the Doris family home had to weave single file through a line of RUC armoured cars blocking the narrow road to the house. Paramilitary policemen trained their rifles on mourners and taunted them with grisly jibes about barbecues and spare ribs.

Tony Doris, Pete Ryan and Lawrence McNally had been travelling through Coagh in East Tyrone when their car was ambushed by the SAS. The official British line that there is no shoot-to-kill policy operating in Northern Ireland usually means that executions like this are followed by elaborate justifications. The authorities issue stories of gun battles or cars speeding through check points to reassure everybody that arrests were impossible. This time there was no such pretence. We were simply told that three men had been identified as IRA members and shot dead. It was as close as you will get to an official declaration of a deliberate policy of public executions.

The RUC story that the men were on their way to murder Protestant workers was readily accepted by politicians and media alike. A statement from the men's own IRA unit, explaining that the operation was aimed at an unspecified military target, was ignored. No journalist felt it necessary to point out that the IRA men were ambushed several minutes after they had driven past the group of workers alleged to be their target.

The media depiction of Tony Doris as a cowardly murderer who got what he deserved made little impression in Coalisland. At his wake, local people queued on his parents' stairs to pay their last respects to a man they regarded as a brave freedom fighter. Two uniformed and masked IRA members stood guard at the coffin, on which were laid his gaelic football shirt and his IRA beret and black leather gloves. In the crowded living room downstairs, the talk was of the low-life behaviour of the soldiers and RUC men. 'They can't stomach seeing so many people come to pay their respects,' said one woman, her voice shaking with anger: 'There's more courage and dignity in that coffin up there than in the whole bloody lot of them.'

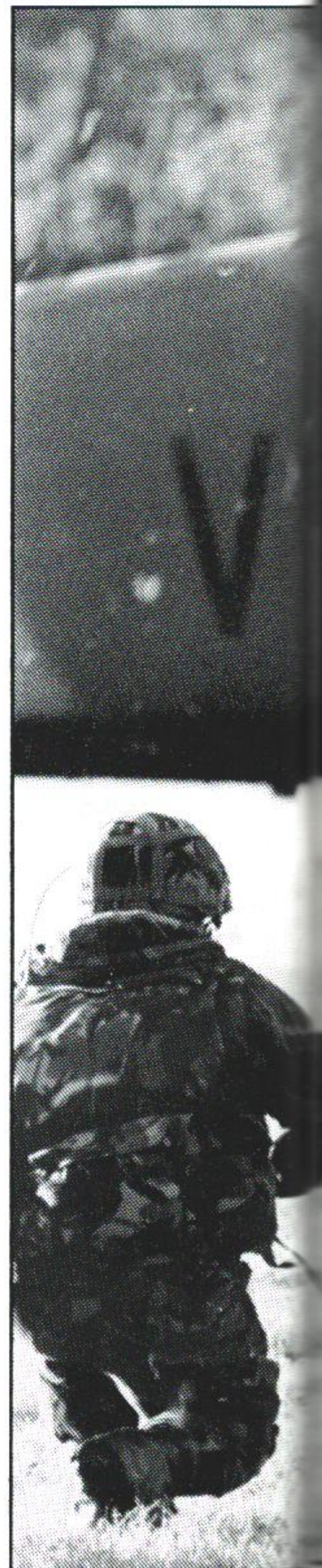
Next morning, locals arrived early at the Doris home for the funeral. RUC men in full riot gear lined up five deep along the narrow road to the house. They had moved in closer overnight and hundreds of them now formed a human wall in the Doris' garden, hemming mourners in and

preventing the coffin coming out. They were wearing their full funeral rig: handgun and rifle on either hip, plastic bullet guns open and ready for fast loading across their chests, riot batons swirling in the palms of their hands. 'They've certainly come dressed to kill today' said the man standing behind me.

The Doris family retained a quiet dignity for the hour in which leading Sinn Fein members and priests asked senior RUC officers to pull back their men from the house and allow the coffin through. Others were less restrained. 'I wish he'd jump up out of it and riddle the lot of you' screamed one woman, who was quickly silenced by stewards. The hate in the eyes of the young men standing by the coffin as they stared at the RUC lines suggested that her sentiments were widely shared.

Nothing but war

At the graveside, Sinn Fein councillor Mairtin O'Muilleoir reminded us that in 21 years of life Tony had known nothing but British occupation, nothing but war. The army helicopters failed to drown out O'Muilleoir's appeal to the crowd to ensure that the young men had not died in vain: 'We have lost three of our finest guides on the road to freedom, but no matter how often they cut us down others will rise up.' The same defiant message was repeated later that day as Pete Ryan was buried in his home town of Ardboe, on the shores of the beautiful Lough Neagh, while



armoured cars formed a ring of steel around the graveyard, helicopters roared through blue skies and an army gunboat watched from the lake.

The third of the executed IRA men, Lawrence McNally, was due to be buried just over the border in Monaghan, in the Republic of Ireland. The young British squaddie at the Border checkpoint believed we were tourists and warned us to avoid Monaghan today. A few miles along the road there were more black flags and more security forces. Their uniforms and the tricolour painted on their helicopter told us that these soldiers were of the Irish variety. But any illusions that we had just left British occupied territory to enter a free Irish state were soon shattered. The funeral of Lawrence McNally demonstrated how the Dublin government and its security forces now operate as extensions of the British state in its war against Irish republicans.

In a carbon copy of the security operation mounted in County Tyrone, Irish police and troops set up road blocks at every point of access

to the McNally home, surrounded the house with armed men and even echoed the RUC's revolting abuse of people on their way to the wake. On the night that McNally's body was finally released, a crowd waiting to meet the cortege had been jostled by trigger-happy police who fired shots and arrested three of the fleeing crowd. The men were beaten up and thrown into Monaghan barracks, while reports of a fictitious gun battle with the IRA filled the Irish newspapers. The Irish papers also condemned the 'disgraceful paramilitary' display at McNally's funeral. They were not talking about the massive and provocative presence of Irish riot police and armed soldiers, nor the antics of the military helicopters that drowned out the graveside oration. They were condemning the unarmed IRA guard of honour that marched ahead of a funeral procession numbering thousands.

At the time of the June executions, all the talk was of Tory minister Peter Brooke's new political initiative and the prospects for peace in

Northern Ireland. The reactions which those killings prompted should remind us of what peace means to those whom Brooke has brought to the negotiating table. The British government is an occupying military power in Ireland, determined to crush resistance to its rule in classic colonial fashion. The Unionist politicians are sectarian bigots, prepared publicly to welcome the killing of republicans while Loyalist police abuse the dead and threaten their families. And the Dublin authorities are little more than junior partners in Britain's dirty war.

The other response to the shootings should also remind us of the voice which will not be heard in the Brooke talks or the media: that of the republican communities which still cry out for freedom from British rule. As discussed elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the core of republican support is now under great pressure. Yet the crowds who turned out for the three IRA funerals in June were in no mood to surrender to those who promise them only the peace of the grave. ●



Can the IRA survive?

Through more than 20 years of war, the Irish republican movement has proved itself remarkably resilient. Yet current trends within Ireland and internationally have left it facing dangerous isolation. Alex Farrell looks at the liberation struggle on our doorstep

With the Cold War over, and the Soviet Union retreating from the international stage, the West is the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. In the Gulf War Western imperialism underlined in blood its new freedom to intervene. Third world liberation movements have been thrown into crisis. Yesterday's freedom fighters are everywhere climbing into business suits, talking diplomacy and looking for compromise on terms dictated by their enemies. The ANC negotiates with the De Klerk regime which is behind the mass murder of its supporters. In Lebanon the PLO's fighters are driven back into the refugee camps by Syria and its proxies, with Western backing. In this grim new world what are the prospects for the one national liberation movement in Western Europe—the Irish Republican Army?

The first thing to establish is why the IRA has survived for so long. For more than 20 years the IRA has held off the British Army, the world's most experienced counter-insurgency force. It could never have done so if it was an isolated gang of hoods and psychopaths, as British propaganda would have us believe. It has survived as the armed expression of popular opposition to the British occupation of Ireland.

When the British Army invaded Belfast and Derry in 1969, the IRA did not exist. What did exist was a sectarian state, carved out of the north-east of Ireland by the British, with a built-in majority of privileged Protestant Loyalists. Catholics were denied the vote, denied jobs, denied homes, subjected to pogroms, and targeted by repressive laws which were publicly admired by apartheid South Africa. The experience of this oppression had long ensured that

Northern Catholics were Irish nationalists. In the late sixties it was to create the modern IRA.

In early 1967 a moderate civil rights movement emerged. When peaceful protests were savagely batoned off the streets, working class nationalists responded. Demands for reform turned into opposition to British rule. Police beatings escalated into full-scale anti-Catholic pogroms. Nationalists fought back. The Army went in. Stones and petrol bombs were not defence enough. The nationalists built their own army—the Provisional IRA. British repression culminated in mass internment in August 1971. People queued to join the IRA. Non-existent two years earlier, the modern IRA was created by the provocation of the British.

British oppression has also recreated the IRA at key moments over the past two decades. By the late seventies the republican movement had lost momentum and support. It had been damaged by the British strategy of criminalisation under which the Labour government had withdrawn political status from republican prisoners and launched a crackdown on the IRA as 'ordinary' criminals. However, this repressive British policy also sowed the seeds of a republican resurgence. In 1980-81, against the strong advice of the republican leadership, the prisoners launched hunger-strikes for political status. Within months hunger-strike leader Bobby Sands had been elected MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone; over 100 000 had followed his funeral cortege; the hunger-strikers' heroism was world news; and the nationalist community threw itself behind the republican struggle once more. It was the start of a new upturn in republican fortunes, the era of the armalite and the ballot box—

electoral success alongside the armed struggle. Instead of defeating the IRA, British intransigence had provoked the nationalist community into a new level of political involvement.

The IRA's survival is down to the hardcore nationalist communities, most prominently in West Belfast, Derry and South Armagh. They have always been at the toe-cap end of British oppression and have responded by backing the IRA. As Fiona Foster's report on recent IRA funerals in this month's *Living Marxism* demonstrates, the republican core continues to face what Britain throws at it with no mean resilience.

At the same time, the republican movement's long-term reliance on that base points up the problems it has had in spreading its support further afield. The highpoints achieved have been the products of a response by the republican community to extreme instances of British brutality rather than a result of political initiatives launched by the republican movement itself.

After the hunger-strike, Sinn Fein set out to win wider political support. Its vote in Northern Ireland peaked at 102 601 in the 1983 general election when Gerry Adams first won West Belfast. At the 1987 general election 83 389 voted Sinn Fein. In effect, this was the republican core expressed in votes. As Gerry Adams commented in 1985: 'This performance and these developments were possible because a fairly clear republican base already existed. What we have been doing in recent years has been to structure that base.' The electoral break out, threatening to make the Social Democratic and Labour Party the minority party among nationalists, never materialised. Sinn Fein has been



unable to convince those who do not live directly under the British hammer to support the republican movement. The most glaring example of this problem is in the South where Sinn Fein has won only a tiny fraction of the vote and where the growing trend among all Southern parties is to junk the constitutional claim to the North and to dismiss republicanism as a dangerous anachronism.

Selective repression

The republican movement's firm base of support explains why the British state has been unable to defeat the IRA. But the narrowness of that base also means that the republican struggle can be contained. As the British authorities have refined their strategy through the years, their aim has been to reduce the republican core to a minimum and push it to the political margins. Mass internment has given way to more targeted repression aimed against known republicans. The Bloody Sunday slaughter of unarmed demonstrators has been shelved in favour of more selective assassinations by the SAS and other undercover units.

In concentrating their fire on the nationalist core the British authorities have two aims. First, to isolate republican activists from the support upon which they rely. Second, to undermine the nationalist base and seduce support away from armed resistance; at the very least, to deactivate it.

The first approach depends on targeting active republicans. From shooting them down, to internment by remand, to non-stop harassment, Britain aims to spell out the consequences of getting involved and discourage active resistance. A transaction as mundane as mending a Sinn Fein councillor's car can earn a garage owner the close attention of the security forces. It is a powerful hint. But it is more effective in isolated nationalist areas than in West Belfast where the frequency of large-scale house raids, intelligence trawls and arms searches means that even keeping your head down is no guarantee of peace and quiet.

The second element in British strategy centres on political initiatives. The function of these is to take advantage of what is commonly called 'war-weariness' and promote the idea that moderation offers a chance of progress. In the early seventies republicans commonly believed that victory was just around the corner. But the IRA's constituency has long since had to recognise that it is not about to

defeat British imperialism. In these conditions, as the conflict drags on from one year to the next, war-weariness becomes more open to exploitation.

While one political initiative after another has collapsed, without producing even minor reforms to benefit the nationalist community, the balance of political forces has swung back in the British state's favour over the last few years. The Anglo-Irish deal, signed between London and Dublin in November 1985, was Britain's response to Sinn Fein's post-hunger strike election successes. From Whitehall's point of view, it has been the most long-lived and the most successful initiative yet. First it involved the Dublin government in discussions (though not decisions) about the North, then it brought the moderate Catholic SDLP to the negotiating table with the Unionist parties—developments which the British government has been able to claim as proof that peaceful progress is possible. By barring republicans from the long drawn-out political process, the British government suggests to nationalists that a vote for Sinn Fein is a wasted vote. And by prolonging the process Britain maintains the illusion—even after the predictable collapse of the first round of Northern Ireland secretary Peter Brooke's talks—that something may come of it.

Back to base

Britain's more subtle balance between repression and political trickery has created serious problems for the republican movement. Since the mid-eighties, working in intensely hostile conditions, it has been driven back on to its base of support and that core has itself been compressed. Sinn Fein can still win elections in areas like West Belfast but its overall vote has stagnated and its threat to the SDLP has subsided. The IRA continues to demonstrate its ability to mount daring and skilful operations like the mortar attack on John Major and his cabinet. But the mass political participation of nationalists in the hunger-strike period is now a thing of the past.

Support for Sinn Fein stems primarily from its association with the IRA. It is the IRA's armed defence of nationalist areas and its armed offensive against the British forces of occupation which wins it the support of staunch Northern nationalists. British pressure on this section of Irish nationalists has remained intense throughout the 'troubles'. The past 22 years have shown that they have maintained the will and the capacity to fight back.

But they are now facing a serious problem of isolation even within Northern Ireland.

The collapse of national liberation movements internationally, into Western-dominated diplomacy and incorporation, has left Irish republicans even more starkly exposed. Republican murals in the cities of Belfast and Derry celebrate the struggles of the Palestinians and of black South Africa. Meantime, leaders of the PLO and ANC have publicly condemned the IRA to boost their acceptability in the UN and at the Court of St James. Libya's Colonel Gaddafi, who—were you to believe British commentators—almost single-handedly financed and armed the IRA, has recently offered to tout on the IRA in return for readmittance to the Western-run club of nations. The British government may balk at having Gaddafi to dinner, but you can be sure that it would gladly welcome him as a new supergrass.

IRAid?

Anti-imperialism is also out of fashion in the West itself. Today many former radicals see the role of Britain in the world as that of a Mother Teresa with military back-up rather than as a colonial killing machine. It is hard to believe that in the early seventies it was almost trendy in right-on British circles to identify with and support the republican struggle in Ireland. On many a wall Che Guevara was stuck cheek-to-cheek with an IRA volunteer toting an RPG. John Lennon, no less, marched on a London street holding up the unequivocal message—'Victory to the IRA'. What price IRAid with today's pop millionaires?

Those days are long gone. By the mid-seventies most British leftists had discovered that anti-Americanism was more congenial and much less unpopular than opposing their own imperialist state. Liberation struggles secured support on the basis that they were not anti-British, and operated at a distance of at least a thousand miles. Today's new condition for being accepted is that oppressed peoples abandon anti-imperialism altogether.

Irish republicans show no sign of abandoning their long war of liberation just yet. But they are facing dangerous pressures and a serious threat of isolation. All the more reason why it is vital for us to show solidarity with their struggle. There could be no more pressing cause around which to lay the foundations of a new anti-imperialism than the liberation of Ireland from British occupation. ●

Beer talking

A schoolfriend of mine had an older brother. When he was 16 he was bullied by my friend, who was six. By the time my friend and I were 16, the brother wasn't worth bullying—not even by a six-year old. If I ever wanted to indicate that something was beneath contempt a convenient shorthand would be to say: 'Oh, even *your brother* wouldn't buy it/watch it/wear it...'

I was invariably wrong. When the Stars on 45 records came out, he returned from a trip abroad with an expensive Dutch *bootleg copy*. An inspection of his bedroom revealed a cassette library of those daytime Radio 4 comedy quizzes with Tim Brooke-Taylor and friends; a James Last album with a cover photo of Mr Last in sailor cap; a polo-neck sweater sporting a saucer-sized badge proclaiming 'I like Rock'n'Roll'; and every record ever released by The Ink Spots and The Hollies.

But the key discoveries were the novelty 'Drinker's Licence' and his personal diary, which we attacked with cruel anticipation. Page after page revealed nothing but blank paper. Then suddenly: 'Thursday. Did not go to pub.' For some time now he had been engaged in a futile attempt to win the favour of the barmaid in the pub down the road, in the hope of losing his virginity (or even kissing somebody) before he reached 30. This single sad entry spoke volumes. It was the snuffing out of a feeble flame.

Soon afterwards, brown packages started arriving in the post and he began to swell up like a balloon. A beard sprouted on his puffy jowls. The packages contained *What's Brewing* and other literature from the Campaign for Real Ale, or Camra, as it is known to serious drinkers. He began to affect a worldly manner, peppering his conversation with disdainful references to 'Grotneys', 'soap' or—most damning of all—'water'.

Those were the days of 'I'm only here for the beer'; 'Double Diamond works wonders'; and 'Whitbread Big Head, the pint that thinks it's a quart'. Big manly ales for rugby players with proper sideburns who drank bitter out of chunky glass mugs. Yet it was this very keg bitter that had prompted the formation of Camra. The biggest villain was undoubtedly 'Grotneys' (Watney's Red Barrel) but it didn't really matter. My friend's brother needed dragons to slay. Now he was a man. And all those drinkers of fizzy water were *little boys*. Or, as Camra put it, 'keg is kid's stuff'.

And he was not alone. In those days if you went to see a band or gategashed the wrong party, you ran the risk of having to stand among these people with their t-shirts saying 'HMS Beero' and 'Reality is an illusion created by lack of alcohol', while they swilled 'Boddies' and Ruddles and filled the air with their disgusting farts.

All this came flooding back to me as I sat in a pub recently and caught the tail-end of a conversation between two middle-aged off-duty postmen. One of them had The Voice. A ponderous, pompous drone accompanied by much slow nodding with closed eyes and pursed lips. 'Remember that lad?' The Voice was saying, 'you know, the one with the Palace shirt, very serious chap, always reading....' I was intrigued; what was he—a poet? a scientist? The Voice took a contemplative gulp of his pint and spoke in hushed tones: 'Yes, very serious. *Very serious* about his beer.'

He can't have been that serious about his beer himself because he forgot to take his copy of *What's Brewing?* when he left. I picked it up, and being a bit pissed thought it was a copy of the *Morning Star*. On the front was a picket, with one bloke waving a noose. At first sight it looked like one of those cringeingly 'good-natured' protests in

Downing Street where people deliver a coffin representing the 'death' of education or something. Then I realised that these people were far too angry. I haven't seen a noose waved like that since they caught the Yorkshire Ripper. These were Camra activists protesting about a pub closure and they were furious. The following pages were packed full of 'demos' and pickets in aid of 'the struggle'. It was like the golden days of the left press, which isn't a coincidence. The editor is a retired lefty himself, as are many of the beer movement's rank and file; the step from labour movement conferences to beer festivals being a small and easy one.

But Camra does more than just champion 'cask conditioned ale'. It preserves the traditional British pub from the encroachment of plastic furnishings, jukeboxes and most other twentieth century things. Picture a Tudor-beamed hostelry with a roaring fire, a jovial group of red-faced regulars dropping coins into the swear-box on the bar (all for charity) and then 'getting their money's worth' to the delight of 'mine host', who is polishing a pewter tankard with a gingham cloth. Now you've got an idea of what the ale heritage project is really about. This struck me forcefully when I visited a London beer festival.

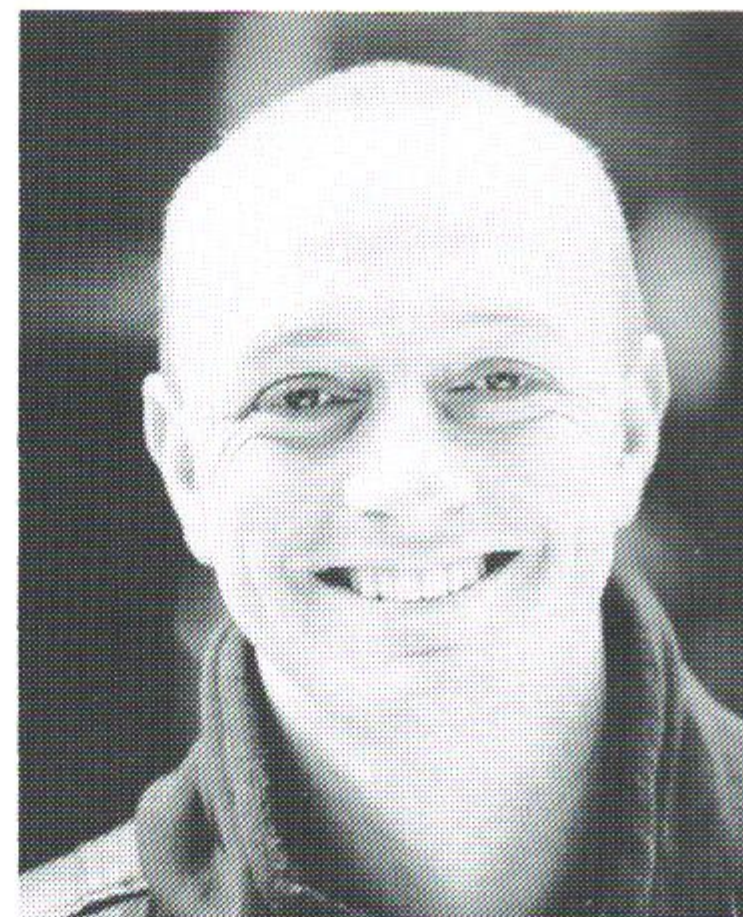
I was greeted at the door by a middle-aged man with a speech impediment, dressed in the adult version of school uniform that is traditional to social inadequates: dark grey trousers and a white nylon shirt transparent enough to reveal the point at which vest neckline and Y-front waistline meet. It came as no surprise to learn that his other interest was canals, information he offered freely, not caring who I was. I once went on a canal holiday, against my better judgement, and met enthusiasts like him at every lock accompanied by wives in tea-cosy hats. The sole pleasure to be had on a canal is asking them 'Is that your barge?', and then watching them frown and huff before explaining the difference between a longboat and a barge.

At least half of the people I spoke to at the festival were canal buffs. Those who weren't all had another 'hobby'. Bird-watching, sausages, train-spotting and visiting non-league football grounds were all popular, but almost anything obsessional and pointless would fit the bill. A special mention to the men who fill empty Lucozade bottles with real ale from different national festivals and meet on Derby station to swap them.

It's not said often enough of English eccentrics that their eccentricities are usually due to a lack of imagination rather than a surfeit. In the case of real ale, it also fits in nicely with another deathly obsession—the Little England tradition of country rambles, friendly pubs and honest ale—and Camra provides numerous guidebooks explaining how to combine these elements. As I entered the beer festival, a troupe of morris dancers were in full cry, and before long various degrees of 'builder's arse' were on display above sagging jeans as ale-maddened punters joined the dance.

Camra is seeking to improve its public image, lest—heaven forbid!—it should appear out of touch with ordinary people. It is particularly keen to encourage women to join, and worryingly, it appears to be succeeding. This of course offers the awful prospect of breeding—a matter of academic interest only to real ale drinkers in earlier, more innocent days. And with that sobering thought I pushed my way through the swaying mass of rugby shirts and beards and back to my safe little world.

A limited number of 'A Woman's Right to Booze' t-shirts are available to any interested readers. Write to me for details.



Toby Banks

It's not said often enough of English eccentrics that their eccentricities are usually due to a lack of imagination rather than a surfeit

Learning Japanese

With the £15m Japan Festival opening in August, Daniel Nassim looks at why Britain's thriving chauvinism seems so muted these days when it comes to the Japanese

Britain's amiable attitude towards the Japanese today is in marked contrast to its increasing hostility towards other non-white peoples. The Japanese even fare relatively well compared to Britain's European neighbours, with the French and Germans getting far more stick from the tabloid press and Tory MPs. Of course there are occasional jabs at Japan. Former Allied prisoners of war routinely complain about their treatment in Japanese camps, and animal rights campaigners criticise Japan for killing whales and dolphins. But all this is decidedly low-key. The more typical TV image of Anglo-Japanese relations is the advert showing a British executive sharing *sushi* with his Japanese corporate partners.

Britain's official friendship is now being endorsed by a multi-million

pound Japan Festival, involving more than 350 events in 200 locations across Britain. This is a curious hotch-potch ranging from a five-day sumo tournament in the Royal Albert Hall to a Japanese version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* performed by the Shiki theatrical company, from an exhibition of Japanese toys in Edinburgh to a performance by the Bunraku puppet theatre in Belfast. The festival runs until January 1992.

Our sponsors

Even before the festival many British institutions were happy to be linked to Japan. The British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum both receive corporate sponsorship from Japanese firms. The London Symphony, London Sinfonietta and BBC Welsh Symphony orchestras also get substantial amounts. Many of Britain's top football teams appear every Saturday with the names of Japanese firms emblazoned on their chests, including English League champions Arsenal (JVC) and winners of the European Cup Winners Cup, Manchester United (Sharp).

Britain's warmth to Japan contrasts with the hostility across the Channel. Edith Cresson, France's new Socialist premier, is a notorious Japan-baiter. She used the opportunity of her first TV appearance after being appointed in May to launch another anti-Japanese tirade. Last year she told the French business daily *La Tribune* that Japan had 'an absolute desire to conquer the world'. She has even declared Japan to be 'an enemy of the French people'.

Britain has become a target for French wrath as a result of its friendly relations with Japan. Cresson once called Margaret Thatcher 'the Japanese Trojan horse for the invasion of Europe'. Last October Jacques Calvert, the head of Peugeot who used to employ Cresson's husband, warned that Britain was becoming 'a Japanese aircraft carrier just off Europe's coast, or even Japan's fifth major island'.

The difference of opinion over Japan is not simply a matter of national taste. It roughly reflects the different economic interests of the British and French capitalists today. No doubt in private, the British establishment is just as anti-Japanese as ever. But Britain desperately needs Japan's friendly largesse to help keep its economy afloat in the nineties.

The collapse of British manufacturing has left Japanese firms as almost the only source of new investment in industry in this country. There is no longer such a thing as a wholly British-owned car company. In contrast, Toyota, Nissan and Honda have all decided to make Britain their European base.

Last year's ground-breaking ceremony for the £700m Toyota factory in Burnaston, near Derby, was attended by trade and industry secretary Nicholas Ridley. He proudly claimed that 'the cars which Toyota will produce here at Burnaston will be British cars,' and that 'like all British cars, they will be entitled to the benefits of free circulation in the European Community'. Ridley was subsequently sacked from the government for making overly shrill anti-German remarks, comparing chancellor Helmut Kohl to Hitler and calling on us all to remember the Second World War. He conveniently forgot to mention that Britain was also at war with Japan. Japanese is now being added to the school curriculum in South Derbyshire.

Cheap labour

There were 187 Japanese manufacturing companies operating in Britain by the end of 1990 compared with 122 in France and 109 in Germany. These include some of Japan's top brand names such as Toshiba, Sanyo and Komatsu. Sony has even won the Queen's Award for Export for the sale of its British-assembled Trinitron televisions. Japanese executives love British golf courses but that's not why they come here. As *Time* magazine observed back in June 1989, the main reason the Japanese favour Britain is 'the

PHOTO: The Japan Festival



availability of relatively cheap, reasonably skilled labour that the Japanese believed they could shape in their mould'. The British authorities have also offered big financial incentives in their desperation to attract Japanese investment.

Even more important than the high-profile manufacturing plants is Japan's involvement in the City of London. The City is Britain's one remaining asset of global economic significance, and Japanese money has been vital to retaining its position. One influential Japanese financier was recently reported as saying that 'if the Japanese were all to go home tomorrow, London's role as an international financial centre would collapse'.

Japanese firms also play a big role elsewhere in the British economy, investing £1.4 billion in British property in 1990 alone. Britain's auction houses are having serious problems as the Japanese market for fine art dries up. And retailers have been chasing after Japanese tourists as domestic trade dries up. A trip down London's Regent Street today reveals plenty of signs in Japanese and stickers welcoming Japanese credit cards. 'JCB? That will do nicely.'

British capitalism has little manufacturing industry left to compete with Japan, and a crying need for Japanese investment in its

key financial sector. So the British authorities have courted Japan, and directed more of their hostility towards Germany. Their longstanding fear of German domination of Europe is being realised through the power of German industry and the deutschmark. The resurgence of anti-German chauvinism thus reflects a real concern over a further loss of British power.

French connection

The French, in contrast, have tried to consolidate close relations with their powerful Continental neighbour; to hitch their fortunes to the tail of the German economic miracle. They also have more reason than the British to fear the strength of Japanese industry. France still has car companies and computer firms of its own, which are directly threatened by the arrival of Japan in the Continental market. This explains the more anti-Japanese tone of French foreign policy statements—and its criticisms of Britain as a 'Japanese Trojan horse' in Europe.

'I'm against the manifest imbalance that exists between the European Community, which is not at all protectionist...and the Japanese system which is hermetically sealed', said Edith Cresson on her appointment as French premier in May. It was 'not at all protectionist'

France that made the tiny inland town of Poitiers the point of entry for all Japanese VCRs in 1983. The nine customs officers stationed there were given strict instructions to examine carefully every video cassette recorder coming into the country. Symbolically the town is the site of the battle where a Saracen invasion was repelled in 732AD.

The French hotly dispute whether Japanese cars such as the Nissan Bluebird, produced in Sunderland, should be considered as British and given free access to the EC market. And when ICL, the top British computer company, was taken over by Fujitsu last year, it was quickly thrown out of European collaborative projects by its former French and Italian partners.

The conflict between the British and the French over relations with the Japanese and the Germans gives an interesting little insight into the way that attitudes are shaped at the top of capitalist society. National antagonisms are not primarily about history or culture clashes. They are determined more by the real economic position occupied by each nation in the international pecking order. As these rivalries intensify in the depression of the nineties, we can expect the chauvinism to get worse as well. Enjoy the Japan Festival while you still can.



PSYCHOS

and

CENSORS

As the latest serial murderer arrives on London screens, Dawn Levine wonders when we are going to get the measure of him



There are men out there killing women serially, that is to say, one after the other. In Los Angeles and Atlanta, London and Yorkshire, it cannot be denied. It may be a relatively new form of mass murder, more likely it has only just been noticed. We may be sure that the nature and scope of the category will bear much further study. At present, it is estimated that 500 people each year die at the hands of the serial killers in the States alone.

What is undoubtedly new is that serial killers have hit the arts in a big way. A fascinated public has been fed a stream of novels, studies, films and television dramas about the subject. Still they come, with the best of the bunch, John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, opening recently in London. At the Everyman cinema preview, Labour MP Clare Short was disapproving and *Prime Suspect* writer Lynda La Plante admiring. The debate will go on, but so far the discussion, which has centred on Bret Easton Ellis' book *American Psycho* and Jonathan Demme's film of Thomas Harris' thriller *The Silence of the Lambs*, has been disappointing.

Both works have been immensely popular. Hannibal the Cannibal helped his backers to gross \$71m in the States. They couldn't keep *American Psycho* down either, hard as they tried. New York publishers Simon and Schuster withdrew the book, under pressure from the ban 'em and burn 'em brigade. Feminists organised burnings of the book, and the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organisation of Women organised a boycott of Random House books (who own Vintage, the eventual publishers) until they dropped it. In spite of all this, and probably because of it, the book is a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic.

The censorship issue has distorted the

debate. Instead of a critical appraisal of the form and content of the work, there has been the now standard knee-jerk response to sex and violence from the censorship lobby: condemn it as exploitative and call for it to be banned. What is as worrying to me as anything in these books and films is the number of people who think that the appropriate response to something they regard as backward and dangerous is to call for its suppression. What on earth are they thinking of? Surely not that the killers will desist, and those who exploit them will turn to writing gardening manuals?

These censorship campaigns are a dangerous distraction from the urgent task of fighting for the interests of women in the here and now, for the conditions that really affect the quality of our lives: for jobs, for an end to discrimination, for access to contraception and abortion facilities, for childcare provision. The censors are chasing an alibi. Organise against John Major, Neil Kinnock and Paddy Ashdown? Sorry sister—they reply—I'm a realist, I vote for them. Let's take on Bret Easton Ellis and Paul Raymond.

Neither does one protest complement the other. They have different explanations of the problem, and different goals. Despite all the evidence and all the arguments, the absurd claim that we are harassed and oppressed because men read dirty books is still being made. Whatever we might think of pornography and the way in which it upholds stereotypes of women, it is not images of violence and degradation which keep us down, it is the way in which society is organised to deliver real violence and degradation to women.

The family, domestic drudgery, pitiful nurseries, job discrimination: these are not just ideological constructs. Mind you, if we are

talking about taking the matter on at the level of culture and representation, we should note how often pornography is portrayed as a threat to the institution of the family. It is always gay porn that gets banned first. To improve our lot we have to win the battle of ideas, not about how revolting certain images are or even about women being kept down—who would argue? We have to win the arguments about who and what is responsible for the way in which our lives are structured (hardly profiteering porn merchants), and how we can mobilise against them.

This is where the nosy censors are getting in our way, diverting attention from the real culprits and from the strategies that might succeed in nailing them.

We should also remember the context in which the calls for censorship take place. Women are not in control in our society. The working class is not in control. The state, to which so many readily appeal to ban and cut, is the agency which oils and enforces the mechanisms of our oppression. It is hard enough at present to keep the state out of every aspect of our lives; inviting the honourable members of parliament, the bench and the nick to defend our sensibilities from porn is akin to asking Dennis Nilson to unblock our plumbing.

Going back to the subject of serial killers, what then of their representation in the popular works of our age? So shocked and/or mesmerised have we been that judgement appears to have gone out of the window. Notice though how every review condemning *American Psycho* has managed to pack in the blood and guts, wringing tabloid-style, every *frisson* out of the rat in the vagina, the decapitated head on the erect penis (oops...) before denouncing it as a 'how to torture women' novel.

Incidentally, I've noticed the same types ecstatically embracing the new 'how to torture men' novel, *Dirty Weekend* by Helen Zahavi. An ex-prostitute on a murder spree gets her revenge by hammering, asphyxiating, shooting and stabbing men. 'She hammered

the message home the only way she could. She bludgeoned him for all her silent sisters.' Gee, thanks.

American Psycho, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* deserve neither to be championed nor condemned. They may not be deeply rewarding experiences, but they are far from being exploitative trash. It has to be said that Ellis has displayed writing skill. The style is relentlessly deadpan ('I gave myself a pedicure and tortured to death a small dog'), his characters unfalteringly mediated through their designer labels and lunches. It is a slick and effective evocation of commodity fetishism and is in many respects very funny. The irony flows freely, especially through the gaps opened up by repeated gags, like the hero Patrick Bateman answering to any number of wrong names, or the superb music-crit pastiches on subjects like Genesis and Whitney Houston.

Ellis has said elsewhere that his generation is 'basically unshockable'. Well, not quite Bret. I had to put the book down several times to do something normal to relieve the horror. What lingers is the unflinching focus on the detailed dismemberment of the human body, as Bateman coldly and coolly rages against the very tissue of life. And still nothing matters or means anything to him. As he prepares to chainsaw 'through skin and muscle and sinew and bone' he muses 'I can already tell that it's going to be a characteristically useless, senseless death, but then I'm used to the horror'. This is genuinely shocking and disturbing.

I can't help feeling that Ellis' bad press has something to do with the fact that he has simply extended the examination of brattish youth which he began in 1985 with *Less than Zero*. This was an approved target. The *LA Times Book Review* observed: 'Expertly, Ellis captures the banality in speech of teenagers.' Turning the same banal mirror on grown-up yuppies who are supposed to be bankers and brokers has appeared less expert to his admirers. Now he is being gratuitous and exploitative.

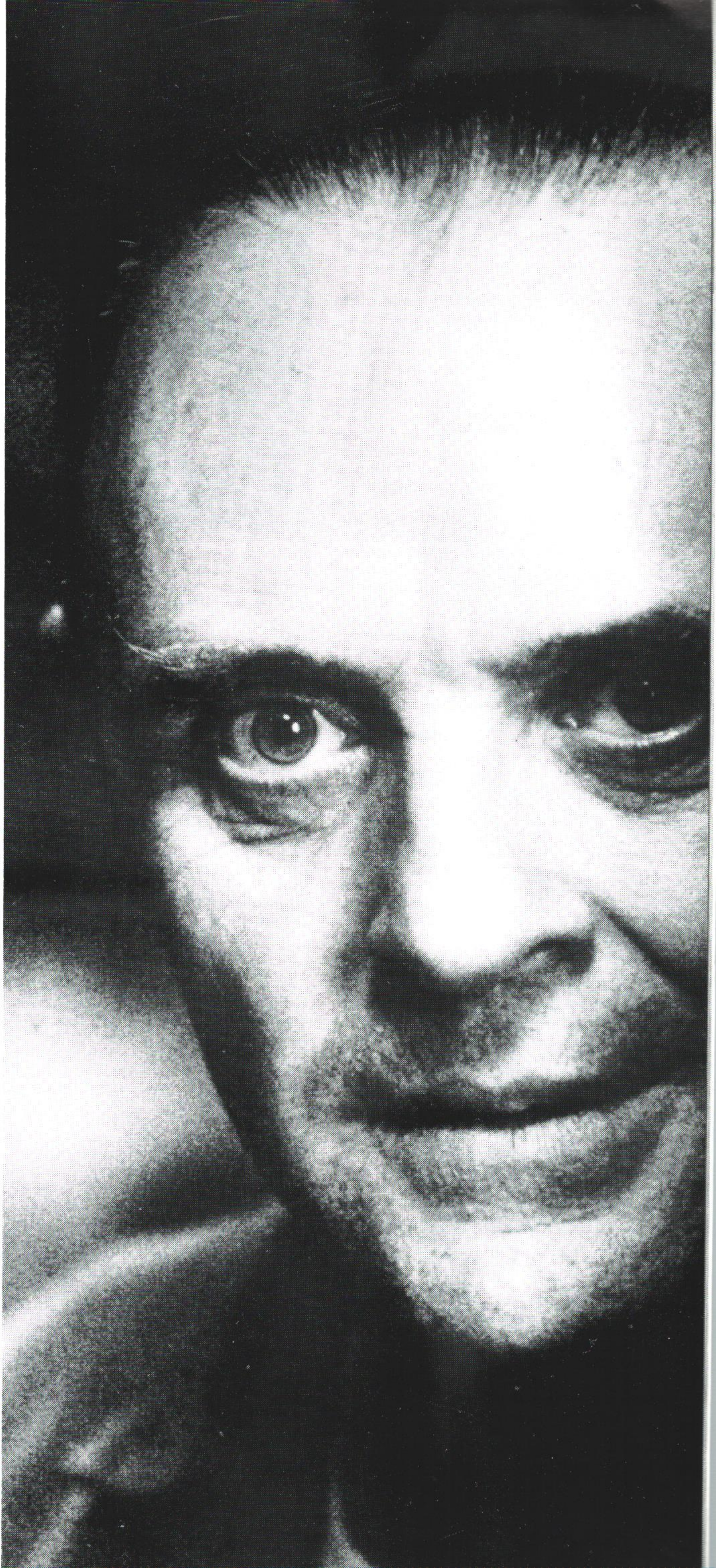
Stereotypes and prejudice

It is interesting that nowhere near the same level of opprobrium has fallen on *The Silence of the Lambs*, even though both Thomas Harris and Jonathan Demme so blatantly have their cake and eat it in the matter of their would-be transexual. There is some token pleading that their murderer isn't really a transexual—who are decent types—before we are treated to a stereotypical monster who summons up all the old prejudices about lisping, pouting, homosexual perverts.

Overall, Harris' book is a deftly-told thriller with an ingenious plot. An eminent psychiatrist and serial killer is in jail, a stupid low-life serial killer is skinning women outside jail and a young woman FBI agent is selling her soul (or at least the deepest secrets of her past) to buy the wisdom of the first in order to trap the second. The mad shrink, who carves peoples' faces off, eats their tongues etc, is fascinating not only because he is otherwise fiendishly clever and rational, but also because there is a certain charm in his appreciation of our heroine. Demme has done a good, sober job in bringing it to the screen, and is served with marvellous performances by Anthony Hopkins and Jody Foster. Demme shows a few tricks of the trade himself, for example with some fine editing when doorbells ring in different cities and front doors open unexpectedly on to the denouement.

It still has to be said that the story loses in the cinematic telling, and not only because Demme closes with a cheap joke about Lecter having somebody for dinner. In the film Lecter becomes both cleverer (he is not as devastatingly outwitted by Crawford as he is in the book) and more charming, to a point which

PHOTO: Rank Film Distributors Ltd





glamorises the character in a way which is more than a little distasteful.

Far more instructive is McNaughton's 'fictionalised dramatisation' based on the (retracted) confessions of a real killer. The film was made in 1986 and, isn't it pathetic, we can only see it now after two cuts have been made. It has the same dull tone and quiet power as Tim Hunter's *River's Edge* (1987) and Krzysztof Kieslowaski's *A Short Film about Killing* (1988). It shows the squalid lives of lumpen losers with tormented pasts and no future.

'Where are you going?' a woman asks Henry. 'Nowhere' he replies without hesitation. The film doesn't moralise, but it depicts a world of emotional and material poverty, an environment where the casual, monstrous murders seem almost unexceptionable. We might not have met Henry yet, but we can recognise that world. There is certainly no place here for the fantasy figures of police or detective saviours and no place for the comforting resolutions of conventional narratives, and McNaughton dispenses with both.

Henry I could begin to understand, but my strongest feeling, having reflected on the other works, is that I don't really feel much the wiser as to exactly why types like Hannibal Lecter and Patrick Bateman cut people up and eat them. Neither am I sure how useful cannibalism is as a metaphor for our current condition. I know it's a man-eat-woman world alright but taking it literally doesn't take it much further. I wasn't expecting a guide to the universe and everything, but the fact that writers and film makers were focusing on serial killers or using serial killers to focus on other things whetted my appetite for great insights.

That may have been an unreasonable expectation with the genre work of Thomas Harris, but Mr Ellis clearly has wider ambitions. His closing passage—'summarising for the idiots' he says, ostensibly referring to Bateman's companions but no doubt also, pre-emptively, to his critics—makes those ambitions clear: 'I'm 27 for Christ sakes and this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar or in a club in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the end of the century and how people, you know, me, behave.'

I suppose any account of extreme alienation and individuation runs the risk of simply reproducing the banality to which its victims are reduced. Where life is this superficial, there isn't enough depth for an abyss; and no drop, no drama. There is not much space around Patrick Bateman in this book, and while getting close to your subject no doubt enhances verisimilitude, a little distance can give a lot of illuminating perspective. It would be unfair to say that *American Psycho* colluded with the despair and anomie of its subject, but there is in the work a self-indulgent tendency in that direction.

There have been any number of tortured souls, hollow men and psychopaths who have floated out of the unreal city this last 150 years, from Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* to Burgess' Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*. They have taught us much. Bret Easton Ellis has revealed a talent for reproducing the horror, the horror of our own time. He has yet to stare it in the face as effectively as some of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*, Pan, £5.99, pbk; Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*, Mandarin, £4.99, pbk

East and West

The battle for Bud

Will capitalism water the workers' beer?
Joan Phillips looks at what the market means for Czechoslovakia's most famous beverage



Hot on the heels of the Big Mac, Budweiser may soon be on sale in Eastern Europe. After sampling the delights of the Western burger, East Europeans may soon be washing it down with Western beer. What's so bad about that, you may be thinking. You'd be wrong. There's Budweiser and Budweiser. And as any connoisseur of good beer will know, the Czechoslovakian brand is infinitely superior to the American variety. But the arrival of the market in Eastern Europe could change all that.

There isn't much worth saving in the old Stalinist bloc, but the Budweiser brewed in Czechoslovakia is one thing that deserves to survive. In the town of Ceske Budejovice in southern Bohemia, the locals know a bit about brewing beer. The name of the local brew is Budweiser, after the German for the town: Budweis. It doesn't taste anything like the rice-based stuff from St Louis, Missouri. In fact, it is probably one of the best beers in the world.

The first brewery to use the Budweiser trademark was established in Ceske Budejovice in 1795. The Budvar factory was founded at the end of the nineteenth century, and nationalised by the Stalinists after the war. There, the amber nectar sits in the nineteenth century cellars for 100 days, before being moved to the hi-tech German bottling plant and then despatched to East and West. Only the best malt, hops, yeast and 10 000-year old water from a local 1000-foot deep well go into making Budweiser; which explains why exports are booming in the age of designer beer.

The threat to the original Budweiser comes from Anheuser-Busch, the world's biggest beer producer. Anheuser has been in a longstanding dispute with Czechoslovakian breweries over the use of the Budweiser name. More than a century ago in the 1850s, a Bavarian worker moved to St Louis and founded his own brewery using the

Czechoslovakian Budweiser's German name, Budweis. The wrangles over the trade mark began when Czechoslovakia tried to export its beer to the USA in the nineteenth century and flared again when American GIs brought their beer to Europe after the Second World War.

Anheuser is now negotiating with the Czechoslovaks over the trade mark and discussing the possibility of a business partnership. The Budvar factory in Ceske Budejovice, which has done well out of brewing Budweiser for export, has recently won its independence after 40 years under state control. It now operates independently of its associated companies which brew Budweiser beer for the domestic market. A privatised Budvar offers Anheuser the prospect of a business deal which could open up the European market to the US giant for the first time. In Europe, Anheuser has been limited to selling its US Budweiser in the UK, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Denmark.

The prospect of Budvar, which produces 50 million litres of superior lager a year, being swallowed up by Anheuser, which produces 10 billion litres of inferior beer a year, is now a strong possibility. Budvar's master brewer insists that market forces will not adulterate the pure lager that millions of beer drinkers know and love. But as the McDonalds experience shows, globalisation seems to mean nothing more than market forces bringing the same shoddy products to every corner of the globe. Soon, East Europeans may be able to drink the same slops as we can.

In Britain, the Campaign for Real Ale has asked Czechoslovakian president Vaclav Havel to stop the Budweiser breweries falling into the wrong hands. Camra, which fears that the involvement of the Western capitalist giant could spell the end of Budweiser, says that purity should come before profits. But the big fat capitalists who water our beer in the West couldn't give a XXXX for anything else.

The Great British Conspiracy

The high class contemporary drama series has gone the way of the high class contemporary novel. It has degenerated into a genre. There is now a recognised list of ingredients which—if you put them together in the right order—will get the critics salivating. In case critical saliva is something that interests you, here is that list.

First of all, it has a Sympathetic White Male Lead (SWML). He will be haunted by some childhood trauma which will seep back into his consciousness bit by bit via soft-focus flashbacks. This will be of a sexual nature. It will be made clear that the baddie has also had such an experience and that this is why he or she is a baddie (baddies can be female).

The SWML's mixture of innocence and persistence will eventually lead him into the arms of the Great Conspiracy—a trope that originates with *Quatermass* and was received into the critical canon as a result of *Edge of Darkness* (BBC). The conspiracy stands in for the political angle. It might be a nuclear cover-up, a very British coup, or MI5 infiltration of Militant, but it will always come down to the following: a tape recorder in the hotel suite; smoke-filled rooms; slide show briefings and hopefully William Franklin. The uncovering of the Conspiracy leads the SWML to confront his childhood trauma.

The presence of the Conspiracy has led to a cross-over between the High Class Contemporary Drama (HCCD) and the thriller. Or so the publicity handouts tend to claim. In fact, few HCCD writers understand the thriller; what they do is borrow a few visual ties from it with which to punctuate their hooks and ends of parts. The visual ties are as follows: sinister car pulls up outside hero's house, electronic window descends to reveal baddie watching hero's house in sinister manner; we see photos of the goodie, pull focus to see the baddie looking at them; we hear goodie's private fears played back on a tape recorder (always a reel-to-reel tape recorder) etc, etc.

Like all genres, it has its own innate ideology which the writer can either confront or accept. The ideology of the High Class Contemporary Drama series has two key elements—the Great Conspiracy and the Childhood Trauma. The Childhood Trauma—usually to do with child abuse—is an opportunity for a bit of edge. It means we are confronting a key modern issue (classy), though since we do it in flashback we can usually get a nice shot of nostalgia out of that; it also means the hero is flawed (very classy).

More interestingly, the key part it plays in the series means that the stories tend to turn on a kind of pocket Freud determinism. Even the most energetic bad guy will be brought down in the end by his childhood. You cannot escape your own past (*Blackeyes*, *GBH*). The personal fatalism of this idea finds its political expression in the Great Conspiracy.

The origin and function of the Conspiracy will change according to the political opinions of the writer of course but the lesson of the Conspiracy is always the same, since it transforms their own political apathy (or alienation) into Wisdom. The target reader is a taxpayer who feels got at by the state and suspicious of his better-off neighbours. The Conspiracy transforms these petty feelings into a kind of grand martyrdom.

Modern American novelists—like Philip K Dick or Pynchon—have used the Great Conspiracy as a way of dramatising and exploring these feelings of victimisation and paranoia. Modern Italian novelists—like Leonardo Sciascia and even Umberto Eco—have used it as a way of questioning the possibility and usefulness of

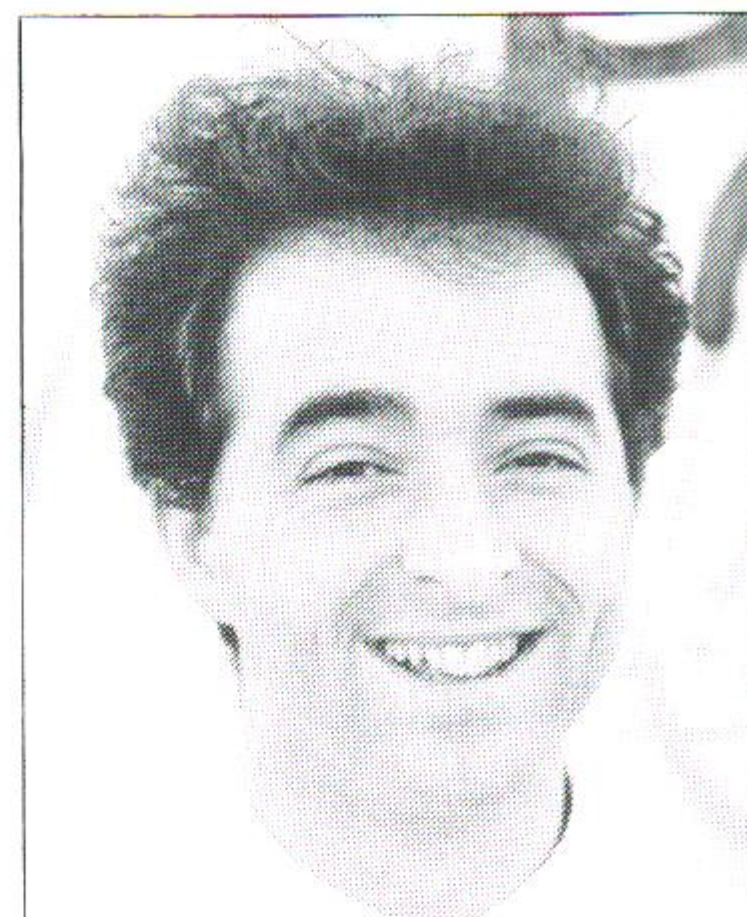
personal integrity in a corrupt society. Contemporary British TV dramatists on the other hand have simply come up with more conspiracies and the same conclusion—They are out there and They will get you. Morally and creatively they are pretty much on the level of *NDCCC* or—another favourite—*Lourdes and the Great Conspiracy* which was written by 'a Housewife of Galway'. Until recently, the only diverting version of this scenario was *House of Cards*, which junked the common man figure and centred on a key conspirator, allowing you to relish his rise to power. He seemed to have had no childhood whatsoever, which was a blessed relief.

Then came *Selling Hitler* (ITV), the story of the Hitler diaries, a scathing attack first on the nincompoops who bought the Hitler diaries, but second on the values of Contemporary British TV Drama. The first victim is the Sympathetic Male Lead. The standard approach for a series like this (see *Who Bombed Birmingham?*) is to have a journalist of Lancelot bravery and Perceval purity. Instead we have a breathlessly daft Jonathon Pryce agreeing to ridiculous fees for the diaries, creaming a percentage off the top and bragging about the risks he is taking. Instead of flashbacks to his childhood, we have glimpses of Hitler's lost opera *Weiland and the Smith*, in which Pryce sees himself bashing out a magic sword on an anvil and being drooled over by Valkeries.

What Pryce stumbles across has all the trappings of the Great Conspiracy—old Nazis sharing a secret knowledge. What it is in fact, is a bunch of half-senile old men being conned blind by a man named—Connie. The diaries themselves play the role of the holy relic vital to all conspiracies (the temple of Solomon is the usual one, though Hitler was reputed to have found the sword with which Longinus pierced the side of Christ—a Perceval reference). The emptiness of the diaries ('...having trouble with flatulence again today') points up the daftness of the conspiracy. All real conspiracies do tend to be daft—think of all those car dealers with their trouser legs rolled up, wearing pinnies. *Selling Hitler* underlines this again and again by playing up the obviousness of Connie's fraud. 'Hitler's' headed notepaper misspelled the word Reichstag. The diaries were aged with cold tea. The virtue of *Selling Hitler* is that in exposing the daftness of the conspiracy itself, it confronts our willingness to believe in it and says that this is what is really sinister.

Why do we want to believe in conspiracies? Why do we find the idea so glamorous? Why has it become so popular? Partly of course because it's easy. Easy politics and easy drama. The series mercilessly parodies the visual clichés I mentioned earlier—the pull focus, the whispered phone conversations, and the sinisterly swanky offices. The boardroom conversations are written in the weird mid-Euro translationese. Alexei Sayle acts like he's in a primary school play. Even the pre-publicity felt like an attack on the po-faced mainstream—leading as it did on the presence of Alan Bennett and Barry Humphreys—neither of whom is in it until episode four. The kind of thing that Connie would like.

I've always had a soft spot for fakers—being one myself—and Connie is my new hero. It is the first time since *The Magic Roundabout* that I have seen ironic TV drama, the first time in a long time that I've felt like a grown-up in front of the box. The interesting thing is that the critics of the quality press seem to hate it...surely there must be some conspiracy?



Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV

It is the first time since *The Magic Roundabout* that I have seen ironic TV drama



Shakespeare

To read or not to read

Why read Shakespeare? Alan Harding enters the debate

Suddenly people are talking about Shakespeare. In establishment circles everybody from Prince Charles to Peregrine Worsthorne is insisting that the work of the great Elizabethan dramatist should be the cornerstone of a quality education. The sensitive prince wants Shakespeare in the curriculum because he thinks it will challenge cultural deprivation. The hard-nosed editor wants to make *Hamlet* required reading because he thinks it will strengthen English national identity. I disagree. Shakespeare cannot do what they want him to and in any case he should be read for different reasons.

I have vivid memories of the 1963 Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Wars of the Roses*—the history plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*. They were serialised for TV and shown on Sunday afternoons after *Chess Masterpieces*. It was a chance encounter for me, but it was no accident that the history plays were broadcast for wider consumption. In a period of national uncertainty, Shakespeare can be a useful symbol of national pride. His plays serve a purpose for defenders of the status quo: they justify the present by associating it with a glorious past.

This is a trivial reading of Shakespeare. True, there are the great patriotic speeches of Henry V before Harfleur and on the field of Agincourt. They still give me goose-pimples, especially when delivered by Olivier, and I don't even support the England football team. These speeches are the literary equivalent of Pavarotti singing *Nessun Dorma*. The power is not, however, in the patriotism but in the rhetoric. The combination of the great stage and the intimate detail through which Henry V links the destinies of his men is compelling:

*'From this day to the ending of the world
But we in it shall be remembered,—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
and gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
and hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day.
(Henry V, Act IV, Scene III)*

Those who read history backwards and present Shakespeare as a symbol of the eternal values of England are making a big mistake. It seems to have escaped them, as they try to turn his plays into propaganda about the enduring values of Englishness, that Shakespeare was also projecting the present back into the past. Let's look again at the theme of patriotism and that most famous

invocation of England: the speech of the dying John of Gaunt in *Richard II*:

*'Methinks I am a prophet now
And thus, expiring, do foretell of him....
This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this
England...'
(Richard II, Act II, Scene I)*

Shakespeare wrote these lines at the end of the sixteenth century when the modern nation state of England was emerging. But the real John of Gaunt, living in the fourteenth century, would not even have spoken English. He would have spoken French. His family, the Plantagenets, held more land in France than they did in England! So Shakespeare also wrote propaganda, but at least he wrote good drama too.

Shakespeare's propaganda duties for the Tudor monarchy have become a recurring reminder of the greatness of contemporary Britain. Shakespeare can be called upon to play this role because, unlike many other British institutions such as the NHS, the Elizabethan dramatist is acknowledged as a genius the world over. This being the case, a central place must be found for Shakespeare on the school syllabus, argue establishment representatives. Shakespeare should be taught because he refines the sensibility and inspires love for the nation.

The idea that putting any author, even one as wonderful as Shakespeare, on the curriculum could end cultural, let alone social, deprivation is staggering in its banality. The corresponding idea that an injection of Shakespeare could make you proud to be British might appeal to cricket commentators but surely to nobody else.

Few schools in contemporary Britain can provide the requisite texts. But even if every student in every comprehensive in Birmingham had their own copy of *Hamlet*, how could Shakespeare compensate for the sense of hopelessness engendered by contemporary society? What would a representative sample of Britain's youth make of Hamlet's observations on the infinite potential of mankind:

*... 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!...
(Hamlet, Act II, Scene II)*

The experience of Britain's youth belies the words. They live in a shoddy, decrepit society. What are they to make of this homage to man's creative abilities in a foreclosed future?

For a few years in the fifties and sixties, a generation of working class kids received a halfway decent bourgeois education for the first and last time. In my school we got four novels and a play each term. *Julius Caesar* was the first Shakespeare to come my way. I also read *The Iliad*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Count of Monte Christo* and *The Red Badge of Courage*.

We were taken to see *Macbeth*: it was a matinee performance at the New Theatre, Bromley. Jane Asher was the less than intimidating Lady Macbeth. Our raucous audience didn't shout 'behind you' when Macbeth killed Duncan. But we did bring the house down in gleeful laughter, when the 'dead' body of Macbeth scuttled from a not quite darkened stage to reappear in short order as a lump of plastic on a pike.

Whether or not you ended up liking or disliking Shakespeare was completely arbitrary. The work itself, and the manner in which it was taught, had little bearing on our generation. Random exposure to Shakespeare will not change you, let alone the world. It will not lead you to uphold the British way of life. But it might well give you untold enjoyment and cause for reflection.

Shakespeare wrote his plays at a special historical moment. English society was unusually dynamic in the Elizabethan age. The static medieval world was transformed by trade, discovery and innovation. In Shakespeare there is both a sense of a vanished past and the exhilaration of discovery. The social and economic transformation took a political form with the emergence of the first nation state.

For the first time, the perennial human experiences of birth, death and copulation were perceived as the problems of individual human beings, and not merely the work of the hand of fate or the divine order. There was a new political economy and civil society. Science and technology advanced. The portrait became a feature of the arts, reflecting the sense of a new individual existence.

The English language became a vibrant and exciting medium through which to express new ideas and experiences in a new way. The form and content of Elizabethan drama managed to reach out to the concerns of a socially heterogeneous audience in a way which has yet to be matched. Hamlet's meditations on the human condition sit alongside the knockabout humour of the graveyard scene of 'alas poor Yorick'—something for the courtiers and summat for the groundlings.

This celebration of Renaissance man still suffuses our experience. Shakespeare concentrates an age and the experience of human beings in a consummate aesthetic form. Moreover the nature of his work is such that it continues to hold some meaning for our own experience in the late twentieth century. For all the advance of science and technology, in sixteenth-century Shakespeare we find all the struggles and conundrums of life as we know it. Not life as we might like to know it: but life in its heroic possibilities, its absurdities and its emotional solaces.

the marxist review of books

There is no other historical debate so loaded with contemporary meaning as that about the Holocaust. **Adam Eastman** takes issue with those who are trying to rehabilitate Germany's Nazi past and with those who are trying to mystify it

Hitler, the Holocaust and history

Books discussed in this article include:

Martin Blinkhorn (ed), **Fascists and Conservatives**, Unwin Hyman, £9.95 pbk; Richard Breitman, **Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution**, Bodley Head, £16.99 hbk; Richard Evans, **In Hitler's Shadow**, IB Tauris, £16.95 hbk, £8.95 pbk; Robert Gellately, **The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945**, Clarendon Press, £35.00 hbk; Charles Maier, **The Unmasterable Past**, Harvard University Press, £19.95 hbk, £7.95 pbk; Antony Polonsky (ed), **My Brother's Keeper: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust**, Routledge, £30.00 hbk; Jonathan Steinberg, **All or Nothing: the Axis and the Holocaust 1941-43**, Routledge, £20.00 hbk

German nationalism stands discredited. Whereas 80 per cent of Americans are said to be proud of being American, only 20 per cent of Germans feel the same about their nation (from a poll cited by Richard Evan's in *In Hitler's Shadow*). While singing the 'Stars and Stripes' is a daily ritual for American schoolchildren, 'Deutschland uber Alles' continues to be something of an embarrassment for German adults. And there's the rub—because popularising patriotism is not an optional extra for any modern state. The reunified Germany has no choice but to set about the task of legitimising nationalism. Just as glorifying the American way was an essential prerequisite for realising the global ambitions of the US ruling class, so too will the German establishment have to make its own nationalism respectable in the course of re-emerging as a world power.

The flimsy identities of the old divided Germanies will have to be superseded by a new all-embracing national identity. The problem

however is that making 'German-ness' something to be proud of is no easy task. It remains directly associated with the expansionism and xenophobia of Hitler's Third Reich. Germany's image in Britain is a case in point. Despite the post-Gulf depiction of Germans as lily-livered hippies, the fanatical goosestepper image stands ready to greet any assertion of German interests. The media attention devoted to the activities of the far right in east Germany is symptomatic of a more widespread anxiety about a united Germany's global pretensions. While Germany remained constrained by her post-war division, it could remain a slumbering giant under American tutelage with its past largely confined to the history books. Germany's re-emergence as a major power requires a more direct appropriation of the past.

But how can such a past be rehabilitated? A clue was provided by the new all-German constitution. Much to the anger of Germany's remaining Jewish community, German capitalism's grim past was equated with the crimes of the recently deceased East German state. The aim was clear. The specific causes and results of German imperialism's sordid past were obfuscated by presenting the problem as a general one of misguided totalitarian leaders and ideologies of left and right alike. However, it isn't only Stalinists who think that equating the feeble Honecker regime with the rapacious Hitler reich is a little far-fetched. The German establishment will have to come up with something better than this if it wants to rehabilitate German nationalism.

Right-wing German historians—the so-called revisionists—have set about providing a more convincing basis for justifying or relativising the Nazi experience. They initiated a debate—the *Historikerstreit*—in the summer of 1986 with the publication of a number of articles by the key protagonists: Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber and Michael Sturmer. In *The Unmasterable Past*, the outstanding American historian Charles Maier explains the intellectual antecedents for the debate and offers some reasons why it emerged when it did.

This debate is no dry academic affair. From the start, it was carried out in prominent national newspapers like the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, rather than obscure historical journals. It informed a number of events in the real world, such as Ronald

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Reagan's controversial visit to Bitburg military cemetery—where there are 49 Waffen SS graves—in 1985, and the discussion about what to include in the exhibits for the new Berlin museum. Michael Sturmer stated clearly the purpose of the revisionist challenge: 'In a land without history, he who fills memories, shapes concepts and interprets the past will win the future', and will be able to provide, 'the measure and mode of patriotism' (Quoted in G Craig, 'The war of the German historians', *New York Review of Books*, 15 January 1987). In other words, the recovery of the national past is a *sine qua non* for a viable national future.

The revisionists' methods and targets are similar to those pursued in the German constitution. Where the constitution relativises fascism in relation to East German Stalinism, the revisionists employ the rather more plausible comparison of Stalin's Russia. As Maier's book points out, the German right has long understood German development as a consequence of being sandwiched between hostile neighbours, particularly Russia. The revisionists argue that Nazism was a defensive response, in the form of a pre-emptive strike, to the threat of Soviet communism. Thus Nolte not only equates Nazi genocide with Stalinist terror; he blames the Russian Revolution for unleashing a terror that caused a Nazi reaction of genocide.

Nazism was an extreme answer to an extreme problem: it is not comprehensible outside the context of the crisis of German imperialism

For a short and straightforward introduction to the ensuing debate, Richard Evans' *In Hitler's Shadow* is adequate. Although not as well acquainted with the historical material as Maier, he is at least able to communicate a sense of outrage that the defensive apologia of the right can be taken seriously, even if he rules this view out of order on purely moral grounds. Nevertheless, his incredulity is justified in one sense. Stripped of its contemporary twists, the revisionist argument is essentially Hitler's own. Hitler presented his war against the Soviet Union as an attempt to destroy the threat which communism posed to the German nation and the Western order too. Indeed, his greatest source of bitterness was the fact that Britain refused to join his crusade.

What is striking about the *Historikerstreit* is the feebleness of the radical response. Led by the philosopher Jurgen Habermas, the liberal challenge to the revisionist interpretation of history has been conducted within a very narrow framework and has failed to refute convincingly Hitler's latter-day apologists. What is more, it is now clear how the conventional historical treatment of the period has paved the way for such a state of affairs. The Nazi experience in general, and the Holocaust in particular, have for the past 40 years been treated as entirely unique and mystifying events by mainstream liberal historiography. Even historians who have attempted to present a rational history of Germany, such as Charles Maier or Arno Mayer, feel obliged to state that the Holocaust remains almost incomprehensible.

The extreme barbarism and undemocratic character of the Nazi regime have led some to suggest that the Third Reich was something exceptional, unrelated to the normal course of German capitalist development. Few have challenged the notion that this period represented an apparently violent break with the past. For the self-consciously apologetic, this interpretation is the result of an attempt to separate fascism from the capitalist system. For others it derives from a mistaken tendency to conflate capitalist rule with liberal democracy. Either way, the effect has been to remove the fascist dictatorship from history and set it up as an object of enquiry in its own terms. Insofar as it is considered historically, fascism's roots are seen to lie in the feudal past rather than a capitalist present.

In fact, even at the best of times the democratic nature of capitalist society is highly qualified. The system allows us to exercise our democratic rights only to the extent that they do not create problems for the establishment. The rights of Irish people, for example, are circumscribed because the right to self-determination for Ireland poses a mortal threat to the British state. In most of the world the capitalist class is too weak to grant even the formal trappings of democracy. Indeed, military dictatorship is the more prevalent form of capitalist rule, not liberal democracy which is often presented as the norm by commentators in the West.

Fascism is another means of capitalist domination. Its adoption by the German ruling class in the 1930s was a desperate response to the monumental problems confronting their system. Constrained by the world's most powerful working class movement at home, and deprived of an empire abroad by competing global powers, the capitalist class felt it had no choice but to deal with these problems in the most drastic fashion. The need to create an eastern sphere of influence and eradicate the threat of working class revolt are recurrent themes in German politics in the early twentieth century. Nazism set about resolving these problems once and for all. It destroyed the labour movement and created an eastern empire. In this sense it was the logical resolution of the German question in the

conditions of the 1930s. It was an extreme answer to an extreme problem: it is not comprehensible outside the context of the crisis of German imperialism.

Whatever the cause of this tendency among historians to separate Nazism from its wider social context, the effect has been to leave only matters of detail open to historical enquiry. The enormous volume of literature on the subject is striking not only for its obsession with ideology, but also for its ever more narrow and fragmented area of study. Of course, local investigations and case studies can be rewarding if they allow us to enrich our overall understanding of history. With Nazism, however, such studies invariably serve as a substitute for, rather than a complement to, a more substantive analysis. Books which attempt to present an overview, such as Arno Mayer's *Why Did The Heavens Not Darken?*, are now attacked for neglecting local detail, as in Richard Breitman's new book *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution*. The shortcomings of the historians' approach are not the result of collective stupidity. Even the more critical protagonists are unwilling to confront Nazism as an organic product of their own society. Instead they try to deny it legitimacy and prevent its re-emergence by suggesting that it defies a rational historical explanation or understanding. In place of logic, morality becomes the main weapon with which to attack the revisionists. This is most clearly expressed in the debate about the Holocaust.

The focus of so much of the literature on the fate of the Jews is not explicable simply in terms of the scale of the slaughter. After all, an estimated 28m Soviets were killed and yet there is comparatively little written about them. The reason why so much has been written about the fate of the Jews is that this appears to be the unique event, the aspect of the period which seems most at odds with modern civilisation. The extermination of the Jews is often referred to as the only genocide to have been carried out by a 'cultured' (i.e. Western) nation. It is presented as a unique aberration, and one that can be avoided in future if we stick to democratic ways.

Those who question the logic of this approach are condemned as pro-Hitler and anti-Semitic. Some undoubtedly are, but to issue moral injunctions against them is no way to win an argument. The impetus behind the rehabilitation of German history cannot be

stopped by moral condemnation. Quite apart from the logical shortcomings of such an approach, morals can also be used for different purposes. What about the thousands of Germans killed by the invading Soviets in 1945, reply the revisionists. What about the firebombing of Dresden by the RAF? What about the dismemberment of Germany by the Allies? With apparent common sense on its side, the right is able to turn the liberals' morality on its head. Is it not racist to suggest that the genocide of the Armenians by the Turks, or the massacre of the Vietnamese by the Americans, is incomparable with the destruction of the Jews because Germany was a 'cultured' nation?

In as much as Nazism remains a part of history it has been trivialised. For the right, concerned with shifting responsibility for what happened away from the nation, the Holocaust was all Hitler's fault. For the left, concerned with the wider social aspects of the period, the question becomes how Germans as a whole could have tolerated such monstrosities. The consequence of a discussion couched in these terms has been destructive. The collective guilt thesis, whereby all Germans are held responsible for Nazism, has held sway in Germany since the war.

After all, if Nazism was not the result of a specific social system, it could only be the product of a peculiar national character of which the Germans should be ashamed. The acceptance of this thesis means that while goosestepping Germans continue to fill our television screens, companies like IG Farben, which built Auschwitz, continue to operate free of any blame for what happened in the past. More importantly, young Germans are not surprisingly bewildered about their role in the crimes of the past, and given the nonsensical character of the left's arguments they are vulnerable to the arguments of the right.

Robert Gellately's book, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy*, is at least well-researched. As a result, Gellately is able to demonstrate the continuity between the Gestapo and the pre-fascist police. Hitler's political police were drawn largely from the ranks of the ordinary police force of the Weimar Republic. This is hardly a surprise, but nevertheless it is a useful observation given that the bulk of the material on this subject is so keen to stress the uniqueness of the Gestapo. At the same time, the book is typical in its narrow focus. Concentrating primarily on what was different about the fascist police—its more stringent enforcement of racial segregation—tells us little.

The author's declared purpose is to counter what he sees as a tendency in recent writing to over-emphasise the degree of public resistance to the regime. But this is not only impossible to quantify, it is also of questionable purpose. From an objective point of view, the number of brave individuals who risked their lives by resisting the police may be inspiring (depending on your estimation of their numbers) but ultimately it is incidental. Reaction had triumphed. The fact that individuals responded with varying degrees of compliance is hardly surprising. Gellately's contention is that there was even less resistance than previously thought. We can only assume that Germans should be even more ashamed of their past than they are already. The logical consequence of this approach is drawn out in Jonathan Steinberg's book, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-43*: it suggests that the bravest were dissident fascists who thought that Hitler was going a little too far.

Steinberg's book does not even have the limited virtue of Gellately's. If the latter's work is too narrow and its starting point dubious, his conclusions are at least the product of detailed research. However the veritable industry of books on fascism has led to a further degeneration in the treatment of the subject. Many authors scabble around for evidence to fit their own preconceived thesis. Steinberg's approach is typical. He has noticed that the Italians were not as systematic in their persecution of the Jews as their German allies were. As a limited insight prompting further investigation into the different forms of reaction in the two countries, this could be a useful starting point. But given Steinberg's acceptance of fascism as a unique, uniform and ideological movement, he is at a loss to explain the differential treatment meted out to the Jews.

Not that he really tries. Steinberg adopts with some relish the personalising approach of so many others. Nazism is seen as hinging on Hitler as an individual. In this scenario, the Nazi generals who tried to save their skins by trying to kill their leader

towards the end of the war become the anti-fascists. Having found evidence of Italian officers who were reluctant to hand over Jews to the Germans, Steinberg makes them both the subject and the explanation of his book. In the end we are left to draw the conclusion that the supposed honour and dignity of these fascists determined events. For those of us who might wonder why they were such splendid fellows, Steinberg simply points to the more democratic traditions of the country that invented fascism.

It is in this context of the breakdown of serious study and the trivialisation of the subject that the revisionists have been able to make an impact. Their strength lies in their demand to put fascism back into history, or as their opponents would have it, to relativise the Holocaust. The terms of the debate are clearest in Antony Polonsky's *My Brother's Keeper*, which reviews the recent Polish discussion about the Holocaust. The terms of the debate are clearer because in Poland the liberals have yet to gain acceptance for the collective guilt thesis so long established in Germany. The intimate link between Polish nationalism and Polish anti-Semitism means that the Polish elite has never admitted Polish complicity in the liquidation of European Jewry that took place on its soil.

The debate was initiated by Jan Blonski, who argued that the fact of the Holocaust 'has to be openly faced'. The only way for Poles to calm their 'subconscious panic' is to stop trying to defend and justify themselves: 'To stop arguing about the things that were beyond our power to do during the occupation and beforehand. Nor to place blame on political, social and economic conditions. But to say first of all, "Yes we are guilty".' (p11) Blonski's concern is that Polish nationalism will not revive in a more humane form unless its past mistakes are acknowledged. He concludes with an appeal for Poles to emulate the Catholic Church—the institution that has done more than any other to propagate anti-Semitism—by repudiating their anti-Jewish past.

Others have suggested that embracing Poland's Jewish past could enrich Polish nationalism. After all, there is little to define 'Polishness' other than its relation to 'Jewishness'. Precisely. The problem is that a Polish national identity tends to be defined through the exclusion of Jewishness, even today when there are few Jews left in Poland. The central reply to Blonski, from the traditionalist Sila-Nowicki, is ample illustration of this point: 'For me it is natural that society defends itself against numerical domination of its intelligentsia—especially in the medical and legal professions—by an alien [ie Jewish] intelligentsia.' (p11)

The absurd argument put forward by Blonski—that Polish lack of compassion condemned the Jews to much lonelier deaths than they otherwise would have suffered—allows the voice of anti-Semitism to sound positively logical by comparison. 'The responsibility of the Western Allies and of Jews in the West', says Sila-Nowicki, 'for failing to prevent the mass murder of the Jews was much greater than that of the Poles' (p11). Since his only concern is to exonerate Polish nationalism and blame the Jews for their own fate, what he really means is that greedy American Jews refused to part with their riches and buy their unfortunate brothers from the Nazis. He does not put the blame where it really lies; with the Allies whose sole concern was to end the war in an advantageous position, rather than halt the Nazis before they could carry out their promise to destroy the Jewish race. Nevertheless, the anti-Semites' grounding in reality rather than morality gives their arguments greater coherence, and a more legitimate claim to represent the real voice of Polish nationalism.

In the country where the mass slaughter largely took place, it remains uncontroversial to argue that Jewish passivity was the first and principal obstacle to the possibility of extending help to the Jews. The liberal opponents of the anti-Semites bear some responsibility for this state of affairs by refusing to confront the central issues at stake. Their shared concern to make Polish nationalism respectable once again limits their ability to challenge the anti-Semitism of the right.

Martin Blinkhorn's *Fascists and Conservatives* is an altogether more useful book than most on this subject. It sets out to explore the relationship between fascism and traditional conservatism. Examining the relationship between the two, rather than treating the two political traditions as if they were unrelated, means that they can be placed in historical context. Studying their elements of continuity as well as difference, and their common roots in

nationalism, allows us to focus on the broader social circumstances in which they arose.

Given this point of departure, the various contributors to this collection of essays are able to explain why more democratic forms of domination continued to be adequate for the needs of the capitalist class in certain countries, while in others the ruling elites abandoned democracy and opted for more drastic solutions. Martin Blinkhorn's study of Spain, for example, shows that 'Spanish conservatives in the early 1920s had no need to look to new and untried political forces' (p123). Their confidence in the army meant that military dictatorship (with fascist ideological trimmings) was their response to the threat of the working class.

Such an approach, far from blurring the distinction between different forms of political rule, allows us to grasp what was truly novel about fascism in the German context. Edgar Jung, a German aristocrat and reactionary, highlights Nazism's peculiarity well in the section on Germany in the thirties: 'The intellectual preconditions for the German revolution were created outside National Socialism. National Socialism has undertaken so to speak the "mass movement portfolio" in this great collaborative effort.' (p81)

'Present of the German Past', *Politics and Society in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, Spring 1990). Don't mention the war and embarrass us in front of our Nato friends, pleads Habermas.

But history cannot be appropriated selectively. Historically, the liberals have separated fascism from capitalism—the social system of which it was a product. Now they are trying to separate German and Polish nationalism from its chauvinist and aggressive consequences. Having accepted that nationalism is a legitimate and worthy cause, they cannot expect the right to be bound by the same liberal morality as their own. Their demand for a nice nationalism is incapable of challenging the right's more strident brand of patriotism, since nationalism is by definition exclusive and intolerant.

In intellectual terms, the *Historikerstreit* exhausted itself soon after it had been initiated. But it will reappear in some other form because it is driven by the demands of history—in this case the need for German imperialism to forge a new national identity as it comes to play a bigger role in global affairs. It will not be stopped by a bunch of liberal historians insisting that the Nazi past is somehow extraneous to the development of the German nation and therefore out of bounds in terms of the national identity discussion.

The demand for a nice nationalism is incapable of challenging the right's more strident brand of patriotism, since nationalism is by definition exclusive and intolerant

What distinguished Nazism from traditional establishment politics was not its ideas. The Germans had no monopoly on racism or expansionism: these characteristics were shared by other Western powers. Nazism's originality lay in its ability to create a social movement. Aristocrats like Jung are not renowned for their ability to enthuse the masses, let alone mobilise the middle classes in their entirety. Their appeal is limited outside of their own narrow social stratum. It took a Hitler—speaking the language of the middle classes and playing on their concerns—to take on the 'mass movement portfolio' demanded by the dire position of German capitalism.

Unfortunately Blinkhorn's approach is the exception rather than the rule. In general it is the right wing which is putting fascism back into history, in order to rehabilitate the German nation's murky past. This is not to say that their more liberal opponents do not share their concern for the nation. Indeed their response to the more aggressive apologias of late has been to stress their own nationalist credentials. Those liberals such as Jan Blonski in Poland, or Jurgen Habermas in Germany, are also trying to make nationalism respectable once again. The debate is not about the need for a national identity but about the values which that identity ought to express.

The response of Habermas and the rest is to rule out of order any discussion of nationalism's historical excesses and evolve a new form of patriotism bound more closely with the existing world order. Habermas' concern is to exhume a constitutional patriotism, 'one that does not alienate us from the West' (Quoted in W Patterson,

If you doubt that this approach is still prevalent, take a look at the new biography of Himmler by Richard Breitman. In explaining the Holocaust, Breitman tells us that 'Hitler did not react to outside events so much as impose his will on reality' (p21). Thus, unlike any other historical event, the Holocaust cannot be understood by examining social reality, but only by penetrating the mysterious ability of Hitler to determine reality single-handed. Incidentally, the proliferation of biographical studies of Nazi leaders should be seen in this light: if individuals are the motor force of history, then studying the psyche of such leaders becomes a legitimate area of study.

The savagery of fascism can only be understood as a logical solution to the impasse reached by the German state and the imperialist system in general in the Depression years of the 1930s. As Martin Blinkhorn points out, fascism is a modern movement that develops only after the Russian Revolution. This does not mean, as the revisionists stupidly claim, that Germany faced a military threat from the beleaguered Soviet state in the 1930s. Nevertheless, as the ultimate form of contemporary reaction, it is appropriate that fascism should have developed in the shadow of the highest contemporary expression of progress, the Bolshevik Revolution. This does not prove that communism created fascism, any more than the French Revolution created Bonapartism. It only shows that the capitalist class will resort to any means to preserve its control over society, and in the process unleash such breathtaking savagery that it seems to defy our powers of comprehension.

Read on

Feminism without Illusions

by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

The University of North Carolina Press, £19.25 hbk

Feminism Without Illusions is a brave book for an American feminist academic to write. It is both a product of, and a critique of, feminist postmodernist thinking. As such, it risks being popular with nobody and being vilified by everybody.

Fox-Genovese notes that today feminism is mainstream: 'Such disciplines as English, Modern Languages, History, Religious Studies, Sociology, and even Political Science and Philosophy feature programs in which sessions on some aspect of women, gender and feminist theory are steadily displacing traditional topics.' (p4) And as feminism has wormed its way into academic disciplines, it has, she believes, raised 'anxieties about the status of knowledge, certainty, subjectivity, the self' (p4). Feminism, according to this book, has become the cutting edge of postmodernism. And this according to the author is a good thing.

However, having eroded our confidence in other disciplines, Fox-Genovese believes that feminism is now eating away at itself. The assumption that 'womanhood' is a universal condition (the basis for the notion of sisterhood) is itself put to question by the 'politics of difference'. Furthermore feminism's commitment to individual rights has produced what Fox-Genovese calls a white, middle class feminism: a feminism for those who can afford to take advantage of educational and job opportunities gained by the activists of the sixties and seventies. This commitment to individualism has led feminist thinkers to neglect the problem of changing society.

This book is more interesting for the questions and problems it poses—which are many—than for the answers it gives—which are few. But it's a useful book for all that. In recent years feminist theory has become increasingly obscure, and increasingly concerned with debates within debates. This book breaks out of that and questions what, many would argue, are the defining and therefore unquestionable features of feminism itself. Simply by doing so, Fox-Genovese has walked on to non-PC territory. Hopefully others will be encouraged to follow. It's about time the cosy world of feminist academia was shaken up a bit.

Ann Bradley

The Pacific

by Simon Winchester

Hutchinson, £19.99 hbk

Rethinking the Pacific

by Gerald Segal

Clarendon, £40.00 hbk,

£12.95 pbk (from September)

These books, which both subscribe to the view that we are witnessing the dawning of a 'Pacific Age', point to an important shift in the balance of world power. Japan has emerged as an economic giant and Asia's newly industrialising countries are the most dynamic in the world economy. The axis of global power has shifted from America and the Atlantic to Japan and the Pacific seaboard.

In different ways, *The Pacific* and *Rethinking the Pacific* explore the significance of the shifts that have taken place. Simon Winchester's journalistic approach gives a good flavour of the Pacific

countries, and the book rates high on entertainment value, although the author fails to alert us to any general trends. Gerald Segal has written an overview spanning the history, economics, politics and culture of the Pacific rim. Yet he is careful to remind us of the diversity of the societies he covers. At his best, Segal clears up some of the misconceptions many Westerners have about the region, reminding us for example that although they are both in Asia, the distance between Japan and Singapore (5321km) is almost four times as far as London is from Rome (1431km).

Both books fall into the same trap as other recent studies of the Pacific: they take it for granted that the Pacific is an integrated and coherent economic entity. Winchester artificially tries to link countries—from Tonga and Panama to China—which have nothing in common except the ocean itself. Segal says in his introduction that 'the original idea behind this book was to assess the main characteristics of the Pacific as a region'. But 'only while undertaking the research did it emerge that it was not helpful to see the Pacific as a coherent area' (p2). Unfortunately, he is reluctant to explore the consequences of this insight. These criticisms apart, readers unfamiliar with the dynamics of the region will find much of interest in these two texts.

Daniel Nassim

The Agreeable World of Wallace Arnold

by Craig Brown (ed)

Fourth Estate, £9.99 hbk

Every Friday, an unmistakable sound emerges from the prime minister's office at Number 10: a contented sigh, the squeak of leather, a few sharp taps and the rustle of paper, as the prime minister repairs to his favourite armchair and turns to the back page of *The Spectator* and the dependable delights of 'Afore ye go' by Wallace Arnold. Soon the air is filled with chuckles as the Arnold humour works its magic on topics as slight as 'people whose names are appropriate to their jobs' or the endless potential for merriment in the mishaps of motorists.

Unlike so many of today's comedians, Arnold's bite is worse than his bark: his affable manner is a cloak for his pugnacious defence of all things English. One need only read Arnold's tributes to the ideas of his friends Paul Johnson and Peregrine Worsthorne, or his side-splitting accounts of Geoffrey Wheatcroft's antics, to know that his cultured wit and satirical flair are harnessed to an unerring moral rectitude. It is this which gives his work moral authority and which elevates him, despite his typically modest protests, to his position as a modern day sage.

It has been suggested that Arnold is a cipher—a pseudonym under which a cowardly journalist called Craig Brown squirts his subversive poison into the faces of defenceless *Spectator* readers. Some say that Arnold's affectionate reminiscences of days spent with the Queen Mother are intended to evoke, not a warm glow of gratitude in the loyal reader, but instead, mockery and contempt. The fact that Mr Brown has been chosen by Arnold himself to edit this selection of his work should finally put a stop to this insidious rumour. As for the pseudonym question, sceptics should examine the dust jacket. They will see that Mr Willie Rushden's clever illustration clearly shows Brown and Arnold to be two separate people in the same place at the same time.

Those who have not yet had the pleasure of Arnold's *bon mots* are in for a treat. Readers of *Living Marxism*, on the other hand, will welcome this collection as a useful summation of his work to date, and a valuable contribution to the Great Debate.

Toby Banks

SHORTLISTED

Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland 1990-91

edited by Peter Stringer and Gillian Robinson, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, £9.95 pbk

Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland is a welcome extension of the British Social Attitudes Survey. The section on national identity reveals some telling responses. For example, when respondents were asked whether 'the law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong', 49 per cent of Protestants agreed compared to just 28 per cent of Catholics. Similarly, 71 per cent of Catholics opposed the death penalty for 'terrorists', but only 19 per cent of Protestants did so. The survey is a useful reminder that the division at the centre of the conflict in Northern Ireland is not religious but political.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together In My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, The Heart of a Woman, All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes, by Maya Angelou, Virago Press, £4.99 pbk each

Virago Press has reprinted all five volumes of the autobiographical writings of black American writer Maya Angelou. Born in 1928 in St Louis, Missouri, Angelou's life encapsulates the experience of US blacks in the years of Depression and war, McCarthyism and lynchings, Malcolm X and black radicalism, Ronald Reagan and the backlash against affirmative action. To accompany the five volumes, Virago has published Dolly A McPherson's *Order out of Chaos: The Autobiographical Works of Maya Angelou*, £5.99 pbk.



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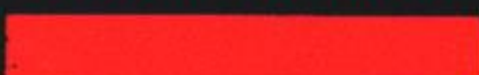
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