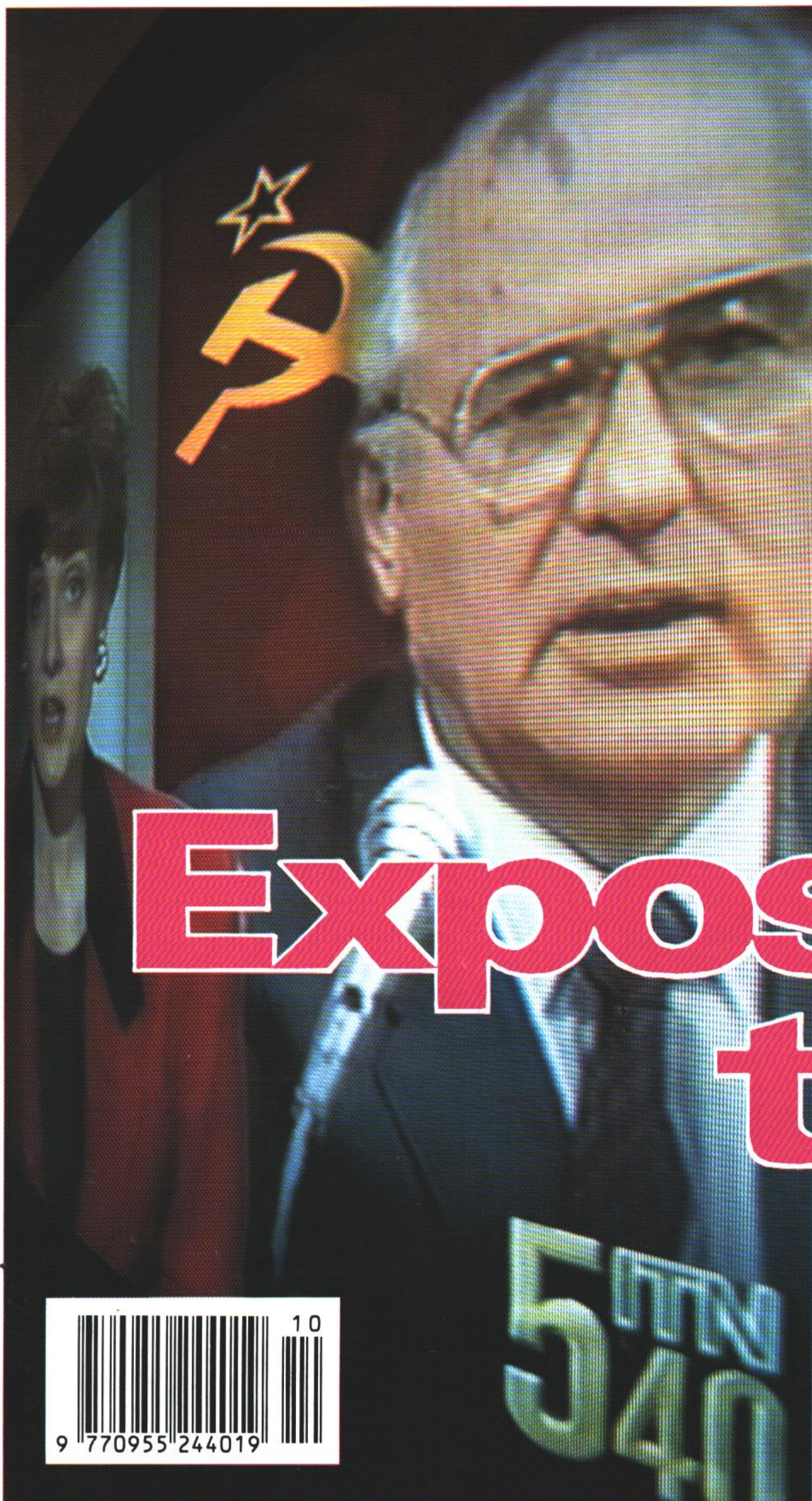


LIVING MARXISM

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' Coup...
Revolution...
..Hardliners...
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...Dictatorship.
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Lenin and
Stalin...
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Exposing the lies




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ROBERT KNIGHT

This book explores the causes and implications of the collapse of Stalinism in both East and West. Separate chapters focus on developments in the Soviet Union, China, the third world, Eastern Europe and Western Europe.

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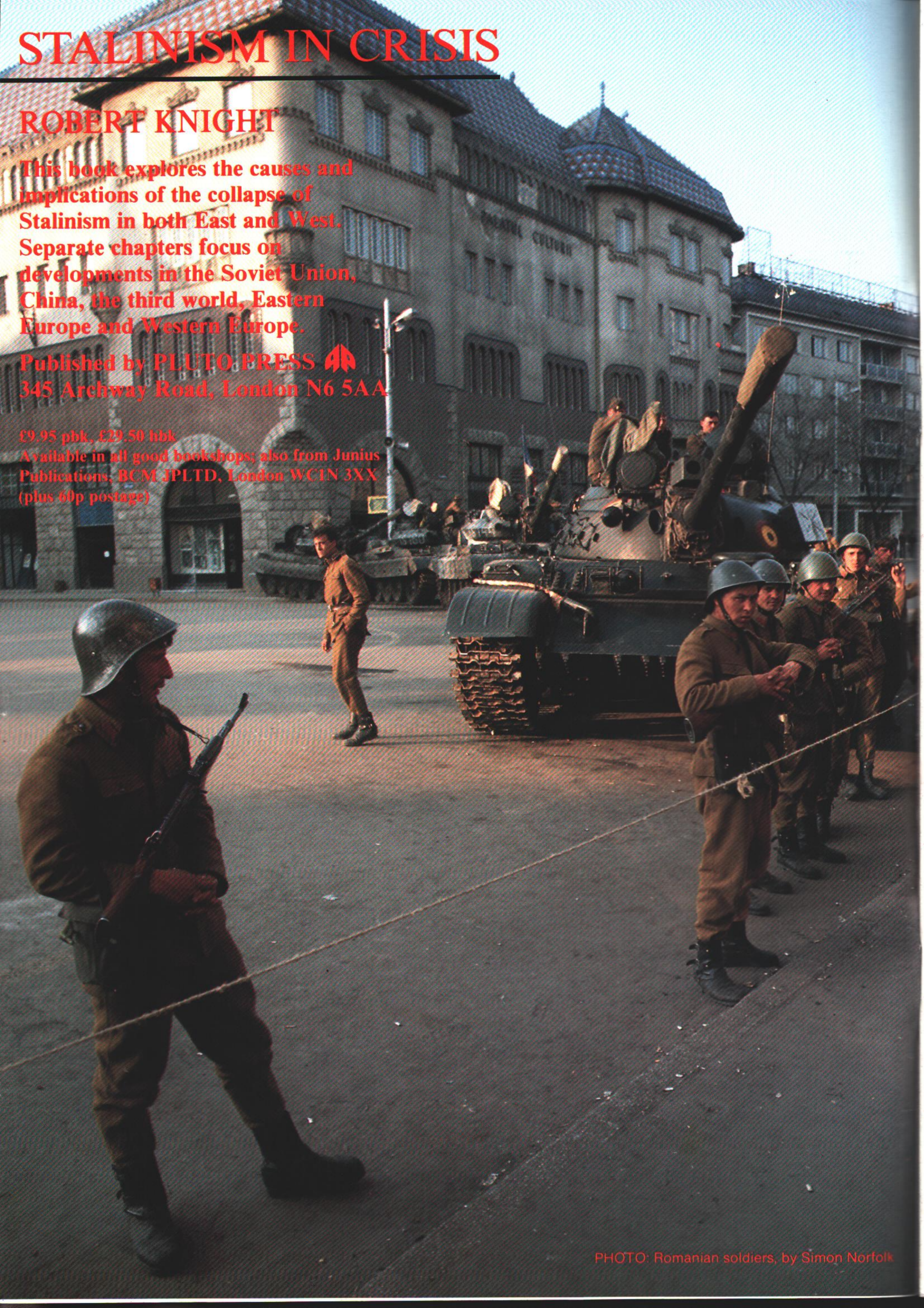
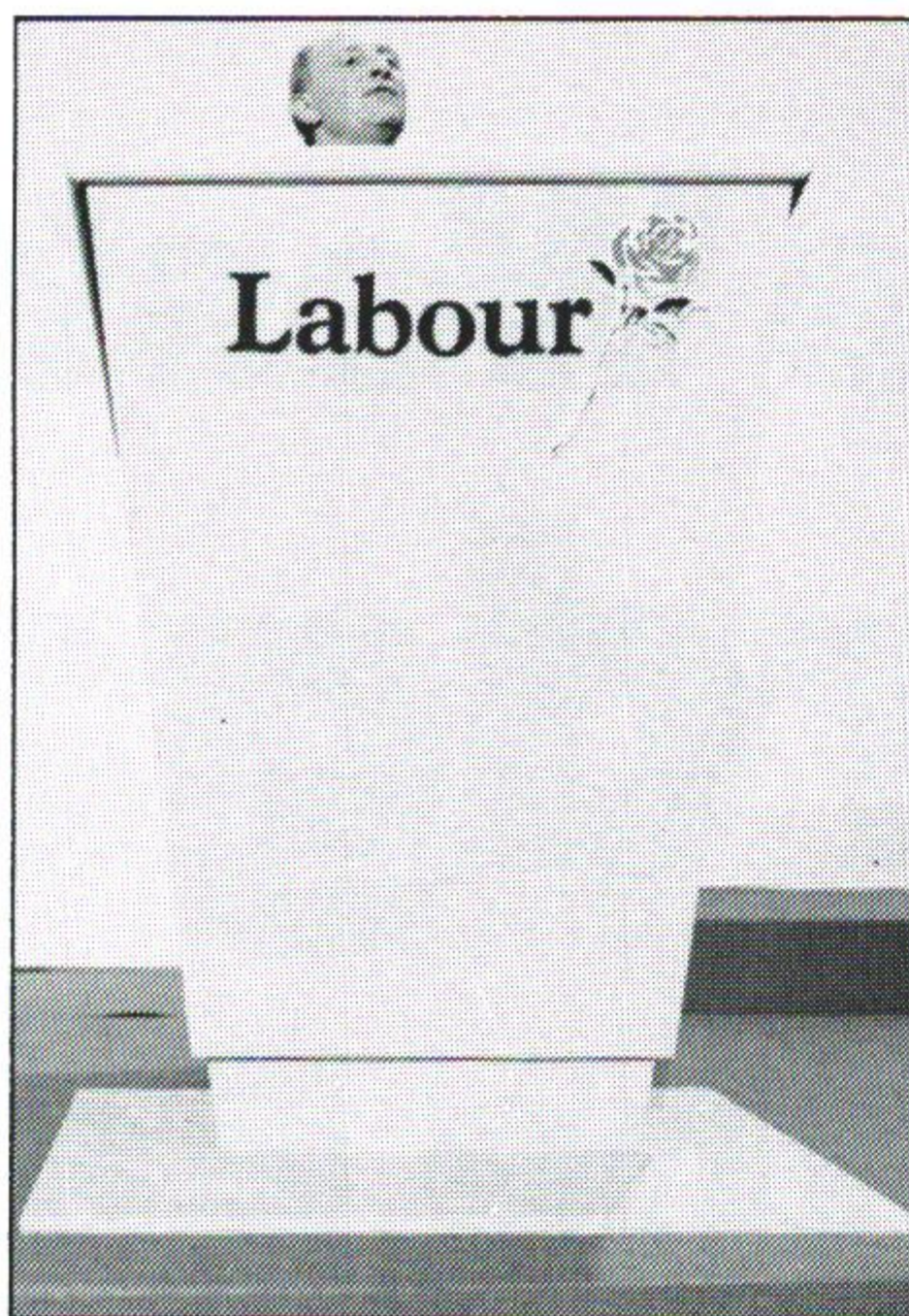


PHOTO: Romanian soldiers, by Simon Norfolk

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Meanwhile, back in Britain...

Whenever the general election is, one thing now seems certain: the Labour Party cannot win it.

Traditional Labourism is long dead, and Neil Kinnock's party has found nothing with which to replace it. In the search for respectability, Kinnock has turned Labour into a bland imitation of the Tory Party. But, as always seemed likely, when it comes closer to election time more people will plump for the real thing.

Labour now has no distinctive policies, no radical appeal, nothing. Its problems illustrate the death of opposition politics in Britain. Alongside the collapse of the Soviet Union, these developments signal the end of the old alternatives to capitalism—at the moment when recession and global crisis point to the powerful need for a new one.

To lay the foundations of such an alternative will involve cutting loose from the old, dead left. That is why *Living Marxism* does not grieve for the Stalinism of the Soviet Union—or for the British socialism of the Labour Party.

Editor: **Mick Hume** • Assistant Editor: **Joan Phillips**

Editorial Assistant: **Kirsten Cale** • International Editor: **Daniel Nassim**

News: **Andrew Calcutt** • Living section: **John Fitzpatrick** • Design: **Richard Stead,**

Charles Longford • Production: **Michael Kramer, Simon Norfolk, Peter Ray,**

Helen West • Advertising Manager: **Manda Kent**

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The West plays wordgames while the East burns

'Hardliners...democrats... coup...revolution': the Western authorities have been playing wordgames with us over the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Who are these fearsome hardliners who are blamed for everything? It surely cannot be the leaders of the farcical 'coup' against Gorbachev, whose woolly-headed incompetence showed that they were neither hard nor pursuing any clear line. On the other side, ex-Stalinist Boris Yeltsin is no democratic crusader. Just one week before he was hailed as the heroic defender of the Russian

parliament, Yeltsin threatened to suspend that same assembly and rule by presidential diktat.

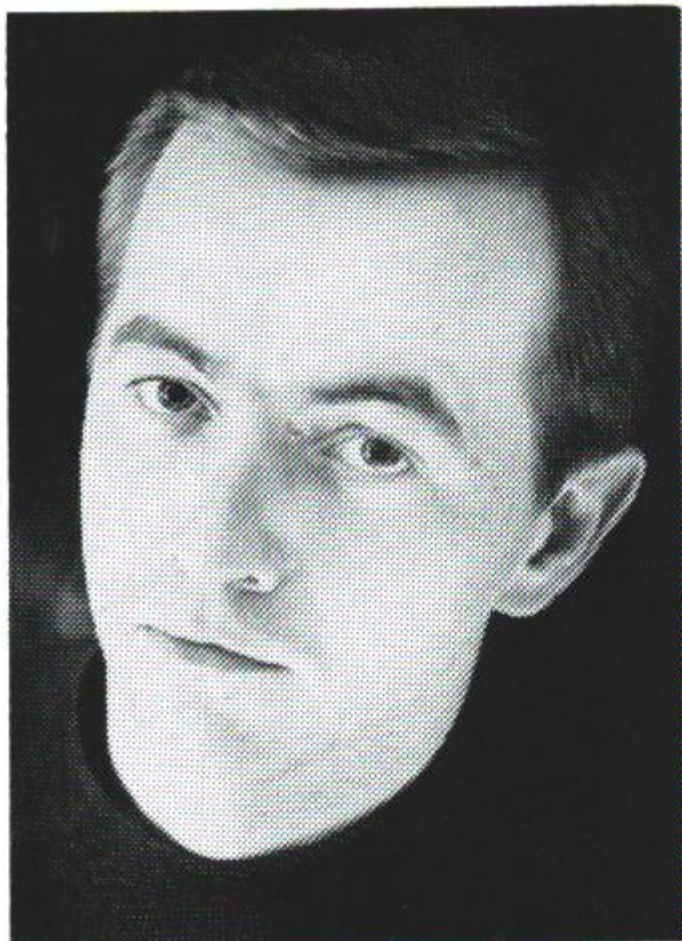
The now-familiar distinction between the 'coup' that ousted Gorbachev and the 'revolution' that brought him back to power is another piece of Western nonsense. If one was the act of an unrepresentative clique and the other an outpouring of popular feeling, why were both operations run by senior KGB officers?

The wordgames of the Western establishment tell us nothing about the events which have led to the disintegration of the Soviet

Union. As examined elsewhere in *Living Marxism*, the drama of August and September was not a political battle between the forces of darkness and light; it was a squalid power struggle among fragments within the ruling bureaucracy, all of them as unsavoury as each other. The wordgames are designed to keep the world's attention focused on the idea of the death of communism, and so distract from what the crisis in the East might tell us about the shortcomings of Western capitalism.

Let us turn the spotlight back into the faces of George Bush and John Major for a moment. What is it that the Western powers really want in Eastern Europe and 'the former Soviet Union'? And what can they give in return?

●
What Bush and Major want most in the East is not democracy, but stability. They will support anybody who can keep things under control. China is the proof of that. It only took a few months for the Beijing government, the butcher of Tiananmen Square, to regain Most Favoured Nation status in Washington. John Major's summer visit there put the seal on the renewed relationship. The media may have highlighted Major's mild criticisms of the



editor
mick hume

Chinese regime's record. But what matters in politics is what you do, not what you say. And what Major did was a deal with Beijing to suppress democratic reform in the Crown colony of Hong Kong.

Look away from the old Stalinist bloc towards other parts of the third world and it becomes clear that stability and control are all the West ever wants. The powers which burnt thousands of Iraqis to cinders on the Basra Road and put the Emir and his hangmen back in power in Kuwait are not going to be squeamish about bloodshed and dictatorship in Eastern Europe—so long as they can insulate themselves from the fall-out.

●
If the 'coup' had succeeded in stabilising the Soviet Union, we can be sure that Western governments would have been willing to do business with the so-called hardliners. As it was they waited until the crackdown had clearly failed before siding with Yeltsin. Then they cheered him as a democrat while he was issuing repressive decrees and bans. As things fall apart more and more in the region, we can expect the Western powers to become less and less concerned with the niceties of the democratic process.

What the West wants in the East is stability and control. What it offers in return is austerity and third world-style capitalism. There has been a heated debate about whether the Western authorities should have done more to aid the Gorbachev government in the past, and how much they should give in the future. In reality this is a non-issue. Western capitalism is in another slump. It can do little or nothing to revive the former Soviet bloc.

●
The USA is the biggest debtor on Earth and had to tour the globe with a begging bowl to fund its war in the Gulf. The British government is in a still worse state and cannot even afford to run a decent railway. Japan and Germany, the more dynamic capitalist economies, are now experiencing serious problems of their own. The West is desperately searching for a saviour to pull its system out of recession. It is in no position to play the role of messiah in the East.

Unable to offer anything significant in the way of investment, British and American capitalists instead emphasise the importance of passing on their 'know-how' to the former Soviets, to help them build an 'intellectual infrastructure'. A glance at the soaring unemployment and falling living standards in the West is enough to tell us what manner of capitalist expertise is being exported Eastwards.

Back in December of last year the *Economist*, the voice of British business, summed up the ideas on offer when it opined

that it might be 'the Soviet Union's turn for what could be called the Pinochet approach to liberal economics'. General Pinochet was a Chilean dictator who came to power in a coup, killed 50 000 oppositionists and trade unionists, then 'developed' the economy by throwing it open to profiteering foreign investors. Such is the role model which Western capitalism now offers the East. The spread of the threat of starvation from Africa

dodge the flak: so the Socialist Workers Party says that, yes, 'communism' is dead, but 'socialism' still lives, while the Communist Party of Great Britain prepares to change its name to Democratic Left. However clever they might think these tricks are, they are doomed to failure because they are conceding the basic anti-left argument.

Of course it needs to be made clear that Marxism bears no responsibility for the

What the West wants in the East is stability. What it offers in return is austerity

to Albania points towards the future which Eastern Europe can expect as part of the capitalist third world.

Repression and austerity; that is all capitalism has been able to offer Eastern Europe for more than a century. It is why there was a revolution in Russia in 1917, why the Stalinists could take over elsewhere with such ease after the Second World War, and why the West has no solutions today.

●
Eastern Europe has always been a desperate place, where democracy and prosperity were strangers. When the capitalists last had the run of the region, during the Depression of the late twenties and thirties, they pulled out their investments and endorsed fascist regimes. As the region's descent into chaos coincides with the slump of the nineties, Eastern Europe can expect to get brutal treatment once more. Already it is clear that the Western response to the crisis in Albania and the civil war in Yugoslavia is to wish that those bloody people would go away and starve or kill each other quietly.

Surrounded by evidence that capitalism does not work, *Living Marxism* refuses to be defensive in the face of all the 'Marxism is dead' propaganda. Too many on the left are indulging in wordgames of their own to try to

corrupt system which ruled the Soviet Union in its name. But distancing Marxism from Stalinism is not enough. The focus must be turned back on to capitalism, to expose its responsibility for the crisis East and West.

To concede that Marxism is dead means to accept that 'this is it'; that after several thousand years of struggle and faltering progress, humanity has reached its highest expression in the grim, riot-torn estates of Britain and the even grimmer cities of the East. Such a conclusion might seem like common sense to the powers that be, since it demands that we resign ourselves to the status quo. Those of us who believe in the potential of humanity to liberate itself from want will see things a little differently. 'This' is certainly all that we can expect from capitalism. The question is, however, why should we accept that capitalism is 'it'?

●
No doubt the worse things become, the more the Western authorities will invent wordgames about the failures of communism. But the trick cannot work forever. In Eastern Europe, many people have hung on every word from the West and cried out for capitalism to save them. Yet the arrival of the market economy has only brought them more misery. How long before the wordgame is up?

Letters

Genocide

I would like to comment on the all-too-common assumption, referred to in Adam Eastman's 'Hitler, the Holocaust and history' (Marxist review of books, August), that 'the extermination of the Jews is...the only genocide carried out by a cultured (ie, Western) nation'. The Holocaust of the Jews was, without question, the most blatant act of genocide, among many others, practised by a Western power in the twentieth century. But let us consider our history in its entirety. A few million Jews, horrendous as that figure unquestionably is, seems almost insignificant beside the hundred million or so victims of the holocaust of slavery.

The West has built its affluence on the dead bodies of scores of millions of every race: black, Asian and white, but primarily black. In doing so it has built a false ideology of superiority in an attempt to justify its behaviour, which leads to discrimination against all but the elite few, but principally against those of African ancestry. Our industrial revolution, and the development of Western capitalism, were built on the horror of slavery without which they would not have been economically viable, and which gave rise to a tradition of oppression that continues to this day in the subtler forms of racism and imperialism. With such a history, who can wonder that Nazi Germany—or any Western power—should find it easy to slide into yet another act of genocide?

Robert Brenchley Birmingham

GBH

Stuart Pearce is right in making the point that *GBH* is not a study of Kinnockism v militancy (Letters, September). Alan Bleasdale made the point that he knew very little about Militant—except for his conviction that 'the further left you go politically, the more right you end up'. And whether it was about Liverpool or not, the entire plot was focussed around the tabloid view of mid-eighties left-wing councils. (The fact that the characters had scouse accents, that Murray bore great resemblance to

someone who now does TV advertisements and that the supposed 'rent-a-jobs' fit the description of Liverpool council's Static Security Force does all seem a little coincidental however).

Nelson was a scab, firstly, because whilst all his colleagues would have been on strike, he was celebrating his 'decency' by continuing to work. And, secondly, because Jim Nelson is the epitome of all that the establishment would like socialists to be; the caring souls such as the Peace Train Organisation—who detest violence—the violence of those standing up to British terror in Ireland.

This is the message *GBH* continually rammed down our throats. The 'concern' we were invited to share was the type of concern those in charge display when ordinary people begin to challenge the prevailing rules of society. Why, if Bleasdale has such a 'belief in humankind' does he consistently present the working class as mindless thugs who would be much *nicer* with the Bleasdale-book values?

It is precisely because these ever-so-respectable Jim Nelson types have the same yardstick as the ruling class when proclaiming a 'belief in humankind' that left-wing politics is so discredited in Britain. In his rush to defend a nice old teacher, Stuart Pearce falls into the same trap. The sickest part of all this is that whilst British capitalism faces its biggest crisis since the thirties, the establishment can rest assured that its respectable lefty friends will continue to blame ordinary people for the problems capitalism creates.

Alan Renehan Enfield

On *Right to Reply* Derek Hatton said that three people thought *GBH* was not aimed at representing mid-eighties Liverpool: the Channel 4 media man he was debating, Alan Bleasdale, and Alan Bleasdale's mum. To this band of refuseniks we can add Stuart Pearce.

Of course Degsy wanted to skate over the issue of Militant but everyone knows it's about them too. Pearce knows the score, that's why his defence of Bleasdale's public interpretation of *GBH* turns into advocating the socialism of that mealy-mouthed scab Nelson.

Pearce misses one of the main points of John Fitzpatrick's article, which is that *GBH* was a caricature, strongly at odds with reality, not that we should take council leader Murray's side in the 'battle of socialisms'.

The schoolteacher character Nelson is a scab because he uses the technicality that there was no picket line when the whole city was on strike. It's not difficult to see that Nelson would have been one of those running the buses in the 1926 General Strike.

Kinnock and Bleasdale's red-baiting aims to stop us doing anything about our problems by presenting people trying to fight back as thugs or loonies or criminals, by arguing it's useless to try and change things. As Pearce suggests, we should remember Nelson's qualities: scabbing, fatalism, moderation, but only to remind us to dump them in the garbage where they belong.

Roy Lidster Sheffield

The German angle

The article of John Gibson ('The deutschmark of failure', July) describes the situation in Germany quite exactly. We laughed at the photo from the 1990 Leipzig election with the fabulous 'Helmut' hymn we had never heard before—in these times it is really hard for satirists to earn their living because real life always surpasses their best ideas.

But I wonder why John Gibson's article ignored the left opposition? I joined the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) since it was the only consistent Marxist Party (despite its Stalinist past). The Greens and especially the PDS warned not to rush the union of the two German states, and they both still fight the unsocial policies of the Treuhands today.

I think John Gibson is mistaken to ignore the opposition because it is very important for the international lefts to join in struggle. Our government sends us to march into a united Europe, but a united left opposition still doesn't exist. There is no time to lose! That's why the quarrel between the lefts of even one country can be dangerous. The red-green debate between readers on the letters page may be funny—but the Greens without red consistency and Reds without green insight are suicidal. The time of the unity parties is over but a co-ordinated movement of all determined opponents of capitalism is a vital necessity.

Uwe Schwarz Königs Wusterhausen, Germany

Frontline South Africa

Simon Mabuse's and Daniel Nina's letters (August and September) in response to 'Rehabilitating the apartheid state' (July), while making some useful points, share one fatal assumption: that the liberation movement in South Africa under the leadership of the ANC is calling the shots and is on the verge of victory. The flip side is their common underestimation of De Klerk's political strategy.

Mabuse acknowledges that there are dangers ahead but argues that the ANC has already achieved great things, for example, the complete eradication of apartheid legislation. Nina, on the other hand, argues that South Africa is experiencing a truly revolutionary period in which there is an open contest for power. Both assert that the ANC's strategy is correct and that everyone should unite behind it. But nothing could be further from the truth. No amount of wishful thinking can change the fact that it is the De Klerk regime, not the ANC, that is dictating the pace and direction of the 'peace process'.

Nina correctly states that the masses did not take to the streets against Winnie Mandela's guilty verdict because she had lost support due to corruption and the abuse of her position. No doubt the 'Imelda Marcos of Africa' label in some way reflects reality. But this is of secondary importance. What these events highlighted was the fact that the state's interference in the internal affairs of the ANC was not questioned. In some cases it was welcomed. Nina misses the point that the passivity of the masses represents a political problem, not an example of revolutionary consciousness on their part.

In asserting that the ANC is in control and that victory is around the corner, Mabuse and Nina are simply adding to what they both acknowledge is a confused situation and failing to address the central problem of the depoliticisation of the masses. Any honest examination of South Africa today reveals that the masses have been contained, indeed, are engaged in a state-provoked civil war while passively observing developments around the prospective negotiations table. The fact that a few right-wing Afrikaner extremists can be presented as a greater threat to negotiations than the whole of the black working class simply highlights how successfully the De Klerk regime has implemented its strategy.

Mabuse and Nina do not totally deny these things. But they present them as potential dangers for the future instead of seeing that there will be no future unless they are addressed now. The call for unity behind the

ANC compounds the problem altogether. Mabuse may regard *Living Marxism's* criticism as a 'luxury' done from afar, but unfortunately it has been proved to be correct at every point. Ignoring the facts is the 'luxury' the South African masses can ill-afford at present.

Bob Foster London

The sectarian tradition

In 'The left has let the Tories off the hook' (August), Mick Hume puts paid to the myth of Liverpool's 'socialist traditions'. Indeed, the 'tradition' myth is greater and more pervasive than any actual semblance of socialism in Liverpool today. The real tradition is of sectarianism.

The first years of the century saw Protestant and Catholic rioting almost annually, culminating in the state of emergency called in 1910. In the wake of Connolly, the struggle for Irish freedom spilled over into Liverpool, ensuring that opposition to the British establishment came not from Labour but from the Irish nationalists whose MP and councillors enjoyed continued support years after the carve-up of Ireland in 1921.

In more recent decades, anyone wishing to join the Labour Party whose face didn't fit would be told that it was 'full up'. With the bitter perception of the Merseyside party being a mostly white male Catholic machine, Protestants found a political counterweight in the Tories, leading to the grotesque popularity of the Working Man's Conservative Association and other reactionary organisations in Liverpool.

Contrary to the left's misty-eyed and self-serving recollection of the past, this is a tradition we can all do without.

George McIver Capel Curig

The intellectual barricades

I have to say that I was impressed by Jill Waverly's letter (August), with her insistence on the class struggle, her statement that 'action speaks more than a trillion volumes of fancy phrases' and her general upbraiding of 'armchair Marxists'. So, what does she want us to do? Perhaps we should call for an all-out

nationwide strike, or start a riot in the centre of London? Or perhaps we should follow the more illustrious example of Baader-Meinhof and the Red Brigades, and get communicated a bit of 'bourgeois brutality'?

Of course, Waverly is right to see that class action is of central importance to our struggle. But she should ask herself why over the past decades working class struggle has failed. The answer is that while workers may have had the guts to fight, they didn't have the right politics to make sure they won at the end of the day. The reason that there is a minimum of class struggle today is that workers still don't have the right ideas.

We have to take on the battle of ideas—however you want to see it. Only when we have a substantial section of the working class on our side can we get on with the real business.

Robert Lockwood Nottingham

According to Dave Chandler (letters, July) Marxism is now an 'intellectual project'. This is a cop-out plea often used by weekend Marxists (usually just before they start to praise the likes of Althusser). Rather the 'pressing task today' is the active defence and promotion of the interests of the working class against the brutal onslaught of a dying system. Part-time revolutionaries like Chandler think that it's enough to retire hurt to their bedrooms and ponder the future.

Meanwhile, dole queues lengthen; Major plays the race card, etc. 'New intellectual foundations' are all very well but they tend to crack under the onslaught of present day realities. Action is what gives people hope and we should be at the forefront of giving people hope.

Quentin J Winner London

Reds and Greens

Contrary to the impression given by most of the letters from Greens, Marxists don't hate animals or have a total disregard for the environment. If avoiding Jaffa oranges and mascara tested on bunnies makes you feel better, then why not, it does others no harm and yourself some good. Obviously the Israeli state won't crumble and science and its uses will remain in the same hands regardless of your shopping list.

At their best, Greens have made us all a little more aware of the damage done to the environment. But the same could be said of a good Channel 4 documentary.

A Carter Glasgow

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

Eve Anderson explains why the Baker peace talks in the Middle East are a continuation of the Gulf War by other means

Do the Arab-Israeli talks planned by US secretary of state James Baker for October mean that peace is finally breaking out in the Middle East? Things certainly appear to be changing in that war-torn region. The West, long reviled as the oppressor of the Arab and Islamic world, has now been cast in the role of saviour. For the first time since Israel was established in 1948, it would seem that the issue of Palestinian statehood is on the international agenda. Indeed, every Middle Eastern shibboleth has been overturned in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

Take president Assad's Syria. For years the Western powers have denounced it as a 'terrorist state', cut off formal diplomatic links and banned arms supplies. Today, however, Syria is the key player in the peace talks and an instrument of

American policy. Assad has agreed to all of Baker's conditions, made overtures towards Israel, and cracked down on the Palestinian groups in Lebanon which he had previously championed.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has undergone a similar transformation from scourge of the West to American ally. Back in 1979, the revolt which overthrew the Shah of Iran destabilised the US-run order in the Middle East. Washington even sponsored an Iraqi invasion to try to unseat the radical Iranian regime. Today, however, the Iranians are being drawn back into the Western orbit, largely through the hostage issue. Once Tehran was the biggest backer of a score of militant Muslim guerrilla groups such as Hizbollah. Now the Iranians are acting as a conduit for Western pressure on these organisations to moderate their approach.

On the other side of the fence sat the Israelis and the Iraqis. In the past, both states acted as loyal stooges for the USA. Now, Iraq has replaced the Soviet Union as the bogey of Western civilisation. The fact that the US-led alliance destroyed Iraq within six weeks, and that millions of Iraqis now face starvation and disease, has not stopped Western speculation over Iraq's global ambitions.

Israel has experienced the preparations for the Baker talks as a process of humiliation at the hands of its traditional sponsor, the USA. The Israelis feel they have been pushed into a corner and blamed for every problem. Gone are the days when the USA would automatically side with Israel against the Arab states.

'A honeymoon'

Over the past year, Baker and US president George Bush have proved willing to do deals with their erstwhile enemies and to face down old friends. One week after the end of the Gulf War, on 6 March, Baker declared that the Western victory meant 'a honeymoon, a window of opportunity' had arisen which might allow him 'to look for new formulas to settle old disputes'. He thereby

Whose peace is it anyway?



drew a line from the outcome of the Gulf War to the settlement of the Palestinian question—the same sort of ‘linkage’ which he had denounced as a fiendish plot when it was made by Saddam Hussein.

Made in the USA

Despite all of the changes in the Middle East, however, one thing remains certain. The USA and its allies will not bring peace with justice to the masses of the region. Nobody has asked the peoples of the Middle East what kind of settlement they want; the Palestinians have been denied the right to choose their own representatives at the talks, never mind determine their own future as a nation. The ‘peace’ on offer in the Middle East has been made in America. What peace means to Bush and Baker is the removal of all barriers to US and Western influence in the region. For the masses, such a peace spells disaster. To see what is in store, we need only look at what benefits the peoples of the region have gained in the aftermath of the West’s victory in the Gulf War.

In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, the diplomatic differences between the USA and Israel have done nothing to interfere with the beatings, the arrests and the murder

of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli security forces. In Nablus in July, the security services carried out a search and arrest operation, described by local residents as one of the biggest for years. The Israelis imposed a curfew on the whole city and its surrounding refugee camps, while hundreds of soldiers conducted house-to-house searches, arresting Palestinians by the score.

The prospect of the USA organising some sort of deal between Israel and the Arab regimes has not meant a softening of the Israeli attitude towards the Palestinians. Instead, the Americans have pressed the Arab states to take a more Israeli-style stance on the Palestinian question. The sheikhs and strongmen have assumed a greater degree of responsibility for policing the Palestinians.

Worse than Israel

In Kuwait, the Palestinian population has faced intense persecution since the end of the Gulf War and the return of the Emir. Those who have escaped the Emir’s kangaroo courts run the risk of being rounded up by armed gangs and summarily executed, or tortured and left for dead. Thousands of Palestinians have left Kuwait, some

saying that they are going back to the occupied territories because even the Israelis are not as bad as the Emir. Other non-Kuwaiti Arabs have not fared much better. The regime has terminated 110 000 contracts for jobs in the public sector held by non-nationals.

Lebanon annexed

In Lebanon, the much-heralded ‘peace’ means that Syria has extended its occupation and effectively annexed the country with the blessing of the USA. The peoples of Lebanon are still denied the right to determine their own future. Here, too, the Palestinians have fared worse. In early July, the Palestinian stronghold of ‘Fatahland’ in the foothills of Sidon, the last base of 6000 Palestinian fighters, was bombed by Israeli air raids and then attacked by the Syrian-run Lebanese army. Hopelessly outnumbered, the Palestinians were quickly disarmed and moved to nearby refugee camps. ‘As you restore the nation to the south and the south to the nation’, Lebanese defence minister Michel Murr proudly told his forces, ‘you are wiping out the last traces of an aggressive conspiracy that created the tragedy that has gone on for 16 years.’ Not a conspiracy between the

Palestinian refugee camp, Jabalya, Gaza Strip

PHOTOS: Simon Norfolk



West and Israel, you understand, but one between Palestinians and Lebanese radicals.

What kind of 'peace' have the Kurds experienced? The Western powers claimed that the 'safe havens' they established in northern Iraq would protect the Kurds from Saddam's Republican Guards. These safe havens have rapidly become killing fields as Turkey has launched bombing raids on 24 Kurdish camps, up to 12 kilometres inside Iraq. In its determination to prevent Kurdish unrest from spilling over its borders, Turkey has occupied a three mile zone inside Iraq, deploying over 20 000 troops supported by tanks. Up

The USA has become less reliant upon Israel to do its bidding in the Middle East

to 700 Kurds had been slaughtered by the end of August. Turkey is a Nato member, was a member of the anti-Iraq coalition during the Gulf War, and is also an active participant in Operation Poised Hammer. This is a Western-inspired rapid deployment force based in Turkey, ostensibly to respond to an attack on the Kurds by Saddam. The US-led alliance which claimed to be the saviour of the Kurds has been revealed as their tormentor.

Fruits of victory

Neither should we forget the Iraqis. How will they fare in the West's 'peace' package? A quarter of a million died in the war which sent Iraq back into the nineteenth century. Millions more now face the threat of starvation and disease amid the rubble. Yet the US and British 'peacemongers' who wreaked this havoc refuse to lift sanctions.

The American 'peace process' in the Middle East is a continuation of the Gulf War by other means. It represents the culmination of the Western powers' attempt to bring the region under closer control. There will be no freedom or justice for the peoples of the Middle East. Indeed, since the power diplomacy is tightening the grip of Western imperialism over the Arab and Islamic masses, things are likely to get worse.

The West remains a force for oppression in the Middle East. What has changed is that the USA and other Western powers are now able to present their interference in the region as a peace mission without fear of serious opposition. The ability of Baker and Bush to pose as peacemakers demonstrates the unchallenged authority which imperialism now enjoys in the Middle East. These are the fruits of victory in the Cold War and the Gulf War.

Gulf watershed

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union has allowed the West to intervene at will in the third world. From Nicaragua to southern Africa, radical regimes and anti-imperialist movements have been disoriented by the Western powers' new found moral authority. In the Middle East this process has been accelerated by the impact of the Gulf War, which marked a watershed in the development of a new political configuration. The USA has become less reliant upon Israel to do its bidding in the Middle East and better able to deal directly with the Arab regimes. Washington might call this change a step towards peace but all it really represents is a reorganisation of the way in which the West dominates the Middle East.

The US-Israeli 'special relationship' was largely a product of the Cold War and America's need for an anti-communist agent to counter Soviet-backed Arab nationalism. Washington armed and funded Israel to keep the Palestinians down, the Arabs in line and the Soviets out. Now that the Soviet Union has gone, Israel has become something of an embarrassment to Uncle Sam.

Blaming Israel

Baker and Bush have blamed Israel for every hitch in the run-up to the proposed October conference, even pointing to the continued settlement of Russian Jews in the occupied territories as the biggest obstacle to peace. This is unheard of in Middle Eastern politics. Usually it is the Arab 'terrorists' or the Islamic 'fanatics' at the end of America's boot. The latest chapter in the saga of Westerners held in Lebanon showed how much things have changed. On 11 August, after the release of John McCarthy, Edward Tracy and Jerome Leyraud, Bush praised the Syrians and Iranians. When asked about the 375 Shiite and Palestinian hostages held by Israel in south Lebanon, Bush reiterated that every hostage held by any country should be released.

Once the lynchpin of imperialist domination in the Middle East, Israeli oppression has now become unfashionable and destabilising. America has not had a change of heart about the Palestinians. Rather, the collapse of the Soviet Union has deprived the old radical Arab states like Syria of their capacity to stand up to the West. For the moment at least, the USA bestrides the region, able to dictate to Israel and the Arab regimes alike.

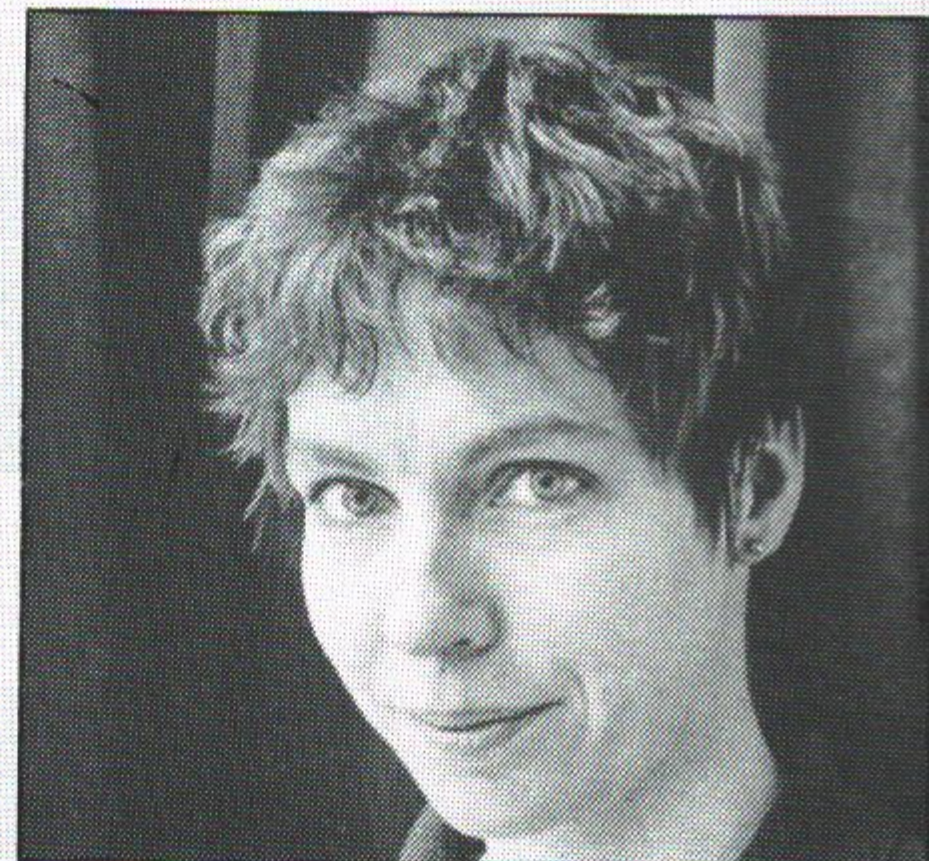
A silent war

The potential *rapprochement* between Israel and the Arab regimes under the tutelage of the USA may appear to spell peace from the comfortable vantage point of the West. But in the Middle East, it spells a silent war against the oppressed masses. It means the sharing out of the responsibility for policing the Palestinians. In Lebanon and Kuwait, it means the Syrians and Kuwaitis doing the dirty work which imperialism would have once left to Israel. It means the temporary end of opposition to Western domination.

From the Gulf War to the Baker initiative: this is the West's hard cop/soft cop act. It is a life sentence for the Kurds, the Palestinians and all the other Arab and Islamic peoples on the receiving end of the 'peace process'.



It's only natural



Ann Bradley

New research by American neuroscientists at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego has found that there really is a biological difference between gay and straight men. They claim that sexual orientation depends on the size of your INAH3.

INAH3 is a tiny cluster of cells in the area of the brain that controls human responses such as sleep. Scientists have for some time claimed that these cells also control sexual urges. They have now found that in straight men INAH3 is about the size of a grain of sand, while in gay men and women it's 'small to vanishing'.

● The author of the study, Dr Simon LeVay, is understandably cautious about his findings. As a scientist with a reputation to keep he stresses his study sample was small. He examined brain tissue from just 41 dead people: 19 of them were known to be homosexual men, the others (presumed to be heterosexual) included six women. Dr LeVay has been quick to distance himself from the conclusion drawn by the media that his research proves homosexuality is biologically rather than socially constructed.

Dr LeVay's denial hasn't been enough for gay activists who claim that the research is irresponsible. One gay organisation denounced the research as 'the kind of study they used in Nazi Germany to justify putting Jews in concentration camps'. They are worried that the claim that homosexuality has a biological basis will lead to attempts to 'screen' people's sexual orientation. These fears have not been assuaged by the arguments of liberal scientists. One American neurologist observed hopefully that if 'homosexuality is beyond the power of the individual...the "sinful" argument that some religions make against homosexuality [would be] harder to agree with'. In fact it will be easier for reactionaries to treat gays as social lepers if liberals are arguing that homosexuality is a physical disorder.

● I would have expected objective scientists to draw the opposite conclusion from the media. If INAH3 is significantly larger in heterosexual men, then these cells surely cannot regulate sex drive. Doctors cannot claim that heterosexual men have exclusively high sex drives. I can imagine a certain section of the scientific community accepting the findings as confirmation of the dubious claim that women have less sexual urges. But I doubt they would apply the same prejudice to gay men. Usually the 'it's natural for women not to like sex' brigade are the same bigots who hold that gay men only stop bonking to reapply their aftershave.

I cannot believe that brain structure directly determines sex drive—heterosexual or homosexual. Sex is as much shaped by society as biology. When, where, how and how often we have

sex (the things that are taken as a measure of 'sex drive') are all shaped by social norms and expectations. The promiscuity of an accountant may be near celibacy to a student.

Even on an individual level, our attitude towards sex changes according to circumstances. Many women temporarily go off sex after pregnancy. Scientists may claim that their appropriate cell cluster has withered away. It seems more probable that they are too knackered by trying to look after a new baby and live up to everything that is expected of the new mother. When you start a new relationship you feel as though your INAH3 has taken over your entire brain—when a relationship goes stale the INAH3 seems to atrophy. It seems to me that your sex drive, and for that matter who you are attracted to, is rather more to do with your own social and psychological experiences, than the biological effect of certain cells.

● Lisa Power, of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, asked a pertinent question when queried by the *Guardian* about the report. 'I'd like to know,' she asked, 'what happens to the brain of someone who is happily married until he is 40 and then finds he is homosexual?'. Presumably those who believe that sexual orientation is the consequence of cell clusters would claim that such people's homosexuality has been there 'waiting to happen', like a developing tumour. I think it's more likely that sexual feelings develop and change according to an individual's experience of life.

A few years ago the INAH3 study would not have been taken very seriously. But today biological explanations about sexual behaviour are all the rage—and not just among trendy Californian scientists. Agony aunt Dr Miriam Stoppard has jumped on the biological bandwagon with her new book *The Magic of Sex*, in which she seizes on the unoriginal observation that many women have unsatisfactory sex lives, and provides a biological basis for it. 'Nature', she claims, 'really has got it wrong! Men and women are so mismatched.' Glenn Wilson, psychologist and author of *The Great Sex Divide* has recently done the rounds of radio phone-ins arguing that men tend towards promiscuity because of a natural desire to spread the maximum *quantity* of sperm. A woman, on the other hand, concerned about the *quality* of sperm, wants men to compete for her and so tends towards monogamy.

● All of these biological explanations are popular with the establishment because they present existing social relations as given by nature. Biological explanations label homosexuals as people with abnormal brains: the diehard reactionaries will say they're sick, the liberals will claim they can't help it. The consensus is that they are abnormal outsiders.

By the same count, if heterosexual couples have

Biological explanations of sexual behaviour are popular with the establishment because they present existing social relations as given by nature

a lousy sex life, it's because men and women have natural incompatibilities—not because couples are often forced by practicalities or convention to remain in partnerships which have run their course, or because the realities of family life are a guaranteed passion-killer.

The new biology lets society off the hook. We should have none of it.

Under siege

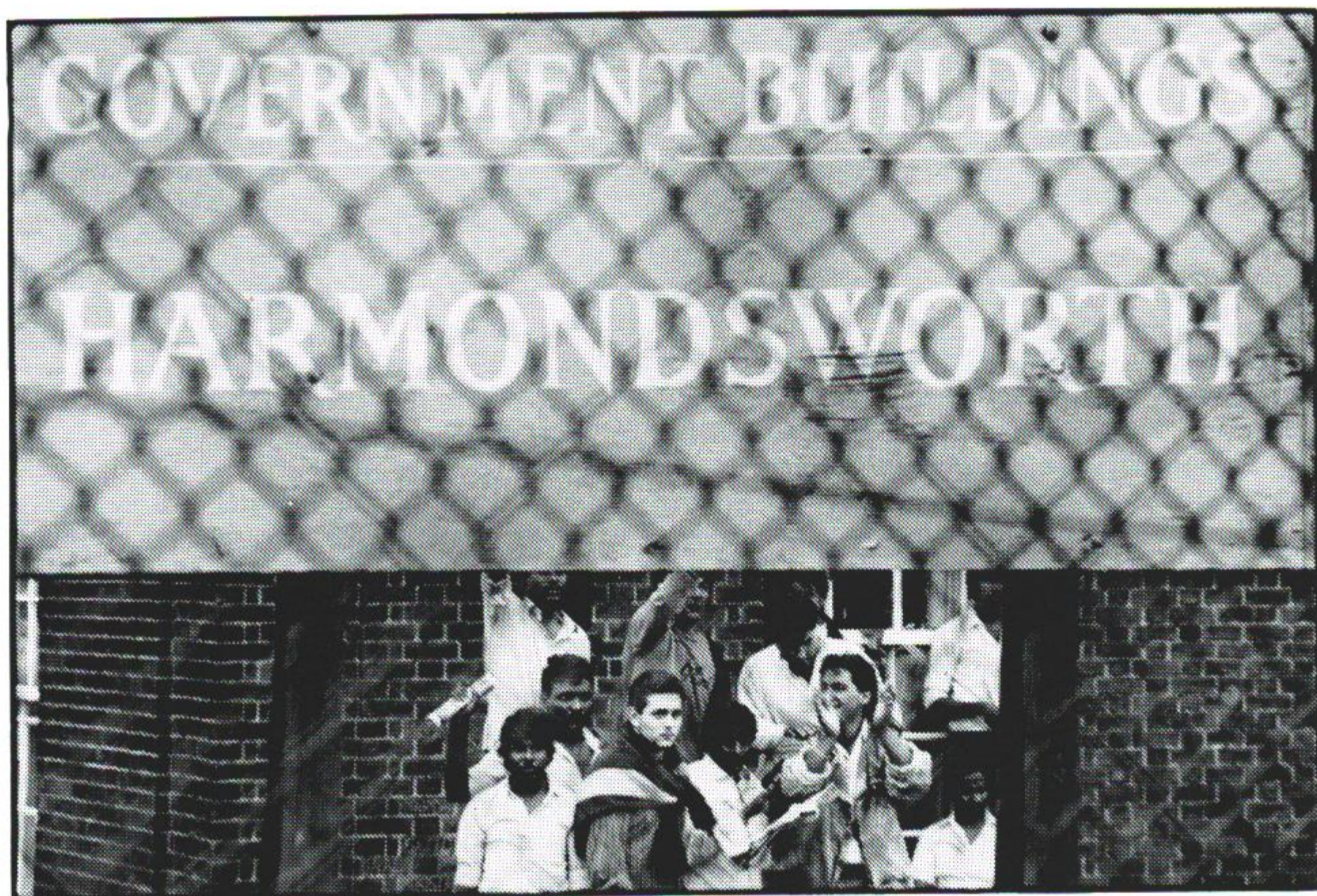


PHOTO: Joe Boatman

in

Fortres Europ

From internment camps in Bari to riot squads in Brussels, Europe's black community is under attack. Kenan Malik looks at why Euroracism is on the rise—and why Britain seems to be different

We must not be wide open to all-comers simply because Paris, London or Rome seem more attractive than Bombay or Algiers', declared John Major at a European Community summit in Luxembourg in June. A yet-to-be published European Community report demands 'actions designed to encourage the economic reinsertion of immigrants to their country of origin'. In other words, repatriation. Over the past few months immigration has become one of the most explosive political issues in Europe.

'Noise and smell'

Major's demand for a 'perimeter fence' around Europe to keep out unwanted intruders found a ready echo on the Continent. Former premier Jacques Chirac claimed that France was suffering from an 'overdose' of foreigners, and that the 'noise and the smell' of France's immigrant communities was driving French people 'crazy'. Former interior minister Michel Poniatowski compared the presence of immigrants to the Nazi occupation of France.

Bush drums

Germany has spent enormous resources trying to seal off its borders. Both the opposition Social Democrats and the Free Democrats (junior partners in Helmut Kohl's coalition government) have demanded constitutional changes to keep out refugees. The Christian Democrat-run government has sent African and Asian countries videos of the appalling conditions facing refugees in German camps to discourage any more immigrants. 'The bush drums will say: "stay out"', explained the former minister for internal affairs in the state of Baden-Württemberg. 'You are put in a camp and given terrible things to eat, little money and no work permit' (Quoted in N Rathzel, 'Germany: one race, one nation?', *Race and Class*, January-March 1991).

In Italy, former labour minister Carlo Donat Cattin has called on Italians to produce more babies 'to

keep away armadas of immigrants from the southern shores of the Mediterranean', while leading novelist Umberto Eco has warned that immigration would lead to 'an inexorable change in habits and unstoppable inter-breeding that will change the colour of skin, hair and eyes'.

The anti-immigrant hysteria has been accompanied by an official clampdown on foreigners throughout Europe. In France socialist prime minister Edith Cresson described Jacques Chirac's comments as 'shocking'—but announced a new crackdown on 'illegal' immigration including the use of air force planes to stage mass deportations. The simmering conflict between police and youth in the black ghettos near Paris and Lyons has been transformed into open warfare. At least five people, including one policewoman, have died in the battles this year. Similar riots have taken place in Brussels and Rome. Italy and Spain have set up concentration camps to intern anyone suspected of being an 'illegal' immigrant. The official clampdown has given licence to unofficial racists to go on the offensive too. From Berlin to Bari, there have been fire bombings of immigrant hostels and attacks on black communities. As the authorities try to buttress Fortress Europe, the Continent's black community is living in a state of siege.

0.1 per cent

At first sight the panic about immigration is hard to comprehend. After all, the 'perimeter fence' that Major wants has long been in place. Eleven million foreign workers came to Europe in the fifties and sixties, encouraged by the authorities. But following the recession in the early seventies, most European countries imposed severe restrictions on further immigration. In recent years immigration into Britain and France has amounted to 0.1 per cent of their population—a third of the figure for the USA. So, why the sudden consternation about 'a new invasion'?

The new focus on race and immigration has little to do with the

question of numbers. It is primarily the product of the dramatic changes sweeping the world. Throughout the eighties, political insecurity in Europe encouraged the rise of racism. This trend has been exacerbated by the events of the past two years.

Racist reaction

The end of the Cold War which divided Europe has led to profound political and social changes in the West as well as the East. All of the old certainties have been called into question, and the traditional political parties of left, right and centre have been badly disoriented. These developments have been made worse by the arrival of serious economic recession. The governments of Western Europe, whether they be the German Christian Democrats or the French Socialists, have been exposed as politically bankrupt. The overall effect of these changes has been to promote conservatism and reaction as the European establishment searches for something it can hang on to. Racism has intensified as a result. As a *Times* correspondent noted of France last year, 'racism appears to be one of the only subjects that can arouse real parliamentary and press interest'.

Western superiority

The fall-out from the Gulf War has given particular emphasis to Euroracism. Deprived of the old Soviet bogey by the end of the Cold War, the Western authorities have launched a new offensive against the third world in order to demonstrate their moral authority as the champions of civilisation. The reduction of Iraq to rubble and the humiliation of its people have promoted the notion of Western superiority. A new culture of chauvinism about the third world is developing. It has become acceptable once more to express contemptuous opinions about foreigners, immigrants and people from the third world. It is in this context that we need to look at the current debate about race and immigration.

Politicians of the French centre now scramble to take on board the

Refugees behind the wire at Britain's immigrant detention camp

S
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British society is at least as racist as France, Germany or Italy

ideas of the far-right. Attitudes which would have been unacceptable a few years ago are now a routine part of respectable debate. Five years ago when interior minister Charles Pasqua deported 101 Malians on a chartered plane there was a national outcry. One Socialist party deputy compared the action to the deportation of Jews by the Nazis. Today immigrants themselves are compared to Nazis while a socialist prime minister backs mass deportations. Centre politicians make plain that their aim is to outdo National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. Poniatowski has described Le Pen's policies as 'good sense' and added, 'I would even think that my proposals go further than his'. Le Pen has complained that mainstream politicians are 'stealing my copyright'.

Le Pen's agenda

The collapse of the once-powerful Communist Party on the one hand and the fragmentation of the establishment parties on the other has created space for the growth of reaction in France. Politicians of right and left have made one racist concession after another in a bid to retain electoral support. Le Pen now sets the political agenda.

All sides agree that the marginalisation of Muslims is the result of their failure to assimilate into French society rather than the product of institutionalised racism. The authorities have used Muslim support for Iraq in the Gulf War as evidence of their inability to fit into France. *Le Figaro* recently accused blacks and Arabs of 'refusing to become assimilated by a French society whose values they do not acknowledge and whose rules they refuse to respect'. The government has been quick to demonise resistance to racism in France by linking it to the third world. The mayor of Sartrouville, near Paris, called the recent riots 'our *intifada*'. The debate today is not so much about how many blacks to let into France but how many to kick out.

German hostility

If French society has been most polarised by the Gulf War, Germany has been most affected by the collapse of Eastern Europe. The economic costs of unification together with the social costs of large-scale migration of East Europeans to the West has heightened hostility towards all foreigners. At the same time disillusionment with the economic consequences of reunification has paved the way for the growth of reaction in the east. The reunification of Germany has also given greater legitimacy to

nationalism and to the expression of chauvinist sentiments. The effect has been to marginalise still further the Turkish and black communities.

Black workers have never been considered part of German society. No longer even called 'guestworkers', they have simply become 'foreigners'. Indeed Germany does not have an immigration law, just a 'foreigners' law' (*Ausländergesetz*), based on the Nazis' prewar slave labour legislation. While the German authorities deny the existence of racism, *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*—'hostility to foreigners'—makes life increasingly uncomfortable for third world immigrants.

In France and Germany the new climate of racism is expressing itself in different ways. But there is a common theme of racial polarisation and overt hostility to immigrants. This pattern is repeated right across the Continent. Italy, Spain, Belgium: virtually every EC country has recently experienced a clampdown on the black community, riots and rising racial tensions.

Britain seems to be the one country in Europe to buck this trend. The issue of race has not acquired the explosive character it possesses in much of Western Europe. Few mainstream British politicians indulge in the kind of racist rhetoric that passes for respectable debate in Europe and there is a general consensus on the need to maintain good 'race relations'.

British oasis?

The lack of overt racial tension in Britain has led many European blacks to regard this country as a non-racist oasis in a hostile continent. Fabienne Hareau was brought up in Val Fourre, a notorious estate near Paris which was the centre of some of the worst rioting over the summer. Writing in the *European* in August she compared the estate with Brixton. The inhabitants of Val Fourre, she wrote, 'feel neglected'; the people of Brixton, on the other hand, 'have the sense of feeling at home'. In similar vein, black activists in Britain have raised fears that Euroracism could have a detrimental effect on British race relations. 'It will set us back 20 years', was Labour MP Bernie Grant's comment about the impact of 1992 on blacks in Britain.

In fact British society is at least as racist as France, Germany or Italy. Britain has tougher immigration controls than any other EC country; more black people have died in police custody here than anywhere else; discrimination in housing and employment is as common as in Europe. Major's 'perimeter fence' speech and home secretary Kenneth

Baker's clampdown on refugees are in line with Continental attitudes. Yet paradoxically the depth of British racism expresses itself in its invisibility. Black oppression is so deeply entrenched, is so much part of ordinary life, that it is barely recognised as racism.

Different impact

The response to the recent shooting by police officers of Ian Gordon, a black youth from Telford, illustrates the point. As reported elsewhere in this month's *Living Marxism*, reactions to the death made clear that the racism suffered by the local black community paralleled the French experience. Yet the impact of the shooting on British politics was very different.

In France the shooting of a young Arab, Djamel Chitou, in March created a fierce controversy and became part of a national debate about racism. The incident polarised public opinion and led to widespread clashes between police and Arab youth. In Telford there were a couple of nights of localised rioting. The incident made relatively little national impact and what debate there was seemed to focus not on racism but on the incompetence of police marksmen. Every major controversy about race in Britain is now being similarly depoliticised.

Not an issue

The British establishment has long recognised the social instability that overt racial conflict would cause. Hence it has been careful to keep racism as low-key as possible. Since the sixties successive governments have followed a two-pronged strategy. They have institutionalised racism through immigration laws, internal controls and the criminalisation strategy. But they have also institutionalised anti-racism, creating an official race relations industry to mop up the mess created by black oppression. The authorities have been particularly successful in incorporating anti-racist activists and black leaders into the machine. The effect has been to entrench racism in British society while at the same time removing it as a political issue.

The black community in Britain is as much under siege as those in Europe—but anti-racist activists don't seem to notice. The arguments promoted by black leaders such as Bernie Grant, about the 'exceptional' nature of British race relations, make it easier for the authorities to intensify racial oppression while keeping racism off the political agenda.



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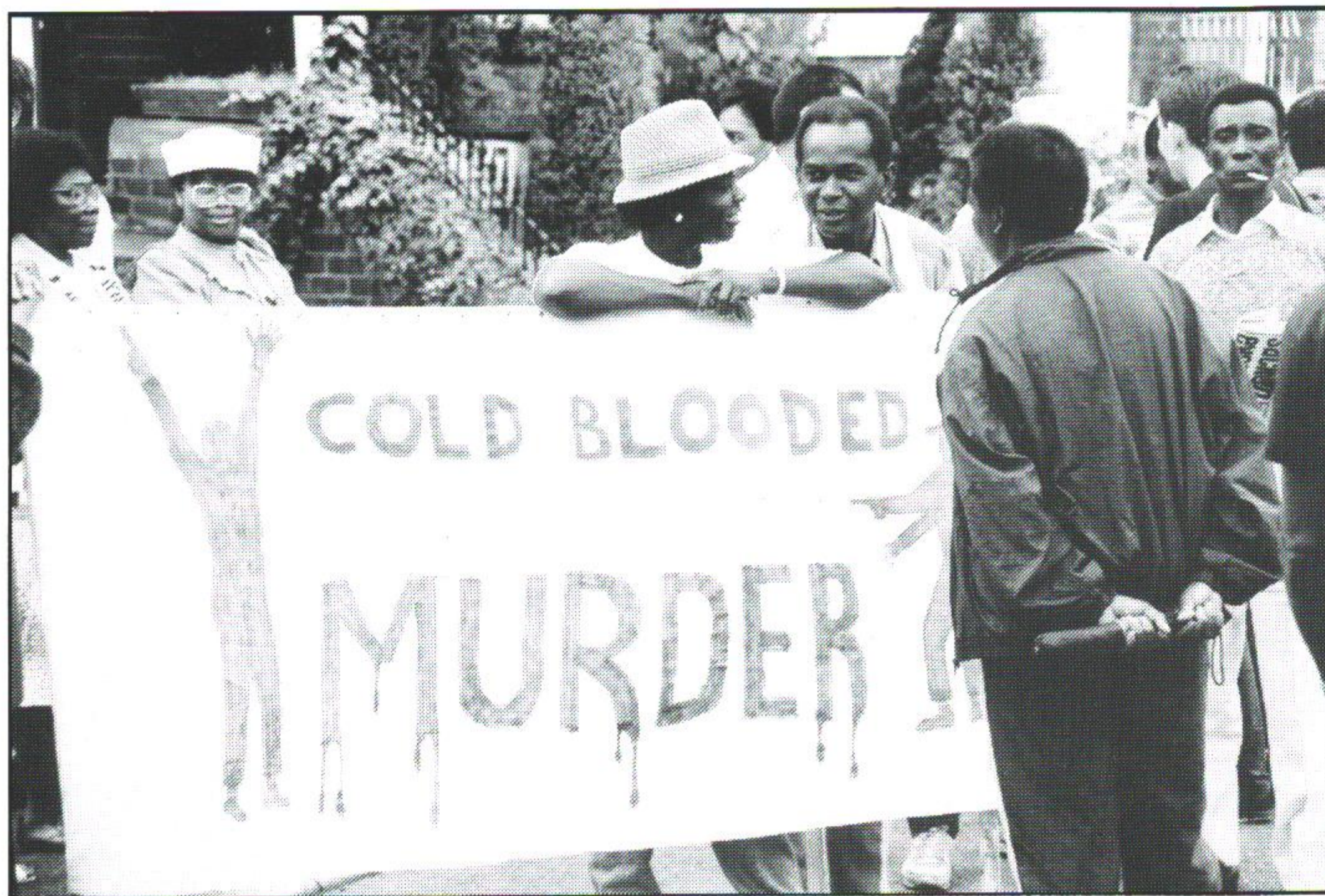
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It happens in Telford, too



In August, the fatal shooting of a young black man by armed police sparked off several nights of rioting. But this was not a deprived inner-city area. It was Telford, in the heart of the Shropshire countryside. Emmanuel Oliver tells the story of a quiet country town where racism is part of the landscape



Telford sells itself as the town for anybody who wants to escape the rat race. The TV adverts show happy workers in spanking new offices, relaxed executives golfing in the countryside and families taking life easy in the shopping malls. 'Telford,' says the reassuring voice, 'the success story continues.' That claim has been dented by the recession. But the local authorities remain keen to promote Telford as a peaceful place in a rural setting, which also enjoys the amenities of a large town; close to the conurbation of the west midlands but not part of it.

In August, Telford became an ad man's nightmare. Television news viewers saw images of a town torn with rioting after the police shot dead Ian Gordon, a 24-year old black

man. Ian Gordon had a history of psychiatric problems but was well-known locally as a harmless character. Police claimed that he threatened them with a gun. It turned out to be an unloaded air pistol which he had been playing with.

Angry youths attacked local police several nights running after Ian Gordon's death. On 17 August 500 people marched to the railway station in Wellington, one of Telford new town's component villages, where Ian Gordon was shot. Many were from Hadley, one of the town's older villages and its main black area. They were joined by local white people, and the march received a sympathetic response along the way.

The West Mercia police were defensive, constantly trying to reassure marchers and bystanders that the armed police who shot Ian Gordon were not local men. 'They were from Birmingham, you know what they're like there', said one genial sergeant. The main concern of local businessmen and shopkeepers was 'to put all this behind us and get back to business as usual'. The same sentiments were expressed in the media by Telford dignitaries. 'What we want', they all said, 'is for things to return to normal.'

The trouble is that, for Telford's 4000 black people, racism is a 'normal' part of life in Dreamtown.

Beneath the surface

Hadley, where Ian Gordon lived along with the majority of black people in Telford, is nothing like an inner-city ghetto. I didn't see anything which resembled the desperate poverty and urban squalor of Hackney's Kingsmead estate or Moss Side's crescents (known in the gutter press as Britain's Bronx). The implication of much of the media coverage of the Ian Gordon shooting and the rioting which followed was that things like this don't happen in places like Shropshire. They happen in Toxteth or Brixton, where many black people suffer unemployment, bad housing and poverty.

But there is one crucial ingredient missing in the media recipe for what makes a riot: racism. This was what sparked the inner-city uprisings of the early eighties, rather than simply unemployment and poverty. And the experience of racism meant that the black community in Telford was bound to react with anger to the police shooting of Ian Gordon.

Appearances can be deceptive. On the surface, Telford may look like the nice, quiet town in the television adverts. But black people who live there face much the same problems as black people anywhere in Britain. They face discrimination in jobs,

housing and social services. And they face police harassment and abuse on a daily basis.

Telford's unemployment rate is lower than that of Birmingham. Yet blacks fare worse than whites, just as they do in any town or city in Britain. For young blacks, employment prospects are bleak. 'There is work here', said Clin. 'But if you're black it's always the shit jobs, driving a taxi or working in a factory.' 'There are jobs' agreed Chris Thompson. 'But once they know you're from Hadley or see you're black they don't want to know.' There are firms in Wellington which have not employed a black person since blacks arrived in Telford 30 years ago. Those that do employ black people are little better.

Normal policing

Rahman has worked at the GKN Sankey factory near Hadley for more than 30 years. The factory once had a workforce of 15 000, today it is closer to 2000. The workforce is mainly black but discrimination is rife. Most of the white employees are managers, supervisors or foremen, while almost all the blacks have been doing the same job for years without the prospect of promotion.

Discrimination is not confined to the jobs market. For the black community, police harassment is a normal part of life in Telford. Young blacks from Hadley were complaining about growing tension between the police and the community for some time before Ian Gordon was shot dead.

There have been several police raids on homes in the Hadley area. The police used the same pretexts they used to justify raids in Manchester's Moss Side in August: the search for drugs and weapons. The criminalisation of the black community goes on wherever blacks are living together in any numbers.

'Day in and day out'

According to locals, the police love to drive through Hadley and abuse its black residents. Brian described how they 'drive up and down the Hadley shopping precinct, call us names and then wait for us to react'. Others described another police pastime well-known to any black person living in a big city: harassing black motorists. 'I've been stopped five times in the last three months for no reason other than the fact that I'm black', said Andy. 'They don't deal with whites in this way.'

Abdul, a cab driver, sat with four other Asian drivers in one cab talking about working in Wellington. 'This is the most racist part of Britain. They do all the things they do to white drivers—puking in the

cab, shitting on the seats—but we have to put up with violence. If someone hits me, I'm the one who gets hassle and the police will call it a civil offence. If I fight back, the police nick me. This is day in and day out.'

All the cab drivers had tales of beatings and police indifference, retaliation and police action. Why did they carry on? 'If you're black you work in the factories or on the cabs', said Abdul. 'We can't get other jobs.' In other words, it's normal.

The police in Telford might be keen to distance themselves from their big city counterparts from Birmingham. But it seems that the West Mercia police are not averse to a bit of selective framing in the style of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad.

Michael, a Hadley resident of 25 years, was recently arrested on a charge of armed robbery. The police told him he was guilty despite being told that he wasn't even in town that day. Presumably unable to find any black Telford residents to participate in an identity parade, the police took Michael to Wolverhampton. Nobody else in the line looked like the suspect, who was supposed to be dreadlocked. The witnesses unsurprisingly identified Michael. The charges were dropped only after a local woman identified Michael as having passed by her house and waved to her at the time of the robbery. The police asked her if she made a habit of waving at young black men.

No surprise

Given what they have to put up with at the hands of a racist police force, it's hardly surprising that local blacks took to the streets after the death of Ian Gordon. The response of the police was no surprise either, as they condemned the 'rowdiness and vandalism' of black youth. The association of blacks with crime is standard police policy everywhere from Toxteth to Telford.

It is not possible to say for sure that Ian Gordon was shot dead deliberately because of the colour of his skin. But local blacks have been given every reason to think so by their experience of police racism. It is certain that the background of racism in Telford was the reason why their anger boiled over in response to the shooting. And it also seems certain that the increasingly repressive and paramilitary style of policing Britain's black communities will result in more shootings and more deaths.

It takes an incident like the death of Ian Gordon to expose the racism which is part and parcel of 'normal' life for blacks throughout Britain.

A public order exercise

Is a police riot the usual response to the theft of a few high-performance cars? Andrew Calcutt sees the state's need to assert its authority as the real reason why the police invaded Oxford's Blackbird Leys estate

The Blackbird Leys housing estate made big news in early September as local people confronted riot police. The Force claimed that they went into the estate to stop the dangerous joy-riding of stolen cars. Their real motives were less public-spirited.

Situated on the southern outskirts of Oxford, Blackbird Leys is built around extensive playing fields. Gardens are well-kept and the row of shops is neat and tidy. But the maisonettes and terraced housing of Blackbird Leys hardly live up to the image of the affluent South. Neither rich nor ragged, this is an unexceptional estate which could be almost anywhere in Britain. Yet its residents have been singled out and subjected to a barrage of physical and verbal abuse by police, politicians and journalists.

Riot Act

After four nights of disturbances, Tory home secretary Kenneth Baker condemned 'lawlessness and criminality' on Blackbird Leys, and warned that 'penalties of 10 years imprisonment are available to the courts'. Leslie Curtis, chairman of the Police Federation, called for the reintroduction of the Riot Act. Journalists conspired with police to concoct scare stories about hooded gangs charging spectators £2 to watch stunt-driving of stolen cars. The media portrayed the youth of the south Oxford estate as mindless thugs, and praised the police as 'the

lonely embattled voice of authority' (*Guardian*, 4 September).

On the night the disturbances began, the police were far from lonely. They came to Blackbird Leys mob-handed, dressed in riot gear with black tape over their numbers. Local residents described how 'married couples were coming out of the pub and going over to the Chinese when we were bombarded with police. They were hitting with nightsticks, not truncheons. People ran for their lives'. Women were punched and kicked. A resident saw 'a policeman grip a woman up on her face and say "nigger-lover, if you like black meat you must be enjoying this"'. A police dog was set on one man, leaving him with a gaping stomach wound. When his mother protested against his arrest, she was told to 'fuck off home, you dirty bitch', then thrown into a police van and locked up overnight, along with her other, 12-year old, son. Another juvenile is said to have been held over the weekend without access to a lawyer.

Breaking heads

On the night of Friday 30 August, police snatched 17 people apparently at random and charged them with public order offences. At one point a police van toured the estate with an officer shouting 'there's room for two more'. On the Sunday night, the tally was nine. On Monday afternoon, police made three arrests, and another 16 on the night of Tuesday 3 September. Most were

bailed and put on curfew from 10.30pm to 7am. 'You'll know them because they've all got bruises', said local residents. One youth was beaten so badly 'his swollen face was level with his nose'. 'I need protection from the police—I mean someone who will protect me from them', said one woman.

Many residents were adamant that 'the police came in to break heads, taking it out on people who were just around. This is a relaxed place'. Several youths insisted that the disturbances 'never would have happened if they hadn't gone in on Friday'. Meanwhile Thames Valley police maintained they had taken necessary action as part of a campaign to stamp out 'hotting'—the stealing and display-driving of high-performance cars.

Two fingers

For 40 years, since the days of James Dean and Jack Kerouac's hero Dean Moriarty, teenagers have been getting their kicks from stolen fast cars. Hotting, or something like it, happens in every city in Britain. With its inactive youth club and a prohibitively expensive leisure centre, Blackbird Leys is typical of many estates. For a frustrated teenager, watching or participating in a rubber-burning display of 50 mph handbrake turns is 'fascination, excitement, adrenalin'. It is also a way of giving two-fingers to authority, and to the police in particular.

Auto-crime is usually near the bottom of the list of police priorities.



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

In the late eighties, the Metropolitan Police announced that it would no longer be a 'specified priority'. So if the used vehicle parked outside your front door is taken without permission, don't expect the police to put out a 'calling all cars' signal. Only when car theft is associated with joy-riding and youthful contempt for authority do they start to give chase, often with dire consequences for pedestrians and other motorists. Indeed it seems as if police drivers chasing stolen cars are more likely to cause accidents than the joy-riders they're supposed to be protecting us from.

Public safety and ending the nuisance of everyday car theft are not major concerns for the police. The most 'specified priority' for the police today is always public order—that is, asserting the state's authority over the public. This was the question they set out to address when they went into Blackbird Leys on 30 August and the nights that followed.

No to no-go

Speaking at a press conference at Thames Valley headquarters, chief inspector Geoffrey Allcraft declared that 'in no way will this become a no-go area'. The question of control was clearly uppermost in the mind of the home secretary when he appeared on Radio Four's *Today*: 'I am not prepared to have scenes like this anywhere in the country...the message has got across to these estates and particularly to these youngsters that the police mean

business...the problem we have on our streets now is to retain law and order.'

'To retain law and order' means above all to keep control of the streets. Baker cannot tolerate public humiliation of the authorities, even if only by joy-riding youths. On Blackbird Leys, the 'business' of the police involved using the residents of an obscure provincial housing estate in a sensationalised national campaign designed to portray an authoritarian crackdown in the guise of public safety and common sense.

'Curfew all the time'

Even before the riot cops went in on 30 August, Blackbird Leys had felt the smack of police authority. Teenagers report 'curfew all the time. You can be anywhere on the estate and they tell you to go home or be arrested, or they walk into the Chinese, tell you to leave a meal you've paid for and go home immediately'. A 32-year old woman explained why she 'sent my son away to his father in New York because he was always getting stopped. Then they called me a prostitute'. A black resident complained it was not uncommon 'to be put in a van on the way home'.

Ever since Blackbird Leys was built, police violence has been part of life on the estate. As a result, bucking the authority of the police is something whole families identify with and it's no wonder that the hotters were drawing a sympathetic audience for their defiant displays.

Night after night throughout the summer months, groups of people stood around 'the arena'—the junction next to the row of shops—where displays took place. Local police responded by clearing the area. A council worker in his late thirties complained that 'they order you to get in your house when you are sitting on the wall outside, you're not allowed to drink a cup of tea outside on a hot night'.

The other displays

Then on 30 August, Thames Valley police launched their paramilitary operation. In attempting to re-establish their authority, however, they only engendered greater hostility and encouraged more people to face them down. One resident summed up the mood which followed the police attack: 'Now there are guys with mortgages coming out to stop people they know being arrested. Women saw their husbands getting twisted up. Husbands saw their wives given stress. This man is here because his son was beaten up. Now it's Blackbird Leys against the police.'

Police, politicians and the media have made it look as if Blackbird Leys is a nightmare-city, populated by swarms of hooded gangsters. Many of the 9500 people on Blackbird Leys see things differently. The 'display' driving they can live with. It's the paramilitary displays of police power which worry them. ●



The

truth



about



the

'coup'

If it was a 'hardline coup', why did it have such a soft centre? If it was defeated by a 'popular revolution', why were KGB colonels leading the opposition? And if the bad days are over, why are things still getting worse for Soviet workers? Robert Knight, author of *Stalinism in Crisis*, takes issue with the standard Western explanations of August's events

The heavily anti-communist slant of Western coverage of recent events in the Soviet Union has obscured what was really taking place. Commentators have encouraged some important misconceptions about what happened—and why. They claim that a hardline coup was attempted against the Gorbachev government by people who wished to defend the old Stalinist system against the introduction of the market, and that it was defeated by a popular revolution, led by the forces of democracy. None of these ‘facts’ are accurate.

Guilty government

A coup is normally associated with an attempt by force to overthrow and replace a government. A coup may involve a few politicians or generals from the old regime but its basic aim is to establish a new government. By that yardstick it was a peculiar kind of coup in the Soviet Union since the main participant in this supposed coup was the government itself. Government ministers, the top state officials from the army, KGB and interior ministry, and the leadership of the Communist Party were all involved with the short-lived junta. The only person to be excluded was Gorbachev himself, and the emergency committee which ousted him even suggested that his removal from power was only temporary.

The failure of the coup has not meant the restoration of the old government, precisely because the old government was so heavily implicated in what happened. Rather than a coup, it is more accurate to see what happened in the Soviet Union in August as an attempt by a governing clique which was losing power to reassert its authority through a government crackdown—an attempt which was doomed to failure before it began.

Bad timing

The main factor in the timing of the attempted crackdown seems to have been the imminent signing of a new union treaty between Gorbachev and several of the republics. The significance of the union treaty is that it would have ratified the devolution of power from the centre to the republics. The central Soviet state and Communist Party authorities reacted against the treaty because it would have formally undermined their authority.

The problem facing them, however, was that the proposed union treaty would only have ratified what had already taken place. Over the past six years, attempts to reform

the Soviet Union have had a fragmentary impact upon the ruling bureaucracy. Different sections of the bureaucracy have carved out local power bases for themselves, often by harnessing nationalist movements in the republics. They have done so in order to retain some kind of legitimacy, as the authority of the old Stalinist regime has crumbled away under the impact of the perestroika reform process.

Out of touch

The accelerating process of fragmentation meant that by the time the central state bureaucrats tried to assert their authority in August, they had none left to assert. Apart from at the very top level, the central state machinery had already gone over to the Russian government. This process was well under way before the attempted coup. One major effect of the ‘coup’ was to concentrate the minds of those who would have been responsible for a crackdown in Moscow—the colonels of the KGB troops—and make them realise that it was time to jump over to the side of Russian president Boris Yeltsin.

The leaders of the ‘coup’ were so out of touch that almost as soon as the orders were given, their efforts collapsed. And then so did they, retreating to sick-beds or the comfort of alcohol or suicide. It rapidly became clear that they had embarked upon their ill-fated adventure out of desperation, and had no idea what to do next. They were a far cry from the hard-headed Stalinist militarists depicted in the West.

All pro-market

It is also wrong to imagine that the ‘coup’ was an attempt to prevent the introduction of the market. Since the early eighties there has been a consensus within the Soviet bureaucracy that the state-run economy was finished, and that the introduction of the market was the elite’s only realistic survival strategy.

The Soviet government ministers who attempted the coup/crackdown were the same ones who had been trying to introduce the market. The KGB leadership which backed the ‘coup’ played a key role in getting Gorbachev appointed in 1985, and has supported him throughout the period of perestroika. It is absurd to try to pretend that all of these people simultaneously turned their backs on the experience of the past and, overnight, fell in love again with failed Stalinist economics.

In fact, the only statement which the emergency committee that replaced Gorbachev issued made clear that they were intent on

continuing the reform process and the move to the market. Their main concern was to maintain central control over this process. In retrospect their efforts seem farcical and it is tempting to see the whole thing as a collective brainstorm but this would also be wrong. From their point of view there was a rational basis to what they tried to do, even if its application was ridiculous.

Stop-go reforms

Ever since the beginnings of perestroika the Soviet bureaucracy has been grappling with an enormously difficult problem. It has tried to reform the economy and to introduce the market while retaining the power and privileges which it enjoyed under the old order. It does not take much imagination to work out the consequences. Even the dullest bureaucrat would be able to see that once the Stalinist past was put to question so would be the influence of those responsible for it. While collectively the bureaucracy has been all for the market, individually they are terrified of losing out in the process. For this reason the watchword of reform has been caution. During the perestroika years the Gorbachev regime has tried piecemeal reforms rather than a fundamental break with the past.

Gorbachev himself has long embodied this cautious approach, one day pressing for change, the next putting his foot down and trying to reassert control. The ‘coup’ was trying to continue this process of stop-go. Unfortunately for the members of the junta, the changes had already gone too far for them to be slowed down from the centre. Although it had not yet transformed society, the reform process had fragmented the bureaucracy with the results that became clear to the world when the junta was left without a state to enforce its state of emergency.

No revolution

Western analysts were wrong to make out that the ‘coup’ was a hardline communist plot against the market, and they were just as far off the mark in suggesting that it was stopped by a popular revolution. In fact what was most striking about the entire affair was the relative passivity of the Soviet people throughout. Only a very small percentage of the populations of Moscow and Leningrad came out on the streets to oppose the state of emergency at the behest of their local leaders. Yeltsin’s call for a general strike was largely ignored, support from Soviet miners being less enthusiastic than it was for their previous strike this year against



Gorbachev's government.

Opposition to the 'coup' was run by local state officials. The people played a subordinate role throughout. This was shown in its most grotesque form when the statue of Yakov Sverdlov (the first Soviet head of state) was toppled in Moscow. Far from being torn down by an angry crowd, it was dismantled by municipal workmen in hard hats while the crowd was kept behind barriers by the police. This is not the usual scenario of a people's revolution.

Mother Russia

What took place was not a battle between the people and the plotters but a squalid struggle for supremacy between different factions of the bureaucracy. In so far as the Soviet people chose sides it was with that section of the bureaucracy which has moved fastest to disassociate itself from its Stalinist past. But there is no great positive enthusiasm for any political movement in the Soviet Union today.

The outcome of all this is that the Party has gone, the labels have changed, but the bureaucrats are still running things. Now, however, it is largely through the Russian state rather than the Soviet state. A quick glance at Yeltsin's appointees reveals that they are almost all Stalinists.

The Soviet state machine is in the process of transferring its allegiance to the Russian government *en bloc*. In fact, Russia has always been at the centre of the union. All that has happened is that a section of the bureaucracy, the old central state and party authorities, have now been excluded from power. Otherwise the changes are a *de jure* recognition of what has always been the case, Russian dominance in the region.

This entire region—the former Soviet Union—is now too unstable to make any meaningful predictions about exactly what will happen next. However, there are some identifiable trends which seem set to accelerate.

There has been a breakdown of the old system of central control of resources. Under this system the centre took control of as much of society's resources as it could get its hands on and gave back as little as possible. The system guaranteed the privileges of the bureaucrats who worked in it. Now that this process has been disrupted, bureaucrats at every level in society are forced to try to grab what they can. This will further speed up the process of fragmentation.

Even those areas which have no interest in breaking away from Russia will be forced to assume as much local control as they can for fear of losing everything. Regions

which have a long-term interest in trying to maintain relations with Russia are also in the short term being propelled away from it, hence the declaration of independence of a republic like Uzbekistan—an economically suicidal move if it were seriously carried through.

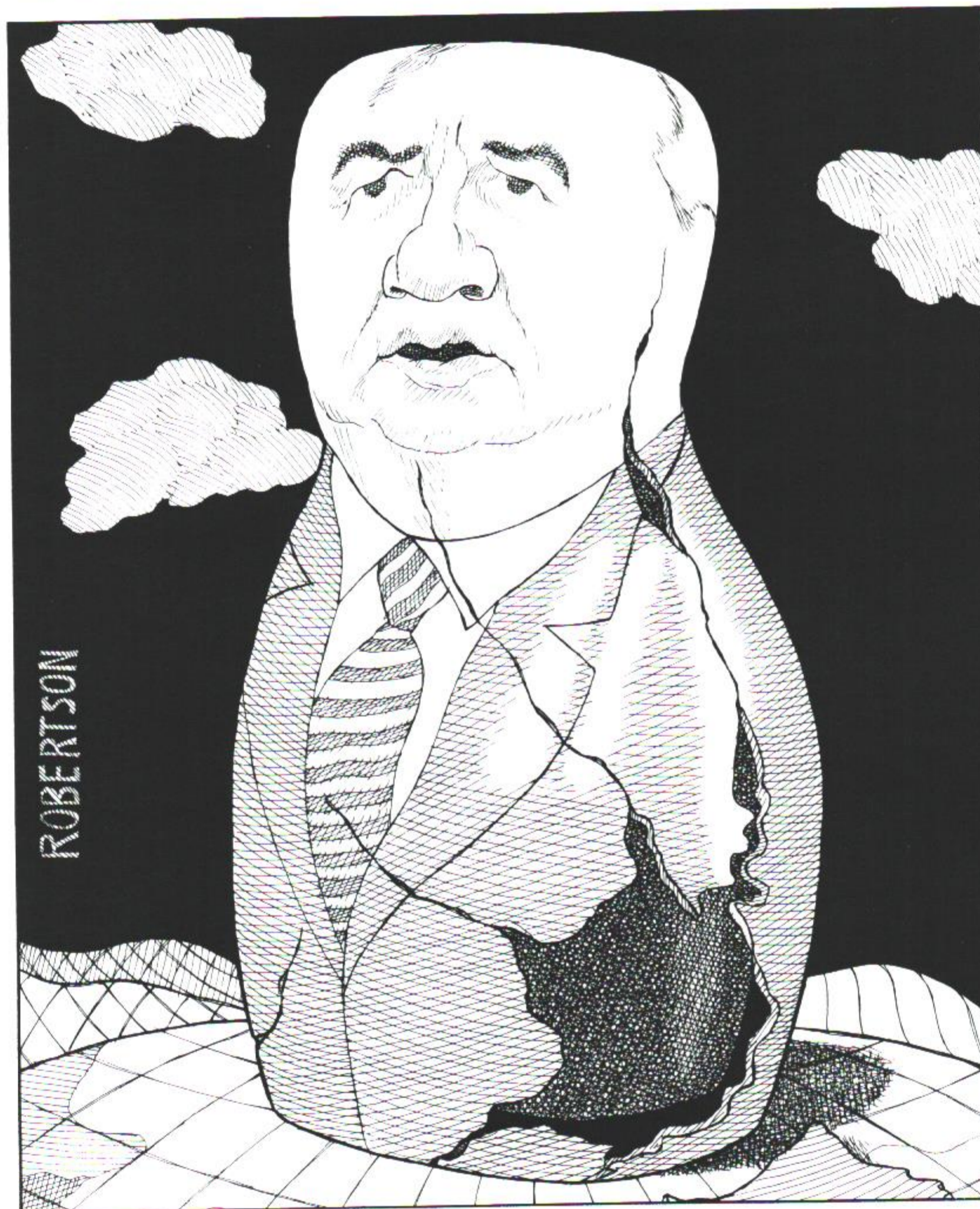
Worse still

The faster rate of fragmentation can only add further to the dislocations within Soviet society and make the existing economic crisis worse still. At the same time most bureaucrats understand that total fragmentation of the Union does not suit their best interests. That is why there have been efforts since the failure of the coup to try to salvage something out of the collapse of the Union. The future of the region will depend on how the tension between the centrifugal process of fragmentation and the bureaucrats' need for some kind of central authority is worked out.

In the meantime the unresolved political crisis means that Western capitalists are even less likely to invest in the region. With the exception of the Baltic states, which already have a working relationship with the capitalist countries on the other shores of the Baltic, the Soviet Union will be shunned by Western investors until some sort of stable order is established. The West's central concern is not democracy but stability, however it has to be imposed.

Stormy future

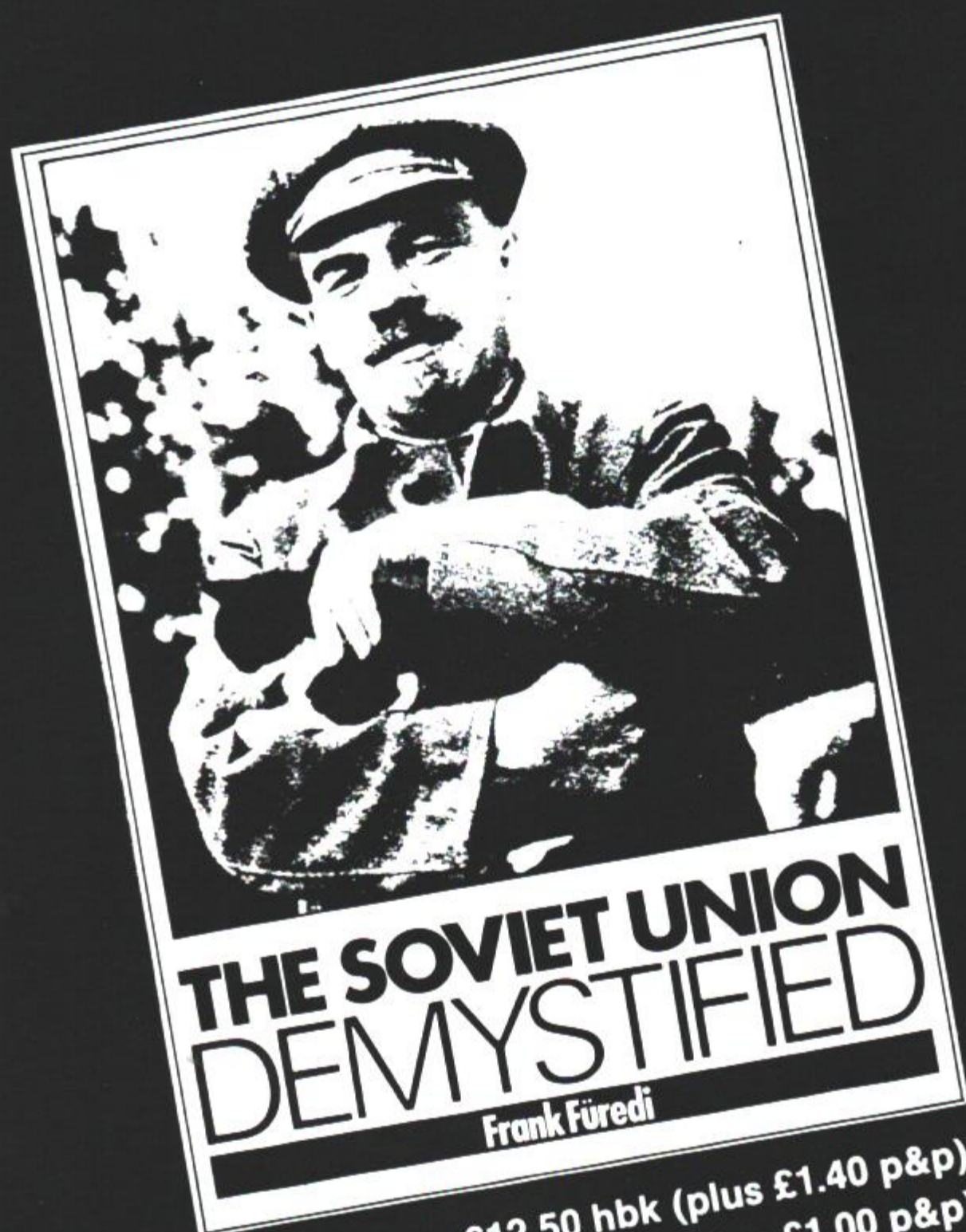
A necessary precondition for Western investment has always been the disciplining of the Soviet working class into accepting mass unemployment and wage cuts. This is a concern which has united every section of the Soviet bureaucracy—junta members, Gorbachev and Yeltsin alike. They all accept the need to crack down on society if they are to make the market function in dire economic conditions. Indeed, months before the 'coup' and declaration of a state of emergency, Gorbachev had assumed new presidential powers allowing him to take similarly repressive steps. No doubt many among the Western authorities are now hoping that Yeltsin, boosted by his temporary surge of popularity, will be the man to restore stability and seriously set about the process of rationalising Soviet industry. Whether he is or not, a stormy future seems guaranteed. Whatever else remains unresolved, we can be sure that the working class is going to bear the brunt of the bureaucrats' attempt to establish a market economy on the third world model. ●



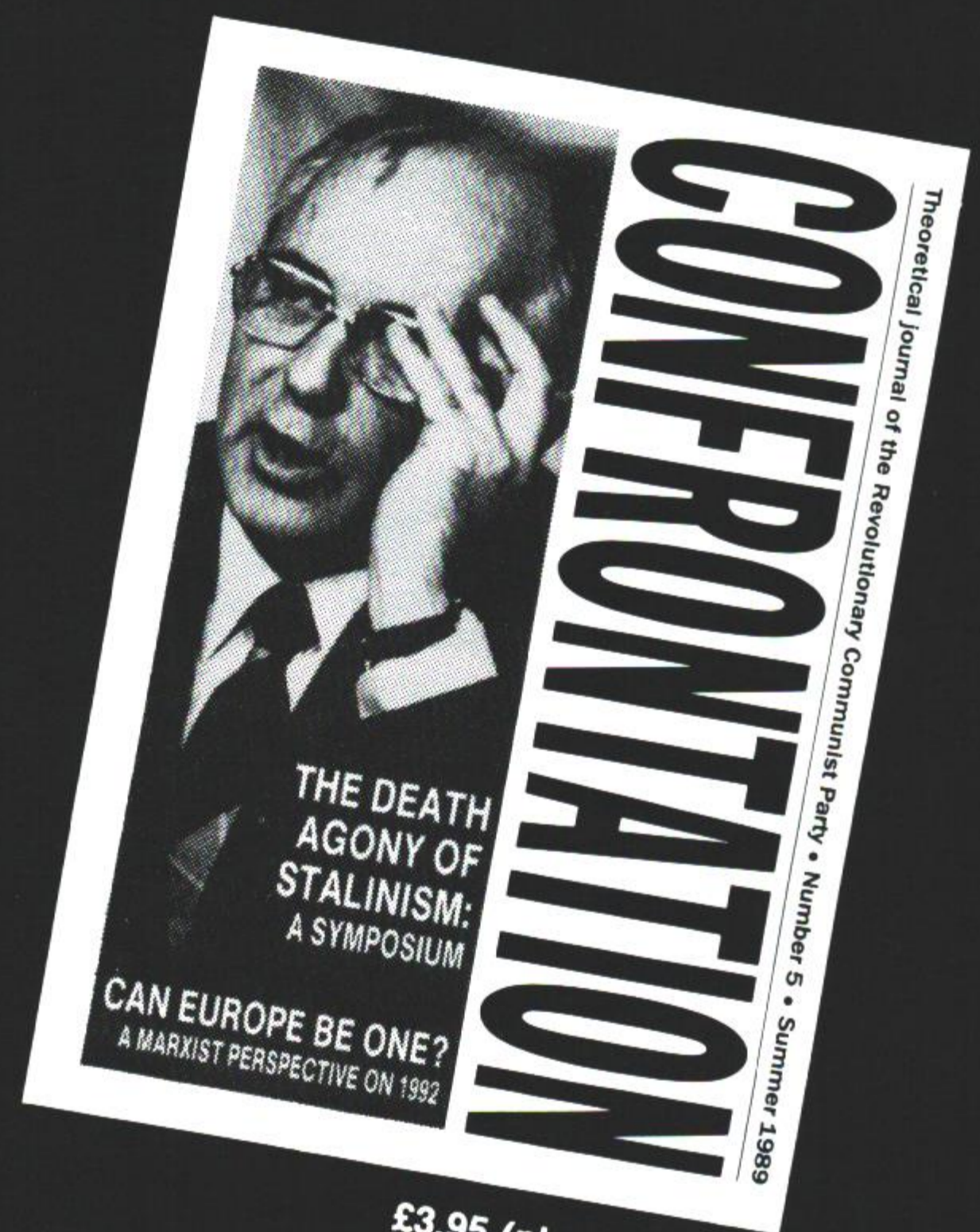
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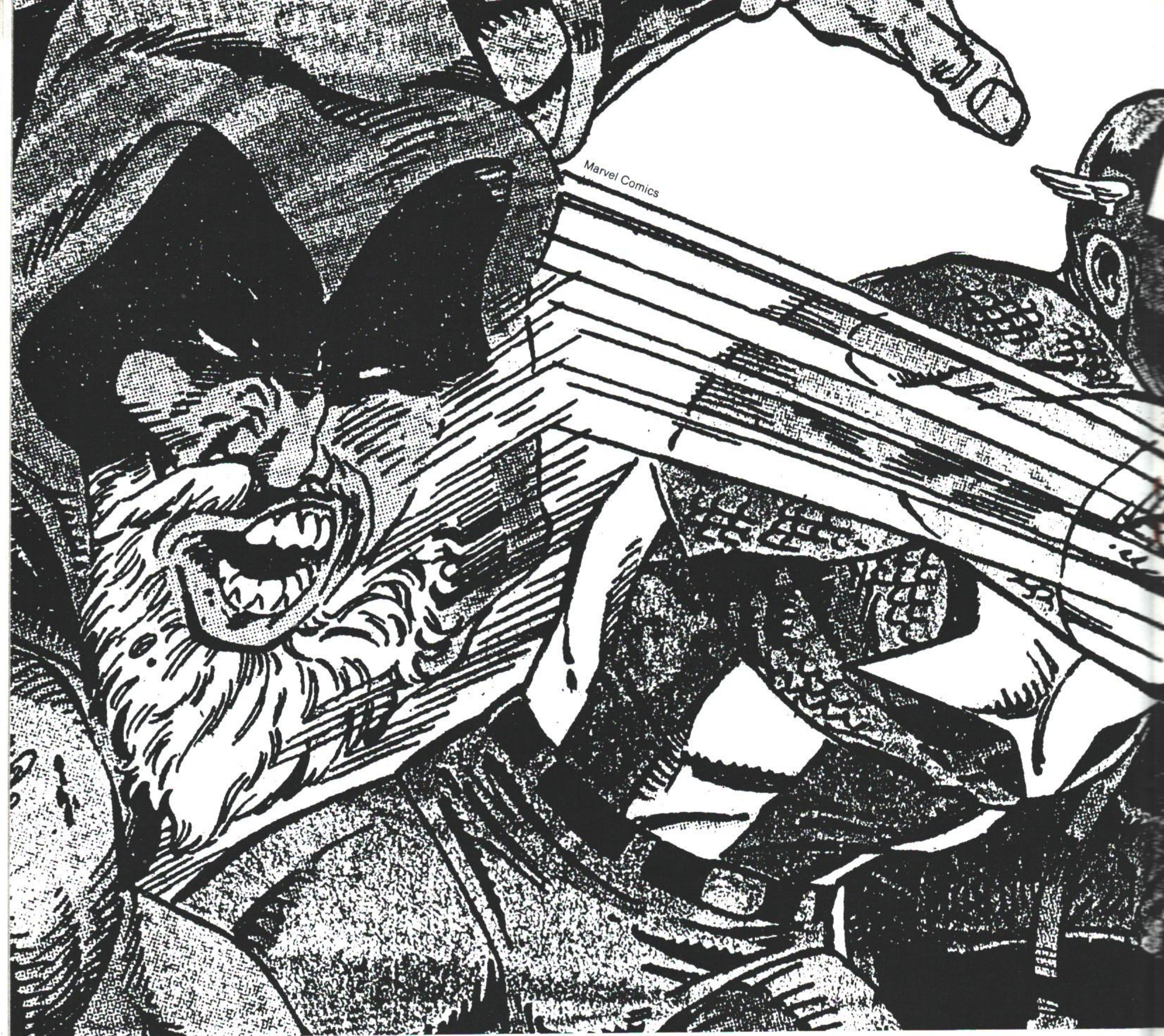


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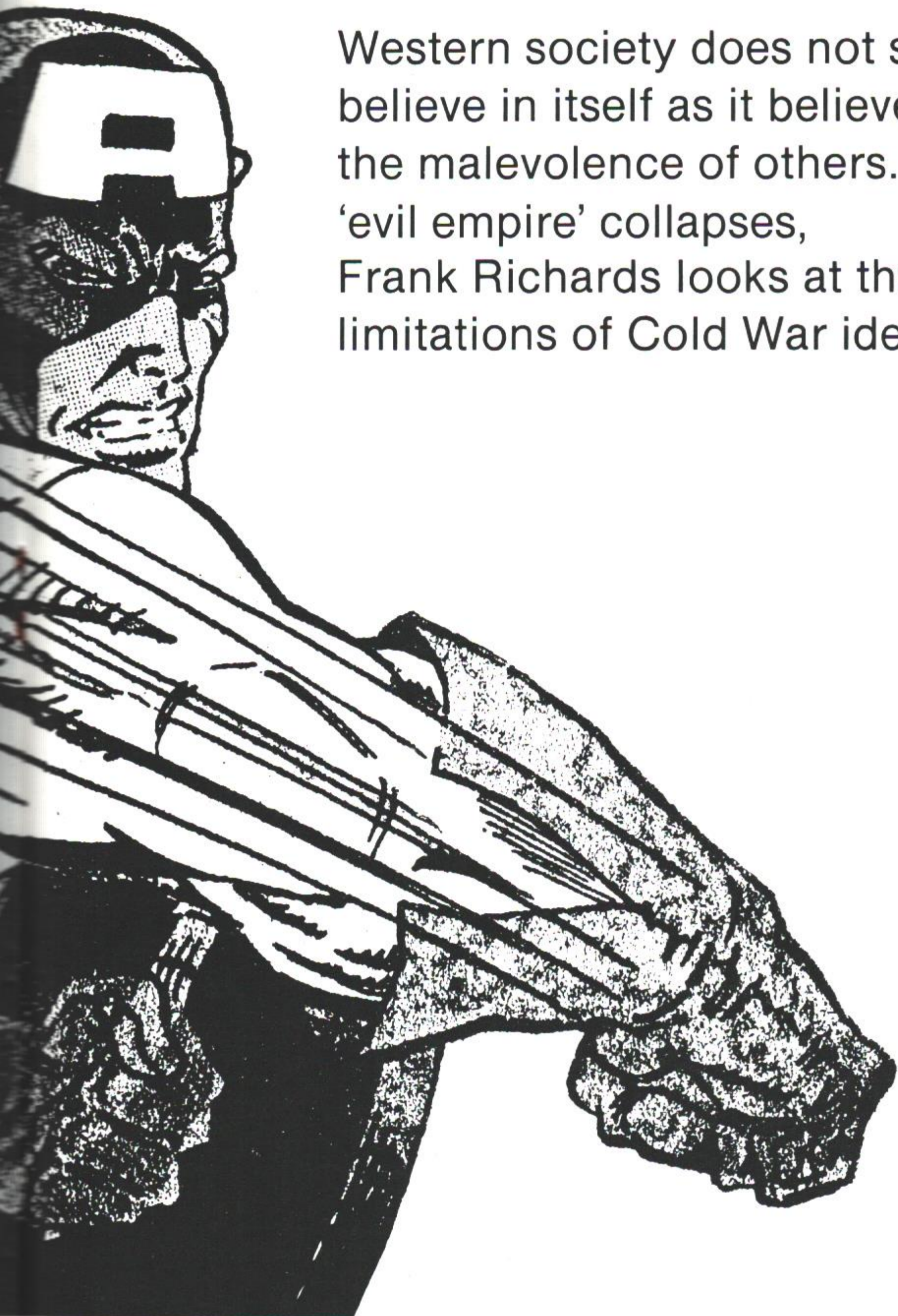
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Marvel Comics

The Good West and the Evil East



Western society does not so much believe in itself as it believes in the malevolence of others. As the 'evil empire' collapses, Frank Richards looks at the limitations of Cold War ideology

In the West, events in the Soviet Union have been transformed into a kind of morality play. While they suffer the punishment of God, we can reap the reward of our goodness. In this relationship, the moral authority of the West and the evil in the East are both unproblematic concepts. No further discussion is required. So it is only to be expected that when the virtuous British prime minister John Major visits China, he should lecture his hosts about the democratic way of life.

All of a sudden it has become fashionable to lecture 'them' on a wide variety of subjects. While Major holds forth on the meaning of freedom in Beijing, one of his ministers, Lynda Chalker reprimands those third world countries who still dare to demonstrate a shred of independence from the West. British

ministers are convinced that they have the moral authority to pass judgement on every aspect of life abroad.

Sometimes, the images of Britain's civilising mission assume ludicrous proportions. What could be more amusing than the sight of our rotund chancellor of the exchequer, Norman Lamont, flying off to Moscow to give 'them' some sound advice on how to run the economy? Here we have a chancellor presiding over an economic nightmare, with a track record that is less than convincing, crossing the world to offer advice to others. Our Norman, although not convinced that Britain is in the middle of a recession, is certain that he has mastered the essentials of the Soviet economy. Like nineteenth-century missionaries, fervent British men and women are being dispatched to educate the

savages that inhabit Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The fact that hardly anyone is questioning this charade is testimony to the influence of all-purpose anti-communist ideology in the West. By continually setting up Stalinism as a counterpoint to the West, the capitalist world can be made to look extremely appealing. After all, who is going to remind the expert Norman Lamont in Moscow that unemployment in Britain has risen by another 50 000? In the USA they do it even better. All you need is a steady supply of pictures showing president George Bush fishing, golfing and throwing the ball around as he comments on the internal affairs of the Soviet Union to create the impression that America is singularly devoid of any social problems. Having overcome such mundane matters as urban decay, racism and economic stagnation, it appears that Bush is fully entitled to act as the disinterested arbiter over the affairs of any nation.

Credit not due

Bush and Major can hardly believe their good fortune. Two rather undistinguished politicians who have yet to accomplish anything at home are nevertheless regarded as leading world statesmen. What is the secret of their success? Their reputation is based entirely on apparent successes in foreign policy. Or, to be more precise, Bush and, to a lesser extent, Major are the beneficiaries of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Western rulers can claim credit for the fall out which has followed the Soviet collapse. In reality all the changes have been brought about by the internal erosion of Soviet power. But Bush and Major are quite happy to claim responsibility for developments over which they exercised no influence. To put it bluntly, Soviet collapse makes the West look good. That is why the G7 leaders have every interest in dragging out the disintegration of the Soviet 'empire' for as long as possible. The collapse of the old enemy endows the Western way of life with legitimacy. All this publicity comes for free, from Russia with love.

Right all along

The foreign policy windfall for the West is considerable. Soviet collapse can easily be interpreted to mean that the West was right all along about *everything*. There is no longer any need to justify Britain's invasion of Suez in 1956 or to explain away America's defeat in Vietnam. The humiliating decline of



the 'evil empire' serves as conclusive proof that these events, and all other Western actions during the Cold War years, were justified and necessary. The Western authorities' easily won triumph in the sphere of diplomacy stands in sharp contrast to the ignominious failure of their domestic policies.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union helps to boost the credibility of conservative solutions. It seems to represent the revenge of the past, and to confirm yet again the conservative dictum that the project of changing society is doomed from the start. The failure of Stalinism is probably the most convincing argument in the intellectual armoury of modern conservatism. The decline of the left internationally lends further force to the argument.

For the first time this century, the capitalist class today feels free to treat communism and other left-wing ideas with derision. During the past few months the tone of anti-communist propaganda has shifted towards ridicule and a sarcastic scorn. As the farce unfolds in Moscow, the traditional heavy handed anti-communist fare seems quite inappropriate. The more light-hearted orientation of red-baiting is symptomatic of the fact that Western capitalism now fears neither Stalinism nor its own working class. More than any other ideological phenomenon, this shift towards ridicule symbolises the shift in the balance of political forces in favour of the capitalists. It expresses a more widely-held cynicism about any serious attempt to transform the way that society is organised.

The absence of any *positive* argument for capitalism is a fatal flaw of Cold War ideology

The capitalist system reaps enormous benefits from such cynicism. That is why the rulers of the West are keen to prolong the death of Stalinism for as long as possible. There is now an established custom of burying and reburying communism time and again. As we have noted previously in *Living Marxism*, many people in the West could be excused for believing that Stalinism was buried at the time the Berlin Wall came down. But no, another funeral was organised after

the farcical coup against Gorbachev. The Soviet funerals seem set to continue. And there is still Cuba, China and North Korea waiting to be buried. Soon we shall have numerous anniversaries, all serving to remind us of who is Good and who is Evil. There can be no doubt that this story will run and run. It is of such vital importance to the ideological stability of the Western ruling classes that nothing will be spared in the bid to prevent anti-communism losing its momentum.

Rewriting history

The reproduction of Cold War ideology has become big business. Thousands of academics are now employed to rewrite history. The media is mobilised to sell the message of the Western way of life. To take one example: the construction of the image of independent Baltic republics demands that nothing be said about their past which might reveal that they were unviable, semi-fascistic neo-colonies before the Stalinist occupation. Instead a new theory is under construction. The object is to provide a monocausal explanation of world events. The explanation is breathtaking in its simplicity: every problem during the past seventy years was either directly or indirectly caused by the Russian Revolution. We can predict with utmost certainty that they will be digging up bodies and finding secret documents about crimes that you have not yet heard about for a long time to come. For communism is evil, and evil does not need to be proved with facts.

Many left-wing people are profoundly depressed by the present state of affairs. The events surrounding the disintegration of the Soviet Union have strengthened an atmosphere of conservatism in the West. For many socialists, it is galling to see their beliefs becoming objects of ridicule. Nobody who believes in the project of human liberation can be immune from the impact of this carnival of reaction.

Not for long

However, it is possible to view the present political climate from a different perspective. Western diplomacy and domestic politics cannot be run indefinitely on the simple diet of Cold War ideology. Eventually the mere act of repetition exposes the banality of the funerals. Major can tour the world once or twice, but his lectures to foreign dignitaries are not going to inspire the British public for long. Sooner or later capitalism will be forced to account for itself.

After a while the ritual denunciations of how evil 'they' are

wear thin, and Western politicians will be expected to justify their own society on the basis of what capitalism has achieved. From this perspective Cold War ideology can be seen as an evasion of the internal problems that are facing the capitalist system. Of course evasions can sometimes work. But in the long run such action can only lead to the accumulation of problems and store up more trouble for the future.

The use of Cold war ideology contains a fundamental paradox. In one sense it works too well. It effectively legitimises imperialism and criminalises the struggle for human liberation. From the capitalist point of view, this is its virtue. At the same time, however, Cold War ideology is entirely dependent on the apparent negative qualities of the Soviet Union. It makes no claims to upholding qualities that are inherent to the capitalist system. Rather it works on the principle of scaring people about how bad life would be if they lived under a different social arrangement.

Fatal flaw

The absence of any *positive* argument for capitalism is a fatal flaw of Cold War ideology. This is evident throughout the Western world, where cultural and intellectual life is bereft of any positive vision. Western politics contains no capacity to inspire. There are no grand plans, there are no great designs. All that is on offer is more of the same.

George Bush typifies this approach. As American president he is closely advised on every move he makes. So we can be sure that the image of the hardy outdoor sportsman that he cultivates is not the product of his own private predilection. He is the regular guy who likes to get away from it all with his family and play a few rounds of golf. This is America, this is it, this is what life is about.

As long as Cold War ideology works, the absence of positive arguments for capitalism need not cause them serious concern. But there are some big problems brewing. The success of Cold War ideology is based upon reproducing public cynicism about the viability of change. Cynicism depends upon ridiculing the idea that people should try to influence the shape of society. Ultimately it demands the belittling of all forms of public involvement, strengthening the conviction that resistance is useless. This 'what's the point?' attitude helps to disarm public protest and revolt, but it also enhances the sense of aimlessness and fragmentation in society.

The growth of cynicism which

parallels the promotion of Cold War ideology shows how limited is the success of the West's anti-communist offensive. It indicates that Western society does not so much believe in itself as it believes in the malevolence of others.

Stalinism became acceptable only because Western capitalism was so unappealing

The conclusion which we would draw is that Cold War propaganda can only work so long as there is no serious discussion of the present state of Western society. Any shift of attention from 'them' to 'us' has the potential to expose the anxieties and ideological bankruptcy of capitalism. Moreover, the absence of any positive arguments for capitalism means that there exists an important intellectual vacuum. Just because president Bush sees golf as the high-point of human achievement, it does not follow that every other member of present and future generations will be happy to accept that this is it. Asking the question 'is this it, is this our lot?' gives a good start to exposing the pretensions of Cold War ideology.

It often appears that the right is far more sensitive than the left to the political defects of anti-communist ideology. Most left-wing thinkers are so overwhelmed by recent events that they have become too defensive to retain a critical faculty. They have embarked on a journey of recantation. The confession of failure is the latest intellectual innovation on the Western left.

In contrast, right-wing thinkers appear far more sensitive to the problem of the capitalist intellectual void. It is almost as if they sense that they are living on borrowed time, that the present climate is too good to be true and that it can not continue indefinitely. The best-selling *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* by Lord Bullock expresses an understated concern with the future. Bullock is enough of a historian to grasp that the present conservative climate must come to an end. Sooner or later the human yearning for change and progress will assume a political form. He writes that 'continuing inequalities and injustices can be expected to keep alive the search for a just and more equitable

society'. All that Bullock can do to discredit such future responses to exploitation is to denounce them as a millenarian 'myth'.

While Bullock explores the problems that are likely to emerge in the future, others are engaged in rewriting the past. The capitalist class has a bad feeling regarding its own intellectual heritage. It is sensitive to its long record of failure to elaborate convincing arguments in defence of its system. It is also conscious of the fact that for years Western intellectuals were more inspired by the Soviet Union than by capitalism. This raises an interesting problem. If the Soviet Union is as bad as Cold War propaganda suggests, how can we account for the defection of significant sections of the Western intelligentsia? How could so many intelligent people opt for Evil when they were living in the midst of the Good?

Uneasy system

The defection of the Western intelligentsia before and after the Second World War helped to speed up the disintegration of the credibility of capitalist arguments. It meant not only the loss of the ideological initiative but also the subsequent failure to regain it. That is why there is now a concerted attempt to rewrite this episode. For without accounting for its past intellectual collapse, capitalism cannot hope to evolve an adequate system of intellectual defence for the future. This concern with intellectual history is significant because it indicates that the system is not at ease with itself. It exposes an underlying lack of confidence which no amount of triumphalist Cold War bluster can obscure.

Living Marxism holds no brief for the old pro-Soviet Western intelligentsia. Most of them were flabby individuals who were quite prepared to promote Stalinist lies in the working class. However, the current attacks on their reputations are being conducted by individuals whose intellectual standards are lower than those of Stalin himself.

'Grisly charade'

Writing in the unsuitably named *Independent*, John Torode says of pro-Soviet intellectuals in Britain that 'among their number were many of the brightest and best of successive generations. They were the heirs of the Enlightenment. Their willingness to acquiesce in a grisly charade that lasted for most of this century is today almost beyond comprehension' (26 August 1991). Since this 'grisly charade' is 'beyond comprehension' Torode should not be criticised for

his inability to explain the 'betrayal' of the intellectuals. A few comments on the psychological need of the intellectual for religion can suffice.

Norman Stone, the Murdoch professor of modern history at Oxford, also dislikes pro-Soviet intellectuals. On 1 September the *Sunday Times* gave him a whole page to savage them under the headline 'The evil empire: heroes and villains'. Stone's object is not merely to denounce the villains, but to suggest that there were some serious intellectual voices on the capitalist side too. His Murdochian attempt to invent a serious pro-capitalist intelligentsia is pathetic. The five individuals whom he lauds include such intellectual lightweights as Brian Crozier and the anti-communist historian Robert Conquest, and two clowns—Malcolm Muggeridge and Ronald Reagan. Only the fifth, George Orwell can be said to possess any intellectual clout; which is why he would not have thought much of Norman Stone.

Both Torode and Stone have strong views about Stalinist lies and deception. Yet neither can allow himself to bring high standards of probity to their subject matter. There is a basic fact that cannot be allowed to come under public scrutiny today: the reason why the Western intellectuals became favourable towards the Soviet Union is because they lost faith in the West.

Even worse

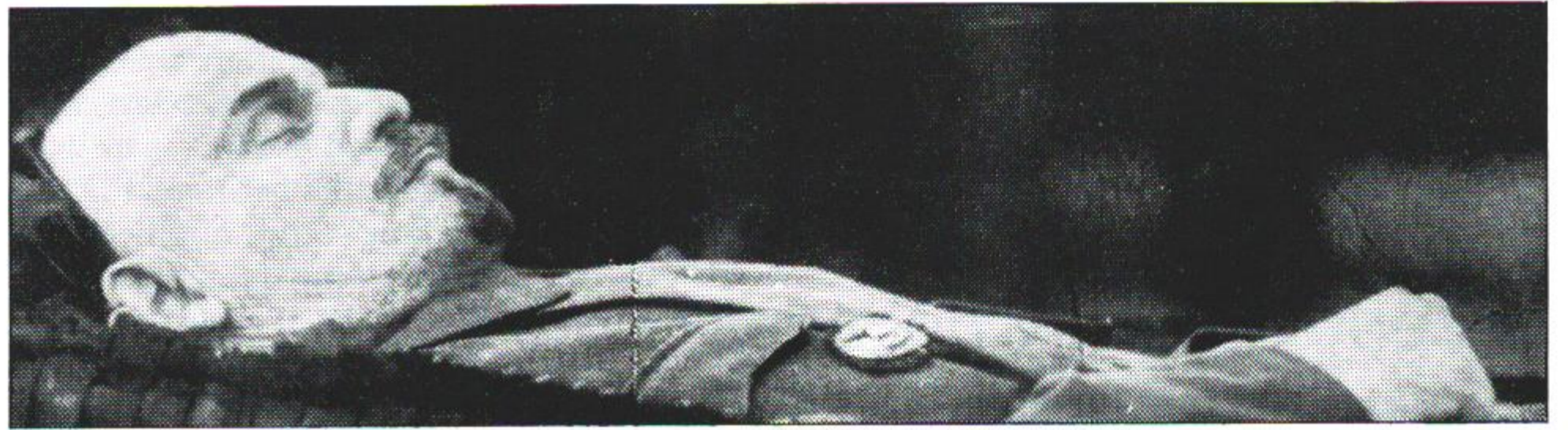
Capitalism experienced a collapse of ideals and Stalinism was the beneficiary. This little truth has enormous consequences. For it suggests that Stalinism became acceptable only because Western capitalism was so unappealing. It indicates that the present incapacity of capitalism to inspire a vision of a future has long historical roots. This is why Western ideologues are so busy rewriting history. The fact that capitalism was once incapable of competing with Stalinism can no longer be conceded. For if Stalinism is as awful as the Cold War ideologue says, how could it have attracted so many intellectuals voluntarily to defect from the West? How could so many workers voluntarily join the evil communist parties? Once this question is posed, somebody is bound to suggest that perhaps the attraction of Stalinism was that the capitalist alternative was even worse.

That alternative is no better today. Pursuing this line of attack can help us to expose the weakness of their system of intellectual defence, by demonstrating that however much they scream about the Evil East, the Good West is just not good enough. ●



No tears at death of Lenin cult

PHOTO: David King Collection



The statues and mausoleums now being demolished and closed in the Soviet Union had become symbols of the mummification of Lenin's revolutionary communism, says Paul Flowers

Demolishing statues of Lenin and defacing monuments to socialism has been a popular pastime in Eastern Europe for a few years. The sport has now taken off in the Soviet Union itself. Within days of the failed August coup, statues of Bolsheviks who had died long before the horrors of the Stalin era, such as Felix Dzerzhinsky and Yakov Sverdlov, were being levelled, damaged or daubed. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of its communist party will lead to the destruction of all monumental reminders of the Soviet regime. Not even Lenin will escape.

Western commentators gloat about the end of the Lenin cult and the fall of 'communist icons', as if this were the burial of Bolshevism. But cults and icons never had anything to do with the revolutionary communist tradition of Lenin, Trotsky and 1917.

'Piece of mysticism'

Undoubtedly aware of his own historical significance, Lenin was nonetheless bitterly opposed to any cult being built around him. He was greatly disturbed at the laudatory tone of the press reports following the assassination attempt on him in August 1918, and rounded on his factotum, Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич:

'What is this? How could you permit it? Look what they are saying in the papers. Makes one ashamed to read it. They write that I'm such-and-such, exaggerate everything, call me a genius, a special kind of man. And look at this piece of mysticism: they collectively wish, demand and desire that I get well. Next they'll be holding public prayers for my health. Why, this is horrible! And where does it come from? All our lives we have carried on an ideological struggle against the glorification of personality, of the individual. We long ago solved the question of heroes, and now we are again witnessing the glorification of personality. This is no good at all.' (Quoted in R Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p57)

A leader of Lenin's stature inevitably evoked feelings of great respect and admiration amongst his party comrades, who, whatever his misgivings, assiduously promoted him as an outstanding leader. In a country notorious for religious obscurantism and mystification, a personality cult began to develop around this charismatic figure. Opportunists within the Communist Party were not averse to encouraging this cult as a means of attracting support among the more backward

sections of Soviet society such as the religiously minded peasantry.

Stalin played an important part in the posthumous iconisation of Lenin. His memorial speech to Lenin bore a striking resemblance to a Russian Orthodox Christian liturgy, with commandments followed by repeated affirmations of faith. Grigory Zinoviev wanted Red Square to become 'a little Lenin town' to which millions of grateful people would come on pilgrimage. These two were instrumental in having Lenin mummified and put on display as if he was a saint. Other old Bolsheviks wanted nothing to do with it.

Trotsky was alarmed at these obscurantist practices being disinterred under communist auspices. Nikolai Bukharin declared that, with the mummification of Lenin, a strange smell was arising in the party. Lev Kamenev said that naming Petrograd after Lenin was fine as was publishing his writings, but embalming him was in direct contradiction to his materialist outlook. Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaya was emphatic:

'I have a great request to you: do not allow your mourning for Ilyich to take the form of external reverence for his person. Do not raise memorials to him, palaces named after him, solemn festivals in commemoration of him, etc: to all this he attached so little importance in his life, all this was so burdensome to him. Remember how much poverty and neglect there still is in our country. If you wish to honour the name of Vladimir Ilyich, build creches, kindergartens, houses,



schools, libraries, medical centres, hospitals, homes for the disabled, etc, and, most of all, let us put his precepts into practice.' (Quoted in EH Carr, *The Interregnum*, p349)

Despite such misgivings, the Lenin cult mushroomed after his death. Busts, portraits and statues of him appeared everywhere, 'Lenin corners' were set up like shrines in schools and other public places. Peasant homes often sported pictures of Lenin alongside religious icons. Very rapidly, what began as a mark of respect began to take on more sinister overtones.

Lenin died as the revolutionary wave that swept across Europe faded

Looking back at the aftermath of Lenin's death, Trotsky explained how the rising Soviet bureaucracy had used the Lenin cult against revolutionary Bolshevism:

'The attitude towards Lenin as a revolutionary leader gave way to an attitude like that towards the head of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Against my protests a mausoleum was built on the Red Square, a monument unbecoming and offensive to the revolutionary consciousness. The official books about Lenin evolved into similar mausoleums. His embalmed corpse was used as a weapon against the living Lenin—and against Trotsky.' (*My Life*, p536)

'The attitude towards Lenin as a revolutionary leader gave way to an attitude like that towards the head of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Against my protests a mausoleum was built on the Red Square, a monument unbecoming and offensive to the revolutionary consciousness....His embalmed corpse was used as a weapon against the living Lenin'
— Leon Trotsky

away. With the isolation of the Soviet Union, and the decimation of its working class through civil war and famine, the Communist Party and revolutionary state were becoming bureaucratized under the control of Stalin. The Lenin cult was an ideal tool for Stalin and his allies to use to legitimise themselves as the 'heirs of Lenin', and so consolidate their control over the party and state apparatus. Within a few years Stalin used the authority of Lenin to defeat and drive out of the party the revolutionary wing led by Trotsky. Hundreds of thousands of politically raw workers were recruited to the party under the 'Lenin levy'. Lenin's works were treated as biblical tracts, a dogma that could be used to justify whatever the bureaucracy demanded. Lenin as a revolutionary communist was replaced by Lenin as an ossified religious icon.

Russian novelist Victor Serge also noticed the change after Lenin's death:

'The spiritual atmosphere of Russia changes at a single stroke in 1924, while a mausoleum is built at the foot of the Kremlin wall for the mummy of Lenin. Marxian thought congeals into verbal repetitions; formulae must be stereotyped so that their content vanishes; and Leninism, invented yesterday, solemnly substitutes for the revolutionary Marxism of Lenin its grubbing into texts—presently bowdlerised—its verbal violence, its oaths, its deformations, its bigotry.' (*Destiny of a Revolution*, p145)

The Lenin cult was rapidly supplemented and overtaken by the cult of Stalin. His fiftieth birthday in 1929 was celebrated on the front

pages of the Soviet press. The grotesque image of Stalin as genial, all-knowing general secretary grew over the turmoil of industrialisation, collectivisation, the terror and showtrials, the Second World War and the Cold War.

The Stalin cult did not long survive the death of the dictator. If in the Eastern European states his gargantuan statues were pulled down by angry crowds, in the Soviet Union they were disposed of by his successors within the bureaucracy itself. Attempting to distance themselves from the horrors of Stalin's days, and to justify their position in society, the Soviet bureaucrats revived the cult of Lenin. They were the true heirs of Lenin, Stalin was an aberration. Lenin was projected as the wise and serene father of party and nation. Millions filed by Lenin's yellowing mummy in the granite mausoleum.

So long as the Soviet bureaucracy believed it could reform its system, the Lenin cult stood some chance of surviving. Indeed, under *glasnost*, as more and more crimes of the Stalin era were being discovered, Lenin's reputation had improved. Gorbachev could appeal to Lenin when introducing his market reforms, comparing them with those instituted by Lenin under the New Economic Policy in 1921. A sixth Russian edition of Lenin's *Collected Works* was being planned. Now everything has changed again.

Back in 1938, Trotsky explained why the Stalinists still paid lip-service to Lenin, even though their policies were 'diametrically opposed to the programme of Bolshevism':

'But inasmuch as the institutions erected by the revolution still continue to exist, the bureaucracy is compelled to adapt externally its tendencies to the old principles of Bolshevism: it continues to swear by the covenants of October; it invokes the interests of the proletariat, and invariably refers to the Soviet system as socialist.' (*Writings 1937-38*, p126)

Today, however, the Soviet bureaucracy has given up on itself, junked the Communist Party and the Union, and is trying to salvage what it can by espousing the market and Russian nationalism. The last vestigial connections with the October Revolution are being severed. The Lenin cult is at an end.

The statues will continue to topple, Lenin's mummy will be buried, and the mausoleum quite likely turned into a fast food joint. No doubt all of this will give a temporary boost to anti-communism. But revolutionary Marxists have more reason than anybody to despise the Lenin cult. ●



Not a time to take sides

Mike Freeman
takes a critical
look at the
British left's
response to the
events in the
Soviet Union

Many people on the left feel distressed by what has happened in the Soviet Union and, as is to be expected, the media is doing its best to present these painful events in a way intended to undermine confidence in socialism.' (Editorial, 'Socialism—what now?', *Morning Star*, 27 August)

Recent events have indeed been distressing for a left that has lived for 70 years in the shadow of the Soviet Union, leaving it pathetically exposed to the propaganda attacks of the Western establishment and its apologists.

The anti-Gorbachev coup was a particular shock to the mainstream British left which has long regarded the Soviet president as a progressive alternative to old-style Stalinism. Thus, in 1988, Ralph Miliband wrote of the Gorbachev phenomenon as 'one of the most hopeful developments anywhere in the world' over the past 30 years and emphasised that if it was 'allowed to proceed', it would 'undoubtedly help the socialist cause on a global scale' ('Problems and promise of socialist renewal', *Socialist Register*, 1988).

Even after the Gorbachev reforms helped to bring about the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany and the electoral triumph of Chancellor Kohl's conservative Christian Democrats over socialists and communists alike, Miliband retained his faith in the Soviet leader. In a book published earlier this year he insisted that if Gorbachev's constitutional changes were continued and extended, they were 'bound to have an immensely beneficial effect on the socialist left in the advanced capitalist countries' (*Divided Societies: Class struggle in Contemporary Capitalism*, 1991, p224).

Market socialism

In open letters to the *Guardian* and the Soviet embassy, Britain's radical intelligentsia echoed Miliband's sympathy for Gorbachev and condemned the coup from the outset. The British left prefers Gorbachev's pro-market, pro-Western wing of the Soviet bureaucracy to the more traditional style of Soviet leadership. Just as the left once endorsed Stalin's command economy as its own model for the

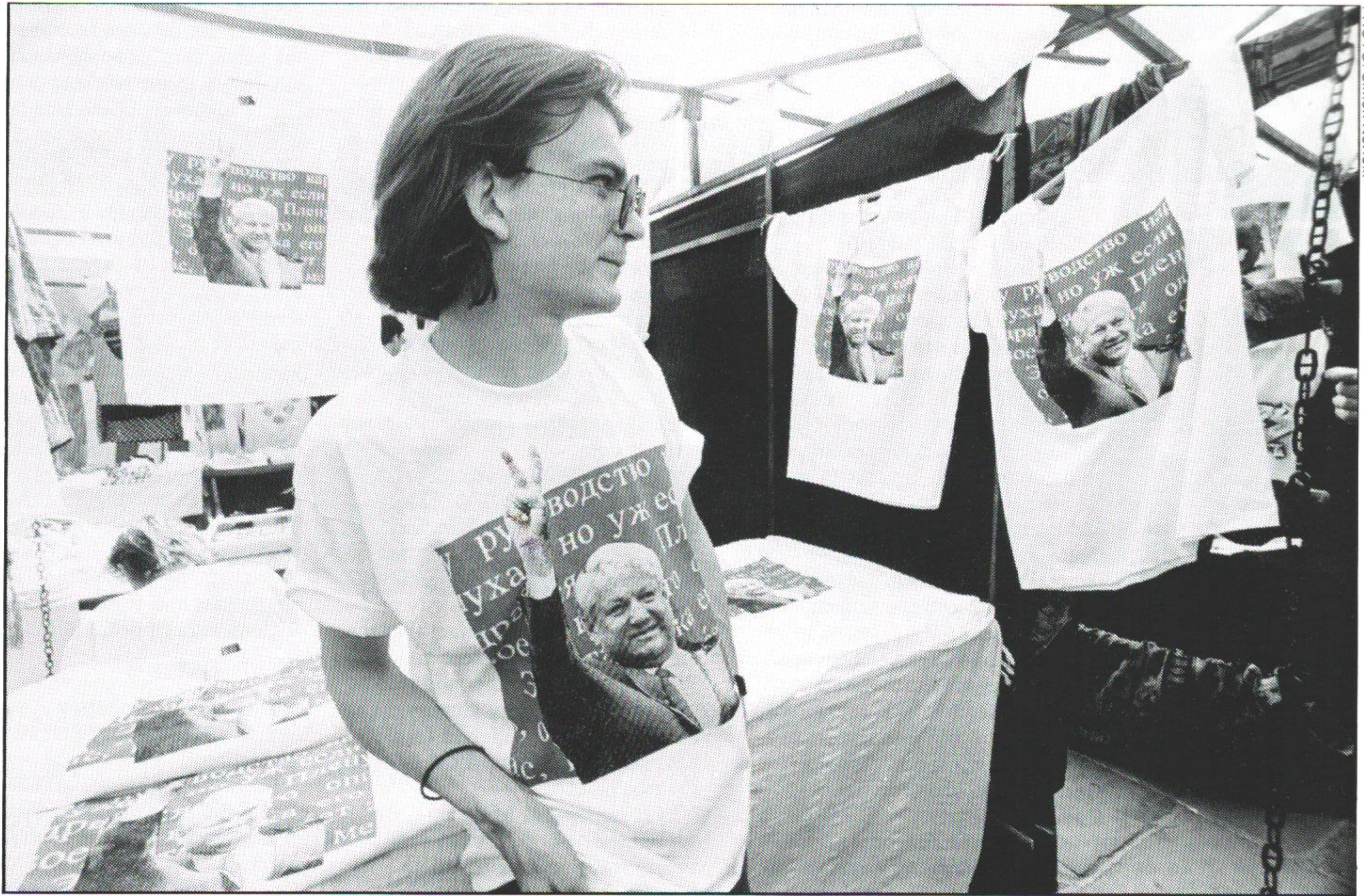


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

future, now it embraces Gorbachev's market socialism as its best hope.

But if Gorbachev's abrupt departure outraged the left, his rapid return, and the subsequent wave of anti-communist protests and decrees in the East and anti-communist triumphalism in the West have proved even more profoundly disorienting. The responses of the British left to the unfolding events in the Soviet Union reveal its familiar tendencies to side with one section of the bureaucracy against the other, invent a role for the masses, and bluster instead of offering a considered analysis of Soviet society.

Distressed Star

The various fragments of British Stalinism were sharply divided in their loyalties and interpretations. Representing the 'hardline' Communist Party of Britain, the *Morning Star* was particularly distressed a week after Gorbachev had been ousted and four days after his return to power, because of its ambivalent response to the initial coup. Though on 20 August it had questioned the legality and constitutional propriety of Gorbachev's removal, it had also

been highly critical of his record and sympathetic towards coup leader Gennady Yanayev. A prominent article expressed confidence that the new regime would not return to old-style Stalinist and Cold War policies.

'Vanguard of progress'

The *Morning Star* subsequently welcomed Gorbachev's return, but was highly critical of Boris Yeltsin's 'counter-coup' and his 'anti-communist witch-hunt'. General secretary Mike Hicks condemned Yeltsin as a 'demagogue and a populist' with dictatorial tendencies and upheld the role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

As if to show the world it was not alone, on 22 August the *Morning Star* published a prominent letter from Eric Trevett, general secretary of the New Communist Party (NCP), a long-forgotten traditional Stalinist breakaway from the mainstream of British communism. Trevett welcomed the initial coup, condemned Gorbachev for 'his betrayal of communist principles', and proclaimed that, with its new leadership, the Soviet Union could 'once again take its rightful and

deserved place in the vanguard of progressive humanity in the struggle and achievement of peace, national liberation and socialism'. Trevett's views on the counter-coup that took place the same day are not yet available; he must be thankful that he lives a long way from Moscow.

Help people forget

Meanwhile the reforming Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) emerged from the tumultuous week less distressed, perhaps largely because it is already in a state of 'transformation' into the 'Democratic Left'. It thus expects no longer to have to take responsibility for the Soviet Union, communism, socialism or even being a party. (It also appears to hope that its new name will help people to forget the party's long record of union ballot rigging, bureaucratic manipulation and consistent support for reactionary labour officials.) Its leaders immediately condemned the coup and demanded the reinstatement of Gorbachev.

On Gorbachev's return, general secretary Nina Temple demanded his resignation from the 'totally discredited' Soviet Communist Party



and welcomed its dissolution. She expressed her joy that the coup had been defeated 'by the actions of the people' and acclaimed 'the courageous role of Boris Yeltsin', thus bringing the CPGB into line with mainstream public opinion in Britain.

Socialist Worker echoed the CPGB line. On 24 August it applauded Yeltsin's 'courageous call for a general strike' and on 31 August it celebrated his victory. Editor Chris Harman went on to emphasise that the real heroism was not that of Yeltsin but that of 'tens of thousands of ordinary Russian workers' who had taken strike action and marched on demonstrations against the coup. He acknowledged that such initiatives had been small in scale, but insisted that they had 'played a very important role' in bringing down the plotters: 'rank and file soldiers became influenced by the mood of the masses and began to turn against the top officers.' Furthermore, 'the victory gained by the heroic minority' had 'mushroomed into a wave of popular radicalisation', forcing Gorbachev to abandon the Communist Party.

Siding with the 'reform' wing of the Soviet bureaucracy against the 'hardliners', Temple and Harman attempt to endow the reformers with a more popular and progressive

Just as Eric Trevett claimed that the removal of Gorbachev had 'vindicated' the position of the NCP, so John Molyneux claimed that the counter-coup had dramatically 'demonstrated' the 'relevance and necessity' of the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) theory that the Soviet Union has long been 'state capitalist' (*Socialist Worker*, 30 August). For Molyneux the fact that in both Stalinist East and capitalist West 'a small privileged minority controls all the key means of production and the state and uses this position to exploit the labour of the working class' confirms that they are essentially the same system.

Indeed by these criteria, all forms of class society—including medieval feudalism and ancient slavery—can be designated 'state capitalist', a term which therefore lacks any historical specificity or explanatory value. The fact that there are 'crises' in both Eastern and Western blocs is further adduced as evidence of structural identity, despite the vastly different forms assumed by economic dislocation in the two blocs.

However, for Molyneux, the supreme virtue of the state capitalist theory was that it provided an 'absolutely unequivocal answer' to the question 'which side are you on?' in the recent conflict. (It is worth

used to provide a justification for taking sides between factions within the ruling elite, none of which offer any future to the working class.

The powers of the true believer in state capitalist theory are not exhausted in the realm of current reality: they can also foretell the future. Thus 'it made it possible to predict, as we did predict, the danger and likelihood of a reactionary coup' and 'finally, it enables us to be clear that the crisis in Russia is by no means over'. It is evident that many journalists and commentators who are scarcely aware of state capitalist theory also anticipated the possibility of a coup and it is also apparent to the most casual observer that the situation remains highly unstable. The role of state capitalist theory is thus to mystify both Stalinism and capitalism, to justify opportunist alignments and to endow banalities with an aura of profundity.

No pressure

The triumphalism of the Western media over the final collapse of Stalinism in the East above all reflects the confidence of a Western establishment which now feels under no significant pressure from the working class movement at home. The inability of the left to come to terms with the events in the Soviet Union reflects its incapacity to act as an oppositional force within the capitalist world. Thus *Socialist Worker* can conclude with ringing calls for rank and file workers and soldiers to take the initiative in the Soviet Union, yet is quite incapable of offering any political or organisational framework for such initiatives in Britain. It is not surprising to find that the left's floundering and blustering response to events in the Soviet Union is paralleled by a continuing retreat and narrowing of horizons at home.

Labouring on

In its poignant 'Socialism—what now?' editorial, the *Morning Star* reminds readers that the key task in Britain is the return of a Labour government committed to socialist policies: whatever else may happen, it concludes, 'the distressing events in the Soviet Union must not divert us from this task'. As the general election approaches, we can expect this sentiment to unite the fragments of the British left, including all sections of the old Communist Party, the SWP and whatever remains of Militant. It must be reassuring for all the old Stalinists, and Trotskyists too, that whatever happens to Gorbachev, the Soviet Union and the CPSU, the Labour Party goes on for ever.

The role of state capitalist theory is to mystify both Stalinism and capitalism

character. In reality, the limited industrial action and public protests against the coup were not the decisive influence in its downfall. The coup leaders failed because they could not carry the support of key sections of the bureaucracy and the military; rank and file soldiers were more influenced by the hostility of their top officers towards the coup than by the masses. The victory gained by Yeltsin and his supporters then mushroomed into a wave of reaction against the rival section of the bureaucracy and a wave of repressive decrees against the Soviet people. Some victory!

noting in passing that the theory seems to give less clear cut answers when applied by the SWP to conflicts closer to home, such as the Falklands War, the Gulf War or indeed the Irish War, over all of which it has adopted highly equivocal positions.) In the Soviet Union though, the line was clear—'we are on the side of the people and against the state machine'. Unfortunately the conflict was not between the people and the state machine, but between rival sections of the bureaucracy and within the state machine. A theory based on random superficial parallels is thus

The last gasp of NHS socialism

Militant

Militant is divided over whether or not it should remain in Neil Kinnock's Labour Party. Frank Richards notes the end of an era for the British left

The publicly acknowledged faction fight and debate inside Militant is a peculiarly sad affair. Many Militant members are finally fed up with acting as the shoeshine boys of the labour movement bureaucracy and getting kicked in the face by Kinnock in the process. Their sense of frustration with the expulsions is palpable. And even the most incorrigible Militant hack finds it difficult to continue with the pretence that Labour is a working class party. It is obvious nonsense to argue that the anti-poll tax campaign and the activities of 'Real Labour' on Merseyside show that there is potential for Militant-style politics outside the Labour Party. The tactical retreat from the Labour Party expresses the crushing defeat of 'entryism', and the end for what was the most distinctly British perspective of the left.

The left's obsession

Since the early twenties the British left has been entirely obsessed with Labour. Almost every significant debate has been about the *tactics* of how to relate to the Labour Party. The options ranged from support for Labour, through critical support for Labour, to entering the Labour Party. Even organisations like the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, which were formally independent, remained psychologically dominated by Labour. Both have consistently campaigned for a vote for Labour. The debate inside Militant is the latest of these discussions about how to relate to Labour.

The tactical obsession with Labour, best exemplified by Militant, indicates that the British left had nothing serious to think about. The only question that needed debating was how to relate to Labour. No wonder that the intellectual horizons and aspirations of the left were so narrow. Its

preoccupation with Labour implied a kind of NHS socialism in which the penny-pinching public health service became the symbol of progress; the kind of institution it was worth fighting for. A bit of welfare was the crumb that the Labour bureaucracy offered the left in return for its unswerving loyalty. It never occurred to Militant that the NHS was merely a system of healthcare, one that is rather pathetic even in comparison to what is available in capitalist Western Europe.

The left's attitude also reveals an enduring incapacity to relate to reality. Debates are always about Labour, not about how to relate to the real world. To be more specific, any attempt to relate to the real world has to be carried out through the Labour Party.

Although most readers of *Living Marxism* cannot but feel sorry for the public humiliation experienced by Militant members, it is important to remember that this organisation fully deserves its fate. For many decades Militant has acted as the left cover for the Labour Party. It played a key role in sustaining the myth that Labour was a working class organisation, one that could be reformed and used for progressive ends. It proudly boasted that it recruited angry young workers to this party. Militant also aggressively denounced those who worked independently of the Labour Party as sects which were outside the working class.

Is Kinnock worse than Attlee?

Militant's politics were built upon the damaging idea which equated the Labour Party with the labour movement and with the working class. It argued that if you were not in the Labour Party then you were outside the working class. By helping to perpetuate this myth, Militant was directly responsible for keeping intact the working class credentials of Labour. Many left-wing

workers who were prepared to question Labour were won back to the fold by Militant. By continually channelling working class anger into the safe institutions of the labour bureaucracy, Militant helped to contain the class struggle.

Now it seems that at least a faction within Militant has discovered that Labour is an anti-working class party. But what is the basis of this discovery? It appears that under Kinnock, Labour has made a significant shift to the right. We have no wish to defend Kinnock. He is indeed a true and faithful servant of the capitalist class. But to argue that Labour is more right-wing than before requires a very selective reading of history. Is Kinnock more right-wing than Attlee or Gaitskell or Callaghan? Has Militant forgotten that the Attlee government took the lead in initiating the Cold War and called out the troops to defeat striking workers?

Reliving the past

Labour is not qualitatively more right-wing than it used to be. So what has changed? The most obvious change is the difficulty of maintaining a parasitical existence inside the Labour Party. Kinnock's regime makes it almost impossible for Militant to continue to organise inside Labour. The new perspective adopted by a section of Militant makes a virtue out of necessity. Forced outside, it argues that that is where it ought to be anyway. This is the stuff out of which Militant's theoretical insights are born.

But there is a more fundamental process at work. The collapse of Stalinism and of the Western left has thrown all of its constituent parts into disarray. This is an entirely natural and perfectly understandable reaction. Traumatic experiences like this may even prove valuable for those who are prepared to learn. Unfortunately most of the left, and Militant especially, seem determined to celebrate ignorance. Instead of adopting the critical posture of *Living Marxism*, they can only relive the past yet again. Thus despite their tactical differences over whether to be in or out of the Labour Party today, all sides in the Militant debate agree that the working class will one day reclaim Labour as its party. It seems that as long as there is one NHS hospital standing there is still some hope. The present debate indicates that Militant and its supporters find it too painful to admit that the only beneficiaries of their activities have been the labour bureaucrats.

Hoodwinking

Penny Robson on a high-profile case of British black propaganda in Northern Ireland

Catholics defy IRA ultimatum', the headlines proudly announced. It was a great story for the republican-bashing media. Two young men told to leave Ireland by the IRA were seeking sanctuary in Newry cathedral, South Armagh, while their mothers and supporters posed for the cameras carrying 'Sinn Fein are thugs' placards. Against the background of intimidation, kneecapping and gun law, here was a glimmer of hope. People power had arrived in South Armagh, and the people were standing up to the paramilitaries.

It was a romantic story, but it bore no relation to reality. For a start the 'Newry Two', the 'defiant duo', made a poor pair of heroes. Liam Kearns and David Madigan were said to be part of a gang of petty crooks—'hoods' as they are known in Ireland—responsible for a lot of anti-social crime. After two republican sympathisers were beaten up in their beds, six hoods had been told to get out by the IRA; Kearns and Madigan took refuge in the church instead.

If the heroes were unconvincing, the 'spontaneous mass protests' in their support were even worse. How many times have you seen ordinary people thrown together in anger form up into a neat little group to make the word STOP when photographed from above?

British and Irish mainstream journalists who ventured out of their newsrooms and went to investigate the story found that the situation did not fit their preconceived notions of a 'people against the Provos' conflict. Radio 4 could find nobody to express support for the two. The *Sunday Times* had to concede that the one local interviewed said he could not understand why the IRA had not acted against them sooner. The *Irish Sunday Press* noted that the IRA's determination to punish the men 'appears to be backed by a surprisingly large number of ordinary Newry people'.

There should be nothing 'surprising' about it. The IRA has long attracted support on Catholic estates for its policing actions and punishment shootings against 'anti-social elements'. Hugo Brown, another of the hoods ordered to leave, told the press that 'we are better off without the IRA, there would be more jobs and money around'. For the likes of Hugo Brown that is probably true, if you are a petty criminal in South Armagh it is much easier to operate if the IRA are not around.

An occupying force

The Royal Ulster Constabulary and British troops do not operate as crimebusters in the Catholic districts of Armagh, Belfast or Derry. They are there as an occupying force, to enforce British rule. Any criminal investigations they take on are simply used as a pretext for them to gather intelligence and harass local nationalists. In these circumstances, many nationalist people cannot or will not turn to the RUC for help; so the IRA steps in. Since a guerrilla army does not have any prisons in which to hold criminals, physical punishment such as 'kneecapping' is quite a common sentence.

The 'Newry Two' did not have the support of local people. Instead their campaign was hyped up

by the Catholic church (temporarily) and by Families Against Intimidation and Terror (FAIT), a group which is funded by the British government and appears to be little more than a front for the Workers' Party. This organisation is the rump of the old Official republican movement which split with the Provisionals at the start of 'the troubles' over 20 years ago. It has since degenerated into the most poisonously anti-republican party in Ireland; which is why, although its reformist policies have attracted some support in the South of Ireland, the Workers' Party has made no headway among nationalists in the North.

The Workers' Party's stand against 'terror' is just an anti-Sinn Fein stunt. The party itself has many reported connections with violent crime and gangsterism. The local organiser of FAIT in the Newry campaign, Workers' Party man Henry Robinson, was himself convicted of kneecapping in 1981! With such upstanding characters leading the protests, it was no surprise to see the campaign quickly fizzle out.

The writing was on the wall when the church told the two to quit the cathedral; priests in places like South Armagh always have to be sensitive to the republican sympathies of their congregations. What really convinced me that the Newry campaign was finished was when I heard that Seamus Mallon MP, of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, was no longer involved. SDLP politicians would never miss an opportunity to jump on an anti-Sinn Fein bandwagon if it was rolling. It wasn't, the two left the cathedral and the media campaign collapsed.

Fish out of water

Since the start of the Irish War, the British authorities have periodically sponsored Catholic or mixed organisations which they think might help to isolate the IRA. The idea, as developed by General Frank Kitson, author of much of Britain's counter-insurgency strategy, is to separate the fish from the water. The most serious attempt was in the seventies, when the British government tried to take advantage of 'war-weariness' within the nationalist community by sponsoring the Peace People, a group set up by two Catholic women. The Peace People won the Nobel peace prize in 1977, but lost credibility in the community through their refusal to condemn the violence of the British security forces.

The high profile given to the Newry events suggests that the British authorities feel the time is right to have another go. The republican movement, as we have noted before in *Living Marxism*, is under intense pressure today and facing serious problems of isolation. Its core support remains firm, as indicated by recent successes in council by-elections, and is certainly not about to be influenced by cheap stunts in Newry cathedral. But the wider climate of opinion in Ireland has firmly turned against the republicans for now. In these circumstances, while the British fancy their chances of putting Sinn Fein on to the defensive, we should probably expect a lot more media attempts to turn hoods into local heroes, and to depict the IRA rather than the British Army as the unwanted force of occupation in Ireland.



PHOTO: Joe Boatman

Good men and true

Mainly because of a few busybodies trying to stir up trouble, the career of Lord Justice Goddard has come in for belated scrutiny. The verdict has been largely unfavourable. In the hope of redressing the balance a little, here are my own observations.

His lordship died in 1971. Throughout his public life he became known as something of a 'character', and it is this that seems to annoy his detractors as much as his alleged malpractices. Had he lived, I have no doubt that it would be he, rather than the flamboyant Judge Pickles, who would have his own column in the *Sun*. Though neither was a stranger to controversy, how different the two men were: Pickles, the showman with the common touch; Goddard, a man who believed that nobody who bought his shirts at Austin Reed should sit on the bench.

Goddard is best remembered as a working judge—rather like a worker priest—who was passionately devoted to the tools of his trade: the noose and the birch. He loved to use his tools on any specimen of the working classes who came before him in the dock. For him, the crime had to be considered in the light of the social character of the accused—a sophisticated calculation, at which he was expert. Although his *Who's Who* entry makes no mention of it, his greatest joy was to pass sentence of death, an act from which he was reputed to take sexual pleasure. Goddard had a high conviction rate, and once the defendant had been seen off, he liked to loosen up a little and reveal his human side, often treating the gallery to his sharp wit. After a good day's work at Winchester Assizes, dispatching three men to the gallows, he drew the court's attention to the strains of a distant barrel organ playing the 'Eton Boating Song'—'We'll all swing together'.

And there, in a nutshell, we have the case against Lord Justice Goddard: that he derived harmless pleasure from his job, and liked to crack the occasional joke. Yet the pundits of the 'anything goes' generation, the people who put masturbation into the school-books and today wallow in the sick 'humour' of the alternative cabaret, are now up in arms about the 'crimes' of a man who never stole an old lady's purse or dodged his fare on the train.

How sad that such small-minded hypocrisy should even now be driving good men from public office. Only this year, we have seen Sir James Anderton resign as chief constable of Greater Manchester, despairing at the 'great sea of wrongdoing' threatening society. Sir Jim said he hoped to 'do a Bobby Charlton' and quit on top with his 'integrity completely intact'. Yet retirement is no guarantee of that. His critics—not a chief constable or person of standing among them—won't retire until they've dumped old Jim in 'a cesspool of their own making', to

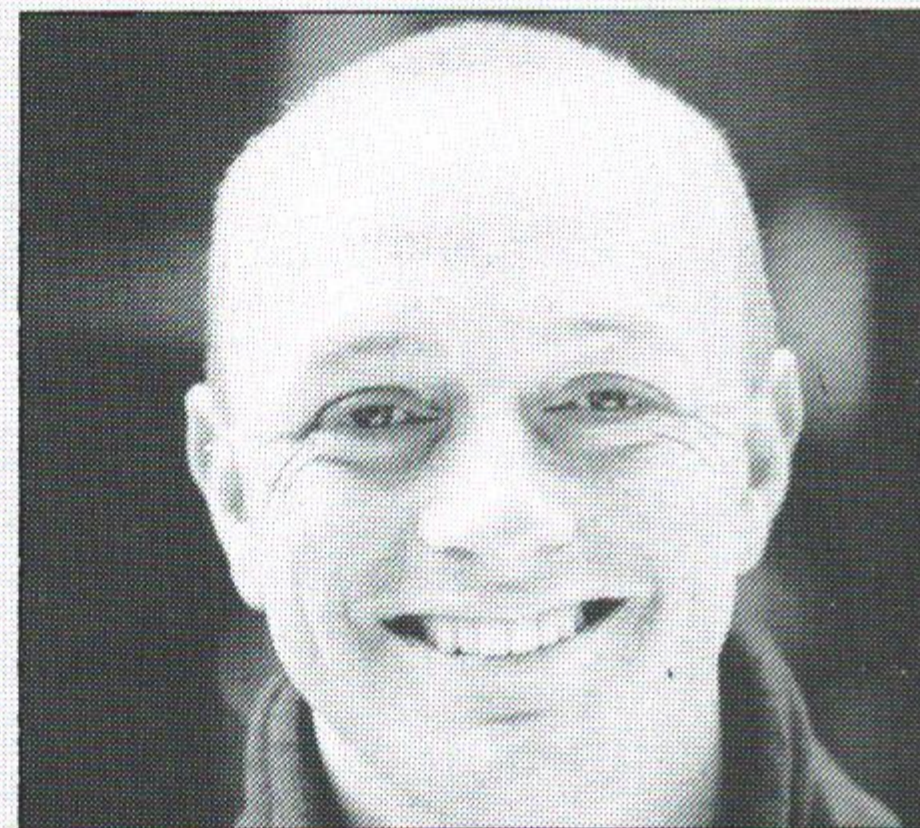
borrow his memorable phrase.

As regular readers of this column will know, my remit is to provide a short respite between the more 'heavyweight' pieces. But as well as light relief, I like to think that, in a modest way, I help to put the momentous events described elsewhere into perspective, with a gentle reminder that life isn't all 'doom and gloom'. However, the Goddard business has put me in a more sober frame of mind. Here we are 20 years after his departure and is the world a better place? The best men are dying off or abandoning ship, and the 'tide of wrongdoing' grows daily more dangerous. Yet where are the Goddards and Andertons of today?

Perhaps instead of looking to judges and policemen for a lead, we should seek a different kind of guide. Journalists have a poor reputation by and large, yet two publications have shone out like beacons of late. The *Sunday Times* is a mine of hard news and penetrating analysis. Where would we all have been in recent times without its famous 'Insight' team and its brilliant diagrams taking us to the heart of events in Moscow. Yet it also has a well-earned reputation as a 'campaigning' paper, always alert to new developments in our society, and ever prepared to point the finger at the truly guilty. It was the *Sunday Times* that brought to our attention the scandal of the 'underclass', tirelessly reporting on the 'sub-lifestyle' of this sub-species, sparing us none of the sordid details. Digby Anderson warned of the 'C2s' and 'Ds' collectively mugging the taxpayer, aided and abetted by the social workers of the 'poverty industry'.

Now others are following his example. Opening the fashionable pages of *Arena* of late I've detected the no-nonsense attitude of Mr Anderson rubbing off on a few younger pens. The most common complaint concerns what they call 'the public realm'. Until this century, the working class was kept out of this area, by financial, political and legal means. Where necessary they were kept off the streets too. Nowadays they get everywhere, and, not to put too fine a point on it, *Arena* doesn't like it. According to Mr John Sweeney, whose expert opinion I have no reason to doubt, the level of incivility amongst British workers has led him to reassess the virtues of Uganda, where, 'after a Jane Austen-scripted chit-chat', the soldiers 'equably wave you on'.

Tony Parsons hates 'white trash' too and complains of the 'sick-making state of the working class'. But for him a worse problem is beggars: 'Ponce your next bruise-blue can of Vomit Brew from some other sucker. There's just *too many* of them. But it goes beyond mere compassion fatigue. I think I have come to hate them.' How obvious it all seems once our eyes are opened! How lovely it is to shout it out loud! Anna Pollack is a Labour Euro-MP. 'I do not like to sit next to *Sun* readers



Toby Banks

The best men
are dying
off or
abandoning
ship, and the
'tide of
wrongdoing'
grows daily
more
dangerous

on the tube', she says. Nor does Michael Jones of the *Sunday Times*. He was in a full train carriage with 'three yobs' who used lewd language in the presence of 'an attractive professional woman'. Nobody did anything while they 'ranted on, a mutually supportive group of slightly drunken boors, scatologically loud-mouthing for mile after mile and getting away with it'. The accompanying illustration shows Jones quaking behind a seat whilst the three scruffs get away with it, laughing and reading the *Sun*.

'What would you do?', asks the banner headline. Lady Menuhin would have them deposited on the live rail. Another reader complains that 'we are being taken over by the louts and the morons and spineless men do nothing'. Jones admits that the woman did not seem bothered, and that the yobs did nothing in particular. But I can't help feeling that the matter has been left hanging. The real point seems to be: why should men like Jones have to sit in a train with working class oiks at all? This is the question of the day, yet where are the men with the answer?

Karl Friedrich Schinkel: A Universal Man

An exhibition of the work of the German architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel is currently showing at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Alan Harding explains how the universal spirit of humanity was stifled in the public buildings of the Prussian state

According to the organisers (V&A) and the sponsors (BMW), this exhibition is the first important cultural result of German reunification. Most of the work here—architectural drawings, landscapes and artefacts—comes from what was until recently the German Democratic Republic. But it expresses the freshness and spirit of a more optimistic age. Now that the new German state is keen to establish its cultural as well as its political legitimacy, Schinkel's work would seem to fit the bill.

Schinkel's work is an appropriate representation of the genesis of the German state; but not quite in the way BMW intended. The pertinent aspect of Schinkel's work is the conflict between the aspiration to a universal in human endeavour and the evolution of a specific German cultural identity. Let me explain.

Schinkel upheld a long tradition which espoused architecture as the most universal art form. In his more theoretical writings, Schinkel believed that this could be achieved by a fusion of the best elements of classical and medieval architecture. Many of his buildings therefore have a sweep and simple grandeur allied with a disdain for embellishment. His intention was to let the material of the building speak for itself.

However, for most of his working life Schinkel was a civil servant employed in the public works departments of the Prussian state. In 1838, three years before his death, he was promoted to Oberbaudirektor (Supreme Director of National Public Works)—the highest title that could be bestowed on a Prussian architect. This meant that, despite his tremendous capacity for work, Schinkel had little time for his own projects. He had to supervise the plans and budgets of every significant public building.

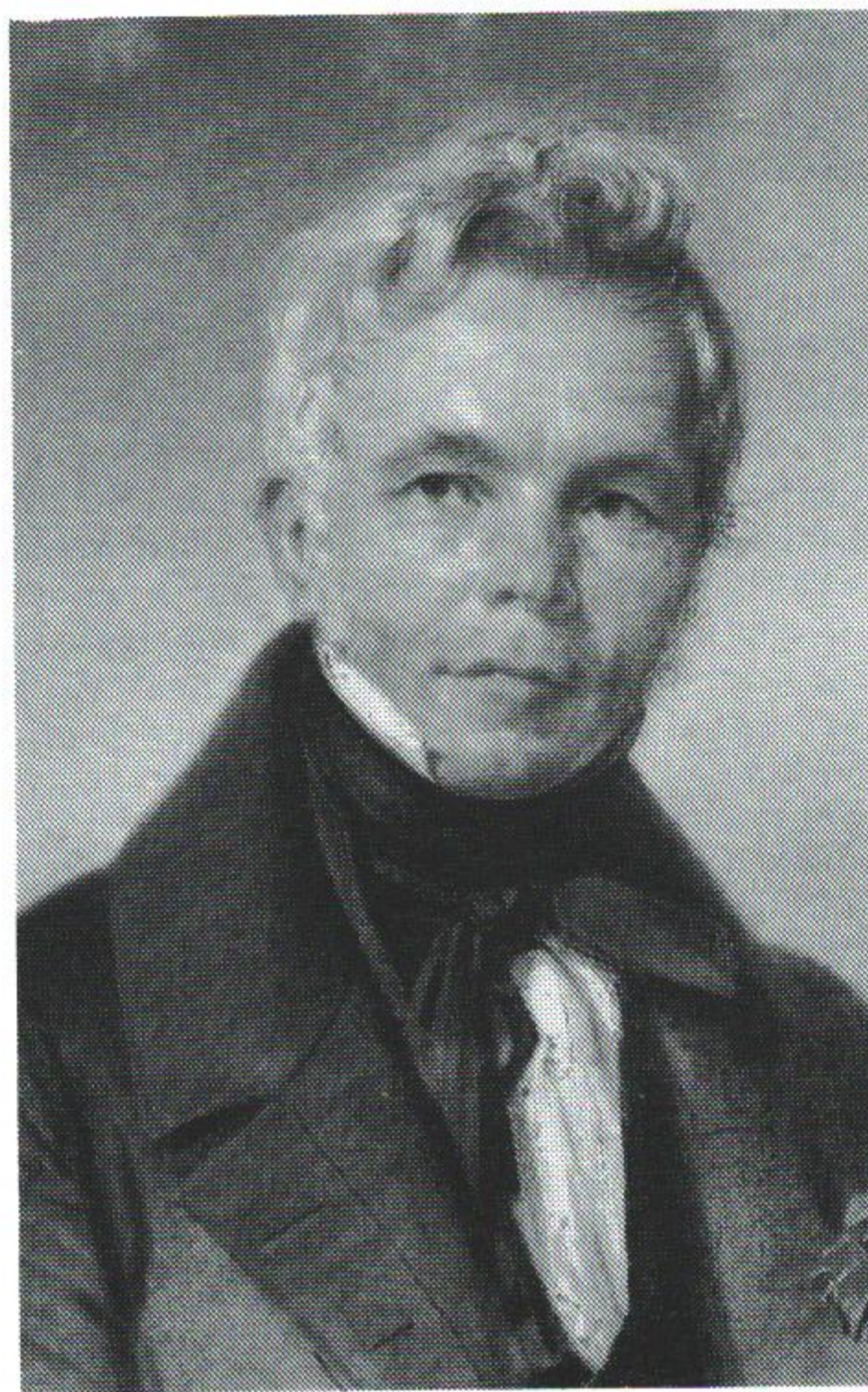
In 1821, Schinkel expressed his frustration in a letter to his boss, the minister of trade and industry:

'In my view the artistic sphere, which alone appeals to me, is of such a limitless extent that a man's life is much too short for it. I feel, with regret, that in other circumstances I could have achieved still more in it, but that I am being inwardly torn apart by work which draws me away from my real purpose.'

His appeal was rejected, and Schinkel was never relieved of an overwhelming administrative workload.

Another consequence of Schinkel's employment by the Prussian state was that the work he executed was in the service of the Hohenzollern dynasty of Prussia. The universal spirit of humanity was therefore to be realised in the public buildings of the Prussian state. Schinkel was steeped in the

tradition of German idealism. The single most important influence on his thought was Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and especially his concept of the duty of the individual to society and the active role of the state in the cultural education and training of the people.



Fichte was the author of *The Addresses to the German Nation* (1807), which called for Germany to assert itself against French political and cultural domination. Given the historical period in which Schinkel lived and worked, the juxtaposition of universal values and a particular state makes sense.

Schinkel decided he wanted to be an architect when he saw Friedrich Gilly's design for a monument to Frederick the Great at the Berlin Academy Exhibition in 1797. The building was inspired by the architecture of the French Enlightenment. Its subject however was the celebration of Prussia's greatest monarch. Within a few years, sensitivity to French cultural domination was superseded by political control. Napoleon smashed the Prussian armies at the battle of Jena in 1806 and Berlin was occupied.

In the intervening years Schinkel had made the *de rigueur* Grand Tour to Italy. He had been most impressed, not by classical Rome or Renaissance Florence, but by the Romanesque arches and unplastered brick buildings of the north. He worked with brick as a solution to the poverty of Prussian architecture—which

compensated for poor stone by overlaying brick with plaster.

Schinkel knew what he wanted to do but had no way of doing it. Only after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 was the Prussian state able to launch an ambitious programme of public works, to which Schinkel made the most lasting contribution. He tried to balance a vernacular tradition, which stressed the Gothic as an embodiment of German national pride, and a classical attitude, which could express the stature of the monarchy.

There is another important influence on Schinkel's architecture. In 1826 he journeyed to Britain and was most impressed by the new industrial architecture in brick. He introduced the techniques into commercial buildings and into his famous school of architecture in Berlin, now destroyed unfortunately. He was aware that more than any other material brick met both the aesthetic and structural needs of modern architecture.

But Schinkel retreated from this intimation of modernity and the possibility of a real universality, not for architectural reasons but for social ones:

'The new age [England] does everything lightly; it no longer believes in an established state.... On the other hand, the complete contempt for everything established, which they desire to replace as quickly as possible by putting another in its place, this tendency and preference for change, which ultimately allows no time for anything to be recognised and enjoyed, is a sure sign of the vanity of the age and of those who stand at its head.'

Schinkel's last works were commissions from Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm. They are fantasies, in which a royal residence is set in harmonious relation with its natural surroundings. The tension between universal aspiration and national outlook is dissolved in favour of the whims of a feudal aristocrat.

This retreat should not detract from Schinkel's achievement nor his ambition. It should remind us how great was the scope of imagination and belief in the human potential at the birth of the modern age. It was the social order that Schinkel worked for which constrained the creative possibilities he sought to express.

If you don't get a chance to see the exhibition, grab a copy of the excellent presentation of Schinkel's work in the Yale University Press catalogue, which is available in bookshops as well as at the V&A.

The exhibition is showing at the V&A until 31 October 1991
Michael Snodin, *Karl Friedrich Schinkel: A Universal Man*, Yale University Press, £30 hbk, £16.95 pbk



living BOYZ N THE HOOD

The Hollywood, that is. And if they are making films like *Boyz N the Hood*, it's no wonder black directors are all the rage with the movie moguls, says Emmanuel Oliver

The curfews imposed on the black ghettos of Los Angeles, Washington DC, New York and Chicago are now reaching white America. But only black America wakes up and falls asleep to the sound of the low-flying police helicopters, police sirens and gunfire which provide the audio backdrop to daily life in the ghettos. John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*, which captures these sounds of a ghetto under siege so well, depicts South Central LA as a third world country on the eve of a military invasion.

Boyz N the Hood is Singleton's first feature. One of the most commercially successful black films of the current crop, it has grossed around \$50m in the States but cost a mere \$6m to make. Singleton has written a good script and directed a slick film, which is a good start if you want to impress Hollywood. But it is the film's conventional story and moral message which has had the studio moguls eating out of Singleton's hands.

Become men or die

This is a film about how black boys become men or die before they are out of their teens. The theme of growing up, and succeeding or failing, may sound like *The Breakfast Club* or any other teen movie. But the problems Singleton's characters face are not about escaping from rich parents who don't understand. They are problems of survival, physical and psychological, problems rarely discussed except in the casual newspaper and television reports of another black victim of the ghetto.

Tre Styles (Cuba Gooding Jr.) lives in the ghetto, but unlike his friends Ricky (Morris Chestnut) and Doughboy (Ice Cube), he has the benefit of a father's guidance. Doughboy, street-wise and scared of nobody, is an example of the survivalist black male. Ricky, Doughboy's half-brother, is a football star and college boy whose naivety is a constant concern to Doughboy and the audience. Ice Cube puts in an excellent performance as the hard-drinking, no-nonsense Doughboy, whose life expectancy is always in doubt.

Boyz N the Hood has little time for women;

bitch, cunt and whore being the most popular terms of reference. 'Who are you calling a whore?', demands one young black woman of Doughboy. 'Sorry bitch' is the reply. Singleton is obsessive about the potential of the black male to the exclusion of all else.

Seeking to provide answers to the problems of urban black America, Singleton unwittingly absolves American society of the responsibility for creating the desperate conditions in which Tre, Doughboy and Ricky are forced to live.

Singleton's vision of black America is from the inside. From inside the ghetto, the view is of disintegrating individuals, families and society. There is only one example of the forces outside which are responsible for brutalising the black community: two policemen, one white, one black, the latter a particularly nasty piece of work. Even this portrayal of the police is suspect. An individual, mad black policeman is presented as the problem. *Boyz N the Hood* fails to incriminate the institutionalised racism of the American state—government, legislature and police—which is responsible for degrading and criminalising blacks.

Not only does Singleton fail to locate the cause of the problem, but the solution he points to is also off the mark. The film suggests that it is the responsibility of the individual to overcome the brutalised existence of black ghetto life. The unmistakable message is that black males are failing the black community. In particular, black fathers are failing to keep their sons on the straight and narrow, failing to bring them up as men and failing to provide positive role models for them. This message is laid on pretty thick through the central relationship between Tre and his father.

This very conservative view of black people being their own worst enemies and compounding their own problems is a popular contemporary prejudice. The idea that young black men lack positive role models is one of the most popular explanations for the condition of black America today. It is a theme which Bill Cosby has popularised for years. It is also one that has been given endless airing by conservatives, reactionaries and racists since the sixties. Hence the film appeals to a wide audience: to blacks keen to get a rare glimpse of their lives being acted out on the big screen; and to whites happy to see



PHOTO: Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

living How the West was invented

their prejudices confirmed on their VCRs (and too frightened to venture out to the cinema for fear of being shot).

Hollywood's enthusiasm for black film makers like Singleton is understandable. The endless sequels of films that were lacklustre first off and a lack of new creative talent have made the likes of Columbia desperate for new angles to exploit. And the fact that America's black population makes up 25 per cent of the cinema-going public (if only 12 per cent of the population) means that the Hollywood establishment is keen to key into an increasingly important black audience. To tap this audience, all the major Hollywood players—Warner Brothers, Columbia, Goldwyn, Twentieth Century Fox—have black films in various stages of completion.

A sanitised glimpse

What's more, there is nothing in most of these films which the company directors would find objectionable. In fact, *Boyz* owes a lot to mainstream Hollywood. Singleton has combined the popular writing and directing skills of a film-maker like Steven Spielberg with a subject matter which offers a black perspective that can appeal to a new audience. Singleton has also gone straight to the values of Hollywood. Unlike the earlier work of Spike Lee, Singleton's subject matter is not particularly radical. He works within the confines of existing prejudices about blacks, often confirming the notion that blacks themselves are the problem rather than the racist society in which they live.

This is a conventional Hollywood film. It offers a sanitised glimpse of blacks by blacks for everyone, and a heavy dose of moralising. The film's subtitle—'Increase the peace'—is unlikely to be heeded by many. It ignores the real pressures which are causing the black community to fragment. The increasingly desperate conditions in the ghettos, which the film depicts so well, mean that platitudes like these will never be enough. Some may be disappointed, expecting the creativity of Spike Lee. This film shows that there are many sides to the explosion of black American cinema. This is the more shortsighted variety.

Boyz N the Hood opens in London in October



The Captive, by Irving Couse 1892

'The West as America', an exhibition at the National Museum of American Art, has become the focus of heated political debate about the American way of life. Toby Banks reports from Washington DC

This exhibition of historical paintings at Washington's prestigious, state-funded Smithsonian Institute has been seized upon by right wingers as a treasonous attack on the American way. It has been dragged into a discussion about 'political correctness' and the supposed subversion of academic institutions. Senators and newspaper editors have queued up to condemn the exhibition (though few of them have queued to see it), and public interest has been exceptional. When I visited, volume three of the huge leather bound comments book was almost full.

The exhibition is subtitled 'Reinterpreting images of the frontier', and the organisers have aimed to 'unearth a deeper, troubling story that poses questions for American society today'. Their central argument is that a self-serving frontier myth of 'manifest destiny' was created to justify westward expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century, and later to cohere a national identity. Themes such as progress, civilisation and industriousness gave continuity and retrospective credibility to historical developments, which

were presented as a 'mission'. Contemporary artists bent events to suit the changing concerns of their capitalist patrons. Not surprisingly, their pictures reveal more about the society in which they were painted than about the events they depict (and often invent).

The changing portrayal of Indians is the most blatant example of this process, and has been the most controversial aspect of the exhibition. Before the 1830s, Indians were generally presented as 'noble savages', and often depicted in classical Roman poses, embodying virtues such as independence, instinct and the natural grace of the wilderness. Of course, this bore little relation to the sordid reality of their lives, but it was a popular image in the east, where art was produced and consumed.

By the 1840s, the Indians were an obstacle to westward expansion, and Indian-hating developed in proportion to the need to steal their land. But Sioux and Cheyenne Indians organised and fought back, and the US cavalry had to protect trains against

ambushes and derailments. Indians were now portrayed in the familiar fashion as belligerent beasts. Indian 'atrocities' were popular subject matter, especially if they involved the kidnapping of women. The captive would invariably be depicted bathed in heavenly light surrounded by shadowy heathens, and the suggestion of sexual contact gave an extra prurient titillation. When not shown violently resisting Anglo-Saxon progress, Indians were shown either cowering and fleeing from it, or fatalistically contemplating the white man's advance and implicitly acknowledging their own demise. Later, when the Indian was no longer a problem for the settlers, he became an integral part of a nostalgic vision of the 'Old West', as in the unashamedly idealised Indian village in Henry Farny's 1912 picture, *The Happy Days of Long Ago*.

The racial frontier

If the earlier stages had simply represented the white capitalist's view of the events depicted, the later works represented his current preoccupations projected backwards on to the past. By the end of the nineteenth century, the frontier was closed and the land fully claimed. The USA was now a continental nation, and an emerging international industrial power. The 1890 census also showed it to be an increasingly multi-racial country. A militant working class, including large numbers of immigrants from Europe with radical labour traditions, was causing the bosses a great deal of worry. There was a pressing need for a national identity that could cohere a geographically and ethnically disparate population, and express distinctive American values that could be shared by all. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner took the frontier as the quintessential expression of the American experience, and this was enthusiastically taken up by Theodore Roosevelt. A powerful myth was created, which was used by the ruling class to great effect to maintain the status quo and foster patriotism.

Race became a central theme. In the face of threatened 'dilution' of Anglo-Saxon stock, a spurious Nordic racial tradition was constructed around theories of evolution and migration. By this method it was 'proved' that the New England town meeting was directly descended from Teutonic forest convocations, and New England 'folk art' became fashionable. In his 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, Madison Grace wrote of English colonists as 'original' and 'native' Americans. Paintings of the period depicted

white settlers as almost superhuman, with barbarous Aztecs and Indians vanquished by the new civilisation. Biblical references were frequently used to add moral authority.

The more recent past, and the creation of the nostalgic Old West myth, posed problems for the artists. The most famous of them, Frederic Remington, despite his obsession for accurate technical detail, was acutely aware of the artificiality of working from his studio models in New York. More than one painter resorted to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show at Madison Square Gardens for Indian models. An Indian janitor called Ogallala Fire would often swap his dustpan for a tomahawk and head off to Henry Farny's studio.

These painters consciously constructed a fictitious past from recycled images and memories. They did on canvas what Owen Wiston's classic cowboy tale *The Virginian* did on paper. Theirs was a deliberately reassuring vision of an ordered world. Its romantic message ignored the sordid reality of the frontier days, and offered escape from the dirty sprawling industrial conurbations that were typical of the new America.

Yet twentieth-century anxiety was never far from the surface. A recurring theme in the Old West myth was the heroic 'last stand', in which a group of heavily outnumbered whites were besieged by bloodthirsty Indians. This obsession clearly reflected the insecurity of the Anglo-Saxon establishment at a time when it was seriously considering anti-immigration legislation. Newspapers repeatedly referred to immigrants as 'savages' and even 'redskins'. A cartoon from *Life* magazine shows Uncle Sam asleep in a chair while Jewish and European rats overrun his garden. Remington himself boasted of his readiness to shoot Jews, revolutionaries and other 'rubbish of the earth'. One of his pictures, *Giving the Butt* shows 'honest soldiers keeping down the tide of social scum' by smashing rifle butts in the faces of strikers.

The modern relevance of the frontier myth is by now glaringly obvious, and it continues to serve the ruling class in the era of Bush. Not surprisingly, the American establishment has smeared the Smithsonian and accused the exhibition of having its own hidden agenda. Certainly, the organisers (and many contributors to the comments book) have projected some of their own 1990s liberal preoccupations—notably 'gender' and the environment—on to the work of Remington and the rest. Nevertheless, they have put on a fascinating show—and a brave one in these days of yellow ribbons and victory parades.

James Kelman Glasgow voices

Deirdre Molloy spoke to
one of the rising stars
of British writing

James Kelman was born in Glasgow in 1946, left school at 16, odd-jobbed around Scotland and London, started writing in his early twenties and has rarely stopped since. In his mid-thirties he took an English and Philosophy degree at Glasgow University. He is now generally recognised to be one of the most exciting writers in the English language, or at least his version of it.

On the face of it, the comparisons with Samuel Beckett and Emile Zola sound like the exaggerated gloss you might expect from a generation of critics who are desperate for something to celebrate. Nevertheless, James Kelman is both fiercely original and centrally concerned with working class people and their communities, and so this is where comment about his work has tended to focus. For example the philosophical, sexual and social dilemmas confronting Patrick Doyle, the central character of his 1989 Booker short-listed novel *A Disaffection*, provoked comparisons with the 'angry young men' and 'kitchen sink' writers such as John Braine, John Osborne and Shelagh Delaney. In the post-war years, these authors rejected the prevailing optimism and moral facade as hypocritical, but they also maintained a mixture of nostalgia and disgust for the working class origins and behaviour of their characters. There is no trace of either nostalgia or disgust in James Kelman.

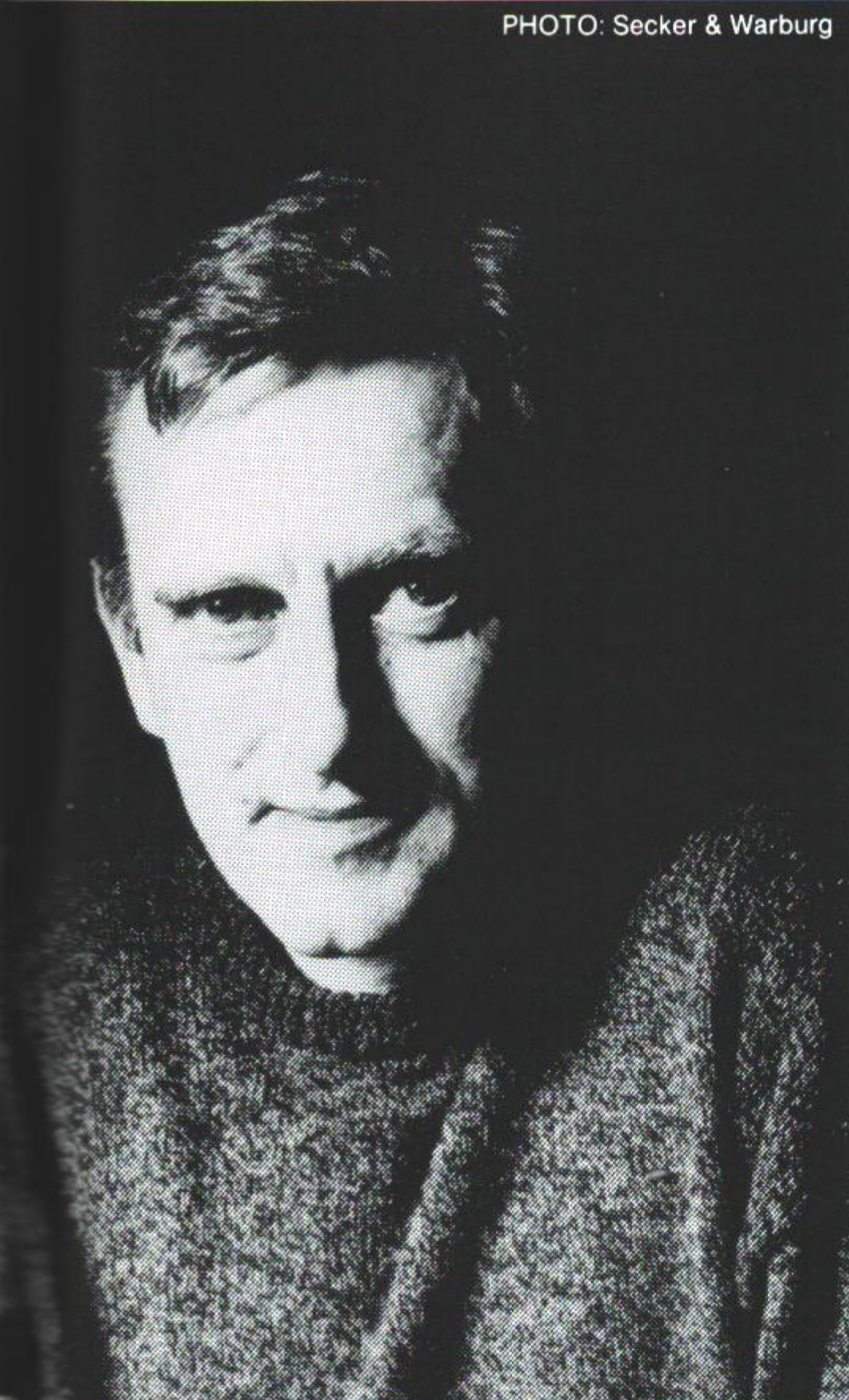
Opportunity knocks not

A central theme of his work is the desperate lack of opportunity in the world his characters inhabit. In his most recent collection of stories, *The Burn*, this lack produces the central tension between the characters' sense of frustration and failure and the stark honesty through which they come to terms with their circumstances. In 'The Street-sweeper' it is only an inner life which provides an escape for



William Henry Holmes c. 1881

PHOTO: Secker & Warburg



words of his characters without the usual punctuation. Kelman sees this as vital for the construction of a new arena for ordinary thought processes and dialogue in fiction.

'Working in that way, from within the perceptions of the people within the world, it's not really a spectacle in that sense. And it won't be like an observation. It's more likely to be from the inner workings of a person's life itself. The stories come from within the culture, from the narrator, and it's usually a different narrator from story to story. The author is third party. And that gives it a sense of being a self-contained thing. I don't want to tell stories *about* this community, rather the stories are created within the community. Therefore those divisions between dialogue and narrator all have to go.'

The authorial God-voice

Allowing working class speech, taken out of inverted commas, to dominate the prose is Kelman's response to the unspoken traditions of English literature, where the power of everyday speech is always subordinate to an omniscient narrator. 'There's not a judgment from within the narrative form itself, whereas in most English literature there's a judgment from within the narrative, in terms of language for instance—that this person's language isn't as good as this person's and therefore that person's culture is inferior to this culture, which is the culture of the authorial God-voice, "standard English", which is usually the counterpoint for everything to be evaluated from.'

His style is quite different from the many half-baked copies of James Joyce's interior monologue. Kelman has managed to breath new life into a style rare to English literature. Subjective fragments of life and experience take on a self-conscious autonomy reminiscent of existential fiction. His prose style, his focus on the life of ordinary people in the west of Scotland and his controversial political views have often put Kelman at loggerheads with critics and the media.

From another perspective, his work could be seen as a celebration of the rubbishy quality of life. 'I don't see my work as a celebration at all. All I see is the creation of stories. Because you happen to make a story it doesn't mean that you're celebrating something. You're writing a story. I've been criticised for that often by critics and artists. It's a criticism of the material that I work from. What actually are they criticising? That this is the material that I use or are they criticising the *material*? Is this stuff that should not be written about?'

Glasgow—city of culture

It is hard to see where Kelman fits into the resurgence of successful writing which came out of the west of Scotland in the eighties. A vibrant writing scene exists but writers as diffuse as Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead, Ian Banks and Janice Galloway cannot be bracketed together. Kelman views the Scottish writing phenomenon as due largely to publishers being willing to take a chance on new writing and the involvement of many artists in alternative and small press printing. Apart from such technical catalysts however the prominence of Glasgow in their fiction is also a common feature. The city is everywhere in Kelman's stories, acquiring almost the status of Dublin for Joyce or St Petersburg for Gogol.

Scottish nationalists have often exaggerated Scotland's economic and cultural isolation, in order to support their claims for a distinctive national identity and for independence from Britain. These influential ideas have fostered contradictory responses from Scottish artists; on the one hand a retreat into parochial concerns and outlooks, and on the other a desire to reach beyond Britain, often to Europe, in order to escape what is considered to be its suffocating domination.

The tension between these opposing drives gives Kelman's work its edge, as he looks inwards to find the resources which will enable him to transcend his situation. He moves beyond the Georgian facade of the city centre to explore life in the vast housing schemes and run-down tenements. It soon becomes apparent however that the urban culture he is trying to assert has a specific Scottishness which he can counterpose to British culture.

'As far as the culture of the mainstream is concerned English literature is news, and there's always been marginalised bits, various aspects of "low life", all the wee cultures that aren't asserted, but they're always on the outskirts. Usually you find them in prose or dialogue, and they're part of the anthropology. What's going on I think in a lot of work in Glasgow and elsewhere is related to what's going on in different parts of the world in the self-determination of ethnic, national and cultural minorities, where people are affirming their *own* culture. That's really what I've been doing—affirming the validity of the culture *I'm* from. I don't see it as revivalist or reactionary at all. Until this is done our culture will never be a valid culture, most particularly to the culture who own most of the linguistic production of standard English.'

Selling himself short

'Affirming your culture is a terribly important and subversive thing to do.' Kelman repeats the point defensively, conscious of the shortcomings of the Scottish nationalist project. Yet he gets drawn into the logic of his own impulse to derive meaning and hope from the local and the particular in a way that counterposes such experiences to the transnational and the universal. And the further he is drawn, the more unconvincing his argument becomes: 'I mean it's easier for people in Glasgow to feel Scottish, in other words to feel different, than it is for people in Birmingham to feel different. It's much harder for them down there in England say, to feel different, to be aware that their culture may have something in it that is valid to affirm. But at least up here we do have a national identity that makes it easier to have a bit of confidence.'

Kelman sells himself short. These narrow political views are not reflected in his work. His depictions of working class life in a provincial city are far from being parochial or introverted. Kelman captures at the level of language and narrative the full experience of his subject. He has disturbed the peace of a comfortable literati and excited the curiosity of a younger generation. If you are fed up with the rather precious versions of urban sorrow on offer from Ian McEwan or the sordid glamour bestowed on the low life by Martin Amis, then James Kelman is a welcome antidote indeed.

J Kelman, *The Burn*, Secker & Warburg, £13.99 hbk

the council worker from the spying of his managers and the drudgery of his work. Through his daydreams we explore another world, the world of an inner struggle for dignity and integrity.

Kelman insists that there is no easy way out of the world of reality: 'For a lot of the characters there isn't any clear method of getting to grips with their situation. The ways of change are closed for them. They are alienated from the possibility of change whether they are working or not.'

Kelman accepts that the compromise of making do with the status quo is linked directly to wider economic conditions: 'The political and economic come very close to the philosophical. Occasionally, it is suggested that there is a big gap between them. But to me, those who suggest this are usually people in comfortable economic situations. So they maybe want to say that spiritual problems are always spiritual and have nothing to do with politics or economics, but that's not a separation I make.'

The strength of his work lies in the way these lives are grasped and reproduced in a vigorous and distinctive prose style. And if this all sounds a bit grim, the anxiety and pessimism of his stories is leavened by an ability to capture the absurdity and humour of everyday events. 'The Ins and Outs', for example, is a hilarious account of the banal sexual intrigues and family feuds at an especially drunken wedding celebration.

With his first novel, *The Busconductor Hines*, Kelman displayed the technique that has become a hallmark of his work, a technique which he assured me he is still trying to perfect. He collapses the distinction between authorial voice and the voice of his characters, moving fluidly between them. He also pays scant regard to many writing and grammatical conventions, passing for example from the thoughts to the spoken

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The Big Brontosaurus Rethink

It's the end of the second summer of moving statues. The first, of course, was in 1985, when, all over Ireland statues of the virgin Mary started moving spontaneously. Crowds gathered to watch and pray. This summer, it was statues of Lenin. Every night the news was full of huge monuments of the great man being tumbled to the ground by Lilliputian citizens. I wondered what would have happened if one of them had miraculously moved by itself, wiggling its world historic hips, like Our Lady. I wonder what's going to happen to all those colossal arms and legs. Where will they end up? For a moment—during the 'coup'—it looked like they were going to be restored. In our street, an old man stopped me and told me that now that Gorbachev was in his proper place—under arrest—we would be privileged to see the renaissance of 'our great Marxist-Leninist heritage'. It's that kind of street. It's probably the last street of that kind in the world.

There was a lot of talk about the dinosaurs of the old order finally meeting their doom. The massive stone trunks of the Fathers of the Revolution were strewn across the squares of Eastern Europe like the fossil remains of stranded brontosaurus. Now this is a very potent image. There is probably nobody on this planet who cannot picture a brontosaurus, up to its neck in swamp chewing primeval plant life and staring into extinction. My three year old son—who cannot tell left from right, or VI Lenin from the Blessed Virgin—can distinguish the brontosaurus from the diplodocus and tell you how big its brain was (the size of a pea).

There is something almost gleeful about our eagerness to point out the inadequacies of the brontosaurus. Look! It was so big, it couldn't support its own body weight and had to stand in water all day! Look! The brain in its head was so small that it had to have another one, half way down its spine! It couldn't communicate properly with its own body! No wonder it died out. Its eyes would see T Rex coming and its brain would tell the rest of its body to run and nothing would happen! The message got lost somewhere in the spaghetti of its meandering nervous system. Ha Ha!

Descriptions of its final demise have a vindictive inventiveness—they died out through mass constipation is one, or their eggshells were too thin. As though it chose to evolve that way. For years the brontosaurus has been used to reassure us of our own perfection. The brontosaurus, what a crap idea. How

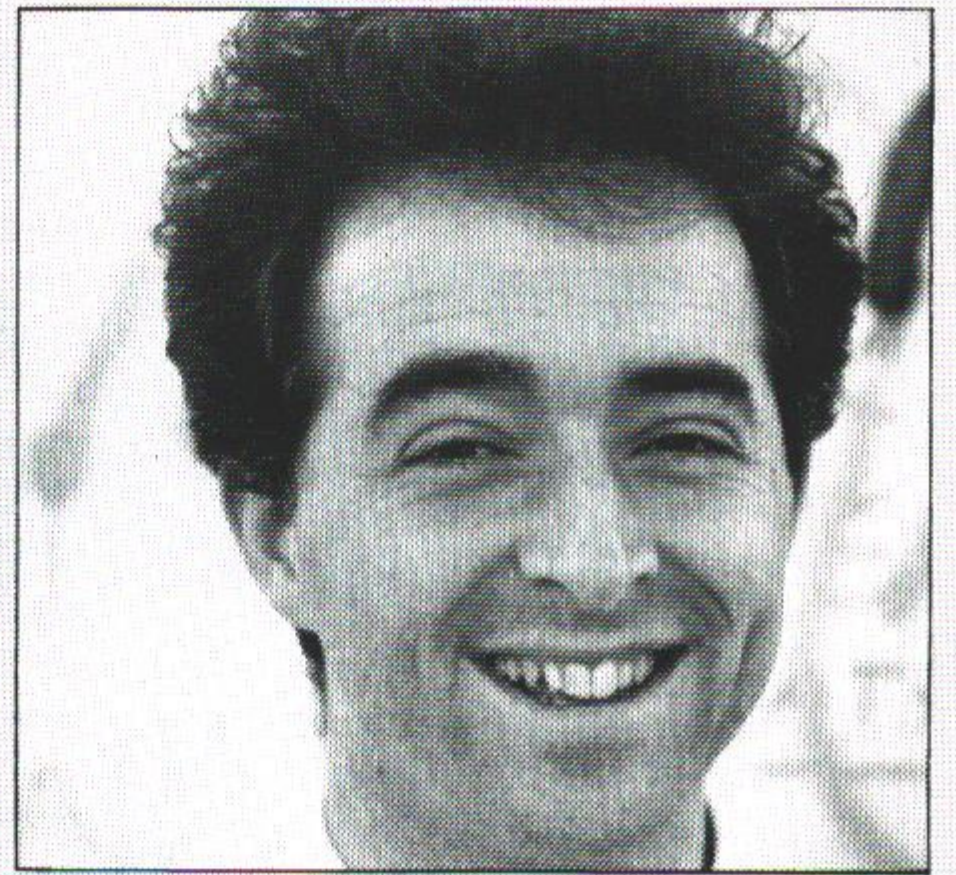
beautifully designed we are by comparison. This is why we are successful and the brontosaurus is not. And, of course, this is why the market is successful and the planned economy is not. But that was all before the Big Brontosaurus Rethink...

The Big Brontosaurus Rethink was pioneered by the great American palaeontologist and thinker, Stephen Jay Gould, whose latest book is called *Bully for the Brontosaurus*, and is presently being popularised through the ITV series *Dinosaur!*, fronted by Walter Cronkite, who has himself the affable gravity of the Jurassic period. Here we learn that the brontosaurus was hot blooded and quick on its feet, a gregarious, grazing, groovy animal. More to the point, it was not a biological flop but a highly successful creature. The age of the great lizards lasted for over a hundred million years. Forgive me if I predict a shorter life span for the market economy and its practitioners.

The brontosaurus rethink has arisen from the new interest in, and concern with, humanity's own fragility. There is no need to ask why the brontosaurus died out. Dying out is what all species do, eventually. This is a hard fact to face. The green movements for instance have not faced it. They present themselves as protecting not us, but the planet. As though we had somewhere else to go. As though protecting the environment was an altruistic act. In fact, the planet will survive. What it may do though is make itself inhospitable to us and go with some other, unimagined, creature instead.

In pondering the size and strangeness of these creatures, *Dinosaur!* highlights just how huge and catastrophic the changes are that life must undergo to survive on this planet. *Dinosaur!* certainly catches the strangeness. It opened with accounts of the early fossil discoveries—massive teeth and so on—and the astonishment that must have gripped scholars when they realised, for the first time, what these remains actually meant. It told the story of the Belgian miners who discovered 39 whole iguanodon skeletons. It is full of the boyish enthusiasm which the subject conjures up. Cronkite is actually accompanied throughout by a little boy, and the palaeontologists themselves are all boys—with straggly beards and Bart t-shirts.

So far, Gould has not been among them. Perhaps this is because he has gone too far. In emphasising the catastrophic nature of the process—the way it proceeds by upheaval, disaster and mutation—he has robbed



Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV

Forgive me
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evolution of its political function as the kindly opposite to revolution. Nature is in fact in a state of constant revolution. As for the brontosaurus and its ultimate demise, everyone knows that life just wasn't the same without them. In my big colour book of *Life Before Man*, the brontosaurus page was read to tatters when the pages that followed—full of ratty little mammals and prototype cattle—were still glossy.

the marxist review of books

Milan Kundera's novels explore the problematic nature of identity at a time when most of the ideas which have sustained the West throughout the modern era have been exhausted. **Alistair Ward** examines the peculiar quality of Kundera's ironic art and its relationship to the intellectual malaise currently afflicting Europe

Writing at the end of history

Books discussed in this article include:

Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, Faber & Faber, £14.99 hbk; and earlier works by the same author

In Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tomas reflects upon two decisions which cost the Czechs their freedom: the defiance of Vienna in 1618 which unleashed the Thirty Years War; and the capitulation to Germany more than 300 years later which precipitated the Second World War. A judgement of these opposing responses to similar challenges is difficult in the absence of a historical rerun which allows the testing of alternative courses of action. But the 'history of the Czechs will not be repeated, nor will the history of Europe. The history of the Czechs and of Europe is a pair of sketches from the pen of mankind's fatal inexperience' (p223).

This recognition of the fortuity of individual and historical experience is one of the crucial factors which distinguishes the ironic art of the novel as conceived by Milan Kundera from the dogmatic understanding of destiny as a finished picture waiting to be revealed. Czech history is 'as light as individual life, unbearably light' because it represents not an unfolding of the inevitable, but the realisation of a single possibility in a world of alternatives (p221).

Man has a natural inclination to deny the fortuity of existence by imposing upon the amorphous structure of past experience a causal continuity which can explain and lend meaning to our lives. Plot, and its revelation of character through the unravelling of a connected thread of events, is the literary counterpart of this tendency as reflected by the realist novel of the nineteenth century. In its sifting of the episodic in pursuit of a 'luminous trajectory' of cause and effect, this main tradition of the novel follows Aristotle in his dismissal of the episode as 'the worst possible type of event': 'It is not an unavoidable consequence of preceding action, nor the cause of what is to follow.' (*Immortality*, p338)

Kundera identifies himself in *The Art of the Novel* with an

alternative tradition of the novel epitomised by Sterne and Diderot. These writers eschew the 'reduction of the world to a causal sequence of events' through the affirmation 'that poetry lies not in action but there where action stops; there where the bridge between a cause and effect has collapsed and thought wanders off in a sweet lazy liberty' (p162). For Kundera, the appeal of the digression lies in its playful release of plot from the self-imposed constriction of an artificial causality; and the rediscovery of the episode as the essential texture of life.

Kundera's novels exploit the poetic potential of the episodic through their acknowledgement that 'no episode is *a priori* condemned to remain an episode forever' (*Immortality*, p339). In *Immortality* a casual acquaintance of one of the major protagonists is transformed for one part of the novel into its central character. We see how their erotic relationship, which is for Agnes a forgotten interlude, has become for Rubens one of the defining moments of his life. Throughout the novel, apparently autonomous narratives are linked not by a related plot but by the shared gestures and motifs which weave through the stories and cast a mutual light upon the love stories of Goethe and Bettina and their twentieth-century counterparts.

This disavowal of sequential development, in favour of a celebration of the mysterious connections unifying stories which are divergent in time and mood, is a central characteristic of Kundera's work. It is an attempt to distil from the disappearing variety of life that precious sense of being for its own sake which is increasingly being lost, according to Kundera, in the single-minded rush of modernity with its 'democratic' appeal to a pervasive cultural uniformity. In *Immortality* Agnes is distinguished from the prevailing mood of the modern by her nostalgic attachment to the road, in a world characterised by the route: 'A route has no meaning in itself; its meaning derives entirely from the two points it connects. A road is a tribute to space.' (p249) Man, it is proposed, no longer sees 'his own life as a road, but as a route'. Time becomes an obstacle as the urge to complete successive life goals accelerates our 'mad dash towards death'.

For Kundera, our craven idolatry of the modern impels us along the contradictory dynamic of historical progression. History, like mortality, is a finite trail through eternity leading inexorably to the exhaustion of all the possibilities contained in its journey: 'People fascinated by the idea of progress never suspect that every step

forward is also a step on the way to the end.' (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p179) In *Life is Elsewhere*, the inauguration of the new age of the New Man sounds the death-knell for the new poetry that heralded its arrival. Rimbaud's imperative that it is necessary to be absolutely modern leads to the identification of the book's poet hero, Jaromil, with his regime's campaign against 'decadent' modern poetry. For him the ruling Communist Party has become the standard-bearer of modernity. In such a way, we forsake our past through our obsessive attachment to the new and with it our sense of the self and its identity which is 'composed of the sum of everything we remember' (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, p234).

This notion of forgetting as 'a form of death ever present in life' is one of the central themes connecting the varied narrative threads of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (p235). For its major characters, the possibility of a meaningful evaluation of their lives is located in memory, and the need to protect or revise it. Mirek, in love with his fate as a hero of the dissident milieu, seeks to erase from the story of his life the indiscretion of an early love affair. In contrast, the purpose of Tamina's life after the death of her husband becomes the religious preservation of his memory. For 'if the shaky structure of her memories collapses like a badly pitched tent, all Tamina will have left is the present, that invisible point, that nothing moving slowly towards death' (p86).

From the perspective of the East European *émigré*, collective historical experience appears as prone to the dissolution of forgetting as individual self-identity. The Czech people have virtually vanished from modern history at least once, with their incorporation into the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the defeat of the Czech Reformation of 1621. With the Stalinist takeover after the Second World War, and even more so with the invasion by the Soviet Union in 1968, the Czech nation once again glimpsed 'its own death at close range' (p159).

Eastern Europe is a possible vision of the West; its experience of the institutionalised amnesia of Stalinism is a warning of the fragility of Europe's historical adventure. Thoughts about the potential disappearance of the Czech nation are interspersed with reflections upon Schoenberg and the end of music. The history of

'People fascinated by progress never suspect that every step forward is also a step on the way to the end'

music ends not in silence, but in the noise of the electric guitar with its return to a 'primordial state of music, a state prior to history' (p180). The history of music, painting or the novel threatens to end not, as the avant-garde at the beginning of the century predicted, in their capitulation to new art-forms in tune with the spirit of a more advanced age but in an intellectual void, in which 'painters continue to paint' but 'no longer will anything new or important to happen' (*Immortality*, p358).

History itself—that European oddity, that smudge on time's pure surface' (*The Art of the Novel*, p56)—announces its end not in apocalypse but in the reign of 'imagology'. In this reign, the notion of change 'so dear to our Europe' no longer means 'a new stage of coherent development', but only the seasonal alternation of fashion (*Immortality*, p129). History, the creation of the Enlightenment and its advocacy of mankind (as opposed to God) as the agent of his own destiny, cannot survive the depreciation of the Cartesian legacy. Man has lost faith in his capacity to control change and, like Tereza in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, longs to step 'down from the road along which mankind, "the master and proprietor of nature" marches onward.' (p290)

One of the major lines of inquiry running through Kundera's latest novels is how the end of '*les temps modernes*', and with them

the Enlightenment advocacy of man's capacity to control and change his environment in the interests of an improved future, has affected the related European invention of individuality. *Immortality* looks back nostalgically to Goethe as a firm centre holding together the extremes of rationality and sentiment 'in a remarkable balance which Europe will never know again' (p84). Goethe represents the early confidence of the heroic age of the bourgeoisie, when belief in the power of man's reason still rendered the world an intelligible and transparent realm. 'Beethoven's work begins where Goethe's centre ends. It is located in the moment when the world starts gradually losing its transparency, darkens...while man, betrayed by the world, escapes into his self.' (p85)

This collapse into subjectivity is reflected in the paradoxical development of the novel. The novel's reorientation from the visible world of action to the invisible interior life of the character, which began with the pseudo-autobiographical and epistolary fiction of Defoe and Richardson, was a sign on the one hand of the new humanism of the capitalist age which has dispensed with the restrictive supernatural criteria of feudalism's understanding of human nature. On the other hand, it signified a growing realisation of man's inability to discover in the world of action a true image of himself. This sense of the discrepancy between inner motivation and external action reflects a growing sense of the limits of man's control over his environment.

This movement inwards, according to *The Art of the Novel*, exhausts itself in Joyce's stream of consciousness and his apprehension of the poetry of the fleeting instant—because in the realm of the microscopic quotidian we are all alike. With Kafka, the focus shifts and the question becomes: 'What possibilities remain for man in a world whose external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry weight?' (p26) The transformation of history, from the promise of progress and adventure in Walter Scott and Honoré Balzac, into an oppressive and inescapable imperative means that 'the time was past when man had only the monster of his own soul to grapple with, the peaceful time of Joyce and Proust. In the novels of Kafka, Hasek, Musil and Broch, the monster comes from outside and is called History' (p11).

The burst of intellectual energy released by the disintegration of the Hapsburg empire in 1918 was a response to the possibilities raised by this critical juncture in history. The experience of the First World War, and the collapse of the old order in Central and Eastern Europe, called into question many of the values that had propped up the discredited status quo. It precipitated in the novel a radical re-evaluation of the basic tenets of nineteenth century fiction.

Kundera refers to this as 'the period of terminal paradoxes' when 'all existential categories suddenly change their meaning': 'What is adventure if a K's freedom of action is completely illusory? What is the future if the intellectuals of *The Man Without Qualities* have no inkling that the war will sweep their lives away the next day?' (p12) These categories buckle under the weight of a historical moment pregnant with frustrated change. The failure of the post-war revolutions in Central Europe meant that the destruction of the old order opened up the prospect not of social change, but of a period of chronic instability in which society no longer appeared to be in control of the forces driving history.

Today we are faced not with the frustration of social change through the defeat of working class revolution, but with its unfeasibility in the context of the marginalisation of the prime agency for change, the working class. In the novels of Kundera, history has lost its authoritative density and becomes unbearably light. The revolutionary period of 1917-21 finds its farcical echo in the Stalinist *putsch* of 1948. And in *Life is Elsewhere* this pseudo-revolution—as one of the last occasions in which the European poet regained his old public role of spokesman for society—becomes the setting for a sardonic commentary upon the last gasp of the poetic tradition of Hugo, Rimbaud and Lermontov.

The questions which Kundera addresses in his fiction are variations upon those which he identified in the works of Kafka and Musil: what is adventure, the future, etc, at a time when the discrediting of the idea of progress has deprived society of its sense of purpose and direction? In particular, how can the novelist grasp the self and its identity at a time when the individual has lost his personal sense of gravity in a world grown light on the 'radical diet of weight-reduction' called 'frivolity'? (*Immortality*, p135)

Some Lives! A GP's East End by David Widgery Sinclair-Stevenson, £14.95 hbk

David Widgery opens his reflections on 20 years working as a doctor in East London with a vivid testimony to the personal disillusionment, 'the grinding down of optimism', which has resulted from his encounters with the brutalised lives of those living in the lengthening shadow of Canary Wharf. He immediately links his personal disenchantment to a wider process of social decay:

'But more importantly, my experience reflects a much larger loss of hope, morale and optimism among those who live in the East End. In the young it's expressed in a kind of nihilism which is impossible sometimes to penetrate. In the old it's more often a nostalgia. It is a yearning for a now gone world of urban optimism and rising working class quality of life.' (p16)

Having outlined two age-related alternative responses to the disintegration of the traditional working class, Widgery appears to resolve his personal mid-life crisis by opting for elements of both. Thus he continues, 'I'm watching something die and I wish I wasn't. Perhaps the best that can be done is to record the process'. If Widgery is not nihilistic, there is certainly an air of fatalism in his account, and he evinces a deep sentimental affinity for the sense of community and solidarity of the East End of the dock strike, the Blitz and the traditional working class family of old Bethnal Green.

Some Lives! skilfully weaves sketches gathered from years of surgery consultations, home visits, night calls and casual encounters in one of the capital's most impoverished areas with a history of the East End and its immigrant minorities and subcultures. It also incorporates an impassioned survey of the devastating impact of more than a decade of mass unemployment, welfare cuts and Docklands redevelopment on the local community.

As a GP in deepest Limehouse, Widgery is uniquely placed to observe the personal consequences of contemporary economic and social policies and he is both a sensitive observer and a moving chronicler of the manifold sufferings inflicted on ordinary East Enders. His anecdotes and vignettes focus on the erosion of the traditional 'respectable' working class and the growth of a 'lumpen proletariat' of the poor and homeless, atomised and demoralised, and those who have succumbed to drink, drugs or madness.

Though Widgery's account sustains a powerful polemic against current government policy and arouses a deep sense of outrage, his approach is fraught with dangers, particularly at a time when right-wing theories of the 'underclass' are promoting a wider growth of anti-working class prejudice in society. The very process of selecting the most colourful of a GP's experiences inevitably tends to exaggerate the scale of the bizarre and the exotic, just as an inner-city GP experiences disproportionately high demands from a minority of difficult and disturbed patients. The result is that Widgery exaggerates the extent of 'lumpenisation' and presents the early stages of a process as though it were complete.

Another danger is implicit in the parallel Widgery draws between contemporary trends and developments in late nineteenth century London. Then too there was a degree of social breakdown and an intense middle class fear at the threat arising from a demoralised 'residuum' in the East End. This fear was fuelled by journalistic accounts of life in the slums, often written by radical campaigners, which indulged a voyeuristic preoccupation with the antics of the

underclass and offered a certain vicarious enjoyment of their depraved lifestyles. The recent *Summer on the Estate* television series about the Kingshold estate in Hackney was a modern contribution to this genre and Widgery risks falling into it.

The greatest danger, however, is that emphasising current trends towards atomisation leads Widgery to glorify the traditional working class of the fifties and sixties. He waxes lyrical about this period when most East Enders had 'stable jobs with apprenticeships and "nice" homes' and lived in 'a vast, autonomous, in some ways innocent proletarian city':

'It may have had street prostitutes and "red light" districts but little rape or child abuse was reported. There were buckets of beer but no heroin, set-piece gang battles but few random muggings, and the traditional working class family...was often intact, complete with stern father, omniscient mum, the Sunday roast, the Sunday best and no answering back'. (p8)

Cor blimey, guv, weren't they the good old days! It seems almost churlish to recall that they were also the days of Cold War austerity and conformity, when women's place was in the home, gays were firmly in the closet and the mighty unions kept blacks off the docks.

Widgery's despair for the 'new' working class and his romanticisation of the 'old' leads inexorably to a conclusion which appeals for a return to the past, for the 'recovery' of 'something infinitely precious, that sense of neighbourhood, community and mutual solidarity'. How is this project of 'recovery' to be effected? In his closing chapter Widgery approvingly quotes the example of George Bernard Shaw in his Fabian municipal socialist mode and endorses the former Docklands Joint Committee of the five local councils against the London Docklands Development Corporation, he approves the old NHS and the old GLC and even finds something positive in the Morrisonian council housing programmes carried through by Labour from the thirties to the sixties. 'We need to plan again' concludes Widgery: a social

Emphasising current trends leads Widgery to glorify the working class of the fifties and sixties

democratic celebration of the harmony and gradual improvement of an earlier era culminates in a social democratic vision of the future.

Widgery's fatalistic reformism reflects a series of one-sided perceptions of contemporary social trends. The death of the old working class has eroded traditional forms of organisation and solidarity, but it has also destroyed the stultifying influences of Labourism and Stalinism which have for so long constrained the potential for revolt, in East London more than anywhere in Britain. The emergence of an impoverished and demoralised layer in the inner cities is only one aspect of the process of remaking the working class that is currently underway.

Despite the way things may appear from Widgery's surgery, it is far from being the dominant trend, even in East London, where new patterns of employment, particularly in services, are creating gainers as well as losers in a restructured working class. While Widgery laments the decay of the old, there is a job to be done in promoting the reconstitution of the new. But that task is clearly outside the compass of this GP and the Labourist tradition to which he belongs.

Michael Fitzpatrick



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