LIVING MARXISM

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Saturday 9 November
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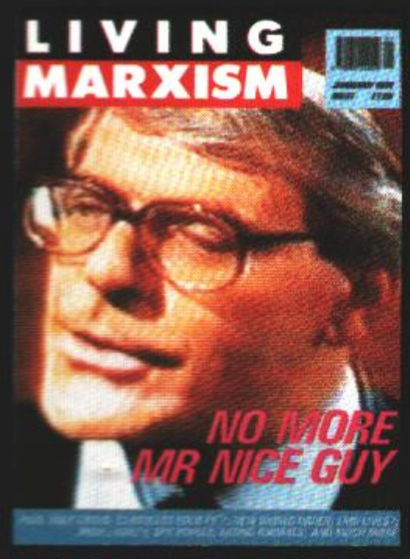
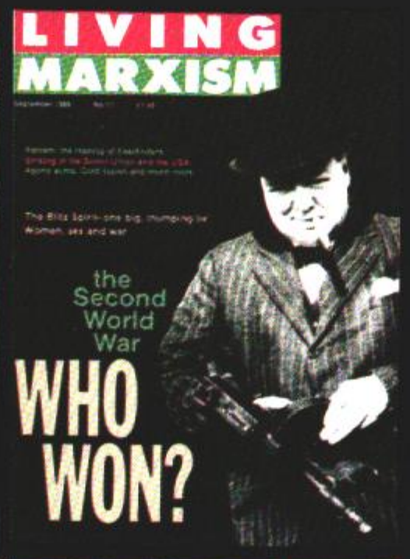
The silent race war

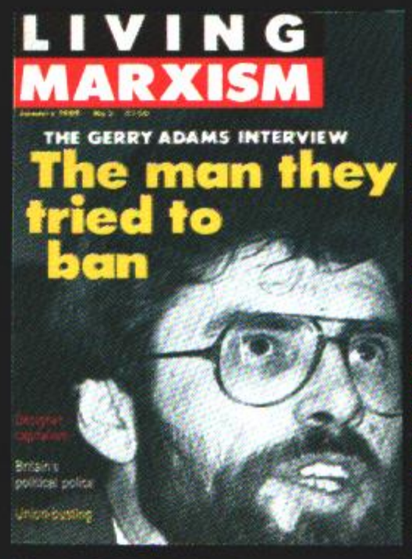
Destruction of the third world

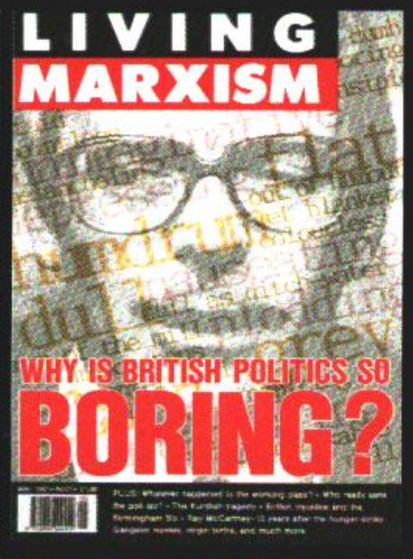
The 'underclass': a race apart?

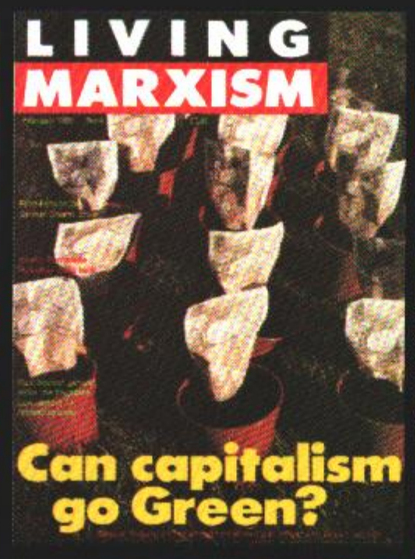
General election?
There's only one party in it

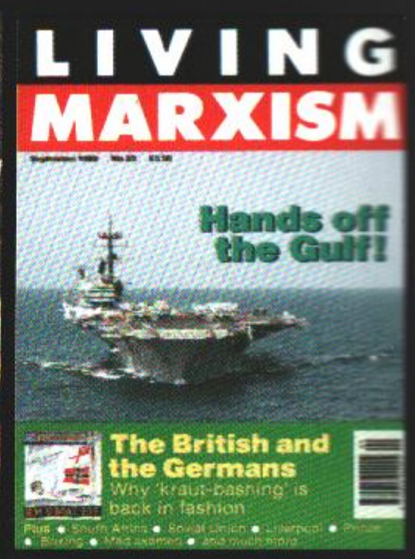


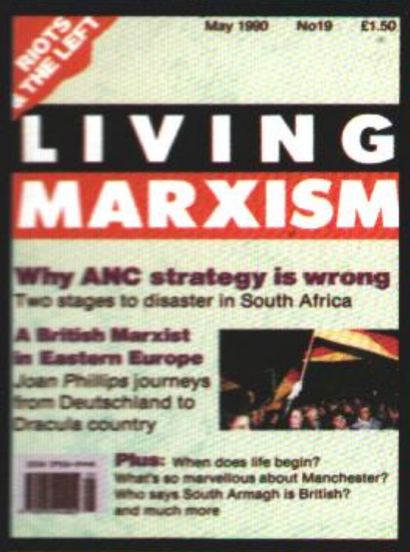


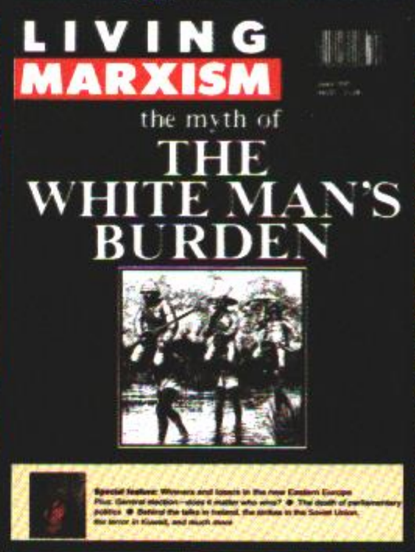


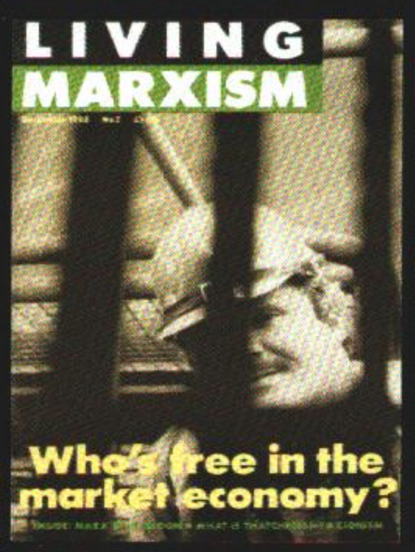


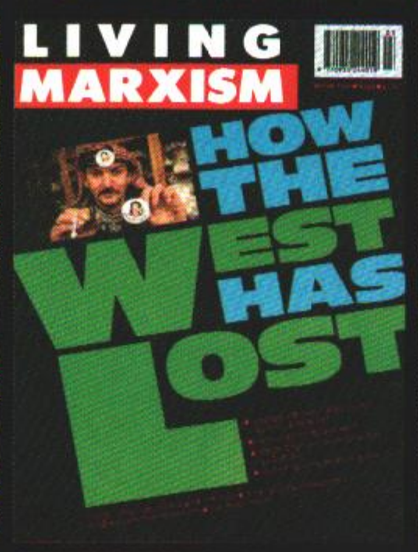


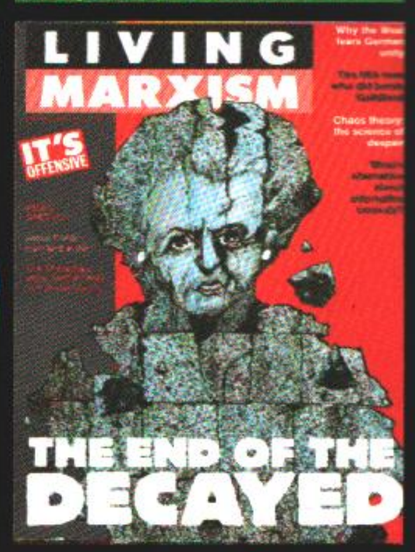


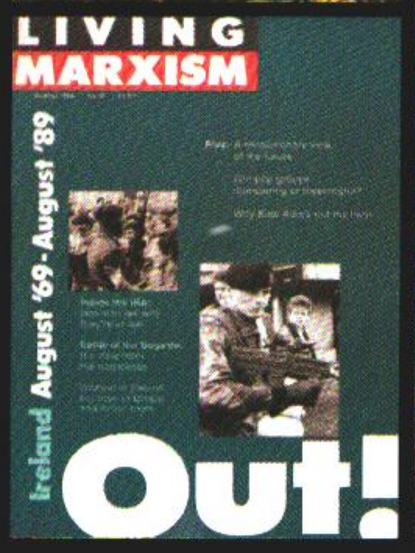


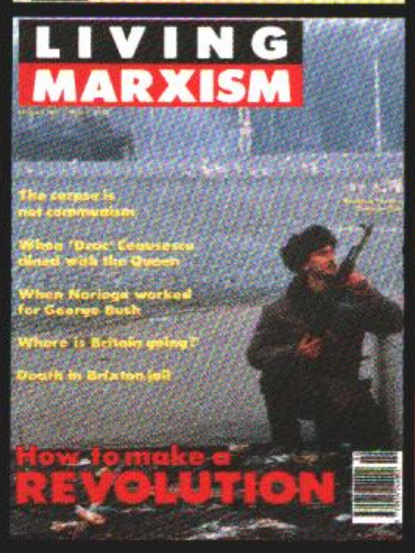


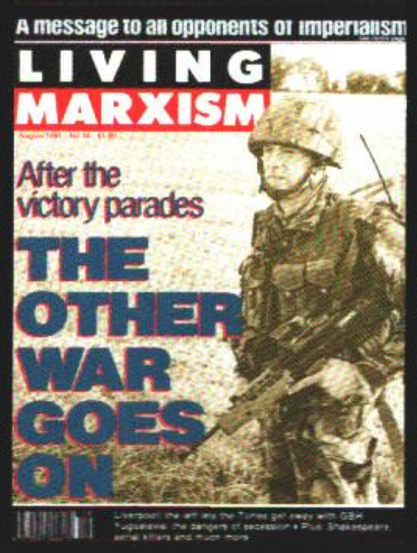


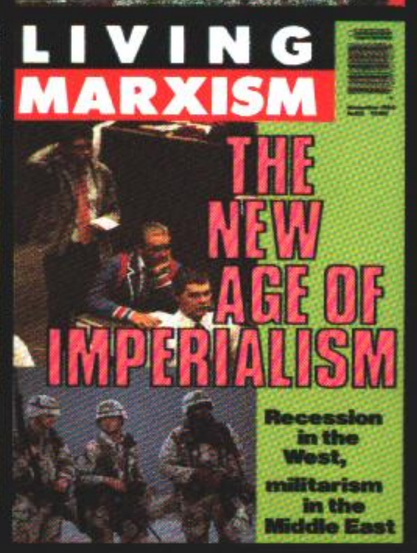












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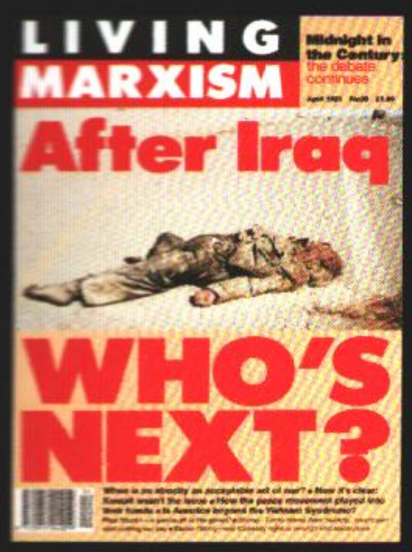

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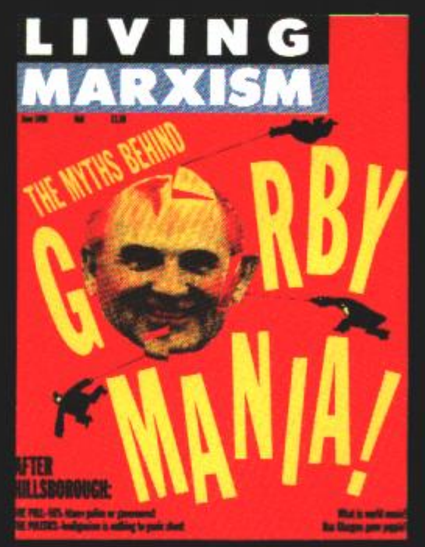

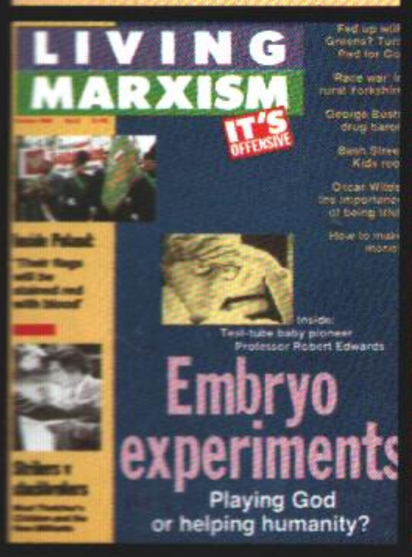

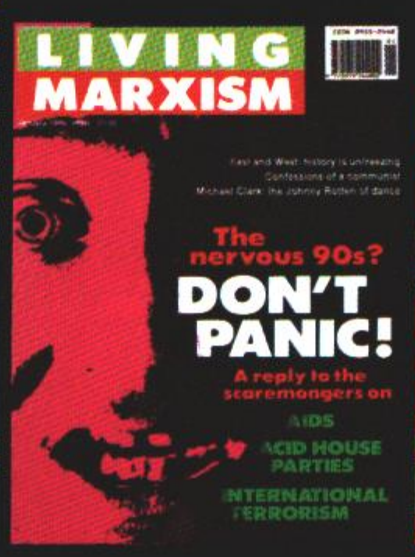

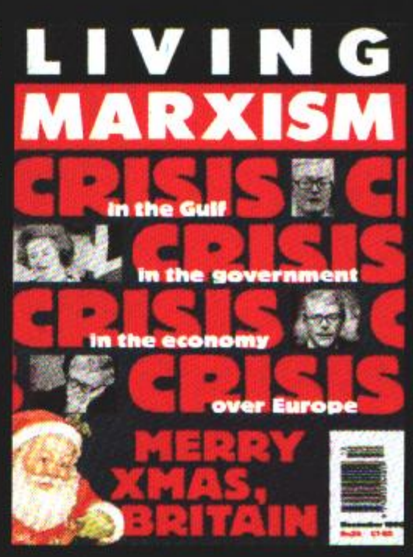

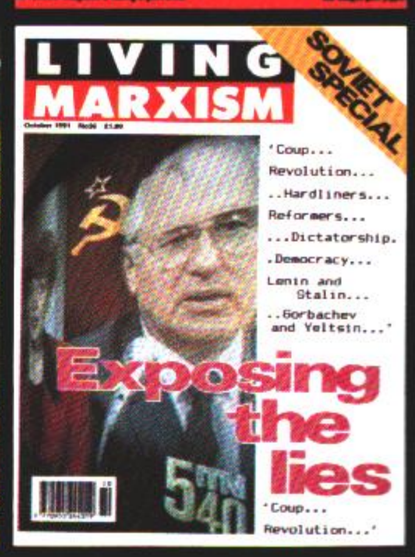

COVER PHOTO: Michael Kramer

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LIVING MARXISM three years on

It is amazing to think, as the tabloid press would say, that until his release Jackie Mann would never have heard of *Living Marxism*. Thankfully, however, a great many other people have heard of and read *Living Marxism* since the magazine was launched three years ago this month, in November 1988.

That very first issue carried a feature contesting the widespread view that Gorbachev and *glasnost* would help to revitalise the international left. Instead, we argued, the Kremlin's conversion from Stalinism to pro-market policies could only strengthen the intellectual case for capitalism. Recent events in the Soviet Union and their impact in the West have proved how right we were.

The ability to stay ahead of events, and identify underlying trends in a fast-changing world, has ensured that *Living Marxism* has survived and indeed prospered at a time when many other left-wing publications were falling by the wayside. While the problems created by capitalism become more pressing each day, *Living Marxism* is now almost the only critical voice left to expose them. We need your support to ensure that voice is heard.

We would like to thank you, our readers, for your support over the past three years, and appeal to you to help ensure that *Living Marxism* continues to flourish in the years ahead. One way that you can do that today (and save yourself some money in the process) is by taking out a subscription—see opposite page for details.

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editorial

General election?
There's only one party in it

There is only one party in British parliamentary politics today. One week, at a conference in Brighton, it calls itself the Labour Party. The next week, at a conference in Blackpool, it calls itself the Conservatives. But in all essentials the two are now so hard to tell apart that they might as well be branches of the same organisation: a single great British party, with no inspiring ideas, no charismatic leaders, and all the colour and passion of a potato.

A lot of commentators have noted that Labour and the Tories now have similar policies. That does not go far enough. What they have in common is a lack of any policies of substance at all. Look at what they produced during this year's party conference season—the last before the general election, and a vital opportunity to launch their vote-winning campaigns.

The best new policy the Tory conference could come up with was Kenneth Baker's anti-joyrider bill, a revolutionary measure which will make it illegal for teenagers to steal other people's cars and drive them very fast. This seems certain to cure all of the problems of our inner cities.

In his big speech over at the Labour conference, meanwhile, Neil Kinnock was responding to the outrageous accusation that his new model party is as boring as the Tories. 'Not adventurous?', he asked in disbelief—and then outlined Labour's daring plan to transform life in Britain by getting BR to clean their trains.

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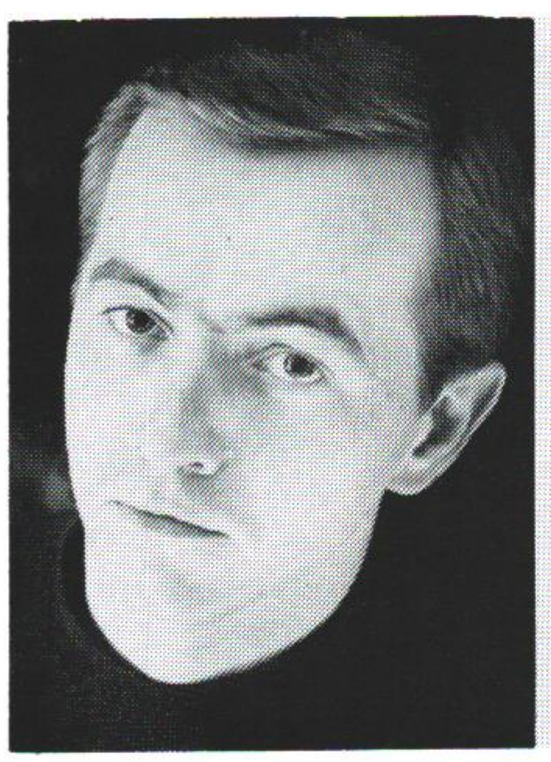
An air of unreality surrounded the party conferences. Since neither party had any solutions to the capitalist slump which was ravaging the country outside, they chose not to discuss it too much inside the conference halls. Instead, attention was focused on the stage-managed presentation of eccentric policies and empty rhetoric, greeted by the most unspontaneous standing ovations seen outside Ceausescu's Romania. And when Major and Kinnock had each delivered the same platitudes about opportunity knocking, both sets of supporters waved the same Union Jack flags.

It all provided powerful confirmation of the Americanisation of British politics. In the USA, the Republicans and Democrats have long acted as extensions of the same political party. They have no significant policy differences, and elections between them are little more than beauty contests about who



editor
mick hume

can present the most populist image. This is the model which is now well on the way to being adopted over here.

For example, the Hollywood-directed TV broadcasts featuring Neil and Glenys Kinnock as two of the lads, or John and Norma Major as Mr and Mrs Next Door Neighbour, are the British equivalent of the American political promos in which a stiff dullard like George Bush is presented as a golfin'-and-fishin' regular guy.

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How has this informal merger of the major British parties come about? Over the past few years, first the Labour Party and then the Tories have experienced the exhaustion of their existing programmes. Each has responded by dumping that which most clearly distinguished it from its rivals.

The Conservatives have put aside the Thatcherite ideology of the eighties, along with its leading advocate, and ditched unpopular measures such as the poll tax. The Labour Party, for its part, has gone to great lengths to kill off the radical reputation which it undeservedly picked up in the seventies and early eighties. Kinnock has hammered the left, distanced the party from the trade unions, and stamped on traditional Labourist policies like nationalisation and unilateral nuclear disarmament.

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The result is that both major parties have lost whatever edge they had and ended up in the marshy centre ground, along with the Liberal Democrats, the natural party of flavourless stodge. This blanding of British politics may well have made both Labour and the Tories less offensive to some middle-of-the-road voters. But they have each lost something important in the process; the ability to enthuse an audience by projecting a sense of political dynamism.

Labour has lost the most. Kinnock has not merely dumped the odd policy, he has abandoned his party's traditional identity. Old-fashioned Labourism no longer exists. The trouble is that Labour has nothing new with which to replace it. Instead, it can only echo Tory principles about the virtues of a market economy, strong armed forces and so on. Critics who point to Kinnock's windy style as the source of Labour's problems miss the point. He is an appropriately vacuous leader for a party with nothing left to say.

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In hammering Militant and the left and tightening his bureaucratic grip on the Labour machine, Kinnock has just about strangled any life that remained in his party. Labour is now a political force on paper alone, with no active day-to-day existence outside of newspaper opinion polls. For a party like the Tories, with the weight of establishment and media support behind them, this problem might just be manageable. But for Labour, which has only ever defeated the Conservatives when it could connect with some movement in the country, it threatens to be fatal.

The Tories too have lost their dynamic appeal. However much they antagonised some in the eighties, the strident Thatcherites at least had the ability to galvanise the Conservative constituency. But their programme is now exhausted, the confidence has gone, and the constituency has been demobilised. Major may be nice, but that is no substitute for economic success as an election-winner. In place of the plausible (though false) economic optimism which chancellor Nigel Lawson expressed before the 1987 general election, all Norman Lamont can offer the electorate this time around is 'the feelgood factor'; a brilliant school of economic thought based upon the superstition that if you say the magic word 'upturn' often enough, one will materialise.

Even unemployment has ceased to be a live political issue

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In electoral terms, the outcome of the contest remains undecided. It seems certain that Labour cannot win outright, but it is also quite possible that the Tories will lose. In real political terms, however, the result of this one-party election is already clear. It is no contest, a non-event; it will make no difference to the vast majority of people's lives whether Major or Kinnock wins more seats.

More people than ever now sense that the parliamentary political charade does not touch their real concerns. Even a pressing problem such as unemployment has ceased to be a live political issue. There is no public enthusiasm for either the Tories or Labour and—unlike in 1983 or 1987—no public demand for an election. Instead, there is widespread cynicism and disenchantment with the whole business.

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This understandable response is another illustration of the Americanisation of British politics. Only a minority of Americans bother to vote in presidential elections; most working class people entirely absent themselves from the political process. The US experience should also serve as a warning to us, however, that such cynical abstentionism is an insufficient response to the problem of one-party politics.

American workers have turned their backs on mainstream politics, but without developing any alternative. As a consequence the unpopular Republican-Democrat alliance has been able to continue running the capitalist economy at their expense. While electoral abstention rates have been rising, working class living standards in the richest country on Earth have been falling. They are now back to the levels of the late 1950s. It will take more than switching TV channels during party political broadcasts to prevent the same thing happening here.

Cynicism and apathy are not enough. What we need instead is a positive rejection of the brain-dead one-party system, and an active endorsement of a new political agenda. *Living Marxism* exists to help change the political climate. We can start by raising a critical voice against the shortcomings of capitalism which politicians on all sides of parliament now accept as inevitable facts of life.

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Unless we can popularise such an actively critical attitude, they will continue to get away with playing their little game of politics in the run-up to the next election while capitalist recession continues to blight our lives. And, whether the country is run by the wing of their party which is funded by big business or the wing which is funded by trade union bureaucrats, we can be certain that the real costs will be borne by us.

In October Adrian Kane-Smith, a founding supporter of *Living Marxism* and Camden organiser of the Revolutionary Communist Party, died of cancer. Throughout his long illness, Adrian maintained an active interest in revolutionary politics. His energy, commitment and, above all, his courage should be an inspiration to us all. We extend our deepest sympathies to Adrian's family, friends and comrades.

letters

Labour, Militant and Marxism

Frank Richard's article on Militant ('The last gasp of NHS socialism', October) condemns the left for believing that 'any attempt to relate to the real world has to be carried out through the Labour Party'. While I agree that socialists need to evolve new traditions outside Labour, I disagree with his analysis of the 'real world'. Out there in working class communities, 40 per cent vote for the Labour Party. We can't write off this fact. We will never be able to quicken the tempo of the class struggle by pretending that in the 'real world' these people don't exist!

The task of socialists is to connect with working class people who see themselves as Labour supporters. Of course we point out that Labour is a capitalist workers party designed to yoke the working class to capitalist interests. But we also have to recognise that working class people don't vote for Labour because it serves the interests of capital, but because they think it will make a change. Our job is to channel that desire for change in a revolutionary direction.
Marie Ellis *London*

Perhaps Militant do seem determined to celebrate ignorance. But they are certainly not ignorant enough to have stated that 'if you were not in the Labour Party then you were outside the working class', as Frank Richards claims in his article on Militant.

As Marxists intelligent enough to adopt a critical posture, you should be intelligent enough to realise that class has more to do with your relationship to the means of production than your membership of any political party. As a one-time member of Militant and a recent subscriber to *Living Marxism*, critical posture is all very easily adopted from the safety of a glossy journal appreciated by the more educated, articulate campus revolutionaries. And, I hasten to add, there are many around who are less arrogant in their opinions but certainly more accurate!

Finally, there has been without doubt an erosion of identity around the workplace, but I really feel that you should consider exactly whose interests you are supposed to represent, instead of catering to an academic readership whose personal experiences of Militant are surely as limited as your own.
M Downie *Birmingham*

Midnight in the Century

The debate surrounding the 'Midnight in the Century' has produced an understandable reaction against an emphasis on the battle of ideas. Many express the fear that the establishment of an 'intellectual project' means ignoring struggle and resigning ourselves to academic passivity.

However, the surest route to passivity is the belief that the class struggle will continue to take the forms of the past. Waiting for history to repeat itself can only lead to demoralisation. A new situation has created new problems with the need for new approaches to resolve them.

The route to practical influence over the future struggle for change lies in the recognition that we have to start from scratch in building a new collective approach to social emancipation. Clearly, while the future forms of the class struggle are indeterminate, this is largely an intellectual project.
Dave Chandler *Newcastle*

Model free market

Phil Murphy's article 'BCCI and the myth of the free market' (September) is timely, but perhaps that is all it is. The article is high on rhetoric, poor on analysis, and provides little data to back up its statements.

My first point of criticism is Murphy's attack on the 'free market'. As most introductory economic textbooks point out, the free market is a theoretical model. Sure, politicians of a certain party do talk about their implementation of the free market, but there is no need to encourage this distortion of meaning.

My second criticism is of the lack of statistical material. Of course, statistics can't be produced to validate Murphy's claim that MI5/MI6 and the CIA wanted BCCI to remain open. But what about his argument that 'late twentieth century capitalism is mostly about financial speculation involving huge cross-border money and credit transactions'. Sounds good, but how much exactly is 'mostly'?

Clearly the market mechanism has failures (which, in Western 'mixed' economies is one of the main reasons for government intervention) as well as successes. Murphy's article made little contribution to its analysis.
Samir Ishtiaq *London*

Did the sports boycott succeed?

Moses Dube's article 'Don't get caught out' (September) on the sports boycott of South Africa, completely misses the point of it. The boycott was never designed to bring down apartheid *by itself*—it is ludicrous to think this.

The boycott was designed, at least from the point of view of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and of the non-white world, to show *moral* outrage at South Africa's racist state. Its whole point was to stop teams, etc, going to and from South Africa, and therefore giving apartheid 'official' acceptance. The success of the boycott's limited aims can be seen from the open and laughable lengths the establishment went to overcome it, such as at Sun City and during the Zola Budd affair.

The boycott was never intended—or in fact never could—bring about apartheid's inevitable collapse. It was meant to complement the much more effective economic and political sanctions. The boycott simply added to the necessary isolation of South Africa, something that ANC leader Albert Luthuli had called for as early as 1959.
Deepak Shah *Epsom*

Words almost fail a Green

The Green Party principle that immigration is not in general a good thing has nothing to do

with racism. It simply recognises that the best way to leave a sinking ship is not for all to try and get into the same lifeboat.

It should be a prime aim of the 'have' nations to help the 'have-nots' to economic viability, where no-one should be driven to leave his/her country by want. Does Lee Osborn (letters, September) seriously believe an immigrant is better off in the backstreets of any European city trying to climb the bottom rung of the Western capitalist ladder, than well fed at home? This is surely an attitude which goes with sending bags of cast-off clothing to the poor naked savages!

As for John Markham's statement (letters, September) that 'human progress is dependent on increasing our powers of production'—words almost fail me. Producing what? From what? By whom? Till when? And first define progress!

HJ Lang *Bristol*

Irish solutions

According to Richard Clark (letters, September) Irish republicans should follow the example of Daniel O'Connell rather than the violent campaign of the IRA. But just how successful was O'Connell's campaign?

O'Connell, a Catholic landowner and barrister, founded the Catholic Association to raise money to support Protestant parliamentary candidates—in favour of Catholic emancipation—at a time when Catholics were allowed to vote but not sit in parliament. Throughout his own parliamentary career, O'Connell promised to campaign against the 1800 Act of Union. However, he took no action on this until 1843 when, disturbed by the growing influence of the more violent tactics of the 'Young Ireland' movement, he attempted to bolster the Association's Irish Catholic support by staging massive open air meetings where he pledged to end the Act of Union within a year. Robert Peel, the Tory Prime Minister responded by banning an 1843 rally and sending more troops to Ireland. O'Connell was arrested on charges of conspiracy; the 'Young Ireland' movement assumed a more prominent role in Irish politics.

The Catholic Association may have been 'distressing' to the ruling classes, but never so distressing as the violent tactics of the 'Young Ireland' movement and later, the IRA. It certainly did not cause them the same anxiety as the deathly whistle of a mortar shell, as I'm sure John Major would agree.

Richard Allen *Birmingham*

Don't defend the Indians

I was concerned to see that some of your correspondents to *Living Marxism* (October), in their eagerness to criticise capitalism, seem to be resurrecting the pre-capitalist past. First, Toby Banks takes the side of the Indians against the Western expansion of American capital. Then Robert Brenchley of Birmingham condemns Western capitalism and the industrial revolution for enslaving Africans. Finally, tongue in cheek I hope, Frank Cottrell-Boyce denigrates us 'ratty little mammals' compared to the prehistoric Brontosaurus!

In discussing the genesis of the industrial capitalist, Marx admitted that 'capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt'. Nevertheless, since capitalism creates an agent that can liberate humanity—the working class, he preferred its temporary tyranny to the unending barbarism of precapitalist society. As the anniversary of Columbus' 'encounter' with America draws near, it is important that Marxists stand firm for progress against the advocates of barbarism.

Andy Clarkson *London*

Outing: a nasty game

I agree with Ann Bradley's comments on 'outing'—it is a nasty game usually confined to the gutter press and can often be counter-productive if played by us gays and lesbians. Who indeed, wants to be identified with sick(ly) pop-stars who embrace Christianity—a religion that must hold the gold medal for moral crusaids and persecution against us over the years. No wonder gay and lesbian teenagers still commit suicide, for all the cosy chats our leaders have with Tory prime ministers.

One piece of history that was denied me for most of my 40 years in the Communist Party was that all anti-gay laws were abolished after the October Revolution (and reinstated by Stalin in the thirties). Thank you, *Living Marxism*, for helping us towards the next revolution.

Bill Thornycroft *London*

German Stalinism: a stinking corpse

I find it funny how Germans throw their political trash, which couldn't even be recycled as toilet paper, abroad. Take Uwe Schwarz's letter on the German communist party (October). The tragic death of a political party has always been something dramatic, hasn't it? Now we face the last act of today's most famous play: 'the deserved end of the left opposition' in Germany. While everyone is yearning for the hero's last breath, a man boards the stage, crying out that there will be another act when the knight will ride again.

Uwe Schwarz wants the readers of *Living Marxism* to believe that his party, once the SED and now the PDS, will be an essential part of a future red-green left opposition in Germany. But let's have a look from the outside. The PDS is not red, it's chicken. The PDS is no more Marxist or anti-capitalist than the Social Democrats (SPD), and no more oppositional that the Christian Democrats (CDU). The equation 'KPD + SPD = SED - KPD = PDS' sums up the communist party's current political role.

The PDS acts like a loyal employee of a shut-down plant who comes to work every morning and mourns that the doors are closed. Uwe Schwarz bemoans the fact that the little join-in struggle which gave him such good oppositional vibes has vanished. 'No time to lose!', he shouts, but the louder he cries, the clearer I see that the future anti-imperialist opposition is based on the destruction of the old labour movement. That might make many PDS pipe-dreamers feel suicidal, but my green insight tells me that one death clears the way for a new birth. Stalinism already stinks a little—I will surely not miss it's burial.

Andre Thiele *Wiesbaden, Germany*

A steal at any price

I nick a copy of *Living Marxism* every month from WH Smiths. I slip it inside an edition of the *Wakefield Express* when the assistants aren't looking and pay only for the latter. Do you consider this kind of behaviour to be Marxist or not?

Martin *Wakefield*

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

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

'Better the devil

Will the shock of economic slump in the south lead 'Essex Man' to desert the Tories? Andrew Calcutt found that the working class voters of Essex feel badly let down by the Tories; but they trust Labour even less

The media coined the term 'Essex Man' (and later 'Essex Woman') to describe the new Tory voters in the south of England. For Tory newspapers such as the *Sunday Telegraph,* it was a shorthand way of saying: these people are ill-mannered oiks, but at least they are our oiks now—not Labour's.

Essex Man became 'our oiks' during the Thatcher years. The experience of the last Labour government was a turning point. The austerity programme implemented by Labour in the seventies led to the biggest cuts in working class living standards since the war, yet still failed to turn the ailing economy around. In the south, where the organisations and traditions of the labour movement were already weak, many working class voters decided they would be better off with a Tory government. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became prime minister. The eighties confirmed the Tory ascendancy, as a new generation of voters in southern counties such as Essex rejected a Labour Party which they identified with the past. The general election of 1987 made the south, apart from a handful of inner-London constituencies, into a Labour-free zone.

Dry lager

Eighties pundits portrayed Essex Man as a generation of brash young stock-market traders, swilling dry lager, driving GTis, and wearing Union Jack shorts under designer suits. They proclaimed the birth of Tory-voting Essex Man as another

you know'

nail in the coffin of the working class. In fact, southern counties such as Essex are now home to the majority of the British working class. Many of the new Tory voters work in relatively low-paid service sector jobs. Many others might commute to the office in a collar and tie rather than cycling to a local factory in a boiler suit. But they are still working class people who, like workers everywhere, are only one pay-cheque away from the breadline.

The economic slump has hit Essex men and women hard. Shakeouts in the City have sent thousands of Essex workers on the train home from Fenchurch Street for the last time. Local service industries have fared just as poorly. All over the county, shops and offices stand empty. The long-term decline of traditional industries—the docks, car manufacture, chemicals—has been accelerated. Vacancies are so scarce that the Department of Employment has closed the Jobcentre in the Essex town of Stanford-le-Hope.

Media creation

Essex Man was largely a media creation. But the pundits who invented the myth were right in one respect: southern workers have voted Tory over the past decade. Labour is hoping that the experience of recession will bring them back into the Labour fold. But will it? I spoke to about a hundred working class people in three Essex constituencies held by the Tories: Harlow, where the sitting MP is Jerry Hayes (majority: 5877); Chingford, where the MP, former party chairman Norman Tebbit (majority: 17 955), will not be standing again; and the marginal seat of Thurrock, captured from Labour in 1987 by Tim Janman (majority: 690). Judging by the comments I heard, Labour's hopes are likely to be dashed.

Here's how an unemployed catering worker introduced himself: 'I'm working class and it's against my background, but I will probably vote Conservative because I just don't think Labour would be any good.' 'I think the recession is worse than they admit', said a student at Grays Technical College, Thurrock, 'but I'm still a Tory because they are the best people to get us out of it'. Worried about the threat of short-time working and her son's impending redundancy, an advertising sales clerk from Chingford felt the same way: 'If anybody's ever going to get us out of this it will be the Conservatives.'

Load of wallies

Among working class voters, there was little enthusiasm for Tory policy. But the consensus was that the Tories are more businesslike and less untrustworthy than Labour. 'You don't get a good deal with either of the parties', said a child-minder from Grays, 'but with the Conservatives you get a slightly better result'. 'The Conservatives are better for the country as a whole', said a middle-aged woman shopping in Harlow: 'Their economics are better. They make you pay for it, but they don't borrow. They win more respect abroad. I want a solid stable country and the Conservatives are more solid.' A manual worker from Harlow compared the two parties to 'the choice between a cup of milk and a Scotch. The Conservatives are the strong ones. You may not like it, but they say what they are going to do, and they do it. Labour are a load of wallies and I wouldn't trust them as far as I could throw them'. A woman from Chingford agreed: 'I think both parties are corrupt but I would trust Labour less. Better the devil you know.'

What is Labour for?

Under Neil Kinnock's leadership, the Labour Party has done its best to break with its traditional image: ditching policies such as nationalisation, embracing the market economy, and bashing the left. But cutting adrift from old traditions is one thing; finding something effective with which to replace them has proved more difficult. Now, the voters of a place like Essex seem not to know what Labour is supposed to stand for, except the hounding of Militant. ▶

Essex blues

Working class support for the Tories remains pragmatic and provisional

Labour may have succeeded in shedding its cloth cap image. But to some Essex voters, it now appears as a sort of charitable organisation with worthy intentions towards the NHS and the welfare state which the majority of working people will have to pay for. 'Labour are all for the poor and needy', said the 'middle of the road' woman from Harlow, 'Someone's got to pay for it—us.' Skilled workers who voted Tory generally associated Labour with giving something up and getting left behind.

The Labour supporters I spoke to tended to endorse the idea that voting for Kinnock is akin to putting money in an Oxfam envelope. A teacher from Chingford explained, 'I would be prepared to pay more in taxes for a better health service and care for the homeless. But I'm relatively secure, so I suppose it's easier for me to talk about making sacrifices'. A former registered docker from Thurrock, sacked last year and now working in a warehouse, called for 'this fickle nation' to elect 'a caring Labour government instead of voting for what's best for them'. It seems that Labour supporters are keen to promote altruism because they don't have a convincing answer to the all-important question, 'What's in it for me?'.

'Labour don't have much to offer in the way of policies', said a shop assistant from Harlow. A pensioner, also from Harlow, recalled an evasive Kinnock interviewed on television: 'He criticises Major but when they say, "what would you do?", he doesn't answer the question.' A group of Chingford residents came up with comments along the lines of 'Labour doesn't know what it is doing', 'Labour has no direction and they change to whatever they think will fit'. A woman in her fifties from Harlow, who described herself as 'middle of the road', preferred Major to Kinnock who 'goes by the wind, got no depth'. A manual worker in his thirties complained that 'Labour are hypocritical. They say they are going to do one thing and then they change it'. He said he might vote Labour next time because he was so fed up with the Tory government manipulating interest rates and doctoring unemployment figures. Even so, he felt the Tories would win because 'Labour doesn't have the capability the Conservatives have for running the country'.

Even 'the poor and needy' are not convinced that Labour would be best for them. 'I don't think I would have done any better under Labour', said a middle-aged former manual worker from Harlow whose invalidity benefit was cut in 1988 by the then social security minister, John Major. A widow from Chingford, living on £39 a week, wanted 'the Conservatives to get their act together. I don't think Labour can do it. It's got to be the Conservatives'.

The race card

Racism may prove a useful issue with which Essex Tories can rally support. Hostility towards black people, while usually muted, is widespread. 'There's many who live off the state. Why should they be allowed in?', said a 'non-racialist' from Chingford. A middle-aged woman from Harlow thought that 'Labour are too much for the ethnics. They try to curry favour with them to get their votes'. An unemployed 18-year old from Chingford said he was thinking of voting Labour, but only if 'they toughen up on immigration or there will be more claiming benefit and looking for jobs'. The consensus was that 'the Conservatives are safer on these issues'. Thurrock's Tory MP Tim Janman has already tried to boost his chances of hanging on to his marginal seat by making statements against 'bogus asylum seekers' and decrying the fact that 'whole areas of London have been taken over'. If race does turn out to be a winning issue for the Tories in Essex, the Labour Party will have only itself to blame. Labour has done as much as the Tories to educate people in the chauvinistic, anti-foreign politics of 'British is best'. Now it is suffering the consequences.

Hearts and minds

It is hard to imagine Labour regaining many of the seats in the south which it lost to the Tories in the late seventies and eighties. But Labour's weakness does not mean that the Conservative Party has won the hearts and minds of the southern working class. Far from it. Many I spoke to who rejected Labour were almost as sceptical of the Tories they plan to vote for.

'Middle of the road' from Harlow complained that 'the Tories look after business people. Labour are for the underprivileged. Neither party does much for us, the ones in the middle'. A manual worker from Chingford commented, 'I will support the Tories again but more people don't care anymore. There is a lot of disillusion'. A woman from Thurrock, who has applied for scores of jobs now that her husband has been laid off, remembered when 'it seemed a good idea that the Tories got in and promoted small businesses. But now look....All these politicians need a kick up the chad'.

Grudging votes

In the short term, Tory candidates look set to receive grudging support from the majority of Essex voters. But a growing number of constituents are giving up the ballot box altogether. 'I don't see any government making that much difference', said a Chingford catering worker. 'Something's got to change but who is there who could do it?', asked a taxi-driver from Thurrock. Many young people simply said, 'I wouldn't vote for any of them'. Youth are not the only ones to sever connections with mainstream politics. A woman from Harlow probably spoke for many working class voters in the South: 'I voted Labour all my life until Thatcher got in, and then I voted for her. Now I don't give a hoot who gets in. I'm sorry if that sounds irresponsible.'

For more than a century, the British electorate has included a rump of Alf Garnetts: working-class Tories with a deep-seated commitment to Conservatism. But the southern workers who turned to the Tories during the past 15 years are not from that mould. None of them mentioned the ideas of 'popular capitalism' or 'the enterprise culture' as a reason why they have voted Tory. They have not been converted to the principles of right-wing ideology. Instead, they elected a Tory government because they saw it as the best available way to achieve a decent living standard for themselves and their families. In the nineties, despite the failure of Tory economics, many still see the Conservatives as a safer bet on the economy than the lightweight Labour Party. In general, however, working class support for the Tories remains pragmatic and provisional.

No choice

Opinions expressed by Essex voters show that the Tories will probably continue to attract working class support as long as they seem more businesslike than Labour. Yet neither Major nor Kinnock inspires real confidence or enthusiasm among the men and women of Essex, and neither party has a hold on the hearts and minds of the working class. ●

Happy families

Ann Bradley

_If_ people did turn their backs on the traditional family, they _would_ be rejecting the organisation of society as we know it

Government statistical surveys are full of interesting little snippets with which to fascinate (or bore) your friends. The latest Office of Population Censuses and Surveys birth statistics are no exception.

Did you know, for example, that last year 18 400 more babies were born than in 1989? Had you sussed that today's women are less likely to give birth to boys than their mothers were? Do you know why the number of women having triplets has more than doubled since 1980?

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You can be excused for not having filled your brain with such ephemera. The press wasn't bothered about it either. They were only interested in one aspect of the birth statistics—the evidence of the moral degeneration of the nation. The rise in extra-marital births in general and the rise in teenage pregnancies in particular.

'When the conventional two-parent family is threatened,' *Sunday Times* columnist, Bryan Appleyard, commented, 'our whole society is at risk'. He went on to pull his favourite shock-horror facts from the figures. The number of teenage mothers has increased threefold over the past decade. In 1990, over a quarter of children were born 'out of wedlock', and the proportion is growing by the year. Last year, 200 000 babies were what Bryan (never a man to pander to liberals) still refers to as 'illegitimate'.

These statistics have certainly put the wind up the moral reactionaries. Charles Murray, an American political scientist, has been wheeled out to confirm that our 'illegitimacy ratio' is now higher than the USA's, and growing faster than that of any other industrialised country. Dr Anthony Daniels in the *Daily Mail* wails that, 'the latest figures on illegitimate births represent a disaster both for the individuals concerned and for the country as a whole'.

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I can see why the Charles Murrays of this world would be worried. He believes that illegitimacy is one of the key defining features of an underclass, alienated from society. Apparently male children who grow up without a father are more prone to violent anti-social behaviour. At puberty they seethe with unsocialised testosterone, and without a stable male role model they become sullen, uncommunicative vandals. In America, Murray argues, it's the fatherless children who are the perpetrators of senseless killings. In Britain, Bryan Appleyard remembers that illegitimacy rates began to rise in 1979, 'a date that precedes the birth of many of our recent rioters'.

These self-appointed moral guardians believe that when people have children outside marriage, they turn their backs on the traditional family structure—and in rejecting the nuclear family they turn their backs on society.

The last part of this equation is arguably true. *If* people did turn their backs on the traditional family, they *would* be rejecting the organisation of society as we know it. Our lives are built upon the assumption that we live in families—that mothers will look after children, that men will strive to be breadwinners, and that our home is our castle. However, nobody can seriously make the case that the family is breaking down.

The moral minority can gnash their teeth till their gums bleed but a balanced look at the 'horror statistics' shows that the traditional mother-father family is still going strong. People may choose not to marry but they still tend to live in monogamous pairs. Three quarters of the so-called 'illegitimate' births were jointly registered by the mother and father, the overwhelming majority living together. The two-parent family is alive and kicking—even if mum has no wedding ring.

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Nor is it the case that feckless teenagers are breeding like rabbits. The rate of teenage pregnancy has increased—slightly. But nothing like the increase in the rate of pregnancies to unwed thirty-somethings which has almost trebled in the past 10 years. Rather than the baby boom being down to gymslip mums, the figures show that the maternity wards are full of working women who have postponed maternity until they have established a career.

The rising number of extra-marital births doesn't herald a breakdown in the social fabric in Britain, any more than in Sweden where more than half of births are to unmarried mothers.

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When Dr Daniels writes that every teenage pregnancy is a tragedy, I'm inclined to agree. But it's a tragedy of human rather than moral dimensions. It is a tragedy that some young girl has to sacrifice all the fun of adolescence and swap it for sleepless nights with a squawking infant.

The final irony is that the myth of the ideal happy nuclear family, peddled by the moralists, is behind many teenage pregnancies. For many young girls, with no hope of a decent job or independence, pregnancy and the chance of marriage seems the way to escape being stuck at home with their own mum and dad. For others, pregnancy is a way of claiming adult status or simply a way of getting somebody to love. With their heads full of Mothercare adverts, and hopes that their boy will 'do the right thing', they embark upon motherhood when they ought to be living it up.

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Young people today are no more anti-social than their parents. On the contrary, the signs are that, as a consequence of the times in which they have grown up, they are more conservative. When BBC schools television asked teenagers about their ambitions in life they found that having fame, fortune and a good sex life were the aim of a tiny few. Over half those interviewed wanted to be married with a well paid job by the time they were 40. Almost a third said they would vote Conservative. Now that is truly depressing.

The feelgood

Tory attempts to talk up the economy might persuade the experts; but, says Helen Simons, they can't transform the reality of capitalist slump

'Stand-by for lift-off' is the London *Evening Standard's* verdict on the economy. In its lead article on 2 October, the paper pronounced John Major 'on course for economic lift-off...the recovery will be stronger than anyone suspects—and it will start earlier than the Tories dared hope' (2 October 1991).

Such economic optimism has become fashionable in recent weeks. Gone are gloomy predictions of slump and stagnation which preoccupied economic forecasters in the summer months. Forgotten are warnings that the British economy would be 'bumping along the bottom' for the foreseeable future. Now there is a new optimism about the economy. The message is clear. The recession is as good as over, the recovery is underway, and the future looks rosy.

The euphoria about the economy began at the start of September when prime minister Major and chancellor Norman Lamont surprised their critics by announcing the end of the recession. Not wanting to miss an opportunity to boost the Tories, their friends in the media were quick to echo these sentiments. Soon the governor of the Bank of England, Mr Robin Leigh-Pemberton, added his authoritative tones to the chorus. He noted that there were encouraging 'signs' in manufacturing and retailing, inflation was falling, wage rises were diminishing and business confidence was rising—sure indicators of recovery if ever he'd seen them. When finally, at the start of October, the International Monetary Fund leaked its own forecast backing the recovery bandwagon, few could doubt that the British economy was on the way up.

Bouncing back?

Listening to such upbeat economic assessments you could be forgiven for thinking that something really dramatic has happened to the British economy over the past couple of months. You might, for example, assume that industrial production has bounced back from its slump, that investment is on the increase, that firms have stopped going bust or that unemployment has stopped rising. But you would be wrong.

A glance at the real economy shows that nothing much has changed since the summer. Unemployment is still rising by 60 000 a month, growth in industrial output remains flat and the rate of business failure is accelerating.

Going bankrupt

In fact, in the same week that the press headlined economic 'lift-off', British bankruptcies reached record levels. There are now nearly a thousand businesses going bust every week in Britain. That is an increase of around 70 per cent on the rate of business failure at the same time last year—which is quite an achievement, since 1990 was the worst year for bankruptcies on record. 'Bumping along the bottom' still seems a pretty apt description of the British economy.

However, none of these facts matters much to today's optimists, since their upbeat assessments are not based upon any analysis of recent economic trends or indicators. Gone are the days when a recovery meant a turnaround in real things like investment levels or industrial output. Today's politicians and forecasters have a new barometer with which to assess the economy—the 'feelgood factor'.

The feelgood factor is all the vogue among Tories and economists. Bereft of any other explanations for the ups and downs of a weak capitalist economy like Britain, they now claim that 'confidence' or the 'feelgood factor' holds the key. If industrialists or consumers feel good about the future, runs the argument, then they will go out and spend money and so boost the economy. On the other hand, if they feel bad about the future then they stop spending and a slump ensues. Armed with this profound theory, analysts and politicians now spend little time studying the economy, and a lot monitoring such ephemeral phenomena as the mood and the confidence of consumers and businessmen.

Virtuous circles

At the end of August Mori pollsters detected a slight shift in their 'optimism indicator'; a few more of the people polled had expressed the view that the economy would get better rather than worse over the next 12 months. Both Major and Lamont wasted no time in announcing the onset of the recovery. 'The point is', explained the prime minister, 'that we are beginning to see the economy turning round':

> 'I think that has a very natural effect on people's expectations and their behaviour and it begins to affect the economy itself. People begin to spend again which means the economy begins to grow and there is a general virtuous circle.' (*Financial Times,* 7 September 1991)

Convinced by such flimsy 'evidence', serious talk of the recovery quickly took off in the press and the media. When the rival pollsters at Gallup confirmed these findings in their own 'feelgood' index, published a week later, the recovery bandwagon was already rolling.

The emphasis on confidence and feeling good is behind all the talk of economic optimism. Erstwhile critics ▶

tory economics

factor

PHOTO: The Guardian

of government policy in the business and banking community have also fallen under the influence of the new mood. Even as sober a figure as the governor of the Bank of England now ignores real economic statistics, and bases his prediction of recovery on 'consumer confidence which seems to be rising strongly and company confidence which though still weak is obviously well off the bottom' (*Daily Telegraph,* 19 September 1991). And, as output and investment continue to fall, David Wrigglesworth from the Confederation of British Industry can cite a tiny shift in a recent poll on businessmen's attitudes to the future as 'the most positive sign yet that manufacturing industry is beginning to move out of recession' (*Daily Telegraph,* 23 September 1991).

Media hype

Minor movements in meaningless indicators such as opinion polls on consumer or business confidence have turned yesterday's doom and gloom merchants into today's optimists. That is the flimsy basis of the entire discussion about an economic upturn.

The Tories and their backers are trying to play a crafty game of media manipulation. They appear to believe that if they can get enough people to state enough times that recovery is on the way, then they will be able to create a feelgood factor around their own hyperbole and rhetoric. This, they hope, will have major spin-offs for the future.

The Tories are counting on the feelgood factor to boost their support in the polls in the run-up to the general election. Since the Tories are incapable of bringing about a real economic recovery before the election, they are prepared to chance their luck with a make-believe one instead. They hope that enough voters can be conned for long enough to save them on polling day.

New depths

But the emphasis on the feelgood factor is not entirely a cynical stunt. The Tories do harbour serious hopes for Major's 'virtuous circle'. Economic discussion has now sunk to such banal levels that many genuinely believe that it is possible to talk your way out of a slump. They reason that if their own talk of recovery can create a new wave of optimism in the economy, then declining consumer spending and business investment could be reversed. The government and economists certainly have nothing to lose by pursuing this ridiculous line, since they have no other mechanism for bringing about the recovery.

The Tories and their backers in the media and the establishment have every reason to sustain a mood of optimism and to keep the recovery bandwagon rolling. But try as they might, this strategy will do nothing to a British economy which is deep in the throes of a capitalist slump.

The fact is that confidence, optimism and feeling good are relatively incidental factors in economic life. Only in the financial sector—in arenas like stock markets, futures markets, loan markets and currency markets—can confidence be considered a significant influence. Mood makes a difference because of the speculative nature of most of these transactions. Here, any blow to investors' confidence, as in the wake of the Soviet coup, can cause market prices to plummet. Such ups and downs simply express the artificial and parasitical nature of such speculative activity, and how far removed it is from what is happening in the productive sector of the real economy. Only because the financial markets are built upon puff and bull do mood changes affect them so dramatically.

No escape

Things are very different in the real economy, and in the real lives of most people. Here confidence is a marginal factor. No matter how good or bad people feel, it is impossible to escape the realities of economic life. For example, consumer spending is unlikely to rise while so many people are burdened by record levels of personal debt, fearful of unemployment, and losing their pay rises. It is equally difficult to see any capitalists investing heavily in British industry when profit levels are low and corporate debt is so overwhelming. Any good feelings or sentiments of well-being soon disappear in the face of harsh economic reality.

A powerful example of the failure of the feelgood factor to turn things around can be seen across the Atlantic in the USA. The Bush administration has been attempting to talk up an economic recovery since the end of the Gulf War. Building on the wave of euphoria which followed in the wake of the US victory over Iraq, the administration has been hyping up the economic news since April. But even with the accompanying cuts in interest rates designed to stimulate economic well-being, it is now clear that the lift-off shows no signs of materialising.

Despite all the talk and the hype of recent months, the US economy remains sluggish. While things are not getting much worse, they are not getting much better either. One commentator recently described American affairs quite aptly as an 'upturn that feels like a recession'.

If the collective might of the USA, buoyed up by victory in the Gulf, cannot bring about a recovery in economic fortunes, it is surely unlikely that a few utterances from Major, Lamont or the gutter press can do much to save the British economy from slump. The Tories will no doubt continue their game of talking up the recovery for their own electoral reasons, but nobody should be fooled by such a crude ploy.

Confidence tricks

It should come as no surprise to find the Tories resorting to confidence tricks in an attempt to boost their flagging electoral fortunes. The Tories are past masters at this—look at the countless revisions they have made over the years to the unemployment statistics in order to present this information in a less damaging light. It is likely that the lies, deceptions and stunts about the economy will snowball over the coming months. With no real economic policies or alternatives to offer, the Tories will have little else to call upon.

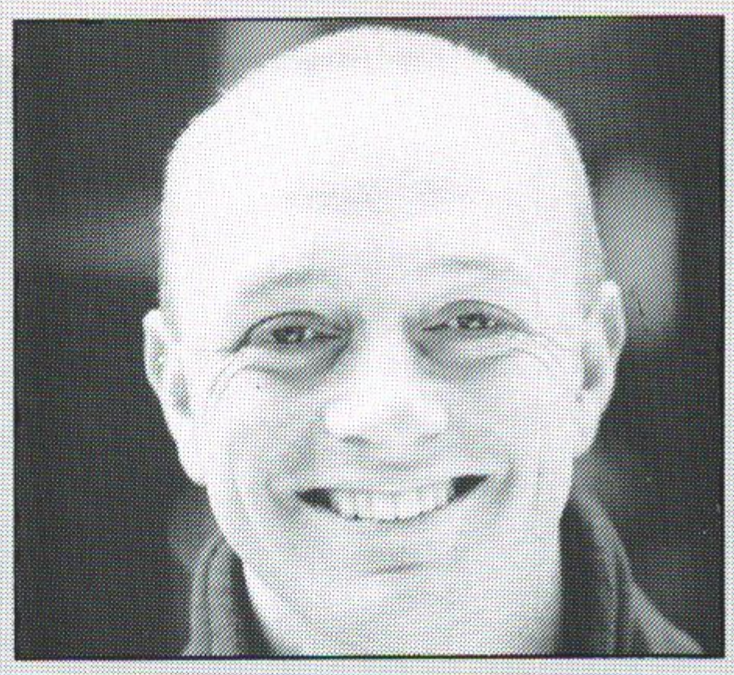
What is remarkable is not that the Tories should go for the feelgood factor but that they have enjoyed some success with it. At least temporarily they have created a mood in which, against all the evidence, many believe that the recovery is on the way. In this, as in so much else, the government has been aided by the inept opposition.

No bottle

Although Labour spokesmen have whinged about the biased nature of characters like the governor of the Bank of England, they have been unable to nail the Tory lies. Instead of refuting claims of recovery, Labour has tacitly acknowledged that recovery might be on its way by dropping its more sceptical stance about the upturn.

In the run-up to the party conference season, at the moment when Tory claims could have been fully exposed as a sham, Labour lost its nerve. Fearful of being charged with talking down the recovery, Labour leader Neil Kinnock and his economic front bencher, Margaret Beckett, signalled a strategic switch away from talking about a recession. Instead, they warned that the Tories were taking Britain back into a 'boom and bust' cycle—effectively conceding that the recovery was underway this time around. With critics like these, the Tories may yet have cause to feel good. ●

Sham '91



Toby Banks

Jackie Mann's release came too late for him to attend the punk rock festival in Brixton last month. Indeed, even had it been possible, it is unlikely that he would have gone, since the event fell on the last night of the Proms. No doubt there were those who left after Sham 69 and hot-footed it to the Albert Hall, arriving in time for 'Rule Britannia', but that wouldn't have been Jackie's way. After all, here's a man who lived in Beirut for 40 years, yet spoke no Arabic and ate an English fried breakfast every day. He was by all accounts, oblivious to his surroundings and, although his wife Sunnie sports a pair of blue Elton John-style novelty glasses, pop fashions seem to have passed him by. Yes, it would have been the Proms for Jackie, no question.

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If ever a man had an excuse for letting himself go, then Jackie Mann surely did. If he, in his 'hell-hole' about which we have heard so much, had allowed his hair to grow past his shoulders and tied it back with a rubber band, then nobody would have been more sympathetic than me. Yet he did not. As Jackie would say, the place for a pony-tail is above a pony's arse, not the back of a man's neck.

I don't expect Jackie Mann has ever heard of Jimmy Pursey. Pursey's group, Sham 69, was not particularly popular in Beirut, and as I mentioned earlier, Jackie never expressed any interest in punk rock. But he would have approved of the strict short hair policy of the punks: anyone with a pony-tail at a Sham 69 concert in the seventies would have received a good natured kicking from the 'Sham Army', Jimmy's boisterous crop-headed following.

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I was looking forward to seeing Jimmy Pursey perform at the Brixton festival. In my opinion, his singing ability has never been properly acknowledged. As a young boy he performed on 'Excerpt from a Teenage Opera', a regular favourite on Ed 'Stewpot' Stewart's *Junior Choice* radio show on Sunday mornings—it was Jimmy's poignant soprano that sings 'Grocer Jack, Grocer Jack, is it true what Mummy says, you won't come back? Oh no, no!'. I had never seen Jimmy with his group, but if it was half as good as that I was in for a treat.

I must admit that I was a bit taken aback when I arrived at the concert. The short haircut policy seemed to have gone out of the window, and the new policy could best be described as 'come one, come all'. Pony-tails were worn openly, and a few of the 'punks' even sported unkempt beards! In the days of the punks v teds battles, I once met a punk wearing a drape coat which he opened up like a spiv displaying a row of watches, but revealing instead a lining covered in greasy quiffs that he'd cut off the foreheads of hapless teds who crossed his path. In the unlikely event of his reading this, I'd like to suggest he makes a comeback, sharpish, starting with a pony-tail cull in Brixton.

Now, you may think I'm over-reacting here. 'Let the kids have their fun', I hear you say, and quite right too. But these weren't young kids. Some of them weren't even attending the concert, preferring to lie outside on the pavement in the rain with their dogs. 'They can't bury Sid Vicious—the binmen are on strike' used to be a joke. But these punks seemed to take it all seriously; rummaging through dustbins and draining old cider bottles.

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I am the first to admit that in the current economic climate employers are inclined to discriminate against the punk community, particularly those in their forties and over. But for heaven's sake! What happened to the 'do-it-yourself' spirit? What about the Olde Punkes of London with their marvellous pink hairdos and historic costumes, who earn a perfectly respectable living as tourist attractions, and bring in much-needed foreign currency? Is all their hard work to be undone by a mindless minority? Are people to say of them, 'They dyed in vain?'

With this in mind, I attempted to put my views to a group of them, but gave it up as a bad job. If people won't help themselves, then there is little one can do for them. I entered the concert hall with a heavy heart, but as is so often the case, my faith was immediately restored. On the stage an elderly gentleman was in full flow, making an impassioned speech about standards. Remembering the magnificent pop festivals that the GLC used to organise, at which Ken Livingstone and others would delight the crowds with their oratory, I naturally took him to be a typical Labour Party firebrand, enthusing about the party's exciting new 'Parental Contract' for schools. Early bedtimes for kids...educationally useful birthday presents like geometry sets...less telly...I mentally filled in the details of what I had missed.

I couldn't have been wider of the mark if I had tried. He turned out to be a singer from 999, and his crusade was for improved standards of broadcasting. I listened with great interest to what he had to say. 'Radio One *still* ain't playing *real* music!' he shouted, and punched the air excitedly, as the band broke into a stirring anthem.

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I must admit 999's music was not my cup of tea, but they left to great applause. After a while a chant started up in the auditorium: 'Sham! Sham! Sham!'. I hurried back in time to see Jimmy arrive on stage. People called out requests for songs, 'Grocer Jack! Grocer Jack!' I shouted, but I was out of luck. 'What have we got?', shouted Jimmy. 'Fuck all!', replied the crowd. This was the refrain of one of Pursey's 'protest' songs, and I'm afraid it set the tone for the rest of the show.

Prince Charles has often expressed concern at the lack of hope and vision in our society and I found myself reflecting upon his words as I made my way home. But then I remembered happier things:

Pony-tails were worn openly, and a few of the 'punks' even sported unkempt beards!

the Proms, with flags waving and the choruses of 'Britons never, never, never shall be slaves' echoing to the rafters. And at that moment I walked past a park. There sat a group of 20 or so vagrants—beggars and tramps, young and old, punks and drunks—proudly holding their bottles aloft, singing 'I did it my way' at the tops of their voices. That was the spirit of the Beirut cell and the Spitfire cockpit. Jackie Mann would have approved.

Why the West lost the East

The current vogue in the West is to blame communism for all the evils of the twentieth century. Joan Phillips turns the argument on its head, and explains how capitalism was responsible for turning Eastern Europe into a dustbin

The West has always blamed the Soviet Union for the loss of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. Today, however, something altogether more sinister is happening. Western thinkers have embarked on a deliberate exercise in rewriting history. Communism is now blamed for destroying the societies of Eastern Europe, and for bequeathing a legacy of backwardness which it will take the market a long time to overcome.

A good example of the modern capitalist school of falsification appeared in a recent issue of *The Salisbury Review,* the house journal of Conservative reaction in Britain. An article by two Polish academics contrasted an idyllic interwar experience of capitalist prosperity and democracy in Poland with a nightmarish postwar experiment in Stalinist regression and dictatorship:

'To understand the present economic situation in Eastern Europe in general, and Poland in particular, one has to go back to World War Two. Before this war, Poland was an independent state with a parliamentary government and opposition parties elected by universal adult suffrage, a free press, a free market, and lively contacts with the world economy. Her economic achievements were considerable...

'After World War Two and the Yalta Treaty, Poland was assigned to the sphere of influence of the USSR. This marked the beginning of yet another dark period in her history. While Western Europe was healing its wounds after the war, secret activities were taking place behind the "iron curtain", activities whose dimensions are only now being revealed. Their main aim was to isolate, enslave, and deprive the nation of any chance of development and economic progress.'
(E Krysakowska-Budny & AD Jankowicz, 'Poland's road to capitalism', September 1991)

This account is in keeping with the traditional interpretation of what happened in Eastern Europe. The arrival of Stalinism is said to have effected a fundamental break with what had gone before. The official view carries a loaded message. The implication is that the transformation that took place after the war was very much for the worse. It assumes that what existed before the Second World War in Eastern Europe was considerably better than what came after.

However, *The Salisbury Review* goes much further in rewriting history. Most earlier historians were more guarded about presenting the past in such a favourable light, conscious of the fact that too close a scrutiny of Eastern Europe's capitalist past would expose some unpalatable facts about what really happened. Today's revisionists have no such inhibitions however. The collapse of the Stalinist world has given a green light to any charlatan to reinvent the past. *The Salisbury Review's* interpretation of history is not simply a case of looking back on the past through rose-tinted spectacles. It is a brazen lie.

The aim of this revision of history is to whitewash the capitalist system, and absolve it of any responsibility for the horrors of the past or the present. But any serious investigation of the past would reveal why today's defenders of the market system are so busy rewriting history. The simple fact is that they have a lot to hide. An honest assessment of the past would show that Stalinist Eastern Europe was the product of the devastating failure of capitalism in the interwar years.

What really happened in Poland before the arrival of Stalinism? The new states of Eastern Europe came into being under the new territorial arrangements worked out

PHOTOS: Simon Norfolk

Peasant cart and nuclear plant, Bucharest 1990: Stalinism preserved the backwardness of Eastern Europe's capitalist past, only at a higher level of industrialisation

by the victorious imperialist powers at the close of the First World War. The four defeated empires which had ruled Eastern Europe—the German, Hapsburg, Ottoman and Russian—were replaced with a dozen new, restored or enlarged nation states.

According to conventional wisdom, their creation was proof of the West's commitment to the principle of national sovereignty. In reality, the new East European states were established as part of the West's containment strategy. They were designed to act as a buffer to contain the twin threats to the international capitalist order—Bolshevik Russia and the threat of proletarian revolution, and Germany and the threat to the international status quo.

Things fall apart

The fracturing of the world economy and the collapse of the balance of power in Europe, during and after the First World War, showed that the capitalist world was no longer capable of sustaining itself in the old way. The creation of the new states of Eastern Europe aimed at the permanent restoration of the balance of power in Europe. But the twenties and thirties were to demonstrate that the rupture of the old order was so great that it could not be repaired. In retrospect, it is clear that the West lost Eastern Europe in 1918 rather than in 1945.

Poland's experience of capitalist development in the interwar years was the very opposite of that described in *The Salisbury Review*. For the leading capitalist nations, the thirties were years of Depression, dust bowls, mass unemployment, dole queues, hunger marches, poverty, social dislocation and profound pessimism about the future. For the peoples of Eastern Europe, the twenties and thirties were a hell that ended in an inferno.

The Western powers recognised that some form of development was essential if the East European states were to fulfil their role as part of the Western containment strategy. The Great Powers did not ignore Eastern Europe: they wanted capitalism to succeed there. However, this turned out to be easier said than done. The weakness of the capitalist order in the twenties and thirties meant that Eastern Europe was abandoned by the West as stagnation turned to slump.

The region emerged from the war on the brink of collapse. By 1920, 55 per cent of Poland's bridges, 63 per cent of railway stations, 48 per cent of locomotives and 18 per cent of buildings had been destroyed. The economic and financial system was in ruins. In December 1918, the exchange rate for the Polish mark was 9.8 to the dollar; by November 1923 one dollar was worth 2 300 000 Polish marks.

Nothing to offer

The early twenties were years of attempted stabilisation: the establishment of sound currencies and stable budgets. The East European states based their hopes for economic progress on the belief that the international financial system would make possible large-scale foreign investment in their economies. But even after the Western recovery of the twenties, the capitalist world had little to offer the region.

Some foreign capital did find its way to Eastern Europe in the twenties. But, although these loans allowed the states to survive, they did not provide the basis for significant development. Western loans were tied to the purchase of goods from the creditor country and were extended at exorbitant rates of interest. The states of Eastern Europe ▶

soon found themselves heavily burdened by indebtedness, especially after the fall in agricultural prices in the late twenties. In 1930, the interest payments on foreign debts amounted to 48 per cent of Hungarian exports.

Nevertheless, the East European states hesitated for a long time before repudiating their debts, vainly hoping that foreign lending would revive. Almost every country adopted rigid deflationary measures to preserve the stability and convertibility of its currency and so prove attractive to foreign investors. But this only had the effect of prolonging the slump and deepening the despair of the population.

Western withdrawal

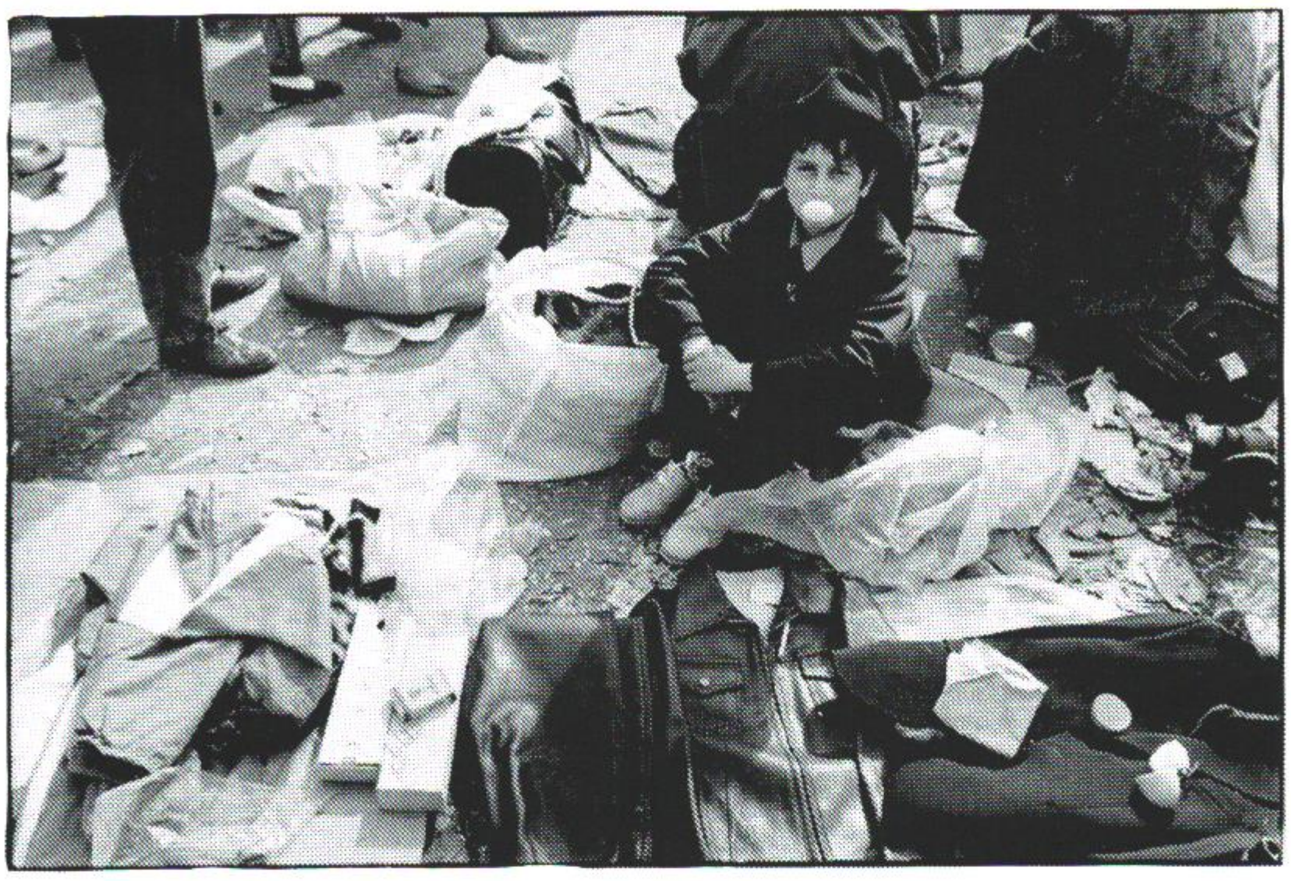
The crash of 1929 and the world recession that followed had a catastrophic effect on Eastern Europe. It was experienced first in the form of a massive collapse in the demand for agricultural goods. As the world prices of agricultural commodities slumped, Eastern Europe's peasants desperately sought to compensate by increasing production, further depressing prices to their own impoverishment.

As recession turned to slump, the West withdrew its funds totally: foreign capital took flight from Eastern Europe and the financial props of the system collapsed. Industrial investment, output and employment fell precipitately. Their abandonment by the West forced a new course on the East European states. In effect, the year 1931 marked the end of their attempt at capitalist development through establishing a relationship with the world economy. By 1933, operational links between the national and international economies had been severed.

Slump capitalism

It was at this point that autarky became a systematic policy: breaking away from the world market was seen as the only means of survival. Many of the features of economic life which were subsequently identified with the Stalinist system in fact emerged as a response to capitalist crisis in the thirties. The policies of state intervention and protectionism which were pursued in the East and the West during the Depression were called into being by stagnant capitalism.

The state increasingly came to take over almost every aspect of economic life. Czechoslovakia, the strongest economy in the region, introduced compulsory cartelisation from 1932 and production was centrally organised into state monopolies. In Hungary, 85 per cent of trade was carried out through domestic monopolies by 1938. Similar measures were pursued elsewhere. But these were simply holding operations. While the states of Eastern Europe retained formal independence for a few more years, from 1933 their existence was increasingly meaningless.



The fact that virtually every serious thinker had stopped believing in capitalism explains why Stalinism was able to take over in Eastern Europe

The abandonment of Eastern Europe by the Great Powers was an open invitation to Nazi Germany to step into the breach. As the level of international trade failed to recover, the states of Eastern Europe, whose currencies were now in many cases not convertible, had great difficulty in selling their agricultural produce. Their most obvious market proved to be Germany, whose currency was also not convertible, and whose rulers were keen to barter their surplus industrial products for agricultural goods. Germany came to act as a magnet for the produce of the East European states. Eastern Europe became tied to the German market, and then became a bread basket for the German war machine.

It is hard to imagine how anybody in Eastern Europe could have lived through these decades and still believed at the close of the Second World War that capitalism had something to offer. In the interwar years, capitalism proved incapable of bridging the gap between East and West or ending the region's industrial backwardness, chronic rural overpopulation, mass impoverishment and despair.

Capitalism could not sustain even the formal trappings of democracy in Eastern Europe. These lasted, at most, for a few years after the creation of the new nation states. Poland was no exception to the general rule. In March 1921, a new democratic constitution was enacted, modelled on that of France's Third Republic. It vested power in the lower house of parliament (the *sejm*), and restricted the powers of the senate and presidency, which had no powers of veto over legislation. The extension of the vote and the introduction of proportional

Blowing bubbles in Hungary's new market economy, Budapest 1991 (left)

representation appeared to herald the dawn of a new age of democracy.

But the backwardness of Polish capitalism and the weakness of the capitalist class saw to it that democracy did not last long. Instability, demagogy, violence and incipient civil war were the hallmark of political life in the new republic. Between independence in November 1918 and Jozef Pilsudski's coup in May 1926, there were 14 changes of government. After years of political turmoil the inevitable happened: the Polish strongman Pilsudski led a coup d'etat which finally put paid to any pretence that Poland was a democracy.

Politics and pogroms

Under a succession of reactionary regimes in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia, the franchise was once again restricted, open voting replaced the secret ballot, vote-rigging returned with a vengeance and the misappropriation of government funds for electoral purposes resumed on a massive scale. The gerrymandering of constituencies, police harassment of voters and the imprisonment or assassination of opposition leaders was the normal pattern of political life. In the entire pre-Stalinist period, there was only one instance of a ruling government losing power through elections (in Bulgaria in 1931).

With economic slump and mass immiseration came chauvinism and fascism. The system which claimed to offer freedom to all ended up enslaving a whole continent in the grip of reaction. In Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism became official state policy: the culture of the pogrom and the liquidation of the Jews began in capitalist Eastern Europe well before Hitler's stormtroopers set foot on Polish soil in 1939. By the mid-thirties, the belief that capitalism was bound to collapse and that democracy was played out was widespread in Eastern Europe. It required only the barbarism of world war to destroy any lingering illusion that the West represented civilisation.

The price of war

The people of Eastern Europe paid an awesome price for the carnage unleashed by the imperialist powers. In Poland alone, six million people—half of them Jews—were slaughtered, a casualty rate of 18 per cent, compared to 0.9 per cent in Britain. In Yugoslavia, nearly two million people were killed, more than ten per cent of the population. Half the country's livestock; half its railway track and stock; 75 per cent of its railway bridges and ploughs; more than 60 per cent of its road surfaces; 20 per cent of its housing stock; and nearly 40 per cent of its industrial value were wiped out. In the Soviet Union, 20 million people lost their lives.

In 1945, most of Eastern Europe was in ruins, literally. About 65 per cent of Polish factories had been completely or partially destroyed, as had up to 40 per cent of the country's housing stock. Warsaw was a massive bomb crater (90 per cent of housing was destroyed). Matching the economic devastation of the country was the disappearance of the Polish business class and its intellectual spokesmen. Capitalism had ceased to exist in any recognisable form in 1939; and by 1945, Poland was without capitalists and their ideas.

Capitalism had not simply been destroyed physically: it had been discredited intellectually. There were no voices arguing for the market: the ideas of liberalism and conservatism simply did not figure in the outlook of the East European intelligentsia. The postwar economic debate took place among parties which were all hostile to capitalism in principle, whether those principles were communist, socialist or agrarian. In Poland, even the Catholic Church refused to carry the capitalist banner. In Hungary, every single party which called itself 'bourgeois' criticised capitalism.

No believers

The fact that virtually every serious thinker had stopped believing in capitalism explains why Stalinism was able to take over in Eastern Europe. There was little positive enthusiasm for a communist takeover, except in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Yet the Communist Parties met no concerted resistance anywhere. That they were able to assume power so easily is testimony to the fact that people simply did not believe that capitalism offered a better alternative. At any rate, it was not an alternative that anybody was prepared to fight for.

At the close of the Second World War, the contrast between capitalist barbarism and decay and the apparent potential for economic and political liberation offered by the Soviet Union had never been greater. The Western powers were exhausted and incapable of enforcing their rule in many parts of the globe. In contrast, the Soviet Union could claim much credit for the defeat of Nazi Germany and project itself as a major force for progress in the world.

The changes that took place in Eastern Europe after the Second World War should be seen in the context of the fracturing of the world capitalist system. The West lost not just in Eastern Europe, but in China, Korea and large areas of the third world. By the fifties, more than half the population of the world was living outside of the capitalist orbit. What better illustration of the magnitude of capitalism's failure in the twentieth century?

Blame the West

It's time to put the record straight. When today's capitalist crusaders condemn communism for destroying Eastern Europe, don't let them get away with it. They cannot blame Stalin's *gulag* for the horrors inflicted on Eastern Europe in the interwar years. Those responsible for the long nightmare that has been the lot of the peoples of Eastern Europe in the twentieth century are the Western capitalist powers which abandoned the region, first to Hitler and then to Stalin.

Stalinism came to power in the East as a consequence of the failures of capitalism. It too proved to be incapable of delivering economic progress or political freedom. But it did not destroy democracy and prosperity in Eastern Europe: those societies had already been ruined by capitalism. Stalinism simply applied the finishing touches. In many ways, not all that much changed. Eastern Europe's backwardness was preserved, only at a higher level of industrialisation. It continued to be a poor cousin of the West, only in a different form. Stalinist Eastern Europe always had more of a link with the capitalist past than the stamp of something radically new.

More of the same

Now that Stalinism is finished, what has capitalism got to offer Eastern Europe today? It is becoming increasingly obvious that the market offers only more of the same. After two years of the market, Poland's economy is wracked by recession, its political system is threatened by authoritarianism and its people are ravaged by austerity and steeped in despair. The market is not working.

Which is why the defenders of the Western way of life are so keen to keep the media spotlight on the crimes of Stalinism. Why do they insist on harping on about something which no longer exists, if not to conceal the fact that the system that does exist in Eastern Europe today—capitalism—is once again demonstrating its inability to deliver prosperity or democracy?

It is time they were forced to defend their bankrupt system on its own merits. ●

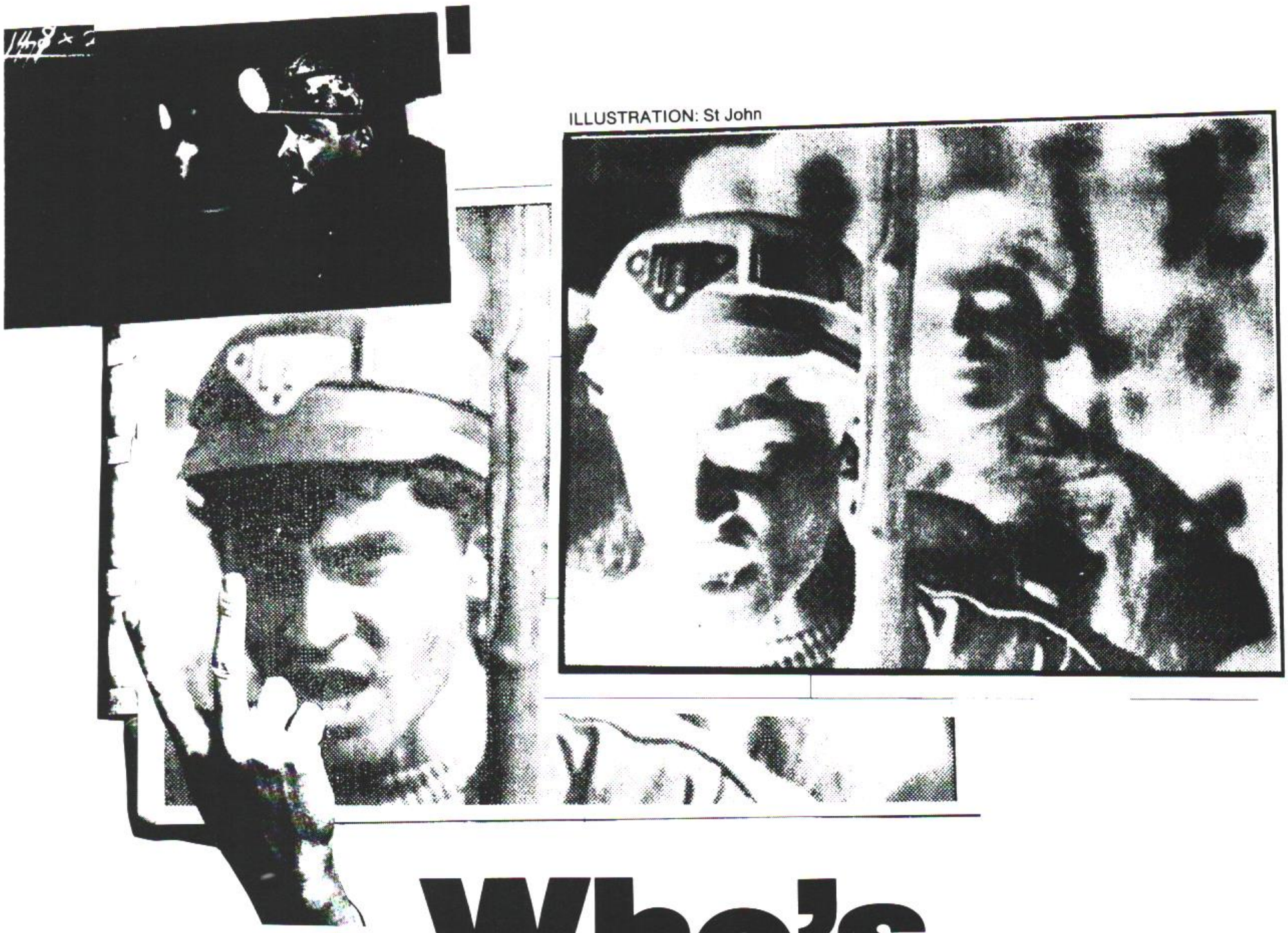


ILLUSTRATION: St John

Who's afraid of the working class?

The riots by Romanian miners in September revealed the potential power of the working class—and the problems that arise when such protests lack political focus.
Amanda Macintosh reports

In late September, 7000 miners from Petroseni in the Jiu Valley hijacked trains and forced the drivers to take them to Bucharest. Armed with clubs, pickaxes and homemade bombs, the miners took over the capital and laid siege to the government. For two days they occupied the centre of Bucharest, took on the forces of the state in hand-to-hand combat and showered the presidential palace with petrol bombs.

Television viewers around the world watched the Romanian police and army turn tail and run when confronted by massed ranks of angry workers who appeared to be afraid of nobody. Back in the Jiu Valley, 50 000 miners were on strike and thousands of dockers from Constanta pledged their support for those in Bucharest. Faced with this awesome display of direct action, National Salvation Front president Ion Iliescu agreed to freeze prices, increase wages and form a new government.

In the West, the official reaction to this display of working class power was horror and outrage. The British media recalled the last time the miners came to Bucharest, in June 1990, when, summoned by the National Salvation Front to deal with anti-government student protesters, they had smashed brutally through the opposition forces with the same clubs and axes.

Once again, British commentators recoiled with fear and loathing from the sight of workers taking the law into their own hands and forcing their demands on a government through violence. 'Their use last year by Mr Iliescu was indefensible,' spluttered an editorial in the *Guardian*. 'But so is the use today of street violence to overthrow an elected government....Rampaging or raging, the miners are not the

solution.' (27 September)

In fact, what the media presented as a wholly negative phenomenon was the most positive aspect of the Romanian events. What the riots in Bucharest demonstrated was the potential power of the working class to force its will upon a government whose reforms are resulting in suffering and immiseration on a massive scale.

The threat

What was it exactly that the authorities and media over here so abhorred about the events in Bucharest? The first thing they could not stomach was the fact that the working class was leading the protests. The British establishment can tolerate seeing demonstrations by students and intellectuals. It is only necessary to contrast the relaxed response to the sit-down protests by middle class oppositionists, in Bucharest in 1990, with the vituperative denunciations of the miners to see that the authorities regard the working class as *the* threat to the established order East and West. Images of workers taking over city centres are the last thing that they want to see on their television screens.

Another thing the British authorities cannot stand to see is people refusing to play by the official rules. They must have been beside themselves watching the Romanian miners showing complete contempt for the law. Whether it was forcibly borrowing trains or collecting petrol for bombs from passing motorists, the miners refused to be constrained by conventional notions of right and wrong. They just did what they wanted to do.

Gutting

Worse still, the miners showed that they were prepared to take on the forces of the state in order to win their demands. Dealing with passive sit-down protests and tent city demonstrations is one thing; having to confront burly workers armed with axes and prepared to use them is another matter altogether. The insurrectionary activities of the miners in Bucharest demonstrated that all the forces available to the state are useless against the collective power of workers who are prepared to fight for what they want. The police in Britain have rarely had to face this type of threat. When they do, they will certainly turn tail as well.

All in all, it was a gutting spectacle for supporters of capitalist law and order. That's why Western commentators happily went along with the smears put out by the National Salvation Front, which accused the miners of being in the service of secret conspirators carrying out a 'communist inspired coup'.

This was rich coming from a government whose leading politicians are old Stalinists wearing different suits. The same people who pulled the strings for the dictator Ceausescu are still in power in Romania today. The only difference is that now they are all supporting the market and pushing through reforms which threaten the livelihoods of millions of workers. And that's why the West has no hesitation in taking sides with the Romanian regime against those who threaten to derail the reform process.

Past and present

Anybody who has seen recent documentary pictures of miners from the Jiu Valley, working waist deep in water at the coal face with nothing to cut the coal except pickaxes while their families live in slums no better than holes in the ground, would certainly wonder why any miner could possibly plot a return to the Stalinist past. The truth is that the miners, as much as any other section of the working class, are bitterly hostile to the old system and want to put the past behind them as soon as possible.

But they are also reacting against the degradations of the present. The assault on Bucharest was a spontaneous reaction to the suffering imposed by the government's market reforms. The working class is having to subsist on wages which are falling way behind triple figure inflation. There may be more food in the shops these days, but it is at prices which put basic necessities beyond the reach of most workers. 'How can we survive?', complained one miner who went to Bucharest. 'Is this a free market when a few people own big shops and we starve?'.

Lashing out

The problem with what the miners did in Bucharest was not that it was violent but that it lacked a clear focus. The miners were lashing out blindly in response to the hardships imposed by the market. It was a wholly unconscious reaction to the situation in which they found themselves. This is why their demands were so incoherent, as several commentators pointed out. 'In a characteristically Romanian way, the demonstrators know what to oppose but offer no alternative', observed the *Guardian,* patronisingly.

That the miners did not put forward an alternative had nothing to do with their nationality. It was a consequence of the fact that all alternatives to the market system have been discredited. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Eastern Europe, where people experienced first hand the miseries of life under a system that called itself socialist. But it is also apparent in Western Europe, as the recent electoral defeat of the left in Sweden demonstrated.

No focus

For now, the discrediting of all alternatives to the capitalist market means that working class protest lacks a political focus. This was amply illustrated by the events in Bucharest. The miners were reacting to the consequences of the government's market reforms. But their protests did not turn into an anti-market revolt. In fact, the miners accuse the government of being full of communists and blame them for the problems they are facing as a result of the economic reform. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, working class protest against the problems of the present is still expressed in a reaction against the past.

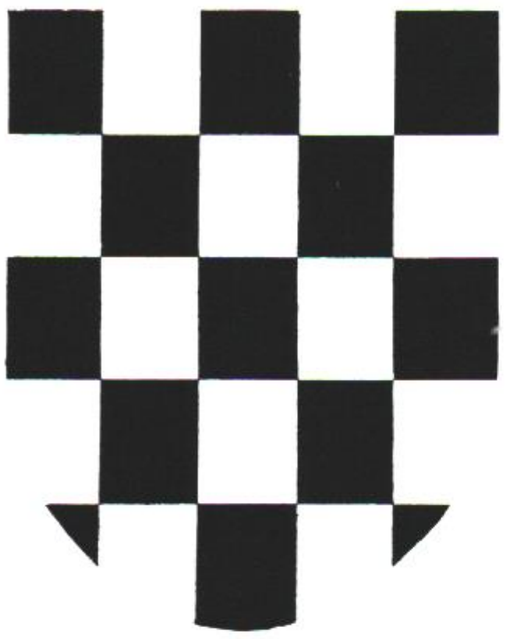
The danger of this kind of unconscious reaction is that it can easily be manipulated by outside forces. In 1990, when miners reacted to the insecurities generated by the transition to the market, it was the government which mobilised this reaction against the opposition protesters in Bucharest. In 1991, when miners once again reacted to their precarious existence, a host of reactionary forces sought to manipulate their protests against the government for their own ends. For example, the National Peasant Party invited the miners to attend its annual congress and address a hall full of reactionary old men who would have had the miners shot for striking had they been in power at the time.

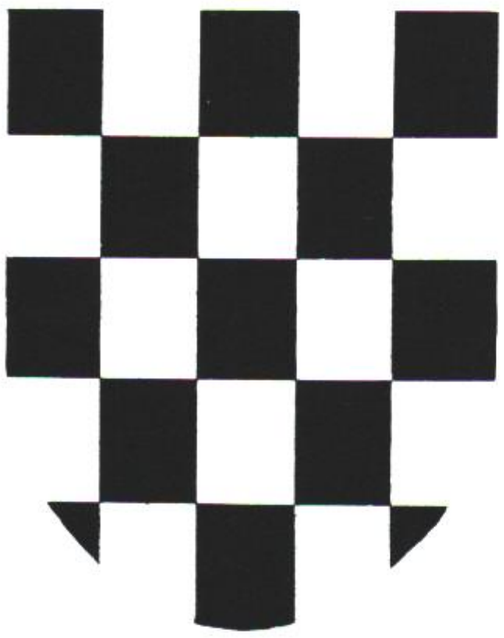
Going nowhere

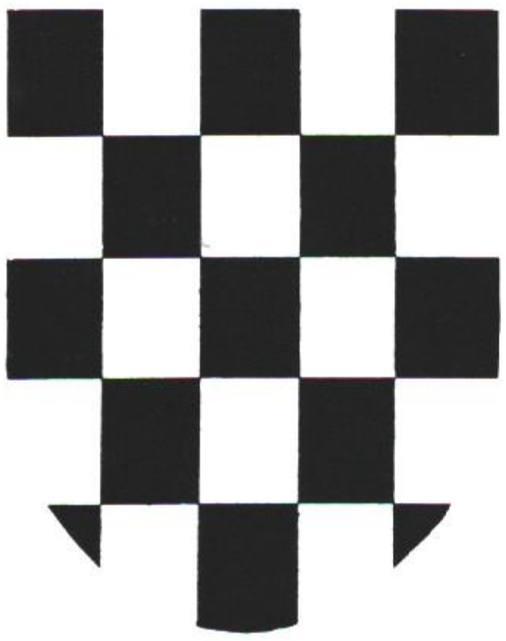
Until the working class acquires a consciousness of its own interests, and begins to see the market as the cause of its current problems, protests such as those organised by the miners will go nowhere. After several days of confrontation, the miners collapsed in disarray. Unsure of their demands and whether they had been met, the miners vacillated over what to do next. In the end, there was nothing to do but go home.

The miners showed that it is possible for the working class to take control of a city centre; but a successful offensive against the harsh realities of the market will require a political strategy that they do not yet have. ●

Rewriting the Second World War







The European right's crusade in support of Croatia marks the start of a campaign to rehabilitate the fascist past, argues Pat Roberts

Yugoslavia, or more specifically Croatia, may well become a symbol for the European right in the way that Spain was for the international left in the thirties. Margaret Thatcher has gone on record as saying that the Yugoslavian civil war is between the democratic forces of Croatia and the communists of Serbia. This impression is continually reinforced by Croatian political leaders who attack the 'communist Serb hordes'. The right, especially the far right in Europe, accepts this perspective. Many individual supporters of neo-fascist organisations in Western Europe have signed up to fight with the Croatian forces.

West European governments clearly favour Croatia in the civil war. Germany in particular has evolved an aggressive anti-Serbian policy. In the German media, Serbs are now often presented as irrational and uncivilised. From the coverage given to it by right wingers, it appears that the conflict in Yugoslavia has assumed some special significance to the Western way of life.

The conflict in Yugoslavia has been seized upon by the right because it provides a pretext for beginning to rewrite the history of the Second World War. The experience of fascism, with all of its barbaric consequences, has long been a source of acute embarrassment to the right in Europe. Throughout the postwar period, the experience of fascism undermined the credibility of overtly right-wing views. There were periodic attempts to minimise the damage by developing arguments that blamed communism for provoking the rise of fascism. Others sought to equate fascism and communism, and tried to present Stalin's offences as the equal of Hitler's crimes. But despite the considerable intellectual effort invested in them, these arguments failed to persuade. The experience of Nazism and the Holocaust were too powerful to be entirely mystified.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the right's campaign to rewrite the history of the Second World War has truly taken off. Yugoslavia is as good a place as any to start. The present war is being presented as the continuation of the conflict between the Nazi-backed fascist regime of the Croatian Ustashe, and the communist resistance movement of Tito's partisans. Only this time, according to the Western media, the Serbs are the bullies and the Croats are the true democrats. By portraying the war in this way, the right is attempting retrospectively to vindicate the Croatian fascist movement of the forties. The stakes are high. If this propaganda coup can be carried off in Yugoslavia then it is only a matter of time before the fascist experience as a whole can be vindicated as a response to the threat of communism.

The numbers game

The political leaders of Croatia are willing accomplices in this rewriting of history. For example, the Croatian president Franjo Tudjman has argued that only 32 000 people were exterminated at the death camp at Jasenovac, administered by the Croatian Ustashe regime. Until now, most respectable estimates of the death toll have ranged from a half a million to 700 000.

Tudjman's numbers game with Ustashe victims is an attempt to minimise the scope of the crimes committed by Croatian fascists. In this light, it is not surprising that extreme right wingers across Europe should have attached themselves to the Croatian cause. They sense instinctively the potential for a successful right-wing crusade. They are not in the least bit concerned about the real issues involved in the Yugoslavian civil war, or the fate of the people caught up in it. Their sole motivation is to overcome the legacy of the Second World War.

The rewriting of history is now a growing industry. In the spirit of capitalist enterprise, anything goes. The *Sunday Times* recently informed its readers that Lenin was not just a tyrant, he was also, apparently, a mass murderer. The paper suggested that a document has now been found in some secret archives which proves that Lenin personally ordered Bolshevik terrorists to 'hang 100 to 1000 bureaucrats and aristocrats' (6 October 1991). It seems certain that this revelation is only the beginning. We can expect the discovery of many more sensational documents in the months ahead. It is surely only a matter of time before we are told that Hitler was acting on Moscow's orders, and that Marx and Engels were direct participants in genocide.

Croatian test case

Reworking the past is a crucial part of the attempt to elaborate a coherent capitalist worldview today. All of the embarrassing episodes can be expunged on the grounds that they were the fault of somebody like Lenin anyway. Croatia is an important test case. If the right's crusade succeeds there, it will encourage the revival of a right-wing intellectual tradition.

Fortunately for us, it is not possible to create a viable intellectual perspective simply through the rewriting of history. Such an enterprise may help with public relations, but it will provide no solutions to the problems of our time. Let them invent a new ending to the Second World War. Marxists are better employed tackling the complex problems that are posed in the here and now. ●

STALINISM IN CRISIS

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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PHOTOS: Romanian soldiers by Simon Norfolk

The silent ra

Saturday 9 November **Sir William Collins School, Cha**

Dear Reader,

On Saturday 9 November *Living Marxism* is sponsoring a conference in London. The aim of this day of discussion is to expose the authorities' hidden agenda for the nineties.

Today the ideas of the right are in the ascendant and liberalism is in retreat. Reactionary politicians and journalists now feel free to express their prejudices as commonsense opinions. Nowhere is this clearer than on issues relating to race.

The problems of the third world are now being discussed in the old-fashioned imperial language of the White Man's burden.

Immigration is once again being targeted as a big problem for the West, with the gutter press running hysterical articles on 'the invasion of Europe'.

Meanwhile, at home in Britain, the response to the summer riots was dominated by attacks on the degeneracy of the urban 'underclass'.

There is an underlying theme which brings all of these arguments together. They suggest that the peoples of the third world are inferior to those in the West; and that within Western society itself, the urban poor should be treated as some sort of lower race. Once such arguments are accepted, it becomes natural for the Western powers to dictate to third world countries, and for the British establishment and its police force to hammer the unruly youth of our inner cities.

The right-wing offensive around these issues marks the start of a kind of race war. It is a silent race war, because the fundamental assumptions of racial inferiority behind their arguments are as yet unspoken—and unchallenged.

The *Living Marxism* conference is designed to bring this hidden agenda out into the open, and confront it. We want to expose the right's attempt to blame capitalism's victims for the problems of society. The articles on the pages that follow outline some of the ideas which we hope will be developed on the day.

If you want to stop the right monopolising the agenda for the nineties, you can't afford to miss the Silent Race War conference. I hope to see you on 9 November.

Yours,

Penny Robson

Penny Robson
Conference Organiser

PHOTO: Michae

ace war

harrington Street, London NW1 **Tickets £10 waged £5 unwaged**

Conference agenda

10am Registration

11am Opening symposium

Introduction by Frank Richards

Followed by
Mick Hume, editor of *Living Marxism,* on the underclass debate
Keith Tompson, author of *Under Siege,* on the emergence of racism in Eastern Europe
Kenan Malik, editor of *the next step,* on racism in America
Lynn Rawley on the myth of the White Man's burden

After the speeches the conference will break up into workshop discussions

1pm Lunch

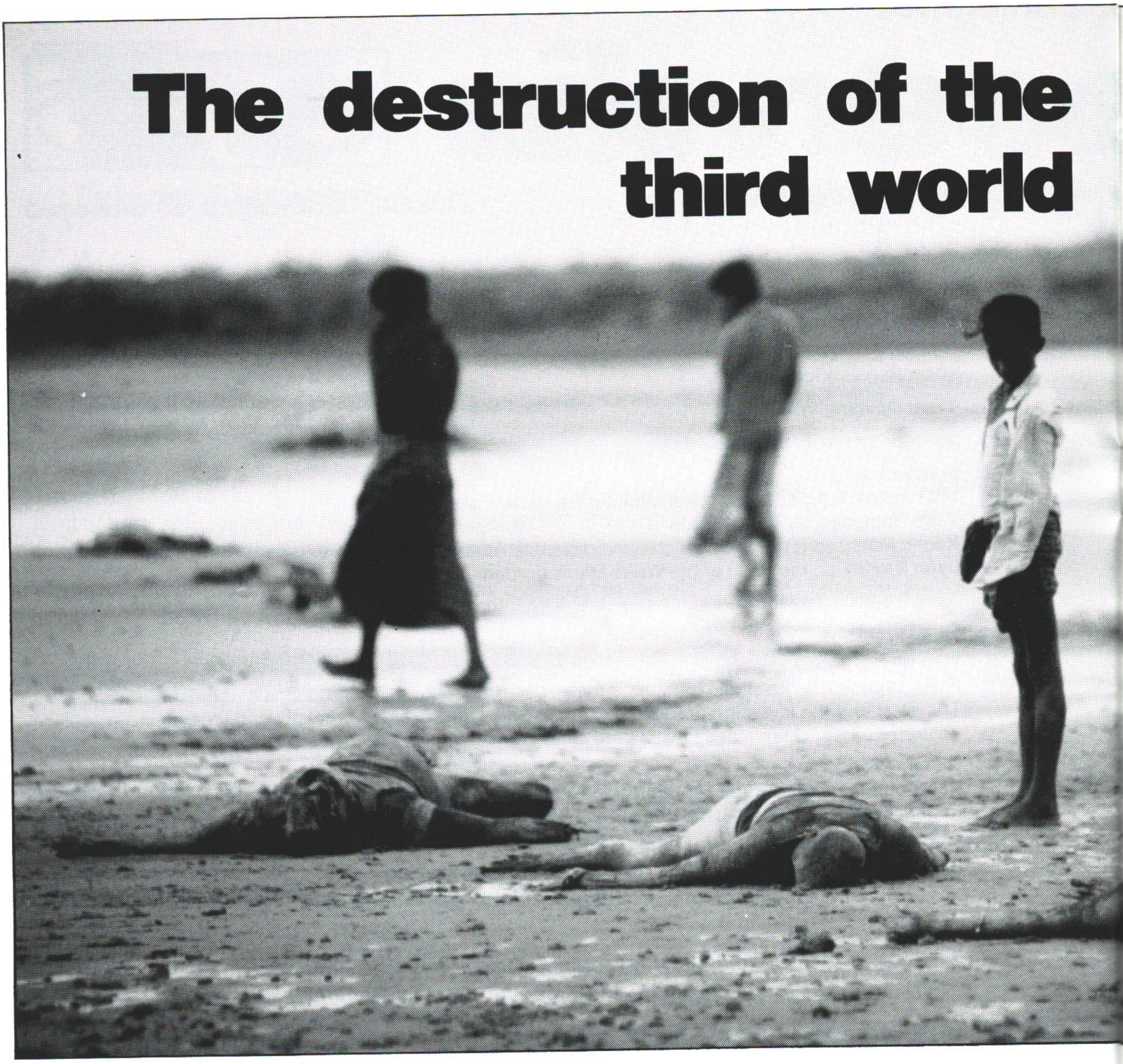
2pm Workshops
From eugenics to the single mothers debate; The British right; The problems of multiculturalism; The West and the invention of Eastern Europe; Serbs and Croats—ethnicity and identity in Eastern Europe; Do humans have innate characteristics?;

3.30pm Workshops
Race, culture and bourgeois thought; The Marxist theory of race; The masses and social theory; Imperialism and imperialist ideology; The race question in Germany; Racism and the new world order;

5pm Final plenary
Hitting back: a charter for anti-racists in the nineties

For tickets and further details contact Penny Robson on (071) 375 1702 or write to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX

The destruction of the third world



The problems of the third world are big news today—but only because the Western powers want to exploit them for political purposes. Kirsten Cale looks at the grim reality behind the concerned rhetoric

'Benign Western imperialism?', asks *Marxism Today;* 'humane paternalism', suggests the *Independent on Sunday;* 'A charitable imperialist age', proclaims the *Daily Telegraph*. A new mood seems to be sweeping the West, with 'benign' imperialism depicted as the bearer of peace and goodwill throughout the world. The irony is that these pious claims are made at a time when the Western powers are presiding over the destruction of the third world.

The third world faces economic ruin. It is more marginal to the global economy today than it was in the thirties: the 80-odd countries of the third world produce only two thirds of the gross national product of Western Europe. Africans are economically worse off than they were in the sixties; Asians and Latin Americans suffer rampant inflation and endemic unemployment. Half of the third world's population live on the poverty line: 20 million face starvation in Africa alone.

The Western powers have responded by imposing economic penalties on the most impoverished regions on Earth. Britain recently cut off aid to famine-stricken Sudan and Somalia. Elsewhere the West has made aid conditional on political (ie, pro-Western) reform. And throughout the third world, the West has threatened punitive measures to enforce the introduction of 'market-friendly' economic restructuring.

Debt collectors from the great Western financial institutions now play a more prominent role in third world economic life than locally appointed finance ministers. One

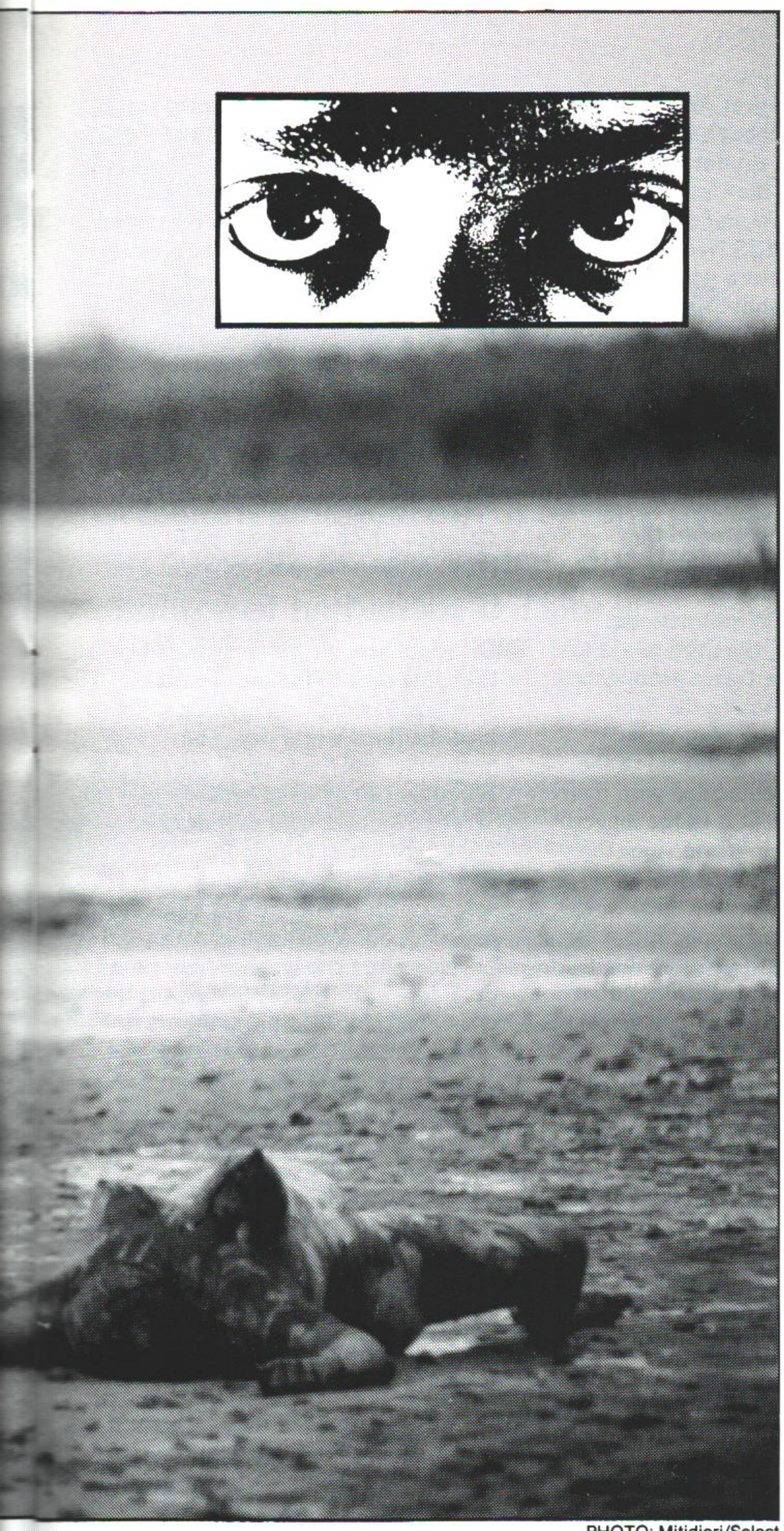


PHOTO: Mitidieri/Select

After the flood: Bangladeshis are blamed for the disasters that are killing their own people

African commentator notes that the programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank 'have amounted to a degree of economic intervention in the debtor countries which matches, perhaps even exceeds, the direct administration of bygone colonial governments (A Hoogvelt, *Review of African Political Economy,* No47, 1990).

Western militarism directed against the third world has also intensified over the recent period. America's genocidal assault on Iraq, and its threat to renew hostilities against a country already reduced to rubble, is a sign of things to come. With the end of the Cold War, Nato has been transformed into an anti-third world force. Everybody seemed to take it for granted that French and Belgian troops were entitled to trample through Zaire during the recent crisis there.

The Western authorities are pushing impoverished countries yet further to the margins of the world economy, while threatening sanctions and military action against any who raise a protest. Behind the charitable image, the talk of 'benign imperialism' represents a revival of the old theme of the White Man's burden—the idea that the civilised West must intervene in the affairs of foreign savages who cannot look after themselves. The Western powers are now demonstrating their contempt for the peoples of the third world in a way that has not been seen since the colonial age at the turn of the century. The key to this departure is the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Third world cockpit

The West's lack of concern for the victims of imperialism is nothing new. Among themselves, the Western authorities have always had the same attitude to the third world. Since the colonial era, they have looked upon it as little more than a battleground and object of exploitation. Western politicians have never been the slightest bit concerned about the suffering, impoverishment, starvation or slaughter of third world peoples. For the past half century, however, the international role of the Soviet Union forced the Western powers to disguise their contempt for the third world in public.

As long as the Soviet Union posed a challenge to Western influence around the globe, the West was forced to present a more conciliatory and circumspect demeanour in its discussion of the third world. During the Cold War years of the fifties and sixties, the third world became the cockpit of rivalry between East and West. The Soviet Union threatened to disrupt the imperialists' previously uncomplicated relations with their empires by cultivating anti-colonial movements. Although the Soviet Union's motives for posing as the champion of national liberation were entirely manipulative and pragmatic, it nonetheless provided ideological coherence and an alternative model of development to third world movements and regimes.

On the defensive

The Soviet Union successfully played on the West's vulnerability to accusations of racism and imperial arrogance. A secret British government document, written in 1959, demonstrates the West's sensitivity to Soviet propaganda on the issue of race:

> 'The present Soviet tactics of exploiting "anti-colonialism" are directed at [the West's] weakest spot, where the Soviet government can present a facade of disinterested generosity.... Above all, they are believed to be free of ideas of racial superiority; we must expect Soviet propaganda and subversion to exploit racial conflicts to the full.'

The Soviet Union's use of racism as a stick with which to beat the colonial powers prompted the West to jettison the unapologetic vocabulary of imperialism—'the civilising mission' and the 'White Man's burden'—in favour of more diplomatic terminology which emphasised its commitment to development, self-determination and, above all, independence for the colonies.

During the fifties, the British Colonial Office even advocated racism awareness courses for colonial officials, designed to combat Soviet influence in Africa. A paper produced in 1951 argues that 'the chief potential attractions of communism in West Africa are at present mainly in the appeal to nationalism and colour feelings'. It suggests courses called 'Living in Africa', which were to be directed in particular towards 'the women' and 'the poor type of "second class" Europeans and commercial people with which is associated, largely, the club problem'. Colonial officials were encouraged to invite the 'better sort' of African and Asian into the club for gin slings and hors d'oeuvres to pre-empt accusations of exclusivity and racism.

Cold War explosion

East-West conflict brought the third world into the centre of international affairs. The struggles of oppressed peoples for freedom and national sovereignty, previously suppressed and ignored, exploded on to the world stage.

Third world nationalist movements aggressively promoted their struggles against imperialism throughout the Cold War. The West felt the third world slip out of its control on several occasions. Take 1958, when the Iraqis overthrew the British-backed monarchy, the Egyptians and the Syrians formed the anti-Western United Arab Republic, the Guineans cut their links with France, and the Algerian war precipitated the fall of the Fourth Republic in Paris. Or 1975, when America was forced out of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and the Portuguese were beaten out of Angola, Mozambique and the island colonies of Cape Verde, São Tomé and Principé. ▶

benign imperialism?

Disasters become holocausts and droughts turn to famines because the West has bled the third world dry

Today the balance has swung back in favour of the imperialists. With the demise of the Cold War, the factors that propelled the third world into the international limelight and forced the West on to the defensive have been reversed. The Soviet Union and Stalinism, which provided third world movements with an alternative orientation, have collapsed. The Kremlin's role under Gorbachev has been to cooperate with Western schemes against third world movements and regimes. Once more, the Western powers stand unchallenged and able to call the shots in the blunt language of imperial supremacy and racial superiority.

Western strategists no longer see the third world as a threatening and disruptive force. Many American military experts now challenge the Cold War view that the USA should concern itself with 'brushfire wars' in the third world: as one argues, 'wars...among the smaller nations in Africa, Asia, Central America or Latin America, though tragic for the people involved, do not threaten the core interests of the United States' (RJ Art, *International Security,* Spring 1991, Vol 15 No4). Others suggest that Western policy towards the third world should be modified since 'third world clashes no longer threaten escalation into superpower conflicts' (KC Campbell and TG Weiss, *Washington Quarterly,* Spring 1991, Vol 14 No2). The third world now lacks the political weight to disrupt Western interests, and can once more be relegated to the periphery of global affairs.

Despite its increased marginalisation in international affairs, however, the third world and its problems now figure prominently in public discussion in the West. Why? The Western authorities' recognition of the weakness of the third world has coincided with their attempt to reinvent it as the biggest threat to the Free World since the Red Menace. The West has deliberately inflated the third world into a dangerous and disruptive force in international affairs, blaming it for every problem from dictatorship to drug-running and arms proliferation.

The creation of a new demonology centred on the third world is primarily designed to bolster the authority of the Western ruling classes as the defenders of civilisation, and distract from their domestic crises. After the Cold War, the third world has assumed a new significance—replacing the Soviet Union as a whipping-boy for the problems of the Western-run global system.

Scapegoats

The third world and its governments are being pilloried as the cause of poverty and war. The Africans have been blamed for the famine that racks their continent: 'dictatorships and uncaring rebel groups...have prepared the ground' for the famine in Africa, argues the *Financial Times* (8 May 1991). Asians have been held responsible for the disasters that afflict their own people: the 'muddled and inept' Bangladeshi government was largely to blame for the death toll in the recent floods, according to the *Independent on Sunday* (12 May 1991). Latin America has been scapegoated for drugs and environmental destruction, and the 'unfriendly and politically primitive' Middle Eastern regimes have been blamed for 'arms proliferation' on a global scale (*Sunday Times,* 7 July 1991).

This composite image of self-inflicted famine, disease, death and destruction has been promoted to enhance the moral authority of the West. Despite the capitalist recession in the West, life in the imperialist nations can still look good compared to the degradation of the third world. The West can pose as a benign and civilising force, the only hope of solving the problems of the third world. Yet behind the charitable edifice, imperialism has condemned the third world to degradation and decay. The Western powers and the system which they run are largely responsible for the third world disasters which they now point to as proof of their superiority.

Bled dry

Disasters become holocausts and droughts turn to famines because Western financial institutions have bled the third world dry. The 'primitive' and 'backward' regimes are generally run by hand-picked Western stooges who preside over weak economies crippled by imperialism. The real centres of the world's arms trade are not Baghdad or Beirut but Washington, Paris and London. And the biggest drug-runner on Earth is the CIA. The West is the cause, not the solution to the problems destroying the third world. Imperialism is starving the famine-stricken, bombing the 'arms-proliferators', poisoning the diseased, and scapegoating the poverty-stricken.

The peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America have become the victims of the moral rearmament of imperialism—the attempt to boost the authority of Western capitalism by demonstrating its superiority over the third world. The West points out the dire problems of the third world and casts itself in the role of saviour; meanwhile, its imperialist economic and political measures ensure that those problems get worse.

Imperialism rules

In the post-Cold War world, Western imperialism holds sway. The third world has been isolated and marginalised, its radical forces disoriented and demoralised, and its people condemned to economic degradation, starvation, and the bloody legacies of Western militarism. The shift of influence in favour of the imperialists is also evident in the West itself. The old liberal critics of imperialism are in retreat, and reactionary ideas such as the White Man's burden are more or less accepted as common sense. There is a pressing need for a new generation of anti-imperialist politics which can pin the blame for the destruction of the third world where it belongs. ●

Heart of darkness

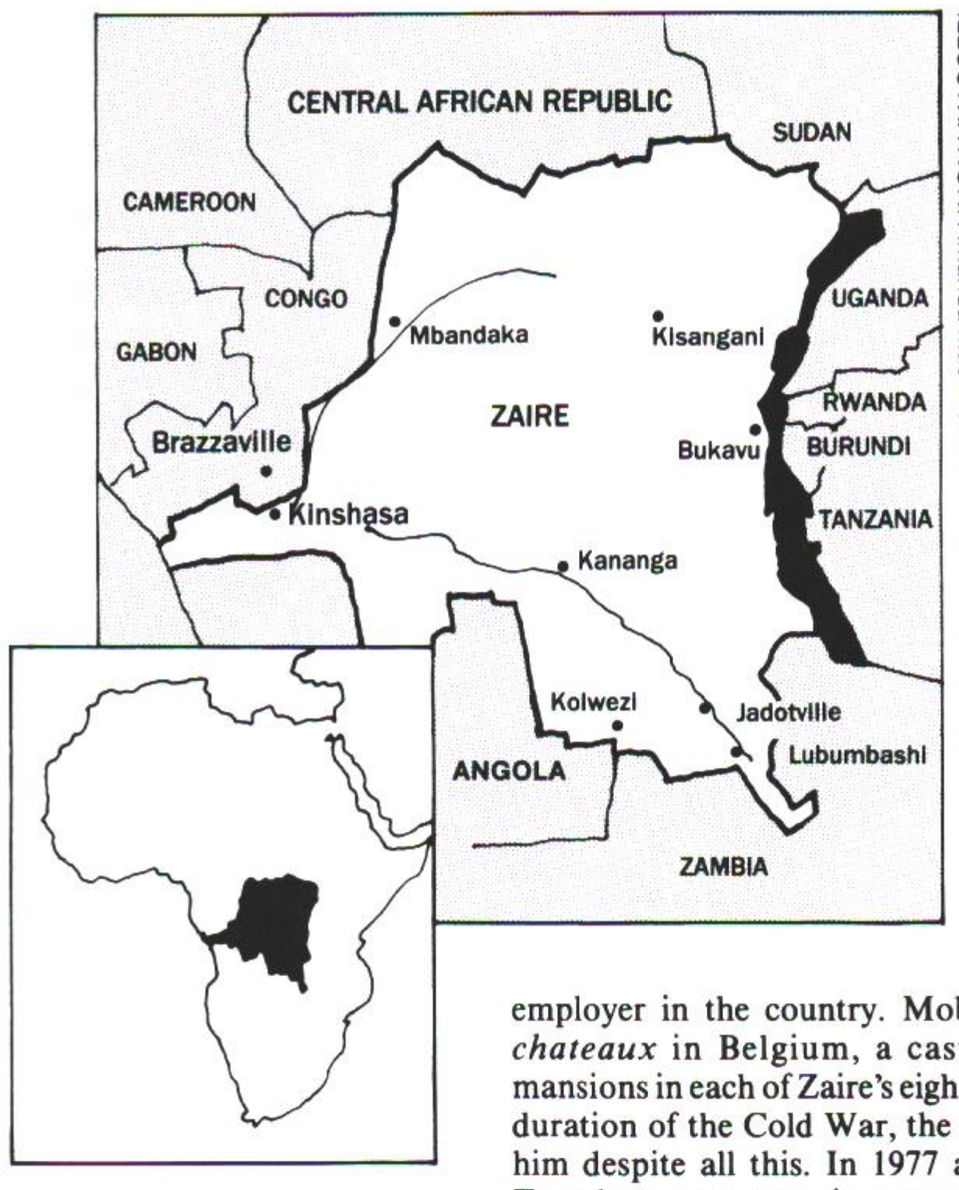


ILLUSTRATION: Amanda Macintosh

The upheavals in Zaire have resurrected Western paranoia about savage deeds in deepest, darkest Africa. But the real source of barbarism in Zaire is Western imperialism, says Barry Crawford

The recent rioting in the Zairean capital of Kinshasa prompted an outpouring of Western moralism, denouncing the repressive Zairean regime and bemoaning the atavistic savagery of the masses. The Western media has called for the end of dictatorship and the introduction of democracy, and conjured up images of savagery and primitivism to present Africa as a nightmare for the civilised West. Yet the long nightmare of Zaire is the product of a century of imperialist oppression by the Western powers.

The Congo—later known as Zaire—gained independence in 1960. But the ejection of the Belgian colonial authorities was only a prelude to further bloody interventions by the imperialist powers. For most of the 31 years since formal independence Western troops have been stationed on Zairean soil. The French, the Belgians, the UN, the Americans; the CIA, Israel's Mossad, and Boss of South Africa; all have intrigued and fought, tortured and massacred the inhabitants of Zaire to secure the interests of imperialism. It is particularly ironic that the powers which promoted civil war, repression and brutal dictatorship are now admonishing Zaire for its lack of democracy and human rights.

The Congo breaks up

The blame for the chaos that followed the Belgian Congo's independence lies entirely with the West. The new president, Patrice Lumumba, under popular pressure, attempted to throw off Western control of the economy—in particular Belgian control of the copper industry located in the southern province of Katanga. Belgian troops invaded and promoted the secession of Katanga to defend their mining concerns. Their action unleashed a series of regional demands for autonomy and the Congo began to disintegrate.

The Congo's break-up suited Belgium, but threatened the wider interests of Western imperialism in keeping Africa under control. A month after independence, the Western powers invaded the Congo under the banners of the UN to put down the revolt. The CIA planned to assassinate Lumumba, sending agents armed with a syringe and poison, but the Katanga secessionists beat them to it, hacking him to death on an aircraft on 13 February 1961. For the next two years, the country was riven with conflict between the government, the secessionists backed by European mercenaries, and the United Nations troops. The province of Katanga was eventually reintegrated into the Republic of Congo in 1963, although mass resistance, including a national strike, continued to make the government inoperative. Parliament was shut down in 1963. The chaos provoked by the West ensured that the institutions of Zairean democracy survived barely three years.

Colonel Joseph-Désiré Mobutu's coup in 1965 ushered in a period of relative stability in the Congo. Under the new regime, political rights were withdrawn. The remaining opposition was outlawed, exiled or killed. The Congolese population was silenced by outright repression. Mobutu's new regime elicited warm approval from the West. Here, at last, was a government with which they could do business.

Mobutu's ruthless domestic policies created a favourable environment for foreign investment and the expansion of Western interests in the Congo. At the height of the Cold War in Africa, the regime was also prepared to act as a pro-Western, anti-communist bulwark against radical movements in Mozambique, Angola and elsewhere. Mobutu threw open the Congo—renamed Zaire in 1971—to Western military advisors, spies and troops. In the seventies and eighties, American military aid to the Unita terrorists in Angola and operations as far afield as Libya were mounted from Mobutu's fiefdom.

Stooge of the West

The West repaid Mobutu's loyalty by according his government special financial status. By the end of the eighties, Zaire's debt stood at over $9 billion. Yet Mobutu remained on most favourable terms with the International Monetary Fund (IMF); he received $1.1 billion in 1981, the biggest ever IMF loan to sub-Saharan Africa. In 1987, the Paris Club rescheduled Zaire's debt for the eighth time, the most reschedulings for any country in the world.

The Western powers turned a blind eye to the endemic corruption of Mobutu's regime. Mobutu feathered his nest with national assets, amassing a $3 billion personal fortune, which makes him one of the richest men in the world. Since 1965, he has taken a five per cent cut of Zaire's mineral production, diverted up to 30 per cent of the budget into the presidential office, and built up a plantation empire that ranks as the third largest employer in the country. Mobutu also owns 11 *chateaux* in Belgium, a castle in Spain, and mansions in each of Zaire's eight provinces. For the duration of the Cold War, the West stood behind him despite all this. In 1977 and again in 1989, French troops even intervened to prevent him being toppled from government.

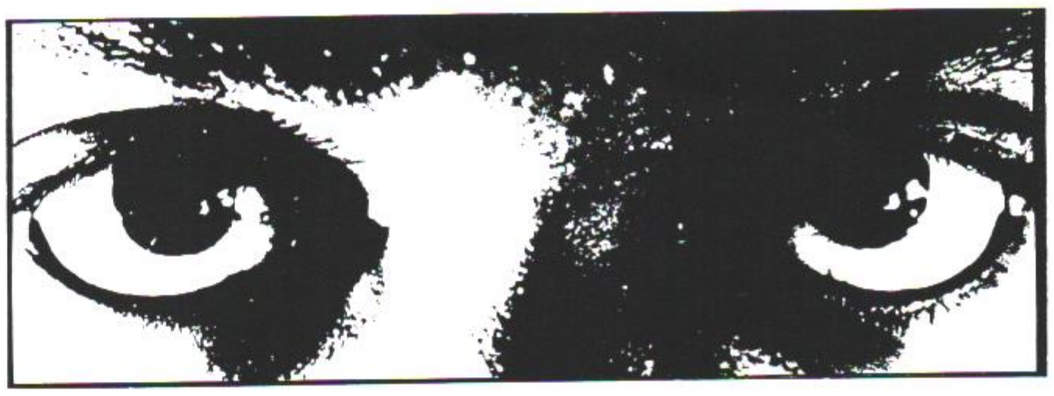
With the end of the Cold War in Africa, however, Mobutu has outlived his usefulness to the West. After 26 years his former sponsors have discovered, with a show of great surprise, that his regime is corrupt and repressive. In the Western media, 'our African friend in Zaire' is now condemned as a bloodthirsty tyrant. The USA, displaying a rather abrupt conversion to democracy in Africa, now sponsors the anti-government Zairean League of Human Rights: these days, the American ambassador is more interested in photo opportunities with Amnesty International representatives than visits to the presidential palace. Another longstanding ally—Israel—has downgraded support for the Presidential Guard. And France has withdrawn its military 'cooperators', trainers and officers from their Zairean posts.

A colony once again?

The West's withdrawal of support for Mobutu's regime has precipitated an explosion of social tensions within Zaire. In September, the 31st Parachute Brigade put the training they received from the French into practice by looting Kinshasa because their salaries had not been paid. The French and Belgian governments sent a thousand troops to quell the mutiny, provoking riots that left 60 dead and thousands wounded. Rather fittingly, the European troops also airlifted the white population to that local bastion of imperial power: Johannesburg. But unlike previous interventions, the West had no intention of bailing out Mobutu's beleaguered regime. Five days later, the president caved in to demands to form a transitional government.

Whatever government follows Mobutu, we can be sure that it will be chosen in the West. In the 1990s the fate of modern Zaire is once more being decided in the imperial capitals where the African colonies were carved out in the 1870s. Belgian troops march the streets of Kinshasa today as they did when the city was called Leopoldville in the past. Zaire and its people are still being brutalised on orders from Paris, Brussels and Washington. Forget the talk of the West bringing freedom to Zaire; recolonisation is a more accurate description of the process now underway. ●

The



Frank Richards finds echoes of the elitist politics of the past in the debate about the 'underclass' which was prompted by the summer riots

The British establishment spent the summer denouncing the 'underclass'. The outbreak of riots provided the powers that be with an opportunity to rehearse all of the traditional arguments about the undeserving poor. It appears that evil young yobbos and criminals and their single mother consorts are threatening the British way of life. The impoverishment of a section of the working class is being presented as the consequence of immoral people choosing to dodge their responsibilities.

It's natural

The discussion of the underclass separates poverty from its social causes. The authorities have spent some time preparing the ground for this argument. From the early eighties, they began to revise the prevailing conception of unemployment. The Tory government suggested that unemployment, far from being evidence of a failure of capitalist society, was in fact natural and not necessarily bad. What was truly wicked was the militant striker. After years of repeating these arguments, chancellor Norman Lamont could feel quite relaxed about informing parliament this summer that 'unemployment is a price well worth paying' for bringing inflation down.

Separating poverty from its social causes leads to the second consequence of the underclass debate: the transformation of a social problem into a moral one. The system is exonerated from blame for the problem of poverty. Instead, we are told, immoral individuals must bear the responsibility for their impoverishment. Their disposition towards crime and their lack of social responsibility demonstrate that they have only themselves to blame for their circumstances. Viewed from this perspective, the riots only confirmed what was already suspected about the criminality and immorality of the underclass.

The consequence of these arguments is that nothing can be done to help the underclass. Money is no antidote for immorality. On the contrary, it merely encourages wrongdoing. Stories about how young yobbos destroy the amenities provided for them confirm the futility of throwing money at the problem. The alternative solution offered by the authorities is the imposition of a moral code. The emphasis on establishing respect for authority is really a call for more repression and law and order.

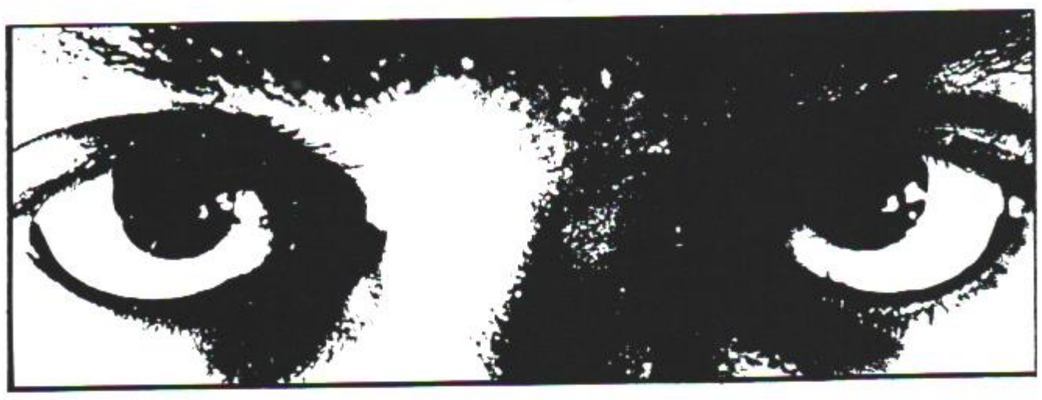
The current arguments about the underclass are a throwback to reactionary themes which were commonplace in the nineteenth century, but have been considered

'underclass': a race apart?

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Liverpool 1991,
sniffing lighter fuel

unacceptable for the past 40 years. The fact that these points can be put forward so boldly today indicates the decline of liberal and left-wing interpretations of society. What is behind the renewed discussion of the underclass, and where is it leading?



The presentation of social problems as moral ones has been strikingly successful

Ever since the emergence of capitalism there has been an ongoing debate about the causes of poverty and other social problems. The defenders of the system have consistently rejected the idea that such problems are due to the way that society is organised. Instead, they argue that the issue is the failing of the individual. During most of this century such arguments have been undermined by the apparent link between society and its problems. But recently the question 'who is to blame?' has once more tended to be answered through pointing the finger at the individual concerned.

The reaction to the summer riots illustrated how much the media has refocused attention away from social and towards moral issues. The main point to emerge from hundreds of pages of coverage was that the riots had a lot more to do with problems of morality than of poverty. So the real evil is the act of riot, rather than the degrading experience of impoverishment. This argument has been most consistently pursued by the right-wing *Sunday Telegraph:*

'In fact what has been going on in Newcastle and elsewhere during the past fortnight has much more to do with the moral climate than with unemployment or hideous housing estates, never mind the hot Indian summer. There was massive unemployment in the north-east during the thirties. Men marched, but they didn't riot or burn buildings.'
(8 September 1991)

The *Sunday Telegraph* can live with hideous housing estates and massive unemployment (although not too close too them). Its sole concern is with morality. And since poverty did not lead to riots in the thirties, it follows that the recent disturbances must have been motivated by a modern collective malevolence.

It is essential for the media to downplay social factors in order to sustain the thesis of immorality. 'You become a member of an underclass when you are severed from the moral pressures of society', writes Bryan Appleyard of the *Sunday Times* (15 September 1991). In other words, the problem is the breakdown of the moral code. What is needed, according to Appleyard's editor, is 'purpose, discipline and a moral code to guide their behaviour' and not money.

Moral degeneracy

The reorientation of the discussion towards the breakdown of a moral code helps to divert attention away from a critique of society. The response to the summer disturbances showed how far liberal arguments about social deprivation have become marginalised. In the past, arguments about the social causes of urban decay have tended to influence the mainstream of British political thought. Certainly since 1945, these arguments have been integrated into the consensus supporting the welfare state. Proponents of this view were prominent in the discussion that followed the inner-city disturbances of 1981 and 1985. Lord Scarman's influential report on the Brixton riot explicitly accepted that there was an important link between social deprivation and unrest. The discussion today is very different. Those who argue the old social deprivation case are far more defensive and far less influential than they were 10 or even five years ago, More ominously, all sides of the debate now appear to accept the relevance of moral degeneracy to consideration of the recent riots.

Bold Archbishop?

The most prominent liberal intervention in the summer debate was made by Dr George Carey, the new Archbishop of Canterbury. To the chagrin of the Tory government which appointed him, Carey stated that 'human wrongdoing is inextricably linked to social deprivation, poverty, poor housing and illiteracy'. Compared to the defensive tone of liberal and Labour politicians, Carey's observation sounded quite bold. However, closer inspection of his statement reveals a different message.

What Carey objected to was not poverty and poor housing as such, but the fact that these conditions created a climate where wrongdoing could thrive. In other words, Carey does not disagree with the idea that morality is at the root of the problem. He disagrees with the government only inasmuch as he believes that social deprivation creates the conditions where 'human wrongdoing' can thrive. His is a different solution to the same problem as that identified by the Conservatives—the problem of moral laxity among the underclass.

Not an issue

The presentation of social problems as moral ones has been strikingly successful. In the aftermath of the riots there has been no serious consideration of urban impoverishment. Unemployment has ceased to be an issue. It is no longer an emotive problem which can stimulate anger. Instead of a discussion of unemployment and what to do about it, the aftermath of the riots has brought the outbreak of a wide ranging debate about the family, parental discipline and delinquent children. Even the *Guardian,* a relatively liberal newspaper, adopted this approach. Its response to the riots was to run a five-part series of features on the problems facing the family.

Giving ground

The *Guardian's* response to the ideological offensive against the underclass is instructive. Its editorial condemned the government's crude attempt to criminalise the poor, while conceding half of the Tory argument:

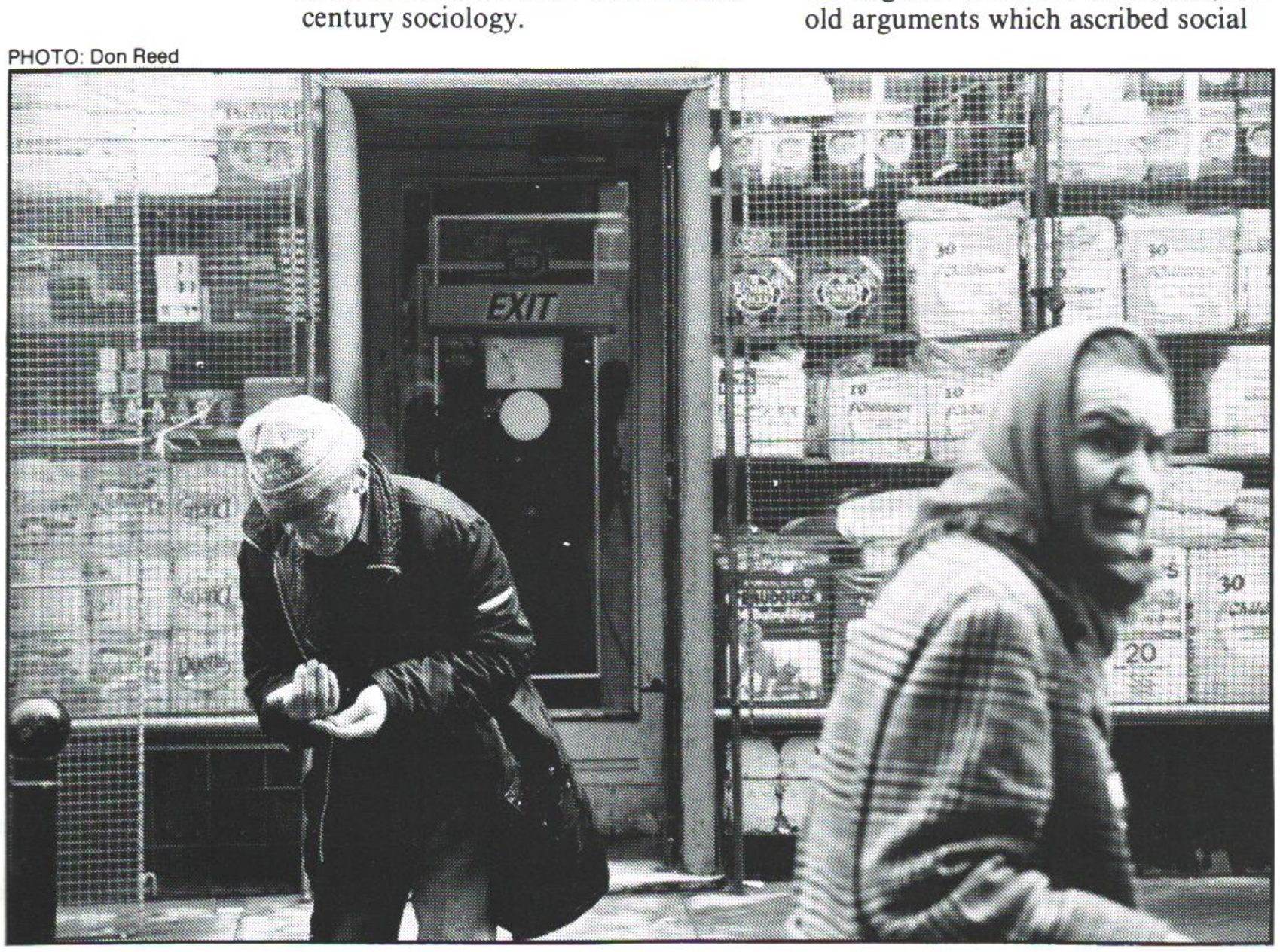
'Of course the riots in Newcastle have a moral dimension. The Archbishop was quick to concede that yesterday. Of course the behaviour of the rioters should be condemned. But there will be little advance if analysis stops there. Ministers who ignore the social causes, and concentrate solely on the moral problem, are only storing up trouble for the future.'
(21 September 1991)

By suggesting that social and moral problems coexist, the *Guardian* only helps to confuse the issue. What can the 'moral dimension' suggested by this newspaper imply? It can only mean that at some level immorality provides an explanation of the disturbances in the north-east of England. And once the argument about morality is conceded, then the shift from the social to the intangible moral inevitably ensues. Above all, this shift implies transferring responsibility for these problems from society to the immoral individual.

Those who convert social problems into moral ones always end up pointing the finger at the individual. Society has no responsibility for the breakdown of the moral code. At best it can help to create conditions for moral regeneration. But at the end of the day, how a person behaves is their own responsibility. The idea of immorality is above all a statement about the individual. That is why presenting social problems as moral issues inevitably means blaming individuals for their predicament.

Although the discussion of the underclass is often couched in sociological jargon, at base it represents the moral condemnation of the urban poor. The argument is that the urban poor deserve their station in life because that is what they are like. Immorality and criminality are their innate characteristics, and individuals are driven to riot by their depraved nature. This is the assumption behind the new home office plan to target children as young as six, who may be potential criminals almost by birth. This resurrection of the 'criminal type' signals a reversion to the crude naturalistic obsessions of nineteenth century sociology.

PHOTO: Don Reed



The renewed emphasis on criminality as an innate characteristic of certain individuals goes alongside a more general resurgence of strident rhetoric directed against the masses, 'the mob'. For some time now the media has sought to portray working class life as a synthesis of football hooliganism, scrounging on the dole and the crass materialism of Essex Man and Woman. In recent months, the rhetoric has become increasingly aggressive, as one journalist illustrates:

'We don't have to travel to Newcastle, or the Blackbird Leys estate near Oxford, to see the Calibans. Ignorant, violent yobbos abound in London too. They mug and rape women in their eighties. Punch and kick mothers carrying children. Attack those who refuse their begging demands.' (*Evening Standard,* 12 September 1991)

Here we are presented with the image of pure evil rampaging across the cities of Britain, of wicked individuals in an otherwise acceptable society. It is a nice image with which to flatter the conservative imagination since these individuals are not just evil; they are also inferior to respectable citizens. As the *Evening Standard* would have it, they are 'instinctively violent...an awful perversion of human life'.

Why are such crude and simplistic accounts of human behaviour now making a comeback? Throughout the fifties and sixties, the old arguments which ascribed social problems to innate human characteristics were systematically discredited. In the nineties, however, it seems that the growing confidence of the forces of conservatism has encouraged the resurgence of elitist arguments about the inferiority of the working classes.

A note of caution is necessary at this point. The spread of these elitist arguments is still at an early stage in Britain and other Western societies. Such views cannot be presented in an explicit way as they would alienate too many people. That is why a right-wing journalist like Auberon Waugh counsels that people of 'superior intelligence' should work around the 'vulgar majority':

'The art of survival in the modern democratic world is to identify those areas in which individuals can be persuaded to dissent from the vulgar majority, and to work away on them, establishing a conscious and motivated rejection of the mass culture among people of superior intelligence and more generous instincts.' (*Spectator,* 14 September 1991).

Waugh's contempt for ordinary people is manifest. Even today, however, the temper of our times does not allow pro-establishment figures like him to broadcast their true sentiments towards the masses.

Although reactionary arguments about the underclass now flourish, the key assumptions behind the argument remain unstated. The main assumption behind the concept of the underclass is that its members are a race of people inferior to those who belong to decent society. These things must for now remain unsaid, since arguments about race and sociobiology are still compromised, especially by the Nazi experience.

An imperial race

Somebody like Auberon Waugh must be envious of the freedom which his predecessors enjoyed earlier this century. A clear exposition of what the British establishment truly thinks about the urban poor was provided by Lord Rosebery in a speech to Glasgow University in 1900. His subject was Britain's 'race problem': that is, how to improve the British imperial race. Rosebery was adamant that this could only be done in the rural areas and not in the cities:

'In the great cities, in the rookeries and slums which still survive, an imperial race cannot be reared. You can scarcely produce anything in those foul nests of crime and disease but a progeny doomed from its birth to misery and ignominy.' (Lord Rosebery, *Questions of Empire,* 1900, p.10)

It seems as if that progeny 'doomed from its birth' has been resurrected in the underclass of our times.

For Rosebery and his co-thinkers, there was no question but that those who dwelled in the urban

Elitist arguments about a social hierarchy serve to cohere the ruling class internally

Even a relatively 'enlightened' liberal thinker like William Beveridge, the main inspirer of the welfare state, shared Rosebery's elitist contempt for the so-called dependent races. 'The line between independence and dependence,' wrote Beveridge in 1906, 'between the efficient and the unemployable, has to be made clearer and broader':

'Every place in free industry, carrying with it the rights of citizenship—civil liberty, political power, fatherhood, conduct of one's own life and government of a family—should be so to speak, a "whole" place....Those men who through general defects are unable to fill such a "whole" place...must become the acknowledged dependents of the state...with the complete and permanent loss of all citizen rights—including not only the franchise but civil freedom and fatherhood.' (Quoted in M Freeden, *The New Liberalism,* 1986, p184)

More than 80 years before the invention of the term underclass, Beveridge was already threatening 'dependents of the state' with the loss of their right to fatherhood. The disease of the single mother had not yet been officially diagnosed, but the preoccupation with fickle fathers showed that it was only a question of time.

With the emergence of working class politics and of the labour movement as a force to be reckoned with, the ruling class felt compelled to tone down its attack. Statements against the inferior masses and denunciations of dependents became more muted. However, the establishment's assumptions about the lower races remained intact. The only difference was that they seldom elaborated them in public.

Beyond the pale

One of Beveridge's main objectives was to broaden the distinction between what he called the 'efficient' and the 'unemployable'. This marked the continuation of the Victorian distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. The intent of this distinction is to split the working class into a section that can be drawn into a tame relationship with the elite, and a section that is beyond the pale. The promotion of the idea of the underclass today serves the same purpose. The moral condemnation of the underclass is at once an invitation to the decent poor to join the dominant consensus. As they did at the turn of the century, the authorities argue for this perspective on the grounds that the dependent underclass is taking away resources from those who could use them better. Today this eugenic argument is expressed in the Tories' suggestion that married couples with children are being penalised by single mothers who get priority allocation of council flats.

The development of elitist themes around the underclass debate is still at an early stage. The legacy of welfare capitalism cannot be eradicated overnight. Moreover, relatively liberal ideas are traditionally influential in the sphere of social policy. Professions such as education and social work are still influenced by the traditional arguments of the welfare state. But there are unmistakable signs which indicate that the liberal perspective has become very defensive and quite liable to collapse under pressure. The absence of a direct challenge to the new overtly anti-working class elitism is symptomatic of the changing intellectual balance.

Compromised

How far can the resurgence of elitist views go? It seems unlikely that the establishment will try to construct a political culture openly based upon self-conscious notions of the racial inferiority of the working classes. Social Darwinism in its different forms is too compromised to make a comeback. In any case, those who blame social problems on natural differences do not need explicitly to raise the issue of race. For example, Charles Murray, the main proponent of the underclass thesis, emphasises the culture of dependence. But whatever the form of the argument, the objective is to link social problems to the innate characteristics of the individuals concerned.

Popularising nationalism

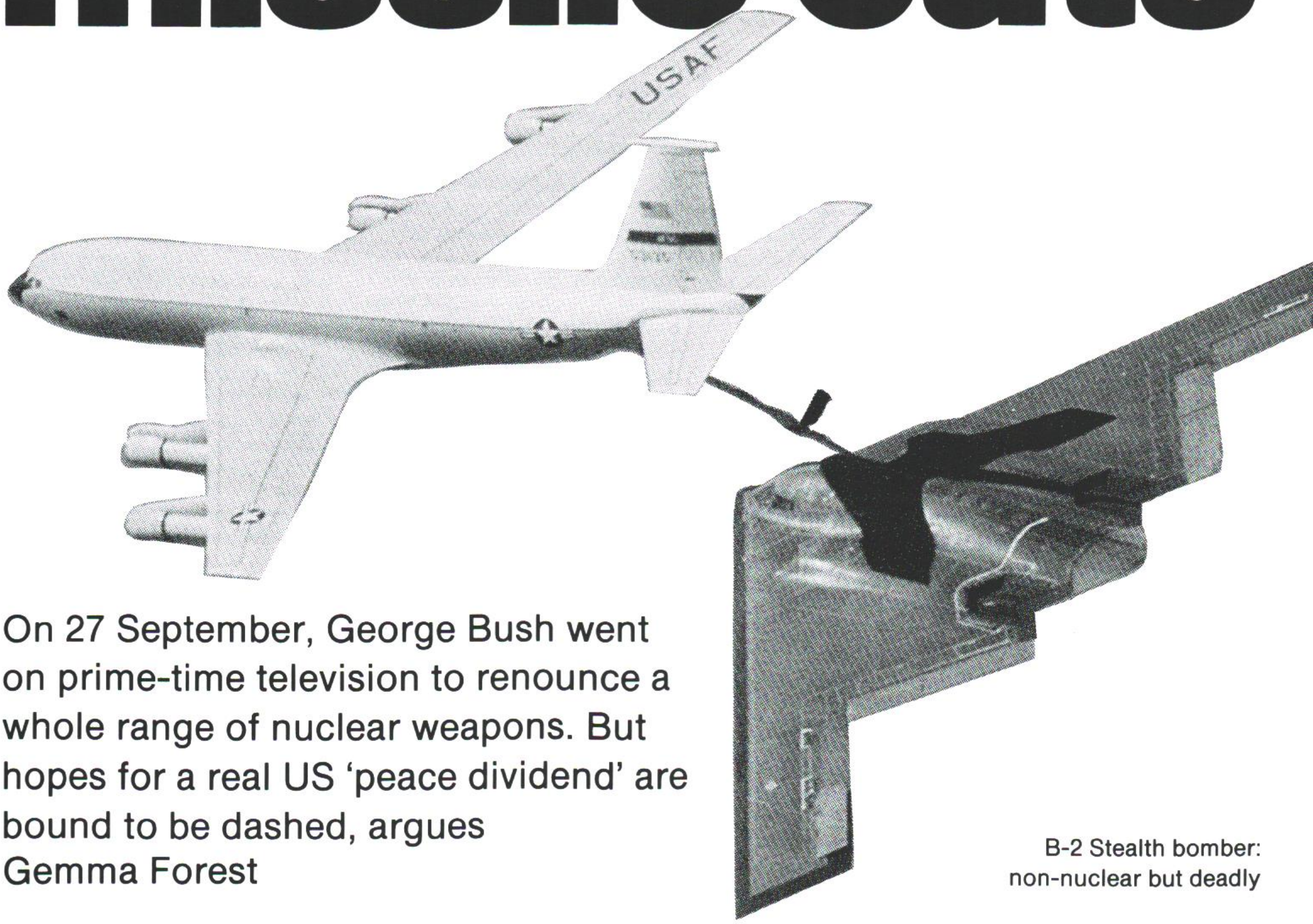
There is another problem with an explicit social Darwinist ideology. Modern capitalist societies depend for their stability upon achieving a degree of mass consensus. One of the most efficient ways to establish this consensus is through popularising nationalism. Thus chauvinist sentiments are encouraged throughout the Western world, and racism is tolerated as the cutting edge of nationalism. The problem with social Darwinism, with its emphasis upon natural hierarchies, is that it contradicts popular nationalism. Social Darwinism tends to focus attention upon divisions within domestic society, while popular nationalism seeks to unite all classes against another nation or race. It is difficult to rally the masses behind your flag if at the same time you are publicly condemning them as a vulgar mob. Consequently, when the ruling class is faced with the question of which race card to play—whether to attack the lower races at home or promote popular chauvinism against other races abroad—it always chooses the latter.

In fact, both the social Darwinist and the popular nationalist temper have their place in the capitalist scheme of things. Elitist arguments about a social hierarchy serve primarily to cohere the ruling class internally. They act as a sort of ideological self-flattery which can periodically be used to direct attention away from the problems caused by the system. The role of popular nationalism, on the other hand, is to bind social classes together behind the leadership of the establishment. It is a way for the elite to retain a grip on the masses.

Exposing elitism

The return to prominence of traditional themes about race—albeit in new forms—presents us with an important intellectual challenge. The renewed emphasis on such elitist themes exposes the predatory and decadent standpoint of the ruling class. Defeating these arguments will require the development of a coherent critique of capitalism which can systematically demonstrate the responsibility of the system for social problems. It is a challenge which *Living Marxism* is well-placed to meet. ●

Behind Bush's missile cuts



B-2 Stealth bomber: non-nuclear but deadly

On 27 September, George Bush went on prime-time television to renounce a whole range of nuclear weapons. But hopes for a real US 'peace dividend' are bound to be dashed, argues Gemma Forest

Cuts in US defence have been big news since 1987, when Ronald Reagan agreed with Mikhail Gorbachev to withdraw Cruise and Pershing nuclear missiles from Europe. Even before 27 September, US defence spending was set to fall by a quarter by 1996. Gulf War apart, we seemed to be ending the Cold War with a massive wind-down of American militarism.

Bush's September announcement came on top of plans to take GIs out of uniforms and other countries. By 1995, US army numbers will drop from 764 000 to 535 000—the smallest force for 50 years. More than a third of America's 1600 foreign bases face the axe, and US troop levels in Europe are meant to halve to 150 000.

Bush has also stood down significant nuclear weapons. Earlier this year, he signed Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (Start) cuts, which will pare the US strategic nuclear arsenal down from 12 000 to 9000 warheads. Now he is going to scrap all battlefield nuclear missiles and artillery; retire nuclear-tipped Tomahawk cruise from warships and submarines; cancel land-mobile Midgetman and MX intercontinental nuclear missiles, as well as air-launched SRAM-IIs; and take B-52 long-range nuclear bombers off alert.

Why so bold? Obviously the Soviet Union is even less of a 'threat' than it ever was. America also wants to stave off instability throughout Eurasia by allowing the Soviet Union to reap a peace dividend of its own. Within days of Bush's initiative, Gorbachev obliged with proposals for still deeper defence cuts to divert funds from arms into food, consumer goods and the kind of infrastructure which hesitant Western investors demand.

The most critical factor behind Bush's cutbacks, however, is the economic slump in the USA. Even after Bush's speech, both Democrats and Republicans called for still more savings. Uncle Sam is broke, and if the end of the Cold War makes cuts possible, the slump makes them a necessity.

Yet the same pressures of economic decline make it imperative ▶

Bush's non-nuclear war machine will prove even more vicious than it did on the road to Basra

for Bush to protect the USA's superpower status in the world. Therefore his cuts are designed to streamline defence only in ways that will leave the USA's military superiority unchallenged.

Bush can only distract European and Japanese attention from his domestic budget deficits and embattled computer and car industries if he continues to control the agenda in international diplomacy. Making a fuss about military affairs—through G7 communiques about arms proliferation, or through asserting UN control over the pathetic stockpiles that Iraq has left—is the best way to confirm America's status as leader of the Free World. After all, even *reductions* in nuclear arms serve to remind Tokyo and Bonn that they have no such arms to reduce. Meanwhile, brandishing new non-nuclear weapons for use against the third world also shows the G7 just who's boss.

Bigger bangs

America's decline means that it must stop spending bigger bucks on bangs and instead find a bigger bang for its buck. Bush's nuke cutting gambit represents not a diminution of America's lethal potential, but a refinement of it. The prospects are that Bush's non-nuclear war machine will prove even more vicious than it did on the road to Basra. In an unstable 'new world order', Washington's self-conscious posture of Globocop demands nothing less.

The other side of Bush's 'disarmament' programme consists of less publicised initiatives to modernise American militarism: giving US troops worldwide mobility; maintaining key nuclear weapons; and learning the lessons of Operation Desert Storm in new non-nuclear technologies. Let's look at these three in turn.

Less means more

The US army will be smaller, but more versatile, better trained, backed by reserves in a higher state of readiness, and kitted out with lighter equipment. It will enjoy improved sea and airlift capabilities, more pre-positioned supplies, and more access agreements among America's allies. US army chief of staff Carl Vuono will have forces sited in America which are immediately 'available for power projection in contingencies worldwide', as well as a garrison in Europe which is not confined to European operations ('Desert Storm and conventional forces', *Foreign Affairs,* Spring 1991). An $8 billion programme of giant C-17 troop transporters will help him on his way.

Bush's nuclear cuts amount to a mere $1 billion a year or less, on an annual defence expenditure of $300 billion. Submarine launched ballistic missiles, still the key to deterring the first strike from all comers, have not been touched. Sea-launched Cruise missiles may not have nuclear warheads, but—as the people of Baghdad know to their cost—the conventionally tipped ones, which comprise 84 per cent of America's nautical complement, can be devastating; anyway, many of the nuclear Cruise removed will be held in readiness on land.

Conventional murder

Bush has no intention of scrapping his nuclear arsenal. And even if he did, it would only dent America's military capability. Nuclear weapons obsessed peace campaigners during the Cold War, but were never used throughout the period. They were more symbols of the old, all-American world order than they were immediate dangers to the human race. Non-nuclear weapons are considered somehow more 'legitimate'. Yet—from fuel-air explosives to the bulldozers that entombed tens of thousands of Iraqi conscripts in their trenches—they have proved themselves just as murderous.

The Gulf War boosted the status of air power as a weapon of strategic significance. That is why, despite Congressional opposition, the following programmes are likely to go ahead: the LH, or Commanche, helicopter for the US army (cost: $35 billion); the F-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter for the US airforce (cost: $75 billion); the long-range, all-weather stealthy AX attack bomber, based on US navy aircraft carriers.

B-2 bombers

Above all, 15 highly secret B-2 Stealth bombers, at $1 billion each, are being built and a further 60 are on order. From only three launch bases, and with only one refuelling, B-2s could bomb any point on the planet. In a future, B-2 repeat of the 1986 air-strike against Libya, Bush would need only four planes and four refuellers, eight airmen, $4 billion and a few hours—instead of the 84 warplanes, 35 support aircraft, 134 airmen, two carrier battle groups (20 ships), five days repositioning and eight foreign bases that were needed last time (Sam Nunn, 'Proceed with the B-2', *Aviation Week and Space Technology,* 1 October 1990).

After Desert Storm, the USA will build up its air power still further. It will 'own the night' through the use of airborne infra-red. It will step up and protect more thoroughly its command, control, communications and intelligence systems: satellites to help commanders find themselves and their targets, Awacs for spotting planes, JStars (a new Boeing 707) for spotting ground targets. It will suppress enemy air defence systems with stealthy bombers, carrier-launched Tomahawks, radar-homing missiles and radar-jamming aircraft. Lastly, it will put the accent on air- and sea-launched precision guided munitions, whether bombs or missiles, and whether guided by infra-red or laser.

Star Wars

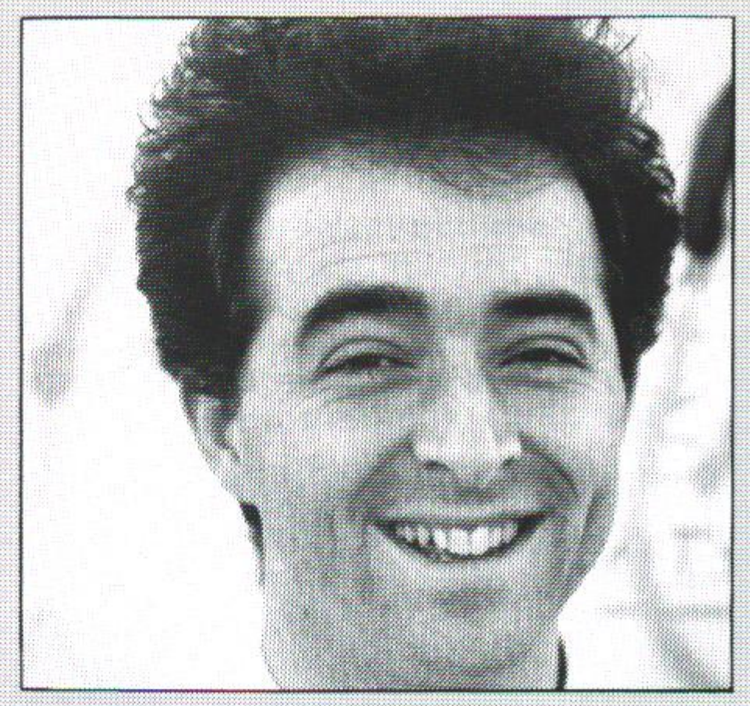
Land, nuclear and air forces are only part of the panoply of American militarism in the nineties. The Strategic Defence Initiative (Star Wars), though lower-tech than the 'impenetrable shield' proposed by Reagan in 1983, will still cost $100 billion. It will now field spotter satellites (Brilliant Eyes), ground-based missiles and space-based smash-into-'em rockets (Brilliant Pebbles). Ostensibly, the purpose is to guard the USA from missiles launched by rogue Soviet republics or by future Saddams. In fact, airlifted into future troublespots, SDI systems would do even better than Patriot missiles in allowing American forces to operate with impunity. At the same time, SDI stands out as something that neither Europe nor Japan can hope to duplicate in a hurry—a further confirmation that Uncle Sam is down, but not out.

America is also much more active in chemical weapons than Saddam Hussein. It admits holding 1000 tons of VX and 1700 tons of mustard gas. The public US budget for 'retaliatory' chemical and biological weapons has nearly doubled over the past two years.

War not peace

The greatest mistake we could make is to imagine that today's manoeuvres by America presage a more peaceful era. In the recession of the early seventies, president Nixon wound down the Vietnam war and pursued nuclear detente; but even when the Western Alliance was intact, Carter and Reagan soon found the need to raise defence spending. Today, we live in a much more fluid and dangerous world in which Washington's position as Number One is far less secure. Just how much the USA feels the need to use its modernised military machine, in order to demonstrate its global supremacy, the peoples of the third world will learn over the next few years. ●

Cop Rock



Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV

The whole idea is so magnificently and insistently wrong that you doubt the sanity not just of the concept but of its producers and directors

As usual, the most exciting, most cinematic and most expensive footage of the month came from the police. Night after night, we thrilled to the sight of hotters spinning, twoccers razzing, and ram raiders in Range Rovers cruising clean through Dixon's window, all in the steady spotlight of the cop copter. Now I don't want to reopen the debate about how far TV influences people; I just want to say these pictures made me want to go out and steal Golfs. They perfectly captured the visceral thrill of breaking the law in a way that *Thelma and Louise* never got near. If anyone else had made a film like that it would have been banned. So why did the police release it? Because it reasserted their toughness and resolution in the face of the most damaging attack yet on the public image of the force. Allegations of incompetence and corruption are one thing, but the suggestion that policemen serenade each other in the locker room and wear leg-warmers is a new one. It forms the central conceit of the new BBC1 series—*Cop Rock*.

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Our incisive British TV critics have compared *Cop Rock* to Dennis Potter's *Singing Detective* on the grounds that both have songs and policemen. This is like saying that *Rod and Jane and Freddie* (ITV) is the same as *Nightmare on Elm Street* because they've both got Freddies in. In *The Singing Detective*, the songs were old and familiar. They provided a kind of sweetly ironic public commentary on an agonisingly private story. They were also good songs. The songs in *Cop Rock* are not old, not good and—most of all—not ironic. What they are is embarrassing. Hypnotically embarrassing. Singing and dancing cops have to be played by singers and dancers. So most of the cast do not look like policemen. They have the cosmetic good health and desperately matey over-projection of long-rested hoofers. Finding these psychotically sincere faces on your small screen is like finding a Jehovah's Witness in your bath. You feel it cannot be really happening, that you are hallucinating. And then they start to sing.

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Cop Rock is the latest product from Steve Bochco—creator of *Hill Street Blues*. And the two series are informed by the same view of the state of policing and the state of America. Whereas in British series like *Inspector Morse*, a wise detective chaperones the viewer through a single case to an infallible conclusion, *The Blues* used to open ritually with a 'roll call' scene in which a jumble of cases were laid before an oddball team of officers while the camera roamed around, never settling on one face, one story, or one answer. The implication of Morse is that if you just keep plodding you will tidy the whole place in the end. The implication of *The Blues* was that policing was at best crisis management, 'keeping despair at arm's length'. One reading of it was that the real enemies were not petty criminals and disaffected youths, but poverty, racism, homelessness and the marginalisation of the urban working class. The other reading was of course—it's a jungle out there, so tool up and hit them before they hit you. Only the Boys in Blue stood between the viewer and bloody anarchy. It is worth noting that the programme was pitched explicitly at an upmarket, high-spending audience. That these images of poverty were being used to flog BMWs and Apple Macs.

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The central image of Hill Street was war. America at war with itself. And this has become the central image of discussions of American civic life. First there was the war on poverty. Then there was the war on drugs—which turned out to be a real war with helicopter gunships. Recently I heard a real doozey—the war on violence. *Cop Rock* takes this rhetoric to its limit. The picture it paints of America is apocalyptic. Crack dealers jump out of cars and spray the watching crowds with Uzi fire. Killers are allowed to go free because there is no room in the jails. At the end of episode one, a mother sells her child to a man in a big car because she cannot afford to feed it. Through it all passes the cop, trying to stick to a set of rules that everyone else is ignoring. Like playing cricket on a minefield. Kind of admirable but not exactly sane. But what would be the proper response? Apparently a song and dance.

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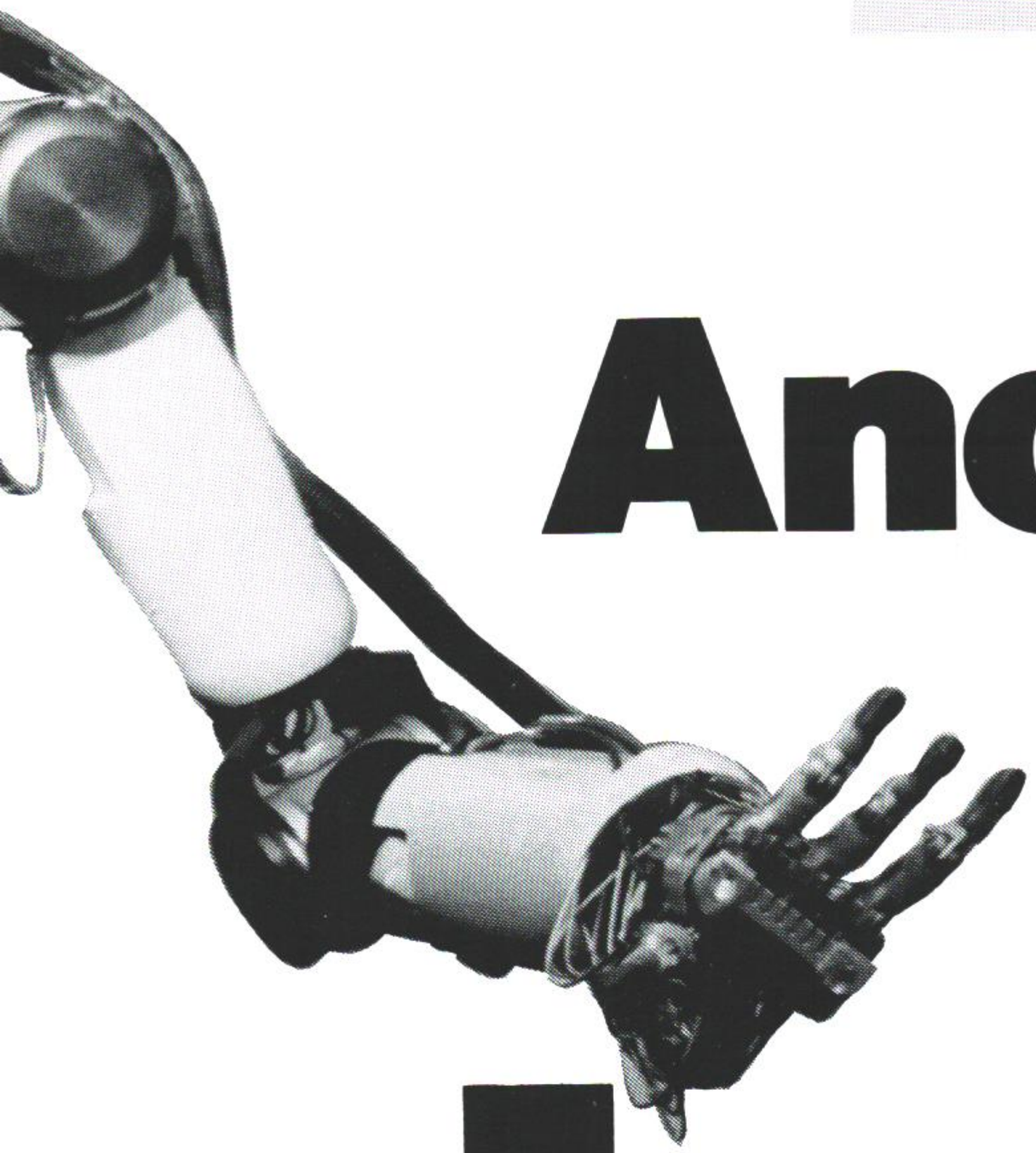
In British series the police tend to be blanks. Morse, for instance, is a collection of writer's workshop props—funny car, dirty dishes, real ale, an attitude. Crucially, his only abiding relationship is professional. On *The Bill* too, we never go home with the police. The police are defined primarily in terms of their profession. In *Morse*, great emphasis is placed upon the fact that Morse *is* his profession. He has no first name. He is a monastic figure who exists only to fulfil his vocation. In *The Blues* on the other hand, the cops were presented as full, complex characters with problems, doubts and domestic pressures to deal with.

Now the thing about real characters—as opposed to ciphers—is that they need real motives. Morse detects because he is a detective. But the cops of the Hill and more especially of the Rock need to ask that old method question—what is my motivation? If the whole world is falling to pieces, why am I bothering with this one crack dealer (who after all might kill me)? The most usual answer, so far, has been revenge. Episode one, for instance, centred around a crack dealer who killed a cop and was allowed to go free and kill again. When they caught up with him, the rocking coppers made a mistake in their warrant procedure and it looked like he would go free again. So they shot him. They waived their function as disinterested functionaries of a social law and went instead for the personal vendetta. Now in a lot of civil theory this is exactly the kind of situation which the police are there to prevent. Vengeance is mine saith the State. So this is a very radical breakdown of the system.

For hundreds of years the revenge story has been used as a way of dramatising dissatisfaction with the nature or competence of the state. Hamlet, for instance, is faced with a killer who has become the law. His problem is that the only way he can deal with it is by becoming a killer himself. And if he does become a killer, he will also become the law (because he's next in line for the throne). Hamlet goes (or pretends to go) mad. The cops sing. In fact, the effect is much the same. You will want to look away from the screen when they do it, just as Polonius wanted to get away from Hamlet. In *Hamlet* only the Mel Gibson character goes mad. In *Cop Rock* it is the actual programme itself that seems insane. In fact, the whole idea is so magnificently and insistently wrong that you doubt the sanity not just of the concept but of its producers and directors. This is all the more alarming when you see their names go up and realise that they are all people you admire. Not only Steve Bochco but also Randy Newman. After a while, glued to the screen, unable to either avert or believe your eyes, you realise that you are starting to doubt not their sanity, but your own. This alone makes it great TV.

living



Another vision of Japan

Robots and *samurai* warriors, cherry blossoms and Godzilla, the tea ceremony and *sumo* wrestlers, *sushi* bars and *geisha* girls. These are the images of Japan being promoted by the Japan Festival in a series of exhibitions and events all over Britain.

The Japan Festival claims to go beyond the traditional, stereotypical images of Japan. Yet the main brochure advertising the festival has 'raw fish and wrestling' as a headline. It is like having a festival on Britain entitled 'jellied eels and cricket'. So much for challenging people's prejudices and offering a real insight into what makes Japanese society tick!

Sonia Parker returned recently from Japan having lived and worked there for more than a year. She describes some facets of Japanese culture which you will not find in the Japan Festival

Tokyo is the closest I have been to paradise. It is a glimpse of a possible future; a Metropolis-style, half-submerged city, immaculate, shiny, large-scale, complex and efficient. The tower blocks of the Shinjuku and Otemachi districts are vast and lavishly, beautifully designed, some with curved bases like waves, others with polished black stone flanks. In the centre stands the Tokyo city council building, an immense structure dominating a circular public space. The two star wars-type towers seem to defy the laws of architecture as they twist upwards.

In the basements of the big office blocks are villages of shops and cafes, and the mandatory waterfall, pond and garden. They are used mostly by the employees working for the companies on the floors above. Outside, connecting the buildings, are the elevated public walkways which criss-cross so many of the roads in Tokyo, adding another futuristic touch.

Beyond Shinjuku is Shibuya, the meeting place. Hordes of sexy *shibu-kaju* (*shibuya* means casual) guys with long swept-back hair, slacks and baggy white muscle-tops, and girls in *kawaii* (cute) white baby T-shirts and slacks, crouch in groups on the pavement, shrieking and playing all night. Youth fashion in Japan is a highly developed sub-culture, especially among those in dead-end jobs, the ones who were rejected from the university stream in their early teens. Their fashion is clean, expensive-looking, experimental and aggressive. Plastic, lycra, gold and silver abound, in a spangly, 60s-ish way, and you can't miss the rejection of good taste, conscious and otherwise.

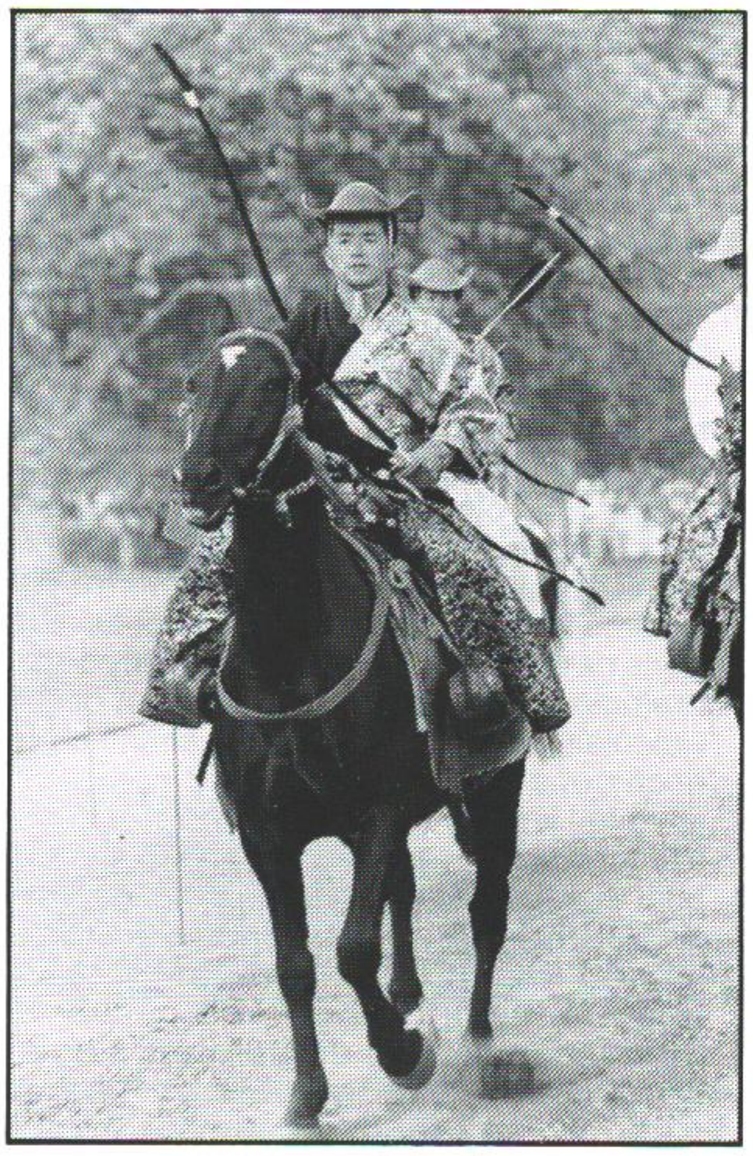
Gold is Tokyo's biggest and apparently most exclusive anyone-can-get-in nightclub.

Last New Year's Eve, girls in clear plastic bras, white pants and blonde wigs ran amok on the club's seven crowded floors. It must have been that shy, inscrutable, discreet, humourless Japanese character that made them do it.

Leaving this Japan a few weeks ago to discover ancient Britain getting into its Japan Festival has been a curious experience. I'm not sure whether the Festival is designed to change the British view of the Japanese so much as preserve in sugar-coating the prevailing prejudices.

What I have seen so far of the Festival and its media coverage does little to show either the diversity in Japanese society or to explain the weight of discipline which bears on ordinary people in order to contain that diversity. Conformity in Japan is more a matter of national policy than national character, and there is much discontent and resistance to it.

Shoggonai, a very commonly used Japanese phrase, roughly translates as 'there is no other option'. It is used in particular to describe the regimented, inflexible working conditions which most Japanese have to endure. I worked for seven months as a middle school teacher, based in a local government office, in a rural area a few hours from the city of Kyoto. Many of my colleagues had lived for years in local government-owned dormitories alongside their workplaces. At least this made it easier to get to work at 8am and (unquestioningly) work overtime without notice or pay. If you were 10 minutes late (apart from me, nobody ever was) for the official good morning ceremony and bowing to various section chiefs, then you lost substantially more than 10 minutes' pay.

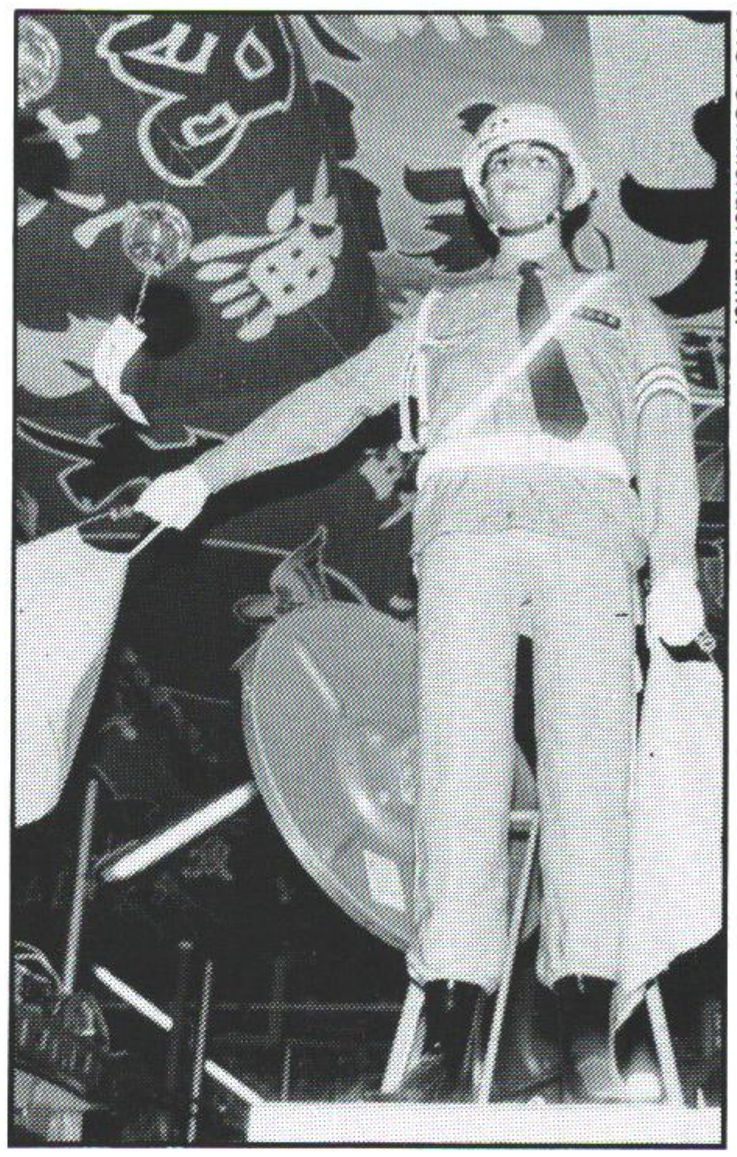


After work we were responsible for cleaning and sweeping the entire offices. This was much more about ideological training than saving on the cleaning bills, and it was taken seriously. I once made the mistake of discreetly trying to avoid picking up the sweeping brush, and was instantly detected and sent on a one-way ticket to Coventry by all my superiors.

Teachers work through mountains of exam marking to brutal schedules, and then have to work unpaid before and after school. And they have to look the part. A friend of mine was constantly attacked for wearing too much make-up and a leather skirt (over the knee too). This was on top of the opprobrium she bore on account of living alone without a husband or parents to watch over her. She would also have liked a cigarette or two during the tiny dinner break to relieve the tension, but was too scared to smoke in front of her colleagues.

I never got to know anyone who did not have a grudge, about being forced to over-work, or live in a town they didn't like, or teach in a school they hated, or something. But I rarely saw such feelings surface in public. Few are brave enough to frown too much or verbalise their complaints. They are scared of being branded 'selfish' and losing their 'good job' (*gudu jobu*), and with it all chances of getting another.

It is to the advantage of those in charge to keep the working and studying population as busy as possible, or at least at their desks. In local government and education many hours are purely obligatory (*giri*), sitting it out in the office simply because you aren't allowed to go



PHOTOS: Michael Kramer

home. School children and teachers have to undertake compulsory 'club activities', usually of a sporting nature, after school and through the holidays. It is not surprising that most arrive home exhausted enough to find television and preparation for tomorrow about as much as they can manage.

As a foreigner, an outsider and a transient I was naturally entrusted with the complaints, secrets and wilder desires of those I worked with. I soon knew who was 'communist', who was 'gay', who hated the headmaster, and which po-faced teachers sneaked off to midnight *karaoke* bars wearing Raybans and leather jackets to disguise themselves as Osaka salesmen.

One of my friends, Teiji, was not unusual. At 25-years old he was forced out of the city and stranded in a remote 'home town' by familial obligations following the death of his father. Two years later he constructed elaborate excuses to obtain a whole weekend off his job in a carpet factory so that he could hang out in the surprisingly large gay scene in Kyoto. The scene includes some social integration with *gaijin* circles (foreigners), another group firmly excluded from mainstream Japanese society.

Despite the strict school discipline, the fact that most children know by the age of 13 if they are going to university means that many of those who aren't become ungovernable. After a while I discovered that many of my pupils staring silently ahead were in fact listening to their personal stereos (which were located in their lockers outside, but operated by radio control from a palm-sized unit which had no connection to the tiny ear buttons). They wander in and out of classes wearing outrageous clothes, toting cigarettes, mouthing off and hitting teachers. ▶

While the achievers work like slaves, the rebels end up in the worst jobs. It was not surprising that my local 7-Eleven in the Komazawa district of Tokyo was run by a haggle of pallid punk brothers with long aquamarine hair, or that the city council building was cleaned by bored girls in DMs and bleached pony-tails. There is another option available to them, the *Yakuza*, the Japanese mafia.

There are probably over 100 000 members in the various gangs which make up the *Yakuza*, although boundaries between legal and criminal businesses are often vague. Nevertheless it is clearly an important part of the Japanese economy and society. There is a stock phrase, 'the Japanese way of doing things', which is very widely used with reference to the wonders of the Japanese economy, and which serves to mystify and celebrate those wonders. The *Yakuza's* way of doing things is less openly advertised.

The *Yakuza* myth

Many Japanese people seem to know less about the *Yakuza* than people in the West, unless they've come up against them. In the media they have been presented as romantic heroes, historical Japanese 'characters'. Militant teachers have discovered the modern reality behind the 'masterless *samurai*' *Yakuza* myth, especially in their campaigns to defend union rights and counter prejudice and discrimination against the *Burakumin*, a sort of official Japanese underclass.

Every year in April when Kyoto members of Nikkyoso, the teachers' union, try to hold their week-long prefectural assembly, the *Yakuza* rallies its forces and surrounds the conference rooms with convoys of black Cadillacs, blaring the horns and shouting threats. Last year the assembly was suspended as the Kyoto police and local government refused to support the teachers' legal rights against the *Yakuza*. Using the mafia is a way of crushing trade union activity and removing militants from the shop floor without having to dirty the name of the police and government.

The ultra right-wing organisations with which the *Yakuza* are involved do not, however, have any monopoly on the race-based nationalist ideology which is promoted right across Japanese society. I attended one of the oldest Japanese language schools in the country, set up in 1947 at the time of occupation. Most of the students were either Koreans or east Asians training to enter Japanese universities and a few Americans and Germans helping to expand Daddy's business to Japan. The teaching material was nationalistic stodge, about the super-fast *Shinkansen* trains, cherry blossoms, kyoto-temples and *sushi*.

Sushi chauvinism

The teacher took an instant dislike to me when I said that I didn't like *sushi*. Every morning she would warm up by asking me if I still didn't like *sushi*. Things came to a head when she was telling us about gorgeous Okinawa pineapples. She wanted Mr Chuo from Singapore to say 'Japanese pineapples are surprisingly tasty', and for some reason, probably because he too had had enough of her boastfulness, it came out as 'Japanese pineapples are surprisingly expensive'. She wouldn't teach our class after that.

There is much more to Japanese society than its official culture and its official attempts to keep control. There are more and more signs of tensions and turbulence beneath the placid surface. It is these which are most interesting about the place, apart from the fabulous modernity of course. I'm going back.

After his World Cup debut, many felt good that Pavarotti was bringing some culture to the beer-swilling yobs. Now they feel he is pandering to their bad taste. It must be the way you feel on a late-night bus when the drunk who amused you at first starts getting abusive. You wonder with growing unease, 'what will he do next?'. After the Hyde Park concert and his schmaltzy last release, 'The Essential Pavarotti 2', the knives are out for the lardy tenor from Modena. The opening thrust came from the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*. In a front-page article it described Pavarotti as 'descending to the level of Madonna', with his 'bulging gut, profuse sweat', and 'singing by ear with modest musical preparation'. Back home, the sensitive *Sunday Telegraph* columnist Geoffrey Wheatcroft joined the chorus: 'There has been, for some time', he fumed, 'talk about "bringing opera to the people". Well it's been brought to them, and it may be time for it to be taken back'.

King of the masses?

That sounds like heavy stuff but really it's a bit pathetic. Taken back to what? As Wheatcroft himself admits, the operatic tradition is well on the way to extinction. Is Big Lucy likely to swap the adulation of 250 000 people for the dead-end of Covent Garden? The same opera house can just about tick over by charging exorbitant prices and running a massive deficit. A seasoned singer will hardly get excited about singing to a house where most of the best seats are block-booked by large companies to entertain their tone-deaf clients, many of whom would just as happily watch *Miss Saigon*. A simple calculation would tell Pavarotti that there's more to be made with the masses.

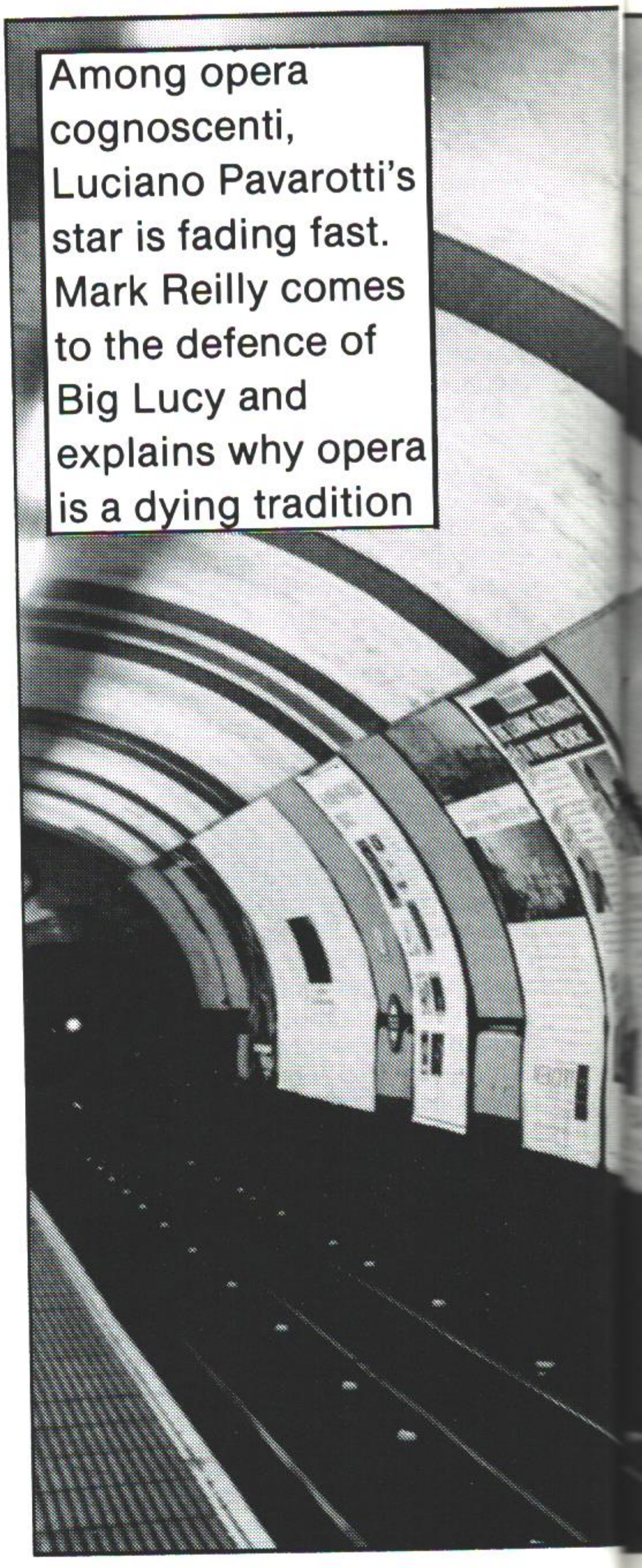
As for the other claim from the disaffected buffs, that he has sacrificed his art to become the 'Carnival King of the masses', there is little evidence of that. It's true he may not have the voice he once had. But that can hardly be due to singing in front of large numbers of people, especially since his voice is amplified on occasions like the Hyde Park concert. If anything is likely to cause the deterioration of a tenor voice it is the new opera houses being built like that at the Bastille in Paris, houses which would test the mettle of the stoutest Italian warhorse. The other drain on a singer today is the gruelling world circuit and dwindling numbers of top-class singers, which means that the likes of Pavarotti sing far more than is good for them. If anything, Pavarotti would keep his voice in better shape if he was to do more Hyde Parks and less trudging around opera houses singing for grey men on expense accounts.

Pasta-eating Italians

Pavarotti is popular because he's the best. He stands head and shoulders above his two main rivals, Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras. They may have a better musical sense but they are too much like technicians to gain a Pavarotti's following. I doubt if they have deliberately forsaken a mass audience and hefty bank balance for the honour of singing to the Geoffrey Wheatcrofts of this world. It is unlikely they could either acquire or hold on to the following that Pavarotti has. The high priests of opera flatter their exalted taste by reassuring themselves that the 'masses' only like Pavarotti because he fits their caricature of the fat pasta-eating Italian. I can't imagine that thousands of people would stand in a rain-drenched field to see a caricature come alive.

Pavarotti may be the best, but maybe he's not brilliant. The malcontents are right that the tradition of singing is in decline, though as

Among opera cognoscenti, Luciano Pavarotti's star is fading fast. Mark Reilly comes to the defence of Big Lucy and explains why opera is a dying tradition



natural sycophants, they blame the singers themselves. The tradition has been in definite decline since the war and probably before that. For me, the last of the great tenors were the Swede, Jussi Bjorling, and the Italian, Guiseppe di Stefano, both of whom reached their peak in the late fifties (Bjorling to die soon after). They represented the last in a tradition which stretched back into the nineteenth century at least, though there are those who argue that *bel canto*, a more natural, centred singing, was dead even by the turn of the century, being steadily supplanted by the forced, heavily veneered singing which is popular today. It is hard to know, since technology has only preserved the voice since the time of Caruso.

Peasant passions

It is not surprising that vocal tradition has declined. In the past, the human voice has flourished in societies with strong popular traditions, usually among a peasantry recently swept into the towns. There, the raw passion of the peasant voice would be given form in the culture of the city. Countries like Italy and France had this tradition and experienced rapid urbanisation in the nineteenth century. They produced the richest operatic tradition

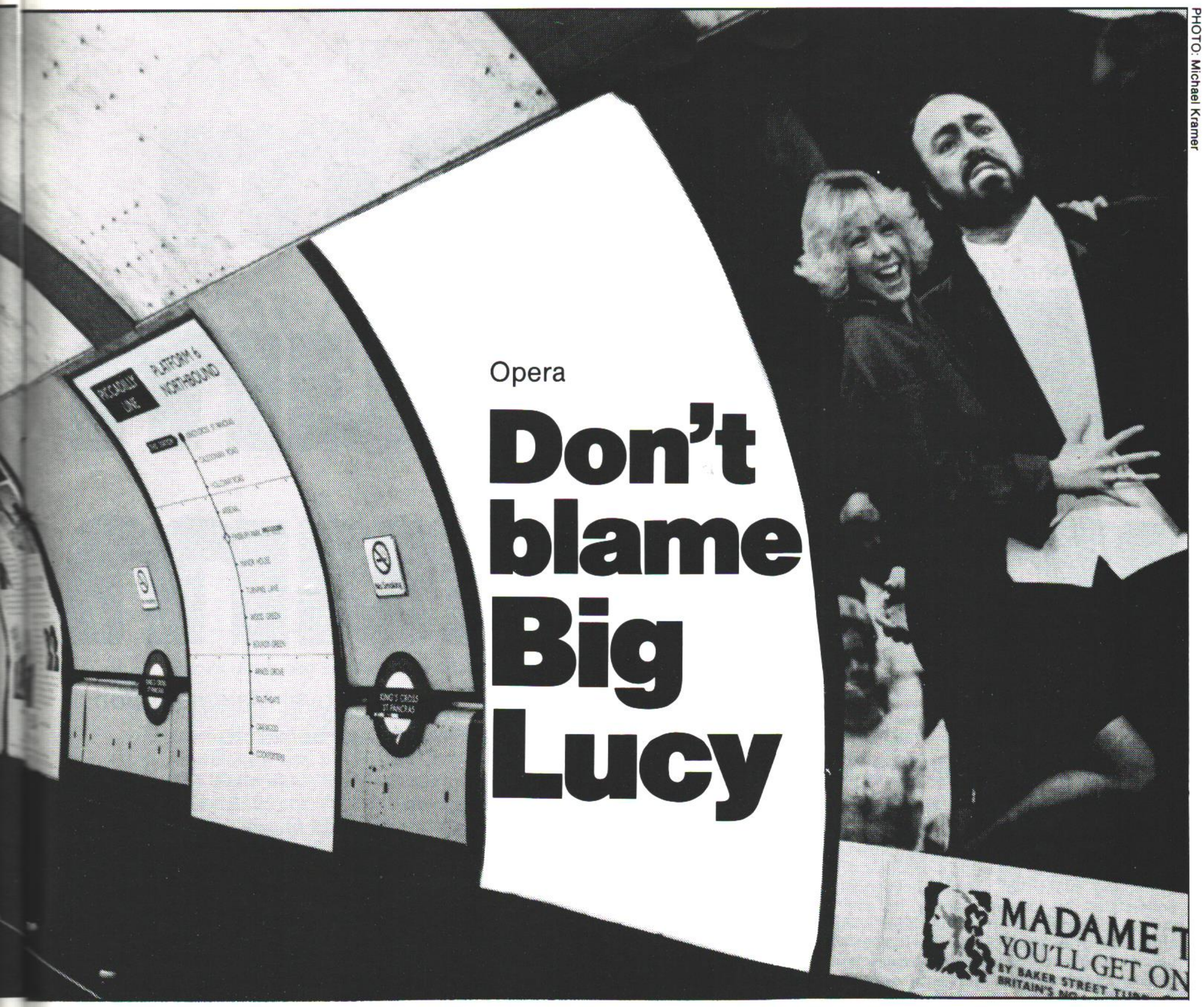


PHOTO: Michael Kramer

Opera

Don't blame Big Lucy

and the best singers. Britain and America, where that sort of society was wiped out long ago, produced next to nothing.

Until the fifties or so, Italy produced the greatest tenors. With the post-war boom and the extension of the market to every corner of life, singing went into decline. Many people would blame technology, especially the television for that. While a lot of people spend their leisure time watching television, most men at least still go to bars in the evening. In the past, even in boring old England, they would sing there. They don't anymore.

The market and 'me'

The problem is that the market and any sort of human distinctiveness don't go very well together. The market asks only one and always the same question about everything—can it be sold at a profit or not? If it can't then you don't get it. At the same time, it narrows and homogenises our experience of life. From Tokyo to San Francisco, people wear the same Benetton clothes, listen to the same Sony Walkmans and eat the same McDonalds food. Only those who live off others have a slight chance of developing some sort of individuality, and that of a very narrow sort, isolated from society. The market destroys all real difference between individuals by turning the personality into an automaton for the performance of the same task day in day out, and elevates the trivial as the mark of true individuality.

More schools, less singers

The apologists who lambast Pavarotti experience this, but think that the world has just become a very boring place. Wheatcroft mourns the decline of national traditions like that of the German heroic tenors. The irony is that although there are probably more people attending singing schools today than a hundred years ago, there are no great singers. The tenor voice seems to have suffered most. More than any other, it touches closest the animal instincts (think of the sex-appeal of a tenor), yet needs a self-critical intelligence to keep it in place. Without a living, social tradition the singer loses touch with that intelligence. Today, a singer like Placido Domingo can launch himself into *Othello*, an opera which has destroyed many a better man, without batting an eyelid. Giovanni Martinelli, the greatest Othello on record didn't touch the opera until he was in his fifties, when his voice had acquired a naturally dramatic weight. Pavarotti, to give him his due, didn't attempt it until recently, and only in repertory.

A tradition like singing can't be manufactured in schools, it must grow organically out of the deeper needs of society. Apart from the pressures singers are under today, there is nothing in our society which naturally encourages vocal expression. If you were a young Neapolitan 50 years ago, the way you expressed your individuality and your relationship to society was by singing. These days the same Neapolitan would be just as likely to do it by buying a Golf GTi. Rather than question a society which generates such paltry assertions of individuality, the apologists assert the importance of tradition as an antidote to the greyness of the present.

Take my advice

Once a tradition like singing dies, it is almost impossible to rebuild it. There are as many potentially great voices around as there ever were, but little or no chance for them to be heard. The odd one might slip through the homogenising net of the market, but once cocooned in the lifeless world of high opera, it will lose that freshness. My advice is, listen to Pavarotti while he can still sing, then get a few recordings—McCormack, Gigli and Schipa—and listen to some really great voices.

living

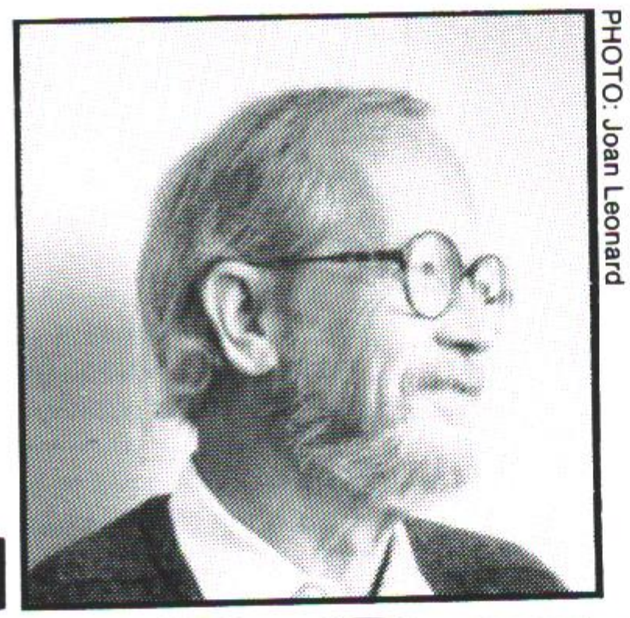


PHOTO: Joan Leonard

Elmore Leonard

Maximum minimum

Crime writer Elmore Leonard has just had another hit with his new novel *Maximum Bob*. But the 'Dickens of Detroit' was so self effacing that Andrew Calcutt began to wonder if he was bluffing

Listening to crime writer

Elmore Leonard, I got the feeling that pretentiousness must be his idea of the world's deadliest sin. Everything about him seemed deliberately understated: his low-key delivery, his smart but not-too-smart get-up of blue blazer, white shirt and grey slacks. But the lowest of Leonard's low-key traits was his assessment of his own writing: 'Forty years ago it occurred to me this might be a good way to make a living. There's no message. Entertainment—that's all it is.' He was talking about crime novels set in Detroit and Miami which have been described as the greatest chronicle of late twentieth century America.

Characters rule

Leonard doesn't like to impose on his characters. Instead of traditional narrative, in which the author-as-unseen-observer describes events in his own distinctive voice, Leonard lets his characters speak for themselves. He chooses which character will describe a particular scene, and then reproduces 'the sound of the character, even in narrative [passages].' When Leonard 'impart[s] whatever information I can through dialogue', and 'concentrate[s] on the sounds of the voices', he hopes that the reader is 'never aware of me'.

Leonard's characters have been known to perpetrate some fairly gruesome crimes, but he declines to 'judge the people in my books'. If, in private, he takes a strong moral stance on the real-life equivalent of the fictional violence he describes, he doesn't want the outside world to know about it. 'You don't hear me', he says, coyly, 'you're never sure'.

Some writers map out their plotlines to the last detail before sitting down to write. This doesn't appeal to Leonard. 'When writing the first page, I have no idea [of the outcome].' Leonard enjoys 'not knowing what's going to happen. That way I'm surprised'. Sometimes a character will put himself centre-stage, or he could write himself out of the story altogether. 'You never know who is going to be the main character until half-way through', he said. Around half-way through *Maximum Bob*, just published in Britain, the initial protagonist drives out of the novel and is never seen again. 'I was surprised he lasted that long', said Leonard. 'The last time we see him he's headed for California. I hope he makes it.' The endings of Leonard's novels can seem equally arbitrary. 'They usually stop around page 360', he quipped. In June, Leonard finished *Rum Punch*, a novel about gun-running which will be published next year. When his editor complained that the ending was too abrupt, Leonard added three sentences, cut two, and went back to his vacation.

No more heroes

Is Leonard so shy and ineffectual that he dare not tamper with his own material? Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a case for arguing that Leonard made eighties crime-writing his own just as Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler stamped their identities on the thirties and forties. What's different about Leonard is that he got rid of the heroic hero. 'What I'm up to is trying to be as realistic as possible, describing real criminals and law enforcement people as I know them.' Now in his early sixties, Leonard came from a blue-collar background and he writes about 'ordinary people into some kind of hustle'. His first crime novel was rejected 84 times by publishers who said, 'there's no one in this book to like'. Nowadays, many crime writers look up to Leonard and credit him with 'making it OK to use the criminal as the main character'.

Leonard likes to make you think that all he has to do is sit at his desk and let his characters do the talking. But verisimilitude is an effect which is hard to obtain. Leonard's writing-style requires an unusually large amount of research. He now employs a full-time researcher to help him. He writes his first draft in longhand and then rewrites five or six times on the typewriter, constantly reading to himself to get the rhythms of speech just so. In Leonard's case, producing entertainment requires a level of professional dedication which would defeat many who lay claim to the mantle of literature.

Inverted arrogance?

Leonard must be aware of this. He keeps up with the highbrow literary scene, although he sneers at the suggestion that he is trying to cross over into serious writing. His denial is so vehement it makes me wonder whether his deliberate self-effacement is really an inverted form of arrogance—the arrogance of a man who could outwrite John Dos Passos, but chooses not to try.

Leonard may be just a regular guy who values his privacy and doesn't want to aim too high. On the other hand, he could be a much smarter operator. In an age like ours, lacking either certainty or direction, Leonard would not be the only one to cultivate the stance of not having a stance. Perhaps it has occurred to him that describing this uncertain mood—and not letting on—makes for a good living and good writing.

Maximum Bob, Viking, £14.99 hbk

the marxist review of books

Are we on the verge of a breakthrough in theoretical science? **John Gibson** and **Manjit Singh** take a sceptical view

Science or speculation?

Books discussed in this article include:

John D Barrow, **Theories of Everything: the Quest for Ultimate Explanation,** Oxford University Press, £14.95 hbk; John D Barrow, **The World within the World,** Oxford University Press, £8.95 pbk; John D Barrow and Frank J Tippler, **The Anthropic Cosmological Principle,** Oxford University Press, £9.95 pbk; Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield, **The Arrow of Time: a Voyage through Science to Solve Time's Great Mystery,** WH Allen, £14.95 hbk; Stephen W Hawking, **A Brief History of Time,** Bantam Press, £14.95 hbk; Roger Penrose, **The Emperor's New Mind,** Vintage, £7.95 pbk

Only *The Diary of an Edwardian Lady* has been on the best sellers list longer (183 weeks) than Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (158 weeks). This alone testifies to the great popular interest in theoretical physics, and to the wide dissemination of current theories. And Hawking is not alone. The work of Penrose and Barrow has been debated in the pages of *The New York Review of Books,* while the subject of Coveney and Highfield's book—non-linear dynamics or chaos theory—continues to captivate a large audience.

According to Hawking and Penrose, we are on the verge of a major breakthrough in science that will finally unite the two great theories of the twentieth century—quantum mechanics and general relativity. Coveney and Highfield feel that modern science is on the verge of a breakthrough of a different kind. They believe that chaos theory will provide a new way of looking at the world. In his foreword to *The Arrow of Time,* leading chaos theorist and Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine argues that chaos theory 'marks an end to the classical conception of science' (p16).

In fact, in 1991 some people have begun to suggest that all is not well with fundamental physical thought. Writing in the May edition of *Blitz,* in a feature looking at contemporary perceptions of the future, leading science populariser John Gribbin expressed his fears about the prospects for scientific theory:

'The holy grail of physics is the unification of the forces of nature into one theory, something called the Theory of Everything. By the year 2000 either we will know that we are on the right lines or we will have found out that we are completely wrong. This will show up in the next five years largely from the experiments with the big new particle accelerators. My suspicion is that physicists will find that they are in big trouble, and have to start again.'

Gribbin may well be right. Far from expressing a revolution in process, the books discussed here reveal the severe difficulties confronting theoretical physicists.

In many areas of science, the relationship between theory and experimentation is no longer an equal one: theory dominates. This is not the case in every area. For example, in solid state physics experimentation continues to play a central role—such as in the development of room temperature super-conductors. However, in the areas of particle physics and cosmology to name but two, the gap between theory and experimentation is a serious problem. In some cases, the theories are so far ahead that they can accommodate a wide variety of experimental results.

The theories are often the outcome of 'neat' or 'beautiful' mathematics. Sometimes scientists cling tenaciously to their theories even if they are contradicted by the results. In the past, experiments played a vital role in developing theories. Today, experiments in some fields are barely managing to test out theories developed decades ago.

This problem is apparent in Hawking's book on the attempt to unify the different aspects of quantum mechanics and general relativity. Hawking believes that this unification would provide us with a complete picture of the workings of the universe, and hence a history of time, since according to current theories time itself began with the beginning of the universe.

A Brief History of Time is a fascinating read. But the more we read, the more obvious it becomes that speculation has replaced anything that could be described as science. As we come to the end of the book, and Hawking's own thoughts on the nature of spacetime based on his development of existing theories, he offers no experimental proof at all for his theory of quantum gravity:

'I'd like to emphasise that this...is just a proposal. It cannot be deduced from some other principle. Like any other scientific theory, ▶

it may originally be put forward for aesthetic or metaphysical reasons, but the real test is whether it makes predictions that agree with observations. This, however, is difficult to determine in the case of quantum gravity.' (p136)

Having conceded that aesthetics and metaphysics can be the basis for scientific theory, Hawking is drawn to ask why it is that the universe should be the way he imagines it to be. This is his route to God:

'Science seems to have uncovered a set of laws that, within the limits set by the uncertainty principle, tell us how the universe will develop with time, if we know the state at any one time. These laws may have originally been decreed by God, but it appears that he has since left the universe to evolve according to them and does not now interfere in it.' (p122)

The physicist Paul Davies went so far as to argue that physics provided a surer route to God than religion. Whether or not Hawking uses God as a metaphor for beauty is not really the issue. What is clear is that once speculation is allowed free rein anything is possible.

Roger Penrose, a longstanding colleague of Hawking, manages to keep God out of things, but only by ascribing to mathematical models the status of reality. The subject of his book, *The Emperor's New Mind,* is artificial intelligence. His attack on the fallacy of machines as men is useful and stimulating, although he relies too much on mathematics and not enough on a discussion of what makes humanity a unique species, which turned out to be the key issue in the debates around the book.

However, he too branches out into a discussion of modern science in general. Like Hawking, Penrose recognises that speculation plays a major role in modern science. He breaks down theories into three categories: Superb, Useful, and Tentative. Tentative means that the theory has no empirical support of significance. Into this category he puts much of modern theoretical physics—super-string theory; super-gravity; grand unified theories.

Unfortunately, his own conclusions about human intelligence are just as speculative, if not more so. This is clear in his discussion of the role of different aspects of quantum mechanics in the processes of the brain:

'I am speculating that the action of conscious thinking is very much tied up with the resolving of alternatives that were previously in linear superposition. This is all concerned with the unknown physics that governs the borderline between **U** and **R** and which, I am claiming, depends upon a yet to be discovered theory of quantum gravity.' (p438)

In other words, he is speculating that the answer may be found in a theory we don't as yet have (and which we know from Hawking will be pure speculation if and when we do get it!).

While Hawking thinks it might all hang together as the work of God, Penrose thinks there must be something in it because the mathematics is so beautiful. In this he is an unashamed Platonist—someone who believes that mathematics is real rather than a human device for modelling objectively existing laws of nature. Referring to a mathematical feature associated with chaos theory, the Mandelbrot set, Penrose declares that 'The Mandelbrot set is not an invention of the human mind: it was a discovery. Like Mount Everest, the Mandelbrot set is just there!' (p95).

For Hawking and Penrose, the 'beauty' of the mathematics somehow means that there must be something to the theory which captures a feature of the real world. In fact, there is no reason to believe this at all, especially when they themselves admit that there is no experimental testing. Speculation has always played a role in scientific discovery and advance. The problem today is that speculation—often in the form of the search for a 'beautiful' mathematical construction—is getting out of hand.

Paul Dirac, one of the leading architects of quantum mechanics in the 1920s was an early exponent of views which have achieved a much wider resonance today:

'It is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiment....It seems that if one is working from the point of view of getting beauty in one's equations, and if one really has a sound insight, one is on a sure line of progress.' (Quoted in 'The evolution of the physicist's picture of nature', *Scientific American,* May 1963)

This idea was given its most extreme formulation in the same period by Hermann Weyl, a mathematician specialising in relativity theory: 'My work always tried to unite the true with the beautiful, but when I had to choose one or the other, I usually chose the beautiful.'

The problem of a fundamental imbalance between theory and experimentation, and the associated problem of beauty as science, is not confined to particle physics and cosmology. It is also apparent in chaos theory. *The Arrow of Time* by Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield lacks the scope and flair of Hawking's or Penrose's work. But it exposes even more clearly some of the current dilemmas facing modern science because it is concerned with subjects which are more down to earth than the origin of the universe and the mechanisms of the human mind.

Written by two enthusiasts for chaos theory, *The Arrow of Time* only ends up highlighting the speculative character of a theory which claims to be a new universal theory of natural laws. Take the question of mathematical speculation as science. Models of population development are notoriously difficult because of the wide variety of interdependent predator-prey relations, as well as changes in food supply, etc. Coveney and Highfield brush this aside in looking at the changes in population of lynx and hare:

'Thanks to non-linear dynamics, an alternative explanation has been proposed that can be couched in terms of properties of the lynx-hare populations alone, without the need for mishaps in the snowshoe hare's food supply, weather fluctuations, disease or other external factors. In a non-linear dynamical system, the irregularities might owe their existence to chaos.' (p245)

Coveney and Highfield dismiss the difficulties ('mishaps') with a ridiculous simplification.

Another example of this speculative methodology is the 'Brusselator', a mathematical model used in chemistry and developed by Ilya Prigogine and his associates at the Free University of Brussels. In discussing models of alcohol production we are told that this 'massive simplification is repaid by the fact that its rhythms are then described by equations similar to those used for the Brusselator.' (p225) Sometimes we can't avoid 'massive simplification' when we want to model complex systems. However, like all propositions which seem too good to be true, it's worth checking the details. In footnote 24 to chapter six we discover that 'The Brusselator has found some applications in the study of instabilities in laser physics; it is, however, too contrived to describe any real chemical reaction' (p333).

It is becoming increasingly clear that the more determinants we take into account in modelling physical systems—ie, the more realistic our models become—the less they resemble mathematical chaos. This is admitted by our authors when commenting on the infamous application of chaos to the weather:

'In the face of the hyperbole, it is usually forgotten that if one adds further variables to Lorenz's equations in an attempt to make the picture more realistic, chaos becomes harder, not easier, to find.' (p209)

No wonder the particle physicist and cosmologist H-Diether Zeh said he found Prigogine's arguments 'not very convincing' (*Physics World,* January 1991).

If we take a step back from the sphere of natural science, it is clear that the problem is not confined to particle physics, cosmology or chaos theory. We are talking about a problem that afflicts most areas of theoretical science.

Now, there is nothing wrong with speculation as such. Indeed, given the limited technology and funds available it is impossible to

put forward a less speculative theory today. However, there are two problems with the contemporary discussion. First, speculation is not even recognised as such, or there is no consensus about what is speculation and what isn't in any particular field. This leads to the limiting of research and a closing of minds. This was something the Nobel laureate Richard Feynman drew attention to in his famous lectures on 'The Character of Physical Law' in 1964: 'The people sweeping the dirt under the carpet are so clever that one sometimes thinks this is not a serious paradox.'

A host of mathematical theorems and models are being used to 'prove' that there are limits to our knowledge

The second problem is that philosophical conclusions are being drawn from scientific theories that are of a highly speculative character. As a consequence, the distinction between what is a philosophical view and what is a scientific thesis is muddled. And even more dangerously, particular philosophical views are masquerading as scientific propositions through the application of particular mathematical models to nature.

Today, when optimism about the future and the possibility of humanity expanding its knowledge and control over natural laws is at a low ebb, a host of mathematical theorems and models are being used to 'prove' that there are limits to our knowledge. The current crisis looming for the existing 'theories of everything' is being seen by some as further 'proof' that such fundamental knowledge is beyond our ken. This theme is one which preoccupies John D Barrow, professor of astronomy at the University of Sussex.

Barrow is fast becoming one of the most widely read popularisers of theoretical physics. He has hit upon the plan of writing several books about the same subject from different directions. There is a lot of overlap, especially between the last two books—*The World within the World* and *Theories of Everything*. Barrow's style of writing is well suited to the subject—very readable and highly informative about detail and ideas, but extremely vague in its conclusions.

In *The World within the World,* Barrow correctly points out that if one adheres to a realist philosophy—that is to the belief that there is an objective reality independent of our senses—the question of whether or not there are a finite number of fundamental laws of nature is a scientific rather than a philosophical question. Einstein—a realist—believed there were a finite set of such laws, while Max Planck—also a realist—believed that there weren't.

This is a different matter, of course, from thinking that existing laws are the key to the secret of the universe. Barrow has become increasingly sceptical of this over the past few years. But in questioning the existing 'theories of everything', he has moved in the direction of questioning the possibility of fundamental knowledge itself. He has done this in several ways, all of which rely on approaches that are probably even more speculative than the 'theories of everything'.

Barrow's first trick is to use some results from pure mathematics to say we just can't decide certain things. These are the results obtained by Kurt Gödel and Alan Turing in the 1930s. Gödel discovered that within the laws of a mathematical framework there are some propositions that are 'undecideable' in principle; that is, we cannot decide whether they are correct or false. Turing muddied the waters even further by showing that even statements that are in principle decideable may not be so in a finite number of steps which makes them undecideable in practice. Barrow suggests that this may put a limit on our understanding of natural laws.

This is speculation of the worst kind—a totally unjustified application of pure mathematics. Even if it isn't possible to extend the mathematical framework and solve the particular question at hand, this doesn't tell us much about the working of natural law. Barrow would have done well to have listened to the advice of Feynman:

'I have often made the hypothesis that ultimately physics will not require a mathematical statement, that in the end the machinery will be revealed, and the laws will turn out to be simple, like the chequer board with all its apparent complexities. But this speculation is of the same nature as the other people make—'I like it', 'I don't like it'—and it is not good to be too prejudiced about these things.'

Barrow assumes that chaos theory provides a universal explanation of the workings of dynamical processes—both natural and social. His latest works show how much chaos theory and its claim to universal application has become part of the furniture of modern physical thinking: 'Almost identical presents lead to very different futures. Such systems are called "chaotic". Their prevalence is responsible for many of the complexities of life: the economy, money-market fluctuations, or climatic variations.' Even Coveney and Highfield are more circumspect than this.

Above all, Barrow is obsessed with order in the universe. This theme runs through all three of his latest books. This is not surprising. Without order in the universe none of us would exist. The problem is that existing theoretical physics finds it hard to explain why there is so much order. And, as Barrow points out, this issue is clouded by all manner of philosophical diversions associated with the 'Anthropic Principle', a principle which in its more extreme interpretations has more in common with religion than science.

The Anthropic Principle is the subject of *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle,* which Barrow wrote with Frank Tippler. In many respects, this is the most sensible and enlightening of his three works under review. The Anthropic Principle comes in many forms. The most important two are the Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP) and the Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP). The first one is undoubtedly of fundamental importance, and in many cases is the way to defeat anyone who invokes the SAP.

The WAP simply states that in discussing the history of the universe we should take account of our own existence. So, for example, when Lawrence Henderson in his 1913 piece 'The Fitness of the Environment' argued that the universe must have been designed because the combination of chemicals necessary to life miraculously happened to exist, we use the WAP and say: 'You can't say that because you are judging such chances from the point of view of a successful development of life. If the chemicals had been different, we wouldn't have been here to muse on such probabilities.'

The SAP is the converse principle invoked by Henderson. It always seems reasonable until scientific advance explains away the seemingly inexplicable. The SAP is the principle associated with teleology—the doctrine of last causes which posits an aim or goal for nature. Historically this doctrine is associated with Aristotle and periodically resurfaces, often in the weaker guise of holistic views of nature.

Ilya Prigogine's development of one aspect of chaos theory allows mathematical models to develop ordered structures out of non-ordered ones. A holistic interpretation says that this is the explanation for the ordered structures in the universe. This is a classic example of a desire to explain order using an almost religious approach dressed up as natural science. And, despite his objections to teleology, this is where Barrow ends up in his *Theories of Everything*. He argues that the interrogation of nature with the aim of finding causal connections was a useful stage in the development of science, but that now we must return to the holistic conception of nature as put forward by Aristotle since this view is in accord with the latest science of Prigogine.

Barrow could do with reading his book on the Anthropic Principle again. He must be a bit worried about the direction in which he's going because the final chapter of each of his two more recent books warns of the dangers of forgetting the Weak Anthropic Principle. The trajectory of Barrow's latest works is a sign of the times. It shows what can happen when you allow speculation to be treated as fact. ●

Read on

Time's Arrow
by Martin Amis
Jonathan Cape, £13.99 hbk

Some books can make you feel things, and some books give you something to think about, but *Time's Arrow* makes you think. It's a mental gymnasium. The plot is simple: time runs backwards. Our narrator is an observer in the mind of Tod Friendly whose life is running backwards, from his birth in the cardiac unit of a hospital to his death in his mother's womb. Everything runs backwards. Food is regurgitated on to plates, sculpted back into shape with knife and fork, cooled in ovens so that it can be sold to supermarkets.

Inversion is an old trick. Goya drew men carrying donkeys on their backs, and apes on thrones, lording it over us. Comedian 'professor' Stanley Unwin ridiculed official jargon by talking backwards, while dressed as an expert doctor or town planner. It makes you think—what if the world were turned upside down? In *Time's Arrow* it makes you think about right and wrong, because they too are running backwards. Pimps are saints, handing out money to their whores. Doctors are sinister. They drag the sickly from their hospital beds, tear open their stitched wounds, insert broken glass and rub in some dirt, swab them with blood, before handing them over to the ambulance men who drop them off at accident sites around the city. Only the drunk drivers and axe maniacs can mend their terrible wounds.

Tod Friendly is hiding a secret from his past, which is to say our narrator's future. We don't want to know what it is, but we are going to find out. His life is descending inexorably, through a string of false identities, to the Second World War, and the Nazi concentration camp where, Friendly, now called Odilo Unverdorben, is a doctor overseeing the extermination of the Jews. They said, 'You cannot write fiction after Belsen' because the truth is too awful. Amis has accepted the challenge to do justice to the unmentionable.

Amis' solution asks much of his reader. In reverse, the final solution is a beginning, the birth of a whole race, the Jews, summoned out of the earth by the Nazis and resuscitated in gas chambers. 'The world, after all, here in Auschwitz, has a new habit. It makes sense.' (p138) For the first time in the narrator's backwards life, Unverdorben is doing something virtuous. Now the reader has to think, to reverse the order, moral and chronological, or become complicit in whitewashing the Holocaust. The book asks a good question: what is it about the twentieth century that makes more sense if you run it backwards? An era when progress has been put into reverse can only be read in reverse. The sense in which everything is preordained, and nothing you do can make any difference, is only bearable if we play the film backwards, but once we know it's playing backwards, we cannot accept fate.

James Heartfield

The Book of Disquiet
by Fernando Pessoa
Serpent's Tail, £9.99 pbk

Written intermittently between 1912 and 1935, *The Book of Disquiet* is the major prose work of Portugal's famous poet Fernando Pessoa. The book is the 'biography' of Pessoa's semi-heteronym, Bernando Soares, and consists of Soares' reflections and observations on the world outside his office window and his relation to it.

In Soares, Pessoa created one of the most pathetic figures in modernist literature; a man bereft of all affectivity, intensely pained by any form of social contact, alienated by the unending tedium of his existence, who finds solace only in solitude and the creation of his own dream reality. Soares' exquisitely pained and fragmented observations on his personal inconsequentiality, and his passive acceptance of it, prove highly entertaining and give the book much of its contemporary appeal.

The mixture of literary pessimism and scepticism which runs through *The Book of Disquiet,* and which is articulated so eloquently by Soares, reveals the profound intellectual malaise that gripped the leading literary writers of the interwar period. The focus of interest on the individual consciousness was part of a broader movement in modernist literature, and expressed a retreat from the attempt to understand and influence the broader social forces at work in the world.

In *The Book of Disquiet* this retreat is taken to its logical conclusion. 'The more I contemplate the spectacle of the world and the ebb and flow of things,' says Soares, 'the more I am convinced of the innately fictitious nature of it all, of the false prestige given to the pomp of reality'. In doing so, he reveals the death of the experimental mood of modernist literature, a death that can only be understood through an examination of the social upheavals, revolutions and instability of the times, the very things Soares dismisses so contemptuously.

Salvador Suhail

SHORTLISTED

The Oxford Dictionary of New Words, Oxford University Press, £12.95 hbk

Calling all airheads and aliterates. Turn off the Brixton briefcase, boot up your brain and mellow out with the baddest guide to every word that's fresh.

Then again, I wouldn't want to encourage any serious giro abuse since, despite containing a great deal of transatlantic teenage slang, *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* cannot be accused of happeningness either. And that, no doubt, will be its appeal to the dedicated *Sunday Times* reader—everything from laser angioplasty to bum-bag treated with the same wry, straight-faced inclusiveness (with definition, etymology, history and usage, and illustrative quotations for each entry). You know the sort of thing:

'Nerd/nɜ:d/noun
In US slang: a contemptible or boring person especially one who is studious, conventional, or square; a DWEEB....'

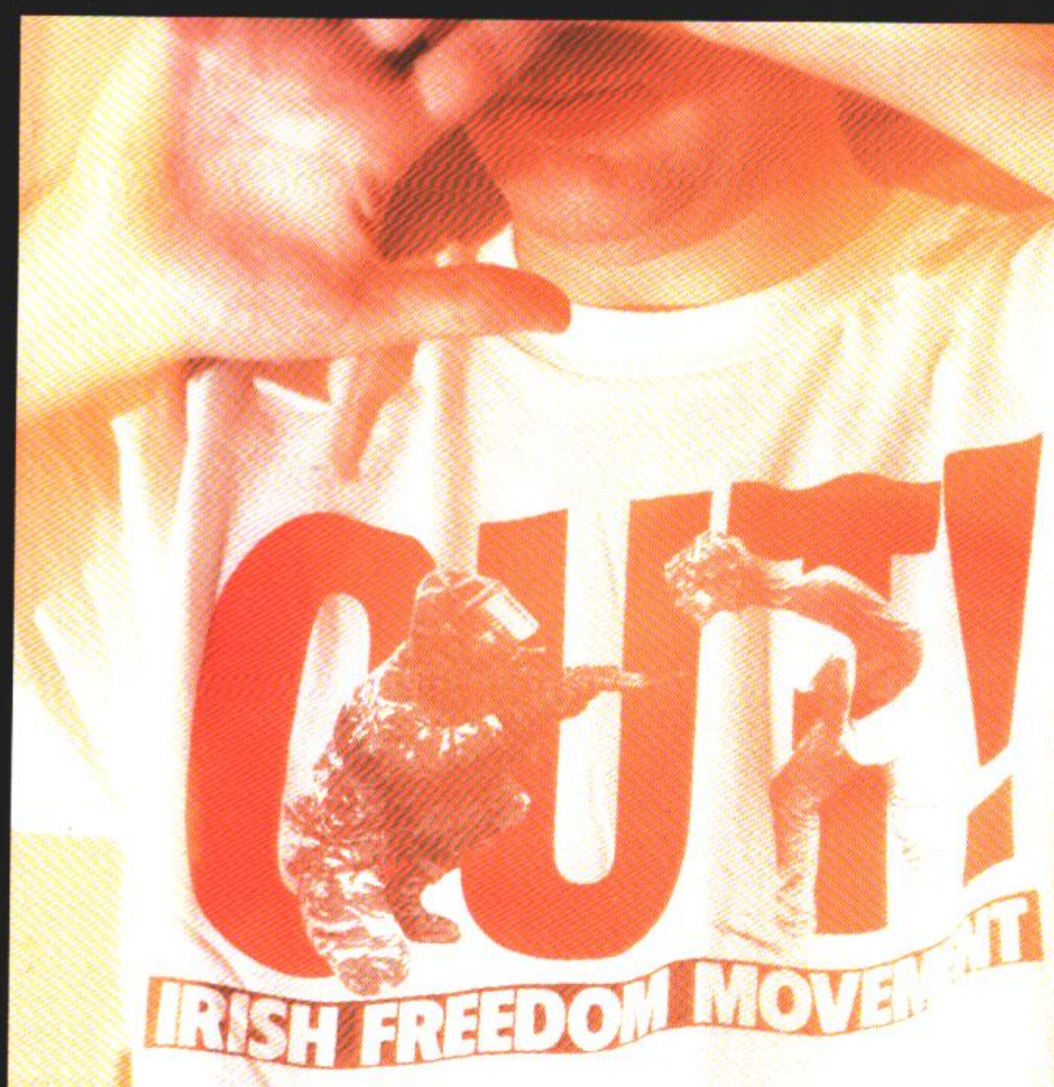
Interestingly, for a dictionary of new words much of it reads like a museum of the 1980s. Particularly poignant exhibits are all the financial and political buzzwords (enterprise culture, ethical investment, yuppie) that came and went as quickly as the prosperity that gave rise to them.

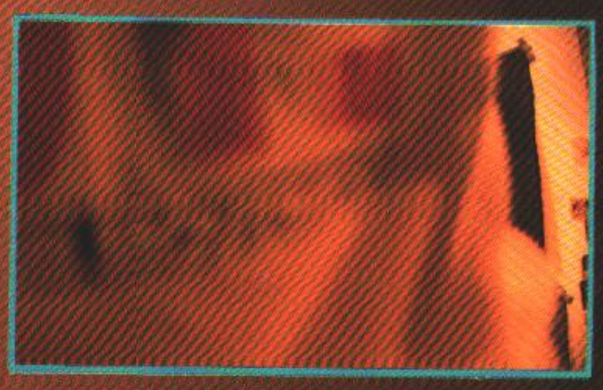
Much of the hyped-up journalese (acid house party, toyboy, bonk), that real people stopped using as soon as the journos started, is now well past its sell-by date, as are the embarrassingly naff linguistic products of the past 20 years of radical liberalism (personkind, differently abled, heterosexist, planet-friendly).

The Oxford Dictionary of New Words provides conclusive evidence that young people continue to put the official culture in the shade when it comes to daring, irony and imagination in the new use of old words. But these developments tend to be as superficial and transient as the fashions they depend on. Arguably, it is mondo cool to know the roots of the superlative totally tubular in the argot of Californian surfers but it will all be ancient history before you can say Net Book Agreement.

Nonetheless, this is not simply quality grazing for the triviaholic. Among the ephemera are also to be found many solid nouns and jargon terms from the genuine, and possibly lasting, growth areas of the eighties—information technology, drug addiction, hi-tech weaponry, and a plethora of lifestyles. Apart from these rather specialised areas however, too many of these new words seem to have as mediocre a past and as little future as Scuds and perestroika.

Peter Ray





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