LIVING MARXISM

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Ireland: Bernadette McAliskey looks back

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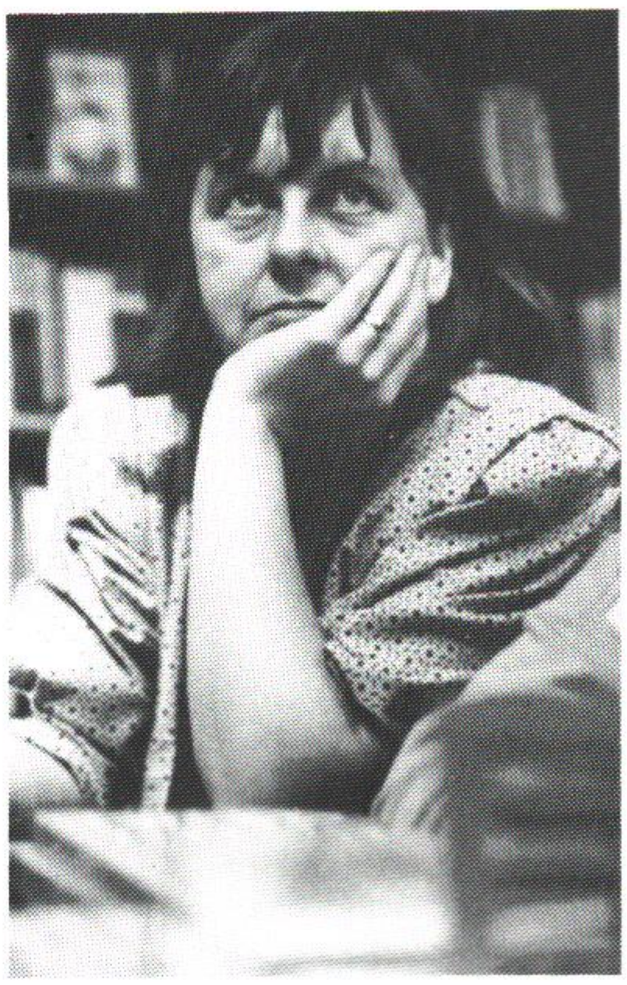

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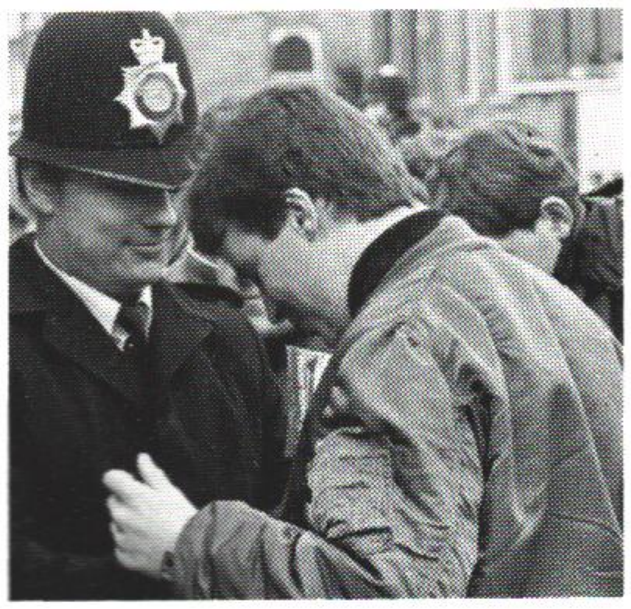

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Silent voices

THE OMERTA FACTOR

Remember the railworkers in fancy dress mentioned in this column last month? On the morning of the Clapham Junction crash, they had to wear disguises while distributing leaflets about poor safety standards to avoid being victimised under British Rail's new code of silence. BR has since sacked two signalmen, Mike Lisicki and Stephen Jackson, who forgot their sardine costumes when they went on TV to expose the many safety lapses which preceded Clapham Junction. Railworkers who want to keep their jobs today have to keep quiet while corner-cutting employers put the public at risk. The Sicilians have a word for this addition to the industrial relations code; *omerta*.

According to legend, *omerta* is the mafia code of silence. However bad things get, *omerta* dictates that you do not spill the beans about the crimes of your superiors; if you do, they will spill your vital organs. People may like to think that this system of blackmail does not operate in Britain, or that it only applies to Dennis 'I ain't no grass' Watts and his like. Yet the Tories and employers like BR are now taking a lead from the mysterious Mr Viddicombe on whose orders the imprisoned *EastEnders* star has kept schtum. *Omerta* is becoming a British convention. Speak out about injustice or malpractice in high places and you risk losing your liberty or livelihood.

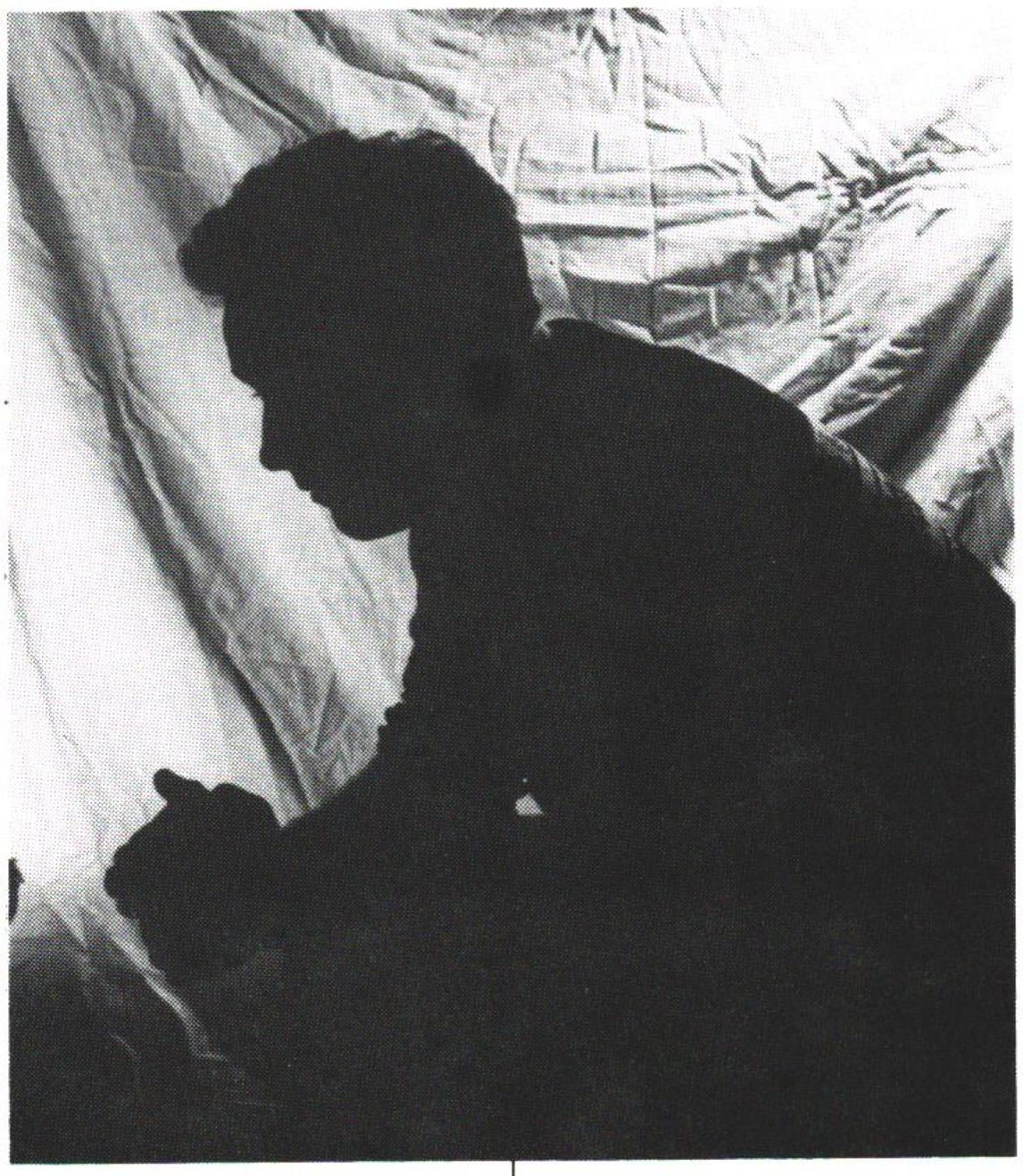

PHOTO: SIMON NORFOLK

Dark secrets

The Official Secrets Act is the form *omerta* takes for government employees. The government needs it because the top civil servants who operate the state machine know as much about the dark secrets of their masters as does any mafia chief's mistress. But Peter Wright flouted the act with *Spycatcher*, and the law lords failed to give him a concrete overcoat; so the Tories want to tighten up the rules.

The new official secrets bill is an extension of official *omerta* of the sort you might expect if Lucky Luciano took over Arthur Daley's operations. The Tories also want to put lifelong oaths of silence in civil servants' contracts. Those speaking out of turn will risk prosecution and loss of pensions. Some have already felt the government's tightening grip on their vocal chords; a foreign office official who accused Margaret Thatcher of hypocrisy over the Patrick Ryan extradition row, pointing out that she let four South African state terrorists escape prosecution here in 1984, was immediately suspended.

Ireland has long been the issue on which the British authorities take *omerta* most seriously. The ongoing row about media coverage of the SAS executions in Gibraltar last March illustrates how they now want to impose an even more comprehensive code of silence on their dirty war. Most of the British media obeyed *omerta* to the letter over Gibraltar, reprinting government press releases and slandering witnesses who claimed the soldiers had killed in cold blood. After the inquest declared the killings to be justified, members of the British press corps received the ultimate accolade for objective reporting—souvenir SAS neckties.

The one infringement of *omerta* came in Thames TV's *Death on the Rock*, which broadcast damning revelations about the shoot-to-kill operation. Ever since, it has been the target of a black propaganda campaign led by the Thatcherite *Sunday Times*. And one journalist on that poisonous newpaper has discovered the price of objecting to *omerta* today. Rosie Waterhouse recently wrote to the *UK Press Gazette* to complain at the way *Sunday Times* hacks rewrote her copy to discredit two witnesses who appeared in *Death on the Rock*. She has since resigned from the paper over another *omerta* incident; the editors refused to print her scoop about the Tory Party setting up a secret network of companies to 'launder' its funds, mafia-style.

The government ban on broadcasting interviews with Irish republicans has stepped up the pressure on TV and radio journalists to speak no evil of Britain's role in Ireland. The loosely-worded ban has been informally extended (as loosely-worded bans are intended to be), to cover anybody who is not a member of the SAS supporters' club. The Pogues' record about the Birmingham Six has been banned by some radio stations, as was an interview with the uncle of Paul Hill, one of the Guildford Four. The last I heard, Hill's uncle was in the old Liberal Party. But since he believes (like most who have looked at the facts) that the four were framed for the seventies pub bombings, he is considered subversive. *Omerta* decrees that anybody who allows him on the air could find themselves off it for good.

There are other, less obvious, signs of creeping *omerta* in Britain. In the colleges, dissenting voices are being firmly discouraged. In a climate where Sheffield University is praised for appointing the first professor of entrepreneurship, there is little tolerance of radical or innovative work in any department, especially among social scientists. Education secretary Kenneth Baker's plans for a 'US-style' higher education system, with a bigger role for private enterprise, will intensify the pressure to conform and stop criticising the system. The thought police in modern Britain are not Orwell's jackbooted thugs, but reactionary money-men and administrators who make teaching jobs and research grants dependent on academics toeing the line.

Spiking criticism

Critical voices are also in danger in the publishing world. Many complaints about Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of Collins are just affronted snobbery; the *Sun* baron is hardly going to publish pin-ups in dictionaries and Bibles. But Murdoch's regime will mean more censorship of criticism of his fellow capitalists. For once, Robert Maxwell is ahead of Murdoch here. He has ordered one of his companies to withdraw a book it published on the *Yakuza*, Japan's supposed mafia. According to an internal memo, 'a friend of the chairman appears in an unfavourable light' (*Private Eye*, 6 January). The friend of Maxwell in question is Japanese billionaire Ryoichi Sasakawa—alleged to have strong connections with the *Yazuka*.

One place where the authorities cannot go too far with official *omerta* is the house of commons. They need to maintain the pretence of free speech there, or risk exposing the illusion of democratic government. Yet the opposition parties are the least of the Tories' worries. When it matters, they impose their own code of silence to avoid embarrassing the authorities. The Scottish National Party's Jim Sillars is the latest new MP to threaten to 'set the house of commons alight', and then display all the fire of a wet night in Govan once he takes his seat.

Linda Ryan

EDITOR:
MICK HUME

TWENTY THINGS THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT THE LIBYAN CHEMICAL WEAPONS SCARE

1 Whether it's in Rabta or Runcorn, any chemical plant can quickly be converted to produce chemical weapons. If you can make modern fertiliser, you can also make chemical warfare. Two basic ingredients in mustard gas, for example, are hydrochloric acid (of which the USA alone produced 2.5m tonnes last year), and thiodiglycol–the stuff that makes the ink flow in your ballpoint pen. Of all the world's biro-using nations, only Libya has been threatened with a US raid on its chemical plant.

2 When the USA first accused Libya of producing chemical weapons, the British foreign office said it had 'no first-hand knowledge' of such a plant (*Independent,* 29 December). On 4 January at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, foreign secretary Geoffrey Howe was hedging his bets: 'We are concerned that other countries–Libya is *the latest possibility–appear to be* developing a capacity to manufacture these appalling weapons.' Yet only a couple of hours later, Howe declared the existence of the Libyan chemical weapons plant 'beyond doubt', because Britain had 'independent' evidence. In between Howe contradicting himself, US Tomcats shot down two Libyan MiGs. The USA needed a quick show of solidarity; so Howe's people mysteriously discovered MI6 proof of a weapons plant.

3 Howe has taken to talking about 'the black art of chemical weaponry'. Perhaps there is a hex on chemical weapons; that would explain why the Western authorities often seem unable to see them or to hear their victims scream. Iraq used them in the Gulf War against Iran from at least 1983; but Washington and Whitehall said nothing, because they were keen to keep the pressure on Iran. So they waited until chemical weapons had helped blast Iran into submissive mood last summer before condemning Iraq's use of poison gas.

4 There are said to be half a dozen Middle Eastern states with chemical weapons. One of them is Israel, which gets more US aid than any other state in the world. US support has allowed Israel to develop chemical and nuclear military capability, and to use phosphorus bombs in Lebanon in 1982. Another is Egypt, Washington's favourite Arab nation since it signed the Camp David accords with Israel in 1978, and the recipient of the second-biggest slice of US aid. A third chemical power in the Middle East is Saudi Arabia, a US stooge which has the pick of American military technology to help it keep the region's largest oil reserves safe for the West. Washington wouldn't even mind Gadaffi exporting chemical weapons, so long as they went to the 'right' people. Last year it was alleged that he had sent poison gas to the Somalian government. But since Somalia is a useful American ally in Africa, providing a key naval base for the US Rapid Deployment Force, there was no major outcry.

5 America itself has the largest stockpile of chemical weapons on Earth, dwarfing anything that Libya might manage. Washington officials claim that the Rabta plant could produce 10 000lbs of poison gas a day, making it, says CIA chief William Webster, 'the world's biggest chemical warfare facility'. Not quite, Bill: the USA has a temporarily-mothballed plant capable of churning out *200 000lbs* a day.

6 The Americans don't believe in outlawing anything useful. They have blocked attempts to impose a worldwide ban on the production and storage of chemical weapons, insisting that they need some as a deterrent. The USA's concern has been to prevent the 'proliferation' of these weapons; that is, to stop any troublesome third world state obtaining 'the poor man's nuclear bomb' and trying to use it, in the words of one American official, as 'the Equaliser' against US or Israeli aggression.

7 The latest US budget plans show a major increase in spending on chemical weapons: funding for the 'Big Eye Bomb' designed to deliver them, for example, will soar from $9.7m this year to $60.7m in 1991. At the recent Paris conference, Ronald Reagan's secretary of state George Shultz insisted that the USA was only modernising its chemical arsenal because the new 'binary' weapons were safer. They might be less dangerous for the Nato troops using them; they are hardly designed for the benefit of their victims.

8 Britain claims not to have any chemical weapons stockpiled. But it has got ICI, the world's biggest chemical company (see No 1). It also has the ministry of defence's chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down in Wiltshire, which funds secret research projects in universities and colleges around the country and trains troops to fight 'in a chemical environment'. The authorities claim that they are only concerned with developing better *defence* against foreign chemical weapons. This is a word game; the fact is that they have the technology, and they will use it. After all, they renamed the old ministry of war the ministry of defence in the sixties; it has still made war from Northern Ireland to the South Atlantic.

9 Western propagandists say that their rulers are civilised and therefore qualified to handle chemical weapons. 'Are the Western powers...more responsible than potential possessors of weapons of mass destruction in the third world?', asks the *Sunday Times'* leader-writer. He concludes: 'Yes, they are' (8 January). Indeed they are. The USA was 'responsible' for the only use of nuclear bombs in history. It was more recently responsible for defoliating much of south-east Asia and killing millions when it dropped thousands of tons of napalm and 'Agent Orange' in the Vietnam War.

10 Britain's record is just as good. Today the British authorities make high-minded condemnations of Iraq's use of chemical weapons against its Kurdish community. They have little room to talk: the first foreign oppressors to burn the skin off the Kurds' backs were the British. In 1922, the imperial cabinet gave Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond the job of exterminating Kurdish resistance. A right-wing account calls Salmond's approach 'frankly terrorist', involving 'demonstrations of terrifying destructive power, using delayed-action bombs, phosphorus bombs, "liquid fire", shrapnel, smoke and gas' (C Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars,* 1986, p98). In

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the Second World War, Winston Churchill wanted to use chemical weapons against Germans. British scientists experimented with anthrax on Gruinard Island off the Scottish coast in 1942; it is still uninhabitable.

11 The same *Sunday Times* editorial cited above asks 'Which man would we least like to see with a chemical weapons facility in his backyard?'. It gives itself an unsurprising answer: 'Colonel Gadaffi, who hasn't even a war, or an enemy, as an excuse for equipping himself so lethally.' So who are those troops of the Contra-style National Front for the Salvation of Libya, now being trained by the Americans and Israelis in the African desert? Why is the US Sixth Fleet forever prowling the Libyan coastline, pausing to lob up fighters which shoot down inferior Libyan planes? And what did Gadaffi's non-enemy Shultz mean, when he told the Libyan leader 'You've had it, pal' before the 1986 US/British air-strike on Tripoli, in which Gadaffi narrowly escaped a bomb which killed his adopted baby daughter? If he hasn't got a war, it's not for want of trying by the USA.

12 The USA has a record of finding weak excuses to attack weak targets which it gets in its sights. In 1986 it justified the US/British air-strike by claiming that it had 'conclusive evidence' of Gadaffi's involvement in the bombing of a West Berlin disco, in which one US serviceman died. In fact no such evidence existed, because if any state's fingerprints were on the Berlin bomb, they were Syria's. The Syrians, however, were important players in the Middle Eastern power game, with close links to the Soviet Union. The Libyans provided a far more inviting target for the F1-11 bombers. The latest accusation that the Libyan factory is a chemical weapons plant may remind some of a story Washington used to excuse its invasion of the tiny island of Grenada in 1983. That time, Reagan claimed that a tourist air-strip on which a few ageing Cuban construction workers were employed was a Soviet airbase being built as the launch-pad for a possible invasion of the Caribbean. Nobody outside America believed him; but 6000 marines went in anyway, just to make sure.

13 Some US hawks no longer make any pretence of 'crime-and-punishment' connections where Libya is concerned. 'The first thing to do now is to to take out that Libyan chemical warfare plant', said Dr Robert Kupperman, senior White House adviser, after the Lockerbie bomb (which nobody could link to Libya, let alone to chemical weaponry). 'In a sense', he explained, 'it does not matter who was responsible for the bomb'. So much for all the lectures they give us about international law.

14 The British and US authorities argue that if Gadaffi gets his hands on chemical weapons he will give them to 'international terrorists'. Even if he tried to supply them with chemical weaponry, and even if they had the inclination to use it, the prospect of small guerrilla groups creating pharmaceutical havoc is an unlikely one. *Middle East International* estimates that it takes 3500lbs of poison gas (not including the weight of the huge containers) to saturate a single square mile. To cart an effective load of that around, you need a big transport system–like, just for instance, the US or British air force.

15 The Americans insist that Gadaffi's offer to open the Rabta plant for inspection is worthless, since he is an incorrigible secret conspirator. Unlike the USA of course, which refuses to say how many chemical weapons it has. While the US authorities were making these charges, they were also dropping the big Irangate charges against Colonel Oliver North, for fear of exposing the Reagan/Bush role in that secret gun-running scandal.

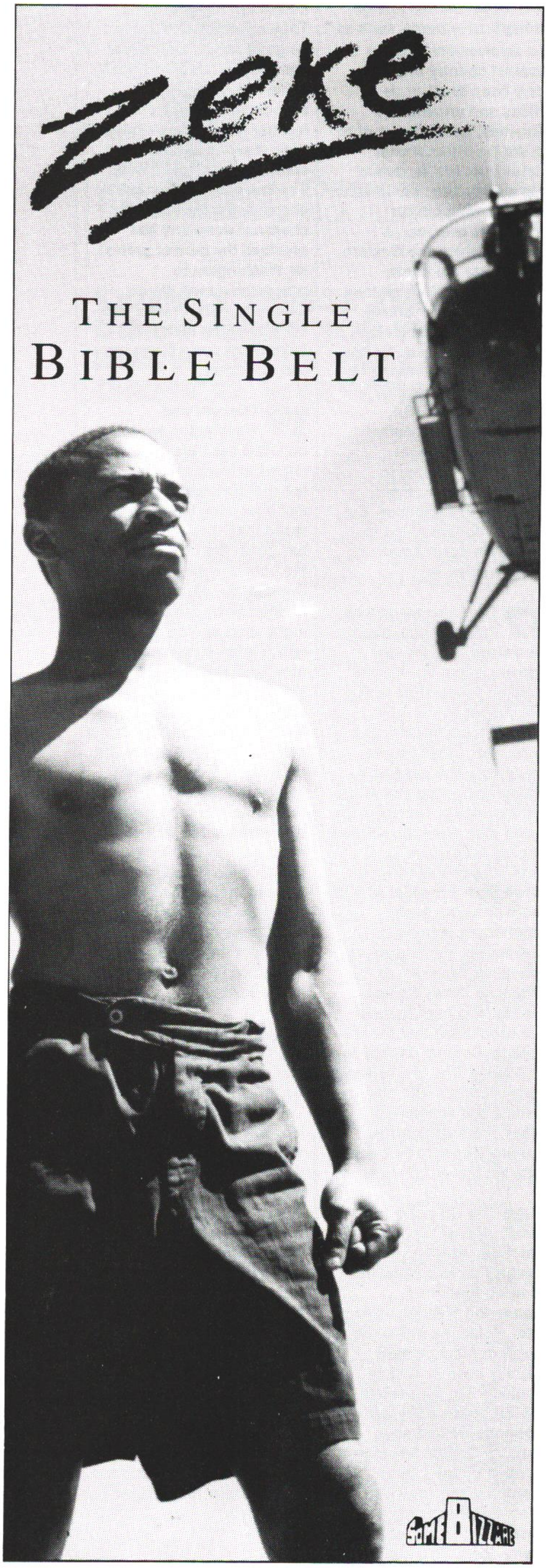
16 There is nothing in Gadaffi's record to justify the special treatment he gets from Washington and Whitehall. His foreign military adventures, such as his involvement in Chad, the poorest country on Earth, have been small-scale affairs and unmitigated disasters, hardly the stuff to shake the international status quo. His 'terrorism' has largely been confined to assassinating Libyan dissidents overseas, a practice which the Western powers are not above themselves and which they have allowed the Israelis and South Africans to get away with for years. Of late Gadaffi has been trying to moderate his image–condemning the IRA, making more sympathetic noises about market economics, helping to release two French girl hostages at Christmas. But this has done nothing to move him down America's 'most wanted list'.

17 The true reason why the West puts Libya 'in a class all of its own' (Howe) is that it is a small, isolated desert state with a population of just 3.5m, most of them farmers and herdsmen. Libya can be picked on, and used as a whipping boy against whom the Americans can show the world their strength, without risking the serious repercussions which could result from a conflict with its more powerful Arab neighbours. Among themselves Western rulers will admit this is so, as the *Financial Times* did last month: 'It is hard to resist the conclusion that the US regards Colonel Gadaffi as a soft target who can safely be intimidated with military threats and actions while other, more dangerous criminals have to be treated with kid gloves.' (5 January)

18 The US crusade against Libya on the chemical weapons issue doubles up as a campaign to bring America's wandering Western allies to heel. Relations within the Western Alliance have already been soured by conflicts like the present US-European trade war over hormone-treated meat. Now, as Gadaffi has moved to open up the Libyan economy, the Japanese and West Europeans have rushed in to grab lucrative trade deals. This has infuriated the Americans. They expect their allies to be good scouts and follow their boycott of Libya, not to behave like naughty schoolchildren when the teacher is away and exploit their absence by clinching contracts with the colonel. The link between normal chemical production and chemical weaponry has provided the perfect pretext for Washington to pressurise Japan, West Germany, Italy, France and Britain to stop their firms building and supplying any Libyan plants.

19 The renewed Washington assault on Libya has little to do with chemical weapons at all. It is a reassurance to America and a warning to the third world that, though Reagan has gone, the USA is still the boss and we are still living in the age of Rambo. Reagan arrived in office eight years ago on a wave of anti-Iranian chauvinism; now Bush enters the White House backed by an upsurge of anti-Libyan feeling and support for firm action. The mood inside the US military establishment can be judged by the disappointment top hawks expressed at the lack of a quick raid on the Rabta plant, which would have allowed them to test out their new sea-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles. No doubt they will soon find a practice target somewhere in the third world.

20 The British and Americans have long branded upstarts like Gadaffi as Soviet agents. Yet, at the Paris conference, Moscow lined up with the West against Arab states which wanted Israel's nuclear weapons included in any ban. Mikhail Gorbachev's cooperation with the capitalist powers blows the gaff on the 'Soviet subversion' propaganda. Now it is clear that the real conflict is not between East and West, but between imperialism and the oppressed peoples of the third world. That is the chemistry which poses the genuine threat of mass murder, from Nicaragua and Mozambique to Palestine and Libya.



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The City broker's tale

GOING DOWNMARKET

Anybody who still believes Tory stories about the health of the British financial sector, and its ability to act as the dynamo for sustained economic growth, should take a peek inside the doors of a typical top firm of City brokers today.

The *Hill Street Blues*-style morning meeting is over, and the dealers drift back to their desks. 'Do it to them before they do it to you' is the motto of dealers who have accepted falling share volumes, and know that cornering a larger share of a shrinking market is the only way to break even. The fact that the meeting took place at all is a sign of the downbeat times. During the stock market boom from 1985 to the Crash of October 1987, nobody had time for talking; heavy dealing started the moment the market-makers opened at 8.30am. Today, with trading at a low level, dealers desperate for information to give them an edge in the increasingly competitive game gather to hear in-house researchers make educated guesses about future trends.

Hi-tech haggling

The modern dealing room is a far cry from the traditional chaotic image of the stock exchange floor. In the old days dealers in bright jackets jostled on the floor, shouting and waving like drowning men as shares changed hands. Since the deregulation of the markets, and the computerised Big Bang of October 1986, the stock exchange floor is almost empty. It acquires something of its former character briefly for big launches like British Steel; but the dealers in BS hard hats were there for a publicity stunt rather than business. Modern dealers are more likely to be in comfortable offices, surrounded by banks of computers and telephone screens, with a research department across the hall and restaurant upstairs. The most common shout across the room nowadays is for everybody to shut up.

Jobs for which boys?

These brokerage firms make their money, not by speculating on share prices, but by buying and selling on behalf of customers. Since they earn a commission on each transaction, they try to match buyers and sellers from among their own clients. There are almost no firms in the City making money in this way today; the more successful are just about breaking even.

The outcome of the morning meeting was that everybody should earn four times their salary in commission. Since the previous week's sales barely covered the phone bills, an air of gloom hangs over the room. 'We don't want to make anybody redundant, but the situation will have to be kept under review' is the cheery thought for the day. In the wake of a spate of sackings in the City, from the stock exchange to the market-maker department of Morgan Grenfell, more dealers are worrying about lay-offs—with differing responses from the various characters.

PHOTO: DON REED

Touting for trade like double-glazing salesmen in Italian shoes

The traditions of jobs for the boys and family firms have taken a knock in recent years. Most firms are now owned by foreign banks with no sentimental attachments to the old school tie. Of course the public schoolboys are still there, with their fourth-form toilet humour and incisive third-form grasp of the economy. And family connections still help; each summer the teenage children of the well-heeled get their work experience over dinner in the wine bars of Moorgate.

These people may not relish the prospect of picking up a P-45, but they can't imagine being unemployed for long before somebody finds a chap a job. Yet the worst of them have plenty to worry about. There is less and less room in the cut-throat world of the financial markets for the drunken overgrown schoolboys, shouting smutty innuendoes and laughing hysterically as the FTSE-100 price index takes another dive. 'You are an arsehole'—'You must fancy me then you old queen' is hardly the kind of dealing room exchange that the Japanese and Germans had in mind when buying into the London financial sector.

Not everybody from an upper class background fits the stereotype, and the more sober old school chums have an advantage in the new climate. With the declining volume of trading the dealing houses have to grab a bigger share of the existing market. This involves them in touting for trade, in much the same way as a double-glazing or insurance salesman. Most of the day is spent just phoning around previous customers to see if they have any odd jobs to do and to remind them that the firm still exists. Good connections are invaluable in ensuring future business.

The aggressive hard sell necessary in today's declining markets has also made room for a new type of employee in the financial world. Look at John and Steve. Their accents, more market-stall than market-maker, often shatter the calm as somebody on the other end of the phone refuses to trade. Usually down the pub by noon, they return to crack jokes about the accents and sexuality of more traditional City gents. The pair recently managed to shift a million shares in minutes by pressing the market-makers to trade. Their methods mock the City's self-styled image of success built on sophisticated expertise; their success is built on shouting down the phone. By demanding an immediate yes or no, they can push a deal through before the price moves. They appear better suited to the new competitive market; but without connections, it is they who fear most for their jobs.

There are many with neither titles nor upward mobility to protect them. A million people rely on the City for their jobs, mainly servicing the financial institutions. Look out of the office window at 6am and you will see teams of cleaners moving along the floors opposite. They are all black women, working unsocial hours for low wages, employed by contractors. Then there are the security guards who sit through the night in foyers in the City. Often students trying to make extra money, they too earn a pittance. Most have to wear a box on their belts, which must have keys inserted into it every few hours, and will indicate if this is not done. The keys are spread all over the building, ensuring that the employer gets his money's worth.

First in and out

So far the redundancies have been confined to market-makers, usually those who have just entered the business. The prices quoted on the stock exchange are the best offered by the market-makers. When you quote a price through the stock exchange you are obliged to trade at that price; hence the sudden increase in telephone faults during the Crash, and the short life-expectancy of inexperienced dealers in the tough post-Crash conditions.

As the credit squeeze tightens and the market slump continues, the job losses will spread. The dealers will struggle to survive. The amount of work done by the manual workers suggests that there is little scope for further efficiency drives there; their future now depends on how long the offices they clean and guard stay out of the red. The construction workers, whose cranes have changed the City skyline and ruined half of London's TV reception, will have jobs while the speculative building boom around the Square Mile continues. But precisely because so many jobs now rely on the financial sector, many will suffer when it goes down.

Mark Butler

Bernadette McAliskey looks back

'People were learning on their feet'

Bernadette McAliskey (née Devlin) talked to Phil Murphy about the days when she marched for civil rights–and hit the home secretary in the house of commons

"It's much easier now to see the factors that produced the civil rights movement than we could at the time. In 1968 most people didn't have that objective understanding of why they were there, they were pulled into it instinctively.

Nationalist people had put up with oppression since partition because they never had any realistic expectation of it ever being any different, that's the way it had been and they had no sense of their power to change it. But there were external factors which changed things in the sixties.

The issue of voting was the crucial one which related to both elements of the civil rights movement. There was a working class element, not in its consciousness but in its make-up, the Catholic poor who couldn't get off the ground. There was also an element which later crystallised around the SDLP, the not-so-poor Catholics, who were off the ground but couldn't get through the ceiling into society, because whatever their education and middle class/professional status, they were still "Fenians".

No vote, no roof

The voting issue brought these two together. It was a political issue for the middle classes, and it was a very practical issue for the poor. It wasn't that they were denied access to the political machinery which angered the poor, it was that the voting system practically prevented them from having a roof over their heads. Look at an area like this, Dungannon. The local Unionist council had from the early sixties practically stopped building houses, because the Catholic sector of the district was full. To build more would mean putting Catholics into areas where they'd change the balance of power. The Unionists weren't prepared to do it. So by 1963-4 you had large numbers of people living in shanty towns, and you had the formation of the Homeless Citizens League here. The same thing happened in Derry with the Housing Action Committee.

For people like John Hume and the Derry Housing Association, things were different. They were dealing with the housing problem through housing co-ops, of the sort that are very popular now, where people could buy in and pay off for their homes. Ordinary people couldn't even aspire to that. So voting for the middle classes wasn't such a practical matter, it was a question of getting political power and getting on to the councils.

You also had the economic boom in Britain in the fifties and sixties, which had an effect here too, with multinationals coming in. If you look at the unemployment figures for the mid-sixties, it's incredible. In this area you were still dealing with unemployment of 20 per cent. Ten miles down the road in Portadown [a Unionist stronghold] unemployment was less than two per cent. So the economic boom had raised expectations about standards of living. But as unemployment in the Loyalist community was virtually eradicated, the gap in the working class visibly widened. Catholics were no better off and yet their Protestant neighbours, from the same class, were flying.

It's interesting, in that context, that the early fair employment work done by the Campaign for Social Justice and later the Civil Rights Association dealt almost exclusively with discrimination in employment for the professional classes. When people came out on to the streets, it was the people who couldn't get a job in the shirt factory, or couldn't get a job in Shorts, who made up the bulk of the marches. But the people in the front row were the ones who couldn't get a consultancy in the hospital. That division was always there, we just didn't see it.

PHOTO: PANDORA ANDERSON

RIGHT: Bernadette McAliskey: a prominent figure in the Irish struggle for 20 years, elected MP for Mid-Ulster in 1969, shot by a Loyalist murder-gang in 1981

'The crowd sang "A nation once again" on the very first civil rights march'

So there was the economic boom, and there was the end of the line for the voting system, which was producing squalor in Catholic communities. Another important factor was the impact of the 1947 Education Act. John Hume and those like him were the first generation of upwardly mobile Catholics, who had gone to university in the belief that if they got degrees, they'd get equal opportunities. They found out that they couldn't. So they became the first generation of reformers, because they couldn't get through that ceiling. They started the Civil Rights Association and various social reform groups.

And of course it was the sixties. People were aware of what was happening in the rest of the world. They could see on TV Vietnam, the black civil rights movement in America. These things affect people without them being consciously aware of it. Basically you had a dam waiting to burst once the first march was called here in August 1968. Before that you were still dealing with mostly middle class groups. Once you had that first demonstration, everybody was out there. The events leading up to that first march here centred on the housing issue.

Which national anthem?

There had been invasions of council meetings and pickets of councillors' homes about housing. Finally the local Republican Clubs and Homeless Citizens League decided to squat a property. A house had been allocated to the 19-year old secretary to the local Unionist Party. She was unmarried, had no children, and didn't come from overcrowded accommodation. I think 298 Catholic families were registered homeless in this area alone. There was one house available, and she got it.

A local family decided to take over the house, and then there were eviction orders and court actions. Austin Currie was the newly-elected Nationalist MP and after considerable persuasion he was talked into going up and supporting the squat. He's made a lot of that since. But it was only when the people had taken their action, were getting hammered by the police and thought the best way to get publicity was to get this politician to support them, that he went up there and gave his token support.

That was really why the first civil rights march happened here in August 1968. From '63 onwards there was ongoing action which didn't involve politicians or the middle classes. That's all forgotten. It's presented as if the decent reformers sat down one day and decided they would have a Civil Rights Association and decided they would have a march. But the reason they decided to get involved in a march was because this action was going on here, and because they were frustrated. They had exhausted almost every reforming channel and got nowhere. So they finally opted for a demonstration. And they lost control of the civil rights movement really the day they took it up that road.

I was on that march, the only student among a group of local young people. Most were young men with no work, young women who worked in the shirt factory. We toddled up that road and the police wouldn't let us into the centre of town. My most distinct memory as a young person who wasn't quite sure why she was there, was that at the meeting held at the police lines, Betty Sinclair announced that we would sing the civil rights national anthem. The crowd didn't know what the civil rights national anthem was. What the crowd heard was "national anthem".

Although we knew that the Irish national anthem was "The soldier's song", the national anthem of nationalists in the North would have been "A nation once again". And that is what the crowd sang on the very first civil rights march. And only because the CRA leaders had the microphone and were singing another song, did it slowly dawn on people that we were singing the wrong song. So the national anthem that we were thinking of, "A nation once again", drifted into "We shall overcome". That song we knew from the black civil rights movement. But the instinctive thing for those 600 people was to sing "A nation once again", they didn't see any problem with singing that on a civil rights march. And they were right, they knew where it was going, maybe it wasn't at the front of their minds but they knew that "A nation once again" was the right song to sing. That was very hastily forgotten about.

'I hadn't a clue'

But we never consciously put the national question on the agenda. Maybe older republicans understood, would have said to us "Don't start what we can't finish". When I stood for parliament in Mid-Ulster in 1969, talking to old people, that was their comment all the time, "Don't start what we can't finish". I hadn't a clue what they were talking about, it never occurred to me that I couldn't finish it.

I didn't see political goals then as I do now. I thought we could force the Unionists into giving us fair employment and housing. But by August 1969, when the Army came in, it was very clear that we couldn't force them into giving us anything and keep the state intact. By that time, not through clear ideas, it was just obvious in your everyday life that you were going to have to force the Six-County state out of existence.

And I think in August 1969 in Derry, although people were simply trying to keep the police out of nationalist areas, they knew.

The night [Stormont premier James] Chichester-Clark appeared on the TV and said that if this didn't stop the state would fall down, everybody watching with us just cheered because they knew that sounded good. That was the worst thing he could have done for his own defence because the immediate reaction of people was to rush out into the streets and keep it going. They weren't thinking intellectually of what the political forces were, or what the consequences were, but certainly they had a very clear understanding that whatever rights they were ever going to get would involve taking the state apart.

The Army arrives

If the Unionists had brought in more reforms earlier, it might have been possible to defuse the situation on an interim basis. But there was something the Loyalists understood before we did; that you could not have civil rights in this sectarian state. Their policy was always "Not an inch", and we had always taken that to be just a statement of Unionist intransigence. They understood much more clearly than us that they *couldn't* give an inch and maintain their institutions; they couldn't do it and ensure the state's survival. There's no doubt that if they'd done away with oppressive legislation, if we'd had equality of the vote, if we'd had equal opportunity at work, then the state was going to fall down. That was what the rank and file Unionist understood before we did. That's why they reacted so violently, that's why Ian Paisley got so much support, why the police reacted as they did, as the frontline of the state, and then when the Army came that role was taken off them.

I remember the day the Army came into Derry. The first time I saw them coming down the road with rolls of barbed wire, a wee lad who'd been up on the Rossville Flats the whole time said "Bernadette, will we fight on?". And John Hume and Eddie McAteer and Paddy Doherty were so afraid that I'd say "Yes!" that they unceremoniously pushed me in the nose and mouth, off the platform and into the crowd. That was that question answered. Doherty took the mike and said "No", and told people that the Unionist regime was over, McAteer assured them we were on our way to a united Ireland. I was sent to America where it was presumed I'd do less harm. And it took people a good while to realise that the Army was just much more effectively doing what the police had done.

There was no discussion of what Britain's role might be before the troops came in. The main complaint

about Britain was simply that it had let the Unionists do as they liked. Before the troops arrived it was very much an argument with the Unionists, over how this state was organised. It was the intervention of the troops and, of necessity because of why they were here, the behaviour of the troops, building up to internment in 1971, which put the national question and Britain's role on the agenda.

The honeymoon period after the troops came in seemed to break down very quickly. It depended upon the area, as the soldiers went about

PHOTO: JOE BOATMAN

20 years on, nationalists are still marching for dignity in Northern Ireland

their business, and as people realised what their business was. In the days following their arrival, their business was to put barbed wire around the Catholic areas and prevent the police going in. That seemed fair enough; as long as the guy was putting up barbed wire and not doing you any harm, you made him a cup of tea. But when it came raiding time and it was the same soldiers who searched your house, they'd get no tea that day. The Army came in, its job was to stabilise the situation, and there wasn't an immediate conflict with the community. Once it came to consolidating that position, they were soon in conflict with the local community and teatime was very quickly over.

By the time the British imposed direct rule in March 1972, people were learning on their feet. The British abolished Stormont because the Unionists couldn't be trusted to handle it. And the British then found out what the Unionists were trying to tell them; "This country can only be governed by the fist". When the British took over direct rule they discovered that for themselves, and Labour and Tory governments got down to the business again. Then it was our opportunity to say "You're right, we see you can only govern this state by coercion".

I was elected MP for Mid-Ulster in April 1969. The only effective thing about my being in parliament was the mistake on their part. I was 21, female, short-skirted with long hair and a civil righter. I was a gimmick to the media, God's gift to the *Daily Mirror*. They could put photos on the front page, it's hilarious to look back at the things they said about me, about the virtue of honesty that shone through my blue Irish eyes. All that disappeared once I opened my mouth.

They opened the door for me and their belief was I should have played ball, become acceptable, been the next best thing to a Labour MP. And they couldn't understand that that was not what I was there for, that I had no interest in the Labour Party's socialising, didn't want to be at their parties, had no respect for the front page of the newspapers. So they had to close it down again, and they couldn't. You can't make somebody a national talking point today and then tomorrow say sorry, disregard all we said, this woman does not exist. To me that was the main benefit of the whole thing. They got wrongfooted and they gave me a credibility that they couldn't very easily take back.

Parliament itself was an education. I saw the Special Powers Act turned around in the space of 12 hours, at exactly the same time that the Labour government was saying that parliament works very slowly, and that to be democratic it has to work slowly, so they couldn't provide money for the pensioners. But when the state needed defending they passed internationally illegal legislation in 12 hours; so I saw how the Labour Party works.

The parliamentary experience is corruptive. I wasn't morally or politically a purer person than anybody else there, I just had much more immediate and serious business, so I had a certain immunity to the corruptive influence of the place. But I could see how it worked, subtle corruptive pressures. Frank McManus and I, if one of us wasn't there, had nobody to sit with, to have a drink with, we were socially ostracised because we didn't play ball. It was a trading shop. My biggest problem was with the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster—200 MPs.

I'd agreed to speak at a rally in Trafalgar Square in support of the Palestinians. CDU chairman Paul Rose told me I would do Ireland no good by being seen in support of the Palestinians. There was no political principle involved. It had to do with the number of Jewish MPs in the Labour Party and the CDU. And I said that's fair enough, I work with them on Ireland and don't hold their views on Israel against them. All I ask is that they do the same. Then Rose wrote to me and threatened that if I participated in the rally he would personally ensure that CDU would not support any position that I put on Ireland. I published his letter with a reply. And they were as good as their word. From that point on the CDU would not support anything that I did.

Pontius Pilate policy

The whole policy of the Labour Party was Pontius Pilate. You got up and made noises—"This legislation is draconian, a breach of civil liberties"—and then you didn't vote against it. Labour made the necessary noises to keep their hands clean for the rank and file, and then pretended they were defeated on the issue. They were never defeated, they never fought. The Labour Party made pronouncements on Ireland and disagreed with me and tried to set me on one side. But I wasn't allowed to take a position on anything that happened in Britain; Kevin McNamara once had me excluded from an MPs' meeting to oppose the Tory Industrial Relations Act, because he said no suggestions should be taken from people who didn't believe in parliamentary democracy.

Hitting Tory home secretary Reginald Maudling [after the Army murdered 14 Derry marchers on Bloody Sunday in 1972] is still remembered as my best contribution to parliamentary democracy. To me

the reaction to it indicated that people outside don't like parliament, instinctively they know it's a sham. People still remind me of it with great glee, that I hit the home secretary. I think it's the one thing people would like to have gone to parliament themselves to do. The reaction inside parliament was that it was a scandal. There was more press coverage of the violence in the hallowed chamber than of why it was done.

The hon lady

'I walked over and hit the home secretary. The whole thing is described in *Hansard* as "Disturbance" '

Parliamentary procedure was that I should have been called after the government frontbench had spoken and the opposition had replied. Maudling was lying through his teeth. I was the only MP who was an eye-witness to Bloody Sunday and procedure was that I would have been the next person called. And I wasn't called at all. I went through the procedure of asking that I be allowed to speak, that the debate not be closed until I'd spoken. And they closed the debate. Then I got up on a point of order and I asked that the debate be reopened and the Speaker said I had no rights: "The hon lady member has no rights in the house save those granted through the chair." I just walked across the house and said "The hon lady member has whatever rights she chooses to exert". I walked over and hit the home secretary. Then consternation broke out. The whole thing is described in *Hansard* as "Disturbance". Of course, later inquiries proved that the home secretary *was* lying through his teeth.

No witless fanatics

What of the future? We have clarified in 20 years that this state doesn't work. Charlie Haughey for his sins put it most simply: "The North is a failed experiment." Charlie forgot that if the North doesn't work, the South doesn't either; there's two sides to the Border. Twenty years of increasing oppression that would have been incomprehensible to us 20 years ago has failed to stifle the movement here. Britain can't repress this movement. So we're in a bit of a stalemate. We have to look at how we move it. I think we have got to make a turnaround in the attitude of people in Britain and the South to make any dramatic progress.

I think it's clear today that Sinn Fein are the leadership, whether they're the revolutionary party or not is temporarily neither here nor there. It is a party which has broadened, learnt from its experience, radicalised, deepened its political understanding and sophistication. And a lot of how we develop depends on how deep and how far that process goes.

Twenty years ago I trundled out there and I didn't know where I was going. Twenty years later I know exactly where we're going, I know the price that will be paid for even trying to go there. And I know we're not quitting. That's what is scary: you know what they're going to throw at you and you know you're going on ahead. I don't mean that simply in a personal sense, that's where this movement is going, with the knowledge of all that has been done to destroy us, discredit us, disable us, it is going on. Not because we haven't the wit to quit, not because we're fanatics but because that's the reality of life. Out there is what we need, out there is basic freedom, dignity. Most of us now know the price of freedom and we're prepared to pay it.

Twenty years ago we thought it was standing out on the street shouting "One man, one vote" and not even realising that was a sexist slogan. But now it's overthrowing an entire social/political/economic system, taking on the might of the British Army, of imperialism. That's what's standing between us and the basic dignity we were looking for 20 years ago. And I think the difference is that if we'd known that 20 years ago, we probably wouldn't have started. But 20 years on we say "Well, if that's what we have to do, we better get on with it".

General strike in Spain

'González and the police are pigs'

You may not have noticed that a one-day general strike against Thatcherite economics closed down the country on 14 December. But then, the strike was in Spain–and so was Stefanie Boston

At 6am on 12 December, as I stepped off the bus in Madrid, the walls of the bus station had been freshly plastered with posters for the general strike by the two union organisations: the Socialist-led UGT and Communist-run CC OO. *El País* reported that Felipe González' governing Socialists (the PSOE) were still negotiating with union leaders—and still scaremongering about Communist plots to overthrow the government and union plans to intimidate people with flying pickets.

At the exit to the underground station in Madrid's main square, the Puerta del Sol, four middle-aged CC OO members were giving out strike leaflets—from their youth organisation. They told me how the strike was being organised in somewhat less bloodcurdling terms than government statements suggested. Each workplace would set up *piquetes informativos* to inform people about the strike, rather than to stop them working. Then all would converge on the Puerta del Sol to picket the department store El Corte Ingles, which had sworn to open on 14 December.

All for it

Signs of the impending general strike were all around the city: banners hung on public buildings, graffiti on walls, leaflets all over the pavements, official union posters and stickers everywhere. Yet there was little excitement among the people, nobody seemed to be arguing about the strike in the bars or on the buses. Most were clearly for it; but few seemed actively involved in organising it.

This impression was confirmed at a meeting of 500 transport workers on the evening of 12 December. It was more a stage-managed rally than a pre-strike planning meeting. Half the audience waved red CC OO flags, the rest sat quietly supporting the UGT, while the union officials told them what was what. Luis Daza, general secretary of the UGT, reported that eight million would be backing the strike, closing down 20 000 workplaces from shops to building sites and football matches. 'The Socialist government cannot rule against the workers', Daza declared, but was also keen to deny government accusations of red subversion, insisting that the strike was non-political.

> The one-day Spanish general strike of 14 December was organised jointly by the Socialist and Communist trade union organisations, to protest against the austerity policies of the Socialist government. The *reconversiones* programme of rationalising industry has caused mass redundancies. Many still in work find their position increasingly insecure, thanks to the government's Employment Plan, which encourages a shift towards temporary contracts. González and the unions are now negotiating over plans to conscript jobless youth on to 'training' schemes.

Bar none

The breadth of anti-government feeling was obvious in the Bar Central, Plaza Santa Ana, later that evening. The owner is a member of the PSOE, but he still intended to close on 14 December. 'I've even done flyposting for them in the past, but I'm going on strike because they've got to change their policies.' He thought that privatising everything was the only Thatcher policy which González hadn't matched—yet.

During the next day, the eve of the general strike, several thousand official union pickets were preparing to oversee the action. They would be on duty from midnight, keeping their eyes open for any workplace not on strike and setting up *piquetes informativos* to try to bring them

PHOTOS: STEFANIE BOSTON

Before and after: strikers protest peacefully–then the police start swinging

out. At 7.30am on strike day, I found some of them dotted around the Standard Eléctrica factory in groups of two or three with bonfires. There were 20 more at the factory gates, singing 'La huelga general'. The streets were deserted, save for police vans racing to the industrial zones.

At 9am the rush-hour in Puerta del Sol didn't happen. The cars, buses, lorries and taxis which normally fight their way around the square were nowhere to be seen. The only crowded spot was outside El Corte Ingles, where pickets were starting to gather. Vanloads of police began to arrive at the rear of the store; all police leave had been cancelled for the strike and 22 units of riot police mobilised, 12 of them in Madrid alone.

Socialist 'scabs'

Later in the morning, a huge crowd marched from the Puerta del Sol. The official stewards tried to divert them away from El Corte Ingles, where police had parked 50 riot vans. The march passed the ministry of the economy, and somebody with a spray-can gave vent to the general feeling about Carlos Solchaga, the Socialist minister: *'Solchaga–esquirol'* (scab). Other graffiti artists had sprayed strike slogans on the windows of all the shut-up shops and banks. The riot police flanked the march, which circled around and eventually landed back at the Puerta del Sol.

By noon the police had ousted the pickets and formed their own line at the entrance to El Corte Ingles. People closest to the police lines linked arms as a surveillance helicopter buzzed overhead. More police arrived and ferried a few managers into the store; the staff were hiding in an adjacent building. The police began to pick on pickets, a scuffle broke out and the riot batons started swinging. The crowd stood toe-to-toe with the police chanting 'murderers' in their faces. The riot squad brought up a line of shields and started to push us back. People began to sing anti-police slogans, putting Socialist premier González in the same category: *'González y la policia son la misma porquería'*—González and the police are pigs. Then police charged into the crowd, batoning the legs and faces of those standing by. A woman hit in the face was shouting 'It's just like Franco!'.

By 1pm the police had cleared a passage to let through the scab staff. But there was little chance of anybody getting in to go Christmas shopping. The Puerta del Sol was packed with pickets and riot vans, most of them decorated with 'Murderers' slogans. The side streets off the square were full of people emptying dustbins (untouched by striking refuse workers) across the narrow streets, and using the contents to make burning barricades.

Police vans raced to each fire, sirens wailing. As they tried to stamp out the flames, more fights started. Riot police chased people, threw them against the vans, beat them and then just pushed them aside. There were no arrests. One picket commented that the Puerta del Sol was being policed 'like Chile'. The police had set up *oficinas de denuncias*, open vans where you were supposed to report any picket line violence. Since the police were causing the violence, the vans were empty.

The confrontation in Puerta del Sol continued until evening. But as it grew dark, police cars raced through the streets scattering the crowds, the helicopter's searchlight scanned the plaza and the sidestreets, and more riot vans arrived. With the business of picketing completed and more serious assaults in prospect, the square started to clear.

Back at CC OO headquarters, union officials reported that El Corte Ingles was the only troublespot. They insisted that, since there were no arrests, police had been 'well-behaved'.

'It's a necessity for us to strike'

Pilar is a shop steward at the Standard Eléctrica factory in the Méndez Alvaro industrial district of Madrid. I spoke to her about the issues at stake in the strike.

'I'm supporting the strike because the government's economic policies blatantly favour the middle classes. González has subsidised their investments while supporting *reconversiones*. People are unemployed or being forced into low-paid insecure jobs. You are lucky if your work pays your social security contributions. Standard Eléctrica has been subsidised by the Socialist government for eight years, and meanwhile the bosses have made 1700 redundant, so it really is a necessity for us to strike. Management are substituting permanent contracts for temporary ones with workers who don't have any security and work in terrible conditions.

'Standard Eléctrica used to employ people permanently as carpenters or maintenance staff. But now all this work has been subcontracted so you have young people being brought in on temporary contracts or without contracts at all. You see the workers hanging out of windows without safety straps, moving machinery without protective clothing, soldering without gloves or masks. I've got a permanent contract, I've been working here 16 years. But a lot of those on the picket are young people on 18-month contracts with a very bleak future. My salary is 70 000 pesetas a month after tax. It's a pittance, not enough to live on. My rent alone is 30 000 a month.

'The company has put heavy pressure on, asking us one by one if we are coming to work today. There is a lot of pressure to show you are loyal to the company if you want to up your grade. When people's contracts run out after a few months, with no guarantee of renewal, that's strong pressure in itself, it's hard to tell the bosses "Listen, I'm going on strike".' Despite that, her workmates showed overwhelming support for the strike.

Redundant labels

Pilar sees 'widespread disillusionment' with the PSOE. 'This is a right-wing government like the other European ones. The PSOE is doing the same as Thatcher in Britain. They call themselves socialist and working class but they might as well just be called the Spanish Party, the other words are redundant. They

A woman hit in the face was shouting 'It's just like Franco!'

haven't got a single socialist policy. They are closing down workplaces and pushing through redundancies, backing the bosses.'

Pilar was aware of the difference in attitudes expressed by the union leaders and the pickets—a tension which was only masked by the tremendous support for the strike, as she explained: 'The UGT and the CC OO have said that the pickets are just to inform people but let's be realistic, we are picketing to stop people going into work. A lot of workers with no contracts and no union rights are under pressure to come in so they can tell the boss that we intimidated them and they had to go home. But there haven't been any major incidents here. Other times pickets have overturned cars to stop people going to work, but this time the caretakers haven't even opened the gates. That's a great help, anybody who wants to get in will have to jump over. Hardly anyone has tried, so here we are, bored stiff!'

The Spanish strike was a tonic for trade unionism everywhere. There were problems with the way it was organised. A 24-hour strike, however big, can only be a protest rather than a way of putting decisive pressure on the authorities. And the action was undermined by the professional Socialist and Communist bureaucrats who run the unions. The rank and file had no say, for example, in which emergency services should be kept running and how; that was decided in a private deal between union chiefs and the government. Nor did the union leaders' insistence that the strike was respectable, and their refusal to confront the government's red-baiting tactics or oppose the police, do anything to help pickets battling riot batons in the Puerta del Sol.

Spanish lessons

Nevertheless, the sight of millions of workers taking action together against attacks on jobs and living standards was a powerful counter to all the lies we are fed here about collective struggles and militancy being a thing of the past. The fact that so many Spaniards identified the shift towards temporary contracts and youth employment schemes as an attack on them all was also a welcome change from the way in which the British labour movement has largely accepted similarly offensive measures as an inevitable part of the modern age.

There are other useful lessons for us from what is happening in Spain. The Socialist González government is pursuing policies almost indistinguishable from those which Thatcher's Tories have imposed in Britain over the past decade. That alone ought to raise serious questions about the widespread view here that Thatcherite economics reflect the personal prejudices of the prime minister. When every Western government, whatever its political complexion, is taking a similar line, it suggests that the problem goes much deeper—to the needs of the capitalist system today. In which case, trying to elect a different government to run that system, whether it calls itself Labour, Socialist or whatever, can surely provide no solution. The willingness of Spanish workers to get out and fight for what they need now looks a much better bet for the future. All they require are political leaders of their own, with policies to match the spirit people like Pilar displayed on 14 December. ●

No Christmas shopping in the Puerta del Sol

PHOTO: STEFANIE BOSTON

The battle of Betteshanger

Kent miners' last stand?

Keith Tompson went to the cutting-face of the fight to save jobs in the pits

Betteshanger is the last working coal-mine in Kent. Now it too is threatened with closure, with the loss of more than 600 jobs. An island of industry in the Kent countryside, Betteshanger looks like a bad hangover from the industrial past: a shower room that conjures up images of icicled noses, next to huge holes holding thousands of gallons of water pumped out of the mineshaft, hinting at the grim conditions for the men underground.

Bob has worked at Betteshanger for 12 years. I asked what he thought of management's plans for the pit. 'It's a mushroom system. We're always kept in the dark while both sides shovel shit on us, union and management.' The relations between management, the National Union of Mineworkers and the workforce at Betteshanger illustrate the conflict between provocative employers and defensive unions in industry today.

John Moyle is president of Kent area NUM. When the miners' strike ended four years ago this month, management dismissed most branch committee members for 'gross industrial misconduct'. Moyle was one of them. A court order still bans him from British Coal property. Since he became president, management has refused to recognise him. The Betteshanger boss won't speak to Moyle on the telephone, and recently wrote to the NUM warning that any correspondence signed by Moyle 'will be destroyed unread'.

'Right to manage'

The treatment of Moyle is typical of management's tactics. Since the end of the 1984-85 strike British Coal has pursued a national campaign of pit closures. Kent had three collieries: Tillmanstone shut down in 1986, Snowdown went the following year. Miners were pressed into taking redundancy by threats that, if they didn't sign the forms fast, the pits would still close and they would receive only the minimum legal hand-out.

Miners who remain suffer British Coal's new 'right to manage' regime. Management has ended allowances for working in wet conditions, banned everything from shift-swapping to time off for funerals, and imposed a code of conduct that amounts to a charter for victimisation. British Coal wants to introduce local rather than national wage bargaining. This will deepen the regional divisions brought about by the area bonus incentive schemes of the seventies, which proved so destructive of NUM unity in the last strike. They also want to divide miners within a pit, by imposing short-term 'spot contract' payments for specific jobs, instead of a general contract and a basic pay rate for all.

These are national developments. But Kent management has assumed the role of pace-setter and tried to go a stage further. Last September it announced plans to end the incentive bonus scheme at Betteshanger, and replace it with a scheme designed to shift the balance further from wages to profits.

Back in 1978, Kent NUM was the last area to accept the Labour government's local incentive bonus scheme, and only did so after negotiating three special clauses. These ruled that bonus payments would be protected if production stopped for safety reasons; that bonus disputes must be resolved through negotiations with union reps; and that earnings would be pooled so that all face workers were paid the same rate, all surface workers were paid the same rate, and so on.

Management ended this scheme last October, and sent the workforce a circular laying down the new law:

'We need a scheme...which is self-financing and cost-effective....The existing Kent scheme does not, in our new circumstances, meet these requirements. Its operation has resulted in an increase in both the wages cost and overall cost per tonne; and it does not provide the direct, personal incentive required to motivate and maximise our output and development potential, or profitability and earnings.'

British Coal wants more work for less pay, and sees a scheme that relies on 'personal incentive' as the way to split the workforce and undermine resistance. On 14 November management imposed a new bonus scheme. The pit bulletin announced that there would be no payments unless there was 'full cooperation with management to improve output and productivity and increase efficiency of each underground and surface operation at the colliery'.

The new scheme slashed earnings by up to 30 per cent and reversed the three points negotiated into the 1978 scheme. From now on, any safety stoppage would mean a cut in bonus. Only miners employed at Betteshanger—and not the sacked reps—could negotiate about bonus disputes. And the pooled-bonus system was out, replaced by differential bonuses for workers on different faces. At Betteshanger, one face—the 26's—is far more difficult to work than the other—the 54's. So miners doing the same job in different parts of the pit would be on different rates of pay—a recipe for the divisions management wants.

'Shape up or ship out'

The miners have responded by slowing down to about 70 per cent of normal working. As a result there have been no bonus payments at all, and the pit is reported to be losing £40 000 a day. Management has answered the slowdown by raising the stakes further still. On 23 November British Coal's assistant operations director, Tom Clark, announced that Betteshanger had lost £1m in the first half of 1988. The pit, said Clark, was in 'a unique situation. It is the first colliery in Britain to be given more authority at pit level. This will enable the colliery to make the most of its operational decisions and to stand on its own two feet. It is an opportunity that everyone, men and management, should grasp'. The clear implication was that the miners must either shape up or go out of the pit gates for good.

On the day I visited Betteshanger last month managers were at the pit faces picking on individual miners. 'You're working normally, you'll get a bonus. You're not, no bonus for you.' Those who objected to their assessment were told to write begging letters to management. Betteshanger miners are being treated as militarised labour, and resentment runs deep. Colin, a miner pointed out by his workmates as having 'enough mouth for all of us', summed up the mood: 'We've got to be worth a certain amount of money for the job, and if they won't pay us it then they can stuff it. Since 1985 we have had dictators for managers. We can't win, we're on a hiding to nothing. But we're not going to do the job for what they're paying.' This bitterness was everywhere. There was little belief that management could be beaten.

PHOTO: CHRIS BERESFORD

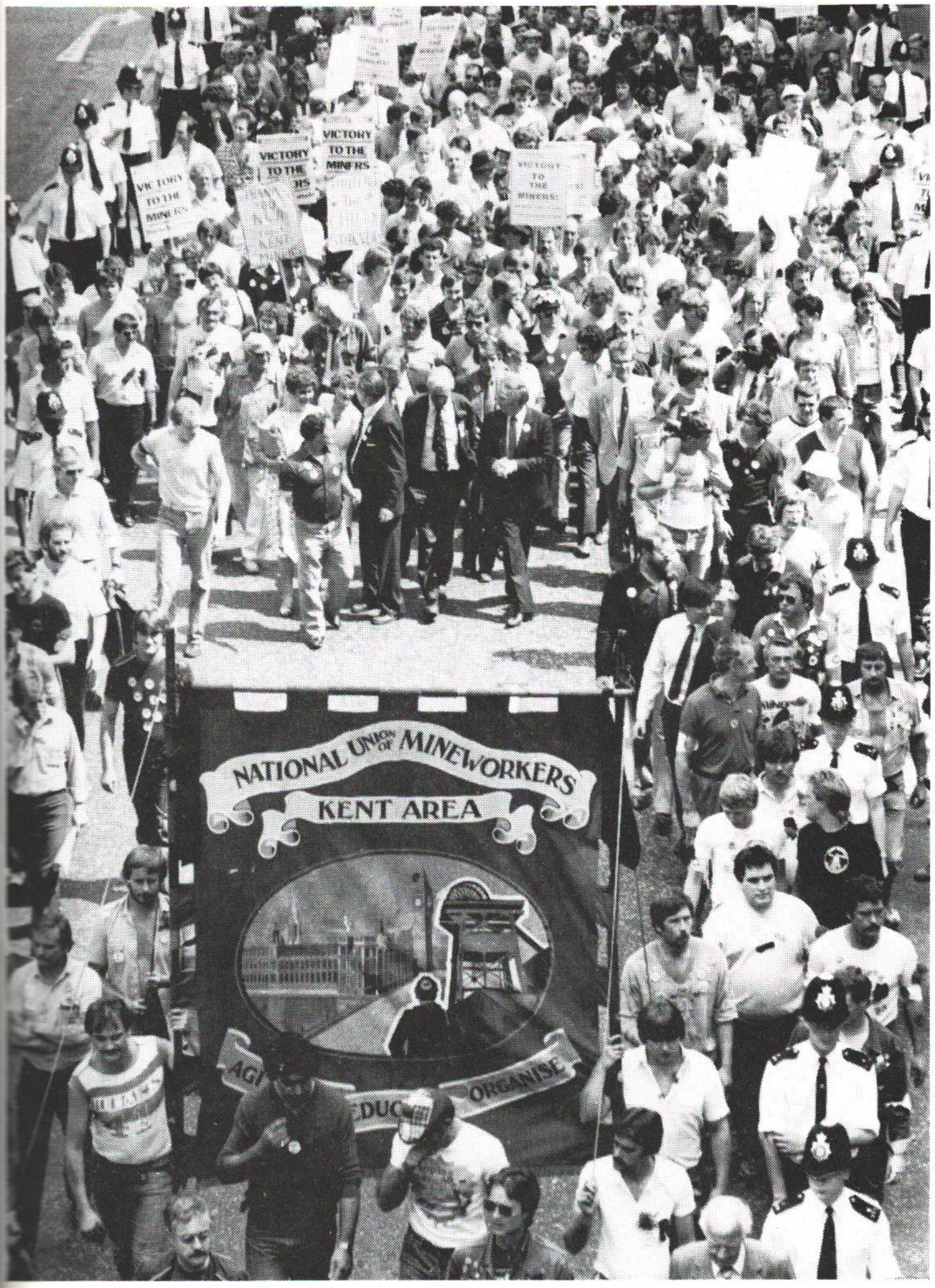
Kent miners have always had a reputation for militancy. Their late president, Jack Collins, was known as the most militant NUM official. When the union agreed to end the 1984-85 strike, Kent miners went to Yorkshire to try to keep the pits out. John Moyle, a victimised miner, is in the Collins tradition. But the traditional trade unionism he represents has proved incapable of dealing with management's new aggressive tactics. Moyle himself points out that the union was not up to saving Tillmanstone and Snowdown. 'The NUM voted for the closures, the branch committee wasn't strong enough to oppose it. In the first instance the threat was from British Coal but in the final analysis the blame for the closure has to be the failure of the NUM to fight the campaign.' Moyle recalls that some union representatives were the first to accept redundancy payments.

Many miners have lost faith in the union, and the remaining militants often find themselves isolated. Moyle is a victim of that isolation. Seeing little chance of mobilising the membership, he has reacted defensively and sought more bureaucratic means to thwart management's plans.

Moyle has referred the termination of the old bonus scheme to the high court. He contends that management was obliged to give three months' notice of the scheme's termination, but only gave four weeks'. The case was due to be heard on 17 January. Even in the unlikely event that the union wins it, it will simply mean that the change is carried out a little later. And, as an NUM letter to management insists, if the court finds in favour of British Coal, the union will 'agree immediately to negotiate within your new proposals on incentive bonus'.

Moyle is putting his faith in the official colliery review procedure to keep Betteshanger open. He believes that, if the pit goes to review, he can prove management is to blame for poor profitability through its imposition of the new bonus scheme and extravagant spending on new offices and geological tests.

These tactics are dead ends, chosen out of desperation. The courts and the colliery review are not unbiased bodies open to rational persuasion. This is the same legal system which jailed Kent miners and sequestrated NUM funds during the strike, and the same review procedure which has already sounded the death knell for several pits. These institutions exist to serve the employers' interests. There is no future in appealing to their better judgement, or in arguing that the union knows better than management how to make a pit profitable. A concern with the employers' problem of profitability is a key concession which has undermined the NUM's arguments against pit closures for years.



Militant Kent miners often led the way in the 1984-85 strike

Face the future

Moyle and the national NUM are essentially seeking a return to the system of negotiated give and take which prevailed in the pits in the past. Today he champions the 1978 bonus incentive scheme against the new one; yet a decade ago he opposed the old scheme as divisive. He has become reconciled to what he once hated, because the past seems less hostile than the future.

But British Coal is not living in the past. It is waging a new war against Kent miners. It will tear up all paper agreements which don't suit its purposes. It wants a subservient workforce producing the maximum amount of coal for the lowest possible wage. And if it can't have that, it is prepared to let pits go to the wall. While the managers raise the stakes almost daily, the NUM remains tied to outdated and ineffective methods.

There would be little point in blaming Moyle for the problems of Kent miners. He is not by nature a compromiser, and holds the New Realists in contempt. But he is an official presiding over the rump of a form of trade unionism which has reached the end of the road. The bureaucratic approach which he sees as his only option cannot succeed in the heated conflicts of today. The last battle of Betteshanger testifies to the need for a new strategy to meet the warmongering methods of modern management.

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The Marxist response

Can capitalism go Green?

Frank Richards locates the roots of the environmental crisis, not in nature, but in the nature of modern society

A recent report to the World Resources Institute notes that the lives of approximately a billion people are 'periodically disrupted by flooding, firewood shortages, soil and water degradation and reduced agricultural production'. Another study predicts that, within 30 years, forests the size of India could vanish and an area as vast as Saudi Arabia will turn to desert. Controversy rages across Europe about nuclear power, toxic waste and acid rain, while the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer and the prospect of a nuclear winter cause widespread concern. Bhopal and Chernobyl are terrifying symbols of the dangers modern industry poses to the environment and to humanity. In response, Green movements have gained influence throughout the West.

The growing threat to the environment is no surprise to Marxists. In his major work, *Capital*, Karl Marx argued that the relentless pursuit of profit characteristic of the capitalist system inevitably damages the environment. He noted that 'all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil' and that 'all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility' (Vol 1, 1977 edition, pp474-75). Moreover, Marx suggested that the more dynamic a capitalist economy was, the greater the damage it could cause:

'The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the labourer.' (p475)

Marx's recognition of the destructive side of modern industry was an important element in his critique of capitalism.

While Marxists share with the Greens a concern about the environmental crisis facing humanity, there are fundamental differences in our understanding of the nature of growth. Here we present the distinctive Marxist approach to the problems of the environment.

The Greens see the ecological crisis as the main problem facing humanity. Prominent Greens argue that modern technology is out of control, threatening the balance between human society and the natural world. Thus Jonathon Porritt, leader of Britain's Greens, warns that 'we cannot expect to continue using up the non-renewable resources and destroying renewable resources at the present rate and expect the system to survive' (*The Coming of the Greens*, 1988, p12).

Green literature emphasises that humanity has become an endangered species. According to Fritjof Capra, a nuclear scientist and influential Green writer, 'we find ourselves in a state of profound worldwide crisis....for the first time we have to face the very real threat of extinction' (*The Turning Point*, 1982, p1). The radical German author Werner Hülsberg

PHOTO: CHARLES SECRETT/FoE

RIGHT: Italian toxic waste dump, Nigeria: for the Western powers, the third world is a convenient trash can

shares Capra's grim forebodings: 'Like modern military technology, the ecological crisis threatens the survival of the human species.' (*The German Greens*, 1988, p2)

As a *description* of the dangers facing humanity, we have few problems with this assessment. Our disagreement is at the level of *analysis*. Marxists see the devastation of the global ecological system as a consequence of a crisis in the dominant international *social* system—capitalism.

Policies to protect and conserve natural resources are antithetical to profit-making

In capitalist society, maximising profit takes priority over every other consideration. Profit comes before any concern for human need or any thought of the consequences for the environment. The drive for short-term profit forces capitalists to disregard the potential long-term dangers of industrial processes. The compulsion to compete in the capitalist market compels even the most enlightened entrepreneur to cut corners and disregard the safety of workforce and public alike.

A social system dominated by the criterion of profitability is a menace to humanity and the environment. Hence, for Marxists, no narrowly ecological solutions to the environmental crisis can be effective. Policies to protect and conserve natural resources are antithetical to profit-making. The root of the problem is not ecological but social: the threat to global survival arises from the capitalist system itself.

Many Greens would agree that the problems of the environment result from the anarchic character of capitalist production. However, their analysis identifies the problem as technical rather than social. For the Greens the danger to the environment is inherent in modern industrial technology, not a result of the social relationships into which individuals are forced in the processes of profit-making production. According to Hülsberg, the danger of nuclear war 'should be more than enough to make us take seriously the threat to human life posed by the automatic development of the production process, quite independently of whether it is directed by the market or by the central plan' (p6).

By abstracting technology from the social system within which it operates, Greens endow it with a life of its own. Yet machines and computers are not the driving force behind technological development. Human beings organised according to the conventions of society are responsible for constantly improving tools and techniques. Nor is technology to blame for destroying the environment. The origins of the problem lie in the ways technology is used by human beings organised according to the dictates of the drive to maximise profit.

Free science

The advance of knowledge, science and technology are crucial to the progress of society. Through science, humanity develops the tools—technology—that allow the possibility of civilised life in a generally hostile global environment. At the dawn of history, people were the mere objects of nature and human life was dominated by natural cycles and climatic conditions. Gradually, human beings learned to understand and modify the laws of nature, hence acquiring some control over their circumstances. Technological development—at first, the acquisition of skills in crop cultivation and animal husbandry—began to give human society a degree of independence from domination by nature. Technology has progressively freed humanity from natural necessity and has allowed the development of civilisation.

Marxism views technological advance and the development of the forces of production as the preconditions for human liberation. The Greens, by contrast, take a profoundly pessimistic view of the prospects for human society, and question the possibility of further progress through technological innovation.

Given some of the results of scientific advance within the constraints of modern society such as nuclear weapons hostility towards technology is unsurprising. Yet progress cannot take place without the risk of unforeseen consequences. The effects of new technology are seldom clear in advance and there may well be negative side-effects. Moreover, technology gives humanity the power to destroy as well as to improve. Today's technological advance is paralleled by the creation of an awesome destructive capacity. This is the inescapable irony of science and technology: it is crucial to preserve and enhance human life, yet it also provides the means for our extermination.

However, the destructive capacity of modern technology is no argument against its development; it simply underlines the urgency of creating a society in which it can be used constructively. Human survival is not threatened by technology, but by the deployment of technology within capitalist society.

'Hydra-headed' monster

Many Greens now argue that technology has advanced so far, and run so far ahead of its creators, that its further application must be called into question. Porritt believes 'the hydra-headed monster...has, finally, slipped its leash' (p233). The fear of the Frankenstein factor has been a constant theme in Western conservative thought since the industrial revolution. The fact that this fear now influences more radical thinkers reflects the scale of the perceived threat to survival in the nuclear age.

An influential aspect of the Green case against technology (and Marxism) is the argument that we lack the knowledge to use many modern techniques safely. According to Hülsberg, the 'optimistic assumption' of Marxists 'that we are in a process of developing a better understanding of the consequences of productive activity, is quite simply false' (p6). He points to the enormous number of newly-synthesised chemical products being widely used at a time when science has little understanding of the possible long-term risks. Unfortunately there are many things that human society can only learn through experimentation. The experience of history is that every advance creates new problems, but that it also creates the means of solving them. The very act of posing a problem in a new way in the

process of innovation and experimentation is often the first step towards its solution. To suggest that unforeseen problems should stop technological advance is to propose that we turn our backs towards the future and return to the caves.

Take the case of the oral contraceptive pill. It is now evident that the pill induces certain side-effects and can be dangerous to some women. These problems require a thorough programme of research and experimentation. Overall, however, the positive impact of the pill on the general health and welfare of women far outweighs its negative effects. It is an example, not of progress pure and simple, but of progress through the creation of new problems. This is how humanity gains new insights and extends its freedom from the constraints imposed by nature.

Given the existing state of society, the Greens' fears about the dangers of certain technologies are entirely appropriate. According to the US Academy of Sciences, a proper hazard assessment is possible for less than seven per cent of the 17 202 chemicals known to be present in agro-chemicals, cosmetics, drugs and food additives (*Guardian*, 13 December 1988). To make matters worse, Western governments are more inclined to conceal the risks of toxicity than to publicise them. Under such circumstances, objective scientists conclude that the chemical industry is an ecological disaster waiting to happen.

Capitalist spokesmen label as 'natural' every value of which their class approves—greed, possessiveness, racism, women's subordination

Secret society

The lack of information about the toxic dangers of new chemicals has nothing to do with the chemistry of particular products. There is nothing inherent in this technology that need present insoluble problems for chemical science. The problem lies in the indifference of the businessmen who run the chemical industry to the potential dangers of their products. Profit and safety do not mix. Investment in research into the potential dangers of new chemicals is regarded as a luxury by entrepreneurs determined to squeeze the last penny from selling them.

The solution lies not in slowing down the invention of new chemicals, but in speeding up research into the potential dangers. A society which took such considerations seriously could organise the necessary research, introduce elementary safeguards and prevent the reckless use of new chemicals. A system dedicated to profit will never make a priority of investigating the risks attached to new technology. By contrast, a system based on the principle of social need and conscious planning could take measures to establish an acceptable balance between the pressure to introduce new chemicals, and the need to safeguard the public and the environment against potential dangers.

Public scrutiny of science is also crucial to the development of knowledge. Yet scientific progress is thwarted by the secrecy imposed by business considerations. Companies look upon their scientific information as private property to be protected from public view. Even the basic information required to assess the environmental consequences of a particular technology is often unavailable. The capitalist social system thus imposes its own barriers on the extension of human knowledge. Once these barriers are removed it would be fairly straightforward to work out the likely impact of any new product on the environment.

Given our current lack of access to the essential information, we must be suspicious of the way that new technology is used. Until we can establish control over the introduction of new technology we should demand full public discussion of its effects and of the necessary safety measures. This provides no long-term solutions to the problems resulting from the capitalist organisation of society, but it would help to raise the level of public understanding of the issues at stake.

For Marxists, the problems facing humanity arise not from *nature*, but from *society*. Ever since the rise of industrial capitalism, both defenders and radical critics of the existing order have taken a contrary view. They emphasise the natural constraints imposed by human biology and psychology, and by the Earth's limited supply of resources. Whereas we locate the obstacles to developing the human potential in a society organised around the profit motive, many conservatives and radicals alike maintain that the limits are given by nature.

Nature's not eternal

Marxism rejects the mechanical separation of nature and society that pervades modern Western thought. Marx emphasised the way in which the interaction between humanity and nature transforms both sides of the relationship. Just as modern men and women are far removed from their cave-dwelling ancestors, so the natural world has been transformed beyond recognition. By intervening in nature human beings have changed their environment as well as themselves; as we have become civilised, nature has become socialised. Hence the relationship of the individual to nature is mediated through society. The implications of this analysis are far-reaching. It means that far from being something fixed and eternal standing outside society, nature itself changes constantly in the course of human development. Our perceptions of nature, indeed the very meaning of natural phenomena, are influenced by social development. To a primitive people the sea is a barrier; to a more developed society the same stretch of water offers a means of transport and exploration.

At any stage in history, the prevailing concept of nature is determined by the kind of society that exists at the time. Since capitalism emerged, definitions of what is natural have been shaped by the class antagonism this system generates. Capitalist spokesmen have long proclaimed that the roots of their system lie in nature. They have labelled as 'natural' every value and tradition of which the capitalist class approves. They justify greed and possessiveness with reference to 'nature's law' of the survival of the fittest. They insist that it is 'human nature' to be acquisitive and competitive. They explain racism and other prejudices by platitudes about animals preferring to stick with their own kind, by universal theories of territoriality, aggression and instinctive behaviour, and even by notions of biological superiority. The nuclear family, the subordination of women and other social practices are

justified as the inescapable inheritance of nature, transmitted through our genes.

Capitalist society brings forward its natural scientists to legitimise its social conventions, and keeps the same authorities on hand to proscribe deviations from approved norms. Practices regarded as subversive of the established order, such as promiscuity or homosexuality, are labelled 'unnatural'. Medical authorities point to the increased incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, infertility and even cervical cancer as the penalty that women must pay for the promiscuous sixties. The Aids epidemic is widely portrayed as

Park Royal industrial estate, London: capitalism twists economic growth into environmental ruin

nature's revenge on homosexuals. The appeal to nature to justify the status quo allows the establishment to repress practices and target groups that it regards as a threat. This 'naturalisation' of social problems is an enduring theme in the outlook of the capitalist class.

Capitalist ideologists also blame nature for the problems of society, such as poverty and unemployment. For 200 years, the system's apologists have used ecological arguments to explain crises, shortages and gross social inequalities.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the political economist Thomas Malthus argued that growth in population led to the diminishing fertility of the soil. He insisted that the threat of poverty and the difficulty of feeding children were needed to discourage the masses from breeding so rapidly that the nation's agricultural resources would be exhausted within decades. Employers warmly welcomed Malthus' discovery of this 'law of nature', and invoked it to justify low wages and widespread poverty; the poor had no cause to complain, since their plight resulted

PHOTO: PANDORA ANDERSON

from their reckless reproduction. Moreover, Malthus argued that the poor could improve their lot only by refraining from early marriage and having fewer children (*Principles of Political Economy with a View to their Practical Application*, 1836). Malthus argued that it was not the drive for profit or exploitation that caused poverty, but the combination of human frailty and natural constraints.

Many right-wing thinkers uphold a modified version of Malthusian theory today. Western commentators explain famine and poverty in the third world as a result of overpopulation. International agencies advocate birth control programmes as the main solution to the problems of impoverished countries. Pointing the finger at the reproduction of the masses distracts attention from the responsibility of Western domination for the degrading conditions that afflict countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Today's neo-Malthusians still blame human nature and shortages of natural resources, not capitalist society.

Marx repudiated the attempt by capitalist thinkers to shift the problems created by capitalist society back to nature. He insisted that nature imposed no arbitrary limits on the possibilities of human achievement; all natural barriers could sooner or later be overcome by superior social organisation. In his critique of Malthus, Marx argued that there was no fixed relationship between human consumption and the availability of food, and no direct link between population and nature. A tribe of primitive hunters 'required a great amount of territory for few people' because of their low level of social organisation and technology (*Grundrisse*, 1973 edition, p607). By contrast, advanced capitalist societies can sustain large populations in small areas, because of their more highly developed productive capacities. The number of people which can be supported by an area of land is not given by nature, but by the sort of society in which they are organised. People are starving in Ethiopia not because of overpopulation, but because they lack the resources to invest in the technology necessary to sustain the fertility of the land.

The idea that nature limits the development of society is an eternal capitalist theme. It particularly comes into its own at a time of crisis. During periods of economic boom, capitalists take the optimistic view that there are no limits to the expansion of their system. However, when the tensions inherent in the system erupt in a recession, such as we have experienced over the past 15 years, optimism turns into its opposite.

Gloom and growth

Signs of a serious economic crisis reappeared in the late sixties. Since the onset of a long-term recession after the energy crisis of 1973, many capitalists have become increasingly gloomy about the possibility of sustaining growth. Confronted with the obstacles to systematic growth which are inherent in the profit system, capitalist ideologues have rediscovered natural barriers to the expansion of their system. Unable to face up to the fact that the system itself is the problem, its apologists take refuge in claims that the resources of nature cannot sustain a high level of growth.

In the early seventies neo-Malthusian theories enjoyed a spectacular revival. Once again economists and businessmen issued sombre warnings about the dangers of insatiable consumption in a world with restricted reserves of energy and other resources. According to the influential 1972 Club of Rome report *Limits to Growth*, 'the basic behaviour mode of the world system is exponential growth of population and capital followed by collapse'. The bleak economic outlook prompted sophisticated Euro-capitalists to seek solace in the specious theories of Malthus, the nineteenth-century English country parson.

The new wisdom that growth was no longer a desired objective, and had become a threat to society, soon gained influence. Prince Albert of Liège summed up the prevailing mood at a European Conservation Year conference in Paris: 'There are reasonable targets for progress. But it is no longer healthy to accept the infernal race for economic growth. If he wants his species to survive, man must limit his appetites.' (*Times*, 9 February 1970) Hard-headed politicians and businessmen underwent overnight conversions to the new anti-growth orthodoxy. After a long career as an advocate of economic growth, West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt suddenly became an ardent conservationist, arguing that it was 'only reasonable that we should hang on to our Volkswagen a little longer before we buy a new one, and that the next car we buy should be a little smaller than the one we would have bought three years ago'.

At a time when the capitalist system had revealed its incapacity to sustain a forward momentum, it was not surprising that its defenders should turn to question the goal of growth itself rather than acknowledge the inherent failings of the system. Unfortunately, these anti-growth notions have spread far beyond the capitalist class as society has been forced to live with the implications of a prolonged worldwide recession. Over the past decade many radical critics of the status quo have adopted elements of the mainstream view that the defects of modern society are at root problems of nature. Capra's book *The Turning Point* is typical. He argues that we are 'witnessing economic abnormalities that seem to confound all our leading economists and politicians' (p5). According to Capra, phenomena such as unemployment and inflation are in some sense a result of the weakened links between human society and nature.

In fact unemployment and inflation are readily comprehensible through an analysis of the workings of capitalist society. The fluctuations of interest rates, the crash of share prices or the collapse of industries may appear to be the effects of invisible natural forces. But neither

money nor shares grow on trees and factories do not sprout from the soil; all these are the products of society. If we are 'witnessing economic abnormalities', the fault must lie with the system that creates them.

Marxists and Greens disagree fundamentally on the question of growth. We share Green concerns about the *forms* that growth assumes under capitalism, but reject the notion that growth itself is the problem. On the contrary, the problem is that there is too little growth. At a time when most people on our planet face economic insecurity and many are haunted by starvation, the idea that we should limit growth makes little sense. The growth of the forces of production can free humanity from the tyranny of nature-imposed necessity. Such a liberation from nature's domination makes it possible for humans to control their lives and realise their potential.

There are real limits to growth today. But these are the products of capitalist society, not laws of nature. Why are there not enough schools, hospitals, nurseries, etc? It is not because we lack space, bricks, wood and other essential resources. It is because the provision of these services is not profitable. The principle of profit maximisation is a fundamental obstacle to the growth of resources essential for a civilised society.

Green politics can appeal to stockbrokers who who want to keep the London riff-raff out of their pretty villages as well as to angry teenagers appalled by Chernobyl

Profit or bust

Green thinkers tend to confuse the consequences of capitalism with its inner workings. They consider that industrial society is motivated by the principle of growth for growth's sake, whereas in fact, under capitalism technical growth is subordinated to the quest for profit. Capitalists do not expand production for its own sake, but according to the requirements of profitability. If they cannot produce profitably, they will make workers redundant, sell off machines and close factories. Throughout the Western world mass unemployment, empty factories, and derelict industrial estates reveal the anti-growth tendencies inherent in capitalism. On an even more dramatic scale, the stagnation and decay of most of the third world calls into question the pretensions of capitalism to be a system committed to dynamic growth.

It is not growth that destroys the environment, but a form of growth that is distorted by the drive for profit. Greens who move from rejecting growth in its capitalist form to rejecting growth in general effectively abandon any hope of advancing human civilisation. Rejecting growth in general means accepting that there is no chance of further progress, that the present level of society is the best we can achieve. But what we have is not enough—especially for the majority of the Earth's population in the third world. Those who want to tackle the dangers to the environment and to humanity should shift their attention from nature and concentrate their attack on the capitalist system.

In the past a concern with the environment was characteristic of a conservative outlook. Only in recent years have environmental concerns been taken up in radical quarters. How have traditionally right-wing views come to influence people generally from a left-wing background?

Alienated individuals

In his writings on alienation, Marx explained how the processes of commodity exchange on the capitalist market have the effect of atomising traditional communities. In capitalist society individuals relate to one another only indirectly, through the market exchange of commodities they produce; former organic relationships, direct ties of duty and obligation, are broken up. The isolated and privatised character of everyday life under capitalism enhances a sense of insecurity, as people feel excluded from some wider whole. This sense of alienation is often interpreted as a result of human society losing its links with nature. A deep dissatisfaction and a revulsion against industrial society has encouraged some to imagine a past golden age, when humanity lived in harmony with nature. From the Utopian settlements of the 1830s to the hippie communes of the 1960s, there have been repeated attempts to restore this balance and to rediscover the sense of relatedness to other people and to nature that modern society has lost.

But humanity has never lived in harmony with nature. It has always been a grim struggle for survival against heat, cold and wet, against predatory animals and lethal microbes, in dark forests, on barren soils and stormy seas. Romantic images of a past rural life exclude the unrelenting toil, the constant threat of drought, flood and disease—and the savage rule of landlord, noble and priest. Nostalgia for quaint rural ways also forgets the petty prejudices of village life, the superstitions and parochial hostility towards anything or anybody unfamiliar.

'Forever England'

The modern experience of atomisation results from the subordination of the individual to the exchange of commodities in capitalist society, not from the disruption of some mythical harmony. The exploitation of workers in the process of production robs them of their independence. Even those who are not waged workers live in a society where the chaotic movements of capital rule the lives of everybody. The pervasive sense of alienation has long ensured a resonance for writers and even political movements offering a sentimental image of the past. Prejudices against technology, city life and growth or progress in general tend to increase during capitalist crises, when the ruling class seeks to escape the consequences of its own system.

When Margaret Thatcher recently started making speeches on the environment, many radical Greens expressed outrage that she should try to appropriate ecological themes. Yet the Tories can claim to be Britain's oldest ecology party. The Green perspective has long enjoyed a special place in the outlook of British Conservatism, which cherishes the view that all that is good is to be found in rural England. Stanley Baldwin, Conservative prime minister during the inter-war Depression, summed up the traditional view that 'England is the country and the country is England', and wrote lyrically about his rural retreat:

'Whatever may happen to England, whatever defilements of her countryside may take place, whatever vast buildings may be completed, whatever disgusting noises may be emitted upon her roads, at any rate in that one corner of England the apple blossom will always blow in the spring and that there whatsoever is lovely and good report will be born and flourish to the world's end.' (Quoted in MJ Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980,* 1981, p101)

Like many of his class, Baldwin had nothing but contempt for the cities, and particularly for their proletarian inhabitants.

Right-wing propagandists have always upheld the virtues of the 'man of the soil' in contrast with the dissolute industrial worker. More than 20 years ago influential Conservative backbencher Angus Maude took a characteristically Green Tory stand: 'The enduring resources of this country are few enough. Among the most valuable are its landscape and the fertility of the soil: its physical and cultural legacy from the past and the instincts and character of its people.' (*Spectator,* 21 July 1967) Like Baldwin, Maude wanted to conserve the environment so that the beneficiaries of capitalism had the space to enjoy its fruits. Current campaigns to save the green belt in the South-east from an influx of vulgar city-dwellers reflect the same outlook.

Gardening Greens

The Conservatives have set about reclaiming their Green heritage. A pamphlet published by the Thatcherite Centre for Policy Studies

RIGHT: Romantic images of a rural past provide no alternative to the way modern society blights our lives

PHOTO: DAVID ROURKE

upholds 'the real Green tradition': 'To be British and to be Green is far more accurately reflected in our national passions for fishing, gardening and country walking, than in any radical ecological fervour. We are indeed a Green nation, but not in the way that the left would like.' (A Sullivan, 'Greening the Tories', 1985) A commitment to conserve the past and a dislike for innovation and experiment are indeed core values for a party committed to defending the status quo.

Several factors have played a part in the remarkable transition of a tradition associated with the reactionary right into an influential outlook among radical activists.

Escape to the land

The right's environmental record has discredited its claims on the ecological cause. The rapid increase in pollution of all kinds has undermined capitalist claims to care about the environment. The growing reliance of Western industry on nuclear power and of Western governments on nuclear weapons has provoked public fears of a catastrophe. Those who take up Green issues are forced to combat vested interests, and often draw radical conclusions from the experience.

Meanwhile, intellectuals and professionals in the West have become more pessimistic about the prospects of achieving progressive social change. The failure of middle class activists to achieve reform has led many to withdraw from politics and to seek personal solutions. Alternative lifestyles and private concerns have grown as political involvement has declined. The recent career of the former senior civil servant Clive Ponting illustrates the trend. Ponting became a national celebrity in 1985 when he was prosecuted for exposing the government's lies about its conduct of the Falklands War. Despite his courageous stand, Ponting's campaign had little impact on the corrupt and militaristic drift of British politics, and he retired to start a new life on a smallholding in the Welsh countryside. Ponting's escape from a squalid political reality to seek fulfilment on the land symbolises the outlook of a generation. As the Western intelligentsia has lost its faith in the future, it has taken up the backward-looking perspective of Green politics.

Left loses favour

The most decisive influence on the growth of Green politics has been the declining political strength of the Western working class. In the past those who aspired to change society looked to the forces of labour as the obvious and powerful ally of any progressive movement. The erosion of union organisations and class-based political parties has removed this focus for radical activism. Traditional left-wing politics have little appeal for a younger generation: as the decay of the old labour movements is seen to remove the objective of transforming society from the agenda, other concerns take its place. The ecology movement in the West has the greatest influence in Germany and the USA—the countries in which the working class is politically weakest.

All things to all

Green politics gain influence as traditional forms of radical action appear irrelevant. The Greens also have a capacity to mobilise people of diverse opinion, who might take sharply conflicting views on more established issues. The Greens' radical critique of industry can inspire those who want to improve the quality of life. Yet because this critique is not directed against capitalist exploitation, it is also acceptable to conservatives. Green politics can appeal to stockbrokers who want to keep the London riff-raff out of their pretty villages as well as angry teenagers appalled by Chernobyl. In different countries, the Greens reflect differing combinations of these forces. In Belgium the ecological party is right-wing and chauvinist; elsewhere Greens tend to have a more progressive outlook. The flexibility of the Greens, their capacity to appeal across the political spectrum, is one reason for their success.

The Green perspective is limited by its failure to address the social causes of the threat to the environment. For Marxists, it is impossible to protect the environment without changing society. The capitalist market cannot be restrained or made more rational; thus, even while Green ideas have become more and more popular over the past two decades, the devastation of the environment has proceeded apace.

Who has the power?

Despite the radical intentions of many activists, the Green perspective is an escape from political realities. In capitalist society it is impossible to fight for progress while ignoring everyday social conflict. Even from a purely ecological point of view, it is necessary to challenge Western imperialism in the third world. For Europe, the third world is a place to dump toxic waste, a place for military search-and-destroy operations, a place where environmental restraints can be ignored. Only by fighting imperialism can any effective steps be taken towards the protection of the world's environment. Like it or not, the future of the environment will be decided in the struggle over which class has the power to control society. ●

PHOTO: DAVID ROBBIE

German Greens in crisis

The trials of Petra Kelly

The recent conference of the West German Greens revealed a party losing support and deeply split between radical 'fundi' and moderate 'realo' factions. In Bonn, Sabena Norton spoke to leading Green Party MP Petra Kelly about the crisis of the world's foremost Green group

Sabena Norton: The December party conference in Karlsruhe seemed to confirm that the Greens are in very bad shape, consumed by internal conflict with little sense of direction or purpose. I wonder, is this still the kind of party you had in mind when you helped found the Greens 10 years ago?

Petra Kelly: No. It's very depressing, because we have moved very far away from my idea of an 'anti-party party', which was meant to be a movement, like Greenpeace. We have become terribly bureaucratic. We have enormous inter-personal problems—a whole number of people simply don't even communicate any more—and we've become very intolerant.

I imagined we'd be a party of internationalism and solidarity, a party that can look beyond its own little patch. But now I get very angry when I see, just to give an example, how stingy we are with our money. We are the richest Green party in the world. But all we do with the money is distribute it to our own voters and groups we associate with, instead of using more of it for international campaigns and solidarity.

We have become a party with all the bad features parties usually display—including financial scandals, a credibility crisis and an inability to resolve problems in a constructive way. This is really not the kind of party I wanted us to be.

Sabena Norton: Why do you think things have turned out this way?

Petra Kelly: The problem is that we managed to unite a whole lot of different people and interests under one roof—and, thank God, we've survived for a long time under this roof. But as soon as we began to become very influential and gained eight or 10 per cent at the polls, an internal power-struggle began. I think these conflicts are boring and useless, because if you want to build up a movement to challenge the establishment, you can't keep on having arguments about who's got the power in the party.

The problem is that all these different interests which make up the Greens share the same goal, but there are big differences about how to get there. There is a strong oppositionist trend, to which I belong—a radical, feminist, anti-militarist opposition—and then there is the opposite trend which says we must come to an arrangement with the Social Democratic Party and make compromises. In between there are many who want both—they say, if the SPD turns Green one day, then we can come together, but in the meantime let's keep our options open. So many divergent ideas about the way forward can destroy the party if each one insists only they are right.

Petra Kelly, born in 1947, is now a Green MP for Freising, Bavaria. She played a key role in founding the Green Party in 1978, and in 1979 was its leading candidate in the European elections. From 1980-82 she was one of three joint party chairs. Internationally, Kelly is the best-known radical Green. She is still associated with the fundamentalist wing of the German party, which was ousted from leadership amid much acrimony and scandal at the end of last year. But she has not taken sides in the current internal conflict, and could now be considered part of the 'third wing' seeking reconciliation between the warring Green factions.

Sabena Norton: Doesn't this suggest that the whole Green project might be flawed, that a 'rainbow coalition' made up of diverse interests and standpoints just doesn't work?

Petra Kelly: That's a possibility. But that would be very sad. If the Green Party breaks up, then we can never build such a coalition again. Let's imagine half the party says 'We can't stand it any more, let's join the SPD' and the other says 'We've had enough, we'll go back to our grassroots initiatives and little groups'—then the whole experiment of a radical parliamentary opposition will be finished.

Maybe you're right. Maybe these interests and strategies can't be reconciled. But then the big question is: what will happen in the federal elections in 1991? Will Oskar Lafontaine or Björn Engholm [hopefuls for the SPD candidacy] pick up our votes? If the Greens fall under five per cent, I don't think we'll be able to recover.

But I'd never say the Greens haven't got a future. Internationally they have a very big future—in Austria, in Ireland, in Australia, New Zealand or in the third world for example. But I can't guarantee that the German Green Party will stay. Sometimes, when I'm abroad, it's almost embarrassing to me, how much faith people have in the German Green Party. We get so much credit and people are so enthused about us that I often feel I have to tell them to be a little bit more sober.

Sabena Norton: Do you see any way to resolve your crisis?

PHOTO: WERNER SCHURING

'It feels odd when my colleagues in the parliamentary fraction complain "Oh God she's got another court case!" '

Petra Kelly: We've got to change the way we constitute our leadership. You can't have one wing in control, like it was up to now. We had a fundamentalist party leadership and a realo-controlled parliamentary fraction. That was a kind of balance. But obviously it doesn't work, because the party doesn't feel represented by the parliamentary wing and vice versa—and in the middle you get a whole lot of members who just don't understand what's going on and become very apathetic.

To be frank, we are experiencing a serious decline in membership. In my constituency, Freising, for example, we now have only five or six people. There used to be 70 or 80. I can give you another shocking statistic. In Nürnberg, which is still my party branch, we used to get nine or 10 per cent of the vote, including at the last federal elections. In the latest mayoral elections the Greens slumped to three per cent—and that in a local election where the SPD had a very poor candidate. Obviously that shows a big loss of confidence. Even with local issues, where we're usually pretty good, and with a female candidate, we slumped. That's pretty frightening.

Sabena Norton: So if you had the chance to start again with the Greens, what would you do differently?

Petra Kelly: One thing is, we could have saved ourselves a lot of trouble if we'd never introduced this idea of rotating MPs. I was always against it because you can't just hand over the work to new people after two years, if you've got a four-year parliamentary cycle. That really gave us a lot of trouble. But as you know, we've abandoned rotation in the meantime.

The other problem I see is that our programme, which I still consider correct and necessary, was not really absorbed by the membership. Take the question of non-violence. To me non-violence doesn't mean being passive or that you don't do anything dangerous. What it means is not to harm anyone. If that's understood, then you've got a clear philosophy which helps you organise better and more activities. What makes me sad is that many Greens say 'We're a non-violent party'—but if you ask, how many of them have still got court proceedings, how many are still involved in civil disobedience, you find it's fewer and fewer. It feels odd when my colleagues in the parliamentary fraction complain 'Oh God, she's got another court case!'. It's like it's become a nuisance that I still do these things.

Things have calmed down in a very negative way. We've stopped being unpredictable. That's very bad, because our job is to intervene in all sorts of situations and be unpredictable to the establishment. But now we have a situation where a Hans-Jochen Vogel [SPD leader] can say, 'I can talk with Otto Schily or Joschka Fischer [leading Green realos] because they're predictable'. We now have an internal division because our opponents can divide us into predictable and unpredictable, responsible and irresponsible, good or bad Greens. That's not right.

You can see the same problem with women's rights. First we had this enormous solidarity among women in the Green Party. Every one of them, from the farm women to the feminists, shared one goal: more women into politics and more

competence. Now we've got a division on the abortion question. This isn't new, but it's worse now than ever before. You've got women who say 'Abortion rights is our main concern, we must get the abortion laws abolished'. Then you get other women, who've got a moral problem with abortion, but who do want essentially the same thing: a self-determined future, good contraception and so on. So now the women have divided into mothers and feminists. It's very sad because now women are the majority in the parliamentary fraction—but we're divided into political wings.

Sabena Norton: I would say that shows that women in the Green Party have obvious political differences. Some are conservative, others regard abortion rights as a key issue. I don't see how these differences can be reconciled.

Petra Kelly: But there isn't really any substantial divergence. The dissension arises only because some women say, 'I want to fight for abortion', while others, rightly, argue 'OK—but I also want to fight for other things: more family planning clinics, more assistance for women with social problems and so on'. Then the other side says, 'No, I only want the abortion laws abolished'. That's an abstract, sterile dispute.

'We all say we want a third way between capitalism and state socialism. But this doesn't yet exist anywhere.'

Sabena Norton: It's difficult to think of any issue on which the Green Party still has a consensus. You seem divided on almost every one: Nato, nuclear power, violence, abortion, defence, to name just a few. What would you say were the really substantial questions that divide the different wings of the party?

Petra Kelly: One is the question of the state. Some say the state is all bad, others like Otto Schily have a very moderate view of the state. I'd say I'm in the middle. The state does a lot of negative things, but it also guarantees rights—otherwise we wouldn't be here in Bonn. We make use of these rights and I think we should learn to use them much better. For example I think our constitution isn't bad. It offers a lot of scope for resistance. But of course it's not enough to say 'We've got a nice democracy'—we must develop and improve it.

Another question is nuclear energy. Now, after the accident at Biblis became publicised, Joschka Fischer said we must get rid of nuclear power. Six months ago he still argued it would take 10 years to make the transition from nuclear to other energy sources. That really made me furious, because to me there was never any question that, if we got into office, we'd shut down the nuclear power stations more or less straight away. When Joschka said

PHOTO: GABY HART

that I thought, if this goes on, what am I doing here?

Another problem we have is economic policy. There is a lack of clarity here, because some argue strongly in favour of the market and consumption, while others say the market is bad. The problem is they can't show a 'third way'. We got stuck in our economic programme because we all say we want a third way between capitalism and state socialism. But this third form doesn't yet exist anywhere. There's no model we can cling to. So here too we've got a problem which is constantly used to fuel the faction fight in the party.

It didn't used to be like this at all. If you look back to our Saarbrücken Programme and the 1984 Europe Manifesto, we had a consensus: get out of nuclear energy, get out of Nato, for social defence. Then Otto Schily got up and said he wanted to stay in Nato. In fact he went round with me in the European elections and argued for getting out of Nato. But he's changed since he's moved towards the SPD. It shocks me how quickly this happened. During the Nato referendum campaign in Spain in 1986 I was there and argued for our anti-Nato position. When I got back I found my colleague Otto Schily arguing in favour of Spain's Nato membership in the Bundestag defence committee. I just threw my hands up. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a different party.

These things happen because the programme gets subordinated to tactics. If you want to come to an arrangement with the SPD and you want Lafontaine to accept us, then you make these kind of compromises. But I don't think this method will work. I think if there's going to be a new coalition, it will be an SPD-Free Democratic Party coalition. Nobody will come looking for the Greens.

Sabena Norton: The Green Party set out, as you formulated it in your book *Um Hoffnung kämpfen*, with the ambitious goal of changing the structures of society...

Petra Kelly: Maybe they've changed us...

Sabena Norton: Or maybe they've proved to be more resilient than you thought and not susceptible to your methods of trying to change things?

Petra Kelly: We always said, we want to be loyal to the grassroots. My impression is many of my colleagues don't see things this way anymore. They don't use the opportunities that being a parliamentary party gives you to help the movement. You can do a lot with the privilege of information, the connections, the money that you get for being in the Bundestag—like I do, for example, with my campaign for children with cancer. But many people don't use this machine the way I hoped it would be used. There's this attitude that this is parliament and that, out there, is the street. People don't see that we have to act together with the others outside. In the beginning, in 1979, when we got here, there was incredible enthusiasm. Now there's total apathy.

Sabena Norton: I suppose you'd regard it as a bit unkind if I said all that the Greens have achieved is that others have taken up your issues, particularly on the environment.

Petra Kelly: A bit unkind indeed and not true. Of course other parties have

The German TUC calls for the defence of jobs and the environment, and for 'humanised' technology

literally copied parts of our programme. But they don't implement them. They only do it cosmetically. On the other hand, if you take the example of the SPD adopting quotas for women at their party conference last year, these things can make you cry. The Greens were the first to introduce and argue for positive action for women. But now the SPD act as if they invented it. That hurts a bit.

But there are quite a few successes. Take agriculture, where a Mr Kiechle [Conservative minister of agriculture] has taken up almost all our criticisms of agricultural policy. Now he also says that the biological way is the only way forward, and that we need to protect the small farmer and so on. We did a lot of theoretical work on this issue and it paid off. If you look at the agricultural committee documents, you will see that many of our ideas—like creating smaller, more manageable units—have been adopted. Of course it's still a long struggle, but a lot of our ideas have been taken on board.

Secondly, we've taken up issues that no other parliament in the world has ever debated like we do here—sexuality, women's refuges, violence, disarmament for example. In a recent session of the defence committee even Egon Bahr [SPD defence spokesman] said that the Greens had introduced a whole new dimension to the debate, a moral dimension. Before we got here you never had debates about whether people had the right to kill or to become mass murderers. Human rights issues, which were never debated before—about Tibet, Sri Lanka, Chile—have been the subject of open discussion. We have information that nobody else—including the foreign ministry—has access to, because we have direct contact with ordinary people and with movements abroad. This has made a big difference. We've initiated hearings on topics like Mozambique, Afghanistan or Nicaragua. Such things are now debated in a much more informed and open way, for example in the SPD. What's sad is that, when the Greens act as pioneers and initiate such things, everyone soon forgets that it was us who started it.

So, if you ask, have the others taken over our ideas, I'd say they just copy them and use them. Take the SPD which has done a lot of publicity work to give the impression that it's now backing the peace movement. If you look at what's really going on, that's something quite different. The peace movement is watering down its politics, just so the SPD joins in. That makes me angry because if you have demands you mustn't water them down just to suit the SPD.

Sometimes I get frightened that, if we don't break apart, maybe we will wind up having two or three ministers in a Lafontaine or Engholm cabinet and that the Greens will have become a nice reformist FDP—a junior partner of the SPD which helps get the SPD in the saddle, but has no influence of its own. That's just as bad as if the party broke up.

Sabena Norton: To conclude, what's your response to the Karlsruhe conference?

Petra Kelly: A lot was destroyed there, particularly human, personal relations. The debate was incredibly aggressive. Someone even said, 'If I had a gun, I'd shoot you'. Of course you could say aren't we a wonderful open party, where things like that can be said in public. But a lot of friendships have broken down. People who worked together for years can't stand each other any more. In the end it was a war.

I was shocked by the debate on the European elections. It was extremely shallow. There was virtually no criticism of the EEC or the internal market. The emergence of Europe as a new superpower was barely touched on. And I was very disappointed by the candidates. Hardly any good, committed European specialists were prepared to run. It was not at all like 1979 or 1984, when everybody was dying for the chance. Now people are tired and apathetic because they're fed up with the struggle in the party. ●

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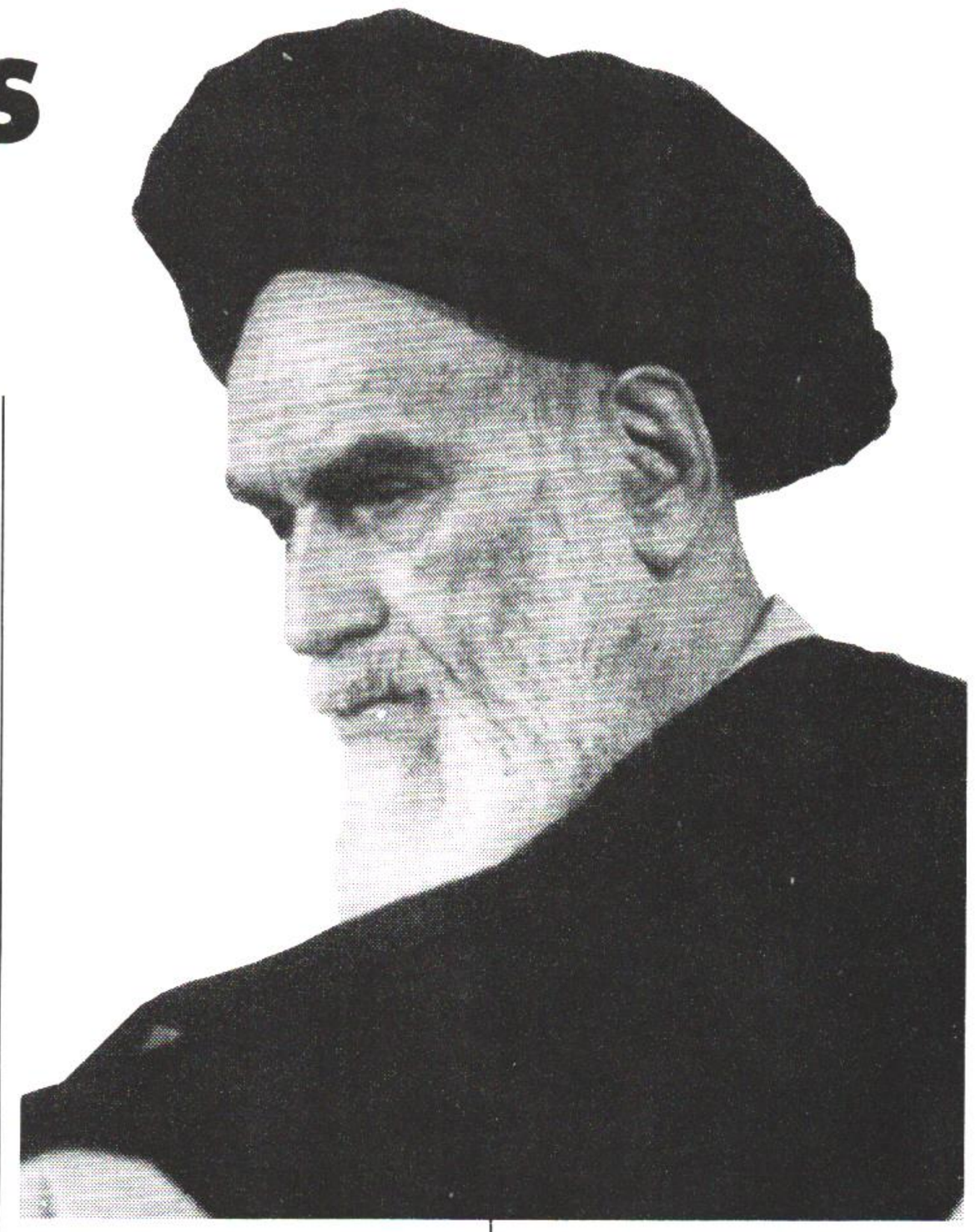


On 1 February 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini arrived at Tehran airport from Paris, thus ending his 14-year exile from Iran. The Shah, who first banished him, had himself been forced to flee the country a fortnight earlier, in the face of a popular revolt. Khomeini returned to assume leadership of the uprising against the corrupt, repressive and pro-Western regime. On 1 April, after a referendum, the Islamic Republic was declared.

For much of the next decade, the Khomeini regime was vilified in the West as a barbaric throwback to the dark ages, a sponsor of international terrorism, a murderous gang of 'mad mullahs'. Yet today Western rulers are doing their utmost to establish closer links with Khomeini's Iran, and the Iranians are playing ball. For those who took at face value the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, and Khomeini's declaration of an 'Islamic Revolution', this can make little sense. But a closer look at the Ayatollah's Iran reveals that things were never all that they seemed.

'Great Satan'

From 1979 radical Islam served as the instrument for stabilising and unifying Iran. At the time of the Shah's overthrow, millions marched in militant demonstrations against the Western stooge and his imperialist sponsors—primarily the USA. The clerics took control of the movement by translating popular anti-Western feeling into the language of Islam. In the early days of Khomeini's regime the mullahs, supported by much of the left, railed against the American 'Great Satan' and even against 'bloated capitalists' breaking the laws of the Koran.

Yet the radicalism of the Iranian regime did not go far beyond words. The difference between the Iranian mullahs and the conservative Islamic rulers of Saudi Arabia, for example, was not one of ideology. Nor was it a difference of economic systems; for all the talk of a new order, Iran remained a capitalist state. The primary difference was that Khomeini's regime had to deal with a mass movement which despised the Western powers that supported the Saudis and had backed the Shah's dictatorship.

Islamic fundamentalism was used to unite the country behind clerical rule, and to discipline the Iranian working class. Despite its pan-Islamic rhetoric, the clerics' ideology was essentially a form of Persian nationalism. The regime's attitude towards national minorities exposes this well. One of the first targets of Khomeini's repression was Iran's three million-strong Kurdish community.

When Iraq's attack on Iran began the Gulf War in September 1980, the mullahs mobilised a nationalist movement in the guise of an Islamic crusade. Khomeini militarised society, suppressed democratic rights and disciplined workers—all under the banners of a 'holy war' against Iraq. Many left wingers and oppositionists were arrested, jailed and executed. A draconian labour code outlawed strikes, gave employers a free hand to sack workers, and allowed wage cuts. In 1981-82 (the last years for which reliable figures are available), real wages fell by 12.3 and 7.4 per cent respectively. All foodstuffs except bread were rationed. Today, more than a quarter of the Iranian workforce is estimated to be unemployed. The attack on women's rights was central to the mullahs' use of Islam to regiment society. Women were forced back into the home, and ordered to wear the black robes and veil of the *chador*.

Bargain hunting

If promoting the cause of radical Islam suited the regime's need to stabilise Iranian capitalism, it also served a useful purpose in foreign policy. A cornerstone of the Islamic Republic has been its 'Neither East nor West' policy of assertive non-alignment. The mullahs sought to play this card to win friends in the 43-country Islamic Conference Organisation and beyond. Sponsoring radical Islamic movements abroad also gave Iran a useful bargaining counter with the West. The Irangate scandal, which exposed America's attempt to give Iran arms in return for help with freeing Western hostages, showed Tehran using its influence with radical Lebanese groups to increase its clout.

After a decade of Islamic rule, including almost eight years of war, Iran has changed dramatically. In the euphoria following the Shah's overthrow millions of Iranians aspired to achieve justice and freedom. But 10 years of austere and authoritarian rule has led to widespread demoralisation. The regime has used its Islamic crusade to isolate and crush opponents. Now that the situation has altered, the clerics have put their radicalism on ice. In June 1987 the Islamic Republican Party, political spearhead of the religious 'revolution', was effectively dissolved. Since Iran agreed to the ceasefire in the Gulf War last July, it has also sought to play down its reputation as a sponsor of international unrest. Signs of success for this policy could be detected last month. When American sources claimed an Iranian connection in the Lockerbie bombing, they accused dissident Revolutionary Guards, rather than the Khomeini government.

An important 'if'

The Khomeini regime now concentrates on stabilising the situation in post-war Iran by killing more Kurds and leftists, and even executing radical clerics of the old school. Iran looks more and more like just another reactionary third world state. It is unclear what will happen in Iran. But it is certain that the West was never worried about Islamic fundamentalism in itself. What the imperialists feared was the anti-American/French/British sentiments of the Iranian masses. If those have been tamed (and it remains an important 'if'), then Thatcher, Bush and the rest are content to see the clerical regime remain in Tehran.

During the years that the Western powers pursued their campaign against Iran, they were also giving immense political and military support to other Islamic states which toed their line, such as Saudi Arabia and General Zia's Pakistan. Western propagandists even depicted the Muslim fundamentalist rebels fighting the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan as the frontline forces in the global struggle for democracy. The West didn't demand that Iran should dump Islam; it sought only to bring this important Gulf state back into its own camp, and to prevent the radicalism of the Iranian masses spilling over into other unstable Middle Eastern countries.

No more 'mad mullahs'

The USA and its allies tried several tacks to achieve that end: from encouraging Iraq to invade in 1980, through courting moderate mullahs in the Irangate deal of 1986, to sending a mighty armada to blast Iranian targets and aid the Iraqi war effort in 1987-88. When the pressure helped to lever Iran into accepting a ceasefire on Western terms, the vitriolic campaign against the 'mad mullahs' came to an abrupt end; Iran is now repairing its relations with the West, and its London embassy is about to reopen. These developments have been hailed as a victory for peace and democracy. In fact they signal a temporary defeat for the anti-imperialism of the Iranian masses, which forced reactionary clerics to strike militant postures a decade ago.

Daniel Nassim

Why Thatcher has changed colour

The Greening of British politics

While the government and opposition parties go Green, the environment gets worse. Nigel Lewis investigates the contradiction

It's official: 'Green is the world's new political colour', says Britain's leading business magazine (*Economist*, 15 October 1988). The leaders of all Britain's major parties have undergone public conversions to the Green faith in recent years. Even Margaret Thatcher's government is now organising conferences on the environment and has sworn to tackle pollution.

Ecological arguments can now be heard from both sides in many debates. Thus opponents of nuclear energy argue that it poses a lethal danger to the environment, while the government promotes nuclear power on the grounds that it is better for the environment than using fossil fuels. The Tories are preparing the public for the price rises that will follow the privatisation of water by arguing that this is the cost of tackling high levels of water pollution.

The Green outlook has acquired the status of an incontrovertible truth. Like Christianity, nationalism or anti-communism the Green perspective is now 'respectable'—that is, it has the establishment's approval. Even business is going Green. While the Tory government voiced concern over the purity of the ozone layer, ICI announced plans to build at Runcorn a 'world-beating, ozone-benign' substitute for CFCs in refrigeration and air-conditioning units (*Private Eye*, 9 December 1988). ICI hopes to emulate its German and Japanese competitors which export 60 per cent of their anti-pollution products.

All talk

The authorities do not oblige capitalist converts to the Green faith to practise what they preach; thus the assault on the environment continues behind the scenes. Each scientific report indicates higher levels of pollution. Despite its self-professed commitment to the environment, ICI still dumps toxic metals in the River Mersey and the Irish Sea. Growing awareness of the dangers facing the environment has not been matched by action.

With so much claimed on behalf of Green issues and so little done, the real significance of ecology for British politics is confusing. To understand where the Green movement fits into broader political matters, it is useful to trace its evolution through three phases: from conservative beginnings, through a radical phase, to the present ambiguous respectability.

Green issues were traditionally associated with a circle of eminent citizens who began to organise at the end of the last century. In 1895 they launched the National Trust, and during the next three decades, conservationists set up various local and national associations to promote their interests.

Green Enoch?

Until the 1960s, conservationism was focused on small groups of concerned individuals, usually interested specialists and academics. Many were political conservatives and romantics, preoccupied with defending traditional lifestyles and values against modern society. These groups operated in a political environment where the establishment upheld rural life as the model for proper existence. In the British Conservative tradition, rural life is glorified as the cradle of civilisation, while urban living is looked down upon as a necessary evil.

As a political theme in the twentieth century, the protection of the environment is closely associated with the defence of old English values. Conservation has thus become an essential part of the vocabulary of British nationalism, and the defence of rural life is depicted as a prerequisite for protecting the nation against foreign influence. Enoch Powell's speeches in the sixties illustrated this intermingling of racism and the rural myth. Powell was continuing the tradition of British racism which evoked a picture of rural England, 'the real nation', being suffocated by urban cosmopolitanism. As one writer has noted, the culprits which carry the blame in this drama are the Americanisation of British cities, and the destructive land speculators, often Jewish, who supposedly threaten the vitality of English rural life (MJ Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, 1985, p107).

Although the anti-urban nationalist sentiments endure to this day, in the sixties ecological concerns assumed new forms as the problem of pollution and of other dangers to the environment begin to enter the public consciousness. The publication of such books as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 highlighted the extinction of many species of wildlife. Books and scientific reports on the destructive effects of modern pesticides such as DDT and dieldrin, and disasters like Aberfan in 1966, when a slagheap collapsed on to a playground full of Welsh schoolchildren, made a considerable public impact. The pollution of the sea around Cornwall by the stricken oil tanker *Torrey Canyon* in March 1968 provoked heated debate and a clamour for environmental protection.

After *Torrey Canyon* the environment became an issue of public concern. Ecology, for so long the concern of small groups of specialists, now developed a significant appeal to the middle classes and young people. This transformation was shaped by complex and often conflicting forces.

As a younger generation began to question the values of industrial capitalism, they took a growing interest in alternative lifestyles. The children of the sixties were less willing than their parents to put up with what was on offer from life under capitalism. In what now seems an incoherent search for meaning and new values, this generation was predisposed towards anti-consumerist and anti-technological ideas. Young people provided a ready audience for environmentalism.

Malignant growth

At the same time that youth radicalism was providing a base for environmentalism, influential figures in the British establishment were moving in the same direction. This was not simply a response to public pressure for action against pollution. The rethink in the upper ranks of British society was prompted by the the re-emergence of visible trends towards economic crisis in the late sixties. As their optimistic assumptions about lasting prosperity and endless economic growth were called into question, some capitalists began demanding a new direction. Now that systematic economic growth was no longer on, it was criticised for its impact on the environment.

The unmistakable signs of an impending recession sparked a crisis of ideas in the British establishment. Labour and Tory leaders alike were confronted by the uncomfortable fact that their policies lacked direction

RIGHT: Thatcher, favourite politician of unscrupulous profiteers, now claims the Conservatives are 'the true friends of the Earth'

PHOTO: GERARD LIVETT

and appeal. Both took up the cause of the environment to fashion an image of relevance.

The shift of emphasis was particularly striking in the case of Labour. At the 1963 Labour Party conference, new leader Harold Wilson described his vision of all-out technological advance:

'We are redefining and restating our socialism in terms of *the scientific revolution*....The Britain that is going to be forged in *the white heat* of this revolution will be no place for restrictive practices or outdated methods on either side of industry.'

In 1964, Labour was elected on Wilson's 'white heat' programme. But by the Labour conference of September 1969, Wilson was pontificating on the need to preserve the environment:

'First our environment: there is a twofold task. To remove the scars of nineteenth-century capitalism—the derelict mills, the spoilheaps, the back-to-back houses that still disfigure a large part of our land. At the same time, we have to make sure that the second industrial revolution through which we are now passing does not bequeath a similar legacy on future generations.'

Wilson made environmentalism a key theme of his speech, and proposed a new government department for the environment.

Edward Heath's Tories took up Wilson's proposals after their election victory in 1970. The Queen's Speech outlining Heath's objectives promised that the Tories would 'intensify the drive to remedy past damage to the environment, and will seek to safeguard the beauty of the British countryside and seashore for the future' (*Times*, 2 July 1970). In 1971 Peter Walker was appointed as the first head of the new department of the environment.

The environment was now an official capitalist concern. The right-wing quality press took up the issue. Publications like the *Spectator* joined the crusade while the *Times* editorialised on environmental issues in apocalyptic terms:

'Conservation, environment, pollution, the words toll like bells through public discourse these days...for 100 000 years, man has been bent on exploiting nature, winning immediate material satisfactions, and multiplying. Now he is told he must stop.'
(19 November 1970)

Looking back on this period, it is evident that the eloquent pleas for protecting the environment were straight PR exercises. When its economic problems forced the capitalist class to turn the screws on society, environmentalism was a harmless diversion from the bitter reality of class conflict. The energy

The Greens have appeared radical in the Thatcher years because of the right-wing shift by the Tories and the adoption of New Realism by the main opposition parties

crisis of the early seventies strengthened the argument. The clearer it became that their system could not deliver economic expansion, the more capitalist spokesmen argued that protecting Britain's environment must take precedence over short-term growth.

'Mutual respect'

The British establishment also looked benignly upon environmentalism because, at a time of industrial conflict and student unrest, it seemed a safe alternative to attract idealists and the disaffected. The *Times* endorsed as a model the campaign to clean up an oil slick off the San Francisco bay:

'One of the fascinating aspects of the operation has been the curious relationship forged between employees of the oil company and San Francisco hippie-style "street people" who have been helping as volunteers and for pay. From the extremes of the American social spectrum, the two groups have developed a surprising mutual respect.' (1 February 1971)

The ability of environmentalism to overcome social conflict made it especially appealing to those who ran society.

Walker, the environment minister, quickly saw the potential for integrating the environmental lobby. The Tories made scientists and environmentalists welcome and invited them on to parastatal committees. For their part, British environmentalists quickly became integrated and institutionalised, busying themselves with 'legal action, lobbying and representation' (J Porritt, *The Coming of the Greens,* 1988, p12).

The British establishment and business intervened to support the environmental lobby. A new newspaper, the *Ecologist,* was launched in July 1970; it was set up and financed not by Green radicals, but by right-wing media baron Sir James Goldsmith and his brother. The *Spectator* strongly supported this 'excellent and to be recommended magazine'. In this climate the Friends of the Earth (FoE) set up office in London. Three years later a group was formed which soon became the Ecology Party. Environmental campaigns had become a normal part of politics.

Green austerity

During the first half of the seventies, environmentalists operated as respectable pressure groups, often supported by establishment opinion. The Wilson government of 1974 continued the policy of dialogue with the environmental lobby. Energy minister Tony Benn provided support for investigating alternative sources of energy such as wave power, and embarked upon consultations with ecologists on the problems posed by replacing coal and oil with nuclear power. In turn, when the Labour government introduced harsh austerity measures under the guise of the national 'Save it' campaign, the Green lobby gave its support. This campaign, launched in December 1974, sought to restrict consumption of fuel in the home, and imposed steep price rises for coal and oil. It was an outrageous attack on people's living standards; but environmentalists interpreted it as a useful attack on the excessive use of finite resources.

The harmonious relationship between the ecologists and the British state only came under pressure when the nuclear power programme became government policy. For the Greens, nuclear power represented the extreme example of technology gone mad. From 1975-79, the FoE, anti-nuclear conservationists and peace groups united to campaign against the proposal to build a reactor at Windscale. Their focus was the Windscale inquiry which opened in 1977; marches of 20 000 could be called upon to support the environmentalists giving evidence to the inquiry.

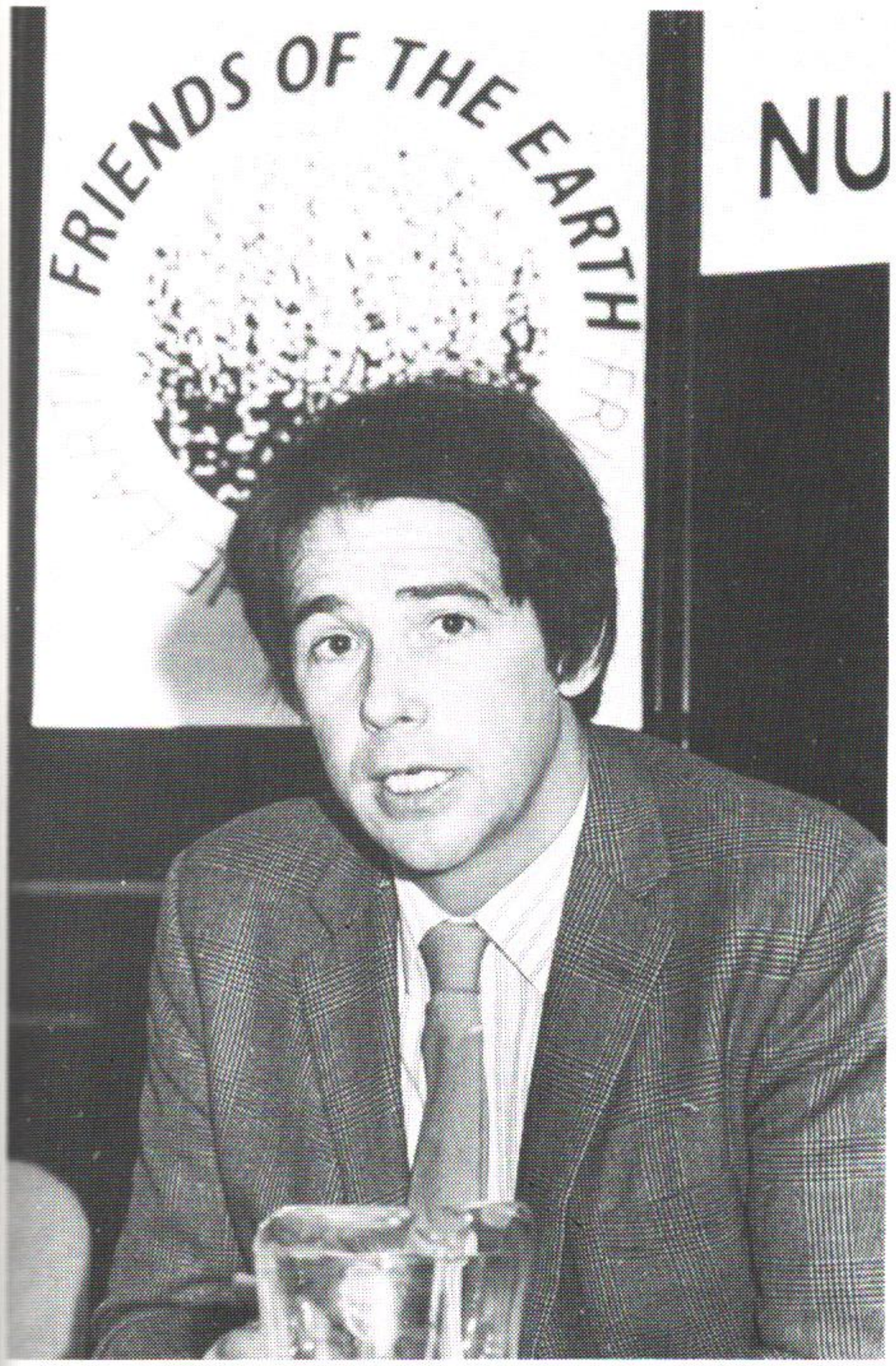
Rude shock

The publication of the Windscale report in March 1978 came as a rude shock to the environmental lobby. Despite all the arguments and the scientific evidence substantiating the risks involved in the project, the government-appointed team rejected all objections. Years of consultation had proved to be an empty PR exercise, and the environmentalist pretensions of the British establishment stood exposed. One study notes that Windscale brought an end to the first phase in the evolution of the Green movement: 'The exasperation of the protesters at the way their evidence was handled accelerated the radicalisation of opposition and strengthened the resort to direct action.' (S Cotgrave, *Cornucopia of Catastrophe,* 1982, p116)

As the establishment became more pro-nuclear there was less room for compromise with the environmentalists. The Thatcher government, elected in May 1979,

PHOTO: DON REED

The decay of Kinnock's Labour Party has allowed the Greens to take the radical ground



Jonathon Porritt, Green Party spokesman and now TV regular

PHOTO: PANDORA ANDERSON

was single-mindedly committed to nuclear power. The new breed of right-wing Tories and recently-elevated businessmen was not inclined to indulge the environmentalists. There was to be no more pretence of consultation and ecologists were dismissed as unhelpful eccentrics. In these circumstances the old-style lobbying gave way to more direct protests. With the advance of the peace movement and the growing activism of CND, environmental concerns acquired a large constituency among radicalised individuals.

Changed times

Green activists organised direct action around nuclear power and other issues. Greenpeace in particular acquired a reputation for imaginative campaigning. Its attempts to prevent the dumping of nuclear waste at sea in 1982, sending motorised dinghies on dangerous missions to harass the dumping ships in stormy seas, received widespread support. The growth of Green campaigning and direct action transformed the image of the environmentalists from a lobby to a radical movement. The conservative supporters of the Council for the Protection of Rural England would have felt ill at ease in the company of the women surrounding the nuclear missile base at Greenham Common.

Yet it is easy to misinterpret the radicalisation of the environmentalists in the early eighties. Above all, their radical image reflected the means used to protest. Direct action went beyond the bounds of conventional respectability. But while the means of the Greens became radicalised, their ends did not. In the eighties, the message of the environmentalists has retained the traditional themes of the past two decades.

Causing a storm

The Green message repeated the essence of the old concerns. But it appeared more radical because times had changed. Thatcher's Britain celebrated the anarchy of the market, the 'enterprise culture' and privatisation. Thatcher's central argument was that the market needed to be freed from the restrictions of state regulation. This campaign on behalf of private greed and enterprise clashed with calls for the protection of the environment. Green policies on acid rain, the depletion of the ozone layer by CFCs, the control of pesticides and of water pollution require enforceable legislation and state inspectorates to monitor and regulate hazards to the environment. At a time when all the political parties were adopting the religion of the free market, the Greens' demands for more state regulation could come across as radical by comparison.

The Greens have appeared radical in the Thatcher years, not so much because of their own programme, but because of the right-wing shift by the Tories and the adoption of New Realism by the opposition. In these circumstances many believe that the Greens have replaced the old left as the movement offering a radical alternative. Incidents such as the sinking of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* by the French secret service in 1985 have helped to strengthen the radical appeal of modern environmentalism; after the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing, Greenpeace's membership doubled to 100 000 in 18 months.

During the past few years the steady decline of Labourism and the traditional left has created a vacuum in British politics. Without a credible left, the Greens have been able to make important gains as the voice of radicalism. The Green Party, formed in 1984, attempts to present conventional ecological concerns in a form which can find a resonance among those discontented with the poverty of life under capitalism.

Changed lines

Yet no sooner had the Greens built a radical reputation than they found many of their ideas being subsumed once more into the mainstream of British politics. During the past year the Greens have become more respectable and less of a fringe movement. Several factors have influenced this development. In the era of Gorbachev and *glasnost*, the pro-nuclear lobby has become more defensive and CND more respectable. It is harder to dismiss those opposed to nuclear arms as naive traitors than it was five years ago. At the same time, the Chernobyl catastrophe has dented the enthusiasm of the British establishment for nuclear energy. The vast majority of the population now believes that nuclear power is dangerous. With this shift in public opinion, it is hard to dismiss Green arguments with the old strident rhetoric.

Colour of money

Back in 1984, Thatcher's 'enemy within' speech specifically included the environmentalists among the threats to the British way of life. Four years later she announced she was Green. The Tories now compete for the Green constituency along with Labour and the old Alliance parties. As ecology is readopted as an establishment concern, the media follow suit. The Greens are now treated as a serious political party, and given a special mention at by-elections despite the fact that they still receive an insignificant share of the vote. In September 1988 businessmen joined with environmentalists to organise Green Consumer Week; even the colour of the cash tills is changing.

Thatcher, Neil Kinnock and the rest have been motivated to turn Green by the exhaustion of their parties' political programmes. All of the major parliamentary parties now lack inspiration, dynamism and a coherent outlook on society. For Thatcher and Kinnock, turning Green is part of a broader attempt to repackage their second-hand products. Robbed of its radical clothes, the Green Party can only complain that the others don't mean what they say. With a rhetorical consensus on the need to protect the environment, it is unlikely that the Green Party can make very much headway on its own account.

Whale circus

The newfound respectability of Green politics is a mixed blessing for committed environmentalists. Public recognition has defused the issue and undermined the impact of Green politics as an alternative. For the time being the establishment is willing to indulge the Green activists. Greenpeace protesters are now portrayed as earnest if somewhat naughty youngsters, capable of doing some good in a misguided way. It is ironic that the more widely Green ideas become accepted, the less likely the radical ecology movement is to make an impact. While youthful activists protest against the world powers' destruction of the

Green gestures are good for business

PHOTO: PANDORA ANDERSON

environment, a million-dollar Reagan-Gorbachev circus presented as a mission to rescue three trapped whales steals all the headlines.

The Greens' new respectability does not necessarily mean that they are unimportant in British politics. In the short run they can benefit considerably from the decline of Labourism. Already many young people repelled by the boredom of Labourist politics are turning towards campaigns around the environment. Today it appears difficult to tackle social problems such as unemployment or racism, because the capitalist class is unwilling to make concessions; thus the attraction of campaigning to defend nature instead grows stronger.

It is important not to confuse the growing importance of ecology in British politics with any improvement in the environment. Words are not matched by action, and the Green movement has achieved little in its own terms. Whatever the intentions behind Green politics, the main consequence is to divert attention from the problems of society to those of nature, redirecting people's anger about the effects of capitalism towards issues which seem to stand above social divisions. In the world depicted by leading Greens there are no oppressors, exploiters, racists and reactionaries. There is only an abstract humanity threatened by the destruction of nature.

Jonathon Porritt's criticisms of the Labour Party are representative of the outlook of leading Greens:

'To go on setting class against class, and special interest against special interest, makes it impossible for the Labour Party to serve the general interest of humanity.' (*Times*, 8 June 1984)

Porritt's caricature of the Labour Party is a vain attempt to create a common ground between conflicting classes and interests. It evades the problem of the real world where everybody must take sides in the struggle for survival. Humanity is not threatened by an environment out of control, but by a social system that seeks profit regardless of the destructive consequences.

Because the Greens evade social reality and the necessity of taking sides in the conflict between classes, the cause of ecology can be used to justify the most reactionary ends. The rich can protect the beautiful green belt on the grounds of preserving the environment. The Tories promote the privatisation of the water industry with promises that private enterprise will invest to curb pollution. The British Army justifies its preparations for war with adverts claiming that the ranges where it stages mock tank battles are really nature reserves, so that it is 'defending the country in more ways than one'. Before too long arguments against immigration will no doubt be presented as calls for the protection of the English rural heritage.

Easy option

The politics of ecology represent the despair of the British intelligentsia with a society that they cannot imagine changing. The politics of despair prefer to fight for the lives of seals than to struggle against social injustice. Stirring the public conscience about dying wildlife appears easier than mobilising opinion on behalf of the unemployed, the poor or the victims of racist attacks.

The retreat from society to the environment is above all the responsibility of the British left. The left has proved irrelevant to the needs of the exploited and the oppressed. The crisis of left-wing politics provided much support for the Green issue. Radical Green novelist Fay Weldon has provided an eloquent testimony to this process:

'We used to think that Marxism or feminism held the answers to all our problems. We thought "If only we can get rid of racism, change capitalism and educate people, everything will be different". But now we know these hopes and aspirations left out something fundamental. They failed because they failed to take account of the Earth that we walk on. Without the Earth, we have nothing. Our Utopian concepts are flying out of the sky. So we have to rethink all our ideas in a new framework.'(Quoted in *The Coming of the Greens*, p130)

Weldon's escape from society to nature reflects the despair of a generation unable to face the world as it is. Instead of recognising that it failed to fight effectively against the evils of capitalism, left-wing intellectuals prefer to renounce the relevance of that fight. Political ineffectiveness is turned into a virtue. Lofty concerns about the Earth, rather than the grimy struggle to change society, are the preoccupation of a generation terrified by the prospect of being forced to take sides.

Best protection

The issue of the environment is the focus for political evasion; it is also a call for inaction. Green politics are incapable of practical application. It is not possible to protect the environment while most of the Earth is the private property of the capitalist class. Capitalism continually unleashes forces which threaten the environment. Government laws and regulations are helpless in the face of an economic system that only recognises the dictates of profit. Token measures and PR exercises are the most that ecologists can hope to achieve. For those concerned with the destruction of the environment, only the struggle against the capitalist system can bring durable results.

Although the Green intellectuals dismiss the relevance of class politics, the class struggle provides the one effective solution to the problem of the environment. It is above all the working class which faces the hazards of pollution and other environmental disasters. Since its inception, capitalism has destroyed workers' lives through its disregard for health and safety. So-called industrial diseases and urban pollution are everyday realities for most people. In the struggle to overcome exploitation at the hands of the capitalists, workers can provide the best protection against the wanton destruction of the environment. ●

From Hiroshima to Hinkley Point

Nuclear power–no thanks?

Scientific miracle or scourge of humanity? John Gibson puts nuclear power in perspective

PHOTO: SIMON NORFOLK

Nuclear power station at Hinkley Point, where the row over plans for another provides the latest focus for the Green lobby

Down on the Somerset coast another round is being fought out in the long-running battle about the siting of nuclear power stations—this time over the proposed Hinkley Point plant. On one side stands the Central Electricity Generating Board, proclaiming that nuclear power can be a safe source of energy. In its support the government has recently attempted to outflank the ecology lobby by arguing that nuclear power is less damaging to the environment than burning fossil fuels to produce energy. Many remain unconvinced. Ranged against the forces of the establishment are representatives of local farmers and residents, backed by the increasingly influential British Greens, who argue that nuclear power is both dear and dangerous.

Nuclear power provokes controversy and confusion. The unions are divided: those representing workers in the nuclear industry—the GMB and the AEU—are pro-nuclear; those tied to coal—especially the NUM—are firmly anti-nuclear. The Labour Party too faces both ways. Senior shadow cabinet member John Cunningham is MP for Sellafield, Britain's biggest nuclear site, and such a staunch supporter of nuclear power that he is dubbed 'Nuclear Jack' by its opponents. The Labour left is prominent in campaigns against nuclear power stations and resolutions calling for closure carry substantial support at party conferences.

What is nuclear power? Can it be safe? Is it economical? By looking at these questions more closely we can begin to cut through the emotional rhetoric and special pleading on both sides that tend to obscure the issues in the nuclear debate.

Nuclear technology is little more than half a century old. In 1932 the physicist James Chadwick completed the scientific picture of the atom, the basic building-block of matter, with his discovery of the neutron. The atom was now seen to consist of a central nucleus, containing a number of positively-charged protons, around which orbited an equal number of negatively-charged electrons; the nucleus also contained non-charged neutrons of identical weight to the protons. The number of protons determines the physical and chemical nature of the element. For example, hydrogen has one, iron 26, uranium 92.

In September 1933 Leo Szilard, an unemployed Hungarian physicist living in London, read a report of the new discovery and had a sudden flash of insight: 'It suddenly occurred to me that if we could find an element which is split by neutrons and which would emit two neutrons when it absorbs one neutron, such an element if assembled in sufficiently large mass could sustain a chain reaction.' (Quoted in R Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 1986, p28) Such a chain reaction would release energy—for good or ill—on a massive scale.

In 1938 Otto Frisch, a German scientist working in exile in the USA, followed up earlier nuclear research by Lise Meitner, Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann in Germany. He determined theoretically that uranium was an element which could behave in the manner suggested by Szilard. The large number of mutually repelling protons in its nucleus meant that it was highly unstable. The impact of a single neutron could split the nucleus into two smaller particles and, in the process, release two or three neutrons. The following year, Szilard, working with Enrico Fermi, another European émigré working in the USA, confirmed Frisch's hypothesis experimentally (see RH Stuewer, *Physics Today*, October 1985).

6 August 1945

Uranium exists in nature in two forms: with a nucleus containing 92 protons and either 143 neutrons (uranium-235) or 146 neutrons (uranium-238). In 1939 Niels Bohr found that uranium-235 was most readily fissile, but studies also revealed that natural uranium contained only 0.7 per cent uranium-235. However, in 1940 it was discovered that uranium-238 nuclei could absorb a neutron and become a newly-manufactured substance, plutonium, which was also susceptible to fission. Fermi further found that uranium-235 could be made more fissile if the bombarding neutrons were slowed down by the presence of some inert substance. In Fermi's first nuclear 'pile', assembled in Chicago in December 1942, graphite was used for this purpose.

For the American government, heavily engaged in both Europe and the Pacific in its war for world supremacy, the historic breakthroughs in nuclear science had a ready application—in making the most destructive weapons in human history. It ploughed $2 billion into 'the Manhattan project', building in the New Mexico desert a vast industrial complex, which soon employed 500 000 people, including most of the world's top scientists. Within three years they produced the first 'atom bombs'. On 6 August 1945 a small uranium-235 device was dropped on Hiroshima in Japan; three days later a plutonium bomb twice as powerful was dropped on Nagasaki. Some 240 000 people were killed immediately and a similar number died of radiation-induced illnesses over the next five years.

'This is the greatest thing in history' US president Harry Truman commented on the news about Hiroshima (*The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, p734). He was speaking to a group of sailors on board the *Augusta*, sailing back from Europe to the USA after the negotiations among the victorious allies at Potsdam following the defeat of Germany. The White House press release described the atom bomb as 'the greatest achievement of organised science in history' and threatened Japan with 'a rain of ruin from the air'. The Japanese government moved rapidly to surrender. When the scientists realised the genocidal consequences of their discoveries, Szilard 'felt terrible' and Frisch experienced 'unease, even nausea'.

In the post-war years, other world powers raced to match the USA's most murderous military technology. Taking advantage of espionage and its own considerable scientific resources, the Soviet Union rapidly caught up with the West: its first nuclear device was exploded in 1949. Britain's post-war Labour government secretly embarked on its nuclear programme in 1947, but it was not until 1952 that the first British bomb was operational. In the same period nuclear power began to be harnessed for the generation of electricity in projects which have subsequently remained closely linked to the production of nuclear warheads.

Inside a reactor

The generation of nuclear power has not changed in its fundamentals since the forties. A nuclear reactor has three essential components. It has a fissile substance—generally uranium or plutonium, elements which have the largest atoms and are hence the most unstable. The impact of neutrons on these elements provokes nuclear fission, the release of more neutrons, which impact on other atoms, producing a chain reaction. These neutrons hit the second component of the reactor, the moderator, which slows down the neutrons and hence increases the fission of other atoms. This moderator is usually made of graphite, water or some other liquid. The final component is the coolant, which may be a gas such as carbon dioxide or a liquid, such as water, or heavy water (water in which the hydrogen atom carries an extra neutron to become deuterium). The coolant is used to create steam, which drives turbines which transform heat energy into electricity.

While the theory of generating electricity from nuclear power is fairly straightforward, the practical application has proved more problematic. Because only a small percentage of the fissile substance—itself a rare element in short supply—can be used, a difficult and expensive recycling process is necessary. Much heat is lost and complex safeguards against explosions and leakages must be built into plants. Finally there is the problem of disposing of waste which remains radioactive for centuries. Engineering problems in the design and construction of nuclear power stations have contributed to chronic delays and escalating costs in all Western nuclear power programmes.

British excellence

The British nuclear programme has been a catalogue of planning failures. The early British reactors designed in the fifties were mainly concerned with producing plutonium for bomb construction; electricity was a by-product. These 'Magnox' plants—the first was opened by the Queen at Calder Hall in 1956—used a natural uranium core, a graphite moderator and air as a coolant. The name derived from the use of a magnesium alloy to contain the rods in the core. This system produced a good supply of plutonium, but only 30 per cent of the heat generated could be harnessed for electricity production. A further problem was that the reactors had to be shut down every few months so that the plutonium could be removed before it started to decay more rapidly than it was being produced (see WC Patterson, *Nuclear Power*, 1986). Meanwhile the USA developed a power station design using pressurised water rather than air as a coolant: under heavy US pressure most Western countries adopted the PWR system.

Successive British governments were so preoccupied with preserving the old Empire's notional nuclear independence that in the sixties they opted for the indigenously-developed advanced gas-cooled reactor instead of PWR. The AGR plant used an enriched uranium ore, rather than metallic uranium, as the fissile substance and carbon dioxide as a coolant. The core was sheathed in stainless steel rather than magnesium alloy. The first AGR plant was commissioned in 1965 but did not function until 1976. The AGR was an economic disaster: the design was rushed, repeatedly modified in the course of construction and costs rocketed as deadlines for completion receded. By 1973 electricity board chiefs wanted to scrap AGR plans and adopt the PWR design. However, in 1974 the Labour government insisted on one last gasp of independence and tried to imitate the Canadian 'Candu' system, which used heavy water as a coolant. Within five years Britain's steam-

generated heavy water reactor scheme had collapsed and the government had no alternative but to go for PWR.

In December 1979 Tory energy minister David Howell announced plans to build 10 PWR plants by 1992, based on the design of the US company Westinghouse. After the customary long delays, the first of these plants is now under construction at Sizewell in Suffolk, the second is the subject of the current inquiry at Hinkley Point, the next is planned for Wylfa in North Wales. At present Britain produces around 20 per cent of its electricity from 28 nuclear power stations.

It is important to note that no design has yet managed to produce electricity from nuclear power more cheaply than from coal—a point recently conceded by the electricity board. The rise in oil prices in the seventies gave a temporary boost to nuclear power in the West. Programmes have since stagnated as costs of oil and coal have stabilised and public concerns about safety have intensified. Every US nuclear power plant commissioned since 1975 has been cancelled. Sweden and Italy have announced plans to phase out their nuclear power stations.

Yet the major world powers (USA, Germany, Japan, France, Britain, Soviet Union) remain committed to nuclear power, and states aspiring to join the big league (South Africa, Israel, Brazil, China, India, Pakistan) are following their lead. They need plutonium for nuclear weapons and it makes sense to incorporate an electricity generating plant. This is why, despite the problems, civilian nuclear power is scheduled to increase over the next decade in Britain and globally. The number of nuclear power plants increased from 346 in 1984 to 416 at the end of 1987, in 34 countries. But is nuclear power safe?

By any objective assessment nuclear power is *potentially* safer and less environmentally damaging than existing methods of electricity generation

'Radioactive man'

Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed the world the awesome destructive capacity of nuclear fission, and the terrible long-term effects of radioactivity. While there can be no dispute about the evil of the military use of nuclear power, the question of whether it can be safely put to civilian use remains controversial. Nuclear accidents at Windscale in Cumbria in 1957, at Three Mile Island in the USA in 1979 and, most menacingly, at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union in 1986 have kept the question of nuclear safety at the centre of public debate.

Civil nuclear power is certainly a potential danger to workers engaged in the industry, to the wider public and to the environment. There are many documented accounts of workers whose lives have been imperilled by working in nuclear power stations. One recent book details the case of Stanley Higgins, who was exposed to a radiation leak at a British power plant and received a dose 20 000 times the safety limit (see J Cutler and R Edwards, *Britain's Nuclear Nightmare*, 1988). He was subsequently dubbed by his workmates 'radioactive man—the one who could set the alarm bells ringing by just standing next to them'. He died at the age of 50, five years after the accident, and his widow subsequently developed breast cancer. Clusters of cases of childhood leukaemia and other cancers in the vicinity of nuclear power stations have become a major cause of concern in Britain. The Chernobyl explosion not only killed workers in the plant, but devastated the local town and countryside and damaged agricultural production throughout northern Europe.

3500 years

How dangerous is nuclear power? In absolute terms this is difficult to determine, because there is a background level of radiation which people experience—from naturally-occurring radioactive materials, and from space. It is estimated that in Britain nuclear power adds 0.1 per cent to background radiation. In addition, while everybody recognises that large doses of radiation can kill by causing massive cell damage, and that lower doses can cause bone marrow suppression, damage to reproductive cells and induce cancers, there is no scientific consensus on what constitutes a safe level of radiation. Studies of survivors of Hiroshima/Nagasaki suggest that previously accepted minima may need to be lowered by a factor of five or 10. In 1987 the National Radiological Protection Board reduced the tolerable limit of exposure, but only by a factor of two to three.

The major risk of civil nuclear power is from accidents. According to the electricity board the chance of a repeat of Chernobyl in Britain is around one in 15m reactor years. These calculations include the chance of the core melting or catching fire (one in a million) and the chance of this leading to an explosion which releases radiation (one in 15). Most expert observers regard these odds as excessively optimistic; by these calculations none of the major accidents which have already happened should have occurred.

There are two basic objections to the electricity board figures. First, they take no account of the possibility of human error, which is extraordinary given the major role of this factor in past nuclear accidents. Second, the board's 'event tree' method, which starts from a possible error and calculates an ever multiplying number of options that could lead to the final catastrophe, presupposes that all the possible routes are known. But the Three Mile Island accident proceeded through a whole sequence of events that had never been foreseen.

Taking account of the experience of nuclear accidents and the known dangers of nuclear plants, anti-nuclear campaigners reckon that an accident rate of one in 100 000 reactor years is a more realistic estimate. If such an accident were to happen at Sizewell we should expect 44 immediate deaths (compared with 13 at Chernobyl) and 10 000 premature deaths from cancer. Given its present number of nuclear power stations, Britain should expect such a disaster about once in 3500 years.

The risks of nuclear power must be balanced against the dangers of burning fossil fuels to produce energy. Last year's Piper Alpha disaster confirmed that North Sea oil rigs could be as hazardous as coal mines. Coal extraction still kills 10 000 people a year worldwide in accidents, 50 in Britain alone. A further 500 die every year in Britain from pneumoconiosis contracted in mines. The mining, processing and burning of coal is notorious for the pollution it causes, from slag-heaps to smoke to acid rain. In the mining area of northern Bohemia in Czechoslovakia in 1980 infant mortality was 20 per cent and nearly two thirds of all teenagers suffered from some form of respiratory, digestive, skin or bone diseases (G Mackerron, 'Alternative energy', in L Mackay and M Thompson (eds), *Something in the Wind: Politics after Chernobyl*, 1988, p12). Burning fossil fuels is a major contributor to disease-inducing pollution, and to the greenhouse effect which is seriously affecting the world's climate. By any objective assessment nuclear power is *potentially* safer and less environmentally damaging than existing methods of electricity generation.

For many Greens opposition to nuclear power is part of their wider revulsion against modern technology: 'If nuclear power—representing science, industry, centralisation, control over nature and maleness—is at one extreme of the symbolic spectrum in energy, renewable energies are at the other extreme—representing decentralisation, rural life, harmony with nature and femaleness.' (*Something in the Wind*, p175) Opponents of nuclear power tend to promote irrational fears of scientific advance, and to cultivate a mystical and sentimental attitude to the past.

Our survey of nuclear power reveals that the problems lie not in the capacity of science to unleash energy from matter, but in the form of modern society which acts as a barrier to the constructive deployment of nuclear technology. Nuclear power should not be seen as an alternative to the fantasy of

windmills, but an alternative to the reality of the human and environmental destruction that results from burning fossil fuels.

The problem of nuclear power is that we live in a capitalist society for which its first and continuing major use is for making weapons to enhance the struggle for supremacy over the world. The development of civil nuclear power has been consistently subordinated to military and profit considerations from the first discovery of the potential of nuclear fission. As we have seen, this has had major consequences. From the start, resources have been devoted preferentially to the military rather than the civilian applications of nuclear power. Plant design has been determined more by the need to produce plutonium than by considerations of electricity generation. More seriously, questions of safety have had to take second place to strategic and commercial considerations. The Sizewell inquiry revealed that the original design had been rejected on the grounds of cost, and that a significantly less well-protected system was chosen because it was cheaper.

One of the most insidious consequences of military domination over nuclear power is that the whole industry has been surrounded by an obsessional secrecy and hostility to public inquiry. The Windscale fire of 1957 only became public knowledge 30 years later when the relevant Cabinet Minutes became available. Last October the government blocked a move by the European parliament which would have forced the disclosure of safety procedures at Sellafield. In the USA, which prides itself on 'open government', the results of research into the effects of radiation on workers at the Hanford nuclear plant were suppressed. The level of secrecy and security paranoia that surrounds the nuclear industry distorts and delays scientific progress and makes it very difficult for the public to make a balanced appraisal of the benefits and dangers of nuclear power. It makes people rightly sceptical of official claims that 'Chernobyl could not happen here' and suspicious of government attempts to justify nuclear plants on environmental grounds.

However, the narrow anti-nuclear prejudices of many Greens lead to an exaggeration of the dangers of nuclear power and an underestimation of the obstacles that the capitalist system puts in the way of a rational energy policy. A narrow focus on nuclear power can even lead to a casual attitude to the wider dangers of capitalist industry. In its evidence to the Sizewell inquiry Friends of the Earth shrugged off the continuing menace of a company like Union Carbide: 'Bhopal is over, and steps have been taken to stop it happening again.' (Martin Ince, *Sizewell B Under Pressure*, 1986, p27) After an explosion that killed 10 000 and disabled 100 000, this was a remarkable statement. It revealed the irrational side of the Greens' focus on nuclear power, an industry with a vastly superior safety record to that of chemicals. It also exposed the Greens' rather naive faith that capitalist firms will take effective safety measures.

The 'Green gauntlet' recently thrown down to the government by a coalition of Green groups, in response to the prime minister's declarations of concern about the environment, calls for a more cost-effective energy policy. But the 'cost-effectiveness' of any nuclear power programme in capitalist Britain will be assessed in terms of its contribution to nuclear weapons and in relation to the wider profitability of the economy. Only a government which is genuinely answerable to the majority of the people, running a system which puts need before profit, can decide whether nuclear power can be exploited safely and cost-effectively to meet our needs.

●

(Additional information from Manjit Singh)

Football fanzines...

WHEN SATURDAY COMES

Toby Banks kicks some ideas around with Andy Lyons, fanzine founder

There are now 80-odd football fanzines on sale at grounds all over Britain. Like the original punk fanzines, they are cheaply and irregularly produced by the fans themselves, reflecting that peculiar combination of love, loyalty, frustration and contempt that a lifelong relationship with a football club can inspire.

Titles range from the quirky *Lennie Lawrence* (one of three Charlton fanzines) and *Sing When We're Fishing* (Grimsby Town) to the ironic *And Smith Must Score!* (Brighton, who have not forgotten how Smith's last-minute miss cost them the 1983 FA Cup). The grander clubs sport self-confident titles like *Arsenal Echo Echo, Not the View* (Celtic), and *When Sunday Comes* (Liverpool—a reference to the demands of TV on the top clubs). Spare a thought for the editors of *Tired and Weary* (Birmingham City).

Booming unrest

A catalyst for this explosion was a speculative lob from Everton supporter Andy Lyons. In 1986 he xeroxed 250 copies of *When Saturday Comes*, written with a couple of friends: 'We felt there wasn't a magazine that reflected our attitude to football. Fans were not represented anywhere in the press. There were a few club magazines, sort of alternative programmes sold on coaches, but we didn't know much about them. We're not insiders, we're outside it all.' A plug in the *Guardian* soccer diary elicited 60 enquiries. Circulation is now 10 000 nationally.

The fanzine boom reflects grassroots unrest among football supporters. The massacre at the Heysel Stadium before the 1985 Liverpool v Juventus European Cup final brought the English game's crisis to a head. Politicians told football to 'put its house in order', and demanded tougher policing. Luton Town (run by a Tory MP) was praised for banning visiting fans; proposals to restrict supporters' overseas travel and impose a national membership card scheme soon followed. The hooliganism panic turned the fans into a political football. One response was the formation of the lobbying Football Supporters Association. Another was the growth of the fanzines.

The basic outlook of the FSA is shared by *When Saturday Comes*, and is a reaction to the malaise of British football. The secular trend of attendances is downwards, leaving many clubs close to bankruptcy. The dwindling bands of supporters pay too much to stand in grounds which too often resemble derelict aircraft hangars, knowing that any half-decent player will be snapped up by the big clubs. They are fenced in like cattle and treated as such by the police. Even those whose team aspires to Super League status have problems: Spurs fans have lost their beloved Shelf terrace to a row of expensive executive boxes.

When Saturday Comes sports a logo of a nineteenth-century player with the legend 'The People' on his shirt, which sets the magazine's tone. Football was never for the people, but it has been of the people. Those people who remain are now more alienated than ever from clubs run by accountants and property developers. Ordinary fans (a much-used expression in *When Saturday Comes*) have common grievances about their treatment, and the magazine articulates this point of view.

The hate factor

But Andy Lyons stresses that he is not trying to invoke a mythical brotherhood of friendly, decent footballing chaps. He agrees with Pat Crerand's view that hate is an important element of the game: 'There's nothing wrong with irrational bias—for example slagging off other clubs—especially if it's funny. That's how people talk about football. I hope we're not going to bland out or lose the belligerence of the magazine. People do go back to watch winning teams, and do extol the virtues of dirty players; nobody expects football to be played by angels.'

The irrational bias which *When Saturday Comes* upholds plays a big part in football culture. It is impossible to sustain a logical argument about a game with such a paradoxical appeal. Football fans do not choose the most comfortable ground, or the most skilful team of the day; they follow their team come what may. And they follow a code of honour: you abuse your team in the company of fellow-supporters and defend them against others, excusing or glorifying their dirty play, boring tactics, etc. If you've spent years suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fluffed passes and missed open goals, you take it personally. This is the closest thing to a 'family atmosphere' in football. *When Saturday Comes* captures the peculiar mix well, through contributions from bona fide fans.

Of course, football also provides fertile ground for nostalgia. The age of the *When Saturday Comes* editors ensures a bias towards the late sixties and early seventies, which is reproduced by the readership. Lyons is aware that this bias 'could be a problem in the future', and is keen to receive items from other age groups.

Stars on Saturday?

The seventies nostalgia is tempered by the recognition that this period was notorious for its regimented 'work-rate' obsession on the field, and for the invention of media 'experts' off it, with their appalling hair-dos and six-inch collars. The humour also contains a whimsical streak, surfacing in the reminiscenses of great own-goals or endearingly awful players. Perhaps the best example is The Bloke Behind Me, in which the ubiquitous Bloke's pearls of wisdom are fondly remembered from wet Saturdays past. Sometimes it's possible to detect a yearning for a cosier atmosphere than exists on today's terraces—the creation of another mythical golden age?

That said, *When Saturday Comes* does not suffer fools gladly, and is no old soldiers' newsletter. It contains perceptive features on the issues that dominate world football and on amateur, junior and women's football. It covers ID cards and membership schemes without the prejudices of the press box. It consistently pinpoints the problems facing the game, but, not surprisingly given the wider politics involved in something like the law and order debate, it is less sure of the solutions.

Lyons thinks that press hysteria about hooligans has contributed to falling attendances, but that the main cause is a general change in leisure habits. He also sees the lack of stars as a factor. Here is another argument that can't be resolved. As TV records football history, it becomes harder to create myths about better days gone by, but it doesn't stop people trying. Watching Pathe News films of Tom Finney dribbling past dustbins is less impressive than seeing John Barnes beat a highly-organised defence. Lyons does agree that real skill will always out, however 'negative' the overall level of the game. Football has recreated itself repeatedly, and will continue to do so.

For now, if you're one of those who put the George Best video in the Christmas best-sellers chart, or if you yearn for the days when 'Heysel' meant nothing more than a TV series written by Terry Venables, *When Saturday Comes* is for you.

When Saturday Comes, 50p monthly, 12 Sutton Row (Third Floor), London W1V 5FH.

PHOTO: PANDORA ANDERSON

...And football fans

SHAME ABOUT THE STATISTICS

Alan Harding nutmegs the government's latest hooliganism report

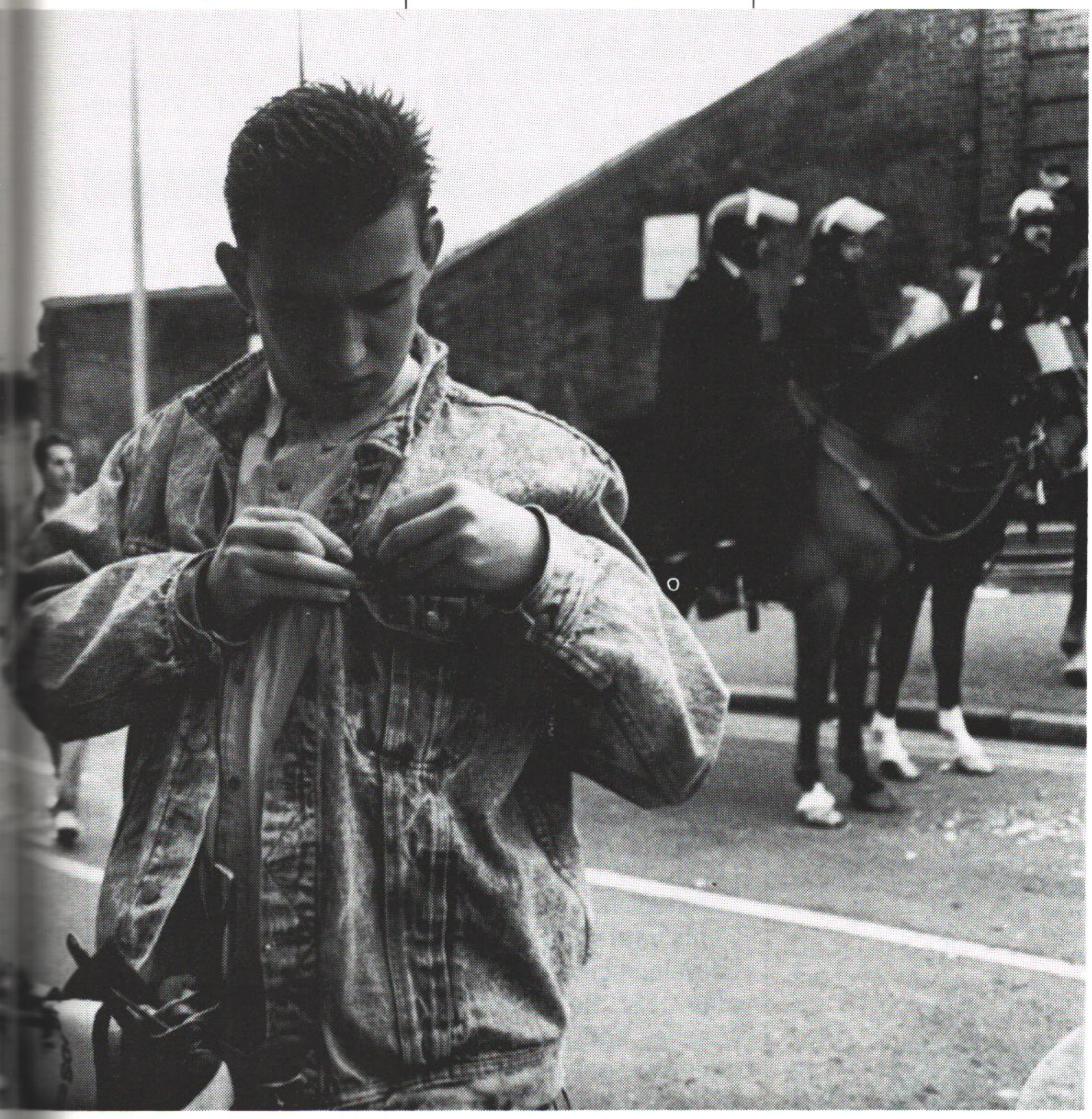
Sports minister Colin Moynihan has published the 'league table of shame', a record of arrests at football matches last season compiled by the Association of Chief Police Officers, to justify his plan to impose a national membership card scheme on Britain's football clubs. The statistics, however, give the lie to Moynihan's claim that hordes of football hooligans are threatening all that the old Oxford rowing cox holds dear.

Last season 8 065 103 people attended English first division games (the report excludes Scottish matches). Arrests totalled 2216; about one in 4000. Moynihan's data gives no details of what they were arrested for, or how many were charged, let alone convicted. This rate of arrests is lower than for many public events or a Saturday night anywhere. On this evidence, you could even conclude that football engenders tolerance. On New Year's Eve in Falmouth, Devon, 200 youths fought police and 11 were arrested. At the nearest league ground, Plymouth Argyle, police arrested 29 of 226 152 people who watched last season's games.

Scarborough unfair

One of last season's more notorious hooligan incidents came on the opening day, when Wolves went to Scarborough for the Yorkshire club's debut league match. As a consequence of that one brawl, Scarborough top the fourth division table of shame. With 145 arrests from among a season's attendance of only 70 504, Moynihan's figures suggest we have found the hooligan capital of Britain. The fracas occurred in mid-August, when thousands of youths from around the country were in the holiday town, alongside Wolves fans who make up the biggest away following in the lower divisions. The inexperienced Scarborough officials and local police proved unable to cope. But the scale of arrests at the match still didn't rival any bank holiday toll in a popular seaside resort. Will the Tories' next move be to make us all carry ID cards to gain access to the beach each summer season?

The big clubs, some with big, bad reputations like Manchester United's 'Red Army', hardly figure in the table. At Old Trafford there were 783 099 attenders and 38 arrests. A second-rank team like Chelsea were first division runners-up with 271 arrests from among 408 538. It would be easy to put this down to the stereotypical Chelsea supporter or the frustration caused by watching their team, but that's just my prejudice. Chelsea fans have been most intensively targeted by the media and police (remember the failed attempt to frame a dozen last year?). The one significant fight there last season followed the match against Middlesbrough which relegated Chelsea, when gates were mysteriously left open allowing home fans to charge across the pitch, and the police waited until the trouble was well under way before moving in. This special attention is sufficient to explain the extra 100 arrests that took Chelsea from the middle of the shame table into contention for the championship.



Luton's law

Arrest levels elsewhere can also be explained by local policing strategy. Coventry, an otherwise unexceptional and reputedly friendly club, are fourth in the first division table with an arrests ratio of 194:350 164. The explanation may well be connected to the fact that the centre of Coventry is policed with unparalleled arrogance and authority; video cameras and systematic harassment have created a 'no-go' area for local youth and left-wing paper sellers. At the other end of the scale are Colchester from the fourth division, with no arrests. But then only 40 607 turned up at Colchester all season, and the rowdiest ones were probably off-duty military personnel, with whom the average Essex plod feels disinclined to mix it.

Next to Colchester comes first division Luton Town. With one arrest Luton is the apple of Moynihan's eye, the pioneer of a ban on away supporters and champion of law and order. But attendances are down by 35 per cent and the club is losing money and friends fast. Strict policing

PHOTO: DON REED

and security screening have won Luton official praise, but ruined things for many fans.

This is the message of the table of shame. Moynihan is not upset about any loss of Corinthian values; he led a pitch invasion when the British hockey team won Olympic gold. His massaged statistics are meant to lend credibility to the Tories' perfect little moral panic about football hooliganism, which they have used to excuse the introduction of new methods of social control. They have chosen the subject of their policing experiment well. Who likes a football hooligan? Who is going to stick up for foul-mouthed racist scum? No chance.

It's a perfect little panic because the huge popular interest and TV coverage keep the issue in the public eye. It's perfect because winning public acceptance of the need for ID cards on the turnstiles is the first step towards legitimising their use throughout society. It's perfect because the paraphernalia and techniques of repression introduced and accepted in relation to hooliganism—from mass dawn raids to surveillance 'hoolivans'—are now on hand to deal with the state's political opponents.

The average football fan is no working class hero, but neither should we be taken in by the government's black propaganda. The arrests are relatively few, and most are for drinking or minor offences against police and other supporters. There's nothing new about frustrated young blokes taking it out on each other from time to time. What's new is the Tories' attempt to inflate this longstanding and unexceptional feature of the violent society they run, and to exploit it for cynical political purposes.

The gay scene today

OUT FOR SEX AND LAUGHS

Don Milligan refuses to blame apathetic 'scene-queens' for the lack of a lesbian and gay movement

The gay scene: a labyrinth of clubs, one-nighters, piano bars, drag shows, and all-round, all-year *bonhomie*. By and large male territory, the gay scene is extensive. More than 400 pubs, bars and clubs cater exclusively for homosexuals in Britain, more than 60 regular weekly or monthly one-nighters for gays are organised at otherwise straight venues, and there are dozens of hotels, health clubs, travel firms, restaurants, theatre companies, chatlines, dating agencies and student societies. Concentrated in London and Manchester, the scene is a going concern in half a dozen other conurbations and all big towns have a gay bar of some sort.

To most people the gay scene is the object of rumour, known about through friends of friends. Direct experience is restricted to 'sightseeing' or gained incidentally by those attracted by the late licences or the sophisticated, fun-loving crowd. News about homosexuals, or more politically, 'the gay question', filters through the outrage of popular newspapers or the prism of left-wing concern. For an object of so much angst, the scene remains blithely inarticulate, apparently unable or unwilling to give an account of itself.

Private party

In response to pressure every gay organisation must now carry the prefix 'lesbian and...'. This is insisted upon whether women are being addressed or involved or not. However, nobody has ever been able to make a case for talking about the 'lesbian and gay *scene*'. Reality is more powerful than word games. The scene is a private world of homosexual men that small shoals of lesbians circle as a threatening presence.

More likely to be unemployed or low paid, much more likely to be saddled with kids than gay men, lesbians, merely by their presence, unnerve the boys. Alienated by the partying glitz, lesbians thwart the carefully contrived sense of well-being. They are the poor relations, of little interest to hard-pressed proprietors. Here and there a special, a women-only event, can up the take on a quiet Monday night, but catering for women will not give a good or quick return on £250 000 worth of lights, carpets and club furnishings. The squeeze mounted by bank managers and breweries converges with the prejudices of businessmen who in turn rely on their customers' desire for entertainment; the scene demands a convivial ambience unsullied by poverty or oppression or struggle.

Night after night, defying all appeals for good taste, the drag artistes pantomime, entrancing thousands of gay men with a confection of bathos and sexual vulgarity. Without the lineage of Punchinello, the art of mime or the desire to revive vaudeville the drag queens press on, expressing the absurdity of the social position of homosexual men. Denounced on all sides as 'sexist' and—worse—'tacky', Adrella, Lily Savage and The Trollettes flaunt the defiance necessary for the survival of their audience.

Star-gazing

More explicitly tactile and erotic, leather bars attract great crowds of men trussed up in webbing of black straps cunningly held together by cockrings. Chains, boots and peaked caps, a jumble of sartorial motifs from the Third Reich, the San Francisco PD and fifties bikers at the Ace Café. Refusing to be done down by radical criticism or feminist fury the S&M lads continue tc camp it up with baby oil and whips. Whether an effeminate 'nancy' or a ludicrously stern clone, aloof behind moustache and lumberjack shirt, gay men on the scene are out for entertainment, sex and companionship.

The left often identifies this escapist, introspective 'scene consciousness' as the barrier to building an effective campaign for homosexual liberation. By shifting the blame like this, the left forfeits the right to lead 'out' homosexuals.

Even in the great homosexual demonstrations against Clause 28 last year the relationship between the 'leadership' and the crowd was strikingly tenuous. The organising committees drew their personnel from the Labour Party apparatus, the direct or indirect employees of Labour councils, the bureaucracy of the National Union of Students and radical left groups. Aware of their inability to lead anything they hit upon the idea of hiding behind television and stage personalities; stars that had won the admiration of the gay scene, both by their portrayal of homosexual characters in *EastEnders* and *Brookside* and by their tireless commitment to Aids charity work.

However, one year on, nothing remains of the huge campaign. The organisers are back in their committee rooms, the popular personalities are out fund-raising for people with Aids and HIV infection, the crowd are back on the scene. Yet last October 98 gay men were arrested in four weeks for gross indecency at one public toilet in Harrow. All are pleading guilty. Vincent Beasley of the gay London police monitoring group commented: 'There is nothing unusual about the arrests except the particularly polite way they were dealt with, and the numbers.' Policemen being polite is probably not a growing trend but the arrests are: arrests for gross indecency and 'infringement of public park by-laws' in London rose from 184 in 1986 to around 600 by the end of 1988.

In November two young men, Gordon Mack and Christopher Hayes, were fined a total of £170 at Bow Street for kissing. Whether it is kissing, cruising a public park or simply running the gauntlet of 'queer-bashers' that hang around known gay spots, the lives of gay men are getting decidedly riskier. Repression is growing apace, yet the lesbian and gay movement seems at a loss. Its organisers are now almost as discredited as the NUS officials or Labour councils. The media figures can attract the crowd and win its confidence, but they cannot sustain a struggle for equality without either the organisational infrastructure of a real campaign or any coherent political strategy.

Our problem

No doubt the moral guardians of the left will continue to chastise those 'empty-headed', 'sexist', 'good-time boys' on the gay scene for only being out for sex and laughs. But why should 'scene queens' stick their necks out to follow wheeler-dealers who recycle popular aspirations for equal rights into a litter of Labour Party resolutions and begging letters to the European court? The gay scene is no more and no less reactionary than any other social milieu. The working class men who make up the bulk of the scene's clientele are generally no more sexist or apathetic than any other group of British people. They are no more progressive either. Their 'apathy' is the product of a wise refusal to be drawn into struggle without an adequate strategy or some prospect of success. That is first and foremost our problem, not theirs.

PHOTO: DAVID ROURKE

The three-minute culture

TABLOID TV?

Is fast TV bad TV? John Fitzpatrick talked to two top programme makers about the trend started by *Network 7*

PHOTO: CHANNEL FOUR

This month Rupert Murdoch's Sky Television will bring, courtesy of satellite Astra, six new channels to Britain. You can have Derek Jameson on the box every day. Soon Robert Maxwell will join the bidding at the auction of ITV regional franchises. It is hardly surprising that many people fear for the future quality of our television. Some think standards have already suffered, and point the finger at breakfast TV, 'youth' programmes and developments in current affairs.

One of the most common criticisms of the late *Network 7*, 'the world in two hours' youth programme, was that it patronised its 16-24 year old target audience by not expecting them to concentrate for more than a few minutes or even seconds at a time. Worse still, they loved it. The current BBC 2 series *3 Minute Culture* with Michael Ignatieff is examining the wider trend of which this was one alarming example. I always thought there was something rather blimpish about the complaint myself. Zappy as it was, *Network 7* often gave more serious items six minutes each. It should take you only about three minutes to read this article, and I'm assured that this is a quality magazine.

Crawling astons

What's more, while reading it you may well break off to answer the phone, change trains or flick back to the editorial or forward to the letters. This is how many people, and not just 'youth', watch television—chatting to a friend, making a cup of tea or just hopping channels. They may be quite capable of sitting at a desk for a day studying international exchange rates, or even of watching an hour-long *Panorama* interview with Margaret Thatcher, but at other times all they want from the telly is a random bombardment of interesting aspects of their culture—pop, fashion, trivia, sport, cinema, current affairs. They may even be capable of reading the 'crawling astons' (the band of printed info which flows across the bottom of the screen), listening to the music/interview, marvelling at the fancy 'paintbox' or computer graphics, watching the main image and chewing gum, all at the same time.

Granted, all this might be a bit of a shock for those brought up on 405 black and white lines. But the idea that the chattering classes watch *Newsnight* while everybody else watches *Dallas* or *Def II* takes a further knock in a new study, *Television and its Audience*, by Patrick Barwise and Andrew Ehrenberg. The authors find that the 'better off and/or more educated groups watch a *little* less television than the rest, in Britain 23 hours per week compared with 27 hours for all adults', and that 'all tend to spend *much the same* proportion of their viewing time on light entertainment (about 15 per cent), sport (about nine per cent), news (nine per cent), etc'. (My emphasis.)

The undesirables

While it would be a mistake to think that the short and the sharp is necessarily the low-brow and the lightweight, or that it should automatically be scorned even if it is, it would also be wrong to ignore the way that a snappier format can encourage some of the undesirable aspects of tabloid journalism. Of course the content must always answer for itself, but the context, especially if it is fast, flippant and frivolous, can also exert a strong influence on the end product.

Two notorious *Network 7* pieces, an interview with American prisoners on death row and an item in which a young lesbian 'came out' live on air, suffered badly from both content and context. They came over as voyeuristic and exploitative rather than calculated to add to the sum of human knowledge. This is the sort of approach that some fear could now become standard in current affairs coverage.

'That wasn't something I wanted to encourage', says Steve Garrett, commissioning editor for youth programmes at Channel 4, who inherited *Network 7* when he moved into the job last year. 'In future I'm not in favour of that kind of trivialising or sensationalism.'

Think again

Garrett believes that youth TV has had a beneficial effect on the mainstream: 'Programmes like *Network 7*, which was the first of the so-called tabloid programmes, made people think about the process of making programmes over the last 20 years or so. Instead of making it in the same old way, people now think "Can we make it in a different way? Are the existing conventions the most helpful way of making programmes?".'

He thinks that current affairs programmes, such as BBC's *On the Record*, have learnt positive things from youth television: 'They have been watching *Network 7*, no question about it, and it does show, but a few style ideas make the thing more accessible and watchable and that's all to the good.' On the debit side he thinks that there has been some pointless copying going on. 'I'm looking forward to the BBC's *Eyewitness* with interest. If it ends up being *Network 7* for adults that will be a shame, there are some bright people working on it.'

Get some in

He is inclined to look elsewhere for any impending decline in standards: 'The tabloid content of factual programmes has not necessarily been inspired by youth programmes. The general trend of the mainstream is towards increasing popularity. People in TV are more scared than they were about viewing figures, particularly on ITV. There really is pressure from the advertisers to get the viewers in.'

For his own part Garrett remains excited about the possibilities of the 'youth' genre. 'Channel 4 was charged with catering for minorities who were not otherwise being catered for and they rather cleverly came up with young people.' And now, 'youth is the only area where real experimentation is actively encouraged'. Interesting isn't it, at a time when minorities like homosexuals are being denied exposure, that such a safe sort of minority as youth should be so enthusiastically promoted.

'The big one'

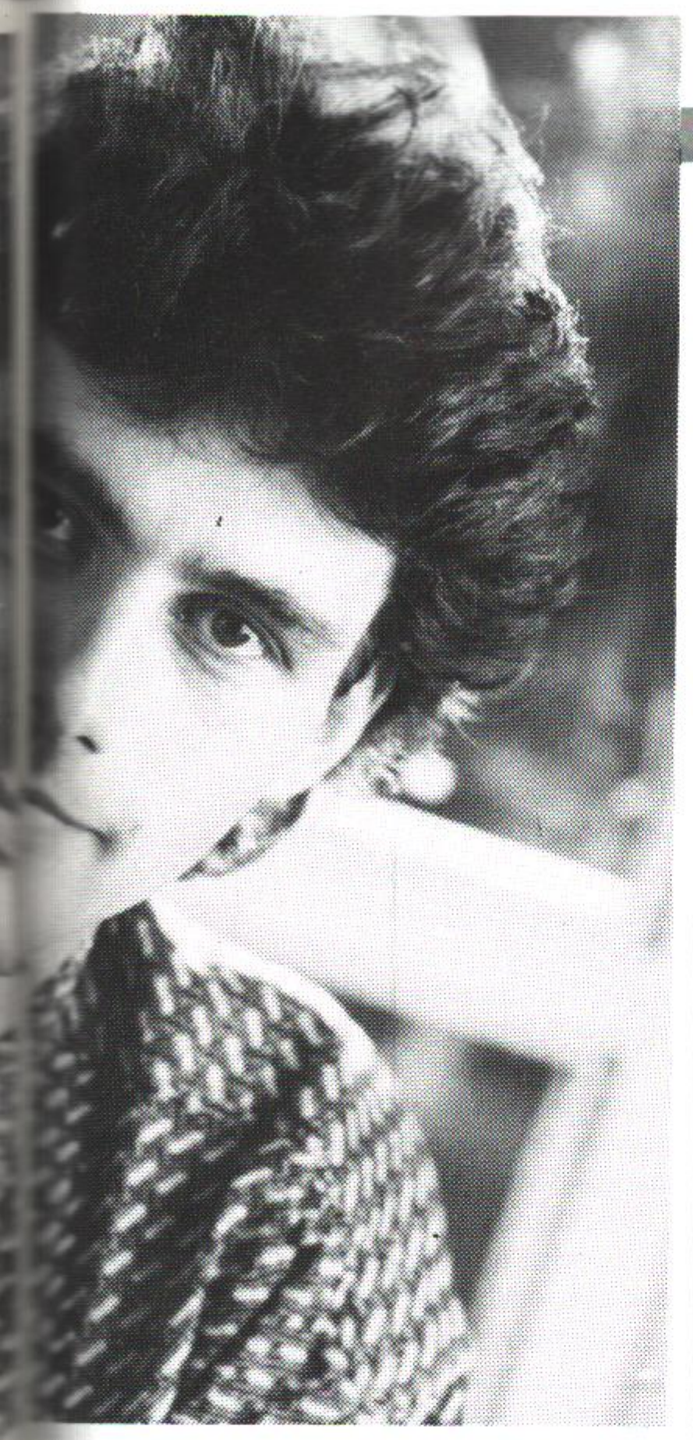
The first of the programmes commissioned by Garrett, *Big World Café*, starts this month. It will be a 'non-chart based music programme, not endlessly responsive to the Top 40, more taste-forming than reactive. It will tap the energy on the dancefloor, on pirate radio and from around the world'.

The future holds even greater treats in store: 'The big one is going to be a one and a half hour youth arts programme starting early in the summer, looking at the whole world of popular culture—music, dance, theatre, books, fashion, style. Arts programmes are missing a whole group of people who actually keep the arts alive in this country.' Again, the emphasis for Garrett will be on breaking new ground both in terms of the subject matter, and how it is handled. He thinks television has been very slow in picking up on what is happening. 'We will be setting our own agenda' he says, rather than catching up on trends set elsewhere. He doesn't even know yet exactly how to categorise the show: 'It will not be a current affairs show, nor a sports show, but apart from that anything goes.'

No cold showers

One of the team who worked on *Network 7* is Simon Shaps. He is now the editor of *Eyewitness*, which started on London Weekend Television in January, and he is determined that this current affairs programme will be different from the heavyweight tradition, typified by *Weekend World* which it replaces in the Sunday lunchtime slot. 'The whole ethos of *Eyewitness* is that it is popular and populist and is trying to identify a range of stories that an audience will actually turn on and watch, rather than what I call the "cold shower" version of current affairs, which is not terribly appetising but it's good for you. The title *Eyewitness* defines what I hope will be one aspect of the programme, which is that it will be quite close to events. The role of the reporter who is observing and reporting will not be detached and removed and anonymous, which is how reporters generally are and have been for 10, 15 or even 20 years.'

Eyewitness is a 50-minute pro-



Steve Garrett: 'People in TV are more scared than they were about viewing figures'

gramme, with three or four items each time. Shaps does not think 'tabloid' is appropriate to describe it. 'Tabloid is too vague a term covering a multitude of, not necessarily sins but, different practices. Some tabloid is good, some isn't. I'm talking about popular journalism. I don't think that everything that is short is sensational or trivial. And, equally, everything that is long is not necessarily immune from that criticism. It is absolutely critical to what we're doing that one can be more economical and pacy in terms of writing and construction of sequences, and in a sense be more ruthless about what it is about any particular phenomenon that you're choosing to depict. Pace is the critical thing I learned from *Network 7*. You can convey a lot of information quite quickly. Some of the conventional grammar of current affairs television isn't calculated to provide the maximum of information or interest. In an hour-long programme there is a lot of padding.'

Shaps warmed to this theme: 'It may be that you can tell in 10 minutes much more clearly something that other people might take an hour to tell. What you are doing is stripping away to the essentials of what the audience wants to know, and needs to know to understand, rather than the kinds of constraints of an hour-long format. I want to cover more rather than less. In 50 minutes we can cover a number of different topics without sacrificing intelligence or information.' This sounds fair enough, but it does not bode well that Shaps stoutly defends the two *Network 7* interviews referred to above against charges of sensationalising and trivialising. I too will be watching *Eyewitness* with interest.

Steve Garrett has the last word: 'I think people are being a little over-anxious about the future. We have a stronger tradition of public service broadcasting than anybody else has ever had. Even in an unfettered marketplace quality television will go on being made and watched, because people are used to it. Channel 4 has demonstrated that there's an audience that advertisers want for really quite difficult quality programming. As long as advertisers want it, which they do because they want the ABs, I'm actually quite optimistic.'

Big World Café, Channel 4, 11.15pm Thursdays from 16 February.
Eyewitness, LWT, 1.10pm Sundays.
3 Minute Culture, BBC 2, 9.40pm Sundays.
P Barwise and A Ehrenberg, *Television and its Audience*, Sage Publications, 1988, £7.95.

Gianni Agnelli

A TYRANT FOR OUR TIMES

If we live in a classless society, wonders Sheona York, why does one man own Italy?

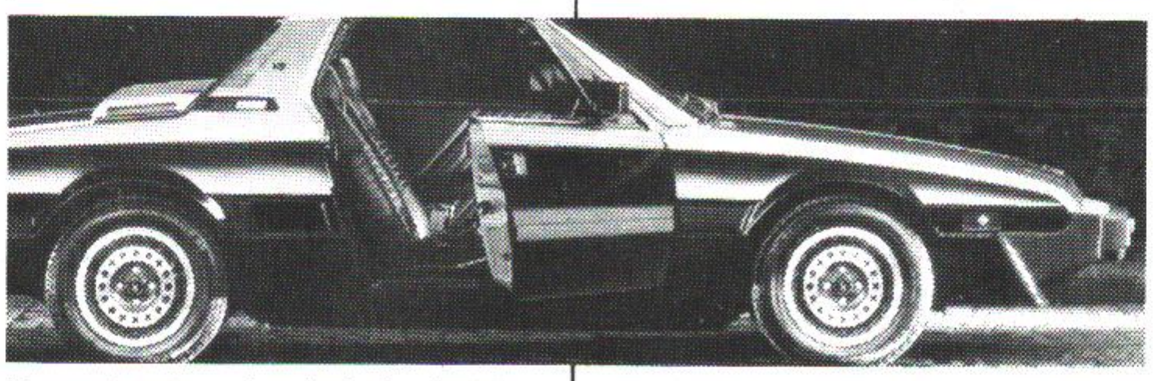
We are told that the working class no longer exists; so I suppose the ruling class has withered away too. The wicked boss, the vile expropriator, is now mocked as a caricature, a Victorian nightmare who has been superseded by vaguely-perceived multinationals in which the workers probably have shares.

True, the powerful are often more discreet these days. When *Money* listed the 200 richest Britons last year you probably hadn't heard of very many of them. But they're there, as surely as the millions who have to work for the latest figures to hand show that 89 per cent of share values and 84 per cent of land in Britain are owned by 10 per cent of the population.

Mr 40 per cent

Italy is the country currently jockeying with Britain for the number five position in the table of the world's richest nations. In a new book by Alan Friedman, Milan correspondent of the *Financial Times*, we get a most telling example of individual wealth and power in the late twentieth century.

The 'uncrowned king of Italy' is Gianni Agnelli. His family owns 40 per cent of Fiat, Europe's biggest volume car producer. Nor is Fiat just about cars. It is the second



biggest enterprise in Italy (behind the state-owned holding company IRI). Through 659 subsidiaries and 190 associate companies in 50 countries. Fiat's $30 billion annual revenues come from aerospace, banking, cement, Cinzano, helicopters, insurance, motorways, publishing, rockets, steel, TV, textiles, tourism and much else.

Agnelli controls two thirds of the Italian press (including *La Stampa* and *Correire della Sera*), and 13 per cent of the country's advertising budget. His family partnership controls, one way or another, a quarter of shares traded on the Italian stock exchange. He employs 270 000 people directly, and two million indirectly. His companies account for five per cent of Italy's gross national product.

Agnelli is never criticised in the Italian press. He has never been successfully prosecuted, although he has often skirted the law. Together with a clique of wealthy and often titled Italian businessmen, the *salotto buono* (literally the 'well-bred drawing room') he exerts enormous influence on government policy. In 1986 he visited Socialist premier Bettino Craxi to stop Ford buying Alfa Romeo, the state-owned luxury car firm. Fiat's bid, 20 per cent lower than Ford's, was duly accepted.

Agnelli deals directly with prime ministers and presidents, with the Pentagon and the politburo. Since 'the 40 days' strike at Fiat in 1980, when the left and the trade unions were routed, nothing has stood in his way. Not surprisingly he commands fear as well as awe. Friedman was warned and intimidated whilst writing the book, and the two investigative journalists on his staff wish to remain anonymous. The most gross aspects of Agnelli's empire and methods may be the product of the peculiarities of Italian society, but he is a good reminder that the capitalist is alive and well, and living in another world.

Alan Friedman, *Agnelli and the Network of Italian Power*, Harrap, £12.95

letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms of *Living Marxism*. Please keep your letters as short as possible, as send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.

MARX AND FREEDOM

In his criticism of Mike Freeman's article on freedom in your December issue (letters, January), Alan Carling misinterprets several points and presents a caricature of a communist society. He begins by alleging that Freeman set out to show that Marx was averse to freedom and individuality, when Freeman explicitly set out to do the opposite—to show that Marx saw the expansion of freedom and individuality as 'the goal of social development'. Carling's comment that 'capital abuses its freedom by crushing the worker' misinterprets Marx's main critique of bourgeois freedom. Marx insisted, as Freeman rightly notes, that exploitation is not an *abuse*, but something which follows from the very nature of freedom in capitalist society.

Carling also confuses Marx's counterposition of the 'true community' of communist society to the 'false community' of capitalist society. It's not that under communism the individual comes before society, whereas under capitalism society dominates the individual. Society always determines the scope for individual liberty. Communists seek to create a society which does not involve the exploitation of one individual by another, the domination of one class over another. This society would create unprecedented scope for individuality and freedom.

Carling offers a model of a future communist society in which those who choose to produce BMW cars are 'exploited' by those who choose only to drive around in them. His method is reminiscent of classical political economists who regarded capitalist values as eternal features of human nature rather than as products of an historically specific form of social organisation, and hence discovered them in diverse pre-capitalist societies. Carling is so imbued with the prejudices of Thatcher's Britain that he anticipates their persistence in any future society.

A communist society can only be built by abolishing the capitalist system of production and replacing it with one that encourages different values as well as raising the living standards of society. In its early stages no doubt a post-capitalist society would have to take administrative measures to protect itself against the persistence of the exploitative forms of behaviour sanctioned under capitalism. But the notion that individuals in a developed communist society will have the same outlook as in Britain today is as absurd as the idea that the ancient Greeks were worried about interest rates.

Carling does not draw out the consequences of his argument that Marx was the greatest of the enlightenment thinkers, committed to 'liberty, equality and community'. However, in his recent *New Left Review* article of the same title Carling is more forthcoming (September/October 1988). Here he concludes that the left 'must live with states, markets and communities'. Those who begin by reducing Marx to a liberal end up by reconciling themselves to the society he committed his life to overthrowing.

James Johnson
Sheffield

GERRY ADAMS AND CHARLIE HAUGHEY

I was pleased to see that your interview with Gerry Adams (January) avoided the usual trite 'What about Enniskillen?' questions. It was refreshing to read a far-ranging discussion of republican strategy. In that context, I was concerned by Adams' point that 'Fianna Fail at times is still the nearest thing to anti-imperialism in a relevant part of Ireland'. I'm sure he doesn't need me to remind him that Fianna Fail's origins and history lie in the betrayal of Irish freedom.

From Eamon de Valera's departure from Sinn Fein and his entry into the Dail in August 1927, to his execution of republicans during the Second World War, from Charles Haughey's internment camps in the fifties to his acceptance of the Anglo-Irish agreement, Fianna Fail more than any other party has ensured the success of partition in the South.

The tactic Adams describes, of trying to force open a gap between Haughey and his rank and file members by pushing Fianna Fail to back its republican claims with action, is dangerous. See the row over the extradition of Patrick Ryan. By handing the initiative to Haughey—to 'expose' him before his supporters—Adams allowed Fianna Fail's wily leader to use the affair to enhance his anti-imperialist credentials. As a result Haughey has increased his popularity, consolidated his position in the party, appeased many 'green' critics (leaving him free to expel others), and left Sinn Fein even more isolated in the South. Surely the cause of Irish freedom can only be advanced in the Republic in so far as the whole tradition of Fianna Fail 'anti-imperialism' is challenged. 'One could take a position of simply lambasting Haughey', observes Gerry Adams. Yes, and so we should.

Kieran Slattery
Newham

THE VALUE OF PLANNING

Paul Cockshott (letters, January) wants to defend Marxism against the advocates of market socialism. But his claim that the 'theory of value is relevant to a socialist economy' shows he is defending something other than Marxism.

For Marx the theory of value was the means for comprehending a particular historical form of social production—capitalism. He criticised bourgeois economics for its dismissal of production as a purely technical process. Capitalism must be understood as a system of production embodying social relations distinct from other modes of production.

Marx showed that the views of bourgeois economists originated in the 'enigmatical' character of capitalist production itself. The production process appears to consist of isolated producers whose labour is devoid of any social character. The social aspect of production only appears in a form separate from production—in the exchange of products of labour on the market. As a result, production proper seems a simple material necessity. Indeed, in the form of commodity exchange, social interaction appears the preserve of products, not of producers.

With the theory of value Marx revealed the social character of capitalist production hidden beneath the market. Capitalism, unlike any other system, is production *for* exchange. As useful items commodities exhibit a million and one contrasting qualities—the product of various individual skills and abilities. As items for exchange they are comparable with each other and, therefore, the product of a single substance—social labour. The concept of value depicts this social aspect of capitalist production. While the social relations among private producers are evident in exchange, Marx argued that they are already posited within production itself. The market is merely the surface form assumed by capitalist social production.

Cockshott imagines there is nothing inherently capitalist about the law of value as a regulator of production. This has more in common with the market socialists he derides than with Marx. In rejecting the theory of value, the market socialists turn the market into a technical device for distributing resources rather than the form which capitalist social relations assume on the surface. Cockshott takes the opposite but equally one-sided course of equating capitalism exclusively with the market, thereby divorcing production on the basis of the law of value from any specific social relations. His belief that the law of value minus the market equals socialism repeats the views of the nineteenth-century French petit-bourgeois radical Proudhon—ridiculed by Marx in 1847 in *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

Cockshott says workers' democracy is a 'political question', 'not an economic mechanism' for planning. Yet for Marx, planning meant replacing one economic regulator—the law of value, which operates outside the control of and subjugates society—with one made to work by and for society. Planning is a system of conscious regulation of economic life, a precondition for which is the full participation of society in the regulatory process—workers' democracy.

Dan Beard
London

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STRIKE

OCTOBER

TIME IN THE SUN/BEZHIN MEADOW

ALEXANDER NEVSKY

IVAN THE TERRIBLE

THE BOYARS' PLOT

MOTHER

END OF ST. PETERSBURG

STORM OVER ASIA

FALL OF THE ROMANOFF DYNASTY (DOCUMENTARY)

TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD (DOCUMENTARY)

HENDRING

RUSSIAN CLASSICS

Nigel Lawson falls from grace

THE BIGGER THEY COME...

Many people are awaiting chancellor Nigel Lawson's budget speech next month in the same spirit that they look forward to the latest 'Hitler alive and living on moon' headline on the front of the *Sunday Sport;* they're interested in seeing what he has to say, but have no intention of taking it very seriously. The polls show public confidence in the economy sliding fast, and dragging the reputation of Lawson's forecasts down with it.

Budget preparation time is a busy one for the chancellor, making him frequently incommunicado. That should suit him this year, given that the alternative is to face a further barrage of embarrassing questions about the parlous state of the economy. Lawson has had almost as bad a year as Frank Bough. A few months ago he was everybody's favourite financial wizard, responsible for turning the economy around and winning the Tories a third election. Now he's a cheap confidence trickster.

Lawson's 1987 autumn statement predicted that the good times were only just beginning: 'Looking ahead to 1988, the prospect is for a continuation of steady growth with low inflation that we have now enjoyed for over five years.' Before last year's budget, the big issue was whether Lawson would deliver on his promise to liberate enterprise from the burden of taxation. The budget speech lived up to expectations, as Lawson committed the government to creating 'a genuine popular capitalism' where 'lower rates of tax sharpen up incentives and stimulate enterprise'.

In the afterglow of Lawson's American-style tax giveaways to the rich, it was party time for British capitalists. Margaret Thatcher pronounced the tax cuts 'the epitaph for socialism'. 'What a chancellor!', declared Norman Tebbit in a post-budget speech to delirious Tory Party workers. Today, top Tories mutter the same words under their breath and through gritted teeth, with expletives in between. Yet even at the height of his success last year, the writing was on the wall for Lawson's strategy.

Early evidence that all was not well with the economy came in the row between Thatcher and Lawson over exchange rate policy a week before the last budget. Lawson's attempt to contain upward pressure on the pound, by 'shadowing' the German mark, implied monetary policies which Thatcher thought risked renewed inflation. Lawson was forced to back down and let the markets push sterling up. Indeed, a major reason for talking up the 1988 budget measures was to deflect public attention from the increasingly heated policy disputes within the Tory hierarchy.

Doubts about Lawson's rosy predictions really set in as the scale of Britain's trade deficit became clear. In that 1987 autumn statement, he dismissed fears of a rising deficit with the assertion that it might reach £3.5 billion for the whole of 1988. When the current trade account went a record £1.2 billion into the red for the single month of May, Lawson looked stupid. His cultivated image as the cabinet's calm intellectual was further undermined by his outburst against the 'teenage scribblers in the City' who had the audacity to suggest that the deficit would reach £10 billion by the year's end.

As it turned out, the scribblers had significantly underestimated the problem. The £2.15 billion deficit in July set a new record, until the £2.43 billion deficit in October snatched it away. Lawson did himself few favours by calling the latter a 'freak figure'. During the debate on his 1988 autumn statement, he insisted there was 'no problem whatever in financing the deficit'. But the pundits had lost faith. They called his new economic estimates unrealistic and accused him of complacency in the face of a possible balance of payments crisis.

The trade deficit has destroyed Lawson's claim to be in control. A year ago he estimated that inflation would peak at 4.5 per cent at the end of 1988, then fall. Today it is 6.4 per cent and rising. His record on interest rates is worse. In 1987 he told a treasury committee that 'when I think they ought to go up, they go up and when I think they should come down, they come down'. Nine interest rate rises in six months have made a mockery of Lawson's contention that what he says goes.

The rises have been dictated by the need to prevent the trade deficit starting a run on the pound. Lawson has had to raise interest rates on sterling assets to encourage foreign investors to keep faith—and capital—in the British economy. According to the latest figures on long-term capital investment (shares and company acquisitions), Britain recorded a net outflow of £11.9 billion in the first three quarters of 1988, compared to a net inflow of £7.7 billion in 1987. With long-term capital leaving, sterling has been protected by enticing 'hot money' into Britain with pumped-up interest rates. This short-term investment can be pulled out at a moment's notice. So the fate of the pound, far from being in Lawson's pocket, is in the hands of panicky overseas speculators. With more big trade deficits on the way, Lawson will find it harder to sustain their interest.

The trade deficit has also hit the Tories' taxation policy. Commentators who swallowed Lawson's claim that tax cuts would stimulate enterprise now blame him for adding fuel to consumer spending on imports. The man who once boasted of his 'historic' tax cuts can now only say that next month's budget won't *raise* taxes to help choke off consumer spending.

You have to search long and hard in the financial press for the talk of economic rejuvenation, popular capitalism and prosperity which was everywhere a year ago. References to an economic miracle now carry the damning prefix 'so-called'. In November, Lawson came clean on the need for unpopular capitalism; 'We have never shirked from taking unpopular measures. These are needed to defeat the scourge of inflation'.

Parsimony has replaced prosperity in the Lawson lexicon. Asked about the impact of rising interest rates on mortgage payers, he insists that 'they can afford their mortgages. It means they have less to spend on other things'. Let them eat building society bills. He has told employers that there will be no bail-out operations for businesses hit by high interest and exchange rates. Instead, they must teach their workers that the way to lower interest rates 'is lower pay rises'.

Lawson insists that the economy's problems are temporary. They are not. A report by the Engineering Employers Federation points out that the trade deficit will not go away, because British industry no longer produces a lot of what it needs. It will rely on imports for years to come. All Lawson can do is to complain that the trade figures are being calculated wrongly—and step up the attack on our living standards. His turnaround confirms that, far from fulfilling the promise of wealth for all, capitalism creates a prosperous minority by making the majority pay.

Tony Kennedy

Lawson looks after his own, and feeds the rest of us sweet nothings

PHOTO: DON REED