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April 1992 No42



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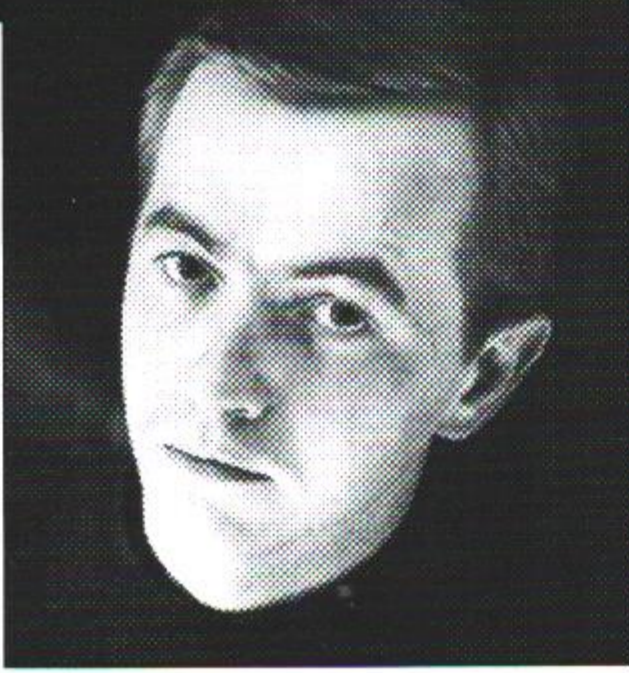
Production: **Michael Kramer, Peter Ray**

Managing editor: **Phil Murphy** ● Advertising Manager: **Manda Kent**

**LIVING
MARXISM**

Monthly review of the
Revolutionary Communist Party
Editorial: (071) 375 1702
Subscriptions: (071) 375 1485

Subscription rates: Britain and Northern Ireland £19.50 ● Europe (airmail) £27 ● Outside Europe (airmail) £37 ● Overseas (surface mail) £23 ● (Institutions add £7.50) ● Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX; Fax (071) 377 0346 ● Distributed in the UK by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE; Phone: West Drayton (0895) 444 055; Fax (0895) 445 255; Telex 881 3787 ● Distributed in the USA by Bernhard DeBoer Inc, 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA; Phone (201) 667 9300 ● Typeset by Junius Publications (TU) © copyright Revolutionary Communist Party
Printed by Russell Press (TU), Nottingham ● ISSN 0955-2448 April 1992. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed



mick hume

Is this it?



Negative politics are what the British general election campaign is now all about.

Instead of promoting their own policies, the main parties devote their mighty publicity machines to rubbishing the others and abusing rival leaders.

Ask the Tories how they intend to build a better future for us, and they tell you about how Labour's 'double whammy' will harm the taxpayer, how Neil Kinnock was a student firebrand, and how various Labour MPs once sponsored an Irish Freedom Movement march.

Ask Labour the same question about their plans, and they will tell you about how the Tory 'VATman' will harm the consumer, how John Major used to be Thatcherite, and how assorted Conservative MPs are liars.

The Tories are even said to have hired dirty tricks experts from the USA, a

country where they have been perfecting the art of negative politicking for some time. The results can be seen in the smears and counter-smears dominating the early stages of the US presidential election campaign.

You might imagine that those trying to become the Democratic Party candidate would be grilled about their ideas to end the deep US recession. Instead, the biggest question facing the presidential hopefuls has been 'are you, or have you ever been, an adulterer/drug-smoker/draft dodger/mafia Don?'

Meanwhile, over in the Republican Party, George Bush (a man who became president thanks partly to an election campaign accusing his Democrat opponent of being a black rapist's best friend), has now been branded as a sponsor of homosexual pornography.

A lot of commentators have complained about the negativity of the

current election campaigns, not only in Britain and America but also in France and Italy. Yet few seem to grasp why this is going on.

It is certainly not the case that politicians are somehow more low-life than they used to be. It would be difficult to sustain the argument that Bush is a dirtier fighter than president Richard 'Tricky Dicky' Nixon was, or that Major is more cynically manipulative than were Margaret Thatcher and her media man, Bernard Ingham.

The reason why electoral politics are so negative today is that British and Western politicians have absolutely nothing positive to campaign on. They have never had a good word to say about each other's policies. Now they don't even have a good word to say about their own.

Take apart the programmes of every major party in the Western world, and you will not find one inspiring idea, never mind

a wider vision of a better future for society. It is easy to blame this boring state of affairs on the dullards who are today's top politicians. But the problem goes much deeper than the shallowness of their intellects.

The parties are downbeat because the capitalist system which they aspire to manage is in a downward spiral.

The last time British or American politicians campaigned on a truly positive programme was probably back in the sixties. Then, Lyndon Johnson's Democratic Party offered Americans the Great Society, while Harold Wilson's Labour Party pledged to regenerate Britain through the 'white heat' of a technological revolution.

These policies came at the end of a relatively long period of postwar prosperity, when it seemed that Western governments could afford to launch big initiatives. That illusion has since been shattered by three serious recessions, culminating in the current economic slump.

Britain, as the weakest of the senior capitalist economies, provides the best example. Many commentators have argued that Britain is in its worst recession since the 1930s. In fact, in terms of capacity to recover, things appear even more desperate than that. In the thirties, British capitalists still had the largest empire on Earth and a big manufacturing base to help support them. Today, they have the square mile of the City of London and some Japanese car factories.

The British economy now has a negative growth rate, a negative investment rate, and a negative balance of trade. And they wonder why parties which want to rule the ruins of capitalism in this country find it difficult to be positive.

The general election campaign is contentless, avoiding the key question of what is happening to British society. What debate there is centres on relatively unimportant or eccentric issues puffed up by the parties' public relations departments—training, taxation, tinkering with the constitution. In the overwhelming mood of negativity, each party's basic policy comes down to this: 'However bad we might be, that other lot will be worse.'

The way in which the Anglo-American crusade against the third world has been adapted for domestic electoral purposes shows how low Western politicians now have to stoop in an effort to look good. Major's Tories and Bush's Republicans have both stepped up the propaganda offensive against Iraq and Libya,

presumably because they feel that their best chance of victory is to make out that they are running against Saddam Hussein and Colonel Gadaffi.

It is quite conceivable that Bush might even stage an air-strike to boost his poll ratings. Another dirty little war in the third world is just about the most positive initiative that Washington and Whitehall can offer.

Against such a negative background, it is not surprising that there should be widespread rejection of the whole political

They resort to the politics of abuse in order to avoid discussing the all-important question of how society could be organised successfully—a question to which they have no answers. By contrast, our criticism aims to put this issue in the spotlight, by demonstrating the ineffectiveness and irrationality of the market system.

Their negative, nothing-much-is-possible approach legitimises the slump society in which we live as the best option. By contrast, our attack on the exploitative and undemocratic character of capitalism points to the possibility of creating a better

Electoral politics are so negative today because British and Western politicians have absolutely nothing positive to campaign on

process in the West today. Nor should it come as a shock to discover that the only parties making headway disassociate themselves from the discredited traditions of the old left and right alike.

This trend can lead to the rise of something like the Italian Party of Love, a coalition of striptease artistes and porn stars. Far more dangerously, it may also boost support for a populist movement like Le Pen's Front National in France, which can exploit the negative political mood to build on anti-immigrant feeling.

So is this it? Is this electoral charade what politics has to mean? Or is it possible to envisage a positive alternative?

It is ironic that the supporters of the existing system always accuse anti-capitalists of being negative. Every time a criticism of the status quo is raised, they dismiss it as the work of 'whiners' and 'moaning minnies'. Yet it is now obvious that they themselves can only speak in negative terms.

Anti-capitalist ideas like those put forward in *Living Marxism* are necessarily critical. After all, our first intention is to expose the shortcomings of the system. But that is very different from the negativity of the mainstream parties.

future, by revolutionising the way in which things are run.

The anti-capitalist argument is fundamentally positive because it is saying that the majority of people want more. It is demanding something better from society—and indicating that the resources exist to make a better life. The case for capitalism is essentially negative, on the other hand, because a crisis-ridden system built upon the pursuit of private profit for the few cannot provide what the many need.

As the election approaches, the answer to the question 'is this it?', is 'yes and no'. This empty circus is indeed all that we can expect from politicians and parties which are in the service of the old order. But there is no reason why we should accept this big void as the be-all and end-all of politics in Britain or anywhere else.

Those who wish to create a new and positive political outlook will in the first place have to adopt a negative attitude towards all of the politics of the past. The general election seems as good a time as any to start. When the negative campaigners for the pessimistic parties ask us to support their nothing programmes on 9 April, let's just say No.

The case against Columbus

The accusation is made against the 'anti-Columbus lobby' of being reactionary and believing that all historical change is necessarily bad (Paola Martos, 'Columbus: rediscovering America', March). The author goes on to claim that the arrival of colonialism and the white man's hegemony in the Americas was not a change for the worse because, after all, the native inhabitants were 'primitive civilisations' living lives of scarcity, superstition, degradation and ignorance. 'More valuable' were the 'science, reason and fulfilment' brought by the Europeans.

This is at best ignorant of Europocentrism, at worst outright racism. Is the author aware of the pre-Columbian history (yes, history—not all societies were 'prehistoric' as stated)? Of the diversity and varying stages of development of the many distinct groupings that made up the population of the Americas, from the hunter-gatherers of the Pacific north-west, to the urban South and Central American civilisation, from the huge, largely agricultural Iriquois Federation to the pueblos of the south-west? And where is the progress, the benefit to native American peoples, brought by the white man? Where is his positive influence, the change for the better? Progress is not exclusively found in the European tradition. After all, a congressional report on the persistence of tribal 'traditionals' (as opposed to the 'civilised' white-approved official tribal representatives) noted with horror that their way of life was 'actual, living communism in practice'!

Paul Thatcher London

What about the Welsh?

Your position on the recent revival of Scottish nationalism has to be unique ('What is not happening in Scotland', March). But will you allow me to raise one point that immediately occurred to me (being a Taffy and therefore of superior intelligence) upon reading your provocative rag? If Kirk Williams is correct to argue that there is no real enthusiasm behind Scottish nationalism because it just represents disenchantment with the whole British political system, why is it that no such albeit 'negative' phenomenon exists in Wales? Why aren't government ministers and their Labour shadows despatched on the next available plane/train to Cardiff and Aberystwyth as well as Glasgow and Edinburgh? After all, if the real problem is British identity, we should expect to see nationalist movements breaking out all over the place. What next? A passport to Pimlico?

Dave Jones Newport

Bloody Sunday: the facts

It may be 'an established fact that none [of the victims of Bloody Sunday] were armed' to Frank Cottrell-Boyce (March). He is obviously well acquainted with the history of Bloody Sunday. But his suggestion, that to question the victims' families about whether they were armed was pernicious, is rubbish.

I agree that 'good journalism is about establishing facts wherever possible'. Cottrell-Boyce should not assume that all the audience were aware of this fact. I discussed the programme with sixth form students; many had not even heard of Bloody Sunday before this *Inside Story Special*, so needless to say they were ignorant of this fact. Had the question not been put to the bereaved, Colonel Wilford's accusations would have been unchallenged and his view may have been read as the 'fact'. The unequivocal answers to the question reinforced the innocence of the 14 dead. It was necessary to underline this for those less experienced than Cottrell-Boyce.

Sally Bowmer Northumberland

End of Victorian values?

Despite the evidence put forward by Sara Hardy outlining the real position of women in Britain ('Still an Old Wives' Tale', March), there has been a marked shift in the attitudes put forward by the government on all aspects of women's status in society.

We have seen the issue of 'date' rape cross the channel, following the Cambridge University survey, which revealed one in five women had been raped by an acquaintance. From the change in the law on rape in marriage to the promotion of access to child care, the establishment is promoting a discussion which it is difficult to distinguish from that of the women's movement. Why has the moral crusade of the eighties been dropped? The issue of abortion in Ireland seems to have set the seal on the abandonment of Thatcher's Victorian values. What has forced the establishment to adopt this position, pressure from the women's movement or the failure of their own programme?

Dave Leeds

'Easy money' for HIV research

It's simplistic to assert that lack of funding is responsible for the slow advance in HIV research (Tessa Myer, 'The Truth about the Aids Panic', December 1991). In fact money (government and private) is relatively plentiful, and more is now known about the Human

Immunodeficiency Virus than about most other infectious agents. With money so short elsewhere in British science, research workers have clamoured for the 'easy money' in HIV. Much of the work funded has been of dubious quality; and it may be that the main thrust of research, towards the development of a vaccine, is itself ill-founded, given HIV's high rate of mutation.

Science will eventually find a solution for HIV infection. In the meantime preventive measures will have to be used to slow the spread of infection. Given that you don't know if your partner is bisexual, has abused drugs, has slept around abroad, it seems sensible to use a condom or avoid penetration. Is this such a big deal? It seems that the plea made elsewhere in the magazine for sexual experimentation has not hit home, with Tessa Myer at least.

The safe sex campaign of five years ago was used by the right to promote moralism. A new safer sex moralism has arisen among some on the gay scene. The article failed completely to examine the debate as it now is, in the changed political climate of today. Myer manages to sound mildly paranoid, something of a conspiracy theorist. There may be a coalescence of interests around the Aids crisis, but it's bland to tar them all with the same brush.

Stewart Leigh Norwich

Nazism then and now

Armin Grambart-Mertens is correct to point out that the romantic ring to the term *Kristallnacht* somewhat obscures the barbarity of the events (letters, March). But its real significance is clarified in the two articles to which Armin referred: '*Kristallnacht*, when mobs of fascists destroyed Jewish shops and synagogues and murdered or deported 20 000 Jews' ('Nazis are not the problem', January) and in Rob Knight's 'Don't mention the war' it is described as 'systematic...terror'.

Changing vocabulary is peripheral to the task of challenging racism and racist ideas. We could call it 'the night when Nazi scum butchered innocent Jews' but it wouldn't change much. At a time when the Western establishment is preoccupied with the project of historical revisionism, the left's response shouldn't be to enter the debate on their terms, but to ask 'why are they resurrecting the past?', in order to expose the reactionary content of their ideas.

This can't be accomplished by ignoring the centrality of nationalism to the promotion of racism. Certainly the world is 'economically, politically and culturally interrelated' but leaders deny the significance of this in order to sustain

the appearance of a common and exclusive national interest. The left's concentration on the dangers of continental fascism complements British chauvinism (witness the importance of the Second World War to British identity) and ironically, allows upholders of immigration controls to claim an 'anti-racist' mantle.

The roles of anti-racists in Britain, Germany and elsewhere must indeed be complementary; we must all challenge nationalism in our respective countries through the recreation of a sense of working class internationalism. How this can be achieved in the present post-Cold War period is a critical issue.

Antoni Orgill Manchester

Well done, Armin Grambart-Mertens for correctly translating *Kristallnacht!* (letters, March). However *Kristallnacht* has come to represent not 'crystal night' but 'Night of the Shattering Glass' and the beginning of the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis. You may want to call it *pogromnacht* or whatever—that's up to you. I leave the issue of defining politically correct words to crusty academics—I've got better things to do.

If there are indeed all these fascists, as you say there are, why did they not spring up say 10 years ago? The racist climate created by the state in Germany has given these racist minorities the confidence to speak. So while the left concentrates its efforts on the far right, the state can play on this and appear moderate. There is no effective anti-racist campaign in Britain so where is the logic in targeting fascists in another country when we can't even provide a unified anti-racist front in this country!

Steve London

Cow dung traditions

Marxists advocate proletarian revolution to overthrow the unsustainable relations of production of capitalist society; *ergo* we do propose sustainable economic development. This is the rational kernel of the Green argument, repeated *ad nauseam* on these letters pages, that Marxism shares the project of reactionary eco-politics.

So, Roger Clague (letters, February) has done Marxists a favour by arguing for sustainable development as 'ways to help third world countries promote and improve their traditional methods of production'. Another correspondent might wish to expose the chauvinist logic of this liberal paternalism; I will simply refer Clague to the Masai tribesmen of East Africa. Savannah-dwelling loincloth wearers, they traditionally build shacks from cow dung, and feed themselves on blood drained from the same cows—beasts fit only for the glue factory. Give me a McDonalds BSE burger any day.

John McLennan Glasgow

God save the seventies?

I agree with Andrew Calcutt that the 1970s are unsuitable for nostalgia because that's when rock got boring and retro ('Naff-naff nostalgia', February). But he forgets the decade's inner-city glories: funk and punk. Black music became confidently critical—check out Norman Whitfield, the ghetto-conscious O-Jays, the 'I Will Survive' of Gloria Gaynor, the eco-dance of Earth Wind and Fire—despite the disapproval of white critics who preferred singers moaning and groaning about 'when a man loves a woman'.

And while in the sixties hedonism and boishness had been restricted to a minority (oh yes it had), in the seventies the young working class black and white took off. They discoed, they came out on strike, they rioted in Notting Hill, they took grass and took up fucking, they came out as gay and bi and sexy, they alarmed Mary Whitehouse, they marched for Rock Against Racism and Troops Out of Ireland or just got down together and boogied. They weren't pop aristos hanging round the Peppermint Lounge with Jackie Kennedy.

Then came The Sex Pistols: rock that wasn't pretending to be American (like Tommy Steele and Mick Jagger). 'God Save the Queen' was a seventies record. The seventies were a terrible time for those who thought hippies like Richard Branson were the Revolution. It was a wonderful time for the rest of us. Do the hustle.

Mike Belbin London

Andrew Calcutt's article was painfully accurate. With everyone wired on E, jogging to the same record for 10 hours at a stretch, the reason for the decline in popular music is apparent—people don't listen to music any more—they keep fit to it.

The only musicians taking risks now are guitar players such as Paul Rose and Allan Holdsworth. Being virtuosos, both have the confidence to go out on a limb and find their own sound. Rose especially, is able to create spontaneously, live, in a manner reminiscent of Hendrix himself.

Only when we demand this sort of approach to music will popular music have some life breathed back into it.

Jim Roberts London

A waste of space

While at school a friend and I would indulge in our favourite game of 'waste space' in our exercise books. My personal record was an entire maths jumbo jotter in six days. I can only assume your editor went to the same school.

Full-page photographs and half-page headlines seem to be the order of the day in recent Living Marxisms. If I wanted a book on cameras I'd buy *Amateur Photography* or even *Hello!*—at least they're in colour. Looking over my early LMs, much more was devoted to propaganda and news and it used to take me quite a few days to read it.

In the days of 'Midnight in the Century', is it assumed that the average reader has to have pictures to guide him through your (increasingly short) articles? Christ! Even your Marxist Review of Books has an obligatory two inches chopped off the top for no apparent reason. Oh for the days of *the next step* number one, when cameras were considered a bourgeois indulgence.

David Bailey Bradford

We welcome readers' views and criticisms.

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

Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion has earned it the label 'a country living in the dark ages'. But, says Ann Bradley, Britain, too, has still to see the light

How

When the Irish courts ruled that a 14-year old girl, pregnant by rape, could not travel to Britain for an abortion, they caused a storm on both sides of the Irish Sea. Few doubted that abortion was the best solution to the unhappy situation. Even the Irish Bishops Conference, an institution not known for progressive views or tolerance, felt compelled to tell the *Catholic Herald* that while abortion was always wrong, it was not the church's intention to coerce people to follow its teachings.

Church and state

The church may claim not to coerce people, but the state has no such qualms. And as abortion is unambiguously illegal in Ireland, and the ban has been enshrined in the state constitution since the 1983 referendum, coercion was the order of the day. Until, that is, the supreme court ruled that the girl could go to England, on the grounds that otherwise she might kill herself, and everybody breathed a sigh of relief.

For the Irish authorities the affair was an embarrassment from beginning to end. The Republic of Ireland has been trying to shed its backwoods image and project itself as a modern European state. With a new Taoiseach and a new (woman) president, the Irish government claimed to be free from the ideological baggage of the past. Then the abortion crisis broke and brought all that is perverse about Irish society back to the surface. Ireland, the world's press declared, is still living in the dark ages.

Irish exceptionalism?

That seems like a fair enough comment about a country which does not permit divorce, restricts the availability of contraception, and takes its ban on abortion so far that a cancer patient cannot have treatment that risks the life of the fetus. A state which writes into its constitution that 'mothers shall not be obliged...to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home'

will win no prizes for commitment to women's equality.

But is the Irish state's stance on abortion as exceptional as foreign critics like to make out? Or are the attitudes enshrined in the Republic's constitution only a more extreme and rigid version of the values upheld by our 'enlightened' laws?

Is Britain better?

Southern Ireland is just about the most backward capitalist country in Western Europe—a consequence of the way that Irish society has been held back by British domination. As Ireland's economy lags behind, so do its laws and social attitudes.

It is easy for the 'liberals' in the British establishment to point the finger at the inhumane and superstitious religious attitudes which underpin Irish law on abortion. But British law is based on many of the same assumptions—it's just practised in a more flexible way.

In response to the teenage rape victim row, many British commentators observed that it was ludicrous to give legal rights to an embryo or fetus. Quite so. But the British parliament recently took a step down that muddy path when it ruled in favour of regulating what research can and cannot be carried out on embryonic or fetal material. Anti-abortion campaigners here are already asking why, if an embryo has a protected legal status at 15 days, it can be aborted at 15 weeks. As the *Times* concedes, 'British and Irish abortion laws both accept that the state has some responsibility for the life of the fetus' (19 February 1992).

Rape and the law

The papers here were quick to condemn the barbarity of forcing a young rape victim to bear a resulting child. Quite so. But rape is not a circumstance in which British abortion law permits a woman to end a pregnancy. Nor does the supposedly more progressive British

law consider the age of the woman.

Most rape victims, and most 14-year old girls, would be able to get an abortion here because any decent doctor would agree that carrying such a pregnancy to term would be a risk to the woman's mental health. Some might even argue that it would risk her physical health. But the fact remains that the circumstances in which sex took place, and the age of the woman are incidental to the conditions laid down in Britain's 1967 Abortion Act.

Media circus

Nor has the British system been above subjecting women seeking abortions to the legal and media circus. Remember the 'Oxford baby' case in 1987 when a student tried to obtain a court injunction to prevent his girlfriend from aborting 'their baby'?

The woman had taken the post-coital pill, but it had failed and she was stuck with an unwanted pregnancy by a guy who cared so much about her that he was prepared to drag her through the courts and the papers. By the time the Court of Appeal had finally ruled that the girl could have an abortion, the pregnancy was so far advanced, and she was so traumatised by the whole circus, that continuing the pregnancy seemed the only option. So much for humane, discreet British justice.

Warts and all

There is no doubt that most women would find British abortion law, warts and all, preferable to that of the Irish republic. But the Irish should think again before they look to it as a model, and British liberals should consider carefully before extolling its virtues.

The new 'modern' wing of the Irish establishment would probably be happy enough to adopt a British-type abortion law. British law allows abortion to be controlled by the medical profession. It denies women the right to abortion, and in doing so it underlines their primary role as mothers in the family home in a more

much better is British law?

subtle way than the Irish constitution.

Legal abortion in strictly controlled circumstances suits the British establishment far better than a total ban. It allows pregnancies to be terminated when they occur in what the authorities decide are unsuitable circumstances, without giving women the right to demand an abortion.

The 1967 Abortion Act was passed on the back of eugenic concerns about the number of working class children being born into 'illegitimate' circumstances. Today, similar worries stalk Irish society. Three

quarters of children born to women under 24 are to unmarried mothers, and with the numbers of marriages falling, women are showing no inclination to 'legitimise' their offspring.

The National Economic and Social Council in Dublin has warned that single mothers 'as a significant sub-group of the population...are growing very rapidly'. Many powerful voices within the Southern Irish state would probably welcome a relaxation of restrictions on abortion, to help control this destabilising 'sub-group' at the bottom of society.

The political and social structures of the Republic of Ireland are deeply

rooted in the past, and there are still influential interests standing in the path of any change. But even if the teenager at the centre of the recent brouhaha is to become the catalyst for reforming Irish abortion law, the question remains as to what should come next.

Fifty-four years ago a legal test case involving a 14-year old rape victim set a precedent in English law which became the first step on the way to the 1967 Abortion Act. Those concerned about the position of women in Ireland should consider carefully whether they want to take that same path to a situation where access to abortion is restricted by MPs and doctors, or to forge a new road to the abortion rights that women need. ●

Britain has its anti-abortion lobby too



Invasion



of the third world fanatics

The Pentagon has projected seven possible scenarios which could require an American military response. Almost all are in the third world. Frank Richards examines why the USA wants to emphasise a hypothetical threat from the weakest nations on Earth

Are you scared of REGT? No? Never heard of it? Then you cannot have read the Pentagon's 70-page long-range guide as to who will constitute the enemy in future war scenarios. REGT or Resurgent/Emergent Global Threat projects seven possible wars into the future, in order to justify a new round of increased military expenditure.

The Pentagon's war scenarios say as much about America's role in global politics as anything else. Most of the scenarios target third world countries. They consist of hypothetical situations such as a North Korean attack on South Korea, a civil war in the Philippines which threatens 5000 US citizens there, and a coup inspired by drug barons in Panama, which could threaten the Panama Canal.

In this Pentagon report and in other American foreign policy documents, there seems to be an inverse correlation between the perception of military danger and the powerlessness of the aggressor. The weaker the enemy, the more of a threat they apparently pose to the USA.

Unpredictable as they might be, Latin American drug barons and Philippine guerrillas are hardly the stuff of which dangers to world peace are made. But then the USA has for some time tended to exercise its force against nations with negligible military weight. The eighties invasions of Grenada and Panama and the air-strike against Libya illustrate the trend. Despite the attempts of Western propagandists to inflate the threat posed by the Iraqi military, the reality of last year's Gulf War quickly made clear that Saddam Hussein posed no danger to the Allied forces.

The Pentagon report indicates that for some time to come small and middle-range third world powers are likely to be vilified as rogue states threatening the civilised world. Despite the implausibility of such a threat to the technologically advanced West, there is a solid consensus of opinion behind this perspective. It is worth looking at the political background to the Pentagon report, in order to understand the strength of anti-third world sentiments in the USA and the West today.

Low intensity warfare

Throughout the Cold War, the West regarded the third world as a problem. It was seen as a region of turbulence, of unpredictable anti-imperialist passions that were liable to explode against Western interests at any time. During the Reagan era of the eighties, this standpoint was turned into a doctrine which advocated low-intensity warfare. The Reagan administration designated nations like Libya and North Korea as terrorist states. By definition, these were states which invited a Western military response.

With the end of the Cold War and the visible collapse of the Soviet Union, it became increasingly difficult for the West to justify major arms expenditures and the maintenance of organisations like Nato. From the middle of 1989 and into 1990, there emerged a perceptible

tendency for Western governments and experts to convert their existing third world problem into the premier danger facing the world. It was as if the third world took on the role hitherto played by the 'evil Soviet empire'. The Western media became obsessed with the new menace of third world nationalism.

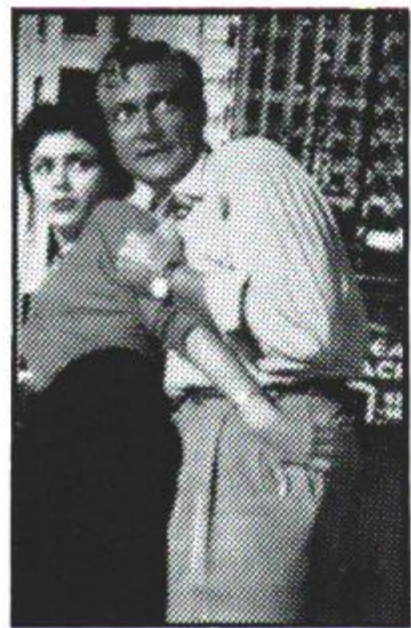
Pathological hatred

The post-Cold War condemnations of the third world have expressed a hatred verging on the pathological. For example, in an article ominously headed 'Dark spectre chills a bright spring', leading *Sunday Times* columnist Norman Macrae observed that 'as Bolshevism dies 50 years later, it would be horrid if any nationalism (including African ones) sprang from its graves' (11 March 1990). Macrae's dark warning rests on the irrational assumption that the end of one monster acts as a prelude to the next. A sense of fantasy means that there need be no logical connection between the demise of Bolshevism and the rise of African nationalism. And why is African nationalism—in brackets—singled out for special treatment? Africa, a continent on the verge of an economic and environmental catastrophe, the victim of global power relations, is with a sleight of hand recast as the potential villain.

Next please

While many anti-third world intellectuals have tended to get carried away by their rhetoric, others have been more calculating and circumspect. Deprived of the all-purpose Soviet threat, they have searched for credible new candidates to play this role. Edward Mortimer noted that 'many even felt the need to discover a new threat to replace the Soviet one' and for this purpose Islam 'lay ready to hand' ('Christianity and Islam', *International Affairs*, January 1991). Many Western

Themes like nuclear proliferation, itinerant Soviet nuclear scientists and Islamic Bombs legitimise a policy of imperialist intervention in the third world



commentators decided that Islam provided all of the right ingredients to give a tangible expression to anti-third world sentiments.

The emphasis on Islam was consolidated through the experience of the Gulf War. The US-led war against Iraq affirmed the relevance of anti-third world politics to the West. For some this war represented a new crusade. 'An ugly, evil spirit is abroad in the third world and it cannot be condoned: only crushed, as Carthage was crushed by the Romans', wrote the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* (3 February 1991). The *Daily Mail* concurred, warning that 'Saddam is not activating his most potent weapon—the fanaticism which lies like a time-bomb beneath the surface of Islamic society' (18 January 1991). So the 'ugly' and 'evil' force is fanaticism, especially of the Islamic variety.

Out of control

The use of the term 'fanaticism', with all of the images it involves, conjures up the kind of threat that anti-third world sentiment can feed upon. Fanaticism is a concept that portrays the actions of others as beyond reason and out of control. A fanatic by definition is dangerous. And a fanatic need not be rich or powerful to constitute a threat. Hence societies that are essentially rural and even pastoral can still be a danger to the industrialised West because they are populated by fanatics.

The war against Iraq helped give shape to the image of a threatening third world nationalism. More importantly, it also helped to morally rearm Western imperialism. Until the Gulf War, the Western powers had to contend with their sordid record of gunboat diplomacy and unpopular interventions in third world countries. The Gulf War helped the West to overcome some of this legacy. In particular, by successfully posing as champion of the Kurds, the West was able to win a degree of moral authority for its interference in the affairs of the Middle East. The pleas of the Kurds for Western intervention affirmed the credibility of imperialism.

Moral boost

Western politicians were exhilarated by the way in which the Gulf War and its aftermath boosted the moral rearmament of imperialism. Lynda Chalker, British minister for overseas development, boasted of the success:

'For 20 years, smart opinion dubbed any criticism by Western countries of the political systems of developing countries as "neo-colonialist". Like much of the conventional wisdom of the period, this was claptrap.' (*Sunday Times*, 18 August 1991)

For Chalker and her co-thinkers, the Gulf War retrospectively vindicated the West. Forget about Suez, Algeria or Vietnam. Imperialism had been right all along.

President Bush said more or less the same thing earlier this year in his State of the Union address, when he told Congress that 'by the grace of God, America won the Cold War and I think of those who won it in places like Korea and Vietnam' (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1992). Even the defeat of Vietnam could now be reconverted into a triumph through the moral regeneration of imperialism.

The Islamic Bomb

The only problem with anti-third world propaganda for the West has been its inability to match the impact of the previous anti-Soviet ideology. As threats go, the two are not in the same league. Nevertheless the Western powers cannot be accused of not trying. They have provided the idea of a third world threat with a technological rationale, by inventing the self-serving myth of nuclear proliferation and the Islamic Bomb. According to this myth, even relatively poor nations can become supremely dangerous by acquiring nuclear technology.

The problem of nuclear proliferation has been given a bizarre twist through the collapse of the Soviet Union. American and British commentators have relocated the problems raised by Soviet disintegration to the third world. They now suggest that ex-Soviet nuclear scientists are receiving or are about to receive princely sums from ruthless third world dictators determined to get their hands on this lethal technology.

After Iraq...

The problem of the ex-Soviet nuclear scientist had been widely discussed in international forums. There is a strong possibility that, in the not-too-distant future, some other third world 'terrorist state' will suffer the same fate as Iraq, on the grounds that its former Soviet scientists are on the verge of producing some new weapon of mass destruction. It does not matter that Nato possesses overwhelming technological superiority; the hypothetical prospect of an Islamic Bomb is sufficient to justify a Western military response.

Themes like nuclear proliferation, itinerant Soviet nuclear scientists and Islamic Bombs legitimise a policy of imperialist intervention in the affairs of third world states. Iraq provides the model. Iraq is continually forced to submit to this or that inspection by the United Nations. Western diplomats now frequently argue for the inspection of third world states. Some say that the inspections should go beyond the

nuclear issue to consider 'human rights abuses'. At a recent meeting of the United Nations Security Council, both China and India argued against such an interventionist approach.

Many apologists for Western imperialism argue that the United Nations is not suitable for playing an interventionist role because it includes too many third world countries. Francis Fukuyama, whose *The End of History and the Last Man* is an eloquent argument on behalf of this standpoint, would prefer Nato rather than the UN to be assigned the role of global inspector. Fukuyama suggests that Nato could be transformed into a league of civilised nations, 'capable of forceful action to protect its collective security from threats arising from the non-democratic part of the world'.

Star Wars revisited

The most striking aspect of the discussion is that hardly anyone questions the right of the 'democratic' Western states to inspect or intervene in the domestic affairs of sovereign nations. Even Russian and East European politicians have been dragged into the discussion, with Yeltsin arguing for a joint US-Russian Star Wars initiative. Washington's Star Wars programme, the military centrepiece of the Reagan administration's anti-Soviet strategy in the eighties, has now been repackaged to counter the threat of secret third world weapons programmes. The Cold War may have come to an end, but it seems that the need for Western vigilance and a high level of military preparedness has not diminished. And the Pentagon can carry on inventing new war scenarios.

Despite the best efforts of the scaremongers in the Pentagon and their British equivalents, the anti-third world panic cannot really provide an adequate alternative to the old Cold War hysteria. Anti-Soviet propaganda glued the West together. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the Western Alliance is also disintegrating. The plan to withdraw Canadian troops from Europe is a sign of the times.

Future intent

However, the Pentagon's hypothetical war scenarios should be taken seriously—not as proof of a threat from the third world, but as an indication of Washington's future intent. They demonstrate how the USA is seeking to recreate the conditions of the Cold War by turning Western militarism against third world targets. Exposing the hypocrisy of the West's anti-third world ideology will not stop the drive towards further Gulf-style wars. But at least it can help to discredit the moral pretensions of the newly confident imperialism. ●



Why envy Yanomami Indians?

Compared to the life of a regular commuter on the Victoria Line, it seems Amazonian Indians have a pretty good time. Not for them endless delays on a decrepit transport system, choking pollution and worries about inflation and unemployment. According to the literature of Survival, a campaign for the rights of tribal peoples, the Amazonian Indians enjoy a balanced, ecologically sound existence. The implication is that we should be so lucky.

The Yanomami of Brazil have no equivalent to the stresses, strains and deprivations of inner-city life. According to Survival they 'live well in comfortable dwellings; warm at night and cool in the day. They have a varied and healthy diet. They live in a close community where loneliness is unknown. And they do it all on three or four hours work a day and have plenty of time for their children, philosophy and religion'.

It sounds great, and from the pictures in the Survival campaign brochure, not only do they live an idyllic existence but they look idyllic too. The pictures of honey-skinned beautiful people playing with their bright-eyed children are enough to prompt even the most hardened Eurocentric to draw a deep breath and exclaim 'ahhhh wouldn't it be lovely to live like that?'

And, of course, in one sense it would. If the Indian peoples' lot was as shown in the Survival campaign literature—an island of self-sufficiency and natural harmony in the middle of a cold cruel sea of progress, civilisation and domination—life would be sweet. But the reality for most tribal people is rather more bitter.

As tribal life goes the Yanomami have struck lucky. Their way of life hasn't developed or progressed, because they've been able to get by as they are. They live in a fertile area which is naturally rich in wildlife. Until recently there has not been a 'struggle' for survival nor a problem of scarce resources.

Anthropologists marvel at the lack of selfishness and the communal spirit of the Yanomami, but in truth, if resources are plentiful, generosity doesn't represent a sacrifice. Circumstances allow the Yanomami to be 'good-natured', 'welcoming' and 'selfless'. Life for most tribal people is rather different—a constant battle against starvation and deprivation.

But even the supposed benefits of Yanomami life over our own technological rat race depend on your point of view. When you're stuck on the tube between Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Circus in the rush hour, Yanomami life seems good. If you need your appendix whipped out, or your dental cavities filled, I'd lay money that a Brazilian rainforest would not be your chosen place of residence.

Survival claim that 'there is nothing superior about our way of life. Tribal people have their own technology, their own medical systems...and they work well. If they didn't they would change them'. I doubt if a Yanomami woman with an ectopic pregnancy would hold to that.

It's fashionable these days to stand in awe of the 'natural way of life'. The Survival literature wonders at the fact that tribal peoples 'get all their food, medicines, building materials and spiritual meaning from what is around them'. The truth is that they don't have any choice! Trendy Europeans and Americans may choose to reject the material way of life and 'turn to nature', but these people have never had a choice. And while rich Westerners *can* go back to the Hilton even if they *choose* not to, the tribal peoples have no means to opt into another way of life.

I think Fiona Watson, Survival's Brazil campaign officer, has got one hell of a cheek to write disapprovingly that 'sadly not all Yanomami groups have been able to resist encroaching white society'. Why exactly is she so horrified that in one area 'some of the Yanomami have slung their hammocks around the stilts supporting the abandoned [government agency] post'? Perhaps it makes it harder for her to get picturesque photos. Fiona believes we should protect the Yanomami from the advances of civilisation by declaring their lands a national park where their culture could be preserved. It sounds like a human zoo to me.

The hard truth is that, whether we value them or not, you can't preserve cultures in the way that you can preserve jam. The Yanomami, even if they wish to, cannot remain isolated from the world system. Even if they have no interest in going into the developed world, the developed world will come to them.

Already capitalist development is having its effect on tribal people. Over the last 20 years an increasing number of gold and tin miners have moved into Yanomami's lands bringing diseases and infections to which they have no immunity. Waste from the mining processes have poisoned the water supplies

and the noise and disruption of the mining itself has scared away the animals which the tribal peoples hunt.

Contact with other cultures necessarily challenges the views of primitive peoples. As they face new problems to which tradition has no answer, so the tradition is itself discredited. Change is inevitable, and I think desirable. Why should we keep the benefits of penicillin and antibiotics to ourselves?

My argument with the current method of industrialisation of the third world is that it *fails* to bring about civilisation or progress. The industrialised world uses countries like Brazil as a source of raw materials and cheap labour. What the Western nations call development has in fact been the systematic denial of any pattern of development that could benefit the indigenous populations of third world countries.

Survival's literature calls on us to 'stop civilisation and progress'. I'd say that capitalism is doing a pretty good job of stopping civilisation and progress all by itself. ●

**If you
need your appendix
whipped out, a
Brazilian rainforest
would not be your
chosen place of
residence**

Wanted by Blinded by White Right

As we go to press, South Africa awaits the result of the whites-only referendum on the future of political reform. The expected 'Yes' vote for president De Klerk's reformist policy will be widely welcomed as an aversion of disaster. But, argues Charles Longford, the issue of the white right is a sideshow distracting from the real dangers facing the liberation movement today

The spectre of the white far right has overshadowed all else in South Africa since the Conservative Party defeated the ruling National Party in the Potchefstroom by-election in February, and president De Klerk announced his March referendum to determine white support for political reform. Many commentators have argued that the African National Congress (ANC) and other black groups must moderate their attitudes, to avoid provoking a white backlash against the government. As the London *Financial Times* put it after the referendum was called, 'Mr Nelson Mandela needs Mr De Klerk just as much as the latter needs him' (21 February 1992).

The point appeared not to be lost on the ANC. Within days there were reports of it making 'significant new

concessions in its negotiating stance on South Africa's constitutional future' which 'suggest that the country could well reach a political settlement before the end of this year' (*Guardian*, 25 February 1992). Mandela himself indicated that he was desperate to prevent the 'tragedy' of a defeat for De Klerk. The idea that fear of the right is accelerating moves towards a compromise deal was underlined a week later, when it was announced that the De Klerk regime and the major black groups could form an interim coalition government by the end of the year.

The critical question which nobody seems to be raising, however, is this: since when has South Africa's white right been a deciding factor in developments there?

In recent years, the Pretoria regime

has pursued a reform process which has had the white opposition frothing at the mouth. It unbanned the ANC, the South African Communist Party and other organisations, released Nelson Mandela and other black leaders, and entered into negotiations with the very people whom white South Africans grew up believing were the devil incarnate and a mortal threat to civilisation. Much to the chagrin of the right-wing opposition, the government unilaterally scrapped apartheid legislation without consulting whites.

When De Klerk found his way blocked by hundreds of angry armed whites as he prepared to address a rally in Vereeniging last year, the spectre of the white right did not prevent him pressing on with his reforms regardless and without any talk of consultation or referenda. The white right are unpredictable and potentially destabilising. But one thing is certain: they are not the problem which has preoccupied the government since it embarked on the present reform strategy.

Containing militancy

The central issue in South Africa has never been the tensions within the white minority. It is the relationship between the white ruling class and the black majority.

Containing black militancy is what has exercised the minds of the white establishment as it has sought to reform the apartheid system. The impetus did not come from an upsurge of the far

RIGHT

the

right in South Africa. The decisive factor was the changes in the international balance of forces brought about by the collapse of Stalinism and the Soviet bloc. These developments boosted the authority of the market economy and helped to disorient ANC militants, among whom the pro-Soviet South African Communist Party has long been influential. The crisis of anti-capitalist politics encouraged the ruling class to believe that it could reform the political structures of apartheid so as to stabilise society, while leaving South Africa's socio-economic system basically intact.

Divide and conquer

The aim of the De Klerk government's reform strategy has been to split the black population and to isolate the most determined opponents of the racist regime. The protracted process of negotiations is part of a strategy designed to neutralise and moderate the liberation movement. And this is where the scare about the white right opposition really fits in.

De Klerk is eager to play up the threat of the white right in order to put more pressure on the ANC, and to lever Mandela into making further concessions. Indeed it has been suggested that De Klerk was happy enough to lose the Potchefstroom by-election for this reason. Certainly the choice of an unattractive National Party candidate, their half-hearted campaign, and the government's eve of poll announcement of huge rises in the

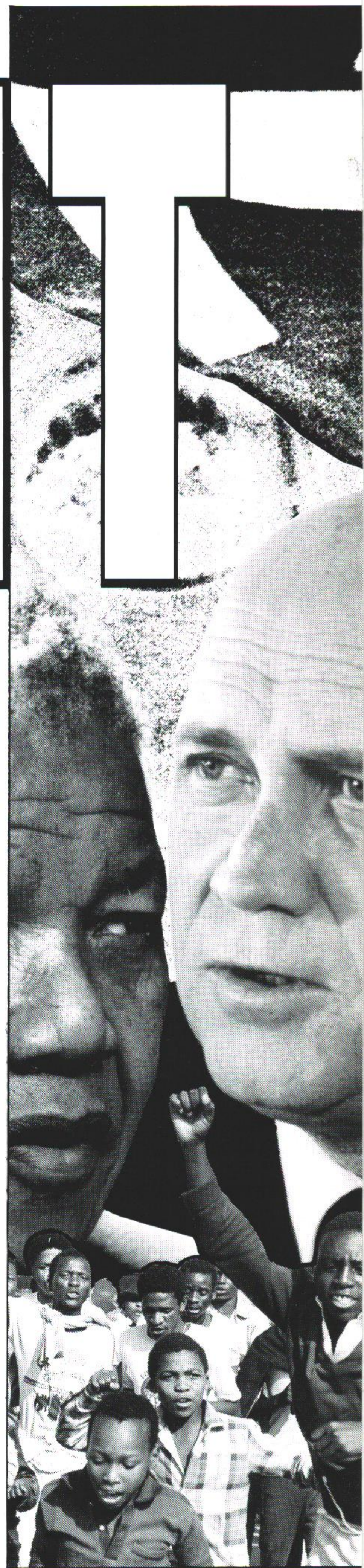
cost of white education, all add weight to the conspiracy theory.

Whatever the truth of that, it is clear that one of the central functions of the white referendum has been to exert more pressure to moderate the resistance movement. It is important to realise that, in pursuing this approach, De Klerk is exploiting the fundamental flaw in the ANC's strategy.

The ANC leadership has come to rely more and more upon the government-sponsored negotiating process, and less and less on mass action by its own supporters. The ANC now seems ready to concede many of its past principles in order to keep the negotiations going. Its initial response to the announcement of the referendum illustrates the point. In effect, by accepting the importance of the referendum on the 'peace process', Mandela and his associates accepted the idea of a white veto on the constitutional future of the country. Meanwhile, there was no organised response from the black masses themselves. They were left to look on as spectators while the National Party and its far-right opponents debated their future.

Arms and the ANC

This is the result of a process set in motion by the apartheid state, but assisted by the strategic approach of the ANC. Although for years the ANC engaged in an armed struggle, its political goal has always been for the establishment of black majority rule ▶



through parliamentary representation. It was the apartheid regime's refusal to grant black representatives a place in the parliamentary process which prompted the ANC to engage in more militant forms of struggle—from armed struggle to mass resistance. The uneasy relationship between the ANC's desire to become a respectable parliamentary

The ANC has become a victim and prisoner of its own politics

party of national government, and the mass movement it has mobilised to help it achieve that end, has always ensured a fundamental tension within its ranks.

In the past, what kept that tension in check was the intransigence of the apartheid regime. The more steadfastly the regime refused to budge, the more the ANC and its mass base turned to extra-parliamentary forms of action. But now that the government has opened the door to black involvement in the political process, the tensions between the ANC's respectable ambitions and its militant traditions have come to the fore.

Limits of change

With the collapse of Stalinism and the opposition's acceptance of market economics, the struggle in South Africa today is not about the socialist transformation of society. Instead, a far more limited process of change is under way. The parties are negotiating about the precise form of political arrangements under which capitalism in South Africa should be run. To make an impact on these negotiations, the ANC needs to be able to mobilise its mass base to bring pressure to bear on the regime. Without any mass pressure, or at least the threat of it, the ANC enters negotiations from a position of weakness.

However, what is being negotiated today is the shape of a political arrangement that will exclude the masses from politics—except in the formal sense of voting for parliamentary representation once in a while. The ANC is forced to try to mobilise its supporters, while at the same time excluding them from having any control over the process itself. Such manipulation is proving a sure recipe for demobilising and demoralising the mass movement—at the very moment when De Klerk's

divide-and-rule strategy is nearing the decisive point. The tragedy is that the movement faces the risk of being destroyed without understanding why.

When the 'struggle' is reduced to manoeuvring over negotiations, when what matters is the exchange of arguments among the great men at the big table, then the masses simply become a stage army, to be wheeled on and off the stage depending upon what is happening in committee rooms. The recent massive strike against the introduction of Value Added Tax illustrated this reality.

More than 3.5m people went on strike to oppose the introduction of VAT in South Africa as an attack on the living standards of the black working class. Introducing VAT is meant to compensate for loss of corporation taxes in the recession. The strike was an expression of grass roots anger at the government's attempt to shore up the market economy in South Africa.

Stage army

For the ANC leaders and their trade union allies, however, the strike seemed to be little more than a mass lobby in support of their right to be consulted on how South African capitalism is restructured. Jay Naidoo, general secretary of the trade union federation Cosatu, described the strike as a lesson to the government on the importance of consultation: 'The government has now learned that it is not going to introduce anything in a unilateral way' (*Work in Progress*, December 1991). The ANC's priorities were confirmed by its attempts to prevent some protest marches taking place, on the grounds that these were 'contrary to the peace agreement' with the De Klerk government.

The VAT strike, an expression of mass anger and defiance, was reduced to another bargaining tool in the negotiations. Devaluing mass action in this way can only engender passivity, by removing the working class from an active role in the process. The ANC leadership is reducing the black working class to a stage army, passively waiting on the sidelines until called upon. When ANC leaders do decide to call on the masses for support, they may well find that their stage army has ceased to exist.

Drifting away

The reduction of the mass movement to a passive bystander is proving a sure way to demobilise it altogether. Thousands of young activists are drifting away from politics, preoccupied with the need to survive. As the movement's loss of direction leads black communities to turn inwards on themselves, divisions are intensifying and state-sponsored violence has wreaked havoc.

Whatever the role of individual ANC leaders, it would be a mistake to explain what is happening as a 'sell out'. This process is the result of the negotiation strategy, not of wrong tactics or personal betrayal.

The demoralisation and atomisation of the mass movement are consequences of the ANC's approach.

ANC backtracks

The ANC's strategy has left it vulnerable to being exploited by De Klerk. Mandela's dependency on the government-sponsored negotiation process means that he is forced to make concession after concession whenever a 'threat' to the process is raised. When the government insisted that the armed struggle threatened the prospect of talks, the ANC abandoned it (the police and army did not reciprocate). When De Klerk says the far right is a threat to the negotiations, the ANC moderates its stance further to avoid provoking more protests.

Whenever an interim coalition government is finally formed, the writing is already on the wall for a final settlement which will fall far short of black majority rule. It looks as if all De Klerk has to do is raise the spectre of the white right, and the ANC will accept the entrenchment of minority rights in the constitution rather than what they have stood for all these years: black majority rule. In this sense, the ANC has become a victim and prisoner of its own politics.

The real enemy

De Klerk's entire strategy of moderating the ANC has been premised upon the understanding that the real threat to the South African ruling class comes not from the white right, but from the potential power of the black working class. The movement is being drawn into a process which is not only setting back the prospects for fundamental social change in South Africa, but is also destroying the one force that could bring such change about. Understanding this process must be the starting point for at least posing the need for an alternative political strategy.

Just as the white right has never been the big danger facing the regime, so it has never been the major problem confronting the black masses. It was not neo-Nazis, but the reform-minded government of PW Botha which waged all-out war in the black townships during the eighties. It was not fascists, but the peace-loving government of De Klerk which was so recently revealed to have used provocateurs to start 'black-on-black' violence in the Inkathagate scandal. If it is to bring real freedom for the black masses, any strategy must surely start from a recognition of who the real enemy is. ●

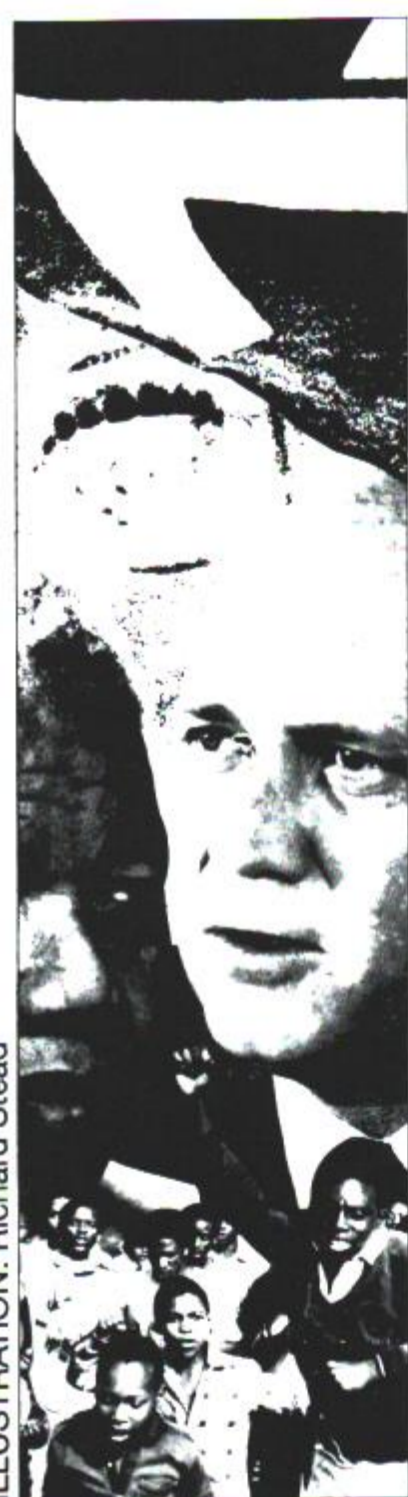


ILLUSTRATION: Richard Stead

THE DECAY OF BRITISH DEMOCRACY



The parliamentary democracy of which the British establishment is so proud now stands starkly exposed as a sham.

In the 1992 general election it is clearer than ever that there is nothing to choose between the parties, because all of them stand for nothing.

The political programmes of both Tory and Labour parties are exhausted; the Liberal Democrats never really had one in the first place. Without one decent idea among them, the colourless leaders of the major parties are reduced to swapping insults—and insulting the intelligence of the electorate with non-policies like the Citizen's Charter.

Meanwhile, in the real world outside this circus, British society is being reduced to rubble by the worst capitalist slump most people have ever experienced. Unemployment, indebtedness, poverty and a general air of economic insecurity are blighting the lives of millions.

The gap between the problems experienced by ordinary people and the so-called solutions offered by the politicians gets wider all the time. As a result, there is a growing mood of public disaffection with the political system, and alienation from the electoral process.

Cynicism about parliamentary politics has long been an underlying theme of British life. Today it is much more out in the open as the election approaches. The dismissive view that 'whoever wins, the government still gets in' is widespread, especially among younger people, who can see no point of contact between their concerns and the electoral circus.

This is what we mean by the decay of British democracy. It is not as if the British electorate has suddenly been robbed of real power. The authority of the House of Commons has always been

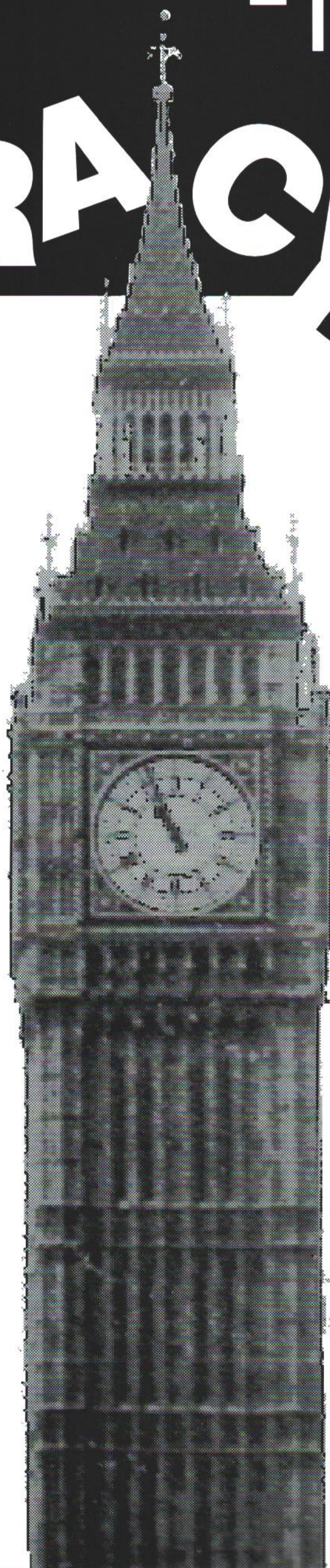
illusory. Real power has always been exercised by the unelected elite of capitalist society—big businessmen, bankers, civil service mandarins, judges, police chiefs and generals, all presided over by a cabinet which takes little notice of the wishes of MPs, never mind the will of the people.

What's different today is the growing sense that many people have effectively been disenfranchised, left without even the semblance of choice or representation. The consequences can be seen in falling rates of voter registration, official fears of higher-than-usual abstention rates in the election, and the general feeling that even those who do vote will do so without enthusiasm or belief.

In the special *Living Marxism* election feature that follows, we look at various aspects of the decay of British democracy:

- Parties that stand for nothing: why the Tories and Labour are both facing a crisis of confidence.
- Of marginal interest: how the parties have failed to win the hearts and minds of voters in key marginal seats, north and south.
- The Scottish dimension: where the prospect of a constitutional crisis best illustrates the breakdown of the British political system.
- Fear of the masses: a look behind the democratic trappings, to reveal the contempt with which the rulers of Western capitalism regard their voters.

It all adds up to an overwhelming case for pulling down the old parliamentary order altogether, and replacing it with an alternative system: one in which the majority of people can exercise direct control over society themselves, instead of simply choosing between useless, faceless placemen once every four or five years.



The Tory government's attempt to win a fourth term is threatened by a new 'enemy within': the empty hole at the heart of its own programme. Sharon Clarke looks into it



Why are the Tories doing so much worse in the run-up to the 1992 election than they did in 1987? The simple answer is the state of the economy. In fact that's too simple an answer. After all, the Tories came through the recession of the early eighties to win a vastly increased majority at the 1983 election. This time they will be lucky to scrape back into government.

The explanation for the decline lies in the combination of a slump in the economy and a slump within the Conservative Party itself. All of the dynamism and sense of purpose which the Tories projected in the eighties is gone. Misty-eyed right wingers may claim that this is due to the mistake of dumping Margaret Thatcher. But Thatcher was removed in 1990 precisely because her 'revolution' had already run out of steam.

'Anti' crusade

The truth is that, even in their mid-eighties heyday, the Tories never had a positive programme for rebuilding British capitalism. What the Thatcherites had was an 'anti' crusade to galvanise the middle class constituency of the Conservative heartlands (anti-the trade unions, anti-the left, anti-Soviet, anti-all the 'enemies within'). They also had the credit-financed illusion of an 'economic miracle' to appeal to more working class voters. But both the negative politics and the never-never economics of the eighties are now thoroughly exhausted.

The recession which was temporarily postponed by the credit boom has now arrived with a vengeance to destroy the Conservatives' claims for 'popular capitalism'. And the defeat of the old left and labour movement in Britain, followed by the more recent collapse of the Soviet Union, has robbed the Tories of the best bogeys for a strident anti-something campaign.

Like other pro-capitalist parties around the world, the Tories have discovered that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the old enemy raises embarrassing questions about what the right stands *for* rather than against. On the evidence of the Conservative election campaign, the answer is 'nothing much'.

Charter party

The Tories are now threatened by a very different 'enemy within': the empty hole at the heart of their own political programme.

The ongoing saga of the Citizen's Charter sums up the mediocrity of Conservatism in the Major era. Launched last year amid fanfare claims that it would revolutionise the provision of public services in Britain, the Citizen's Charter remains a piece of paper, backed by no new investment.

Devoid of meaningful ideas and constrained by the parlous state of British capitalism, all the Conservatives can do is to issue one glossy charter after another, to try to create the impression of purposeful action. So the original Citizen's Charter has been followed by a seemingly endless

stream of sub-charters from various government departments and privatised corporations: the taxpayer's charter, the shopper's charter, the commuter's charter, the electricity/gas/phone consumer's charter, the butcher's, baker's and candlestick maker's charter, etc, etc. Meanwhile, the services which all of these charters are supposed to improve continue to deteriorate.

When Major first launched his Citizen's Charter, he said it was designed to replace the outdated idea that you could solve social problems by throwing money at them. It is now obvious that he has replaced it with the revolutionary idea that you can solve social problems by throwing worthless pieces of paper at them.

When British Rail's risible passenger charter was launched in early March, setting the lowest standards for the worst commuter lines into London, it received a hostile enough reception to suggest that few people are so easily fooled.

Bumping along

Whether it's the Citizen's Charter or a national lottery, the paper proposals in the Tory programme seem farcically inadequate at such a time of economic and social crisis. The emptiness of nineties Conservatism, well represented by the mediocrities in the party leadership, means that even against unimpressive opponents, Major will not enjoy an easy ride back to Number 10.

It also means that, even if he is re-elected, Major has no chance of conjuring up a solution to the problems facing British society. The government, like the British economy, will continue 'bumping along the bottom'.

Five years ago the Tories triumphed under the banner of popular capitalism. The unpopularity of the government today (even among many of its own supporters) is a sign of what has happened to capitalism since then—and of how that slump has exposed the Tory Party's lack of a single positive policy. ●

YOUNG, DULL AND GREY

If John Major is grey, I'm glad to be grey', said a rare Scottish delegate at February's Young Conservatives conference in Eastbourne. Her colleague quoted Major as saying 'a nation which went through rapid change in the eighties can now become at ease with itself'. In other words, anything for a quiet life.

In the eighties, the Tory youth wing saw itself as the vanguard of 'Mrs Thatcher's revolution'. The right-wing Federation of Conservative Students got so far out of hand that Central Office closed it down. But

today's YCs are as downbeat and directionless as their seniors. The young blades who considered themselves the cutting-edge of radical Toryism have become dull young fogs trying to pass off their party's lack of dynamism as a sign of maturity and responsibility.

The order of the day at Eastbourne was making a virtue out of a necessity. Many YCs freely admitted that Major lacks charisma. For them, however, 'charisma-free' was meant to be as much a term of praise as 'ozone-friendly'.

PHOTO: Michael Kramer

Major's Tories



Fighting their own mediocrity

'Charisma is what counts in America, not Britain', said one delegate. Another declared, 'you don't need dynamism for government'. Indeed, according to the YCs, lack of dynamism is what makes Major a world statesman: 'He represents the caution and continuity required in world affairs.' These qualities will apparently prevent Britain from making an over-hasty escape from recession: 'As John Major said, the quick way out of recession isn't the best way. We should build slowly and

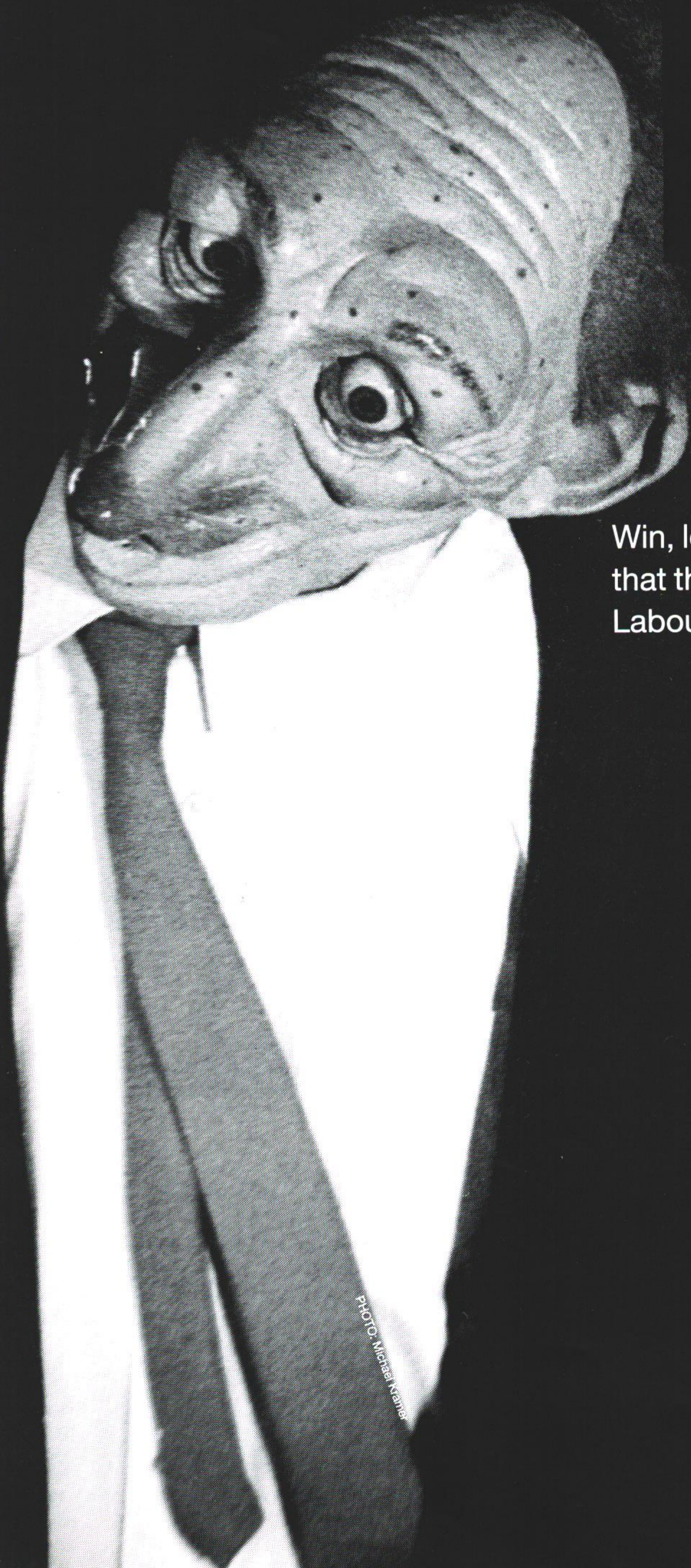
steadily for the long term'.

If there was a 'quick way out of recession', you can bet Major would take it. All this talk of 'slowly and steadily' is just a polite way of saying that the Tories have run out of steam. Some YCs came close to confessing as much. 'Political life is more dull than it was', admitted one. Another lived in hope that 'by the mid-nineties we will know where we are going'. Others denied that their party is short on new thinking. 'Our leaders are always coming up with new ideas', said

one, 'but we don't know what's going on in their heads at the moment'.

Today's YCs are already reduced to reminiscing about the past. One assured me that Britain 'will always be there in the history books'. Another typically defensive delegate wanted me to know that 'politics is not necessarily combative'. Hardly the fighting spirit which launched Thatcher against Arthur Scargill and 'the enemy within'.

Andrew Calcutt



Win, lose or draw, Eddie Veale thinks that there is big trouble ahead for a Labour Party with nothing left to offer



The Labour Party is a very different proposition in this election than it was in 1987. It has made some headway in the opinion polls. It has done so, however, at the cost of ditching its traditional identity—and replacing it with nothing. As a consequence, Neil Kinnock's Labour Party today lacks substance and standing. This already presents it with some serious problems, and promises to create far bigger ones after the election.

The old movement on which Labour relied is finished. The once-powerful trade unions now represent next to nothing. Which workers faced with redundancy in this recession would think that they could turn to their union to fight for their jobs?

Inoffensive material

As its relationship with the old working class movement has unravelled, Labour has transformed itself into just another centre-ground party. Kinnock's policy reforms have made Labour more and more moderate and bland, as it seeks to appear as inoffensive as possible to as many people as it can.

Many commentators concede that there is no longer any real difference between Labour and Tory policies. Even as the run-up to the general election began, Labour was moving closer towards the Conservatives by making significant concessions on its

PHOTO: Michael Kramer

crisis

waiting to happen

opposition to the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act and the racist Asylum Bill.

These changes have probably made Labour less objectionable to some anti-socialist voters. But they have also deprived Kinnock's party of any political distinctiveness or sense of dynamism. This is one reason why Labour has had such trouble breaking away from an unpopular Tory Party in the opinion polls. That failure could cost Kinnock dear in the election.

Lesser evil

In the eighties, there was a sizeable body of opinion which would vote for the Labour Party as 'the lesser evil'. That was hardly an enthusiastic endorsement, but it was a definite reason for supporting the Labour Party based upon its policies. This time around, that view is far rarer.

The liquidation of traditional Labourism means that people who want a change from the Tories are more likely to talk in general terms of simply voting for 'something different'. And that sentiment will not necessarily lead to a vote for Labour. It could just as easily benefit the Liberal Democrats, the natural party of the marshy middle ground. Kinnock's chances of forming a majority government still seem pretty slim.

Whatever difficulties Labour faces now, however, the real crunch will come after the election. Win or lose, the nothingness on which the New Model Labour Party is founded looks set to create big problems after polling day.

Four-time loser?

If Labour loses, it will be its fourth successive election defeat. It will mean that, over the past 13 years, the party has lost both on its old programme and its new policies. Every option will appear to be just about exhausted, and the question of what is holding Labour together is likely to come to the fore. The resulting crisis could lead to far-reaching realignments.

Even if Labour wins, or enters a coalition government, Kinnock could

soon be in serious trouble. Labour ministers will be faced with some hard decisions about how to shore up British capitalism. Their commitment to market economics suggests that they will quickly abandon any last trace of radicalism, and pursue a Tory-style economic policy. That is likely to explode the tensions within Labour's ranks beyond control.

Screws and splits

Back in 1929-30, the Labour Party split when Ramsay MacDonald's government responded to the start of the Depression by turning the screws on the working class. If there is anything like a repetition this time around, the consequences could be even more serious for Kinnock. Unlike in the thirties, there is no longer any mass movement to ensure that the Labour Party survives the crisis.

The Tory government has taken a lot of stick over its handling of economic crises. But at least, among their core constituency within the establishment and the middle classes, the Conservatives have been able to rely upon a solid base of support for the financial restraints of a 'good housekeeping' policy.

No turning back

Labour ministers would have no such support to appeal to when forcing through harsh economic policies. Their core constituency wants more public spending on health and welfare, not further cuts. The austerity programme which Labour would soon have to impose would only further speed up the demoralisation and fragmentation of its base of support.

The vacuity of Labour Party policy provides an unanswerable case for a new political alternative. There is certainly no solution to be found by trying to turn the clock back to the old postwar Labourist programme. But, as the crisis facing Labour suggests, getting rid of the political baggage of the past is not enough if you only replace it with a pragmatic commitment to managing capitalism in the present. ●

Left behind again

The British left cannot come to terms with the fact that everything has changed. Despite being discarded as Labour has turned itself into a moderate machine of the centre, most on the left still insist that Labour can be transformed into a socialist party.

The fragments of the traditional left continue to define themselves in relation to a Labour Party of the past. *Socialist Outlook* dreams of a return to the 1970s, and hopes that a Labour general election victory would somehow 'shatter' the 'quiescence of the labour movement' (23 November 1991), which is rather like asking Kinnock to raise the dead.

Socialist Worker believes that voting Labour still signifies enthusiasm for a socialist alternative, so that a Labour defeat will bring 'widespread disillusionment and demoralisation among large numbers of people who have put their hopes in Labour' (1 February 1992). They don't seem to have noticed that disillusionment set in years ago, and that few people now invest real hopes of a better future in Labour.

Sometimes there is a glimmer of recognition that something has changed. Militant's decision to stand candidates in the general election as 'Independent Labour' (supported by the Socialist Workers Party) marks a shift from its previous blind loyalty to Labour, and is a sign of the damage done by Kinnock's witch-hunt.

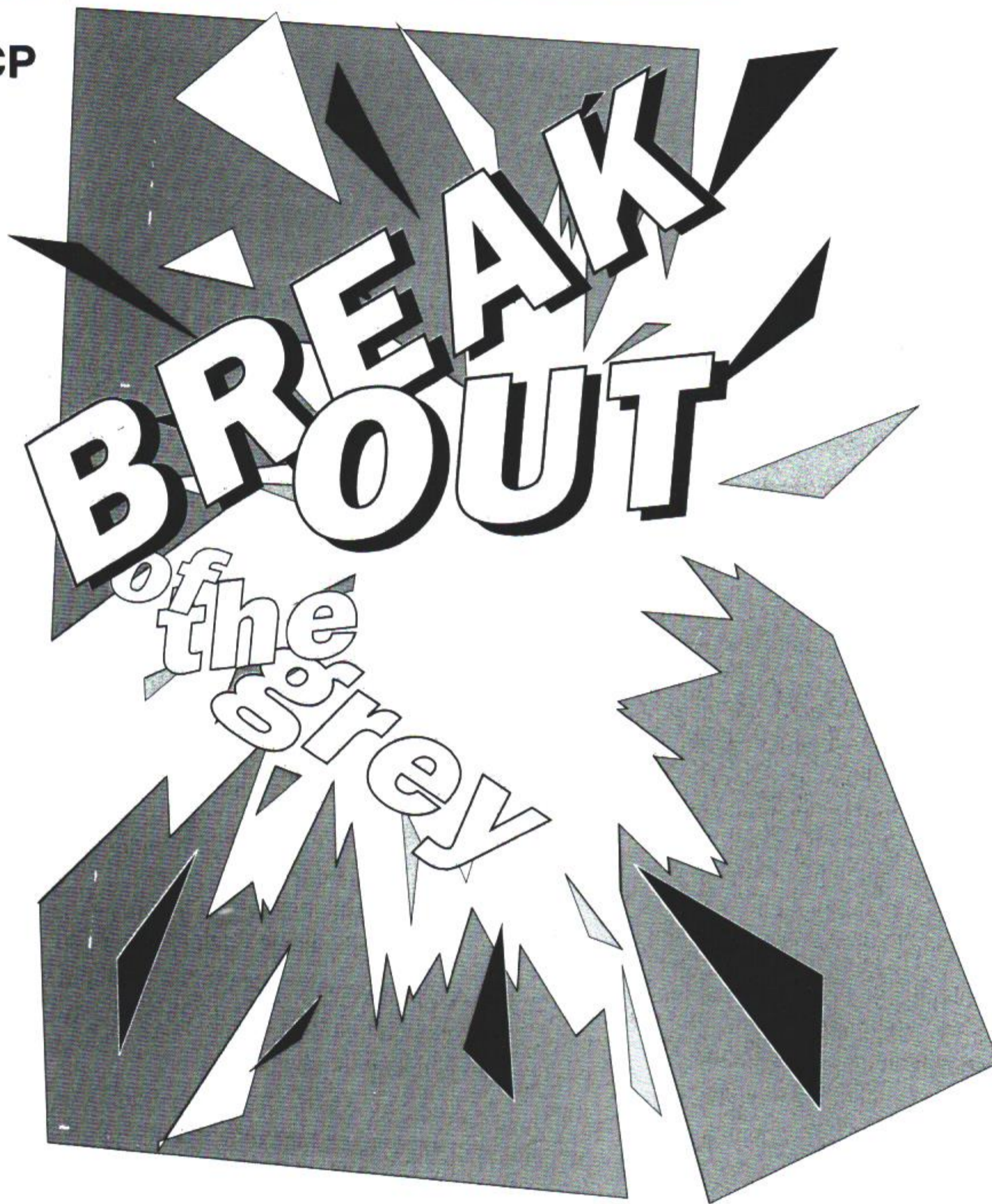
However, Militant still explains its balancing act of continuing to argue for 'Labour to power on a socialist programme' while also standing candidates as merely 'a detour through which we can strengthen the forces which in the future will lead the transformation of the Labour Party' (*Militant* editorial statement, 24 January 1992). In other words, the past may not be about to return today, but they are convinced that it will come back sometime in the future.

The rump of the old Communist Party of Great Britain, the Democratic Left, does acknowledge that some changes are permanent. For them, traditional left politics are 'now archaic. Things have moved on' (*New Times*, 22 February). But the former Stalinists have gone completely the other way, suffered a total moral collapse, and abandoned any notion of being anti-capitalist. The Democratic Left's 'new challenge' is therefore centred on the familiar-sounding ideas of 'a classless society, citizenship and the limits of politics' (*New Times*, 22 February).

While one section of the old left dreams of 'reclaiming' Neil Kinnock's party, the other part ends up sounding like John Major.

Tessa Myer

The RCP



If the electoral process is such a sham, then why is the Revolutionary Communist Party standing candidates? Campaign organiser Elli Dashwood explains



When the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) has stood election candidates before, one very common response has been that supporting the RCP is a wasted vote. Many people who might agree with our criticisms of the Labour Party would still argue that voting Labour was worth it, since they were 'the lesser evil' compared to the Tories.

In practice the differences between Labour and Tory policies were always more apparent than real. But, until fairly recently, Labour did at least make a pretence of offering an alternative economic strategy, and did take a radical stance on issues such as unilateral nuclear disarmament. It wasn't much, but for many it was enough to make voting Labour seem worthwhile. The 'lesser evil' argument seemed tenable.

Today, things are quite different. There are no alternative strategies or policies of any kind on offer from Labour. It is a fully paid-up supporter of the market economy, British militarism and just about every other Tory Party principle.

The consequence of this shift is that the old argument about Labour being the lesser evil has lost its force. Today, people who oppose the Tories are more likely to conclude that 'they're all as bad as each other'. Many who intend to

vote Labour, or even Liberal Democrat, will do so not out of support for their policies but simply out of a desire to get something, anything, different from a Tory government.

It should now be clear, however, that the best way to waste your vote is to give it to any of the mainstream parties.

There are no substantial political differences among the parties. Whichever of them forms the next government, there will be little alteration in the direction of policy—or in the downward drift of the economy. Voting for Labour or the Liberal Democrats in the hope of bringing about some unspecified change seems to be a guarantee that nothing which matters will change at all.

Taking the 'vote Labour for a change' approach to the election is not just useless, however; it is worse than useless. It is dangerous, because it will reinforce low expectations. It will strengthen the idea that none of us can make much difference to what is happening in society. And that will prove a self-fulfilling prophesy when those who vote Labour find that it really doesn't make a shred of difference.

The end result of all this will be to endorse public cynicism about anything that smacks of politics, and to encourage people to disengage themselves from the entire political process.

That is a mood which the RCP is keen to counter.

It is one thing for people to turn their backs on the parliamentary charade. But if their disaffection is only turned into apathy, the government will continue to get away with it. What is required is to convert that passive cynicism about the way things are into active support for an alternative way of running society, under the direct control of the majority.

Expose it

Given that parliamentary politics has nothing to do with such an alternative, it may seem strange that the Revolutionary Communist Party has chosen to stand several candidates in the general election. However, our aim in standing is not to become part of the process of parliamentary democracy, but to expose it as a front for the rule of the capitalist elite.

Parliament is an ineffective talking shop at the best of times. And today the discussion is more banal and irrelevant than ever before. But the RCP isn't standing to win seats in order to allow us to take part in that discussion. We are standing in an attempt to start promoting a discussion of an entirely different kind.

In the absence of any alternative, the consequence of the malaise in British politics will be more disenchantment with politics in general, and deeper cynicism about the possibilities of changing society for the better. For many people the only option appears to be a lonely struggle to survive.

Facing reality

This is where the RCP's intervention in the election fits in. We intend to take advantage of the high-profile election campaign to get the party's anti-capitalist message across to as many people as possible. We want to encourage the trend towards rejecting mainstream politics. But we want to go further, and show that it is both possible and necessary to set about creating a different kind of politics—one which bases itself on the ability of ordinary people to get organised and change the world.

Marxists are often portrayed as utopian dreamers who have no understanding of the real world. The irony of the general election is that the representatives of the Revolutionary Communist Party are the only candidates who will be focusing on today's reality—the fact that Britain is a slump society.

Tory, Labour and Liberal politicians' only role in life is to administer a decaying system. We are standing in the election to promote the need to get rid of it. They are guaranteed to bore you to tears and offer you more of the same. We can offer at least the beginnings of a genuine alternative. Don't waste your vote—Break out of the grey!

The Revolutionary Communist Party is standing candidates in the following constituencies:

- Glasgow Hillhead ● Manchester Gorton ● Sheffield Hallam ● Bristol West ● Oxford East ● Birmingham Selly Oak ● London Vauxhall ● London Hornsey and Wood Green ●

The RCP is also supporting the Irish Freedom Movement candidate in London City and Westminster, and the Workers Against Racism candidate in London Holborn and St Pancras. ●

Southern marginal: Swindon

No contest

Swindon is a key Tory marginal but neither Labour nor Conservative activists seem keyed-up to fight for it.
Andrew Calcutt reports



It was a freezing cold day in January, but 1000 people were queuing in the town centre. A food queue in St Petersburg? No, a queue outside a job centre in Swindon, Wiltshire, waiting for news of just 60 vacancies offered by Japanese pen company Pentel.

Swindon is one of the Tory marginals (majority: 4857) which Labour must win to form a government. It is also an area where questions about Britain's future are starkly posed, an eighties boom town turned nineties slump city where 400 firms closed their doors last year. Yet the striking impression after talking to Labour and Tory activists was that neither side had any confidence that it would win.

In the bar of Swindon Conservative Club, enthusiasm and confidence were in short supply. 'The Conservatives are the best of a bad bunch', said an accounts clerk. 'I think our MP might just about scrape back in'. His wife, who works in a pub, added: 'There's not a proper leader among any of them. They're all out to line their own pockets and none of them are linked to working people. But you've got a little bit more of a chance with the Conservatives.'

These were dues-paying members of the Conservative Party. Club committee members were more loyal but equally apprehensive. 'The recession must have an effect on the voters', said one. He expressed concern that sitting MP Simon Coombs was too quiet and unobtrusive to rally Conservative support. Two more paid-up Tories said they would vote

Labour this time and they only came to the Conservative Club for a drink.

At one of many working men's clubs in the town, Labour activists were not exactly gung-ho either. 'I'm not sure if the Labour Party can sort out the economy, but I don't think anybody could', said a lifelong Labour supporter. 'I do know that Labour needs a better leader than Kinnock.' Another long-serving Labour man was equally unconvinced: 'You wonder sometimes if there is any difference.' He feared that Labour candidate Jim D'Avila might lose votes as a trade union official and a Catholic of Anglo-Indian extraction. 'A total stranger would have more chance here', he said, but concluded, 'we won't get a Labour MP if it was God Almighty'.

These premonitions of doom were issuing from both corners at a time when the contest was still wide open. The lacklustre mood among all of Swindon's activists suggests they don't think their own respective parties can make a success of government.

A town like Swindon ought to be a hotbed of political controversy. It was one of the few constituencies which enjoyed economic growth in the eighties, and has been hit very hard by the recession. Its newly built housing estates are populated by the sort of skilled and white-collar working class voters which both major parties identify as the key to the election. The fact that even Swindon is stuck in the political doldrums is a telling indictment of British politics today. It shows that no party has what it takes to win the hearts and minds of a large and growing section of society—the southern working class.

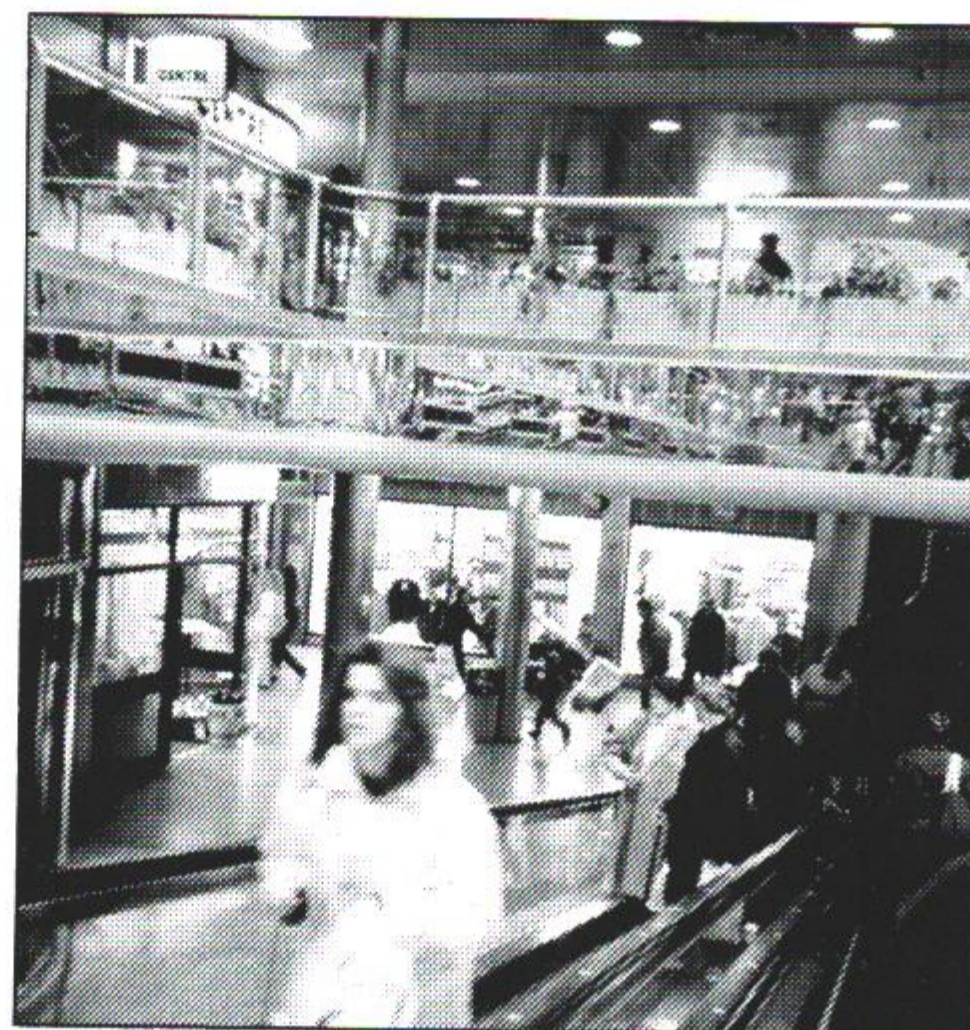
Swindon has always been a solidly working class constituency, and its political allegiance has changed several times in line with wider trends of working class opinion.

Father to son

Before the war, the town depended on the engine sheds of the Great Western Railway. Skilled jobs were handed down from father to son and Swindon's MPs were paternalistic Tories. Wartime brought nationalisation of the railways and the coming, as one activist recalled, of 'a strong Labour opinion'. In the fifties, sixties and seventies, Swindon's blue-collar, unionised workforce elected Labour MPs. In the eighties, British Rail closed its Swindon works. Traditional firms—Garrard's record-players, Compton's coats—followed suit. But the town was revitalised by an influx of service industries and hi-tech manufacturers (most of them defence-related or foreign-owned like Honda cars).

Between 1981 and 1990, Swindon's labour force grew by 18 500 (26.7 per cent). *Financial Times* journalist Roy Hudson celebrated 'the magnetism of the former railway town...30 glittering industrial and business estates...an important national centre for four modern industries' (*Financial Times*, supplement on Swindon, May 1988). Swindon earned the title 'fastest-growing town in Europe', and became the leading light in the handful of expanding urban centres between London and Bristol known as the Western Corridor.

The promise of future prosperity under a Tory government was one reason why working class constituents dumped Labour MP David Stoddart



From boom to slump:
Swindon's shopping centre

in 1983 and elected Tory Simon Coombs in his place. The subsequent short-lived boom was the major reason why Coombs increased his majority in 1987.

Some Swindon Labour supporters explain away the constituency's Tory MP by claiming 'it's not working class any more, now the dirty jobs have gone'. But the slump has shown that, whether you are employed as a Clydeside boiler-maker or a Wiltshire data processor, you are a worker who is only a pay packet or two away from the breadline. The largest part of Britain's working class now consists of white-collar labourers, most living south of Watford.

A generation switched to the Tories, not for committed ideological reasons, but simply because they wanted a better deal. 'My father was a miner and socialist', said one Swindon printworker, 'I voted Labour in the past but in 1983 I was not impressed so I changed. I don't have much preference, but I think the Conservatives are marginally better because they get on with the job, whereas Labour promises the earth and then backs off'.

What can you do?

Now there is another generation of voters in Swindon, and most are unwilling to identify with either party. 'Whoever wins, the government still gets in', said a 22-year old selling hot dogs in the shopping centre. 'I just let them get on with it because it makes no difference anyway. My mates think like I do. Even if we choose something, they're not going to do it. But what can you do?'

'The police charge in Trafalgar Square was the worst sight I've ever seen. Awful. But would Labour do any better?', asks a building worker in his twenties: 'I don't know. I'm laid off from a building site. I was earning £600 a week and I saw it go down to £250. But you just have to accept it. I don't feel strong for any party. It doesn't make any difference, it's the way things are.'

This is now a strong mood in the south where traditional patterns of political allegiance have been widely abandoned. The mood is cynical but passive, with no sense of connection either with the existing system or with any alternative way of running society. Whoever wins the 1992 election, it seems the celebrations are likely to be muted in the clubs of Swindon. ●

PHOTO: Andrew Calcutt

Surveying the

W

A Living Marxism survey of the crucial Tory marginal seat of Bolton West offers some telling insights into the state of public opinion in Britain on the eve of a general election.

- The largest section of voters cannot name a British politician who inspires them
- A majority of voters believe that election will change nothing important
- Almost 60% think that the recession will last until the end of next year, and probably longer

State of the parties

How will you vote in the 1992 election?

Labour	36%
Conservative	33%
Don't know	16%
Liberal Democrat	13%
Green	2%
Other	—

Who is the most inspiring politician?

None inspiring	29%
John Major	17%
Neil Kinnock	16%
Paddy Ashdown	14%
Margaret Thatcher	9%
Tony Benn	4%
John Smith	2%
Jonathon Porritt	2%
Claire Short	1%
Michael Heseltine	1%
Norman Tebbit	1%
Other	4%

Who is the least inspiring politician?

Neil Kinnock	22%
Margaret Thatcher	19%

John Major	14%
Tony Benn	12%
Norman Lamont	9%
Bernie Grant	8%
All equally uninspiring	7%
Claire Short	2%
Paddy Ashdown	2%
Other	4%

Have you switched parties from the 1987 election?

31% of those who voted last time said they had switched either to another major party, or to 'don't know'

Away from Conservative	16%
Away from Labour	7%
Away from Liberal Democrats	8%

If you are switching from the Tories, why?

Repelled by Tory government	72%
Enthused by others	8%
Other	19%

If you are staying loyal to the Tories, why?

Dislike Labour/others	37%
Economic policies	20%
General principles	10%
No alternative	10%
Best to govern	8%

Family tradition
Other

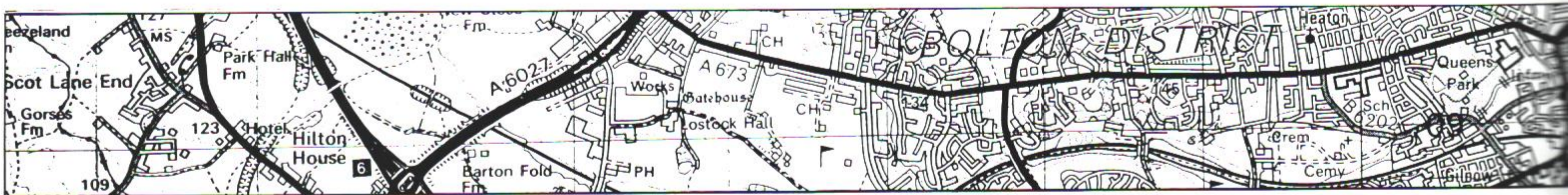
If you are staying with the Tories, why?
Dislike Tories
Party of working class
Family tradition
Social policies
Economic policies
General principles
Party of socialists
Other

If you are staying with the Tories, why?
Dislike others
General principles
Other

State of the nation

Do elections change anything?

No
Yes
Don't know



reckage

name one
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bably longer

- Only around a third believe that their children will ever be better off than them
- On every question, the most cynical and pessimistic responses are concentrated among younger voters

Kirsten Cale analyses the findings



Bolton West has been a weather-vane seat for most of the past 30 years: it had a Labour MP during the Wilson government, a Tory MP during the Heath government, a Labour MP during the Wilson/Callaghan government and a Tory MP after the Thatcherite landslide of 1983. At the 1987 election, Conservative Thomas Sackville had a majority of 4593.

Cynicism rules

The *Living Marxism* poll shows that, at the end of February, Labour (36 per cent) was holding a three per cent lead over the Tories (33 per cent) in Bolton West. But the large number of 'Don't knows' (16 per cent), many of whom voted Tory last time, make the final outcome far from certain. Although Labour has taken the lead, at 36 per cent its support in our poll is exactly the same as the share of the vote which the defeated Labour candidate received in 1987—a fact which points to a lack of dynamism behind any of the parties.

The most significant feature of the responses is the high level of cynicism about parties and politicians. Few will cast a positive vote for anybody. The largest section of those remaining loyal to each party say they will be casting a negative vote *against* the others, rather than a positive vote *for* the party of their choice.

A bad bunch

While few would go as far as Howard Miles—an unemployed Bolton man who recently fire-bombed a local Conservative Club because the Tories had 'ruined his life'—many are casting their votes as a protest against either the government or the opposition. The politics of the 'best of a very bad bunch' will hold sway on polling day. ▶

5%
10%

Why loyal to Labour, why?

35%
17%
16%
11%
8%
6%
4%
4%

Why loyal to the Liberals, why?

42%
24%
33%

What are the three most important problems today?

(% of respondents naming each problem as one of their top three)

Unemployment	66%
Health service	52%
Crime	47%
Housing	34%
Environment	23%
Inflation	21%
Aids	18%
Immigration	8%
Education	8%
Racism	6%
Defence	5%
Other	11%

When will the recession end?

Summer	4%
End of the year	21%
End of 1993	26%
Longer	29%
Never	3%
Don't know	17%

Are you better/worse off than your parents?

Better off	77%
Worse off	13%
Same	8%
Don't know	2%

(survey continues over) ▶

of the nation

change anything important?

55%
37%
8%





Almost a third of respondents could not name a single living British politician who inspired them. 'They all piss in the same pot', said an 18-year old youth from Blackrod. 'They're all so boring', complained a housewife from Horwich. People were more forthcoming about their political hate figures: Neil Kinnock scored an easy victory as the least inspiring politician in Britain, and was roundly condemned as 'spineless', 'incompetent' and 'clueless' by Tory and Labour supporters alike. Margaret Thatcher ('that cow') and John Major ('a jerk') took second and third prize for most unpopular politician.

A battering

Unemployment topped the poll as the most important political problem (66 per cent named it as one of their top three). Bolton has taken a battering in the recession: 10 per cent are unemployed, with a 40 per cent increase since Major became prime minister. The recent lay-offs at the Lostock British Aerospace plant—the largest private employer in Bolton—have forced even more on to the dole queues.

Few think the recession is likely to end in the near future. The largest group (29 per cent) predicted that the

recession would last at least until 1994. Only 4 per cent thought the recession would be over this summer. (Norman 'the recession is over' Lamont was the fifth most unpopular politician.)

Crime capital?

Nearly half also listed crime in their top three issues, responding in part to attempts by local politicians and press to puff up a crime wave in Bolton ('Capital of crime'). Tom Sackville, Tory MP for Bolton West, recently dressed up as a policeman to go on a fact-finding tour of Westhoughton, a one-supermarket-town on the outskirts of the constituency. He concluded that Westhoughton's 'proximity to the motorway network acts as a magnet, attracting criminals from as far away as Merseyside'. The *Bolton Evening News* has called for 'two years hard labour without comforts' for those accused of stealing car radios, and publishes a weekly list of the names and addresses of poll tax defaulters.

Fear of the future

People's cynicism about politics reflects a wider pessimism about the future, especially among younger people. While there was little celebration of the past (the vast majority believed that they were better off than their parents' generation) there was considerable ambiguity about the future. Nearly a third (32 per cent) thought their children would be worse off and a fifth didn't know. The most pessimistic were people under 35, who made up close on half of those who

thought things would be worse for their children's generation.

A lack of optimism about the future also coloured opinions on which British institutions would cease to exist in 50 years time. Despite the high levels of concern expressed about welfare issues like health and housing, more than a fifth predicted that the welfare state would be eliminated by 2042—a sure sign that they believe things are going to get worse. At the same time, the lack of belief in any prospect of radical change in Britain meant that less than one in four people felt an anachronism like the House of Lords would have disappeared by then.

No choice

In this context, it might seem strange that more than 80 per cent of respondents said they were proud to be British to some degree. But this stock response tells us little about the way people really think. As the overall *Living Marxism* survey reveals, on every specific issue the most striking response is a lack of faith in the British system.

The deep cynicism expressed about the election in Bolton West illustrates the lack of appeal of the major parties. The Tories are condemned as 'a party of spivs', the Labour Party dismissed as 'a waste of time'. Most see the elections as a charade which has no bearing on their real concerns. As one Halliwell pensioner put it, 'they're all crap'. But until the people of places like Bolton West are presented with an alternative, they'll have no choice. ●

Will your children be better/worse off than you?

Better off	37%
Worse off	32%
Same	12%
Don't know	19%

Which British institutions will cease to exist in 50 years?

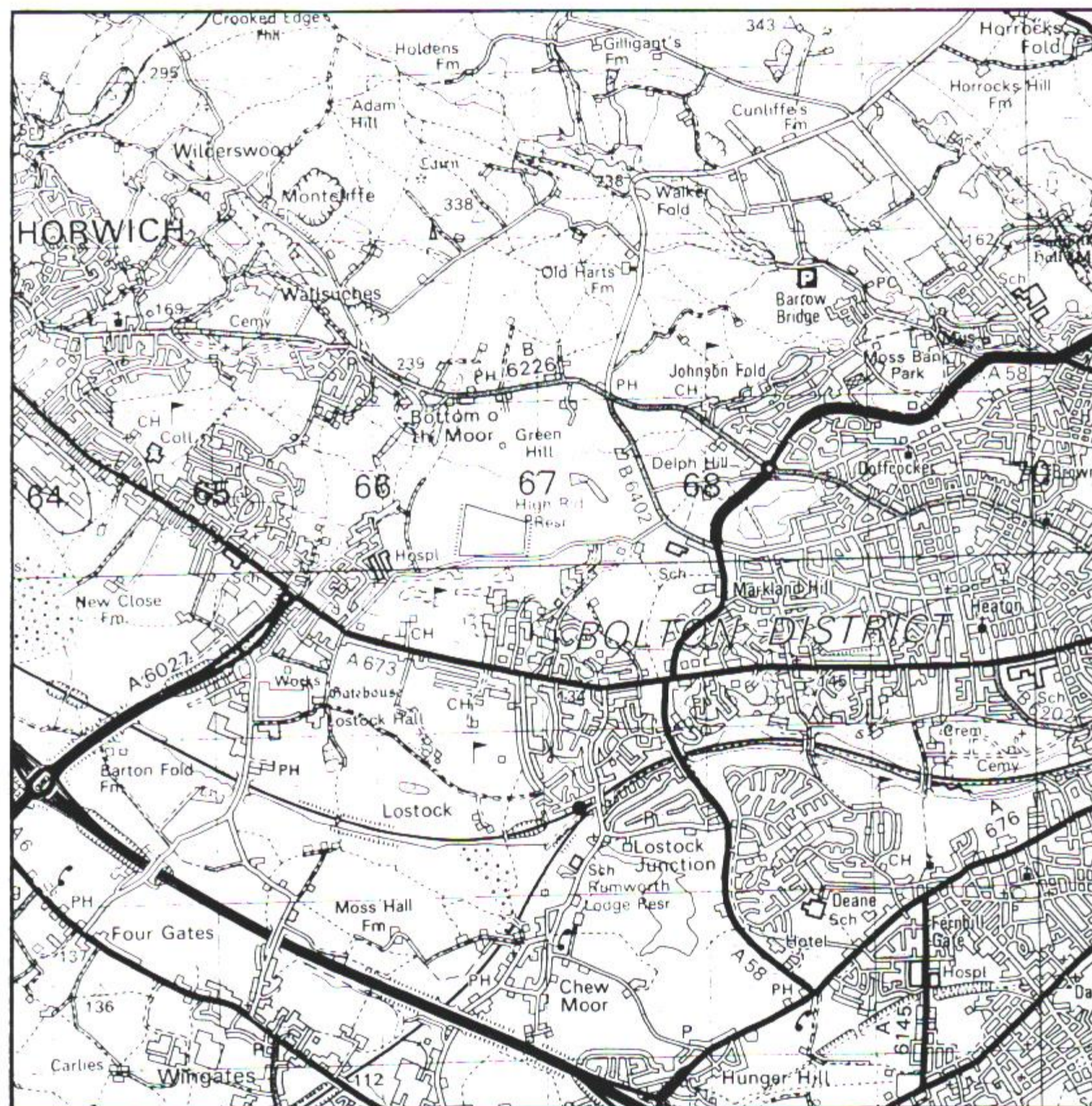
House of Lords	23%
Welfare state	22%
None will cease	22%
Royal family	16%
Parliament	3%
Labour Party	2%
Conservative Party	1%
Don't know	11%

Are you proud to be British?

Very proud	55%
Moderately proud	31%
Indifferent	8%
Not very proud	4%
Not proud at all	3%
Not British	—

Survey conducted by Manchester and Liverpool *Living Marxism* readers. Statistics compiled by Kirsten Cale and Simon Banks. Additional research by Ravi Behn and Colm Murphy.

(The survey was carried out in Bolton West between 18 and 29 February 1992. The 500 respondents were drawn proportionately from age groups corresponding to OPCS population projections for Bolton in 1991.)



The importance of being Scottish

The rise of national sentiment in Scotland is the clearest expression of public alienation from the British political system, argues Kirk Williams

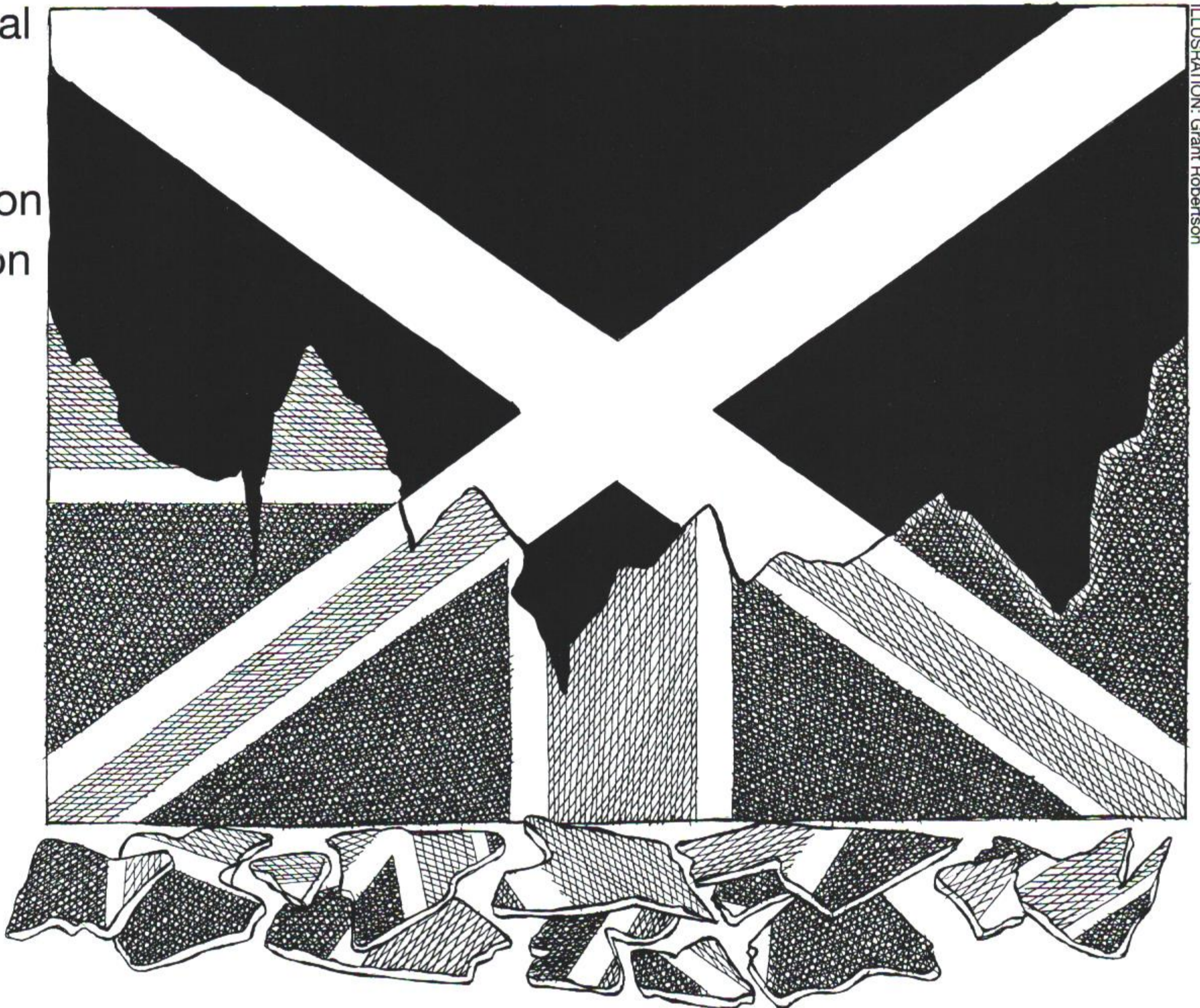


ILLUSTRATION: Grant Robertson



Living in Scotland today seems like living in two different worlds. First there is mediaworld, as seen on TV and in the daily newspapers. Here Scotland is in the throes of political upheaval and cultural revolution as the rise of nationalism turns the Scottish question into the most controversial issue in the British general election.

Mediaworld is an exciting place where big things happen on a daily basis. If it's not an opinion poll showing widespread support for the idea of Scotland leaving the UK, it's

a press conference with Deacon Blue to launch Artists for an Independent Scotland. In mediaworld the debate about Scotland's future goes heatedly back and forth, and Glasgow and Edinburgh are in a state of political ferment.

Then there is the real world, which you enter as soon as you leave the artists' press conference in central Glasgow. Walking down Argyle Street a leaflet was thrust into my hand: 'This year, a Labour government.... Next year, a Scottish parliament'. A wet and tired young man was posing in front of

a hired video camera, trying to get people to take leaflets adorned with Labour's big celebrity supporter, comedian Robbie Coltrane. He was being drowned out by both the buskers and the soap box Christians, and whipping up about as much public enthusiasm as the bag ladies.

In the real world the dominant mood among Scottish people is one of apathy and cynicism. There is no large-scale active campaigning on any important social issue, from the closure of Ravenscraig steel works to the poll tax.

The image of an excited and



optimistic Scotland depicted in mediaworld is a long way from the reality of a dead-end society in which youth drug abuse is on the rise. In Glasgow alone, 24 people died of drug overdoses in the first few weeks of this year, compared to 11 deaths in the previous 11 months. A Glasgow University survey makes clear the pessimism of young Scots, who no longer see education as a means of escape from poverty, but as a 'brief interlude from the dole'.

Glasgow scene

As for a Scottish cultural revolution, there is certainly considerable support among the youth for bands with a Scottish identity. But musically much of the Glasgow scene seems to have more in common with Manchester or Liverpool than Edinburgh or Inverness. A group of young voters interviewed by the *Scotsman* were highly cynical about the political pretensions of local pop groups. One suggested that a politician offering free raves would sway more youth votes (28 February).

There is no real interest or enthusiasm for any of the Westminster parties. The Tories are bitterly resented

and blamed for the further economic deterioration of Scotland. The party that won more than half of Scottish votes back in the fifties now has only nine seats in Scotland, and is panicking about the prospect of winning even fewer in the election.

The Tory leadership's response has been to raise the stakes by polarising the debate between unconditional support for the Union and Scottish independence. It is a high-risk strategy, and it is unclear what the consequences will be for the Tories or for the British constitution. But one thing it has achieved is to put the squeeze on an already unpopular Labour Party.

Unappealing politics

Labour is the traditional recipient of the emotional and political opposition to the Tories in Scotland. Today Labour's inability to make exciting promises, never mind lead effective opposition, has left it unappealing, especially to the young. There are now fewer than 300 members of the Labour Party under 25 in Scotland.

The prospect of hearing George Galloway MP speak at Glasgow University in his Hillhead constituency

recently appealed to 12 souls. This university has produced many past and present leaders of the party, including Scottish spokesman Donald Dewar and shadow chancellor John Smith. No doubt Labour is unappealing to young people across Britain. But for an entire generation to turn its back on Labour in Scotland could have especially serious consequences.

Passive rejection

This is the downbeat background against which to understand the rise of support for Scottish independence (and to a lesser extent for the Scottish National Party) in the opinion polls. What we are witnessing is not an upsurge of popular nationalism, but a passive rejection of the old failed parties and institutions which many Scots identify with the United Kingdom.

People's alienation from and disaffection with the present political arrangements in Britain is taking the form of a culturally based sense of difference, of being Scottish. Far from indicating positive support for an exciting alternative, the raised profile of the outlook of 'Scottishness' reflects

Helene Gold puts the case against celebrating 'Scottishness'

Alex Salmond of the Scottish National Party boasts that 'a mood of Scottishness is sweeping across our country'. But to talk of 'Scottishness' as a political identification seems absurd. 'Being Scottish' is basically about being born north of Hadrian's Wall. We had no say in the matter and can do nothing to change it.

To suggest that we should celebrate where we were born is like asking redheads to celebrate the fact that they were born with ginger hair, and to assume a political identity on that basis. Our birthplace, like our chromosomal make-up, is a biological accident produced in the past. Why make a virtue of it? Nationalism is about defending and celebrating what once was and what now is, instead of addressing the question of what is to be. It is the future, which we have the power to change, that we must look to rather than the past, which is outside of our control.

All together now?

Nationalism is also dangerous, as it can only benefit those at the top of Scottish society. Do we really share common interests with everybody who happens to have been born within the same borders as ourselves? Such a

notion of Scottishness is never taken seriously by Scottish businessmen. The Confederation of British Industry (Scotland) and Business Says Yes may have hedged their bets on devolution. But this is not out of any compassion for 'the Scottish people'; it is, as they admit, out of a concern to provide a stable and profitable environment for Scottish business. In pursuit of those same aims, the employers will not hesitate to cut the jobs and living standards of their 'fellow Scots'.

Low horizons

Some of Scotland's top-paid company directors—Gus Macdonald of Scottish Television, Alick Rankin of Scottish and Newcastle, and Charles Winter of the Royal Bank of Scotland—have been at the forefront of implementing the wave of recent redundancies, 1000 at the Royal alone. They do not allow their 'Scottishness' to interfere with the ruthless pursuit of profit at our expense.

In courting Scottish businessmen, the SNP reveals its priorities. Alex Salmond might promise hairdressers an extra £2.40 a week in an independent Scotland. But as he says, independence will not establish an instant utopia. Sacrifices will have to be made to put

Why I'm not a

the lowering of horizons among many cynical Scots today.

British society is in crisis, and there is no major party or movement that can offer an effective solution to social problems. When there is nothing to enthuse about in the outside world, people seeking refuge will tend to turn inwards on themselves. All sorts of narrow sentiments can be strengthened in these circumstances, from family values to regional parochialism. The renewed strength of 'Scottishness' fits into the same pattern.

The sense of what you already are—in this case, Scottish—can become more important in conditions where it seems impossible to create something new and better in society. It is a negative rejection of what passes for political struggle today.

Looking at the question of Scottishness in this way helps to explain why there can be a growing desire for Scottish independence among young people, but no mass movement of any kind demanding it. It also helps to explain why support for the policies

of the SNP, the one party in Scotland committed to independence, is still considerably lower than paper support for the general idea of independence.

In all the discussion of electoral arithmetic, it is worth remembering that while the SNP may reap some advantage from current developments, it is not responsible for them. It is benefiting from the combination of low expectations and political alienation now influencing wide layers of Scottish society.

Damning judgement

Although there is no upsurge of popular enthusiasm for SNP policies, nationalist feeling may remain high as what British society has to offer becomes less and less appealing. The existing political and economic system has failed Scots so badly already, and offers so bleak a future, that frustrated young people can even find the petty, inward-looking celebration of simply being Scottish attractive by comparison. That seems a damning judgement on the decay of British democracy.

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



Scottish business back on its feet. I wonder who will make these sacrifices? And I can assure you it would take more than a few more redundancies and a few more pounds out of our wage packets to make Scottish business internationally competitive.

I am not a nationalist, because nationalism is exclusive and inward-looking. It is necessarily a chauvinist and narrow-minded creed which promotes one nation as better than others. The SNP of course argues that the Scottish version is different. It uses the Scandinavian countries as its model for a more outward-looking, relaxed, non-exclusive and more cosmopolitan style of nationalism. I wonder if they have asked the Iraqis, Turks, Vietnamese and Latin Americans now being booted out of these countries what they think of the 'non-exclusive' Scandinavian model of nationalism?

No Scottish solution

Nor should we forget all of the backward ideas that are buried inside the traditions of Scottishness—the religious sectarianism, the anti-Irish bigotry, the racism towards Asian immigrants, the opposition to women's abortion rights.

The nationalist outlook feeds off the conservative, pessimistic mood of our times. It also reinforces that pessimism by reducing the possibilities of changing the world to a debate about how to tinker with borders and parliaments. The grey discussions on constitutional change, and the retreat into an inward-looking Scottish identity, provide no solutions to our problems. Trying to create a better future for ourselves must be a better bet than celebrating the historical accident of having been born in Scotland.

Fear of the masses

The 'end of communism' has led to widespread celebrations of the triumph of liberal democracy. But, says Mike Freeman, a spate of elections in the West reveals a pervasive uneasiness in the relationship between capitalism and democracy



A recent poll conducted for the European Commission in Eastern Europe revealed widespread

disenchantment with the operation of the new democratic systems (*Guardian*, 29 January). Only in Lithuania was a clear majority satisfied with democracy; in Bulgaria more were dissatisfied than satisfied; everywhere else the majority was dissatisfied, by 2:1 in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland and by 4:1 in Russia west of the Urals. Just as in the past conservative ideologues in the West influenced the intelligentsia in the East, now Eastern disillusionment with democracy fuels

anti-democratic sentiment in the West.

Take the recent review of a collection of the writings of the notorious Russian chauvinist Alexander Solzhenitsyn by Oxford history professor Norman Stone (*Guardian*, 31 October). In a generally sympathetic account, Stone notes, almost in passing, that Solzhenitsyn 'does not care much for universal suffrage; he thinks that voting should not begin until 20, and that there should be a lower age limit for people who are elected'. (Stone also notes with approval Solzhenitsyn's suggestion that men should be paid more so that women can stay at home and raise a family.)

Not so fast

At February's World Economic Forum in Switzerland, former Japanese premier Noboru Takeshita expressed alarm at events in Eastern Europe. Takeshita, who himself had to resign in 1989 over his involvement in one of the financial scandals that are endemic to Japan's parliamentary democracy, declared that while 'democracy was laudable', some countries had rushed into it so fast that their political systems had collapsed. He was particularly concerned that nobody should suggest accelerating the pace of democratic transformation in Japan's East Asian sphere of influence.

In discussing the problems of democracy in the East, *Sunday Times* columnist Barbara Amiel has commented that 'democracy, strictly speaking, is only a means of ensuring a method of succession in government.

It is an excellent method, but by itself it is not a guarantee of anything' (26 January). The democratic ideal, so recently proclaimed over the ruins of the Berlin Wall as the ultimate realisation of human destiny, is now reduced to a technical device for reproducing governments.

Corruption and patronage

Just as the ending of the Cold War has thrown the old world order into disarray, it has also unleashed a crisis of legitimacy of the political institutions of Western society. Combined with the impact of economic recession, the result is a trend towards the fragmentation of old parties and alignments.

Take Italy. For 40 years, Italian politics were polarised between the virulently anti-Soviet, anti-communist Christian Democrats and the Communist Party. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of the Communist Party (which has changed its name and split) has deprived the Christian Democrats of their unifying focus. Faced with all the problems of inflation, unemployment and regional differentiation, the Christian Democrats are revealed for what they have always been: a coalition of local bosses relying on corruption and patronage. Only now they are incapable of holding together.

Throughout the West, mainstream parties of the right have lost the propaganda focus that gave them cohesion throughout the Cold War era at the very moment when the deepest postwar recession weakens their grip



PHOTO: Press Association

“ But you see, all the democracies are bankrupt now, because, you know, because of the way that the services have been planned for people to grab. ”

Her Majesty the Queen to Ronald Reagan, featured in a recent BBC documentary commemorating her 40-year reign.

on society. The right's only consolation is that the collapse of the Soviet bloc has dealt an even heavier blow to established labour movement organisations, both Stalinist and social democratic, further discrediting their programmes and eroding their popular support. The resulting instability gives unprecedented scope for populist, even demagogic, politicians to make dramatic advances. It is in response to such movements that anti-democratic trends have recently become apparent.

Some increasingly widespread trends are apparent in the USA. Until recently, president George Bush anticipated a fairly easy ride through this year's election campaign to a second term in the White House. But the conqueror of Baghdad and the victor in the Cold War has spectacularly failed to defeat the recession that is ravaging America, intensifying sentiments of national decline that are not assuaged by triumphs in far-away countries.

Sex scandals

The main threat to Bush in the early stages of his campaign has come from rivals for the nomination of the Republican Party, notably Pat Buchanan and David Duke. Both candidates emphasise populist, racist and anti-Semitic themes, Buchanan in the more discreet terms of a Washington sophisticate, Duke in the less coded rhetoric of the South. Bush's first response to the challenge was to subvert the electoral process by using bureaucratic methods to prevent

both his rivals, but especially Duke, from entering Republican Party primary contests.

Another trend evident in the early stages of the US presidential election is the mobilisation of the media around sexual and other scandal allegations to discredit opposition politicians. Bill Clinton, Bush's most dangerous challenger from the chronically demoralised Democratic camp, has been subjected not only to highly publicised allegations of sexual misconduct, but also to smears about his record in relation to Vietnam. The most striking feature about the latter charge is that it suggests the involvement of the security services in providing dirt for the presidential campaign. The recent media attacks on Neil Kinnock and Paddy Ashdown in Britain reveal a similar process.

Blocking tactics

As the far right has grown rapidly in Europe, politicians in mainstream parties have resorted to collaborating together to try to block its rise—if necessary by delaying elections. In January in Milan, Italy, for example, the Christian Democrats persuaded Piero Borghini, for 30 years a prominent communist, to become mayor in a new municipal coalition, so avoiding the danger of holding elections. Both the traditional right and left feared that they would lose support to the anti-Southerner, anti-immigrant Lombard League which recently won an election in neighbouring Brescia and is set to

advance further in Northern Italy.

But the racists' influence will not be reduced by depriving them of opportunities to display it. Such tactics simply expose the weakness and desperation of the mainstream parties. Similar trends are apparent in the response to the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National in France.

The fact that anti-democratic measures are commonly used against far-right and racist politicians and movements today should not disguise their reactionary character. It is already clear that the predominant response of the mainstream parties to the success of the far right is to adopt similar policies. This is apparent in the explicitly racist statements of prominent French politicians, both in the conservative parties and in the Socialist government. While trying to restrict Le Pen's organisation, they are happy to adapt to his prejudices. It is also clear from the campaigns against moderate opposition politicians like Kinnock, Ashdown and Clinton, that any more radical opposition movement could expect the even more drastic curtailment of democratic liberties.

Fear and contempt

However, at the root of the current trend to restrict democracy and to question its validity lies a more fundamental feature of bourgeois politics—a profound distrust, compounded with elements of fear and contempt, for the mass of people who express their judgements through the ballot box.



The Queen's cocktail party exchange with Reagan, quoted above, echoes the concerns of the establishment about the consequences of expanding voting rights in the nineteenth century. The consensus of contemporary capitalist opinion was that there must be a direct link between the franchise and the ownership of property. Only those who paid taxes should vote because only they had a stake in the system. It was considered self-evident that the beneficiaries of government revenues should not have the vote, or they would use it to back candidates offering more benefits—thus unleashing a spiral of public expenditure and corrupting public life. This is why, according to the Queen, 'all the democracies are bankrupt'.

For people like the Queen and Reagan, the trouble with democracy is not only that it gives non-taxpayers authority over taxpayers, but it also gives the uneducated masses power over the enlightened few. For a minority ruling class, democracy is the

For people like the Queen and Reagan, the trouble with democracy is that it gives the uneducated masses power over the enlightened few

tyranny of the majority. Such concerns were widely expressed in response to the 1867 Reform Act which, for the first time conceded the vote to a significant section of the working class in Britain.

This limited measure, which fell far short of universal suffrage and included a property qualification, was fiercely resisted by conservatives, notably by the Queen's great-great-grandmother. A recent appeal to 'restrict the right to vote' recalled that the fear of 'thoughtful people' was that 'if everyone had the vote the result would be tyranny of the mob, in other words the dictatorship of the ignorant' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 13 October).

A contemptuous attitude towards the masses was by no means exclusive to aristocratic and upper class circles. It was also held by the lower middle class Fabians who became a major influence on the early labour movement. This is how George Bernard Shaw, a prominent Fabian,

summed up the prevailing view:

'In spite of all the efforts to feed and educate them, the common people were still "riff-raff". To hand over the country to riff-raff is national suicide, since riff-raff can neither govern nor will let anybody else govern except the highest bidder of bread and circuses.' (From the preface to *Man and Superman*)

The Fabians aspired to forge a new elite to run society on rational principles: they ended up as a Labour Party think-tank.

Nineteenth-century prejudices against popular democracy are currently enjoying a revival. One of the central Tory justifications for the poll tax was that it restored a direct relationship between the individual taxpayer/voter and the local councillors responsible for spending on services. The immediate result was to remove thousands of voters from the electoral register. Numerous surveys showing



high levels of ignorance and indifference among young people about the general election have reinforced Tory scepticism about a system that puts the power to change government in such unreliable hands. On the left, an echo of Shaw's disdain for the masses can be detected in theories of 'Thatcherism', which sought to explain the Conservative ascendancy in the eighties by the gullibility of 'the common people'.

The British ruling class conceded the right to vote to the working class in a gradual and piecemeal way over several decades, carefully constructing mechanisms for containing and managing the masses through the party system. The whole panoply of modern parliamentary party politics, with its structure of national and local organisations, conferences, newspapers, factions, and other activities emerged in response to the problem of integrating the masses into the political system. The current malaise of democracy

results from the fact that these mechanisms are now in decay.

The growing corruption and trivialisation of politics throughout the Western world creates many problems for the establishment. At least in the short term, the process of the disintegration of old organisations and the emergence of new populist movements is likely to continue. The result will be more instability and more conflict between the old and the new.

Urban outlaws

Another consequence is growing alienation from the political process. Commenting on the number of people who have disappeared from the register to avoid the poll tax, the *Daily Telegraph* concluded that 'we may be confronted with a new and threatening character—the urban outlaw, a being with no interest in the rule of law, who, by his own choice, has no political party to represent him' (13 February). While the *Telegraph* does not yet say how to deal with 'the urban outlaw' its definition of the problem suggests that the solution will be more repression.

Liberal critics of British parliamentary democracy have focused on the defects of the voting system, proposing various electoral reforms as a solution. Others call for a written constitution or a bill of rights to protect and extend civil liberties. The weakness of all such schemes is that they identify the problem too narrowly in the political sphere, when its roots are to be found in the structure of capitalist society itself. Even the most democratic system of government provides no respite from the exploitative relations of the capitalist economy and the problems that follow.

Guardian adverts

Furthermore, the constitutional reformers seem to assume that the power of persuasion is sufficient to ensure that their schemes prevail. But, while history offers examples of constitutions imposed by dictators from above or enforced by revolutions from below, there is no precedent for major constitutional reform resulting from full-page advertisements in the *Guardian*.

Defending the limited democratic rights that exist and extending them in face of the repressive trends of modern capitalist society will require the mobilisation of the long-despised masses. They alone can realise the ideals of government of the people, for the people by the people, long abandoned by those who still proclaim, in increasingly subdued tones, the triumph of democracy over communism. As the Queen concluded her chat with Reagan, 'I think the next generation are going to have a very difficult time'.

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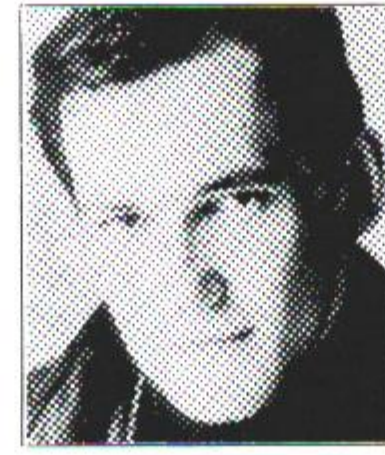
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Return of the Gestapo

The trial in Germany of a man accused of murdering two policemen 60 years ago marks a major step forward in the rehabilitation of the Nazi era.

Rob Knight reports from Frankfurt

On 9 August 1931 the German Communist Party reached a new low when it joined with the Nazis in a referendum against the Social Democratic government of Prussia. On the same day in the Prussian capital of Berlin, two policemen, Paul Anlauf and Franz Lenk, were shot dead by persons unknown. At the time, the killings were seen as revenge for the police murder of a young worker, Fritz Auge, the previous day. In those increasingly violent and uncontrolled times the murder of two policemen was not a headline event, and nothing came of the police investigations.

Nazi witch-hunt

However, after the Nazis took power they reopened the investigation as part of a general anti-communist witch-hunt. The two dead policemen were hailed as heroes and a statue erected to them in Horst-Wessel Strasse. In 1934, using evidence and confessions extracted from witnesses with the usual Gestapo methods of threats and torture, a group of 25 Communists, including one Erich Mielke, were charged with the murder. Mielke had by this time fled to Moscow and was consequently tried in his absence. The court had no difficulty in finding most of the defendants guilty. Three were sentenced to death, one of whom was executed.

In 1947 the authorities tried to reopen the trial, as part of a review of legal cases under the Nazis. But the Soviets, who at that time shared control of Berlin, refused to cooperate and nothing came of it. No more was heard of the case until after German reunification, when all the old files became available again to the West.

ILLUSTRATION: Grobnik



On 10 February this year the case was reopened, with the defendant, Erich Mielke, in court for the first time.

Such an obsession with a 60-year old murder case seems bizarre, until you know that Erich Mielke was for 32 years head of the Stasi secret police in East Germany. The German government wants to bring leading members of the old East German government (GDR) to book for crimes committed against their own people. This is an extremely complex legal process, given that the GDR was an internationally recognised state, and there is no generally accepted legal framework for it. After all, if every government leader was to be held legally responsible for repressive acts committed under him or her the world's jails would be full of politicians. The German state is arguing that, because of this legal problem, it wants to use the old criminal charges against Mielke to make him pay for his later crimes.

In reality, the Mielke retrial has more to do with the dark shadow that Nazism casts over Germany's past than it does with the legacy of Stalinism. Mielke is being tried using exactly the same charges and evidence that were brought against him by the Nazis. Just to emphasise the continuity even more, his case is being tried not only in the same court but in the same room as it was in 1934. The message from the state prosecution, backed up by editorial comments from the German press, is explicit. The German establishment is saying that the Nazi legal process was legitimate and normal. It is the clearest example yet of how far the German authorities are prepared to go in rewriting the past.

Legacy of the past

Rewriting the past is an urgent necessity for Germany's leaders. They know that all the world, including the German people, have not forgotten Nazi atrocities. While Germany was recovering from its defeat in the Second World War the Nazi past was not too great a burden. Germany concentrated on rebuilding its economy and did not aspire to play any great role in world politics. But now the world has changed dramatically and Germany has once more been thrust on to the world stage as a leading actor. The gradual erosion of US power, coupled with the weakness of other European powers, is making Germany the most influential nation in Europe.

Germany has difficulties in exercising this new-found power because of the legacy of the past. Every attempt to develop its foreign policy is met by dark comments from its rivals about German assertiveness. At home as well, the German establishment faces difficulties. It has yet to create a consensus among its own people for

a more aggressive intervention in the outside world.

In the eighties, leading German historians and politicians began to discuss the necessity for coming to terms with the past, as a prerequisite for a resurgent Germany. Since reunification this attempt to settle accounts with the past has passed from the realm of discussion to the world of practical politics. Recent articles in *Living Marxism* have noted how Germany has promoted Croatian independence in order to legitimise retrospectively both the pro-Nazi wartime Croatian government, and the role of Nazi Germany in the region. But this was an indirect apology for Nazism. Although the implications were clear enough, nobody spelled them out fully.

Hitler=Stalin

The Mielke trial is something else. It is an indication of how far things have changed that such an explicit endorsement of the Nazi regime can be made without provoking any protest. Ten years ago it would not have been possible for anybody to endorse Gestapo methods of evidence collection in this way. Those, such as Mielke's own lawyer, who have argued that Nazi evidence is tainted have now seen their arguments dismissed out of hand. Indeed the response of the press this time around was to question the lawyer's right, as an ex-GDR lawyer, even to participate in the new Germany's legal processes. Under pressure he has since resigned.

The Mielke trial is also being used to legitimise the past in another way. Some sections of the German press have been commenting on the absurdity of charging Mielke for this old crime while ignoring his record in the GDR. The right-wing *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) has said that it is as ridiculous to try Mielke for this old crime as it would have been to charge Goering after the war with something he did in 1920, rather than what he did during the Nazi reign. By directly comparing the Nazis with the Stalinists, the FAZ is relativising Nazism; Goering was no worse than Mielke, Hitler was no worse than Stalin, Nazi Germany was no worse than the Soviet Union.

No more guilt

This has long been a favourite theme of the right. The conclusion it draws is that Nazism was to be regretted, but then so was Stalinism, and there is no reason why Germany should feel any more or less guilty than many other countries for what happened in the past. So when one newspaper headed its trial report with the senile Mielke's question 'Is it not over yet?', the message was very clear. The past, whether Nazi or

Stalinist, is over and should be forgotten. Germany should be allowed to get on with its business of becoming a major world power without having continually to look over its shoulder or apologise for what it is doing.

'Butcher' Harris

When it was announced recently that a statue was being erected in London to Britain's RAF leader 'Bomber' Harris, the German press drew attention to the fact that he was responsible for the deaths of 600 000 German civilians, and dubbed him 'Butcher' Harris. The message was that other countries have their war criminals as well—a far cry from the acceptance of 'national guilt' which until quite recently characterised Germany's attitude to the war. Just to drive the point home, one paper compared the raising of the Harris statue with Kohl and Reagan's controversial visit to the SS graves at Bitburg in 1985.

There are other examples of how Germany is now legitimising the Nazi period. It is insisting that the 1938 treaty with Czechoslovakia, signed by the Czechs under threat of Nazi invasion and under extreme pressure from Britain and France to capitulate to Nazi demands, is legally valid. This would mean that the property rights of Sudeten Germans who used to live in Czechoslovakia, which were guaranteed under the Treaty, should be upheld. No doubt there is much more rewriting of history to come.

Ideological cement

The creation of a new identity untainted by the past is an urgent necessity for the rulers of the new expansionary Germany. The old anti-communism which was the ideological cement binding West German society together can no longer operate because of the collapse of Stalinism. In addition, the rise in economic strength typical of Germany since the war is threatened by the effects of recession. To ensure social cohesion and a sense of purpose in society, the German establishment needs to discover a new ideological framework to replace anti-communism. The emergence of a more overt German nationalism is a product of these pressures.

Of course, the process of historical revision is not straightforward. There are many in Germany who view it with discomfort and dislike. It is also true that by constantly reinterpreting the past the authorities risk sacrificing the consensus which has stabilised German society since the war. At the moment, while everything seems to be going their way, Germany's leaders are prepared to take risks. But, in the future, they may regret that they had to break so decisively with the certainties of the past. ●

Brittan's best?

Financial Times columnist Samuel Brittan is the most prestigious economic analyst in the country. Jon Fryer thinks that bodes ill for British capitalism

Too many heavyweight speeches after a good dinner', was Samuel Brittan's verdict on last year's Lord Mayor's banquet. Amid the ornate splendour of the City of London's medieval Guildhall sat the annual assembly of overfed industrialists, satiated financiers and boozy bureaucrats. You can imagine them dozing off as the monotonous heavyweights of the Bank of England and the Treasury droned on. Such a spectacle speaks volumes about the current state of economic thinking. 'Too many speeches', concluded Sir Samuel, 'and not enough jokes' (*Financial Times*, 4 November 1991).

Samuel Brittan is supposed to be the epitome of level-headed common sense. As the leading *Financial Times* columnist he inhabits a world of speculation about the shifts in stock markets, exchange rates, trade imbalances and budget deficits. His conclusions often turn up later in the pages of *Hansard* or the speeches of UK chancellors. He is a one-man think-tank, a shining star in the dull firmament of capitalist economics. So it is worth looking at his view of the slump and the prospects for recovery.

Sir Samuel claims to know 'what makes economies tick'. There is a 'transmission mechanism from excessive or deficient growth of the money supply to inflation or slump'. It goes like this:

'When output is above capacity, inflation rises and therefore the boom has to be brought to an end. When output is below capacity, inflation falls and recovery will occur, whether automatically or through deliberate policy.' (*Financial Times*, 4 July 1991)

The knack of sound economic management, then, is to ensure an even rate of monetary expansion in line with the potential growth of the economy. The 'nominal GDP' money rule was first formulated by Brittan in his 1981 pamphlet, *How to End the Monetarist Controversy*, and has since found its way into Bank of England orthodoxy.

Such monetary management techniques rest on the view that the state is able to engineer economies up to 'potential output'. But

'potential output' or 'capacity' are meaningless expressions, since this potential changes with time and is never a fixed and identifiable thing. Moreover 'potential output' is defined by Brittan in an entirely circular fashion:

'The meaning of "potential" here is not the maximum of which the economy is capable in some engineering sense. It is the maximum of which it is capable without accelerating inflation.'

So inflation results once potential output has been reached, while potential output is defined as a situation beyond which inflation is generated. Bravo! Inflation results from an inflationary

situation. What is an inflationary situation? It is a situation which generates inflation. There you have it: pure genius!

Sam Brittan's 'golden rule of boom and slump' rests simply on his own impressions about capitalism's growth 'potential'. And these are gloomy indeed. By 'potential output', Brittan does not mean the ultimate possible development of the productive abilities of society ('in some engineering sense'). He is not even talking about full employment under capitalism. For Brittan, 'potential out-

put' merely includes the scanty sums of idle capacity or unutilised capital reported in annual CBI surveys.

Even so, the notion that this meagre 'potential capacity' can be mobilised by a growth of the money supply is a complete fiction. It is also a shabby lie. The logic of the capitalist system is not to work towards some elusive level of 'potential output'. It works at a far lower level of profitable output, regardless of whether this leaves masses of spare capacity unused and idle.

Brittan holds out the promise that this 'excess capacity' could be drawn into action by a future injection of money into the system. But for the present he reconciles his readers to the degradation, impoverishment and unemployment of the slump. Recessions are inexorable cycles of 'creative destruction'. Sir Samuel's illusory economics promise greater things for tomorrow, while celebrating the 'creativity' of the slump today.

Through 1991 Brittan stood firmly with the

Norman Lamont sycophants, promising recovery and declaring depression impossible:

'It is in fact extremely rare for market economies to spiral downwards into a tailspin' (20 June); 'What goes down usually comes up' (4 July); 'The vast majority of recessions do not turn into great depressions' (4 July); 'My main reason for believing recession will be succeeded by recovery is that this is what has nearly always happened in the past' (1 August); 'Belief that every recession is a prelude to great depression clouds judgement' (19 December); 'It is often darkest before the dawn' (16 January).

L-shaped slump

From blasé summer confidence, Sir Samuel descended into downbeat autumn gloom. By late November he finally announced 'the postponement of the recovery in the UK'. But even then he held out hopes for recovery based on extrapolating grandiose conclusions from a few months' figures for output and exports and surveys of industrialists' 'expectations'—the same facile 'teenagers' method that he has criticised for so many years.

By December, Brittan had lost hope in the recovery. No longer was the recession a quick U-shaped downturn followed by a sharp revival. It was not even to be a W-shaped 'double-dip' slump with a subsequent resurgence. More likely was a drawn out L-shaped slump, with the right hand part of the L drooping downwards.

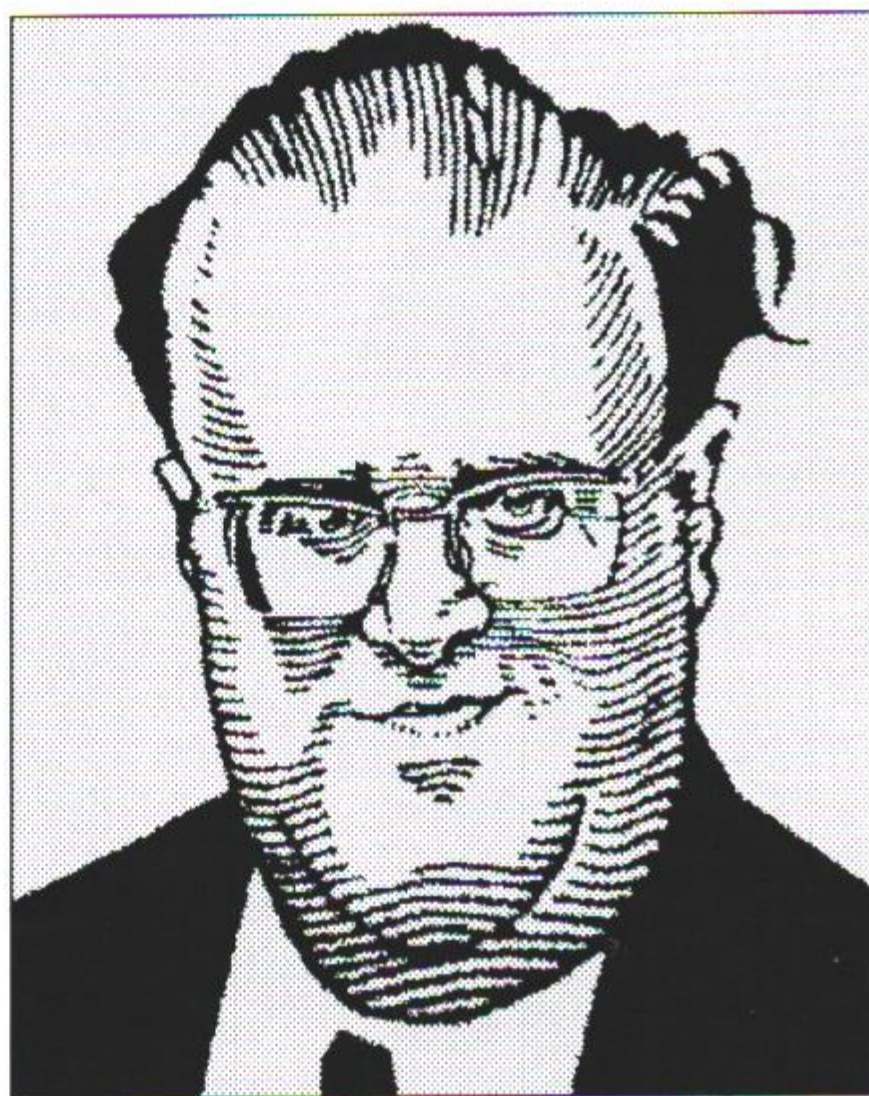
So surely now the time had come to unveil the spectacular Sam Brittan recovery plan? Now you would expect him to resort to the stimulus of the (fraudulent) monetary 'transmission mechanism'. But no. It never existed. So what did Brittan come up with in the doldrums of February 1992?

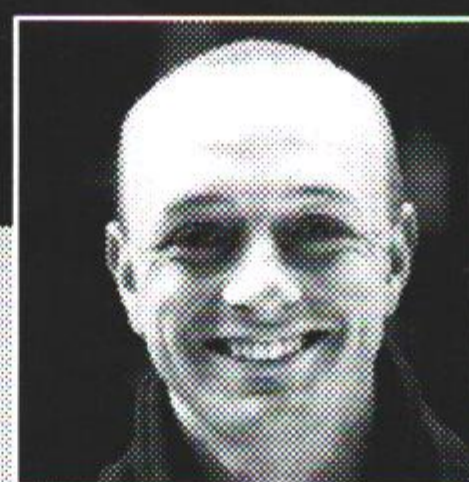
'Keynes did speak of burying pound notes in the ground and leaving it to the forces of self-interest to dig them up. Milton Friedman has spoken of dropping dollar bills by helicopter. It is not time for these heroic devices yet.' ('Why falling inflation is still good news', *Financial Times*, 13 February 1992)

Beaker boom?

Instead Brittan spent February preaching restraint, austerity and religious faith in 'self-correcting economic forces'. Now disillusioned with the efficacy of UK monetary machinery, Brittan the 'good European' could only promise (pray?) that sometime in the future 'the heavy cavalry of the Bundesbank will come up from behind' to the rescue.

Aside from this, Brittan's one idea to tap into his illusory 'potential capacity' was a Yuletide strategy for retail-led recovery based on shops introducing 'gift-wrapping to stimulate trade', abandoning the 'horror' of 'loud pop music' and leading the way with new lines in beakers ('Nightmare on Oxford Street', *Financial Times*, 30 December 1991). Yes, beakers. In all seriousness: 'Coloured plastic beakers which one can use after cleaning one's teeth or taking a drink of water.' No doubt it's just what 'one' needs after a heavyweight dinner at the Guildhall.





Don't let them eat cake

Fifty-two year old Margaret Jellicoe's nightmare began when she ate a slice of chocolate cake which her niece had spiked with marijuana. She was eventually found chewing grass by the side of a road, believing she had died and gone to hell. On the way, she had starred with Esther Rantzen on *That's Life* and taken part in *Crimewatch UK*. On top of this, two police officers wanted to kill her.

I never touch chocolate cake myself, but I know how she feels: where I'm living seems very similar to the place Mrs Jellicoe was unfortunate enough to visit. Esther Rantzen, *Crimewatch UK* and the police are all here, and it looks just like Britain, but something's not quite right about it all. Some funny things have been going on lately. Here are a few examples:

Arts

- *The Big Holy One* published: an anthology of the 'Christian Viz' comic, *The Winebibber*
- *The Joy of Sex* (worldwide sales 8m) updated with new beardless male model. New version declares: 'kissing is as satisfying as sex'
- 'Don't Be a Lout, Be a Scout' released: 'rap record with a message'
- Harrods restaurant purchases giant Soviet painting of the storming of the Winter Palace ('delicious irony')
- Winnie the Pooh books reinstated to school reading lists

Culture

- Garry Bushell, former skinhead music journalist, now *Sun* TV critic, suggests that *The Word* should be replaced with something that sets young people a good example—such as 'the Colonel H story'
- Children's adventure game awards 'hero points' for saving schoolteachers from danger
- Beer and fags banned in professional darts; neckties introduced
- British Sausage Bureau launches competition to compose a song in praise of the 'British banger'

Current affairs

- House of Lords debates new measures to curb public spitting
- World Wildlife Fund (President: Prince Philip) branded 'subversive' by the Campaign for Real Education and accused of 'undermining national sovereignty and culture'
- England's Polite Society established (Secretary: Rev Ian Gregory). Campaigning for good manners

Technology

- British Tea Council unveils revolutionary 'Teapot 2000'

Advertising

- Groundbreaking Nat West commercial features a group of cheering bakery workers presenting their manager with a cake inscribed 'Well done boss!'

All true. Well, all except the last one. In fact, the Nat West ad is a few years older than the rest, but you just wouldn't believe me if I told you about the current one. They've got these kids in shorts and school caps, with frogs and catapults, and this bank manager who gets a 'buzz' from his job....

As I said, there's something very disturbing about this place. They get all the British news here, and *Question Time* and plenty of sport. There are lots of books about English Heritage and The British People. They know about Highland crofters, Chelsea Pensioners, the Royal Variety Club and the Norfolk Young Farmers League. They've got the national psyche off pat: how the boys go from nannies to boarding school and 'turn homosexual'; how everyone used to 'live under a nuclear shadow', but now 'live under the shadow of Aids', and so on.

And somewhere in the historical footnotes you'll find the 'British Class System', along with the 'Imperial Measures System' and other curiosities. *I'm All Right Jack* was on the other day, that film they took off the air before the last election ('too controversial'). 'Up the workers!' How quaint. Everyone rather liked it this time.

Of course, they know all about ordinary people here—they see them on *Blind Date*, those ordinary surveyors and drama students and the rest. But now and then they get the odd 'throwback' who makes things tricky. That cricketer, Phil Tufnell, the one who took all those wickets—they didn't know what to make of him. His voice didn't fit, did it? They looked it up in the books and decided he 'spoke like a rag and bone man with a fag in his mouth'. And what about that Vinnie Jones? Well, apparently he used to be a 'hod carrier', whatever that is. But they worked that one out: it seems he 'rose above his humble origins' to become a professional footballer.

Funny old world, isn't it? Sometimes I get the feeling there are others here who feel a bit out of place. You hear the occasional story...those who refuse to move with the times...the few who spoil it for the rest. Only the other day a *Blind Date* contestant had been recognised in the street and beaten up for being a 'snob'. What was all that about?

Worse still, there was that family from...where was it?...*Bermondsey*, who went skiing in Soll. Well, everyone thought it was terribly amusing for a day or two, but then things turned sour. It seems these newcomers had rather a serious 'sense of humour failure' and made a large withdrawal from the local bottle bank.

What followed is history. Not too funny, but everyone's hoping it will be one of the last little battles in the class war. Get things in perspective and keep a steady nerve. Best to carry on ignoring them. After all, as history shows, it always ends in a nightmare if you let them eat cake. ●

**Only
the other day
a *Blind Date*
contestant
was beaten
up for being a
'snob'**

Race, not rape, was the central issue in the controversy surrounding the Mike Tyson trial, suggests Emmanuel Oliver

The rape of

BL



The conviction of Mike Tyson for the rape of Desiree Washington has been hailed by many as a victory for women's rights. In fact, the case has done nothing to advance the cause of women's rights. But it has done a lot to criminalise the black community.

Those newspaper editors who championed the cause of Desiree Washington could not give a damn about women's rights. They took the side of one oppressed group only because it gave them the opportunity to stick the boot into another. Under the pretext of standing up for the rights of rape victims, they stamped all over the rights of black people.

Media coverage of the Tyson trial was saturated with racial stereotypes. There was the stereotype of the black brute who cannot control his sexual urges. Tyson was said to have an oversized penis and an insatiable sexual appetite. Then there was the stereotype of the black mugger for whom violence is a way of life. According to the *Sun's* four-page profile of the 'Baddest man on the planet', Tyson's child gang 'mugged drunks, robbed old ladies and ripped necklaces from women's throats' (12 February 1992). Finally, there was the stereotype of the black sportsman who is all brawn and no brain: 'Mike Tyson has the temperament and physique of a mutant pit bull terrier and an intellect to match.' (*Sun*, 13 February)

This composite of every white prejudice added up to a police photofit of urban black America. It was not

Symbol of the 'underclass': Mike Tyson as seen by the *Guardian* (27 January 1992)

just Tyson who was in the dock in Indianapolis. The whole black community was on trial. Indeed, for the duration of his trial, Tyson became the personification of the 'underclass', against whom the US establishment has been rallying a racist backlash.

Over the past decade, the underclass has become a code word for the urban black community in America. The notion of the underclass is constructed on images of the ghetto: unemployment, welfare, illegitimacy, criminality, drugs and violence, all set to a soundtrack of NWA's 'Fuck the Police'. The reason why the media focused so much on Tyson's upbringing in the ghetto was because his past provided fuel for their preoccupations in the present.

Just read Frank Keating's description of Tyson's upbringing in Brooklyn: 'Lorna Tyson, who was unmarried, gave birth to her second son, Michael, in a tenement room at Herzl Street in the notorious Bedford-Stuyvesant district of Brooklyn. The family lived off public assistance. The children lived, and sometimes slept, on the streets. Michael grew up to run with a gang of under-10 hoodlums who called themselves the Jolly Stompers.' (*Guardian*, 12 February 1992)

The continuous link made between Tyson's beginnings in the ghetto and the premature end of his career in the dock served to drive home the racist argument that 'you can take a black man out of the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out of a black man'. This point was spelled

out by Glyn Davies in the *Weekend Guardian*: 'It's not that nobody can take the ghetto out of Tyson: it's more like Tyson trying to stuff as much of it back into himself before it's too late. It's as though he is trying to reclaim his soul.' (18 January 1992) The implication is that a ghetto spirit lurks within all black people, and no matter how hard they try they will never escape from it.

The idea of the underclass serves a useful purpose for the American establishment. The deficiencies of US capitalism are at their most glaring in metropolitan centres such as New York, Washington DC, Chicago or LA, especially in inner-city areas where blacks are concentrated. The appalling squalor of many of America's major cities is testimony to the parlous state of US capitalism. The urban deprivation which so obsesses conservative politicians is an index of America's economic decline.

According to the US elite, however, the responsibility for this grim state of affairs lies with the black community and its inability to come to terms with modern civilisation. The foremost victims of capitalism's failure to offer everybody a stake in the American Dream are themselves blamed for their own degradation. In other words, the underclass provides a scapegoat for the manifest failures of American society in the 1990s.

The other function of the idea of the underclass is that it can be used to rally support from white workers who are themselves less than enamoured with the American way of life at the moment.

Conservative politicians are trying to use the consequences of their own social failures as a way of cohering what's left of middle America. By targeting the underclass and the 'dependency culture' as a drain on scarce resources, the establishment can deflect attention from the shortcomings of its own system.

The idea of the underclass functions as a sort of internal evil empire, a contagious disease which must be contained at all costs. It can be used to justify the most repressive of social measures. In South Carolina, for example, the state has been jailing (mainly black) women who take drugs when pregnant. In some American cities, the authorities have used the violence of the black ghettos in order to justify police curfews. The underclass debate enlists the support of white America for a more repressive crack-down against a supposed threat to the American way of life.

Periodically, an individual black male is used to lend credence to the idea that the American Dream is turning into a nightmare thanks to the existence of a malignant disease called the underclass that is eating away at society. Who remembers Willie Horton, the paroled black rapist who became the stick which George Bush's supporters used to beat the Democrats in the 1988 campaign for the presidency? In another year of presidential campaigning by increasingly desperate politicians, we can be sure that Mike Tyson will not be the only black to take the rap for the failures of American capitalism. ●

AACK

America

British design

Shape of the future?



One of the very few areas in which Britain can still compete with the rest of the world is in graphic design. British artists are supposed to be hip to the latest trends and styles. Just as in the fashion world, where Paris produces the *haute couture* and Britain is trendy, so too in the field of design. Britain has its finger on the pulse, something celebrated monthly in *i-D* magazine and recently documented in a glossier format in *Design after Dark: The Story of Dancefloor Style* by Cynthia Rose.

The emphasis on innovation in British design glosses over the striking similarities between today and the past. In fact the two main strands in contemporary design owe more to the past than the future.

Rose's book identifies the origin of much of today's trendiest design in the period just before and after the Russian Revolution. Kept to the forefront of British design through the influence of ex-*Sunday Times* and *City Limits* designer David King and the typographer Neville Brody, the influence of Russian design has been immense.

At the time, the designs of Malevich, Kandinsky, Lissitzky *et al* expressed the excitement and aspirations of a rapidly changing society through the use of colour, abstract form and typography. What was innovative then has now become familiar. Today's reworkings of the past can only add superficial decorativeness. At its worst, this expresses itself in the classy blandness so familiar to readers of men's magazines like *Arena* or *GQ*. At its best, it can be a concentration of shapes, colour, texture, logo and motif, as seen in any Dream Warriors, Massive Attack or rave-influenced record cover.

In fact, many of the best visual images today come from the dance-inspired styles of the past few years. With little pretension to be radically innovative, but expressing a desire for immediacy, iconic imagery has been plundered from advertising, detergent packets and even

Are British designers as trendy as they think asks Richard Stead



toilet doors. Colour and bold outlines abound. Computerised images are cropped, squeezed and montaged. These are images of high intensity and little longevity, but none the worse for it. Indeed this is preferable to the alternative on offer.

The second strand of contemporary design has less obvious roots in the visual imagery of the past, but nonetheless has both feet firmly planted there. Its precursors are the likes of Byron and the German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. While dance floor design frequently celebrates its modernity through kitsch, this romantic design wants nothing to do with the present, never mind the future. It is dreamy, often blurred, slightly rusted, maybe burnt and certainly yellowed. It can be found on any album cover by the Cocteau Twins or in any graphic novel that doesn't want to be thought of as a comic.

The romantic, aged quality that is so popular today is a rejection of all things modern. Modern is equated with tacky, while the discreetly aged represents quality, something fine from a mythical bygone age, nostalgic and more often than not melancholic. Usually this means some beautiful textures and tones are used, frequently including either bones or dried flowers. This is the imagery which can justifiably lay claim to expressing the spirit of the backward-looking age in which we live.

* *Design after Dark: The Story of Dancefloor Style*, by Cynthia Rose is published by Thames and Hudson, £12.95 pbk



But is it Art?

There is a kind of TV writer you sometimes come across, usually an ex-schoolteacher with a beard, who after one pint always says, 'if Shakespeare was alive today, he'd be writing soap opera'. I can just imagine Shakespeare on the *Street*: 'OK, now this is the bit where Rita wakes up and Ted is next to her in the bed with his head chopped off and at first she doesn't notice that his head is missing, right, she just talks to herself for about a page, and then Ted's identical twin comes in and he sees the body and quickly swaps places with it, right, but just as he does that, a bear comes in....'

The next thing the beard says is, 'of course, I could have done a David Hare but I wanted to get my message across to working class people' (exactly what the message is, he never says). David Hare here stands for 'Art' as opposed to 'popular culture'. So it is interesting that it is Hare who has reopened the debate about the relative merits of these two worlds by posing the question (on *The Late Show*), 'is Dylan better than Keats?'

It's a GCSE General Studies kind of a question (the answer is, Dylan is better than Keats to precisely the same extent that Juventus is better than the Ballets Russes) but its subtext is interesting. Given what I've just said about Hare, it could be translated—aren't I (David Hare) better than, say, *Coronation Street*? It's a question posed by a writer pleading for recognition. But beyond that, it is a question posed by a whole culture suddenly stropky about its own worth and identity.

It is interesting that Hare chose a social worker's favourite like Dylan, as opposed to a more populist figure like McCartney. He is interested not in the opposition between mass and high culture, but in the moral state of middle class culture. The real question is—has the bourgeoisie been slumming it for too long?

For 30-odd years now, the intelligentsia has been flirting with mass culture. It's usually an embarrassing sight, like the decrepit young Mr Grace pawing some mini-skirted 'dolly bird'. There was the case of the *Times* journalist who called The Beatles 'the greatest songwriters since Schubert'; Christopher Ricks, the Keats scholar, has an inexplicable enthusiasm for Dylan's lyrics; and most recently, Martin Jacques said that 'Lennon was more important than Lenin', just as the Lennon Memorial Concert had finally proved that Lennon was not only a nasty little sociopath but also a deeply talentless songwriter. So it is interesting that this love affair now seems to be coming to a close.

I have often thought that the affair seemed to arise from a lack of confidence in the intelligentsia itself, a pathetic middle-aged groping after relevance ('What's this, son? It's got a good beat!'). In university humanities departments, it took the form of a move away from evaluative, prescriptive criticism towards interpretative criticism; away from questions like 'Why is Keats so morally uplifting?' towards questions like 'What is the true significance of the *Blind Date*?'

So does the move back to Keats signify an attempt to reconstitute and assert the superiority of an unashamedly elitist High Culture? Well, *The Late Show* would be the place to launch such a project. Despite a decent slot straight after the prestigious *Newsnight*, it rarely gets more than half a million viewers. Presumably these are all very superior. Interestingly, the Keats versus Dylan edition was followed a week or so later by a programme devoted to another exam question—Has history ended? (the answer is, ask an Islamic fundamentalist). This took its lead from Francis Fukuyama's triumphalist account of the 'victory' of liberal democracy as an ideal, ie, of the victory of the bourgeois intelligentsia, and presumably of Keats.

But how deep is this new self-confidence? Indeed how confident can anyone be with fewer viewers than *Pobol Y Cym* (there is talk of *The Late Show* being slashed back to two episodes a week)? It is important to note that in the debate about high versus popular art, the Keats faction had to choose its ammunition from the past. Looking for

modern practitioners of the high art values, they ended up with AS Byatt—a Booker novelist who whatever her merits, is surely as disposable as Milli Vanilli.

I have no idea what David Hare's work is like, because like most intelligent people these days I haven't been to see a play in the theatre since I was old enough to say no. When *The Late Show* did approach a genuinely elitist subject—the conceptual art show at the Hayward Gallery—it did so in a jittery, jokey manner—sending the cynical Howard Jacobson along with the arty Waldemar Januszczak. Despite their big intellectual credentials, the two soon fell into the most banal kind of musing with Jacobson saying one installation could not be Art because it was not skilful and Januszczak replying that a lot of work had gone into it (apparently unaware that a lot of work goes into Pot Noodle).

They seemed to want some sort of assurance that they were getting their money's worth. The Art itself seemed similarly contradictory. It was austere cerebral and lacking in entertainment value, but at the same time over-friendly, full of comics and soft toys, as if crying out, 'love me, love me'. It's interesting to note that the most popular modern artists—Richard Long (who makes sculptures out of long walks), and Cindy Sherman (who takes photos of herself in disguise)—are engaged in big existential projects. The fact that these artists are patently suffering in some way (by walking all the time, or spending hours in heavy make-up) makes up for the fact that what they are giving us appears to be nothing more than some footprints, or a snap.

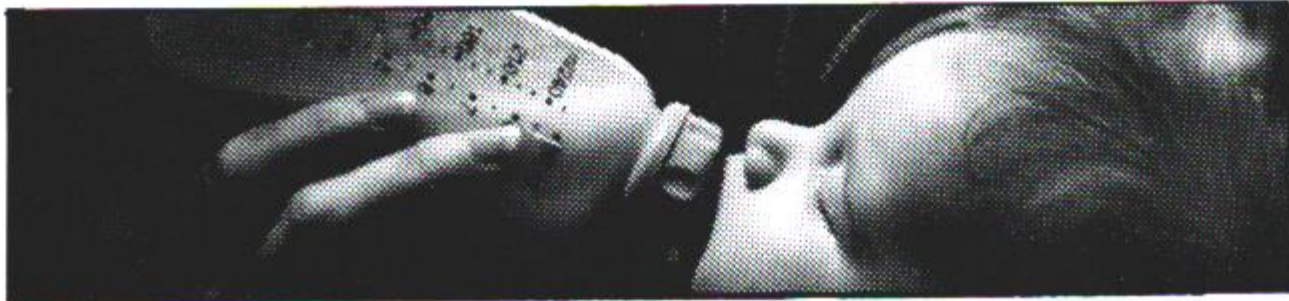
The fact is that most of what we think of as Art was produced as a by-product by people who were not interested in Art. Most Art in every area of the world was produced to be functional—to be useful in religious or ceremonial contexts. Most 'great' writers did their best work for money, or out of vindictiveness or lust. If you aim to produce Art, all you get is AS Byatt, or worse, Channel 4's pricey nobs and knockers saga *The Camomile Lawn*.

The term Art, as it operates on *The Late Show*, is a marketing pitch, a way of selling product to an uptight bourgeoisie who simply don't know how to have a good time. It is cultural healthy eating. If you tell them something is good for them, they'll lap it up. The crudest possible example is *Morse*. One slap of cultural varnish in the shape of a *Readers' Digest* selection of classical music, and they'll sit and look at it all day. The long flirtation with popular culture can be explained in the same way—the apparently interpretative criticism was effectively evaluative, in that it gave them something intelligent to say about, say, *Blind Date* and so permitted them to enjoy it. Behind the retreat into Keats and crowing about the victory of liberalism, there seems to be a deep anxiety, a feeling that this is no time to party.

The advantage of this is that *Take Your Pick* (ITV, Mondays) will—presumably—not get the cult status accorded to *Blind Date*. So keep to yourselves the fact that it is the most profound dramatisation of *Schadenfreude* since Coriolanus. The show is introduced by Des O'Connor. Contestants have to decide whether to 'take the money or open the box', while Des shovels tenners into their hands.

The audience always shouts 'open the box!', baying the contestants towards their hubris, willing them to throw away hundreds of pounds for a bog brush. The baying noticeably does not diminish in the case of box 13—when the audience knows what is in the box (this week a blank video tape while the contestant was being offered £500). There is no solidarity here. Unless, that is, the contestant comes out on top (the blank video tape turned out to be packaged with £1500 worth of video equipment), when they cheer sycophantically, grovelling masochistically at the feet of Success. It is a chilling spectacle, better than David Hare any day. In fact, if Shakespeare were alive today, I think he'd be making up game shows.

Are we really to believe that babies fed on breast milk will be more intelligent adults than those, like Bernadette Whelan, who were fed on the bottle?



Have you seen the TV advert where the scientist proves that Fairy non-biological is the best washing powder for baby clothes? The battleaxe in the Margaret Thatcher suit, representing Mothercare, has to concede that Fairy can (wash whiter). The recent claim that breast-feeding makes brain cells multiply seems to be a similar sort of trick to me, except this fairy story is selling a labour intensive type of mothercare—and I'm not buying.

The hard facts are few. The only thing we can be sure of is that the results are drawn from a sample 300 babies, who were given IQ tests at the age of seven or eight. The departure from fact to fiction begins with the contention that babies who received breast rather than formula milk had significantly higher IQs than those who did not receive maternal milk: 'Our data points to a beneficial effect of human milk on neuro-development', declared *The Lancet* (31 January 1991).

How did the Medical Research Council come to make such outrageous claims on the basis of such paltry evidence? Even more to the point, why have these claims been seized upon so eagerly by the media? I suspect that it has something to do with the trend in recent debate to suggest that social problems have natural causes. We have heard a lot of late about the underclass, a category of people who are apparently congenitally incapable of making a contribution to society. According to the new conservative wisdom, this is part of the natural order of things. Now we are told that the intellectual prowess of the nation's youth is also given by nature. In this case, it's in the mother's milk.

Any doubters who might worry that this wasn't an entirely conclusive study are offered this reassurance: 'The findings take account of other possible explanations, such as breast-feeding mothers tending to be better educated and from higher socio-economic groups.' (*Times*, 31 January 1992). Funnily enough, they don't tell us how they managed to take account of these other explanations. My guess is that if they did, this might too easily betray the

The breast-feeding fraud

prejudices that informed their research.

I don't mind admitting that I have a double-edged axe to grind on this issue. I have only recently emerged from a month-long wrestling match with my daughter, most of which she spent stuck to my chest like a limpet. Finally, I burned my nursing bras and found liberation in a can of formula milk. Two months of decent nights' sleep further into motherhood, having got the New Man out of bed to bottle-feed, I now feel qualified to champion the cause of bottle-feeding as progress.

I have no objections to scientists striving to manufacture formula milk which more closely matches mother's own. I'm sure that if they put their best minds and enough resources to it, they could even make milk which is nutritionally far superior to that which I can produce, given that I do not subsist on a diet of organic vegetables and may even have a few drinks from time to time.

But that is not the issue here. I don't believe the moral crusaders for breast over bottle care any more about my diet or my daughter's than Edwina Curry did when she railed against the working classes for buying fish and chips with their dole money.

Regardless of whether they come in the guise of journalist, feminist or scientist, accepting the idea that intelligence can be measured physiologically makes all of these people eugenicists in my book. It should also be said that their empirical ground is too shaky to support the argument anyway. Indeed, we would do well to remember Sir Cyril Burt, who at the turn of the century claimed to prove that intelligence was hereditary. He wasn't discredited until the 1960s, when it emerged that he had falsified the results to obtain the conclusions he wanted.

Even Burt's first and 'honest' paper of 1909, which he cited as proof of the innateness of intelligence, proved in a circular argument only that he had begun his study with that *a priori* conviction. 'The "evidence" served only as selective window dressing.... He continually argued for innateness by citing correlations in intelligence between parents and offspring and he continually assessed parental intelligence by social standing, not by actual tests.' (Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*)

Nearly a century later, Burt's discredited methods have been rehabilitated. The *a priori* assumptions of these

present-day eugenicists seem clear to me. They want us to believe that the middle classes are naturally more intelligent because they get brains from their mother's milk.

Breast-feeding is out of the question for most working class women who have to go out to work or have other children to look after—and don't have live-in nannies. According to a survey commissioned by Farley's Baby Milks, only one in four babies is breast-fed, and that figure includes the women who, like me, learned the hard way that it's impractical to be an Earth Mother if you live in a council flat and want to get out once in a while. I assume that the women who persevere do so because they can afford the time and have the inclination to do it (it's a round-the-clock job).

The test claims that the offspring of this section of society are more intelligent than the rest of us. No doubt these people also have the wherewithal to furnish the older child with the trappings of the intelligentsia to which they rightfully belong—perhaps a little desk complete with computer—before Dr Lucas, whom we have to thank for this latest survey, comes along at age seven or eight to carry out his IQ tests. I have a feeling that if we all had the same start in life, then we wouldn't have to put up with bogus surveys like this one.

I reckon that my mother was a potential Einstein when she started out. The reason why she never realised that potential probably had more to do with having to work in a stultifying job and look after an army of children than with the way in which she was weaned. Despite all this, she made a lot more sense than the Medical Research Council when she convinced me that neither I nor the baby were getting much out of breast-feeding.

If I had continued to breast-feed my daughter, I doubt very much if it would have had much impact on her intelligence in later life. But it would have had a major impact on mine in the here and now. Having sat through a month of breast-feeding with no hands free to even eat properly myself, it dawned on me that my intelligence was being drained away in the process. I might as well have been put out to pasture for good if I'd kept it up for any longer.

Breast-feeding is the most exhausting, time-consuming and boring occupation imaginable. It didn't allow me to do anything except sit in front of the telly for the whole month. I could go into the mental and physical anguish involved in the operation of the breast pump, the essential appliance for the breast-feeder who wants to get out for an hour, but I won't. Despite some women's claims that they enjoy the whole business, I'm telling you that there are better ways to express yourself. ●

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

James Heartfield examines why France's radical intelligentsia is apologising for a German fascist

The Heidegger affair

Books discussed in this article include:

- On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy**, Tom Rockmore, Harvester Wheatsheaf, £30 hbk
Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question, Jacques Derrida, University of Chicago Press, £15.95 hbk, £7.95 pbk
Between the Blinds: A Derrida Reader, Peggy Kamuf (ed), Harvester Wheatsheaf, £12.95 pbk
Heidegger and 'the jews', Jean-François Lyotard, University of Minnesota Press, £8.50 pbk
The Differend: Phrases in Dispute, Jean François Lyotard, Manchester University Press, £11.95 pbk
Heidegger and Modernity, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, University of Chicago Press, £13.50 hbk
Nietzsche and Modern German Thought, Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed), Routledge, £40 hbk
Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth, Alan White, Routledge, £8.99 pbk

In 1987, Victor Farias' book *Heidegger et le Nazisme* was published in France, establishing beyond all doubt that the German philosopher Martin Heidegger did not simply turn a blind eye to fascism, but openly espoused it, renewing his Nazi Party card every year from 1933, when Hitler took power, to 1945, when the Allies overthrew the fascist government. The book caused an uproar, with conferences and seminars held, speeches and books written, as French intellectuals were obliged to clarify their relationship to Martin Heidegger. Why so much concern? Because, as Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut point out in their clear presentation of the Heidegger affair, the radical intelligentsia in France—from Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism to Jacques Derrida and deconstructionism—has based itself on the anti-rationalist philosophy of Heidegger and other German irrationalists.

Now Tom Rockmore, who edited the English edition of Farias' book, has returned to the fray with *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, a retelling of the tale that includes a critique of Heidegger's apologists. Rockmore, like many right-wing commentators on deconstruction, has taken advantage of the association between the radicals and the Nazi philosopher to press home his attack. His book is well researched, but marred by an ill-concealed motive to attack all thoughts radical and Continental. For Rockmore, any expression of German nationalism is tantamount to fascism, while the French are alternately parochial and hysterical.

Also, Rockmore virtually ignores the significant Marxist challenge to Heidegger's thought, such as Hungarian Georg Lukacs' *The Destruction of Reason and Existentialism oder Marxismus?*, because it does not fit his desire to equate Marx and Heidegger. Where Lukacs situates Heidegger's fascism within a parallel development of anti-democratic politics and irrational philosophy, Rockmore reduces the question to one of which of Hitler's policies Heidegger supported. However, flawed as Rockmore's book is, it puts the spotlight on the radicals, leaving the real question of the Heidegger affair: what did they see in him?

The deconstructionists especially had some explaining to do. They had caused a few eyebrows to be raised when they embraced the German irrationalism of Friedrich Nietzsche. France, after all, has been the home of rationalism since Rene Descartes first argued 'I think, therefore I am'—and Nietzsche's ideas had not previously been thought of as radical, but more as a precursor to fascism. However, Nietzsche died before he could be implicated in the rise of the German right, and, it was argued, his contempt for democracy was more an expression of his wholesale rejection of modernity, than of any sectional interest.

Then there was Paul De Man, a literary critic who did so much to further the cause of deconstruction, until he was discovered to have been a propagandist for the Dutch Nazi Party during the war. De Man was quietly ►

shelved, though even then some argued that his political affiliations were not the issue. But then the bombshell—Victor Farias' *Heidegger et le Nazisme*. Once, after all, could be an accident, twice a coincidence, but three times?

The deconstructionists' response to the Heidegger affair is represented here by Jacques Derrida's *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* and Jean-François Lyotard's *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, as well as the survey by Ferry and Renault. Taking the opportunity to look again at deconstruction through the prism of the Heidegger affair, three things emerge. First, the French deconstructionists have much more in common with German irrationalism than they have differences with it, and they are not prepared to give up the essence of Heidegger's ideas without a fight. Second, in so far as deconstruction differs from classical irrationalism, it only succeeds in a further degeneration of the morbid subjectivity of that outlook. And third, the French intelligentsia's rejection of the Enlightenment aspiration to reason is an unthinking reaction to the degradation of socialism by Stalinism, that ends up reproducing the central fault of Stalinism, its narrowly national orientation.

The various attempts by deconstructionists to explain the relationship between fascism and Heidegger's philosophy all seek to detach the real lesson of Heidegger from his political affiliations. Lyotard explains his purpose in rethinking the Heidegger affair as avoiding the

he spiritualises National Socialism' (p39). Well, one could, but isn't it asking too much that we should believe that if only Heidegger had wanted to save the whale he would not have turned out to be a speciesist Nazi?

The confidence with which the deconstructionists trace the lineage from Enlightenment to fascism is disconcerting. One only has to demonstrate some lingering attachment to Enlightenment values to explain fascist affiliations. The ease of this conflation of Enlightenment with fascism is the clearest sign of the common ground between German irrationalists like Heidegger and deconstructionists like Derrida. For, though they differ on their assessment of fascism, they agree on the overriding wickedness of Enlightenment rationalism.

Now that fascism is discredited, irrationalists assume that fascism's barbarism arose from its roots in rationalism, not its break from rationalism. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe even goes so far as to cite Heidegger's own apologetic description of the final solution from 1949:

'Agriculture is now a mechanised food industry; in essence it is no different from the production of corpses in the gas chambers and death camps, the embargoes and food reductions to starving countries, the making of hydrogen bombs.' (Quoted in *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, p89)

Lacoue-Labarthe is cautious enough to say that this is 'scandalously insufficient' and yet 'absolutely correct' (as if something could be both insufficient and absolute), because it places the extermination camps on their true stage, that of technology (quoted in *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, p85). The assumption that the application of human reason in technology and industry is a negative thing is so strong in both irrationalism and deconstruction alike, that fascists, farmers and scientists are all pretty much as guilty as one another.

In fact the relationship between the irrationalist Heidegger and Enlightenment thinking is misunderstood by the deconstructionists. Heidegger is not somebody who made a brave attempt to escape from the totalitarianism of Enlightenment thought but failed. Rather, Heidegger was engaged in a reaction against Enlightenment reason that, if it did not necessarily oblige him to sign up for the Nazi Party (some things we must allow to choice), was, nonetheless of the same order as the fascist revolt against democracy.

Heidegger stands in the tradition of the Enlightenment only in the sense that he attacks it for not fulfilling the promise of subjectivity that Descartes made when he 'broke down the door' to 'the sovereignty of the Earth'. Heidegger explains the failure of the French to resist the German invasion of 1940 as their failure to live up to Descartes, being unequal 'to the metaphysics born of [their] own history' (quoted in Ferry and Renault, p62).

Isn't it asking too much that we should believe that if only Heidegger had wanted to save the whale he would not have turned out to be a speciesist Nazi?

trap: 'if Heideggerian, then Nazi; if not Nazi, then not Heideggerian.' (p51) Indeed, the characteristic argument is that Heidegger's fascism was a consequence not of his hostility to the Enlightenment tradition of rationality, but rather of his unwillingness to make a complete break with rationalism. Remaining implicated within a humanist tradition of rationalism, Heidegger, against his better judgement, must follow the inexorable path from Enlightenment to fascism. As Derrida's pupil Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has it, 'Nazism is a humanism' (Ferry and Renault, p2).

Derrida identifies Heidegger's failure to break with the Enlightenment as his remaining commitment to humanism. Heidegger's insistence on the superiority of man to animal 'cannot avoid a certain anthropocentric or even humanist teleology' (p55). The expression of that humanist teleology for Derrida is Heidegger's concept of *Spirit* which is implicated in fascism: 'One could say that

German irrationalism decries reason in favour of the Nietzschean 'will to power', a celebration of the Enlightenment value of the subjective will over that of rationality. Even here subjectivity is either restricted in its application, as with Nietzsche, who felt that a handful of supermen can exercise it while the rest of us plebs keep

terms—*differend* and *differance*—need not be too mysterious. Both are attempts to avoid the lifeless abstractions that characterise classical capitalist ideology, and socialist ideology, the deconstructionists would add. However, in the blanket rejection of the universal for the particular, deconstruction forgets a far richer conception of their relation in Marxism.

Derrida would rather have many leprechauns, all giving voice to their *differance*, than one Spirit

our mouths shut, or subjectivity is ossified, as with Heidegger, for whom subjectivity found its high point in the national spirit.

Deconstruction, by contrast, lacks even the perverse subjectivity of German irrationalism, and in that is a descent from the low point of Heidegger and Nietzsche.

On the face of it deconstruction would seem to be subjectivity in spades, with its celebration of *differance* over the subjugating universals that it seeks to undermine. Peggy Kamuf's comprehensive Derrida reader reproduces the founder of deconstruction's original 1968 lecture, 'Differance', which demonstrates an early hostility to the subject:

'What differs? Who differs? What is *differance*? In effect, if we accepted the form of the question, in its meaning and its syntax...we would have to conclude that *differance* has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being, which itself could be some thing, a form, a state, a power in the world to which all kinds of names might be given, a *what*, or a present being as a *subject*, a *who*.' (*Between the Blinds*, p68)

The celebration of difference, then, is prior even to the subject. It is not a question of my difference from you; that would be to tie difference down to one person. Instead we have a blind *differance* that disrupts all unity, even the unity of the individual subject. Most of all, though, difference disrupts the possibility of communication between individuals. So, where Derrida places *differance* before the subject, Lyotard places the *differend* beyond all possible commensurability:

'A *differend* would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments.' (*The Differend*, pxi)

The emphasis upon difference made in both of these

'To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself.' Karl Marx praised the Enlightenment resolution of the overarching religious conceptions in to their human, and hence universal, essence in his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' (*Early Writings*, 1975, p251), but he went further. The challenge then was to explain how *specific* ideas arose from a specific social reality. Instead of abstract man, one had to work from historical man in the real conditions of his existence:

'Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.' ('Theses on Feuerbach', *Early Writings*, p423)

The concept of specificity, as opposed to that of *differance*, alights on the particular without losing sight of universality. As in biology, *species* implies *genus*. *Differance*, however, implies nothing but difference. It is an abstract dogma—'attend to difference'—like the autocratic rule: 'there are no rules'. In this way difference is asserted as an already given abstraction, whereas specificity is a guide to investigation that avoids the unmediated reduction of particulars to universals, but retains the aspiration to universality.

Derrida's hostility to universality is such that he fears he sees it in Heidegger's occasional references to Spirit. Derrida suspects Heidegger of giving nationalism a universal existence as Spirit, and eschews even this mystified attempt at universalism. His criticism of Heidegger's Spirit is not that it is an insufficient basis for agreement, but that in presuming to lay the basis of agreement, Heidegger is falling into the old rationalist trap. Derrida would rather have many leprechauns, all giving voice to their *differance*, than one Spirit. Here one can say that even Heidegger's sordid mystification of German society has the advantage over Derrida's non-judgemental respect for every point of view in that it can at least be refuted.

The popularity of the German irrationalists for the French radical intelligentsia is that they seem to provide an alternative viewpoint to Stalinism that remains critical in its approach to modern society. In fact, the very terms of the break with Stalinism show that the radicals remain within the Stalinist trajectory away from the universalism of Marx and the Bolshevik Revolution. ►

Ferry and Renault explain the attraction of German irrationalism to the intelligentsia as 'the chance to condemn, no longer on the basis of Marx but of Heidegger, the economic exploitation of the world, the false values of the industrial culture' (p86). In the absence of a credible Marxism, the irrationalist opposition to modern society appears to be a suitably oppositional one for the intelligentsia.

The deconstruction of Lenin's internationalism which began as socialism in one country, ends up as difference in one living room

In *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth*, Alan White makes clear that the critical posture he takes from Nietzsche is as much directed at the presumption of opposition as at the status quo, if not more so. Nietzsche provides 'a doctrine that denies gods, afterlives, and even radically different futures (Marxist or technological utopias, or Kantian indefinite progress)—a doctrine that insists life is as it is, now, that it will never be anything else' (p103). The authors of *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought* provide a less adulatory treatment, but retain the hope that 'Nietzsche "follows" the achievements of Marx by adding yet another vast dimension to the potential for human understanding' (p163).

None of this affection for the German irrationalists' retrograde attack on modern society would make sense if it were not for the perceived failure of Marxism to fulfil the intelligentsia's aspirations to a progressive end to capitalist society. In the events of 1968, when students and younger workers occupied their colleges and factories, the French Communist Party (PCF) opposed them. Radical critics of the party drew the conclusion that the PCF and the bosses were much of a muchness. The student slogan 'no leaders' summed up the hostility to all forms of organisation, whether called communist or capitalist.

As a reaction to the bureaucratic stranglehold of the Stalinists on workplace organisation, the students equation of bosses and the PCF was understandable, but as a method of social investigation it was disastrous. The formalistic identification of all organisation—whether repressive, reformist or revolutionary—turned away from the process of critical analysis in favour of blanket condemnation. All that had to be done was to characterise a point of view as ideological, or as a 'grand narrative', and no further explanation was necessary: the ideology was

exposed, the narrative was deconstructed.

In *Of Spirit* the echo of the slogans of '68 can still be heard. Associating the left with the right, Derrida writes 'discourses...state their opposition to racism, to totalitarianism, to Nazism, to fascism, etc...[they] do this in the name of (the) spirit, in the name of an axiomatic' (p40). Derrida means that to take a definitive stand against fascism is to adopt the totalitarian outlook of fascism. In *The Differend* Lyotard is more explicit: 'The party must supply the proof that the proletariat is real, but it cannot, no more than one can supply a proof for the ideal of reason.' (p172) Hence Marxism is just as idealistic as rationalism. This method is nothing but formalism. Formal similarities between different phenomena—racism and anti-racism, the proletariat and the ideal of reason—are emphasised at the expense of an investigation of their true specificity.

The formal method of deconstruction, far from providing an alternative to Stalinism, gave a more forceful expression to its inner trajectory—the disintegration of the international communist movement. The radicals, victims of their own formalism, saw in Stalinism only an excessive totalitarianism. However, the bureaucratic methods of the communist organisers masked the subordination of internationalism to national particularism. Stalin's instruction to the communist parties to orient themselves to their own national roads to socialism was not only the defeat of Lenin's universalising synthesis of internationalism, but also the pre-history of the politics of difference.

When the French students counterposed autonomy to the French chauvinism of the PCF, they were in fact taking the disintegration of the left into new territory. Stalin had already laid the basis for the collapse of the international communist movement along national lines. With the politics of difference, even unity within a nation state is held to be too abstract. The deconstruction of Lenin's internationalism which began as socialism in one country, ends up as difference in one living room.

Indeed, Lyotard, an opponent of Stalinism in the sixties, now accepts its basic premise, seeking only to draw its consequences out further: 'Internationalism cannot overcome national worlds because it cannot channel short, popular narratives into epics, it remains "abstract"... Even the communist epic of workers' liberation splits off into national-communist epics.' (*The Differend*, p161)

The collapse of the Stalinist-inspired left has visited lasting and often humiliating defeats upon the working class movement. But the ideological confusion of the once radical intelligentsia makes a virtue of necessity. In place of Marx's attack on the chaos of capitalism, it embraces the irrationalist condemnation of modern society's excessive rationality. In place of Lenin's universal programme of internationalism, it follows Stalin's path of national particularism. The alternatives of chauvinism and irrationalism demonstrate the need to rebuild an internationalist opposition.

If you want to read something like this

at least once a month:

Die deutsche Revolution hat die schon nicht mehr erhoffte Gelegenheit geschaffen, die fünfundvierzig qualvolle Jahre lang nur zwischengelagerte deutsche Geschichte der finalen Entsorgung zuzuführen. Die Täter zweier Weltkriege und eines unvergleichlichen Genozids konnten sich plötzlich als Opfer der Geschichte entdecken, als Opfer von Leuten gar, die zuvor als ihre Opfer gegolten hatten. Im Zuge der revolutionären Umwertung aller Werte stellte sich nämlich heraus, daß diese Opfer der Deutschen später zu Tätern an Deutschen geworden waren. Bedeutete dies nicht, daß sie schon zur Zeit ihrer Verfolgung nicht etwa als schuldlose Opfer, sondern als künftige Täter in Vorbeugehaft genommen bzw. der Vorbeugeexekution zugeführt worden waren? Wenn man annehmen darf, daß aus Thälmann ein Honecker hätte werden können — ist es da, bei aller berechtigten Kritik an den juristischen Formalitäten, nicht irgendwie von höherer Gerechtigkeit und ein Segen obendrein, daß er das KZ Buchenwald nicht überlebt hat?

Wie tief die erfreuliche Nachricht, daß wir, die Deutschen und die Brüder und Schwestern der Deutschen, denen undeutsche Gewaltherrscher vierzig Jahre ihres Lebens gestohlen haben, die eigentlichen Opfer der jüngeren Geschichte seien, die Psychen erlöst hat, mag man an Landsleuten ablesen, die sich vor ein paar Jahren stolz Sozialisten genannt haben und nun Wiedergutmachung für die Hinterbliebenen von Gestapo- und SS-Führern fordern, die in Internierungslagern der Roten Armee an Hunger und Seuchen gestorben sind. Doch auch ganz andere, Leute von Anstand, die Klügeres als ich über die deutschen Verbrechen gesagt haben und noch vor einem Jahr ganz bei Sinnen waren, können heute über die Legitimität der Verurteilung von Grenzsoldaten der DDR durch die BRD-Justiz nicht mehr diskutieren, ohne die Frage aufzuwerfen, ob die Verurteilung und Hinrichtung des Auschwitz-Kommandanten Höß durch die Alliierten etwa nicht legitim gewesen sei. Jeder Tote ist ein Toter zuviel, wie wahr, und man soll nicht aufrechnen, gewiß — aber wie muß eine Moral beschaffen sein, der es wirklich keinen Unterschied mehr macht, ob an

der DDR-Grenze 6.000.000 Menschen vergast oder in den Vernichtungslagern der Nazis 200 Flüchtlinge erschossen worden sind?

Was in 43 Jahren nicht gelingen wollte, ist in weniger als zwei Jahren danach gelungen: die Deutschen endgültig und schmerzlos von der Verantwortung für ihre Geschichte und damit zugleich von den letzten Spuren einer Scham zu befreien, die ein wenig Zurückhaltung gebot beim Griff nach Weltmacht bzw., wie das im neueren Jargon heißt: »den historischen Möglichkeiten deutscher Politik« (A.Vollmer). Welche das sein könnten, hat des Landes beliebtester Talkshow-Historiker, Arnulf Baring von der FU Berlin, kürzlich auf jenem Platz in Springers »Welt« erläutert, auf dem ein hauptberufliches Stasiopfer kurz zuvor über ein vom MfS angerichtetes »Auschwitz in den Seelen« geklagt hatte. Nachdem der Herr Professor ganz ungerührt dargelegt hat, daß in Osteuropa nun keineswegs »kompromißbereite Demokraten, sondern rabiate Nationalisten, gewalttätige Faschisten, verbohnte Antisemiten: alle möglichen Kräfte der Gewalt und des Hasses« die Macht ergriffen und »unsere neuen Gegner möglicherweise viel rabiatere als der Spätstalinismus« seien, kommt er zu dem Schluß:

Gerade auf dem Gebiet der Sicherheit ist die europäische Solidarität nicht sehr stark entwickelt... Es wird wichtig sein, sich an solche Grundeinstellungen (Frankreichs und Großbritanniens) zu erinnern, wenn in drei Jahren der Atomsperrvertrag ausläuft. Wir werden uns darüber klarwerden müssen, welchen Schutz uns der westliche Zusammenhalt fortan bietet und welche praktischen Schlußfolgerungen für unsere eigene zukünftige Politik aus einer realistischen Lageeinschätzung zu ziehen sind.

Atomwaffen für Deutschland — welche andere historische Möglichkeit bliebe einer so herrlich wiedergutmachten, der Verteidigung von Zivilisation und Besenreinheit verpflichteten Weltmacht, die Nationalisten und Faschisten Osteuropas zur Vernunft zu bringen? Vielleicht, Herr Professor, bekommen die Deutschen ja die Chance, ihr weltgeschichtliches Konto mit einem Schlag auf verbohnte russische Antisemiten atomar auszugleichen.

(Extract from Hermann L. Gremliza's leader »Wilhelm der Allererste«, KONKRET 3/92)

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