

LIVING

MARXISM

A
Manifesto
Against
Militarism

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The West's secret agenda

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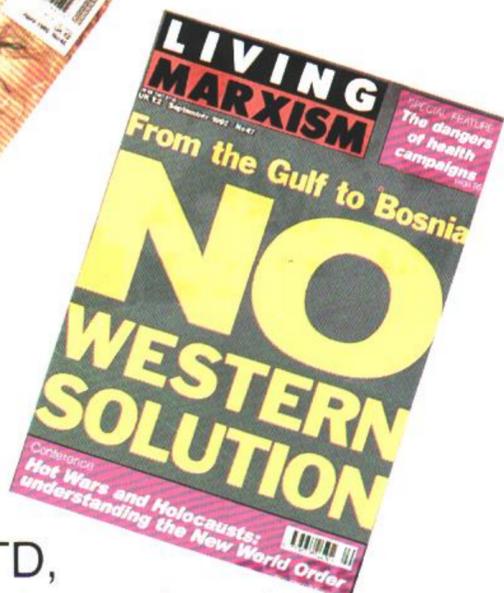
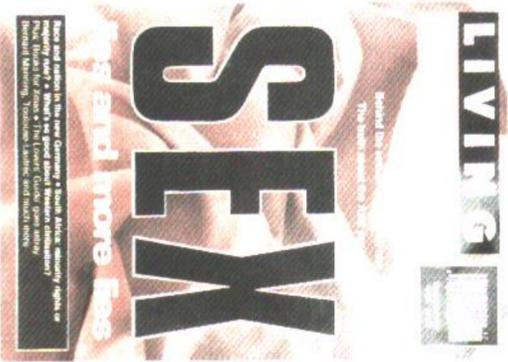
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Over the four years since *Living Marxism* was launched, it has prided itself on being the magazine that is always right.

We were right about the illusory character of the 'peace dividend'. We were right about the distortions behind the Aids panic. We were right about the recession turning into a full-scale slump. We were right about Labour's inability to win the general election.

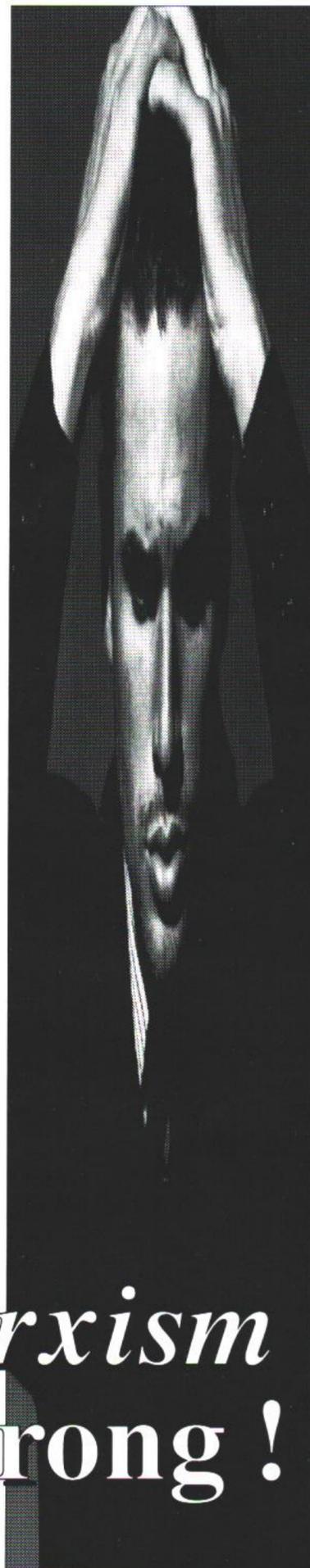
However, for the first time, we have published something that has been proved wrong.

In the September issue of *Living Marxism*, we announced that the weekend conference on the New World Order which we are sponsoring in November would be on a certain date at a certain London venue. But it won't be.

The organisers have since decided that that venue is too small, judging by the amount of interest already expressed in the Hot Wars and Holocausts weekend. To get somewhere larger, they have had to change the conference dates as well. The correct details are now available on page 27 of this issue of *Living Marxism*.

We're very sorry. But we hope it will happen again.

Living Marxism gets it wrong!



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A Manifesto

This month, we use the editorial pages of *Living Marxism* to publish our new Manifesto Against Militarism. The Manifesto, to be launched at the Hot Wars and Holocausts conference in November (see page 27), will be the theme of a campaign in the months ahead. Watch this space, or ring (071) 375 1702 for information.

Can the unthinkable happen? Could the world be plunged into a great war once again? Most people think it impossible. Yet what was unthinkable yesterday seems to happen quite often today.

- When the Cold War ended, everybody expected a 'peace dividend'. Today we are witnessing a state of permanent warfare from the Gulf to the Balkans.
- The easing of East-West tensions was supposed to create an international climate of security and cooperation. Today the UN is falling apart and the Western Alliance is fracturing.
- Europe was said to be on a straight road to peaceful unification. Now even the future of the EC is open to serious doubt.
- The 'economic miracles' of the eighties were meant to have banished the bad old days of Depression forever. Today international capitalism is experiencing its worst slump for half a century.

The explosive mix of economic chaos and political conflict is creating a new global crisis. The warning signs in international affairs are there for all to see. The West is now far less inhibited about dictating terms in semi-colonial fashion to the peoples of the East and the third world. Meanwhile the rivalries among the Western powers themselves, over everything from interest rates to Bosnia, are becoming increasingly bitter.

As the old order collapses and the struggle to shape the new one takes off, there are grave dangers ahead for us all. Every important development today points towards *the rise of militarism*—not just in terms of an accumulation of weapons, but as the dominant political outlook in all Western nations.

There has never been a more important time to take a stand against militarism. Yet

today there is no serious criticism of what the Western powers are doing. The aim of this manifesto is to begin to turn that around. It is a call to oppose the key trends in politics which could pave the way towards war.

1 Against the moral rearmament of imperialism

Today everybody from George Bush to the liberal *Guardian* appears to think that the West has a legitimate right to interfere at will in the affairs of Africa, Eastern Europe or the Middle East. This arrogant assumption of moral superiority, the notion that the West must know what's best for the world, is the most dangerous idea underpinning the New World Order.

Why should the future of, say, the peoples of the former Yugoslavia be decided by Western governments at a conference held in London? Western intervention cannot be the solution to the problems of the world, because it is the cause of them. From Somalia through Iraq to Bosnia, the roots of today's crises lie in the way that the West uses others as pawns in its own geopolitical games.

The Western powers do not intervene abroad for humanitarian reasons. They are pursuing their own agenda of international power-struggles. America (with British assistance) destroyed Iraq to show its Western rivals that it was still Number One. Germany has targeted Serbia to demonstrate its own authority in Europe. The result is always to escalate the crisis, turning local disputes into international conflicts. Any further Western interference can only make things worse for those on the receiving end.

The argument that the Western powers should save the world represents the moral rearmament of imperialism. It is the modern form of the old imperial ideology of the White Man's burden. However worthy the motives which inform the call for more Western intervention, it can only legitimise the carve-up of the globe among the great powers.

Against Militarism

2 Against Western chauvinism

Behind every discussion of international affairs today lies the assumption that Western nations are more civilised than the 'inferior' peoples with which they have to deal. This chauvinist outlook is being used to scapegoat the East and the third world.

In the opinion of Western commentators, the peoples of the ex-Yugoslav republics are fighting because of their 'tribal' hatreds, Africans are starving because they breed too quickly, and almost every other problem on Earth is the fault of the poor and the powerless rather than the wealthy and powerful West.

At its worst, Western chauvinism targets peoples against which the great powers can demonstrate their civilised credentials. Those who are set up to play the part of the West's whipping-boys, such as the Iraqis and the Serbs, pay a heavy price for the privilege.

The argument that 'the West knows best' legitimises these campaigns of demonisation; it has already been used to justify starvation sanctions and carpet-bombing against Serbia and Iraq. But as their rivalries intensify, Western powers can also be expected to turn their chauvinist propaganda against one another—a prospect glimpsed today in the anti-German outbursts in Britain and on the Continent. National chauvinism is the cement with which our rulers will always seek to bind us together behind their banners.

3 Against race hatred

Racism is the cutting edge of the politics of the New World Order. The outbreaks of violence against immigrants and refugees in Europe are often blamed on 'Nazis' and far-right fringe groups. But whether in Germany, France or Britain, such attacks are really the practical consequence of government propaganda campaigns. By seeking to scapegoat the third world, and to blame 'immigrant scroungers' and 'bogus refugees' for social problems, the

Western authorities have created the climate for a racial pogrom.

Opposition to racism has collapsed before the renewed challenge. The fashion today is for former liberals to try to come to terms with the racially charged atmosphere, usually by agreeing that firmer immigration controls are required to ease tensions. The result is quickly to shift the debate from the problem of racism to the problem of too many black people. Such appeasement of the politics of nationalism and racism is a recipe for disaster.

The return of racism to the surface of capitalist societies is one domestic sign of these militaristic times. It should serve as a reminder that the moral rearmament of imperialism has serious consequences not only for the third world, but also for those living in the heartlands of the West.

4 Against the rewriting of history

The capitalist powers are seeking to consolidate a more assertive Western worldview as the ideology of the New World Order. To achieve that, however, they first have to deal with the embarrassments of their imperial pasts.

Each national elite is out to rewrite its history in order to legitimise its militaristic role in the world today. A nation like Britain, for example, has to revive the politics of Empire which have lain discredited for the past 50 years. The USA needs to come to terms with its 'Vietnam syndrome'. And Germany has to take the edge off the Nazi experience.

One example of how the Western authorities now seek to rehabilitate their past is by arguing that Africa and Asia are worse off than when they were ruled by Western decree. History is turned on its head, and the ruination of continents which was brought about by Western exploitation becomes an argument for colonialism.

Current debates about international affairs are peppered with attempts to discover the past in the present, whether by branding Saddam Hussein as 'the new

Hitler' or describing prison camps in Bosnia as 'another Holocaust'. The effect of turning tyrants and atrocities into everyday current events in this way is to play down the significance of the past crimes of Western imperialism.

The rewriting of past wars is more than a matter of historical interest. It is part of preparing for future conflicts, by rehabilitating Western militarism in the present.

5 Against the cultural war

At the US Republican Party convention in August, Pat Buchanan announced that America was now engaged in 'a cultural war, as critical...as the Cold War itself'. Since the end of the Cold War removed the old faithful anti-Soviet card, the Western right has been trying to cohere an alternative ideology. The notion of 'the cultural war' brings together many of the reactionary ideas which they need to popularise.

The cultural war is being fought to create a conservative political climate in the West. It is a war against the 'street terrorism' of black teenagers in the inner cities; against abortion, unmarried mothers and homosexuality; against sixties-style liberalism, immigration and the third world. And it is a war in defence of 'family values', motherhood and marriage; in defence of tradition, the flag and the free market; in defence of Western civilisation and the New World Order.

The right is fighting its cultural war on many fronts. Some of these, such as the moral crusade around Aids, may not appear to have any direct connection with a hot war. Yet the cultural war is laying the ideological foundations for the next phase of Western militarism.

The creation of a pervasive reactionary political climate at home can give Western governments a free hand to act abroad—against the third world, or even in conflict with one another. By the same token, challenging that political climate is a practical way of undermining the culture of militarism. Which is why the cultural war must be fought against on every issue.

Bosnia: dangerous do-gooding

Although Mr Hesk (letters, September) rejects military operations by the West in the Balkans, he nevertheless calls for 'somebody' to go in.

I wonder who this 'somebody' is? Maybe Mr Hesk has a military force of his own somewhere in Cambridge, which he has managed to keep hidden from everyone? I suspect instead that Mr Hesk is calling for the West to intervene for humanitarian reasons, rather than naked self-interest.

This understanding is not only naive, it is wrong. The solution to the conflict does not need to be 'brought in' from outside. The only force with the potential to solve the crisis is already there: the working class of the region. Any external 'solution' can only amount to interference which intensifies existing problems and creates new ones.

The 'cold theorising' Mr Hesk finds so objectionable comes from the truth of what Western intervention amounts to. Which sort of warmer, 'more sensitive' solution would Mr Hesk prefer? The frazzled-to-a-crisp variety experienced by Iraqi people on the road to Basra, or the compassionate 'saving' of the Kurds which left them dying of diseases like cholera, which they never even had before the West lent its helping hand?

It's about time Mr Hesk addressed the consequences of his argument and stopped being a dangerous do-gooder.

Sara Walthamstow

At a time when the imperialists have acquiesced in the creation of Greater Serbia, have pressurized the Bosnians to surrender, have prevented them from arming themselves and have actually accused them of slaughtering their own people for publicity reasons, it takes a particular kind of spitefulness to join with the imperialists in equating victims and aggressors; to claim, like David Irving, that the genocide is a myth and to say, like Thatcher with regard to South Africa, that sanctions on Serbia only hurt the people.

What next? Perhaps your great anti-imperialist hero Saddam Hussein didn't really gas the Kurds? Maybe General Franco was really a great fighter against Soviet imperialism in Spain? You may continue to spread your racist poison about Croats and Muslims, but it won't hide the fact that the RCP has shown itself to be a staunch supporter of British imperialist interests in the Balkans and of fascist Serbia, Britain's anti-German Balkan stooge.

Attila Hoare Cambridge

The old lie in Darwin's deathbed

I was surprised to see the old lie of Darwin's deathbed conversion being repeated in, of all places, *Living Marxism* (Wayne John, letters, August). It is irritating to see ignorant Christians

propagating this old fiction despite its having been repeatedly refuted by Darwin's own relatives.

Darwin's daughter, Mrs Litchfield, was present at his death and, referring to the deathbed conversion talk, wrote in *The Christian* (23 February 1922): 'He never recanted any of his scientific views either then or earlier. We think the story of his conversion was fabricated in the USA....The whole story has no foundation whatever.' His granddaughter, Lady Barlow, also refuted the story in a letter to *The Scotsman* (8 May 1958) and, quoting Mrs Litchfield, referred to one 'Lady Hope' as the originator of the myth. Darwin's family denied he ever met Lady Hope or was influenced by her.

Voltaire, Paine, Lincoln and many other eminent non-believers have posthumously fallen victim to deathbed conversion tales by dishonest Christian propagandists. What Wayne John foolishly calls 'a historical fact' is nothing more than a cruel Christian hoax. Darwin died an agnostic.

Dr Stephen Moreton Cheshire

The Chips are down

Has *Living Marxism* become a euphemism for *Woman's Weekly*? Helen West ('My one night stand with the Chips', August) not only failed to answer the two questions she asked, but also to address the hypocrisy of male strippers being made powerful, professional artists by women, when for so long female strippers have been relegated to powerless bad and sad individuals.

Why did she fail to expose the fact that this 'professional' show is based around man's interpretation of women's sexuality, as passive and subordinate. She went as far as to validate the sexual fantasies by giving readers several unchallenged, stereotypical examples—women's sexual fantasies determined by men for men.

I find the idea of 1000 women having a great time together watching The Chippendales a confirmation of how women have internalised their oppression. The article was purely a representation of women's oppression, an education for women about their place in the socially constructed sexual hierarchy.

I particularly take offence to the use of girl when referring to women. It undoes any implication of status, authority and seriousness, which, in fact, was the whole definition of the article. Finally it must be clear that the selling to women of sexual stereotyping of themselves serves the interests of maintaining patriarchy. If women have any real desire for validation of their sexuality it must be done on their terms.

Zoe Richmond Nottingham

Having read your article on the Chippendales, I was disappointed that the author made no attempt to investigate the impact of such

a show deeper than the superficial analysis of it just being a great time. An exploration akin to that would probably have ensued had the piece been concerned with a female striptease—ie, its effect on social relations outside the confines of the auditorium.

Surely the women who idolise and enjoy such displays are basically supporting women's oppression and men's for that matter by creating a virtue out of physical strength? With the level of theoretical science as it now stands such expressions of masculine power are anachronistic and serve reactionary purposes helping to maintain the status quo.

It is bad enough there being a process of brutalisation which distorts people to fit work, which non-profit-bound technology would remove, or at least ameliorate considerably, without its victims going out of their way to rejoice in the Frankenstein's monsters that are created by it.

The fact that, in all probability, the women who visit this entertainment are too scared to walk home lest the nasty side of male superior strength flips up in the guise of an insecure man who cannot live up to the demands of his female peers to be like one of their fantasy males, would seem to illustrate the danger and naivety of this type of venture.

Reader Gwynedd

The mafia fraud

I disagree with Kirk Williams ('Mob Rule', September). The 'mafia' as an organised crime syndicate does not exist now and never has.

The 'mafia' is an invention dating back to pre-Second World War America. The idea of a foreign crime organisation created anti-Italian racism and more importantly a moral panic akin to the anti-communist hysteria. Both were false issues greatly exaggerated to legitimise an ailing ruling class.

As with all moral panics there was a grain of truth among the hype. There was evidence to suggest a small proportion of crimes were committed through syndicates. However the idea that there was a 'mafia', which was a highly organised, super-efficient crime machine posing a major threat to governments was a myth.

To discuss the 'mafia' therefore in the context of Italy is absurd. Italy has a major crime problem but to label every offence as a symptom of this 'Italian disease' is a misdiagnosis. In reality they are sporadic incidents with no common perpetrator. In Sicily I would suggest the hired 'guns' used to impose order, were merely individuals not members of the so-called Mafiosi.

I am not throwing into question the legitimacy problem of the Italian state, but the 'Italian origins' of the mafia. In my opinion the mafia is as American as Mom's Apple Pie.

Donna Gray Liverpool

Ireland's artificial majority

Mr Steve Revins (letters, September) would do well to read up his history books. The reality of Northern Ireland is that of a propped-up Loyalist state for a Protestant people. After the flight of the Earls in 1609 after the nine year war with the English that part of Gaelic Ireland was fiercely colonised with English and Scottish settlers. Meanwhile the native Irish were kicked out of their homesteads and farms. This plantation of Ulster was carried out with ruthless efficiency at the expense of the indigenous Irish population.

It is ridiculous that the Loyalists today have the nerve to claim that part of Ireland in fact belongs to Britain. They do so on the premise that they have a two-to-one majority over the nationalists in that province. This is an artificial majority and the sooner this is realised by everyone the better. Let's give Northern Ireland back to the Irish now.

James Lynch London

Striking lessons from Newham

Living Marxism has often argued that Labour is no longer the party of old, and that this is expressed through the severance of the party's close links with the trade unions. Nowhere is this point more clearly vindicated than the way in which striking Newham council workers were forced back to work in September.

It was the first time that a Labour local authority has taken a trade union to court under Tory legislation. It was also the first time that a court has gone even further than the Tory anti-union laws in making it illegal for a union to campaign for a 'yes' vote before a secret ballot.

After the court decision, Nalgo pulled the plug on the Newham strike. After 15 weeks of indefinite strike action against compulsory redundancies, council workers went back to work with trade union activity further criminalised than before the strike. The unfortunate consequence is that many will feel it is not worth taking action in defence of our jobs or conditions. This would be a mistake.

The action itself was not the problem. The ideas which informed the strike strategy pursued by activists became the barrier to that action achieving something.

The first barrier was the failure to recognize

that the Labour council had fundamentally altered its relationship both to the unions and its own workforce. With the defeat in the general election, Labour councils are more isolated and restricted in their options than ever before. They cannot and will not return to the old ways of collective bargaining.

The second barrier was the failure to recognise the isolation of the trade union bureaucracy itself. The Nalgo leadership made a desperate attempt to use Newham strikers as a test case to regain their place at the negotiating table. Their narrow interests were always going to be in conflict with the needs of the strikers.

Recognising the real reasons for the defeat of the strike is the first step to working out a winning strategy for the future. As the old institutions of the labour movement become more ineffectual and useless, they also present a bigger barrier to our needs—unless, as suggested by *Living Marxism*, we get rid of them and create our own. Lobby the TUC? Whatever for? Bury them!

Sharmini Brookes A Hackney striker

Banal Banks

One of the things I like about *Living Marxism* is that it does not suffer from the anti-intellectualism which afflicts much of the left in the UK. In most of the magazine I know I will find well-argued and rigorous analyses of political events, and critical discussions of new books and ideas. All the more disappointing, then, that the 'Living' section and some of the regular columns seem often to be depressingly banal.

Take Toby Bank's piece 'Generation X' (September). Part book review, part venomous caricature it purports to say something about the thousands of middle class, educated, anti-materialistic young people who 'don't like capitalism, but reject any collective alternative too'. This could have been a fascinating article, but it turns out to be a rehash of well-worn stereotypes in which Banks substitutes personal prejudice for political analysis. Instead of trying to develop an understanding of this group—who are they, what form does their disaffection with capitalism take, why have they rejected a Marxist analysis, etc—Banks has written a Burchill-esque piece which merely sneers at them without adding anything to our understanding.

As the old political order breaks up we are going to need more, not less, sophisticated analyses of new class fractions, their political allegiances (if any), the role of 'new social movements' in articulating dissent, etc. If you want to do something constructive with the anger of young educated people, then you'll have to do more than dismiss them with easy stereotypes.

Rosa Gill (Dr) Nottingham

Sporting chance

Alan Harding's preoccupation with the health and safety aspects of athletics diverges somewhat from the will to win, safety to the wind attitude of many of the great sporting competitors ('Drug-runners', September). While it's an easy point to make that the pressure to win at all costs and the panic about drug use leads to hypocrisy and moralising, Alan sticks to the tired old leftie prejudice against competition as bad and dangerous. A much more fruitful line of enquiry is to look at the degradation of competition caused by the use of sport in today's society.

If all rules on drugs were lifted we would only have real competition between pharmacists. If this is what people want, fine, but let's face it sport would become like Formula One motor racing, boring. Alan's red herring about going back to wooden javelins misses the point. Of course people will have different equipment, but there is a framework of rules within which this equipment is regulated so as to bring out the physical element in competition.

The context doesn't exist at the moment where the values of fair competition in sport are likely to hold, that's true, but Alan should know that some things are worth fighting for.

Roy Lidster Sheffield

Hierarchies and non-humans

The letter from Violet, Pete, Mark, Karl, Framboise, Beryl and Andy (September) said they are against animal experiments because they 'totally oppose all kinds of hierarchical grading' between people and 'non-human animals'. If by this they mean that they are on the same intellectual level as a rabbit, we must agree with them.

John, John, John, John and John London

We welcome readers' views and criticisms.

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

northern ireland's 3000 dead

Blood on whose hands?

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Fiona Foster on the issues behind the body-count

When Hugh McKibben was shot dead by the Irish Peoples Liberation Organisation on 27 August, it presented a welcome propaganda gift to the British establishment. McKibben was the three thousandth victim of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland. The fact that he was killed as part of an internal feud among republican fragments gave British journalists and politicians the perfect opportunity to blame the 3000 deaths on an age-old conflict characterised by sectarianism, tribalism, faction-fighting and 'tit-for-tat' killings.

McKibben's death could not be described as sectarian, but the media decided that it was 'symbolic' of the pointless deaths caused by 23 years of 'internecine strife' between two religious communities. Hugh Annesley, chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, said that 'republican and Loyalist gangs continue to match each other in fanatical hate, blind bigotry and sectarian savagery'.

Pig in the middle

The advantage of this kind of coverage is clear. If the killings in Ireland result from an ancient religious feud then the British can neither be blamed for the violence, nor be expected to prevent it. All they can do is act as the neutral arbiter, keeping troops in Ireland to prevent a Yugoslav-style bloodbath. In this spirit, Northern Ireland minister Michael Mates could call the 3000 deaths 'brutal and senseless', and promise that the security forces would pursue 'terrorists' on both sides of the religious divide.

The statistical breakdown of the 3000 victims provided by the RUC adds to the impression of the Irish War as a sectarian feud with British troops caught in the middle. Most papers simply stated that 2081 of the victims were civilians and 918 members of the security forces.

Hidden within the figures for civilians, however, are 350 people killed by the security forces, the vast majority of whom were nationalists. Also listed as civilians are an unspecified number of people whom republicans target as part of the British war machine, like prison officers, judges, collaborators and politicians. The category of civilian is certainly accurate for

the nearly 800 victims of Protestant paramilitaries, most of whom have been targeted simply for being Catholic.

Media coverage of the three thousandth victim of 'the Troubles' revealed some confusion over who was the first. The *Independent's* David McKittrick said the first was 66-year old Catholic Francis McCloskey, killed in the mêlée after the RUC baton-charged a crowd. The *Telegraph* and the *Times* said the first was John Gallagher, a Catholic man shot through the heart by the RUC auxiliary, the 'B' Specials, as he ran for cover in a cathedral in Armagh.

The *Irish Times* meanwhile named the first victim of the troubles as another Catholic man, Sammy Devenney, a father of nine given a 'savage beating' by nine RUC officers who burst into his home during a riot in the Bogside area of Derry. His wife said that though her husband was a strong man, 'his whole body was destroyed' and he died shortly after the attack.

Common cause

Despite the confusion over who was the first victim, the three deaths all had something important in common. They all took place during the civil rights campaign of 1968-69. And all of the victims were Catholics killed by the British security forces.

There is general agreement that today's 'Troubles' emerged out of the campaign for civil rights, but the consensus is that the noble aspirations of that campaign have been corrupted by the men of violence. Richard Ford of the *Times* described the three thousandth victim as 'a long way from the demand for civil rights'. McKittrick said that 'the disturbances occasioned by the civil rights movement degenerated first into street violence and later into terrorism'.

They are right to say that what began as a peaceful civil rights movement was transformed into an armed struggle. But they are wrong to blame the victims of violence for creating it.

When Northern Ireland's Catholics took to the streets demanding equal rights with their Protestant neighbours to housing, jobs and political representation they were met with brute force by the security forces employed to enforce British rule in Ireland. Whoever was the first victim of the 'Troubles', Gallagher, McCloskey and Devenney all paid the price of daring to ask for equal rights in the sectarian state set up by Britain, and they were to be the first of many. When the paramilitary police failed to subdue the nationalist protests British troops arrived to keep them down.

Many beatings and shootings later, and after the random internment of nationalists in

August 1971 and the massacre of 14 unarmed demonstrators on Bloody Sunday in 1972, a significant section of the nationalist community concluded that they could not achieve equal rights under British rule. An armed struggle for national independence began and continues today. It was the British state which brought violence to Northern Ireland not the IRA; indeed the modern IRA did not exist when the Army arrived. Today, the British authorities use 32 000 armed troops and paramilitary police, and special powers that would be the envy of any dictator, to subdue a community which still refuses to accept the Crown's authority.

The ease with which the British can present their war against the Irish as a sectarian feud is a sign of their confidence today, at a time when liberation struggles worldwide have been defeated or compromised. The Irish republican movement itself is on the defensive and under pressure. Problems with IRA informers and feuds in small republican groupings have made it easier for the media to present Britain as an impartial arbiter—in a year when the Brian Nelson trial has revealed the close relationship between the security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries.

As British as Nelson

Brian Nelson was a British agent paid £200 a week to work as part of a Loyalist death squad targeting innocent Catholics with the full knowledge of his British Army handlers. In the week that the Irish War claimed its three thousandth victim, the RUC visited the homes of 20 nationalists to tell them their personal details were in the hands of Loyalist death squads and an American journal quoted a member of the Ulster Freedom Fighters saying 'we get all our information from the British security forces'.

It was lucky for the British that the three thousandth victim of the Irish War was killed in a republican feud. The next two victims revealed the conflict at the heart of the Irish War—between the nationalist community and the British state and its Loyalist allies. The three thousand and first victim was a young British soldier shot dead by the IRA in full view of the massive British Army barracks that overlooks the staunchly republican village of Crossmaglen. The three thousandth and second victim was 18-year old Peter McBride from nationalist North Belfast, shot in the back by two British soldiers as he ran away from an Army patrol that had just searched him.

The British state's ruthless determination to impose its rule is ultimately responsible for every victim of the war it forced upon Northern Ireland. The British authorities have the blood of those 3000 victims on their hands. ●



Gay rights? Don't count on it

A new study into America's sexual mores has apparently horrified gay protest groups in the USA. The findings of researchers at the University of Chicago, yet to be published over here, suggest that there are far fewer lesbians and gay men around than the campaigns for homosexual equality have usually claimed. The new study, based on interviews with 3200 Americans, reveals fewer than 3 per cent of the population are 'committed homosexuals', while 4.5 per cent admit to having had occasional same sex activity. Gay groups are worried that the report is set to reduce their clout.

In agitating for gay rights, groups like Act-Up have generally used the argument that their numbers make them too significant a minority for politicians to ignore. Demonstrations and protests have trumpeted the received wisdom from the days of Alfred Kinsey, that one in 10 guys are gay. The conclusion politicians were supposed to draw was that if a tenth of the population are doing something, it must be OK. There was also an implied threat that attacking homosexuals might lose you a tenth of all votes.

I always thought these kind of 'head count' arguments were rather specious. Faced with the '1 in 10' statistic, your average reactionary politician seems more likely to respond that he knew there were too many of those buggers about. And even the moderate ones would rather play happy family values with the 90 per cent heterosexual constituency, than go out on a limb for the gay 10 per cent. But gay activists have stuck with the tactic. Part of the philosophy behind 'outing' is that the acceptability of gays will increase with their visibility.

Gay activists have claimed that the Chicago study is a biased attempt to marginalise them. We have to reserve judgement on the quality of the research until it's available here. But it wouldn't be surprising if, in these years of growing sexual conservatism, fewer people are glad to be gay, and consequently fewer people will admit it in a survey. Maybe there are also fewer people who see it is an acceptable sexual identity. I don't know, and either way, it doesn't affect my commitment to gay rights.

The issue is straightforward and has nothing to do with statistics. Discrimination against homosexuals is a denial of basic democratic rights. How many or how few there are doesn't come into it. If US gay groups are worried that the Chicago study will undermine their argument—it's only because they've been using the wrong argument. The case against bigotry is as strong as ever. ●

It may have been a bad summer for the royals, but the Windsors can draw comfort from the lack of organised opposition to their parasitical existence.

Most of the serious stick which the royal family has received in the media has come from the Tory side: Andrew Neil's *Sunday Times* has pontificated on the place of the monarchy in the New Britain, while the *Sun* publishes surveys which show that more than half of its readers think the royals are an expensive extravagance.

But even these Murdoch papers have made clear that they are not

republican. In fact their most common complaint seems to be that the royal family isn't royal enough. The most bitter criticism levelled at the younger royals is that they are bringing the venerable institution into disrepute.

The Labour-supporting *Mirror*, meanwhile, has tried to lead those rallying to the defence of the royals. The *Mirror's* revelations of those Fergie photos and the toe-sucking episode were all presented, not as an attack on the royal lifestyle, but as proof that this flabby Sloane was not fit to be a member of Britain's first and finest family. When the *Sun* printed transcripts of the Dianagate tapes, the *Mirror* responded with a 'Long to reign over us' front page, claiming that its readers still wanted Di to be Queen.

And what of the Labour Party itself? It was striking that the modest proposal for the Queen to pay a bit of income tax on part of her untold wealth came from within the Palace itself. As *Living Marxism* has noted before, throughout Labour's long obsession with who ought to pay how much tax, it has never dared to suggest that the richest woman on Earth might deign to dip her hand into her pocket. Now Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has been made to look even less radical than Her Majesty herself.

All of which makes the royal scandals something of a microcosm of the state of British politics today. The Tories and the establishment have lost their grip to such an extent that they are turning in on themselves and attacking their own institutions. Yet they are continually being let off the hook by an opposition which can best be described as, well, squidgy. ●

It's comforting to know that the police are to adopt a code of ethics. It is supposed to ensure that officers 'act justly within the law', 'uphold human rights', and 'avoid force wherever possible'. It will be displayed in every police station as a reminder that coppers should either behave—or be seen to be behaving.

The police are trying very hard these days to project a right-on image, but watch out for the iron fist in the velvet glove. I received a very chatty little circular letter from our local police station last week explaining how they are working to 'stamp out vice' in my area. It contains three sides of banal advice about personal safety, the effect of which is to lull you into a false sense of security before you get to the controversial bit.

Buried among handy hints like 'walk towards oncoming traffic' is the paragraph about the 'proposed use of police cameras'.

It seems the Force are setting up cameras to conduct a street surveillance operation in my area. While it's nice to know that 'no close up views into premises through windows will be taken', I'm rather more concerned that they plan to use the cameras to 'gather information and intelligence' and 'for training purposes'.

I suppose that with the new code we can at least rest assured that the cameras really are to protect vulnerable women, and that they have nothing to do with a campaign of harassment against local black youth. It just wouldn't be ethical. ●

'Cultural war' 'commie-libs'

George Bush and the Republicans have launched a desperate bid to brand poll-topping Bill Clinton as a leftist. Which is ironic, observe James Heartfield and Graham Bishop, since the Democrats themselves are now appealing to Reaganite prejudice

Whatever happens in America—hurricane Andrew, the debate over Iraq or Bosnia—the conclusion always seems to be the same: George Bush is a weak president. The perception that the Bush administration has lost its way is all-embracing.

November's presidential elections present a major challenge not just for Bush, but for his party. For more than 20 years, elections have been marked by the fragmenting of the Democratic Party and the ascendancy of the Republican Party. Now, however, the Republican base is crumbling.

Richard Nixon first pulled together the constituency which has kept a Republican in the White House in all but one of the elections since. Nixon appealed to white suburbanites, Californians and southerners who identified their own relative success with America's ascendancy in the Cold War era. The two things they feared were the black inner cities they had fled and America's Soviet enemies abroad. All the Republicans had to say to win was that the Democrats were soft on crime or communism.

Today that Republican constituency has been paralysed by the twin pressures of the end of the Cold War and the recession. The recession has left America's middle class feeling the pinch badly. The end of the Cold War and the loss of unquestioned global leadership has robbed the US right of its coherence, and undermined American pride in the country's international status. Foreign adventures strike many Americans as a commitment with little return while the economy is stagnant. 'Saddam Hussein's still got his job, have you got yours?', read the bumper stickers.

The weakness of the Republican constituency has been expressed in many ways in the run-up to the election. First there was the right-wing challenge to Bush from Reagan speechwriter Pat Buchanan. Buchanan's unexpectedly strong challenge for the party's presidential nomination put Bush under real pressure. Most importantly Buchanan defined the perception of Bush as a backslider who had ignored his own promises to middle America. 'Read my lips', chanted the Buchanan supporters, parodying the president's broken promise on taxes, 'No second term!'

Domestic cold war

Then there was Ross Perot. Perot appealed to a middle class constituency that wanted to see America back on its feet. The Perot phenomenon went as fast as it came, expressing nothing more than a discontent with the old arguments. But in the process Perot peeled votes off Bush, and, when he withdrew, Bill Clinton picked up enough of those votes to put himself 20 points ahead in the polls.

With their backs to the wall the Republicans are making a desperate bid to discredit the Democrats. The Republican right has launched what amounts to a domestic cold war, painting Clinton as the biggest danger to America since Joseph Stalin.

Eleven and a half million Americans listen to radio talkshow host Rush Limbaugh, whose daily broadcast

is produced by Bush communications adviser Roger Ailes. Limbaugh's shows are one long rant against the 'commie-libs'—his term for Clinton and the Democrats. It is a phrase which captures the tone of the Republicans' last-gasp campaign.

At the party convention, the Republican right held sway over the platform. Buchanan's first-night speech launched a new crusade to cohere the politics of race and reaction—'the cultural war':

'There is a religious war going on in this country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton & Clinton [Hillary and Bill] are on the other side and Bush is on our side.'

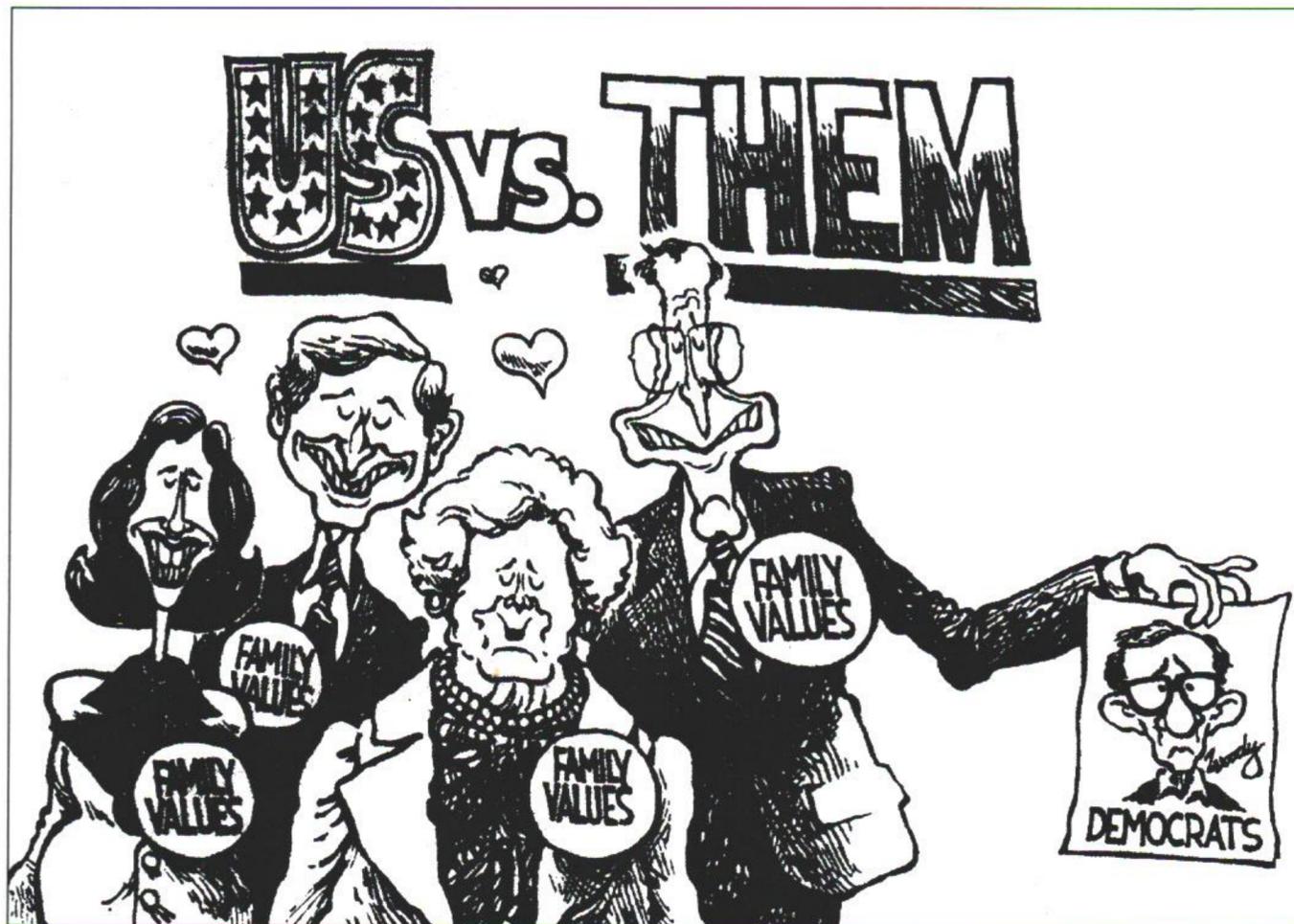
Texas senator Phil Gramm emphasised that the cultural war was a war against the commie-libs of the Democratic Party: 'In all the world, only in Cuba and North Korea and in the Democratic Party in America do we still have organised political groups who still believe that the answer to every problem is more government.'

The Republicans have responded to the low polls in the only way they know—by upping the stakes. In previous elections won by Reagan and Bush, slating the Democrats for being liberals has worked. Today, when both America and the Republicans are in more desperate straits, they have raised the stakes much further by branding the Democrats as 'commie-libs' and Cuban allies.

Vote-losers

The Republicans' cold war against Clinton may manage to consolidate their own fragmented core. But it is far from certain that the hysterical prejudice of the party right will win back wider support. Some aspects of the platform, such as opposition to legalised abortion, are proven

against



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vote-losers. It is also stretching credibility to accuse Clinton of being a 'leftist' at the moment when his party is modelling itself on the politics of the Republican majority more than ever before.

Nothing could be further from the truth than the idea that the Democrats are fifth columnists for communism. Bill Clinton's biggest commitment to state expenditure is the creation of a National Police Corps. If he did manage to beat Bush in November, it would probably make less difference to America than any change of president in the past.

Gipper Clinton?

The Clinton campaign has carefully crafted its policies to evoke the images of a traditional Democrat agenda while in practice echoing the substance of Reaganite Republicanism. Catchphrases like 'New Covenant' evoke the Democrats' New Deal of the 1930s, while Clinton has dug out his earliest photo-opportunity: himself as a teenager shaking John F Kennedy's hand.

Clinton's New Covenant is far from a return to the liberal spending commitments of Roosevelt or Kennedy.

In his newly published *Putting People First*, Clinton is at pains to emphasise that nobody is getting a free ride. Training programmes will be expanded to 'break the cycle of dependency' but 'after two years, [we will] require those who can work to go to work either in the private sector or in community service'. As well as threatening the introduction of forced labour schemes, Clinton promises firm action against fathers who desert children to welfare dependency. From criticising welfare dependency to upholding family values, these are familiar themes for Republican supporters.

'No more freebies'

By distinguishing between real need and the undeserving welfare dependents, the Democrats appeal both to the fear of recession among middle Americans and to the prejudice that secured the old Republican majority. White suburbanites identify welfare dependency with blacks and the inner cities. They resent taxes because they imagine that they are paying to buy crack for black 'welfare queens'. Clinton's tough talk appeals to those sentiments.

Writing in the *New Democrat*

Daniel Yankelovitch explains Clinton's New Covenant: 'If the society gives you a benefit, you must pay it back in some appropriate form. This means no more "freebies", no more rip-offs and no more unfairness to the middle class.' Middle class is here a euphemism for white America, just as 'welfare' is a code word for black.

In black and white

The underlying racial message of Clinton's campaign is not restricted to welfare spending. Clinton has opposed racial division, but at the same time attacked black militants for creating it. His attack on black rap star Sister Souljah over her support for black rioters in Los Angeles followed a similar line to Bush and Dan Quayle, in reposing the issues as ones of black crime and violence rather than poverty and racism.

Clinton's chosen photo-opportunity on the eve of the Maryland, Georgia and Colorado primaries was in front of a formation of prisoners in chains, most of whom were black, at the Stone Mountain Correctional Facility. Jerry Brown, Clinton's liberal challenger for the Democratic nomination, interpreted the imagery well enough: 'Two white men and 40 black prisoners, what's he saying? He's saying "we got 'em under control folks, don't worry".'

Despite the Republicans' attempt to portray the Democrats as high-spending commie-libs there is less dividing the two parties than ever before. They have always been alternative parties of American capitalism, but today's Democrats are even to the right of yesterday's Republicans.

Homer and hearth

In the circumstances of this circus, it is no wonder that many Americans are fed up with politics. Anti-political movements like the Ross Perot candidacy are only the symptoms of a growing cynicism about the common programme offered by the two parties against a background of national crisis. The celebration of home and hearth as against a hostile world provides little comfort to a middle America in the depth of another recession. When Bush said that he wanted family values in America to be like *The Waltons* rather than *The Simpsons*, Homer and family replied that they were just like the Waltons: waiting for the end of the Depression.

Whoever manages to scrape together enough votes to win in November, however, one thing is certain. The growing all-party consensus on issues like black crime and welfare, and the declaration of the 'cultural war', ensures that race will remain the most potent issue in America up to and beyond the election.

A doctor's rig

The 1967 Abortion Act, which became law 25 years ago in October, has often been celebrated as a breakthrough for women's liberation. But what rights do women really have under the act? Anne Burton thinks its silver anniversary is no cause for celebration



PHOTO: Debbie Humphry/Photofusion

ht to choose

The *British Medical Journal* recently carried an article by a London doctor explaining why she had refused to refer a patient for an abortion. 'The patient', wrote Dr Trisha Greenhalgh, 'was 38 and had a husband, three children and a marvellous nanny. She wanted a fourth child, but not quite yet. They had booked a skiing holiday for Christmas. Next spring would be a good time to get pregnant. In fact, while she was here she would like to request a home delivery for the definitive pregnancy. Meanwhile she wanted one of those green forms and a standard letter to a local NHS abortion clinic.'

Dr Greenhalgh refused to sign the form. 'I am a feminist', she explained, 'but I am not a rubber stamp. I am a thinking and feeling professional and I must live with the clinical and ethical decisions I make. I, the doctor, also have a right to choose'. (*BMJ*, August 1992)

Dr Greenhalgh's plea for the right to choose is rather ironic. Under current abortion law, doctors have considerably more 'right to choose' than the women who visit them.

A battle won?

Britain is one of the few industrialised countries that does not allow abortion on request at any stage in pregnancy. The 1967 Abortion Act clearly states that abortion is an offence unless two doctors agree 'in good faith' that a woman meets criteria laid down in law (see page 15). Under British abortion law, a planned skiing holiday is not a sound reason for referral. A doctor with liberal inclinations might be prepared to argue that under these circumstances the continuance of a pregnancy would damage the patient's mental health, but he would be pushing his luck.

'Pro-choice' organisations across the country have been preparing to commemorate the anniversary of the Abortion Act, which became law on 27 October 1967. The Act has been variously described as 'an important contribution to women's equality' and 'a major battle won in the war for the liberation of women'. But such claims don't stand close scrutiny.

It is undeniable that the qualified legalisation of abortion in 1967

contributed to improvements in the general health of women. But it failed to extend women's *rights* in regard to abortion in any way at all.

It has become relatively easy for a woman to obtain an abortion in Britain—providing a woman is sussed enough to work the system. Abortion is now the most common operation in Britain. One in five pregnancies are estimated to end this way, with doctors carrying out over 200 000 abortions in Britain each year.

Bending the rules

But this situation is not a testimony to the liberalism of the abortion law. Rather it's a reflection of the way that the rules are bent by doctors with the tacit agreement of the Department of Health. Medical professionals recognise that forcing a woman to have an unwanted child is a far from ideal start to a family. Consequently, most doctors are prepared to interpret the law in such a way that a woman can be referred.

The current abortion law is susceptible to creative interpretation. Modern early abortion methods are so safe that the risk of a woman dying from an early abortion is less than the risk of her dying in childbirth. Pro-choice doctors argue that it can therefore be said that in *all* pregnancies (to quote the Abortion Act) 'the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman...greater than if the pregnancy were terminated'. Other doctors play out a sort of charade with their patient. The woman says she will be very distressed if she has to continue the pregnancy, the doctor agrees that such distress would constitute an injury to her mental health.

The power to decide

This situation means that some women have little problem obtaining a referral for an abortion. Or, if they do experience problems, it is a consequence of the failure of the NHS to dedicate sufficient resources to the provision of abortion rather than to the strictures of the law. But it's worth remembering that—as Dr Greenhalgh's patient discovered—it is doctors, not women, who have the right and power to decide how they interpret the law.

Government officials recognise that the way in which the law is currently administered gives the authorities the best of all worlds. The regulation of abortion by law is important to them, because it marks it out as different to other operations. The only criterion required for a surgeon to perform an appendectomy is that a patient has a medical problem with his appendix such as to require medical intervention. Heart by-pass operations, varicose vein removals and even lobotomies are not regulated by law—except in so far as they have to be carried out by a qualified medical practitioner in a licensed place. The different treatment of abortion underlines the fact that it is considered an illegitimate operation which the authorities only allow on sufferance.

This method of regulating abortion allows the authorities to maintain what could otherwise be seen as a contradictory stance. On the one hand they can disapprove of abortion and present it as a 'moral problem' or 'unnatural act'. At the same time, they can allow abortions to take place in circumstances where childbirth would be undesirable—for example, in cases where the child would be handicapped, or the mother too young to care for it, or where an additional child might destabilise an existing family.

Their needs, not ours

Black women have often noted that their experience of abortion provision in Britain is very different. Where middle class white women are encouraged to have children and discouraged from abortion, black women often find the reverse situation. They are encouraged and even pressured to have abortions by racist doctors who would prefer fewer black children in the world.

It would be naive to expect British abortion law to give women the right to abortion. It was never intended to. The popular notion that a woman's right to abortion was won in the 1960s as a consequence of pressure from the women's movement belongs more in the realm of feminist mythology than in political fact. It is surprising that these myths could ever have developed. The feminist movement had barely emerged in Britain in 1967. ►



David Steel's Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill, which became the 1967 Abortion Act, was introduced, and supported by, the pillars of the British establishment. Twenty-five years on, it's worth recalling that the abortion law was drafted to meet their needs rather than ours. When Steel introduced the Bill to the House of Commons he bent over backwards to stress that, 'it is not the intention of the promoters of the bill to leave a wide open door for abortion on request'.

For the British establishment, the regulation and provision of abortion has always been a matter of social control rather than an issue of women's rights. It is one of the measures through which the institutions of the state manage society, with a view to maintaining order and stability.

The first aim of the 1967 Abortion Act was to regulate a medical practice which was perceived to be out of

practitioners began to follow the lead of their private colleagues. In 1961, 2300 abortions took place within the NHS; by 1967 the number had risen to almost 10 000.

The rising number of abortions became a matter of concern on two counts. With amateur operations resulting in the deaths of around 50 women a year and the hospitalisation of between 30 000 and 40 000, influential doctors' organisations made clear that it was unreasonable to expect their members to deal with the dire medical consequences of an ineffective law.

More important, however, were the worries in establishment circles that the law was being openly flouted. Lord Silkin, supporting Steel's bill in the House of Lords, drew attention to the fact that the current law on abortion was unenforceable. Women would not testify against illegal abortionists, the police wouldn't arrest them and the courts wouldn't convict them. 'The total number of convictions for illegal abortions', he explained, 'is only about 50 a year, or one conviction in 2000 cases. Clearly the law has broken down. It is neither respected nor obeyed'.

Curbing 'problem' people

By 1967 public opinion was substantially in favour of law reform, with opinion polls registering 75 per cent support for legal changes to permit abortion. Public support had been strengthened by the thalidomide disaster in the early 1960s, when thousands of women gave birth to severely deformed infants after taking a sleeping drug during pregnancy.

Public support for legalised abortion reflected the liberalisation of attitudes associated with the sixties.

The willingness of the establishment to reform abortion law also reflected a mood of the times: the belief that social problems could be alleviated by the benign intervention of paternalistic government, which could compensate for the shortcomings of 'inadequate' individuals. From this perspective, abortion was seen as a potential way of dealing with problem women from problem categories. Parliamentary debate on Steel's bill provided a striking example of middle class prejudice in favour of improving British society by curbing the numbers of the lower orders.

In the eyes of the British establishment, the provision of abortion for certain types of people would benefit society as a whole. Suitable cases for treatment were:

- women who were medically unfit to bear children
- women who were psychologically disturbed

- women from 'deprived' or 'demoralised' backgrounds or whose families were judged to be too big
- women who were too young to raise a family.

Dr John Dunwoody MP summed up one of parliament's main concerns when he supported the bill at its second reading with the argument that 'we have all too many problem families in many parts of the country'. Dr David Owen appealed to MPs to 'think of the doctor who is faced with the problem of a woman with seven children who tells him that she shares her bed with her husband and two other children, with perhaps two other children sleeping in the same room. This sort of thing still occurs in this country, and we must face it'. Owen made clear that he did not approve of abortion 'for the person with four bedrooms and a bedroom for each child'.

Social engineering

For parliament, abortion reform was seen as a way of helping to eliminate the consequences of poverty. It was a means of minimising the numbers of delinquents, inadequates and deprived individuals, and a way to maintain social responsibility and stable family structures. Abortion became another component in the establishment's general perspective of social engineering—dealing with the poor and other 'social misfits', not by combating poverty, but by curbing their reproduction.

It is important to remember that abortion law reform was never meant to extend women's rights. Its aim was to bring abortion under medical control, and allow 'unsuitable' pregnancies to be terminated. It was only the coincidence of the act with the 'swinging sixties' which created the impression that a liberalisation was taking place.

In their desire to defend the 1967 Act against the anti-abortion lobby, pro-choice supporters often forget that the law does not give women the right to abortion in the here and now. This approach does women no favours. At best, it ignores the problems faced by many women who find it difficult to obtain the abortions they need. At worst, it lulls women into a false sense of security by telling them they have the right to an operation, when they do not and when they may not be able to obtain it in practice.

Those who believe that women should have the right to abortion need first to face up to the problems of abortion provision today. The 1967 Abortion Act is not, and was never intended to be, the solution to our problems.

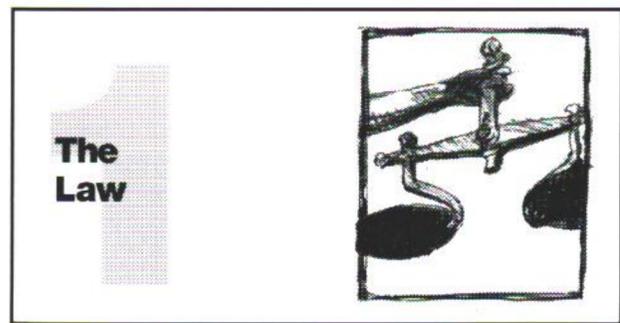
For the establishment, abortion has always been about social control, not women's rights

control. Before 1967 the legal position of abortion was foggy. Legislation dating back to 1861 outlawed the procuring of a miscarriage and established a blanket ban on abortion. This was tempered in 1929 by the Infant Life Preservation Act, which allowed abortion providing 'such an act were done in good faith with the intent of saving the life of the mother'. In 1938, a case where a doctor carried out an abortion on a 14-year old rape victim resulted in a high court ruling that abortion was lawful not only to save life, but also to prevent a woman becoming a 'physical and mental wreck'.

This legal jumble left unclear the conditions under which doctors could terminate a pregnancy. But while there was doubt about the legality of the operation, nobody could doubt that abortions were taking place in ever increasing numbers. Wealthy women had no problem obtaining abortions from private practitioners 'to preserve their health'—providing they could afford the fee. Poorer women sought the help of unqualified abortionists. Estimates put the number of 'backstreet' abortions at between 15 000 and 100 000 a year. Throughout the 1960s a growing number of NHS

A guide to getting an abortion

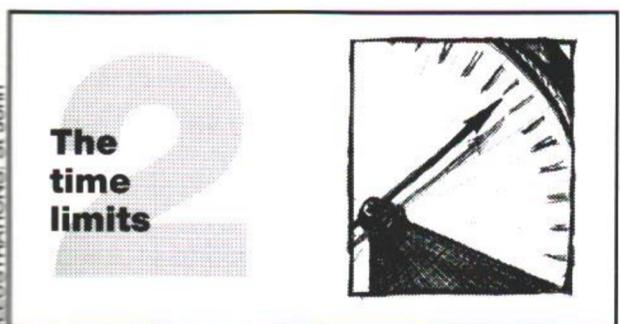
No woman in Britain has the right to an abortion. Amanda Macintosh and Jane Wilde look at the hurdles a woman with an unwanted pregnancy has to jump



Abortion is regulated by the Abortion Act 1967 as amended by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. Subject to the agreement of two doctors, abortion is legal in the following circumstances:

- i. Your life is at risk if the pregnancy continues
- ii. Your physical or mental health will be damaged if the pregnancy continues
- iii. The physical and/or mental health of any existing children will be injured if the pregnancy continues
- iv. There is a substantial risk that the child will be mentally or physically handicapped.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act sets an upper time limit on abortion of 24 weeks, except in circumstances where there is a risk to the life of the mother, risk of permanent injury to the mother, or risk of serious fetal handicap.



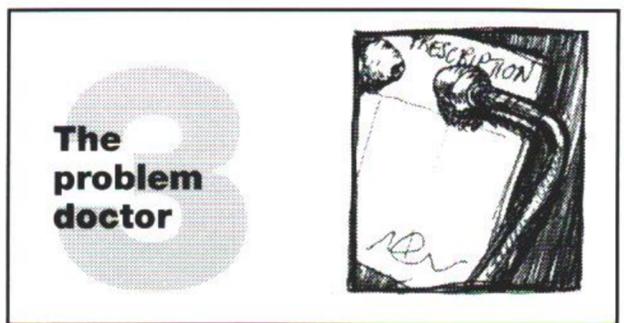
Twenty-four weeks sounds like a long time to organise an abortion—but don't get lulled into

a false sense of security. Doctors calculate the date of your pregnancy from the first day of your last period. So if you have the usual four week cycle, by the time your period is two weeks late you are officially already six weeks pregnant.

Within the NHS, many hospitals only offer an abortion service up to the twelfth week. This is because after that time the method used to carry out the abortion changes, and many hospitals and clinics are loath to redirect extra resources from meagre budgets to provide the necessary resources, unless you or the fetus have a serious medical problem.

Even if you get to your doctor early, and he refers you to a hospital immediately, you can still fall at the time-limit hurdle. Often hospital waiting lists are so long that, by the time you get your appointment, you are too far gone to have the operation.

Many early abortions are done by private clinics, because at least that way you're certain to get an appointment. But a private early abortion will cost you around £225.

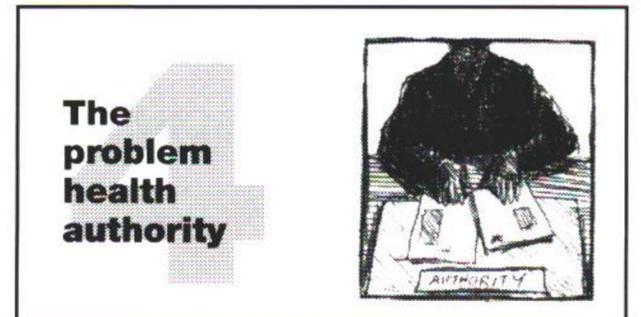


Your doctor does not *have* to agree to refer you for an abortion even if you unequivocally meet the legal criteria. Under the conscientious objections section of the 1967 Act, he does not have to 'participate in any treatment' to do with abortion and that includes agreeing that you can have one.

If he is a conscientious objector he should refer you to another doctor. But many don't.

Some anti-abortion doctors have been known to lie to patients about reasons for NHS refusal. Some have simply 'forgotten' to pass on referral letters.

Anti-abortion doctors are not obliged to make their views known. So if you suspect that your doctor might be deliberately slowing things down, make an emergency appointment to see somebody else.



Local authorities are not legally required to provide an abortion service, although a 1979 NHS Royal Commission recommended that they should aim to provide 75 per cent of the abortions in their area on the NHS. A quick look at the official figures shows that where you live can make all the difference.

Top of the list is Oxford, where the local authority dealt with 98 per cent of requests for abortion from local women residents in 1991. You could also try Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Leicester or West Suffolk, all of which provided above 90 per cent of services.

But beware of the regional health authorities of South Warwickshire, North and South Birmingham, Coventry or Dudley, where the chance of obtaining an abortion through the local national health service in 1991 was less than 2 per cent. Almost as bad were Huddersfield, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, West Birmingham and West Lambeth, which managed a miserable 10 per cent at best. If you are unlucky enough to be in these areas, private clinics are probably your only option (figures from *Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Monitor*, AB/24, 11 August 1992).



During the Gulf War, a number of clinics and hospitals announced that abortion services would be deprioritised in order to free beds for returning casualties. A surgeon at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford helpfully advised women 'not to get pregnant in the next six months'. Remember that however urgent it may be to you, abortion fits neatly into the category of what are considered non-urgent operations; if they declare that it's in the greater national interest to hand over the bed, you will be first in the queue for a minicab home.

'Pro-life' politics,

The 'pro-life' lobby against abortion is quietly gaining ground again in parliament. Susannah Hall replies to their arguments

British anti-abortion activists maybe quieter than the American variety, but they are just as dangerous. They beaver away in parliament trying to show that the 1967 Act has given women abortion on request and is being abused by callous doctors who have no respect for life. In the first half of this year alone, more than 50 questions were raised by anti-abortion MPs like Liberal David Alton and Tory Ann Winterton, largely around four issues.

● The disposal of fetal tissue

David Alton made a stink after he found a private abortion clinic in Liverpool using a macerator (which grinds fetal remains down). He demanded those responsible be prosecuted, arguing that 'the human remains of the unborn child should be treated with respect'.

Nobody wants to watch babies' bodies being shoved into grinders, and the anti-abortion groups Life and Spuc often use pictures of bits of fetal legs and arms to play on this sentiment. Alton knew he could rely on the authorities to be sensitive on such an issue; sure enough, the health department conceded that maceration was 'inappropriate' and undertook to phase it out.

How women feel about the disposal of the fetus after an abortion probably depends on how they feel about the pregnancy. Women who want a child and are having their pregnancy upset by the necessity of an abortion (maybe because the fetus is disabled), might feel sensitive about how its remains are disposed of. Their pregnancy meant a forthcoming child, around which they had already started organising their lives—buying clothes, thinking of names, etc. The aborted fetus is more likely to represent the

dead child, and as such, they may want its remains to be buried.

However, for the majority of women having abortions, disposal of the remains is not an issue. Abortion for them is not about ridding themselves of a child, but of a problem. These women want to have an abortion to avoid reorganising their lives around a baby, and they want to have the operation with minimal fuss—something which is hard to attain on the NHS. It would be far more useful if the health department worried about the provision of adequate abortion facilities rather than the disposal of fetal remains.

Alton tries to play on public squeamishness to strengthen the case against abortion. But in fact most of us would be just as squeamish about watching the disposal of limbs, appendices, wombs or any of the other bits and pieces commonly removed during surgery. That does not mean that we're against operations.

● The conscience clause

The conscience clause of the 1967 Act allows doctors to opt out of performing abortions. David Alton asked the Secretary of State for Health to extend this to include ancillary staff who may have to deal with fetal tissue.

Alton was no doubt surprised when Virginia Bottomley reassured him that hospital managers had been instructed to extend the clause as requested. Ann Winterton immediately pushed the point further, asking why the extension didn't include personnel involved in preparing a woman for an abortion.

Anti-abortionists try to imply that medical staff who object to abortion suffer discrimination. But, in fact, the medical establishment is all too willing to allow them to opt out.

The opt-out clause is a peculiarity of the Abortion Act. Who would want medical staff to be able to opt out of treating us if they were a Jehovah's Witness, and disagreed with blood transfusions? It should be entirely unacceptable for women trying to get an abortion to be faced with refusals and hostility from doctors and other staff who disagree on religious grounds.

This problem is made far worse by the mixing of maternity and abortion facilities in British hospitals. If the NHS provided separate abortion clinics, they could be staffed by people sympathetic to a woman's need to terminate a pregnancy. After all, nobody would work for the Family

Planning Service if they disagreed with contraception. It would be more satisfactory for women, who now find themselves dumped on maternity wards after their abortion, often with distraught women who have just miscarried.

● Abortion because of handicap

As more and more ante-natal tests are made available to women, Alton and his followers are quick to point out that they may lead to more abortions. Anti-abortionists don't regard disability in a fetus to be grounds for an abortion. In fact, they argue that abortion on these grounds is discrimination against disabled people, adding an emotional kick to the argument by likening people who advocate such abortions to eugenicists and Nazis.

There is a vital distinction, however, between a deformed fetus and a disabled person, which makes it possible to take a quite different attitude. Fetuses are not human beings. Aborting an unwanted pregnancy is not the same as murdering a child; and supporting a woman's right to abort a disabled fetus does not mean advocating death camps for the disabled. There is no contradiction between on the one hand wanting to lessen the number of people who are born with disabilities and, on the other, fighting discrimination against disabled people.

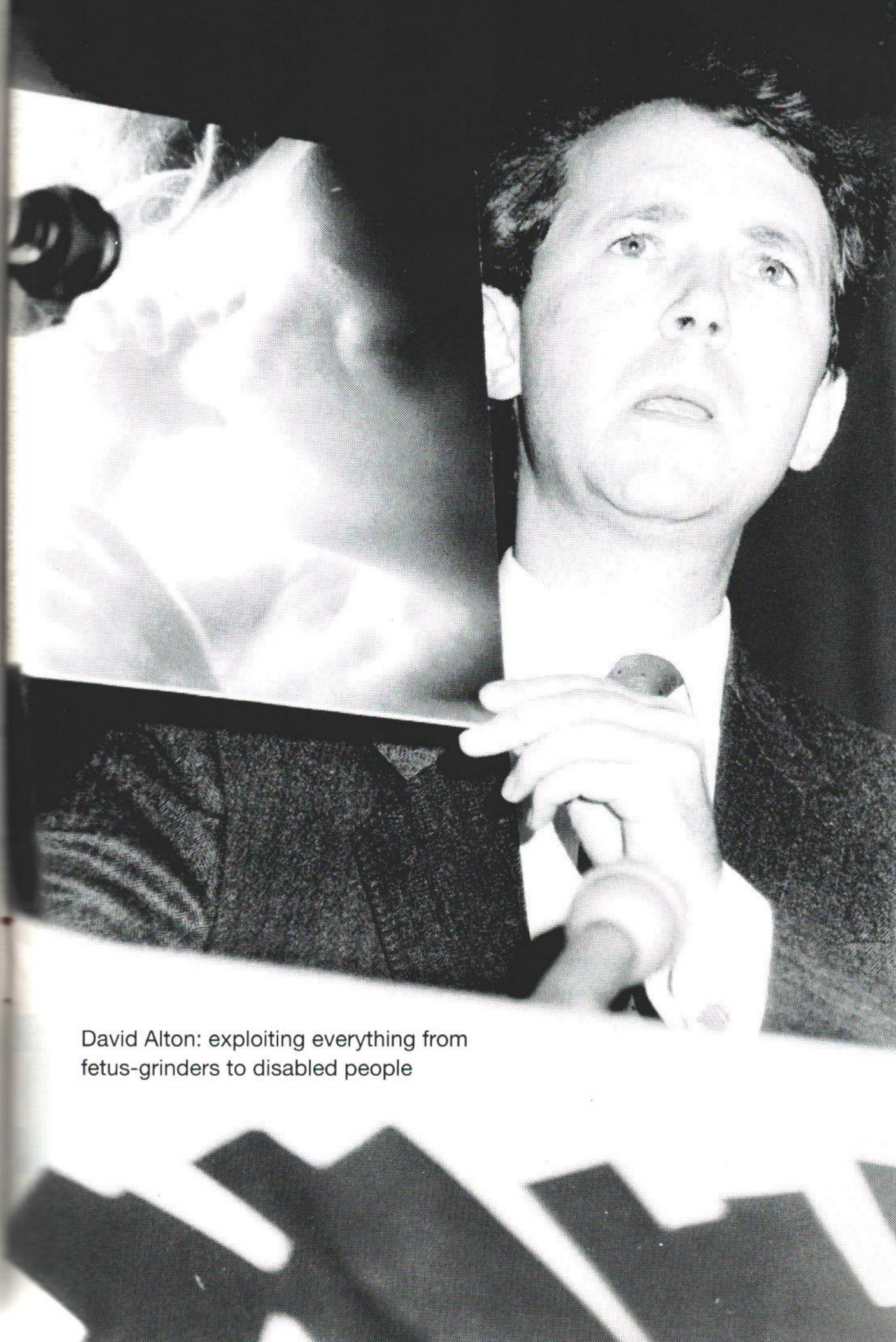
Of course a fetus, disabled or not, is biologically alive and has the potential to become a baby. The question is whether that *potential* should take precedence over the ability of a woman to control her *actual* life. Being unable to determine whether she should be pregnant relegates a woman to the role of an incubator. There is no way that such dehumanisation can be justified through the cynical use of emotive arguments about disability.

● Post-abortion trauma

Alton has also used another line to profess his concern about women's health, demanding that the health department report on the terrible effects of post-abortion trauma. Post-abortion trauma, or syndrome, is described as follows in a British Victims of Abortion leaflet:

'Post-Abortion Syndrome (PAS) can be devastating to women and men who experience it. For some their depression

low-life tactics



David Alton: exploiting everything from fetus-grinders to disabled people

reaches the point of suicide. Many turn to alcohol and substance abuse to deaden the lingering pain from this unrecognised death experience.'

Since abortion is such a devastating experience, say the anti-abortionists, no woman should have to endure it. The government has already carried out research into PAS and it is now common practice in abortion clinics to assume that women want counselling after the operation. Many pro-choice activists also present abortion as a horrible experience, but something which nonetheless needs to be available for women to choose if they really need it.

Why is it that women feel traumatic about having an abortion? Why should it be more stressful than having your appendix out? The difference between the experience of these two operations is not medical, but moral. Abortion is stigmatised in our society—not just by hardliners who say abortion is murder, but also by the authorities who insist that women cannot be allowed to have an abortion without the approval of two doctors.

It is hardly surprising that women feel under psychological pressure not to have an abortion. Being a mother is supposed to be the ultimate fulfilment for a woman in this society. So those who have an abortion may well feel guilty and depressed. However, there is little evidence to suggest that it causes long-term psychological problems.

The *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists* published a paper last April which noted that just three women out of every 10 000 will suffer 'post-abortion psychosis'—a much smaller figure than the 10 per cent of mothers who suffer post-natal depression, the most common complication of childbirth in the West. And what about the psychological impact of having to go ahead and give birth to an unwanted child?

The 'pro-life' lobby may be low profile, but its arguments are slowly gaining ground, and winning concessions which further undermine a woman's limited access to abortion. In this, the anti-abortionists have been aided by the highly defensive stance of their opponents.

Typically, most of those who oppose Alton and Winterton now call themselves 'pro-choice' because it sounds less offensive than being 'pro-abortion'. This is just dodging the issue. The 'pro-lifers' arguments should be met head-on: for a start, by expressing unequivocal support for the right to abortion as a simple operation which enables women to decide for themselves whether they want to be pregnant or not. ●

As the new term begins, Britain's colleges are packed with more students than ever before. And, thanks to the 'upgrading' of polytechnics, many more of them will now be university students. These might seem like changes for the better. But, says Penny Robson, today this massive expansion represents a real cutback in the higher education system

By the year 2000 it is estimated that one in three young people will be entering higher education. The government claims that by widening access to education it can create new opportunities for everyone. But behind the egalitarian rhetoric lie other concerns which have nothing to do with improving education. The latest shake up of higher education has primarily been inspired by the rapid increase in youth unemployment and the need to cutback public spending.

'In 1979, only one young person in eight went on to higher education. Today, it is one in five. More resources



PHOTO: Michael Kramer

Access t

have helped provide more opportunities than ever before.'—John Major, 1991.

Brixton man is visionary on the projected college intake, but less clear-sighted on the question of funding. The truth is that the government is increasing student numbers at the same time as it is cutting the resources available to educate each one of them.

In last year's autumn public spending statement, the government announced the following spending increases for the academic year 1992-93. The polytechnics get a 12 per cent cash increase—7.4 per cent in real terms, after accounting for inflation. This extra funding will have to cover a nine per cent increase in student numbers. For universities there is a 3.8 per cent increase in real terms, to pay for a 5.8 per cent increase in student numbers. The government expects colleges to cover the gap with 'efficiency gains'.

Since it now appears that these projections underestimated the numbers of new entrants into higher education, it seems certain that the 'efficiency gains' will have to be substantial. A draft report produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research estimates that spending per head across all higher education institutions will fall by 20 per cent in this academic year. A 20 per cent cut in what were already inadequate resources will leave the new generation of students with next to nothing.

On the margin

The government's new funding methodology promises a core/margin approach. This means that only a core of funding is guaranteed, the rest has to be fought for. Even the core funds are not guaranteed to keep pace with inflation. Margin finances will only be given for expansion of teaching. No allowance will be made for increased capital expenditure—which means that the huge expansion in student numbers will often have to take place within the existing buildings.

All colleges are desperate to pack in students in order to guarantee as

much funding as possible. Every college is now restructuring—not to improve the quality of education, but to expand its student base and so strengthen its demands for money.

Many polytechnics have taken advantage of new rules which allow them to 'upgrade' and become universities. This name-changing does not improve the education they offer, but it does help to attract more entrants. Meanwhile, some colleges have already expanded so much that they are franchising out some parts of their courses to local Further Education colleges—despite warnings from the education inspectors that FE colleges are not equipped to teach degree courses.

Hidden unemployment

When Kenneth Baker first introduced the government's higher education reforms in the late 1980s, with plans to freeze grants, make students take out loans and encourage private sector sponsorship, they were popularly understood as a move to restrict education to those who could afford it. The 1987 Department of Education and Science document 'Meeting the challenge' declared an intention to remould education to be more closely related to the needs of the labour market. It made great play on the low levels of graduate unemployment.

By the time of the 1991 white paper on higher education, however, it was clear that there were no jobs and that the cash-strapped private sector was unlikely to sponsor training programmes. It was against this background that the government introduced its new emphasis on expanding student numbers and widening access to education. It was a device which would allow the authorities to pretend that school leavers swelling the ranks of the unemployed were really all university undergraduates.

Improving access to higher education sounds like an attractive idea. But when the motive is to save money and massage jobless figures, it is another matter. In the current climate

of economic austerity, widening access can only mean downgrading higher education for the majority of young people. Most universities are becoming rather like YTS schemes, without the T for practical training. Young people are being crammed into inadequate classrooms without proper resources, indeed often without lecturers, and told that they are being educated. If they manage to stand three years of this, all that awaits many of them at the end of it is a quick trip back to the proper dole office.

No doubt many young people are cynical about the 'opportunities' on offer. Yet in the absence of any alternative, education can seem like the most viable survival strategy. Despite the shoddiness of the colleges, students seem to be taking their academic progress very seriously, some making big personal and financial sacrifices to improve on their qualifications.

Low expectations

Back in the thirties, faced with economic crisis and mass unemployment, the government adopted a similar approach to today. They set up juvenile instruction centres for the jobless, many in large northern towns, and made attendance compulsory. These institutions were nicknamed 'dole schools' and treated with cynicism. Even today those that were forced to attend will tell you that they were introduced to keep young people off the streets. The fact that more people are prepared to take seriously the government's modern dole schools shows how low expectations are today.

It is understandable that young people might look to the promise of an education as a way out. But there can be no sympathy for the response of college managements. They lecture staff about the exciting challenge of operating with fewer resources. Nor have the academics and college teaching staff taken up the cudgels against the reforms. It must be clear to many lecturers that John Patten's plans are not the 'access for all' that they dreamed of in the sixties and ►

o what?

seventies. However the threat of redundancy seems to have dulled the critical faculties. In a desperate bid to maintain funding for their area of work, they too are swept up in the drive to pack as many young bodies as possible into the lecture theatre.

The only individuals actively campaigning against the reforms come from Oxbridge, where the colleges' own income and reputation protects academics from some of the pressures

The worst aspect of the downgrading of education is the authorities' suggestion that they are giving the underprivileged a better deal

to sing-a-long-a-Major. Elsewhere, the government can carry off its phoney 'opportunity knocks' routine because a large proportion of the academics will go along with it. Packaged in the language of participation and improving access, cutbacks become easier to swallow.

Borrowed buzzwords

The 1991 white paper on higher education reads more like an extract from a Bill of Rights than a celebration of the market economy. According to the government, the main aim of its reforms is now to end the stuffy elitism which has dominated higher education in this country. The packaging of the reforms in the Majoresque language of egalitarianism has disoriented many of the Tories' traditional opponents in education.

The government boasts of having destroyed the 'binary divide' between the aloof academic universities and the flexible and practical polytechnics. There is now a whole vocabulary of buzzwords, borrowed from the American education system and Japanese management seminars, which promotes the repackaging of college courses as an exercise in increased openness. 'Semesterisation' and 'modularisation' are the most popular types of reorganisation. Each of them breaks down the structure of a course, apparently to allow more flexibility and choice. In reality, the aim is to make education a cheaper and more saleable commodity.

Semesterisation involves breaking down the college year into self-contained time units, or semesters, which often run right through the calendar year. It is supposed to allow those who cannot afford to study full time to instead take different sections of a degree course at different times—for example, one semester each summer. In a situation where education was considered intrinsically valuable and was properly resourced, this could be a useful development. But today, when its primary aim is to enrol more students while economising on the use of lecturers and space, semesterisation must mean lower quality education.

Three into two

A second aim of semesterisation is to allow full-time students to compress their degree course into two years instead of three. This confirms that the reforms are not really motivated by educational concerns. Higher education should not be about trying to remember as much as possible in as short a time as possible. On the contrary, a quality education must maximise the time available to study and to think. Critical thought, however, is out of fashion in the climate of fast-food education which semesterisation reflects. That is reaffirmed by the way in which semesterisation turns college lecturers into full-time teachers, most of whom will have no time to conduct research of their own.

Modularisation involves breaking up courses into disconnected segments, which the student can select and put together in a package in order to accumulate the necessary points for a degree. By allowing students more say in the content of their courses, modularisation is presented as an exercise in consumer choice. In fact, it means undermining the quality of a coherent course, and allowing college authorities to cut costs.

Lowest level

Modularisation tends to produce a sort of lowest common denominator education. For example, a module on biochemistry can include students studying to be nurses, doctors, chemists, biologists and engineers. In the past they would have been taught separately, and for good reason. One lecture cannot possibly meet all of the needs of such a varied group. The consequence of this from the student's point of view is to produce an incoherent and inferior degree. From the point of view of college management, modularisation is a way to cut back on teaching resources, and to create small education and training packages which are more marketable to students who cannot be in full-time education.

All manner of other euphemisms have been invented to legitimise the changes and disguise their real meaning. Distance learning, student-centred learning and open learning are all different labels for low-cost, low-quality, do-it-yourself education. When colleges boast about their videos and microfiche resources, what they mean is that they can no longer afford books.

Perhaps the worst aspect of the downgrading of education is the attempt by the authorities to suggest that their aim is to give the underprivileged a better deal. Franchising is now being presented in this fashion. A policy introduced to cut back spending on degree courses ends up as an opportunity for students (particularly 'disadvantaged' students) to get on to university courses by studying the first year of their degree at a local FE college.

Equally inferior

The educationalists claim that they have introduced franchising to help achieve equality for women, blacks, disabled people and the working classes. The idea that you can solve social inequalities by offering people a place on a college course has always been flawed. The notion that you can do so by allowing them to take poor quality modules at underfunded, overcrowded FE colleges is completely ridiculous. Even if a working class woman manages to overcome all of the obstacles to pursuing a course—such as the shortage of childcare facilities and cash—what she is being offered is 'access' to an inferior education.

When I first went to college, a favourite slogan of student politics was 'education for the masses not the bloody ruling classes'. If John Patten succeeds, that demand may have been met—but only by sending 33 per cent of young people to universities with no resources and scarce teaching facilities as an alternative to signing on. This is not access for all; it is access to nothing, no education, no training, no future, a piece of paper called a degree that represents nothing.

Under the banners of access, semesterisation and modularisation, Britain is heading towards an American-style system, where there are a handful of prestigious Ivy League colleges at the top and a great many other colleges teaching rubbish at the bottom. The old system in this country may have been elitist. But at least it gave students something worthwhile in the way of education. What will they get from being granted freer access to a higher education system which is sinking lower all the time? ●

Additional information from Jim Banks

Studied ignorance

Khalid Morrison thinks that universities are teaching their students to be thick

The blank generation: generation X, a generation that has no opinions, a wide-eyed stare and just lets the world go by. The sort of people who pensioners look at and mutter, 'God help us if there's a war'. But this is not just the youth on the dole with no prospects, or the youth working in dead end jobs; these days the term blank generation is applied to university students too.

Universities are supposed to be the places where great minds are forged, where great



minds clash and ideas fly like sparks. Today they are more likely to be places where minds gently rub together, and the odd seepage of an idea leaks out every now and then. Universities are now places where a certain vacancy has been made into an art form. Academic circles are no longer dynamic, but have a vague, eccentric quality to them.

You too can enter the select academic establishment. Over a period of three years you too can learn the art of speaking and writing at length yet saying nothing. The blank generation is not just drinking in the White Lion, it is drinking in the Nelson Mandela bar—recently renamed the Frankie Howerd Centre.

You can get yourself a degree by learning to express a lack of any original thought. Your tutor will guide you in the art of not thinking, you will

sit through endless seminars where the conclusion will always be that there are no answers and the world is far too complex for us to understand.

On entering the university you will be subject to the rules of the groovy dimension, where there is no right or wrong and holding a strong opinion is something of a *faux pas*. Universities teach you not to think, in an educated manner.

The first year of my history degree had a compulsory unit entitled, 'What is history?'. It's the sort of course that many students are likely to encounter in the first year—'What is English lit?', 'What is philosophy?' and so on.

The 'What is history?' course was something of an eye-opener. The main thrust of the first lecture was that the endeavours which had been made in the past to use history as a tool to create a brave new world had failed. Nonetheless, we could still glory in the new Historicism, the art of recreating the past.

What the lecturer was saying was that studying history is now about no more than evoking the past, whether in written form or as one of those history theme parks that provide fun and entertainment for all the family. New Historicism is what brought us London's latest tourist attraction, 'the plague' at the Tower Hill Pageant: you can see and smell it for yourself.

The accepted school of thought in my college is that you can recreate the past but it is no longer legitimate to draw conclusions from your study. History has become an art form with no real purpose; yet history has a special place in academic circles because of its great unfathomability.

The general trend in academic thought is that the more vacant and non-committal a discourse is, the more erudite it becomes. University lecturers today have fallen in love with irrationalism as a get-out clause for the lack of a dynamic in contemporary thinking. Or, as the Kent university modernity course guide has it:

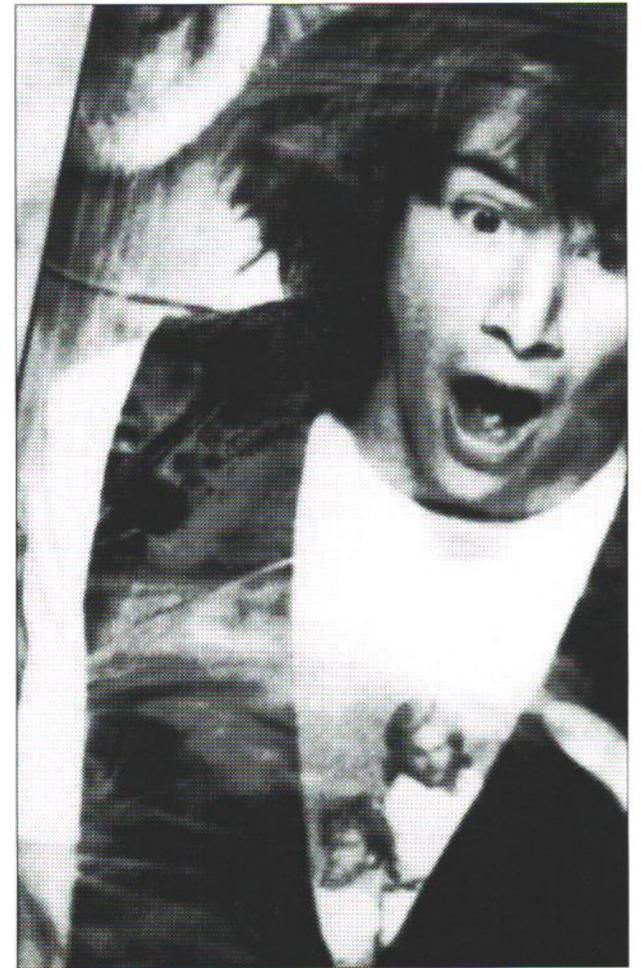
'If it is true that the spatial, temporal and representational frames of modernity are altering in important ways then the kind of self that could "carry" these experiences will clearly be more or less radically transformed by them.'

At the same university law students are asked in examination to 'consider the concept of the Other and Otherness within the construction of the legal order and assess the parallel cultural forms in understanding the nature of legal culture'.

The first rule of this otherworldliness is that there are no rules. An exercise given as part of the discourse analysis course at the University of North London invites the student to look at two news reports. One describes the exploits of

Afghan 'freedom fighters', the other, the acts of Irish republican 'terrorists'. Apparently the right approach when reviewing these two extracts is to point out the inconsistency of the media's treatment.

As for a discussion on whether the nature of either group is freedom fighter or terrorist...well, that is out of the question. You see everything is relative and who can say which opinion is right or wrong? Freedom fighter or terrorist? Who knows?



The academic establishment has turned the ridiculous into the sublime. The more ridiculous a theory, the better it appears to be received. It is very difficult to be in awe of lecturers who create vacuous courses and have nothing to say for themselves. Try expressing a forthright opinion in a seminar and watch your lecturer begin to squirm. In a time when Derrida can get a doctorate at Cambridge, the ability of a lecturer to assert his superiority is greatly diminished. Students who call their lecturer's bluff can often watch his status disappear in a puff of smoke.

Many academics are no more able to make sense of the world than Norman Lamont. Their special ability is to stretch such nonsense to a course or even a book. This skill is what is being taught to what are meant to be the best young minds in the country. ●



sick system

Britain's drug dependency

The pharmaceutical industry is often held up as the one dynamic sector of British capitalism. In fact, says Debra Warner, it survives on a drip-feed of government stimulants

We've all become familiar with the tragic tale of British industry's decline. News of factory closures and businesses going bankrupt fills the financial pages daily. Even the City of London, pride and joy of British capitalism, has seen better days. But there is one sector of the economy which still puts a twinkle in the eye of the most jaded forecaster. The pharmaceutical industry, according to one excited commentator, is 'the jewel in the UK manufacturing crown' (*Guardian*, 8 August). Four of the top 20 pharmaceutical companies in the world are British and between them they produce six of the world's top-selling drugs.

Without its 'mother's little helpers', Britain's economy would be a great deal sicker. The pharmaceutical industry produced a trade surplus of £1.1 billion in 1990, climbing to £1.2 billion last year, according to the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI). Glaxo, with a workforce only a sixth the size of British Telecom, is the world's second most profitable

drug company. And amid all the recent doom and gloom about the economy, Smith Kline Beecham announced a growth in profits of 10 per cent over the past half year.

So what makes pharmaceuticals different? Strong management is often cited. There are legendary tales of how Sir Paul Girolami, Glaxo's chief executive, rocked the industry by launching the ulcer 'wonder-drug', Zantac, at way above the market price then watched it grow to become the top-selling drug in the world. Or how John Robb transformed Wellcome from a charitable trust into a stock-market blockbuster.

The drug industry bosses have certainly been ruthless. Behind the recent highly publicised sale of shares to raise £2 billion for the Wellcome Trust's charitable works (and £75m in fees for the City), Wellcome management have cut unprofitable research into such minor ailments as cancer to concentrate on high-profile and highly profitable treatments for diseases like Aids. As a result, Wellcome's pre-tax profits leaped by

28 per cent in 1991 and 35 per cent in the first half of this year.

However, managers have been equally ruthless in other British industries—usually without a corresponding surge in profits. The question remains, what makes drug companies so successful?

The real reason for the success of Britain's pill-pushers is much more straightforward, and one that the industry is less keen to boast about. The secret ingredient in the pharmaceutical industry is good old-fashioned state intervention. This comes in two forms.

The National Health Service comprises 80 per cent of the British market for drugs and consumes nearly 40 per cent of the British pharmaceutical industry's output—a figure which has grown by almost 10 per cent since 1970. Annual NHS expenditure on medicines has risen from £2.78 per head in 1970 to £43.97 per head in 1990. The fact that British drug companies have been guaranteed the largest slice of this expanding cake, paid for out of the public purse, has helped to protect them from competition and downturns in the world market.

Profit protection

The second factor is the Pharmaceutical Price Regulatory Scheme, a watchdog body set up in 1957 by the Department of Health. It is ostensibly aimed at controlling drug expenditure in the NHS by preventing companies from artificially inflating prices. But rather than directly imposing price controls, it places a ceiling on the profitability of each company, measured by the rate of return on their assets. Those companies which exceed their target profit margin (usually 17-21 per cent) can opt to invest in plant or research and development rather than paying the excess to the government or lowering their prices. It is this which has encouraged investment in pharmaceutical manufacturing plant within the UK, at a time when investment in the rest of British industry has been falling. Britain now has 16 per cent of European production capacity, while holding 13 per cent of the European pharmaceutical market. All good news for the ailing balance of trade.

State protection looks set to increase into the 1990s. The industry is currently lobbying the government to extend patent life in order to protect it from foreign imitations of Great British Brands.

The other leading producers of pharmaceuticals, such as the USA, Germany and Switzerland, all use state regulation of one form or another, and all are arguing for longer patent protection. But the essential role of government in propping up the pill-pushers becomes much more transparent in Britain, where strong state involvement has kept alive what is just about the only globally competitive arm of the manufacturing sector.

As the Wellcome experience shows, government regulation does not produce more people-friendly drug companies. It simply protects the profits of the industry against competition from abroad. But in an era when, despite the slump, everyone seems to be worshipping at the altar of market forces, it is worth remembering that even in the one small remaining corner of the British economy that amounts to anything, free market forces don't really work. ●



Elvis lives

Where were you when Elvis died? That depends on when you think he died, or whether you believe he's dead at all—a new video claims he's alive and well and working for the CIA.

To all intents and purposes, Elvis the rock'n'roller died in 1958 when he was conscripted. He went into the army as the devil incarnate, a 'nigger-lovin' faggot' in eye make-up and pink clothes, blamed for juvenile delinquency and for hospitalising 25 'vibrating teenagers' in New Jersey with his 'jungle beat'. He came out American as apple pie. Then he died slowly for 17 years until his body finally gave up on 16 August 1977.

● I remember the day Elvis died. I felt vaguely surprised—I'd forgotten he was still alive. Growing up in Lewisham, the last Confederate state, you were surrounded by Elvis. Framed like Jesus, tattooed on arms, impersonated in pubs, displayed in juke boxes and shop windows, The King was everywhere. 'Elvis Lives'—even before he died. Even the club all the kids went to was a shrine. Every week it had a bopping contest and the same bloke would win: a skinny ted with metal legs which he would spin like a propeller. 'Elvis prays for all his fans, you know.'

On Saturdays whole families of teds would parade in the shopping centre: Dad in greasy quiff, sideburns, suede creepers with fluorescent socks, a sharpened steel comb and two of a packet of three in the pocket of his drape jacket; Mum in ponytail, cut down blouse, flared skirt, stockings and stilettos; the kids perfect miniatures in full uniform ('if any of 'em go punk I'll break their fucking necks'). Not too keen on change these Rebels. Their boozers had a 'Cricket test' before Norman Tebbit. That's as in Buddy Holly & The Crickets, and even Chuck Berry would have failed it. 'All white? Haaagh!' No? Well you ain't coming in....

● Just after Elvis died I heard Lewisham was in the middle of the biggest riot since the war, during a National Front march. It seemed symbolic somehow. In the fifties the segregationists burned Elvis records. Now most of them probably owned all his albums. Not that every Presley follower is a bigot—50m Elvis fans can't all be wrong. Nor did Elvis himself ever express any views about anything important: as a symbol, he went from rebel to conformist without any real difficulty.

The first Elvis myth—the raw sexual hoodlum who danced like he'd swallowed a jackhammer—changed peoples lives in a way that is hard to imagine today. If he hadn't existed things would have changed anyway; but Elvis personified it all, and that meant he couldn't just fade out of the public gaze when his moment had passed. As a new generation took over, all that was left was a country boy with simple tastes and enormous riches.

● Surrounded by yes-men and 'protected' from the outside world by a huckster manager, he was 'King' only within his own castle. He became the Randolph Hearst of white trash, with Graceland his San Simeon, crammed full of gaudy junk instead of priceless art. He indulged his every whim: women were sent up like room service; private jets dispatched in the night to pick up sacks of cheeseburgers. Why should he 'rebel' against anything?

By the sixties, most Elvis fans just wanted fifties nostalgia. His fan club conventions were full of mums and dads, and before long their mums and dads were coming along. Their Elvis was the Southern boy

who said 'sir' and 'ma'am' and sang gospel—he was no hippy, hell no. In the summer of free love, Elvis was getting married. He was so cut off from any kind of artistic stimulation that he couldn't have developed his music if he'd wanted to, so he just took care of business, churning out three movies a year. If your adoring fans hail the soundtrack of *Clambake*, why change a winning formula?

At the end of the sixties he hit the road again, and still had enough charisma to raise pulses. In the Hollywood years he had developed a self-deprecatory approach which helped him carry off his ridiculous novelty numbers and cornball ballads with a certain style. But soon his mannerisms teetered over the edge into self-parody, and his pure hard tenor degenerated into a melodramatic warble. D-I-V-O-R-C-E and the pressure of touring pushed him further into drugs, and he lost respect for himself and his music. The perfectionist who recorded 'Hound Dog' 30 times now just sang perfunctorily over backing tapes on his rare visits to the studio.

● Elvis spent most of the seventies in a paranoid stupor, surrounded by guns. He planned his day by the *Physician's Desk Reference*, balancing out all the stuff he was taking. That other great fraud, Richard Nixon, audaciously appointed Elvis as an honorary narcotics agent to front his anti-drugs crusade. Out of his head on a cocktail of barbiturates, The King accepted his badge and gun at the White House.

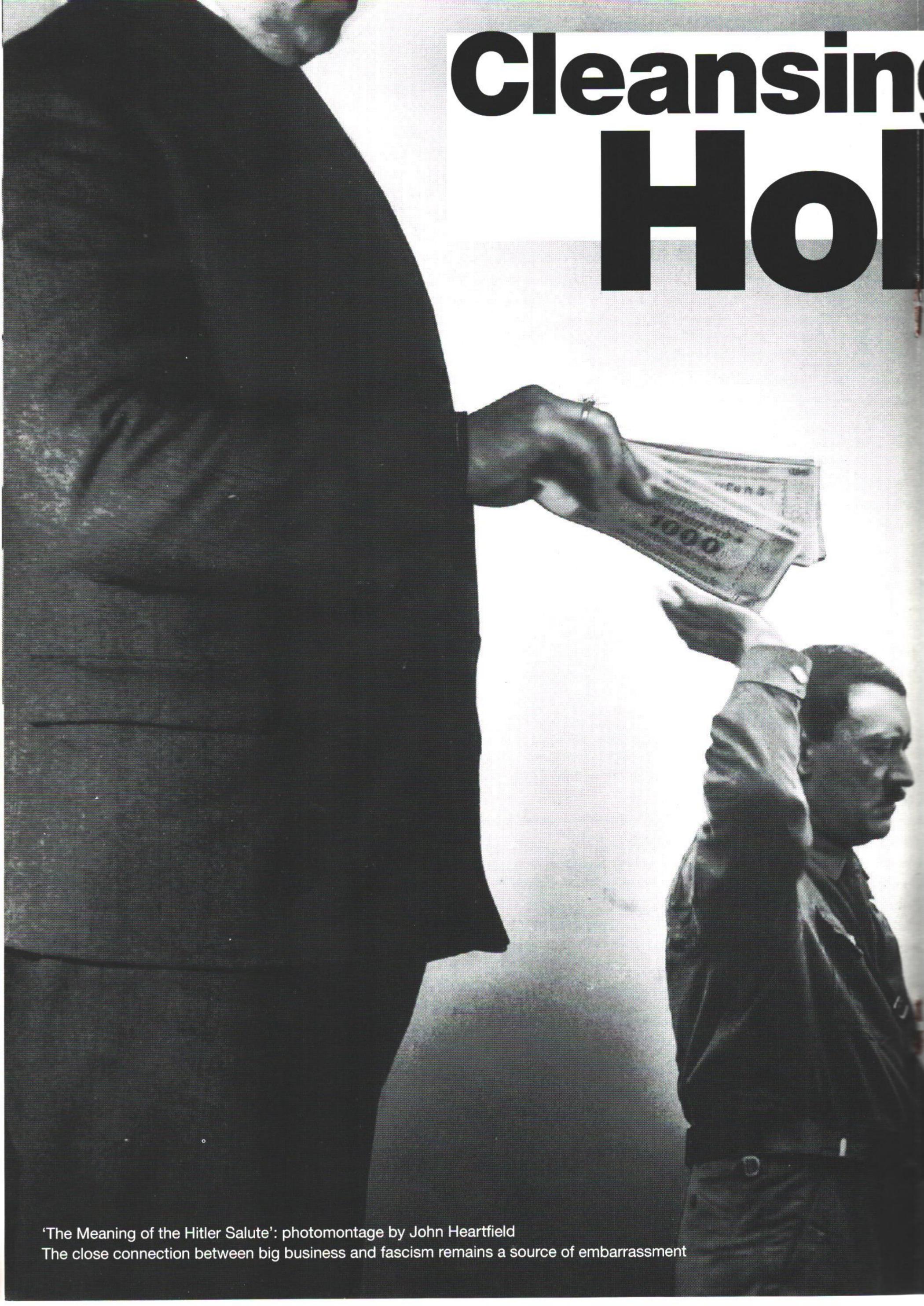
Even to his most blindly uncritical fans, Elvis's final performances were a pitiful spectacle. The huge hulk strained at the seams of his grotesque rhinestoned jumpsuit, wing-like collar and flared trousers flapping about as he puffed around the stage. In the karate routine his limbs would flail like an old drunk being shown the door at closing time. Sweat poured down his puffy face as he squinted through his big tinted glasses and tried to remember the words. Sometimes he'd order the lights off and sit in the dark talking gibberish. Even so, there was no shortage of women begging to be squashed by 230 pounds of famous blubber.

● For weeks before his death he wore a giant nappy and did nothing but sleep, with brief breaks to eat and take his 'medicine'. He was found on the toilet holding a copy of *The Scientific Search For Jesus' Face*. There were 14 different drugs in his bloodstream, and if his stomach hadn't been pumped he would have broken the record for the most chemicals in one body. He ended up, in the words of a country song, the world's greatest loser.

When Elvis became an American institution upon his death, it was a parochial, conservative institution, with a mean, paranoid siege mentality. The National Guard provided a guard of honour at his funeral. Country music shook off its embarrassing lynch-mob past, and became the respectable face of patriotic white America; but the nasty edge is still there. Today it sells more than ever, defining itself against 'subversive' black rap and 'satanic' heavy metal. Elvis is its sheriff and its saint. In death he became a saviour for the system ('Elvis loved law and order!'—local mayor) and its spiritual values: worshippers at the Graceland shrine are 'brought together in the [not 'by a'] love of Elvis'.

● It takes a King-size man to keep that show on the road, and as the ad for Elvis cologne says, America has had 41 presidents but only one King. America to Bush: 'You're no Elvis Presley.' ●

Cleansing Hol



'The Meaning of the Hitler Salute': photomontage by John Heartfield
The close connection between big business and fascism remains a source of embarrassment

g the Holocaust

Saddam Hussein is not just a dictator, he's 'the new Hitler'; Bosnia is not just suffering a civil war, but 'another Holocaust'. From the Gulf to the Balkans, images of the Second World War seem to dominate discussion of international affairs today. What lies behind this obsession with discovering the past in the present?

Frank Furedi, author of *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*, sees the ideologues of capitalism pursuing a secret agenda: to free themselves from the burden of past horrors by rewriting history, and so lend moral legitimacy to the West's New World Order

The stakes are high in the current climate of historical revisionism. Suddenly it seems that everything which happened in the past is being rewritten.

This surge of interest in the past is sometimes explained as a consequence of the discovery of some secret Stasi files in a German cellar, or the unearthing of the Goebbels diaries in the KGB archives. In reality, the rewriting of history is driven by the demand for an unproblematic vision of the world. To achieve that, it is necessary for the powers that be to sanitise every past experience which compromises capitalist politics.

Most of the great tragedies of this century—two world wars, colonial oppression, the Great Depression, fascism, the Holocaust—are too closely linked to capitalism for comfort. A careful inspection of any of these events exposes the failure of a system which has proved dependent upon mass destruction for its survival. That is why there is now a campaign either to blame these developments on some other party, or at least to minimise the gravity of the century's crises.

The rewriting of history takes different forms. In some cases it means literally substituting fiction for facts.

For example, in some quarters it is now fashionable to absolve the Western powers, particularly Germany, from responsibility for initiating the two world wars. Some have even suggested that, since the First World War was sparked off by events in Sarajevo, and since that war led to the 1939-45 conflict, the Serbs should shoulder the blame for unleashing the mass slaughter. Cartoons in serious German newspapers now attempt to construct this myth of Serbian responsibility.

Other variants of such myth-making involve the argument that everything was fine until the 1917 Russian Revolution. From this perspective it is suggested that a golden age was somehow overturned by the monstrous machinations of the Bolsheviks. 'I wonder if there has ever been anything quite the equal of St Petersburg before 1914', asks the right-wing historian Norman Stone rhetorically. Stone's vision of pre-revolutionary Russia has no place for the grinding poverty and autocratic repression which have long been the dominant images of that society. Instead, the Russia of his imagination was a prosperous nation where the arts and sciences thrived, until it all went terribly wrong, both for Russia and the rest of the world.

In the prevailing intellectual climate, even the most outrageous distortion of human experience can gain currency. Very few will interrogate those who peddle the myths of a past golden age. If Russian society was so prosperous and exhilarating, why did it disintegrate so swiftly in 1917? If the Russian ancien regime was so wonderful, why was the fall of the Tsar celebrated so widely in Europe? Why did even the British monarchy distance itself from its Russian cousins, by not granting the deposed Tsar's request for safe haven? These questions are less and less likely to be posed by today's profoundly conservative media.

The rewriting of history means more than merely the revision of texts and the substitution of fiction for fact. This textual side of the revisionist project is the sphere where the apologists for the social order carry out their work of preparing arguments for the establishment. However, a flattering view of the capitalist order cannot be elaborated on the basis of books about the past.

To establish a viable world outlook, it is necessary to win the revisionist arguments in relation to contemporary targets. In practice this means cementing society *against* some individual or group or people, who ►

can be portrayed as far worse than any of the skeletons in the capitalist cupboard. A few examples may help to illustrate how outwardly unconnected Western propaganda campaigns act as mutually reinforcing parts of the same project.

Take the depiction of Saddam Hussein as a Hitler character. The equation of the West's opponent in the Gulf War with Hitler is obviously designed to underline his brutal and negative qualities. In that sense it represents the straightforward vilification of the enemy. But it also means more than that. It continues the promiscuous use of the Hitler metaphor, through which any third world leader can be portrayed as the equivalent of the leader of the Nazi Party. The consequence of this is that the quality of evil attaches itself to the third world, rather than to Western imperialism.

The demonisation of the third world is now an accomplished fact. So the editor of one of Britain's foremost 'quality' Sunday newspapers can in all seriousness write this sort of thing:

'An ugly, evil spirit is abroad in the third world and it cannot be condoned; only crushed, as Carthage was crushed by the Romans.' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 3 February 1991)

in the third world, then what is so special about the movement that nearly destroyed Europe? In other words, the systematic use of the Nazi metaphor minimises the historic significance of the fascist experience.

Since the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Serbs have become the new Nazis. This time around, the propaganda campaign has been even more extravagant than the previous one aimed at Iraq. The world's media has invented a veritable Holocaust in Bosnia, with concentration camps and all. It is surely only a matter of time before gas chambers are discovered in the car park of the agriculture ministry in Belgrade.

There is no space in this article to expose in detail the campaign of lies about Bosnia which seeks to equate the routine atrocities that characterise every war with the horror of the Nazi experience. It should just be noted in passing that different standards were applied in relation to Britain's concentration camps in Kenya, or to General Pinochet's prisons in Chile. What concerns us here is that the demonisation of the Serbs has helped to vindicate—or at least to neutralise—the fascist experience.

All of a sudden the Serbs emerge as the incarnation of evil, whom we are meant to half-suspect of starting

one almost innocent example. In the run-up to August's London conference on Yugoslavia, German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel made a little request. It appears that, as a great humanitarian, Kinkel was concerned about Serbian atrocities. Consequently he indicated that Germany would be demanding that the London conference establish an international court to prosecute leading Serbs for crimes against humanity and genocide (see the *Guardian*, 20 August 1992).

New Nuremberg?

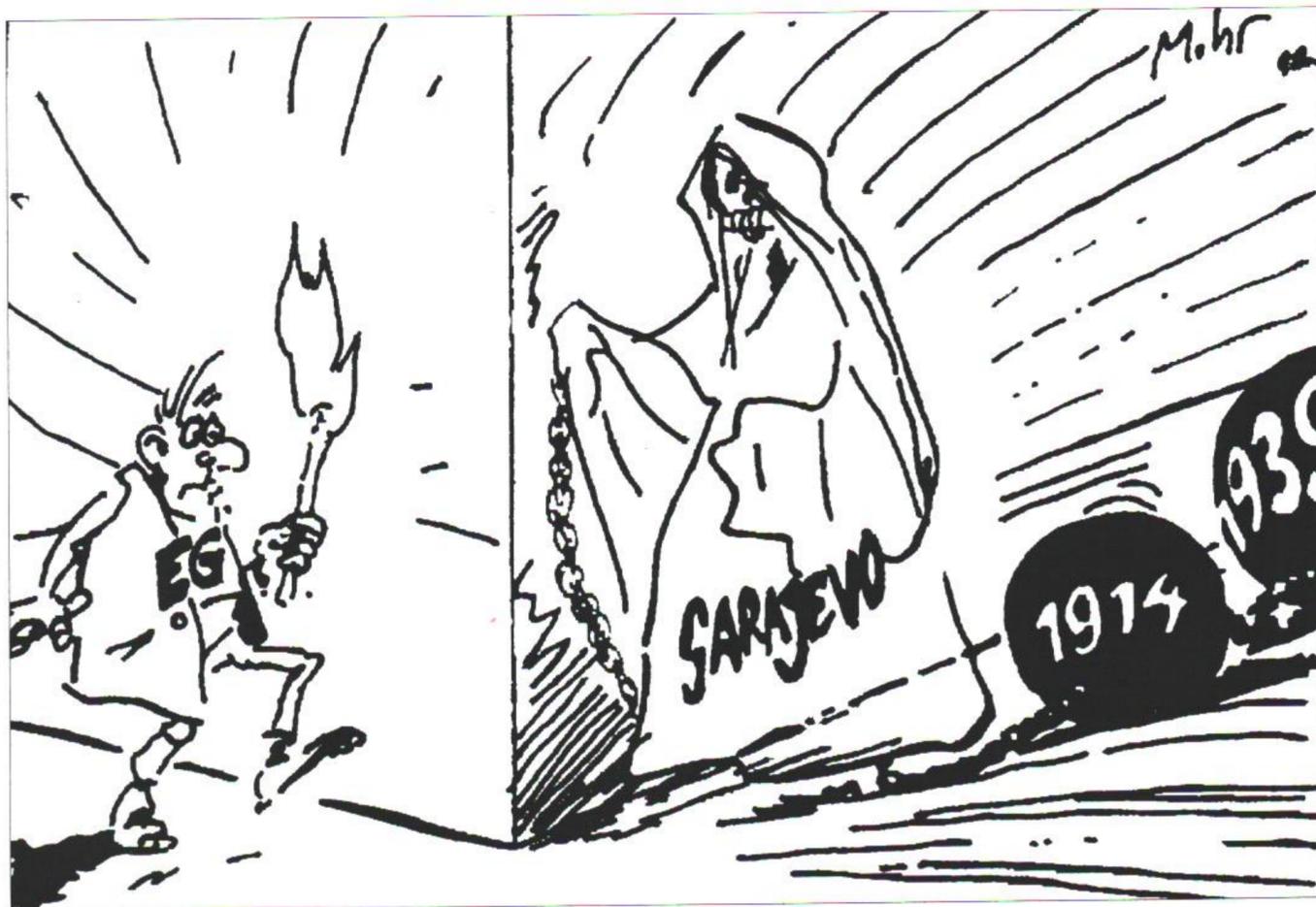
Kinkel's demand for a war crimes trial could have been motivated by the most honourable intentions. However, the innocent onlooker might well ask, what is the precedent for an international war crimes trial? In fact, such trials are not very frequent. The last one, strangely enough, took place in Kinkel's own homeland, in a town called Nuremberg. A coincidence?

Whatever Kinkel's intentions, the demand for a war crimes trial against Serbs helps to revise our perception of the proceedings at Nuremberg. If a local Serbian militia leader is to be treated in a similar way to the Nazi hierarchy, then an embarrassing blot on the German past becomes relatively sanitised. The Holocaust becomes relativised, as every atrocity—large or small—is now treated as an act of genocide.

The primary aim of this campaign is not to nail the Serbs or any of the other selected targets. These are just convenient stepping-stones across which the Western right can pursue its broader aims. For example, when the media discover that the Croats too have got detention camps and have committed atrocities, it is not a problem. It merely reinforces the general trend; the more concentration camps, the better. The multiplication of the holocausts serves to rehabilitate the fascist past. It makes the Nazi experience ordinary, nothing special to write home about.

Abortion and rainforests

One of the more grotesque examples of this annihilation of the real Holocaust took place at the recent Republican Party convention in Houston. During the convention's formal invocation, a prayer compared abortion to the Jewish Holocaust. In today's mood of Holocaust-mongering, such offensive comparisons are considered in good taste in right-wing circles. But the climate of revising the past does not merely affect the hard right. Radical protestors against animal experimentation often write of a holocaust of species. Others use the term to describe the destruction of the rainforests. That the term 'holocaust' is now used so widely ►



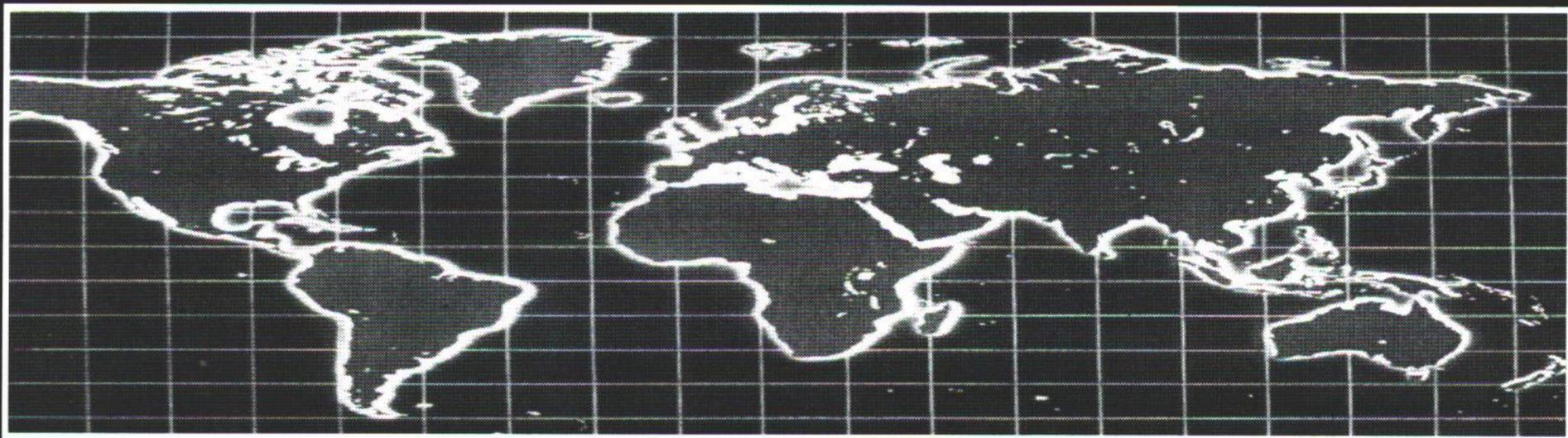
Blaming the Serbs for two world wars: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 August 1992

Some liberal writers have reacted to this racist criminalisation of third world societies. But what has generally been overlooked is the *other* consequence of the West's propaganda campaign.

The repetitive use of the Hitler and Nazi labels to describe third world leaders ends up trivialising the devastating experience of fascism. If, these days, Hitlers are two a penny

the two world wars. Of course, by arguing that concentration camps and holocausts are such everyday phenomena in Eastern Europe today, the real Holocaust becomes one footnote among many in a chapter called 'Atrocities'.

The bombardment of Western society with anti-Serb propaganda is one of the most powerful means of rewriting history. Let us take



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right across the ideological spectrum reflects the success of the campaign to rewrite the past.

It is the crisis of contemporary ideas and the lack of a vision for the future which has fuelled the explosion of interest in revising the past.

One way or another, all of the revisionist propaganda touches upon the experience of the Second World

national and racial superiority of the West, they felt obliged to pay lip service to multiculturalism and the equality of nations via the UN. The gradual weakening of social cohesion, culminating in the radical unrest of the late sixties and seventies, was the price that they had to pay.

During the Cold War years, the weakening social consensus was effectively limited by anti-communist propaganda. In a sense the anti-Soviet consensus served as a substitute for a popular vision of the common good. However, since the Cold War ended, the lack of cohesion in capitalist society has become more exposed—especially in circumstances of economic slump. The demonisation of the third world and the Serbs, and the rewriting of history, are all attempts to create an acceptable Western view of the world.

The central ideological project of capitalism today is to free itself from the burden of its past through the revision of history. The widely acclaimed attacks on liberalism in recent years spell the end of the postwar compromise. The next stage is to rehabilitate an undiluted right-wing perspective. But to achieve this objective, the links between capitalist politics and the horrors of the Second World War need to be severed. This can be done either by textual revision or by relativising the Holocaust. The shadows cast by Belsen can be best dealt with by trivialising the experience.

The 'vision thing'

However, cleansing the Holocaust out of existence is in itself an insufficient basis for the elaboration of a viable modern world view. The first tentative steps towards the formulation of this 'vision thing' are evident in the discussion around the so-called New World Order.

It would be wrong to dismiss the New World Order as so much claptrap. Of course, as *Living Marxism* has often argued, it has nothing to do with the image of global harmony and prosperity conveyed by Western ideologues. In fact, the New World Order is not even a geopolitical concept. The controversy over what international institution to use in Bosnia—Nato, EC, UN, WEU, CSCE—indicates the total absence of a New World Order in any geopolitical sense.

The New World Order is not a geopolitical concept, but a moral one. It is an ideological attempt to compensate for the absence of any positive dynamic within Western capitalist societies by demonising others. So the main merit of the West is that it is not as bad as the third world or Eastern Europe. The New World Order endows the West with moral authority. It does so because in

comparison to Somalia, Iraq or Serbia, it appears stable and prosperous. The evil abroad becomes the source of Western virtue.

The main consequence of the New World Order is not Western domination of the world. There is nothing new about that. Western domination of and intervention in other countries have a history which long predates the Cold War, never mind the post-Cold War era. The main consequence of the New World Order is that it legitimises the West's global domination and interference in the affairs of others. The ideology of the New World Order morally rearms Western imperialism around the world; and, through its intervention against those whom it has demonised, the Western elite can morally recharge itself.

History on its head

As a moral concept, the New World Order is working. This is shown most clearly by the fact that often it is the liberals who are demanding more Western intervention in Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The West is continually implored by ex-radicals to do something about Somalia or Yugoslavia. Ostensibly liberal voices like the *Guardian* in Britain, the Social Democrats in Germany and the Democratic Party in America have often been the loudest advocates of forceful action against the Serbs.

Today the West is being asked to intervene abroad in order to prevent a holocaust. This is the major achievement of the New World Order in morally rearming Western imperialism. It turns history on its head. Holocausts are now the creation of the powerless. Meanwhile those with power, who were responsible for the one true Holocaust, are now charged with the task of averting another one. ●

The demonisation of the Serbs and the rewriting of history are attempts to create an acceptable Western worldview

War. So the West's demonisation of its opponents today always resorts to the use of Second World War metaphors. The reason for this is that all of the capitalist powers—and not just the defeated nations of Germany and Japan—experience the Second World War as an indictment of their system.

The Second World War revealed the destructive capacity of the capitalist order. The elites of all the Western nations were for many years profoundly embarrassed by the public's awareness of their close connection with fascism. To this day, the intimate relationship between fascism and big business remains a touchy subject. In these circumstances, it is far better for them to treat fascism as the product of German culture than of an inherently self-destructive system.

The wrong stuff

One crucial consequence of the Nazi experience was that it compromised the political right. Everything which the right traditionally stood for—Western superiority, racism, the naturalness of inequality, the legitimacy of national expansionism, colonialism—became undermined by 1945. The right itself could not project itself through its traditional vocabulary. During the next two or three decades it was forced to adopt the language of liberalism.

The liberal ideology of the postwar years represented a compromise by the establishment. But it was a compromise with which the Western elite felt less than comfortable. Like all compromises, it did not inspire confidence or strong loyalties. The moral uncertainties of the postwar years were the consequence of this ideological compromise by the capitalists. For example, instead of the old assumptions about the absolute

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The Ossietzky files

Sabine Reul reports on the latest German court case to put the past in the dock

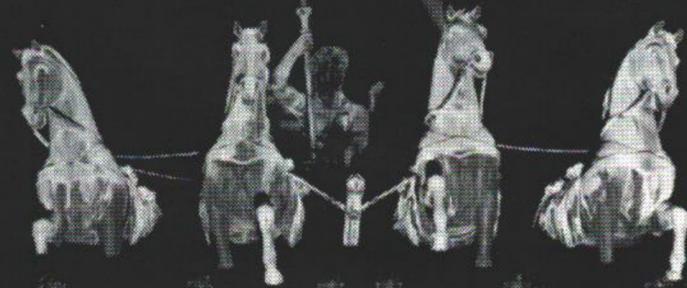


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

On 4 May 1938, the writer Carl von Ossietzky died in Gestapo detention at the age of 48, after five years in concentration camps. Today his case has become another focus for attempts to revise the official history of the Nazi experience.

Although he died a prisoner of the Nazis, Ossietzky was actually imprisoned for political offences by the courts of the Weimar Republic more than a year before Hitler was installed in office. As editor of the radical journal *Weltbühne*, he was sentenced to 18 months in November 1931 for publishing an article disclosing the secret rearmament of the German army, the Reichswehr. The sentence was pronounced by judge Otto Baumgarten of the Berlin Reich Court, who was to become a leading state prosecutor at the notorious Nazi Volksgerichtshof in 1936.

Ossietzky's case is now due to be re-examined by the German High Court. His daughter Rosalinde applied for a judicial review last year in the belief that, after German reunification, the time had come for official rehabilitation of her father. But the review of the case is taking a course which would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. Far from rehabilitating the eminent writer and victim of Nazi terror, the German judiciary seems bent on abusing him again—this time to rehabilitate the reactionary excesses of Weimar courts in the twilight years of the republic.

Revisiting the scene

In a grotesque case of revisiting the scene of former crimes, German judges have already seen fit to detain and try former East German leaders Erich Mielke and Erich Honecker in the very prisons and courtrooms where they were held and tried as communists by fascist judges in the 1930s. Now the Ossietzky case seems destined to serve as a further excuse to redefine official attitudes to the German past.

Rosalinde von Ossietzky's application to reopen the case was pronounced 'inadmissible' by a Berlin court in July 1991. The court argued that there was no new evidence 'likely to substantiate exoneration of the defendant'. It further declared as legally impeccable the 1931 verdict that Ossietzky was guilty of treasonous disclosure of military information to a foreign power under a law enacted just before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. This decision has now been sanctioned by leading federal attorney Alexander von Stahl, who has

advised the supreme court to throw out the appeal and reaffirm the Berlin verdict.

The federal attorney emphasised that the 1931 sentence was legitimate since, as editor of the *Weltbühne*, Ossietzky had threatened the 'security of the Reich' (see E Spoo, 'Einmal Landesverräter, immer ein Landesverräter?', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 August 1992). In other words, for von Stahl and his colleagues the exposure of the secret rearmament of the Reichswehr in 1931 remains a crime—even though that rearmament was illegal both under the terms of the Versailles Treaty and the Weimar constitution.

A cause célèbre

The Ossietzky case is the most important attempt yet to use the courts to revise official German history. Ossietzky was not a communist, but a radical democrat writer who became a *cause célèbre* of international anti-fascism in the 1930s. Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, Arnold Zweig, Romain Rolland, Kurt Tucholsky and many others supported Carl von Ossietzky during both his 1931 trial and his incarceration under the Nazis. Ossietzky became the champion of mainstream anti-fascism.

The campaign in his aid culminated in the award of the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize to the concentration camp inmate. Such was the diplomatic pressure generated by the campaign for Ossietzky that the Hitler regime felt obliged to allow international League of Nations delegates to visit him at the Papenburg concentration camp in 1935, and eventually he was transferred to Gestapo custody in the Berlin Nordend hospital. The international publicity infuriated Ossietzky's captors: in 1936 Hitler personally initiated a law to prohibit the acceptance of Nobel Prizes by Germans.

Treason redefined

That such a prominent anti-Nazi is now being denied rehabilitation signals the desire of the German authorities to challenge key assumptions of the postwar anti-fascist consensus. In the past it was generally assumed that the barbaric nature of the Nazi regime was sufficient reason to oppose it by all possible means, including cooperation with Germany's foreign 'enemies'.

Until recently the exposure of secret remilitarisation measures instigated by the Reichswehr in the run-up to the fascist takeover would have been rated as at least an honourable, if not

a courageous and commendable deed. It would have seemed bad taste even to ask whether such action might have benefited Germany's foreign rivals—never mind to designate it an act of treason. Yet that is what leading figures in the German judiciary are now doing.

By retrospectively denouncing as treason the exposure of the revival of German militarism in the early 1930s, the authorities have come pretty close to revising the official view of Germany's role in the Second World War itself. No doubt further cases will soon be dragged up by the German courts to proceed further along this path.

There is another aspect which gives this case its special poignancy. Not only was Ossietzky an eminent focus of international attention in the 1930s—the deed for which he was imprisoned was, and remains, a highly delicate international diplomatic affair.

The incriminating article which appeared in the *Weltbühne* on 12 March 1929 exposed secret attempts by the Reichswehr to rebuild an air force. Such activity flouted the military restrictions imposed on Germany after the First World War in Article 198 of the Versailles Treaty—restrictions which were also enshrined in German law in 1926. The 1931 sentence imposed on Ossietzky was therefore illegal both under international treaties and in German law. Its official reaffirmation today is legally tenuous. More importantly, however, it is diplomatically contentious.

Two fingers

By rubber-stamping this sentence, the German authorities are effectively condoning one of Germany's earliest breaches of international treaties—a precedent which was to be followed under the Nazi regime with the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1934 and other preparations for war. In grasping this nettle, leading German judges are showing two fingers not only to the postwar anti-fascist consensus, but to the Western powers which were their wartime enemies and are now their allies/rivals.

At a time when Germany is taking steps to break out of the international straitjacket imposed on it at the end of the Second World War, and to take its place on the world stage as a great military and diplomatic power once more, the message behind the Ossietzky case should be clear to all. It remains to be seen whether the highest court in the land will sanction this new venture. ●

No time for N

Those who warn of a Nazi revival in Germany are confusing the past with the present, and confusing the debate about what has caused the recent wave of racist violence. Rob Knight reports

The attack on an immigrant hostel in Rostock in August marked an escalation in violence against asylum-seekers in Germany. And the response to the violence from liberal and left-wing commentators marked a new stage in the creation of a right-wing consensus in German politics.

The left was quick to blame Nazism for the violence in Rostock. In so doing it distracted attention from the real cause of the violence—the respectable racism of the German state. It also inadvertently contributed to the right's campaign to relativise the experience of Germany's Nazi past.

The wave of violence against foreigners in Germany began last year, not with a declaration of war by

neo-Nazis, but when the government began its campaign to tighten up the asylum law. The debate over asylum was a clear attempt by Helmut Kohl's government to scapegoat foreigners for the rise in unemployment and social problems in Germany. Such encouragement of racism is an important element in the government's project of creating a stronger sense of German nationalism.

Campaigning under the slogan, 'the boat is full', Kohl's supporters put the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) under pressure to bring their own policy on asylum into line with the government's. The SPD then proposed a plan to speed up the processing of applications in order to sort out 'genuine' asylum-seekers from the rest. After forcing the SPD on to the defensive, the government insisted that this was not enough, and that the entire asylum law would have to be changed.

Getting the message

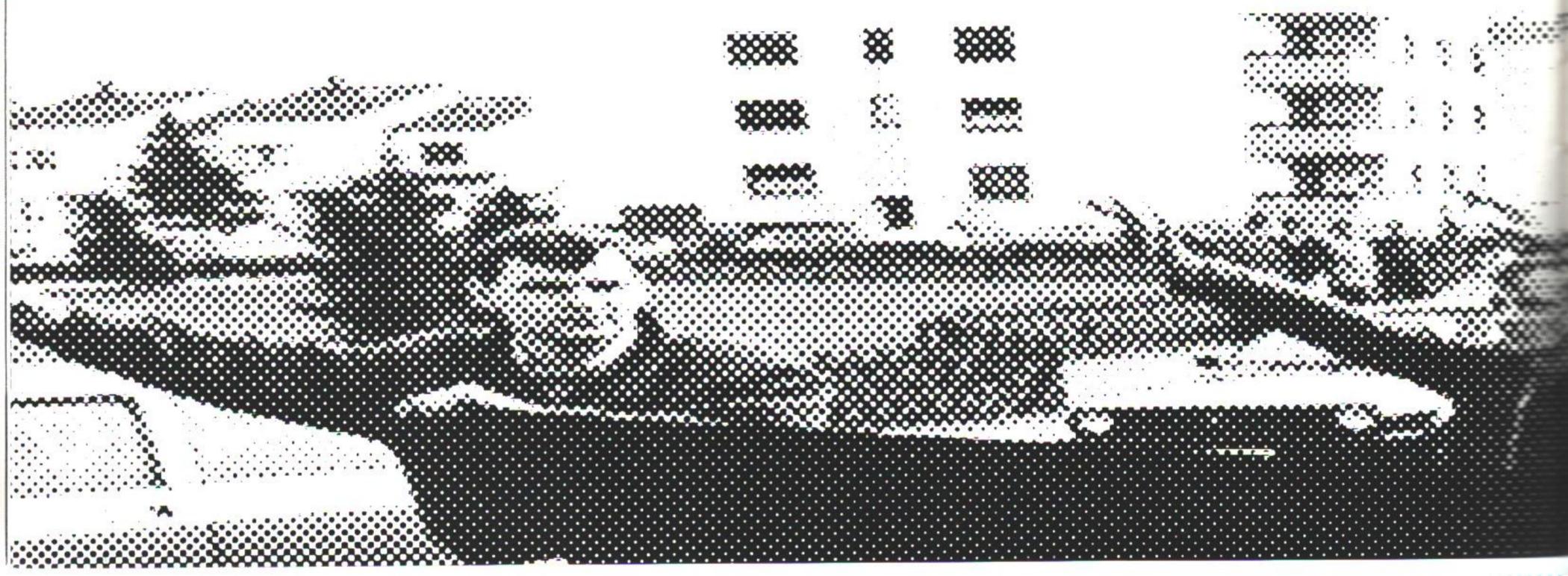
Having won the argument that immigrants are a problem, the Kohl regime proceeded to aggravate the situation by putting asylum-seekers in areas such as Rostock in eastern Germany. Rostock, along with many areas in the old East, has 60 per cent unemployment because of the devastating impact of the market and privatisation. In Rostock the hostel was so overcrowded that many immigrants had to live outside without even basic sanitation. The combination of racist state propaganda and the disgusting material conditions in which immigrants are forced to live created the basis for focusing on immigrants as a problem.

Meanwhile in the streets, disaffected youth from both eastern and western Germany got the message from the government that foreigners were legitimate targets. If the boat is full then it does no harm to tip a few overboard. The infamous incident at Hoyerswerda followed, when attacks on an immigrant hostel were reportedly met with applause from some local residents. Since then attacks on foreigners have continued unabated, but with less publicity. What brought Rostock into the headlines was both the sustained ferocity of the attacks, and the apparent inability of the authorities to contain the violence.

Cause as cure

After pious condemnations of violence in Rostock, leading German politicians made it clear where their real concerns lay. The local interior minister, Lothar Kupfer said that he 'understood' the rioters, and called for the asylum law to be amended further. Politicians from across the spectrum have used the violence as justification for tightening the asylum laws, on the grounds that it is immigration which causes racism.

In fact, immigration laws are a central cause of racism in the West, since they brand foreigners as second class citizens without rights. Today, however, the consensus in Germany is that this cause of racism is really the cure. Kohl and his cronies have managed to establish that liberal opposition to changing the asylum laws increases racism, while tighter immigration controls would release racist tensions. Kohl's success in this is reflected in the way that the SPD has caved in and backed a revision of the asylum law.



azi-hunting

The reaction from the German left to the violence against asylum-seekers in Rostock has been to emphasise the role of Nazism. By trying to pin the blame on neo-Nazis, the left does the German authorities a great service.

First, the left is making itself increasingly complicit in the right's project of relativising the Nazi period. Leading members of the German Green Party have already compared the Serbs to Nazis and backed the government's call for intervention against them. Having discovered a holocaust in Bosnia, the left has now discovered Nazis in Rostock. No doubt these comparisons are intended to emphasise how bad things are in Bosnia and Rostock today. In fact, they end up de-emphasising the specific brutality of the real Nazi era, in a way which can only assist the German establishment's attempt to play down the importance of its past crimes.

Off the hook

Second, the left's Nazi-hunting approach ignores the fact that the German government has encouraged attacks on immigrants by systematically playing the race card. The left's concentration on 'Nazis' is letting the government off the hook. While the left searches for Nazis, the respectable racism of the state is left unchallenged. Undoubtedly some far-right groups have been involved in the violence. But they did not instigate it, nor make it widely acceptable; the government did that by scapegoating foreigners.

The left is uneasy about challenging the state's immigration policy. It prefers to court easy popularity by identifying Nazis as the problem. The German left

has made it clear that it even includes Kohl's government in its planned 'coalition' against Nazism. In a bizarre reversal, the instigators of racism are presented by the left as allies in the struggle against it.

The left's calls for more effective policing against 'Nazis' also play into Kohl's hands. The fact that police took a break while rioters set fire to the Rostock hostel was a clear indication of how much concern the state feels for immigrants. When the state is encouraging the idea that foreigners are a problem for Germans, it is hardly surprising that the police should not be overly concerned about immigrant welfare.

There has been some controversy about whether or not there was open collusion between some police officers and the rioters in Rostock. But this is all beside the point. The police will continue to give immigrants a raw deal, not because some officers are sympathetic towards neo-Nazis, but because the German state's policy is founded upon a rock of racism.

Sitting targets

A few days after the rioting the police arrested some locals who they claimed were responsible for the violence. The left's call for police action against racism allows the authorities to improve their credentials through token gestures of this kind. But it does nothing to stop the government's racist campaign against immigrants rolling on regardless. For example, all sides expressed their support for the arrest of a few people found behaving suspiciously in the vicinity of refugee camps. Yet nobody saw fit to point

out that it was the government which penned refugees into those camps as sitting targets in the first place.

Kohl's Christian Democrat government must be very satisfied with its easy victory so far. The government has won the argument on immigration and forced the opposition to back it. However, not everything is under government control.

The way in which the attacks on foreigners swiftly turned into attacks on the police has provoked deep concern among politicians. The violence in Rostock was not only a reflection of the racist climate in German society. It was also an expression of general dissatisfaction with the government and the state. The position in Germany today is highly contradictory. Most people are influenced by state racism. But at the same time there exists deep distrust of the political system.

As much to fear

The disaffected youth of Germany are looking for targets against which to vent their frustrations, and the police have potentially as much to fear as immigrants. This shows the absurdity of dubbing all those influenced by racism today as 'Nazis'. Most are far from being hardcore Hitlerites or fascists. They are frustrated youth whose anger could well be turned in another direction.

The German left's preoccupation with Nazism is not only allowing the Kohl government to pursue its campaign of respectable racism unhindered. It is also missing an opportunity to build on the deep unpopularity of the German state. ●



Never again?

Western comparisons between events in Bosnia and the Nazi extermination of the Jews have led to a grotesque distortion of what was behind the real Holocaust, argues Daniel Nassim

From *Newsweek* to *News at Ten* the imagery of the Holocaust, the Nazi massacre of six million Jews during the Second World War, has become associated with the Yugoslav civil war. Omarska camp in Bosnia was dubbed 'Belsen 92' after the Nazi concentration camp. The accusations that the Serbs are pursuing a policy of 'ethnic cleansing' have evoked comparisons with the Nazis' aim of creating an area that was *judenfrei* (free of Jews).

Most mainstream commentators have accepted the analogy, and even those who didn't still used Holocaust imagery. The *Economist* observed that 'although it is not Belsen in Bosnia, and will probably never be, it is certainly beyond Kristallnacht'—the night when the Nazis launched a public pogrom against Jews in Germany (15 August).

The consequence of using Holocaust imagery in this way soon becomes clear. If the Serbs or anybody else are indeed committing Nazi-style

atrocities in Bosnia, then the West has the supreme moral justification to intervene, whether by imposing sanctions, setting up war crimes trials or sending in troops. John Bolton, the US assistant secretary of state, used the TV images of Serbian prison camps to justify stepping up economic and political pressure on the Serbs: 'The international community took a vow when it realised what had been committed by Nazism in Europe during the Second World War: "Never again!"' (*Guardian*, 14 August 1992)

Such comparisons between the Serbs in 1992 and the Nazis during the Second World War turn reality upside down. The Holocaust did not come about as a result of a conflict between ethnic groups in Eastern Europe. Instead, it was the consequence of Western intervention in the East.

The Holocaust was the result of the invasion of Eastern Europe by a leading capitalist power, Germany. The vast majority of the Jews killed by the Nazis lived in the areas captured by Germany in the East. Between their seizure of power in 1933 and the end of 1940, the Nazis murdered fewer than 100 000 Jews. It was the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 that created the conditions in which the remainder of the six million would be massacred.

Despite that experience, Germany and the other Western powers are once again assuming the moral right to intervene in the East—and worse still, they are even using analogies with the Holocaust to justify their actions.

Many would object that the Holocaust was the result of some evil unique to Nazism, or even to Germany. But in reality there was little to distinguish the Nazis' underlying principles from those which informed the policies of other Western powers at

the time. British and American leaders believed in national superiority, racial inferiority and empire as much as the Germans or the Italians. In this sense, the Holocaust can be seen as a product of the politics of Western imperialism.

The Nazis are notorious for their belief in the superiority of Aryans over other groups. The Holocaust is often seen, with justification, as an attempt by the Nazis to purge Europe of those they regarded as being genetically inferior. From this point of view, it was perfectly rational to kill Jews as well as gypsies and anybody else who didn't conform to the Aryan 'norm'. Those who were not killed were destined to become slaves for their Teutonic masters.

None of this was so very different from the view that prevailed in Britain before the Second World War. The British establishment certainly viewed





Auschwitz,
Poland:
most of the
six million
were killed
in German
occupied
Eastern
Europe

itself as superior to its subjects in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The assumption underpinning all of Britain's imperial diplomacy was that of the White Man's burden—civilised John Bull teaching Johnny Wog how to behave.

The theme of racial inferiority was clearly the mirror image of national superiority. If the Nazis considered Aryans to be inherently superior, it followed that Jews were naturally inferior. And if Britain was the 'mother country' then the colonial subjects were wayward children to be punished.

In the postwar years racism became associated with discrimination against black immigrants. But in classical capitalist thought, the politics of race has a far broader meaning than colour. Before the war race embodied the elitist idea of a natural hierarchy in society,

where much of the population was considered part of the lower orders. In the first half of the century, this was the dominant view of the ruling classes not only in Germany, but elsewhere in Europe and in the USA.

Winston Churchill, the British prime minister during the Second World War, was a typical exponent of this form of racial thinking. Before the First World War, while Hitler was still working as a casual labourer in Vienna, Churchill was already Britain's home secretary. During this time, Churchill put forward a proposal to sterilise forcibly more than 100 000 people he regarded as 'mentally degenerate'. It was based on policies that were already implemented in several states of the USA.

Recently, Clive Ponting, who is writing a biography of Churchill, has unearthed papers which clearly illustrate Churchill's views on race.

They are worth quoting to counter the view today that Churchill was a crusader against fascism and racial politics. In 1910, Churchill wrote to Herbert Asquith, the prime minister, calling for urgent government action to deal with the mental degenerates:

'The unnatural and increasingly rapid growth of the feeble-minded and insane classes, coupled as it is with a steady restriction among all the thrifty, energetic and superior stocks constitutes a national and race danger which it is impossible to exaggerate. I feel that the source from which the stream of madness is fed should be cut off and sealed up before another year has passed.' (Quoted in the *Guardian*, 20 June 1992).

Apart from forced sterilisation, Churchill advocated that some ►



'mental degenerates' be detained in camps: 'As for tramps and wastrels, there ought to be proper labour colonies where they could be sent for considerable periods and made to realise their duty to the state.'

Although Churchill's proposals were only accepted in a watered down form, his assumptions were commonplace for his time.

In discussion of the Holocaust, it is particularly important to note that anti-Semitism was a key component of racial politics right across the West. Churchill himself was an infamous Jew-baiter. After the First World War, he wrote to the prime minister,

the war. In those days 'imperialist' was a label the right wore with pride rather than a term of abuse. Britain revelled in its ability to subjugate other peoples.

Every empire was built through the savage repression of the colonised. Britain, France and Belgium cut bloody swathes through Africa and Asia. What was different about Germany's empire-building was that it was done in Europe, and it was carried out with much more advanced military technology than that employed by the Victorians in India or South Africa. The peculiar horrors of the Holocaust were largely the result of these factors.

advanced industrial power. There have been many other acts of mass killing by Western imperialists since 1945; the American carpet-bombing of Indo-China, the French war against Algeria, Britain's numerous colonial wars, the killing of up to a quarter of a million Iraqis in the Gulf War last year. What distinguished the Holocaust was the degree of intensity and industriousness with which the extermination was carried out. But the political assumptions which legitimised such slaughter were not really peculiar to Germany.

Back to the future?

In a muted form, many of those assumptions are coming back towards the surface of Western politics today. The language is different, usually less crude, but the message is much the same. For example, the case for Western intervention in what was Yugoslavia has been based on the assumption that the Germans, Americans, French and British are in some way morally superior to the peoples of a place like Bosnia, and know what's best for them.

At the same time, the white inhabitants of Eastern Europe are being talked about in terms which, until recently, were reserved for people from the third world. The way in which Western commentators now discuss the problems of 'ethnic tribes' in Yugoslavia, or of 'Serb barbarians', demonstrates a drift back towards the traditional racial themes of elite politics. This represents an important step in the rehabilitation of overtly racial thinking.

Grotesque irony

The right internationally has cynically used the discussion of a Bosnian 'holocaust' to try to rehabilitate some of its old ideas which were discredited by the Nazi experience. Comparing pictures of unexceptional prison camps to images of the Holocaust has the effect both of playing down the horrors of the imperial past, and of making the point that the West today is morally superior to the savage peoples of the East. Of course, these arguments are now presented as a case for humanitarian action rather than genocide. But that does not alter the dangerous implications of assuming that the Western nations are a superior force for right.

It is a grotesque irony that the Holocaust, the event which discredited Western imperialism more than any other, should now be manipulated to justify Western intervention in the East once more. The real lesson of the Holocaust is that the politics of race and empire can only lead to disaster, again and again.

Anti-Semitism was a key component of racial politics right across the West

Lloyd George, about the problem of appointing three Jews as cabinet ministers. 'There is a point about Jews which occurs to me', said Churchill, 'you must not have too many of them'.

'Eliminate...complaints'

Similarly anti-Semitic views were shared by British and American statesmen. At the 1943 Casablanca conference, for example, American president Roosevelt told the French of his plans to 'eliminate the specific and understandable complaints which the Germans bore towards the Jews...the number of Jews engaged in the practice of the professions should be definitely limited'. Churchill thought there should not be too many Jews, Roosevelt wanted to limit their numbers. It is not hard to see how close such ideas about keeping the lower races in their place come to the racial thinking behind the Nazi Holocaust.

Alongside national superiority and racial inferiority, the third element common to the politics of the Western powers was empire. For the Nazis, building an empire primarily meant expanding eastward into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This was the meaning of Hitler's search for 'Lebensraum' (living space) to the east.

Britain, unlike Germany, already had a substantial empire in place before

As a relatively late developing capitalist power, Germany emerged into a world that had already been carved up by the older imperialists such as Britain and France. The few overseas possessions Germany did collect were taken away after the end of the First World War. This left Germany no option but to expand to the east.

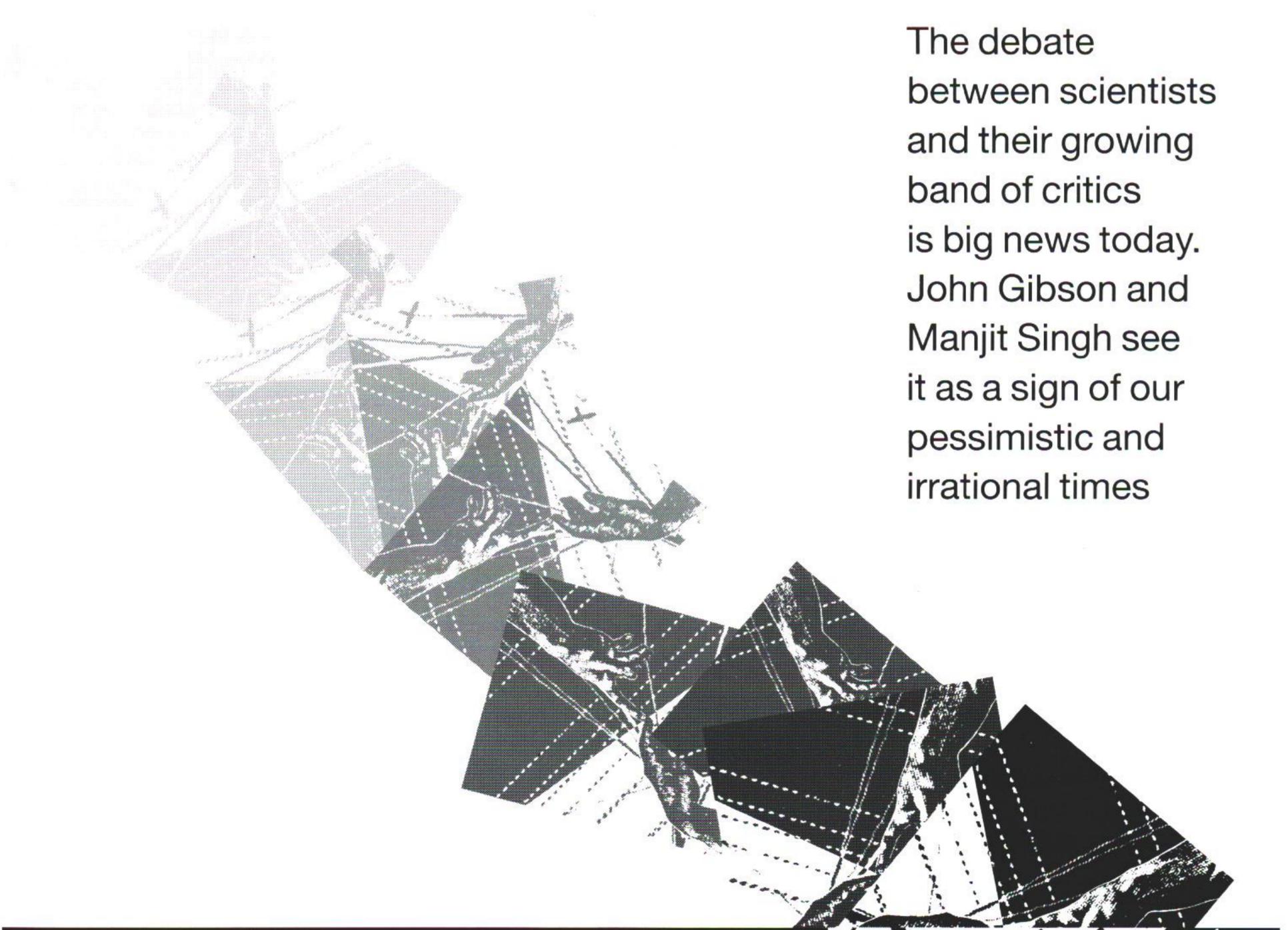
But Germany's expansion into Eastern Europe in the mid-twentieth century was far more difficult than Britain's earlier moves across Africa or Asia. Eastern Europe consisted of societies that were relatively advanced compared to the colonies. The only way that Germany could subjugate them was by the massive use of force, applied via a sophisticated killing machine. That is why 26m Soviet citizens were killed in the war between Nazi Germany and the USSR.

Death industry

The Jews, in particular, were singled out for extermination. As Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union faltered, the Jews bore the brunt of the Nazis' wrath. Jews did not suffer the most in terms of absolute numbers killed. But more than any other people they were selected for a systematic policy of extermination—the Nazi production line of death.

The Holocaust was the politics of race and empire put into practice in the bloodiest way possible by an

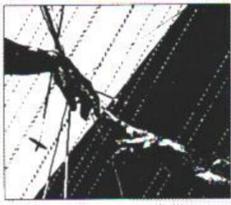
The debate between scientists and their growing band of critics is big news today. John Gibson and Manjit Singh see it as a sign of our pessimistic and irrational times



The scapegoating of science

ILLUSTRATION: St John

Like some expansionist power, science has swollen its claims and its frontiers until the petty kingdom of the self has lost all will to resist', argues ex-science minister George Walden (*Guardian*, 13 June 1992). According to Walden, science and its values have come to dominate society, with disastrous results for our spiritual well-being. He is one among a growing band of critics of modern science who have received media prominence this year. ►



Others who stand out are former *Sunday Times* columnist Bryan Appleyard, in his book *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man*; the philosopher Mary Midgley, in her book *Science as Salvation*; the makers of TV series such as *Pandora's Box* and *The Real Thing*; and assorted clerics and Greens. Some share Walden's concerns about spiritual malaise, others worry about environmental decay. All think modern science should take the rap.

Some scientists found it hard to take their critics seriously. Biologists Lewis Wolpert and Richard Dawkins responded in knockabout style on God, Galileo, Darwin, and the ignorance of humanities graduates who influence public life in Britain. Others were more worried. They were used to being

are trying to deal with the incoherence of their ideology: seeking scapegoats for their own crisis of faith, and justifications for their system's failure to deliver the goods. Some conservatives are turning on science, or 'scientism' as they call it.

What are the arguments? Bryan Appleyard says that science is determining human values. This is a disaster, he believes, because scientific truths change all the time, so undermining the stability of human values. For him, this is the cause of the crisis of values today. The rot must be stopped: 'We must resist and the time to do so is now.' (*Understanding the Present*, pxi). *Pandora's Box* pursued a similar theme. The series of six TV programmes argued that, during the Cold War years, the attempt to use

at Oxford university, seemed spot on when he observed that 'Britain, far from having a culture betrayed by its worship of machines, has a culture dominated by those who fear or despise them' (*Independent*, 24 December 1991).

Some scientists have responded aggressively to the critics, but others have been quite defensive, feeling that the tide is running against them. In response to Appleyard, *Nature* did not offer a grand vision of science riding out to capture the secrets of nature. It quoted St Augustine to the effect that the meaning of life lay in rearing the next human generation.

'The mind of God'

This is not just a British phenomenon. *Science*, the American equivalent of *Nature*, takes a pessimistic position about the future. One of its editors, Leon Lederman, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, argues that 'today, science in America is in a mood of uncertainty and discouragement' (*Science*, 22 May 1992).

The critics of science have been particularly fired up by cosmologists claiming to dispense with God. A large part of the critics' thesis that science dominates contemporary culture is based on the remarkable success of Stephen Hawking's book, *A Brief History of Time*, (more than half a million hardback copies sold in Britain alone) in which Hawking mischievously talks about science letting us know 'the mind of God'. George Smoot, leader of the team which recently discovered the 'ripples' in the early universe, has declared that 'science is replacing the role of religion as an authority' (*Science*, 3 July 1992).

It is certainly the case that science has replaced the old religions as an authority in the Western world. This may upset you if you're a religious fundamentalist. But what kind of science is it? The way in which science is popularised today is more akin to religion than to scientific enlightenment. The point about the most popular of 'pop-science' books is that they are pantheistic tracts. They use 'science' to 'prove' some religious or mystical point of view.

Onward Crypto-Theists

Paul Davies embodies the trend. Davies is a theoretical physicist who recently left Britain, in part because of what he called 'a deep-seated antipathy towards scientists, especially academics, among the general population' (*Guardian*, 1 July 1992). But he is also the author of best-selling popular science books with titles like *God and the New Physics*, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, and his recent *The Mind of God*.

The way in which science is popularised today is more akin to religion than to scientific enlightenment

attacked by Greens and postmodernists, but not by conservative thinkers. As the leading science magazine, *Nature*, commented on Appleyard's book and the appreciative review of it by Walden: 'A new version of the old assertion that science affronts human dignity...may herald an assault on basic science and its sources of support.' (30 April)

Minority rule

Most commentators have taken the argument about science too much at face value, as a debate from which one side should emerge victorious. Yet at the heart of the debate is a paradox. Both sides see themselves as a protesting minority dominated by the other. The critics see the influence of science as all pervasive, yet many scientists feel under siege, complaining that it is they who are underfunded, misunderstood, and unpopular.

So what is going on? The key to resolving the confusions is to recognise that much of the debate isn't about science at all. The contemporary debate about science and values can only be understood in the economic and political context in which it occurs. This applies in particular to the contribution of conservative thinkers. With their worldview thrown into some confusion by the end of the Cold War and the arrival of economic slump, they

science to solve social problems—such as the development of civil nuclear power, or DDT—led to the takeover of society by scientists and technocrats with no sense of moral values. The programme-makers' hope was that in the post-Cold War world steps could be taken to put morality back into scientific decision-making.

Alien and Robocop

Contrary to what these critics say, however, society today is not dominated by science. Indeed it is arguable that contemporary culture is more anti-scientific than at any time since the Enlightenment. Science as technique continues to advance, but popular enthusiasm for a vision of progress based on science has entirely disappeared. What's more, popular opinion is suspicious, even hostile, to the idea of science as a liberator. Just think of the image of science and the future in the *Alien* or *Robocop* films.

Most scientists are aware of their declining influence. The Institute of Physics has launched a campaign to attract young people back to the subject. A journal—*Public Understanding of Science*—was also launched this year to try to understand and combat what it saw as the 'anti-science phenomenon'. Denis Noble, professor of physiology

In a review of *The Mind of God*, Don Cupitt, philosopher of religion at Cambridge, made the astute point that 'it seems that not only the physicists themselves, but also the general public, are gratified by the idea that theoretical physics is a branch of theology'. (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 March 1992). Far from feeling threatened by such scientists, Cupitt welcomed them as foot soldiers in the (religious) cause. His review was entitled 'Onward Crypto-Theists'. Scientific optimism is distinctly out of fashion. Scientific mysticism is in.

The growth of popular mysticism is a symptom of a society that is exhausted, at every level: economically, politically, and ideologically. It is also symptomatic of the collapse of secular alternatives to the status quo.

The critics of science are trying to rationalise the fact that capitalism can offer only meagre rewards

This stagnation, along with the usual commercial interests, has undermined the ability of science to make the difference to people's lives that it always seems to be promising. Take the example of the civil nuclear power programme in Britain, which had the added disadvantage of being the neglected offshoot of military interests. When she opened the Calder Hall power station in 1956, the Queen declared: 'Atomic scientists, by a series of brilliant discoveries, have brought us to the threshold of a new age.' We were promised free electricity. Instead we still have old people freezing to death in the winter, as well as hopelessly inefficient nuclear power stations dotted along the coast of Britain.

Chasing shadows

The failure of science to live up to its promise is the fault of capitalist society. However, this failure has led to a general cynicism about science and scientists. The destructive use of science by the elites of modern society has turned such cynicism into outright hostility in some quarters.

Contrary to what critics like

Appleyard say, religious or mystical ideas are gaining more influence today, while scientific optimism is in retreat. This reflects the pessimistic and irrational times in which we are living. It suggests that Appleyard and the other critics are chasing shadows. So what are they reacting to?

They are reacting to a crisis of their own value system. On the religious front, the growth in mystical ideas is *at the expense* of the traditional high religions. This is why Appleyard and company are so upset—the Church of England is suffering from falling rolls, while Taoism, Buddhism, and a myriad of New Age faiths are doing nicely. This is how Richard Harries, the Bishop of Oxford, sees it: 'In many ways our time is reminiscent of late antiquity, with a decline in the official cults and the emergence of hundreds of mystery religions offering a more personal and intense experience of death and rebirth' (*Guardian*, 20 April 1992).

Conservative crisis

Harries' observation about the crisis of the high religions is illustrative of the wider crisis of conservative doctrine in today's conditions of slump and social fragmentation. Conservatives feel particularly disoriented because they expected to be on a roll after the end of Stalinism. Instead, the demise of their Eastern adversary has robbed them of a coherent focus, and a scapegoat. Now they are on the look out for an alternative.

Science is not the best of scapegoats since modern society needs science as technique. So 'scientism' is attacked—by which they mean the idea that moral and social values can be deduced from science. 'Scientism' is a new version of the old 'slippery slope' argument. For example, if it is scientifically possible to produce a genetic super-race, 'scientism' supposedly decrees that we *must* produce one. According to the Appleyard school of thought, this is the attitude of modern science. So if we support genetic engineering, its next stop Dr Mengele. This reading of the situation is quite fantastic. Scientists today are excessively defensive about their goals and set themselves very low horizons.

Faith against reason

This doesn't matter to the conservatives, however. They need to explain away the crisis of their values and society. From attacking 'scientism', the critics move on to defending *faith* against *reason*. Why? Because it is easier to defend the inequities of modern society on the basis of faith than it is on the basis of reason. What we see, however, is an assertion of the need for faith more than faith itself. Defending Appleyard in a debate

at the Institute of Education, Fay Weldon displayed the sneering elitism inherent in such a view: 'Homeless people need faith', she said. Adding, 'most people are not very bright'.

Alongside their attempt at scapegoating, the critics of science are also trying to rationalise the fact that capitalism can offer only meagre rewards for most of us today. The problem with scientific optimism, they say, is that it raises expectations above what can be achieved. They ask for human modesty when looking at the workings of nature; 'awe' and 'humility' as Midgley puts it. This perspective denigrates the scientific optimism of the Enlightenment; 'puritan arrogance', says Midgley. Once again, the message is apologetic: don't expect too much. If science fails to live up to its promises, don't blame the way society is organised, blame the scientists for making the promises in the first place.

'Deaf to his music'

This attack on Enlightenment optimism and reason is at the heart of the 'anti-science' phenomenon. It unites the apologists like Appleyard and Midgley with Green and postmodernist critics of science. Midgley reserves most of her bile for the existentialist, Nobel prize-winning biologist, Jacques Monod, who upheld a few basic aspects of the Enlightenment tradition. Monod argued that nature has no plan, no design. Man, he wrote, 'must realise that, like a gipsy, he lives on the boundary of an alien world that is deaf to his music, and as indifferent to his hopes as it is to his suffering or his crimes' (quoted in *Science as Salvation*, p46).

In other words, forget about 'awe' and 'humility'. This is too much for Midgley: 'People like Monod, however, want us to get rid of all reverence, all belief in something greater than ourselves.' (p73) For his sins Monod has been attacked by Midgley, the chaos theorist Ilya Prigogine, the Green mystic Rupert Sheldrake, and the free marketeer/defender of 'tradition' Friedrich von Hayek. They make strange bedfellows, but they know what they don't like: the progressive optimism associated with the Enlightenment.

New Dark Age

Under the guise of humanism and concern for our spiritual well-being, the critics of science are taking part in the promotion of a new Dark Age mentality. Recovering an optimistic view of science requires changing the political culture on a broad front. But as a first step, let us recognise that we should indeed 'get rid of all reverence, all belief in something greater than ourselves'.

Match of the yesterday

There are some obvious gaps in the autumn schedules this year. The first is the football; the second is the present tense.

First, the football. Since it began in 1964, *Match of the Day* has defined both Saturday night viewing and soccer on the box. Its basic philosophy was that viewing was a substitute for attendance. It was on late because it assumed that you had spent the afternoon at a 'real' match. It also assumed that you were watching with a crate of ale to hand. Only the belief that the audience was exhausted and half cut could explain the presence of Jimmy Hill on the payroll.

The blunt, austere presentation—the limited camera angles, the Alzheimer commentary, the sheepskin coats and nightmare jumpers, the stoic endurance of weeks of banal, defensive play—meant that nobody could mistake this for entertainment. This was sport. It felt live and newsy. The logical development of this ethos was *The Match*—the genuinely live Sunday afternoon match. For the first time, football had to follow the slots instead of the other way round. Passive reporting was replaced by active staging of the game around the demands of the medium.

The status and popularity of a number of sports have been enhanced, often to a ludicrous degree, by the attentions of television. Darts, snooker, golf, and bowls had plenty of participants but few spectators. In fact they were largely seen as a way of inducing manges and nerds to group themselves into coach parties and go away for a while. TV transformed these grassroots exercises in temporary social cleansing into popular entertainment.

More recently, American football and sumo wrestling were barely understood here until Channel 4 got hold of them. Kabbadi was unheard of. Yet now it enjoys a huge cult in the highlands and islands of Scotland, an Asian women's game now embraced by men in kilts shouting at each other in the Gallic. I have actually seen it played at a Highland Games.

Soccer, on the other hand, had a huge, well-organised spectator base before TV was invented. It was therefore able to resist the scheduling demands of the medium for a very long time. It remained a weekend

event and TV remained a spectator at rather than an arranger of games.

Oddly enough, soccer's resistance to the schedule worked to the benefit of the TV. TV was there with the rest of us, shivering on the sidelines. The broadcast assumed the position of the viewer much as it had on Coronation Day, the First Day of popular TV. The broadcast thus shared the viewer's excitement. This is why you yelled at the screen. TV was absorbed into the event. You could get little TV cameramen for your Subbuteo set.

This will not be the approach favoured by Sky. Sky's football coverage is being produced by David Hill. It was his idea to have

a cartoon duck waddle across the screen whenever a batsman was bowled for nought on Kerry Packer's Channel 9 cricket coverage. He also changed rugby coverage so that it focused on 'bums not balls', in an attempt to get women viewers. The same approach will no doubt be taken towards football, and it will be interesting to see if the pertness of the player's buttocks becomes an item of discussion on the Kop and in the boardroom.

The big match will take up five hours of Sunday afternoons, including interviews in the changing rooms, baths and other erotic settings. Sky also insists upon a Monday night game, which could be a real disaster for club football. There is no doubt that these will be better, more entertaining programmes than *Match of the Day*. But they will be just that. Television

programmes cut together from football footage, not football itself. The sheer incompetence of *Match of the Day* made it into something of a different order, a part of the more glorious whole, a fellow guest at the feast. Sky will be more enjoyable but less essential.

In fact, the BBC have signed a deal with Sky so that *Match of the Day* can still go out. But it won't be the same. For a start there will be competition. ITV is putting a season of Schwarzenegger films up against it. This will produce a crisis of British maleness. For two generations *Match of the Day* has provided a trouble-free site of father-son bonding. Now there will be oedipal struggles around the remote switch with who knows what repercussions for the future.

The only other programme so ingrained in the fabric of life itself was *Top of the Pops*. The degeneration of these two institutions has profound implications for the very nature of television



At its peak, watching *Match of the Day* was not a choice but a ritual. It made TV into the nervous system of the national weekend and acted as a weekly dose of what normally only happened during natural disasters and royal weddings. Television hegemony.

The only other programme whose time and format remained so ingrained in the fabric of life itself was *Top of the Pops*. Like *Match of the Day*, it was both infuriatingly bad and unquestionably crucial. And now a national poster campaign is comparing it to a stale sandwich and Morrissey has declared that it no longer exists. The degeneration of these two institutions has profound implications for the very nature of television.

Television has always been regarded as the medium of the present tense. Until the invention of the VCR, you could not turn back the page. If you missed a classic TV play or goal, you would not see it again until television decided. TV's own drama form—the soap—is predicated on relentless forward motion.

In a very short period of time, all that has changed. It began, of course, with the VCR. This made TV into a more interactive medium, allowing the viewer to reschedule the evening's entertainment, and, more importantly, not to watch TV at all but to watch movies instead. The old familiar box in the corner could suddenly be filled with very unfamiliar images—driller killers, surf Nazis and Emmanuelle. And later, thanks to the camcorder, with weddings, holidays and spouses humiliating themselves.

The image which had once moved forward as relentlessly as the clock could now be slowed, frozen, reversed and stored. Recently this has had an effect on the broadcasters themselves. Television—which never before looked over its shoulder—has been suddenly paralysed by a sense of its own history. Repeats are no longer afternoon padding but primetime anchorages.

I am not talking now about untarnished classics like *Bilko* or *Star Trek* or Eintracht v Real Madrid. Look at Wolfie Smith. What can

a comedy about a suburban revolutionary possibly mean to anyone under 40? How can you laugh at stereotypes that don't exist any more? The pleasure of the programme is its quaintness. It's a video horse brass. A look at the list of programmes in production shows repeats turning into remakes. STV is presently shooting a new series of *Dr Finlay's Casebook*.

Part of the power of TV was its urgency, the sense that what you were seeing might never be seen again. Everything was in the present tense.

Now everything seems to be imperfect. *Top of the Pops* and the weekend football coverage were the only programmes left which it seemed important to view at the moment of broadcast. One of the interesting things about all this is that this huge epistemological change has taken place without you having to buy a new set. The old familiar box houses the strange new outlook.

The most radical transformation of the familiar screen took place last Christmas with the colonisation of Britain by Nintendo and Sega. You can hook Nintendo up to your TV and discover that it contains not merely a past but also—space. As you chase Mario the plumber or Sonic the hedgehog through their sewers and woodlands, electronic landscapes open out in front of you. It is impossible to shake the illusion that

these landscapes are 'in there someplace', hidden away inside the box.

Playing it the other day, I remembered that I once believed that Bill and Ben lived inside the TV. I cannot imagine my own children believing any such thing. To me then everything on the screen seemed to have stepped into being at the moment I saw it. My children assume that most of the people they see on TV are dead now. What happens on TV happened yesterday. Nintendo, on the other hand, holds out the promise of undiscovered countries, of levels and ploys that only you have seen, of things that do not happen until you make them happen, of a story in which the next paragraph is not written yet. ●

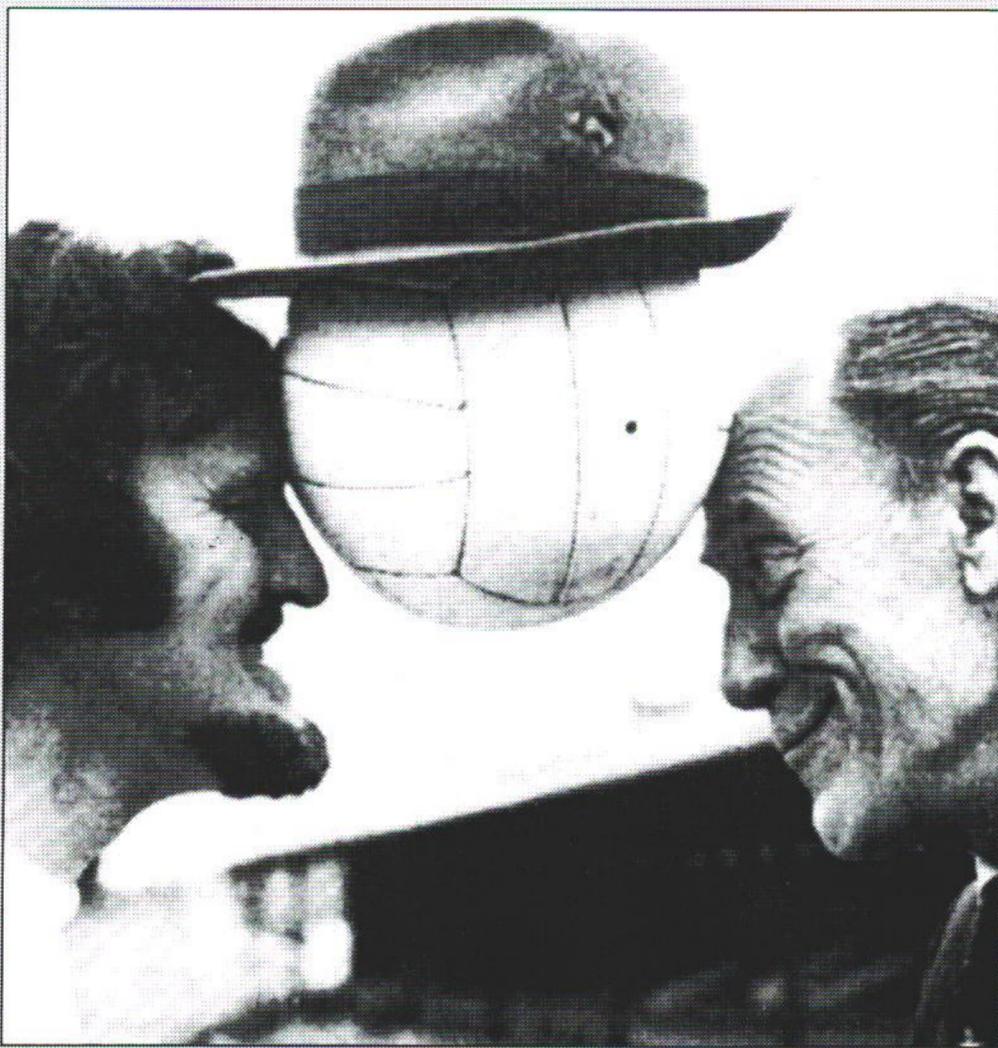


PHOTO: The Toby Banks Archive

Marxist rappers? Emmanuel Oliver met Marxman

You'd think that four young homies making a rap debut would opt for a trendy theme like kicking their pregnant girlfriend in the womb, or who has the biggest dick in the recording studio. Yet Marxman (MC Hollis, Phrase, K1 and Oisin) settled on Marxism (it's dead isn't it?). It's not surprising they are signed to Gilles Peterson's Talkin Loud label. Peterson, the former Jazz FM DJ, was sacked for speaking out against the Gulf War.

Marxman are four young rappers, originally from Bristol but now based in London. All have interesting pasts which go some way towards explaining the fusing of hip hop drums and bass with an Irish folk feel. MC Hollis and Oisin were both born in Dublin, Phrase was an influence in the Bristol dance scene during the 1980s and K1 is a DJ. Their debut double A-sided single 'Sad Affair'/'Dark Are the Days', released on 17 August, has received a positive response underground and from the mainstream. At the moment they are working all hours in the studio, with an LP due out in October.

Those of you familiar with Bristol's finest, Massive Attack, will appreciate Marxman's sound, which is less of a rap than a south-western drawl. The rap sits on a mellow beat which is becoming a bit of a Bristol trademark. 'Sad Affair' is built around a tough, solid backbeat interspersed with an uncredited female vocalist, over which a mellow mood is laid, which gives the rappers plenty of space in which to get their message across.

And it's the message which makes Marxman different. They might be getting plenty of attention at the moment, but they are likely to suffer the slow suffocation of censorship by disregard which is a typically British technique for dealing with the unmentionable. And when you listen to 'Sad Affair' you'll hear why:

**'But my people suffer great injustice daily
Condemned by racism in the Bailey
The Guildford Four, Maguires and the Six
Innocent! But guilty of being Micks.'**

A video single, drawing attention to events in the Irish War, and intercut with performances from Marxman, was released simultaneously with the single. According to Phrase, anybody who doesn't take a stand against the British



Shootin' from the lip



occupation of Ireland and the criminalisation of the Irish people has no right to call themselves a Marxist.

Marxman aren't easily pigeon-holed. They don't fit into the hippy wing of dance music or the nihilistic end of the scene. Instead they have created a slot for themselves as the first Marxist rap crew. They can't really be interviewed on TV because they take themselves too seriously. I can't imagine Terry Christian getting much of a laugh out of the New

World Order or Britain's war in Ireland.

At a time when everybody else is saying that Marxism is finished, it hardly seems to be the best ticket to musical success. So why call yourself Marxman? 'We believe the system is wrong', says MC Hollis. 'It's immoral. Calling ourselves Marxman is just the starting point. For us there is a generation of youth who are not ready to be organised and don't want to listen to parties. They are turned off, for us it's about keeping alive an idea.'

In one sense, you could say that Marxman are following in a British tradition of explicitly political rap music. From Hackney's Shut up and Dance's 'Dance before the Police Come' and Overlord X's 'Weapon is my lyric' to Manchester's Ruthless Rap Assassins' 'And it Wasn't a Dream', British rap does have a fairly respectable pedigree. (In America too there seems to be a backlash growing against the gangsta themes which have been the popular rap staple—see the recent acclaimed sets by The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy and Arrested Development, which addressed contemporary political themes while keeping the groove locked tight.)

On the other hand, Marxman have something more to say. They don't just rap about social problems, they're saying that social problems have got social solutions. Marxman's message is 'question everything'. They question Britain's presence in Ireland and the meaning of the New World Order—all in 12 inches of vinyl. They are refreshingly offensive, as in this scathing attack on the defenders of the status quo in 'Dark Are the Days':

**'How can you justify, stand up and decry
The communist, when you stand for all
this
Persist in your madness and be damned
As the tables turn to a clenched hand
Dark are the days!'**

While many critics may argue that Marxman, like most British rappers, lack the finesse of their contemporaries across the water, they are at least attempting to forge an independent identity while staying firmly anchored within the rap genre. As such, they are a welcome addition to the current crop of talented UK rap groups such as Brothers Like Outlaw, MC Mello, Caveman, etc.

MC Hollis believes in the power of the media, and feels Marxman have to beat the media at their own game. So far Marxman have had an easy ride: they've been given the novelty value treatment by the music press. But they know that won't last long and are preparing themselves for the worst. Rap music cannot bring down the system. But as the recent furore about Ice T's 'Cop Killer' in the USA has shown, rap music with a message can still expect to be censored one way or another. ●

Maybe it's

because I ain't a Londoner

Some people have a great time at the Brick Lane Music Hall. Andrew Calcutt was less enthusiastic

The auditorium done out in red plush. Boiled beef and carrots served by waitresses in black skirts and frilly white blouses. Ad-libs about melons and spotted dick. Lovingly preserved jokes and old-fashioned songs sung in an old-fashioned way. This is the stuff of the Brick Lane Music Hall, which opened this year thanks to the enterprise of master of ceremonies Vincent Hayes.

Onetime warm-up man for Benny Hill, Hayes used to promote old-style entertainment at the Lord Hood, a London pub he ran with the late Allan Roberts MP. Last year he began refurbishing the derelict canteen at the former Truman's brewery in Brick Lane, east London. His aim: 'To bring music hall back to its ancestral home.'

Hayes promises 'fun, food, frivolity and falcohol'. For £15 a head, punters get a three-course dinner and a wholesome show. There were plenty of singalong songs on the night I visited. A young soprano trilled 'I know he's clean and tidy 'cos I wash him every Friday', and the audience chorused 'I might learn to love him later on'. In another ditty—'she was one of the early birds and I was one of the worms'—everyone was expected to 'cheep cheep' at the appropriate moment. Hayes compered from a red plush throne at the side of the stage, ready to rebuff hecklers or gee up the audience as required.

I couldn't help squirming in my seat, but most of the paying customers were having a rollicking good time. A Joan Collins lookalike from Miami was hand-jiving to 'Daisy, Daisy'. The office party from Chelmsford swayed in unison. A group of local residents were game for almost anything.

If the house had been full, no doubt the roof would have been raised. But only half the tables were occupied. Publicist Roger Foss apologised and explained that cheap seats at Covent Garden had drawn potential customers elsewhere. I prefer to think that the appeal of music hall is not quite as widespread as its advocates would have me believe.

To my mind, the music hall turns were unbearably bland. By contrast, some local Bengalis have found the music hall offensive. Brick Lane is the main thoroughfare in 'Banglatown', and when Hayes applied for a music license, some of its inhabitants are said to have

'exploded with rage'. Religious leaders accused Hayes of 'corrupting the youth' and encouraging prostitution.

Hayes refused to back down. He received support from some local residents, and from showbiz personalities including Barbara Windsor. Hayes and Foss welcomed support from such quarters but they wanted nothing to do with the 'rights for whites' types who tried to get in on the act.

Their enterprise may have given offence to Muslim clerics, but Hayes and Foss are nothing like right-wing bigots. Foss has recently worked on *Tribune*, the ailing left Labour weekly. Nor are they cynical businessmen out to exploit the anti-immigrant chauvinism which has always been strong in the Bethnal Green area. Foss defended the music hall on the grounds that its audience comprises a unique cultural mix: 'We have community groups rubbing shoulders with people from the City.' Hayes believes the music hall is a 'joyous project' for the benefit of the whole community.

However, 'the whole community' does not patronise the Brick Lane theatre. The only black person I saw there was a young man with learning difficulties chaperoned by a responsible adult who looked like a social worker. He didn't seem terribly relaxed. I venture to suggest that few Bengalis would feel at ease with an audience participation routine which involved an overweight white male stripping to the waist and belting out 'Rule Britannia'.

Hayes gets his kicks from the music hall tradition and his role as its protector. Regular customers enjoy the Brick Lane Music Hall for equally innocuous-sounding reasons, mainly because it brings back childhood memories. 'It's part of our heritage', said local residents Don and Jean. 'We can remember our parents singing these songs and going to music halls like Queen's, Poplar.' Memories of the 'old East End' exert a powerful influence in the area. Parish priest Reverend Ted Brack has congratulated Hayes for 'restoring music hall to its rightful place—the heart of the East End'.

'Tradition', 'heritage', 'the heart of the East End'—such are the words and phrases which crop up whenever anyone talks about the Brick Lane Music Hall. Hayes, Foss and the local vicar like to think that 'the East End tradition' has

room for everyone. This is wishful thinking. Chauvinism and racism are a traditional part of East End life. Whether its authors are aware of it or not, re-enacting the heritage of music hall involves the celebration of a bygone era when Britain did rule the waves and there were no blacks in 'the real East End'. In the current racist climate, nostalgia for music hall resonates with the unspoken message that fings ain't wot they used to be before they arrived.

Evoking 'the old East End' inevitably gives grounds for viewing the past through red, white and blue spectacles. Hayes and Foss wouldn't have been seen dead on the 'rights for whites' march through Bethnal Green in 1990. Nevertheless their re-enactment of times past would have been warmly appreciated by marchers who described themselves—with some justification—as 'the real East End'.

Thankfully the religious campaign against Hayes seems to have died down. And it would be ludicrous to oppose his theatre on the grounds that its audience are all right-wing bigots: they're not. But it is equally ludicrous to expect Benaglis to identify with a jumble-sale version of imperial culture—which is what music hall is. Everything about the British tradition—even old-fashioned fun—carries some connotation of imperialism and racial domination.

A recent letter from a Hayes fan to the *East London Advertiser* points to the inevitable side-effects of reliving any aspect of Britain's past: 'I, like many ex-East Enders here in Blundeston prison all agree that it [the music hall] would be a great thing for the East End...give the people good old laughter. What could be nicer than going to the theatre...then have a good curry and a few pints of lager?' If the author is serious about living out the East End tradition, his ideal night out won't be complete without verbal or physical abuse of 'curry shop' waiters or other Bengalis in the Brick Lane area. You put your left foot in....

Brick Lane Music Hall,
152 Brick Lane, London E1
Open: Wednesday to Saturday.
Dinner: 7.30pm. Showtime: 9pm.



THE

MARXIST REVIEW OF BOOKS

Terry Smith's *Accounting for Growth* has caused uproar by exposing the way in which British businesses massage their profit figures. Phil Murphy sees the scandal as a sign of desperate times for capitalism in this country

The profits of doom

Accounting for Growth: Stripping the Camouflage from Company Accounts, Terry Smith, Century Business, £19.99 hbk, £12.99 pbk

On 12 August, City investment house UBS Phillips & Drew suspended Terry Smith, the head of its UK Equity Research department. It also took out an injunction in an unsuccessful attempt to ban his new book, *Accounting for Growth*. In an internal memo, dated 13 August, UBS P&D said the suspension was 'for disciplinary reasons arising from the need to investigate apparent serious breaches by Mr Smith of his duties to UBS Phillips & Drew and breaches of certain well-established internal procedures in connection with the proposed publication of the book *Accounting for Growth*'. Terry Smith's book has since been at the centre of a public furore.

Accounting for Growth reveals the way in which many of Britain's biggest companies use accounting techniques to inflate their reported profit figures and earnings per share. Smith is at pains to point out in his introduction that he is 'not suggesting that the practices analysed are illegal, or even that they contravene Generally Accepted Accounting Practice' (*gaaap*). His point, he says, is to expose the resulting deceptions about the well-being of the companies involved.

At the practical level the book is designed to advise investors and others as to how they can identify and avoid the corporate disasters which creative accountancy can disguise. The meat of the book sets up a guide to investors, so that they are less likely to be 'caught up in the gloss of the annual accounts and can separate "profit" from cash' (p6).

Smith's use of inverted commas around the word 'profit' captures the essence of his case: that by massaging the figures, British firms can make profits on paper which

may not exist in reality. Smith itemises 12 'financial engineering' techniques by which companies and their accountants enhance profit and loss accounts to give investors the impression that a company is doing much better than its real trading record justifies. One of the most illuminating sections of the book is the accounting health checklist of over 200 British companies, indicating which camouflage methods they employ. This is known as the 'blob guide'.

These creative accounting techniques involve, for example, crediting the potential profits from long-term contracts immediately, long before the profits are realised. This was a technique used by the computer leasing firm Atlantic Computers. It collapsed in 1990, the final nail in the coffin of the conglomerate British & Commonwealth.

Another method involves writing down (ie, deliberately underestimating) the debt owed to and the stock values of a company which is taken over. If the new bosses later sell off the stock for more or get their debts repaid at a higher level than their figures suggested, their future profit earnings are artificially enhanced. Coloroll, the home products group, used this technique when it took over the John Crowther Group in 1988. Despite showing profits in 1989, Coloroll went into receivership in 1990. Other companies which were able to report profits just before going bust include Maxwell Communications, BCCI and Polly Peck. The list of firms featured in Smith's blob guide which have now collapsed is growing all the time.

The controversy following the attempted ban on *Accounting for Growth* has focused on the independence

and impartiality of stock market research, following the rapid expansion of the financial services industry in the 1980s. After the City's 'Big Bang' in 1986, brokers and banks were allowed to merge to form much larger, integrated financial institutions. For the first time too, foreign investment houses from America, Canada, Japan and Europe were allowed to operate on the London Stock Exchange alongside British firms. Union Banque Suisse's acquisition of the brokers Phillips & Drew was one of the many new hybrid creations.

Because a single firm, like UBS P&D, can now combine a corporate finance office and a stockbroking department, concern has frequently been raised about potential conflicts of interest. Investors who are advised by a broking operation to purchase certain shares have often expressed fears that such advice may reflect pressure exerted by the corporate finance wing of the same firm, if it is involved in organising an issue of those shares.

So-called Chinese Walls exist within these firms supposedly to prevent the different departments influencing each other. But it is generally recognised that investment analysts like Terry Smith face subtle and not-so-subtle pressure to swallow any doubts they may have about a share rights issue being arranged by the finance department. This serves to deflect criticism from the company they are analysing, and helps to retain them as lucrative clients.

As Smith now sees it himself: 'The Chinese Wall fell on me.' Some of UBS P&D's clients and their accountants may have been behind the attempts to ban the book so as not to have their own shady operations thrown into the light. But the significance of the furore surrounding this book goes well beyond the internal politics of the financial sector and the accountancy profession.

One intriguing twist in the Smith affair is that the book is not news to UBS P&D and its corporate clients. UBS P&D published, under its own name, many of Terry Smith's exposures of creative accounting techniques in a January 1991 report which was also entitled *Accounting for Growth*.

The original report was sent to UBS P&D's institutional clients at the time. It aroused so much interest in the financial community that it was voted the best piece of research published during 1991 in the Extel survey of

economy. Up to a few months ago most economic commentators and forecasters still believed that economic recovery was just around the corner. But, after all their firm predictions of an upturn over the past 18 months have come to nought, a mood of gloom and doom has set in. Businessmen, bankers and economists are now saying they can see no recovery well into the 1990s. Comparisons with the Great Depression of the 1930s are becoming more common.

It is in this climate of slump that the consequences of Smith's book are so damning for the British economy. Not only does it question the viability of many British companies today; it effectively denies that there was ever a real recovery from the last recession at the start of the 1980s. And if that is so, then it would be more accurate to say that today's recession started as long ago as the late 1970s, not the late 1980s.

Much of the profit produced during the supposed boom of the eighties was 'manufactured' by sharp accountants playing with figures, not by industrialists producing and selling things profitably. In his new book, Smith explains his motivation for co-authoring the original report: 'We felt that much of the apparent growth in profits which had occurred in the 1980s was the result of accounting sleight of hand rather than genuine economic growth.' (p4)

In the late eighties UBS Phillips & Drew was among the many City institutions whose favourable reports on the British economy sustained the government's hype about an economic miracle. As proof, they pointed to a steady rise of company profits of about 20 per cent a year from 1981 to 1988. Even this year—three years into the recession—UBS P&D have forecast a resumption of profit growth of about eight per cent as a sign that things are not wholly bad for Great Britain plc. The republication of Smith's exposures tears away any credibility from such forecasts.

This book represents much more than a critical description of the ingenuity of corporate treasurers and accountants. It confirms the long-term bankrupt character of British capitalism. The issue is not the legitimacy or otherwise of creative accounting techniques, but the fact that British industry needs to resort to the sort of spurious financial activity which spawned such methods. In the absence of being able to produce profitably, the vast majority of companies have *had* to turn to credit-funded survival measures and the subsequent juggling of figures. Behind the manipulation of the profit and loss accounts through takeovers, asset stripping, foreign exchange transactions and hiding loan interest payments lies the reality of what British capitalism became during the eighties—a 'casino economy'.

The original *Accounting for Growth* report had already identified the paper character of the eighties boom in an appended 'aside'. After a section highlighting pension fund chicanery (long before the Robert Maxwell affair broke), the authors wrote: 'It can be argued that the excellent performance of UK equities over the last 10 years is due to the strong progression in earnings per share growth, which in part is due to some of the accounting techniques discussed in this review. ►

It would be more accurate to say that today's recession started as long ago as the late 1970s

institutional investors. Earlier this year, UBS P&D gave permission to Terry Smith to publish an updated and extended version of *Accounting for Growth*. Yet, having done so, Smith has been suspended and his book has become a subject of bitter controversy in the financial sector. Why?

The change of attitude towards Smith and his book reflect changed perceptions of the state of the British

This has allowed a reduction in pension fund costs which in turn further boosts earnings per share performance, thus allowing the argument to become circular' (p15-16). What this means is that much of the supposed worth of British industry is made up of millions of bits of financial paper which keep circulating around.

The irony of the Terry Smith affair is that it coincides with the beginning of the end for the one true success story in the British economy—the financial services industry. City of London earnings were a real boon for British

capitalism over the last decade. City institutions were not creating any real wealth either. But they did cream off fat commissions from industry for arranging the sort of financial scams which Smith alludes to in his book. Now that even these measures are unable to keep British industry alive, as evidenced by the continuing growth of corporate closures and the falls in corporate credit levels, time is running out for the UBS P&Ds of the City of London, too. Smith's move to jump ship, go independent and make as much as he can from his book looks like a shrewd bit of timing.

The recent offerings from the radical intelligentsia reveal that there is no longer any such thing as a left alternative, argues Adam Eastman

Socialism after Stalinism

Books discussed in this article include:

After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism, Robin Blackburn (ed), Verso, £29.99 hbk, £10.95 pbk

Moments of Decision: Political History and the Crises of Radicalism, Stephen Eric Bronner, Routledge £40 hbk, £12.99 pbk

The Revenge of History, Alex Callinicos, Polity, £35 hbk, £9.95 pbk

With few exceptions, the trend of the twentieth century has been for the left to become increasingly marginal. From a highpoint of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the few short years before the Soviet Union's isolation bred decay, the trajectory has been downwards. Even in periods such as the thirties when the left enjoyed some popularity, a growth in numbers disguised a weakening of ideas and a lack of any real vitality.

Since the defeat of the Russian Revolution, the typical response of the left to its unpopularity has been to try to make itself more palatable by watering down its politics and making concessions to the status quo. But in the long run this has only contributed to the left's decline as an independent force. A bold statement of the anti-capitalist aims of the working class movement became almost an embarrassment as the left wrapped itself in the respectability of state intervention, anti-Nazism and 'popular fronts'.

If the century has taught us anything it is that the left wins nothing if it limits its objectives. This, however, has not been a widely drawn conclusion. Typically it has been concluded that not enough concessions were made, rather than too many. Consequently, next time around the left has been even more modest in its demands upon capitalist society. Sometimes, as after the Second World War, this response has reached grotesque proportions, as

the Western left has set about quelling working class militancy in order to prove itself worthy of official state patronage.

Unfortunately for the left, however, the authorities have proved rather ungrateful. Socialists have ended up incapable either of articulating the more radical aspirations which the limitations of capitalist society generate, or of defending the small concessions which capitalism has sporadically made. As a consequence the left has become increasingly isolated from any major current within society.

A symptom of this decline has been an ever-decreasing level of self-belief and an ever-increasing passivity. As the left lost any sense of its own capacity to change the world by leading a movement, it put its faith in forces outside of its control. The attachment to ready-made 'models' increased in proportion to the left's inability to make one of its own.

For most of this century, the prime 'model' has been the Soviet Union. But many others followed, as each turned out to be something of a disappointment. The more marginal radical forces became, the more desperate became the models. At various times since the Second World War, China, Yugoslavia, Cuba, Sweden and many others have been promoted as the ideal to emulate. The complete collapse of the USSR, the model upon which all

others were dependent, has destroyed the basis upon which the modern left was founded.

The left has been on course for a more or less complete accommodation with the status quo for over half a century. The collapse of Stalinism has accelerated that process and brought it out in the open. It has led most radicals to make their final peace with capitalist society.

In some respects the current thinking of the left represents more of the perennial calls to make further concessions and invent models. But it is distinct in its open acceptance of the market system. In their enthusiasm for the market economy, many left-wing converts are less qualified than the right. Now more isolated from society than even the capitalist elite itself, they seem insensitive to the absurdity of hailing the market economy at a time when it is collapsing into slump. Along the way they have also picked up a lot of the other ideological baggage that has been associated with postwar advocacy of the market. The concern with the notions of 'individual citizenship' and 'pluralism', which was promoted by Cold War ideologues in the 1950s to undermine the left, has now been inherited by the ex-radicals of the nineties. In so far as they still see it as possible to do anything, it is to return to the utopian socialism of the early nineteenth century and dream that one day common sense may prevail.

The left's response to the collapse of Stalinism has been extraordinarily defensive. Given the political dependence of most left tendencies upon the old Soviet bloc, they rightly sensed their own demise in the ruins of the Berlin Wall. Their reflex has been frantically to distance themselves—to prove that it was really nothing to do with them. To make this quite clear, they have embarked upon rubbishing not just the Stalinist deformation of the Russian Revolution, but even the revolution itself.

For those such as Alex Callinicos who still wish to retain an association with the Marxist tradition, this takes

'cult of organisation and discipline' and his 'intolerance and ferocity', assumes Charles Manson-like proportions as the ring leader of a strange sect (*After the Fall*, p189).

Reflecting the fatalism of our times, what the left now really objects to about the revolution was its 'voluntarism'. The fact that human beings sought to make their own history, regardless of the difficulties of circumstance and the 'laws of history', is the real object of attack. This becomes even clearer in the explicit objection to the idea that society could be planned.

According to much of the left intelligentsia today, the problem was not the specific form of planning adopted by Stalin—a bureaucratic system devoid of possibility because of the absence of working class control. Rather, they say, it is not possible to transcend the market system as a way of allocating the resources of society, since human beings could never hope to reproduce the complexity of its operations. Although attributing this view to the West Indian radical CLR James, Blackburn gives the game away when he says that planning 'expressed a besotted faith in the powers of intellect and a necessary totalitarian logic' (*ibid*, p197). According to the new left wisdom, to try to defy the laws of the market is like defying the law of gravity, and has even more catastrophic results.

The capitalist market is in its essentials seen as the only way in which the economy can be efficiently regulated. Socialists are now said to have been foolish ever to have argued the need to transcend the economic limitations imposed by the capitalist laws of production for profit. Radical intellectuals now suggest that substantive criticism of capitalism can amount to nothing, as planning could never rival the marvels of competition. Instead, they conclude, the left should have restricted itself to requesting a more democratic political system and a degree of economic redistribution.

As the American radical Stephen Bronner puts it, the 'adherence to socialist values must stem less from any "scientific" conviction...than from an ethical commitment to their just character'. (*Moments of Decision*, p140) Since the market is the best system available, socialism should be confined to a call for more fairness in its social policy. In 'Out of the Ashes', his contribution to *After the Fall*, Eric Hobsbawm puts the case bluntly: 'The argument that socialism is needed to abolish hunger and poverty is no longer convincing...the material argument has been weakened.' (p320) Rather, it appears that 'socialists are there to remind the world that people and not production come first' (p324).

Anyone vaguely familiar with Marxism will recognise this to be the very antithesis of its rationale. Marxists have always understood that improving the efficiency of production is the prerequisite for liberating people. The scientific character of Marx's case developed through a direct attack upon the ethical arguments of the early utopian socialists. Rather than socialism being an ideal waiting to be realised through the power of reason, Marxism established that socialism would come about as the culmination of attempts by the working class to remove the restrictions which capitalism places upon the advancement of human needs. As Blackburn himself is ►

The fact that human beings sought to make their own history is the real object of attack

the form of trying to prove that Lenin was actually a democrat, and that the Bolshevik Party was nothing more than a group of trade union activists. While conceding in *The Revenge of History* that there was a problem with the professional and 'elitist' form of organisation adopted by the Russian revolutionaries, he assures us that they had abandoned such nonsense by the time of the revolution. Although Callinicos' avowed aim is to uphold the revolutionary tradition, the net effect of all this is to reinforce the defensive outlook of the left—an outlook typified by ex-Stalinists who have changed their party names from Communist to Democratic Nicepersons.

Most old radicals go a lot further than Callinicos, and fully concede that the Bolshevik Revolution was the work of an unrepresentative and bureaucratic elite. Lenin, with what *New Left Review* editor Robin Blackburn calls his

forced to concede, 'Marx insisted that socialism should arise from the real movement and not be cooked up by thinkers in their studies' (p180).

However, much of the old left now seems to have conceded that capitalism has proved capable of satisfying the needs of the working class. As the world economy enters its worst slump for at least half a century, Hobsbawm can seriously say that the 'material argument' for socialism 'has been weakened'. This concession can clearly have nothing to do with any dynamism in the market system. Instead, it reflects the fact that the collapse

In short, we need a critique of contemporary capitalism

of the left's old models has left it bereft of any alternative to the capitalist economy. It has therefore set about revising the whole basis for socialism, so that it has nothing to do with the search for a superior means of satisfying material needs.

When the left intellectuals survey the history of the socialist movement, they see its most fruitful moments as those when it stuck to the realm of extending democracy rather than expressing any foolish pretensions to tinker with the economy. The new models for Bronner, for example, are the French Popular Front government of the 1930s and the Allende regime of the early 1970s in Chile. That both these regimes paved the way to disaster is no matter. What is important is that they both identified themselves with parliamentary democracy. Some commentators even have the audacity to suggest that Marx himself was just a radical democrat, and the subsequent emphasis upon economic development was merely an unfortunate misinterpretation.

Rewriting the past is all very well. You can turn Marx into a parliamentarian or even, as Blackburn does, convert Lenin and Trotsky into men who realised the necessity for the market. The trouble is that, once you abolish any substantive case for socialism in the here and now, its future can at best arise from the realm of desire rather than of necessity. Thus in introducing one of the contributors to his volume, Blackburn tells us that 'Goran Therborn transports us into an imagined future beyond capitalism' (pxiv). Beam us up, Goran! Wishful thinking becomes a substitute for serious political analysis.

And what is so much better about life in Mr Therborn's Disneyland dream world? Well, we will care more about the environment and have equalled out the inequality between the first and third worlds. Ecology and third world poverty are the only issues remaining for a left incapable of mounting a substantial critique of Western capitalism. Where the original utopian socialists dreamed of reason prevailing over inequality and heralding a new economic order based upon the abolition of competition, their contemporaries only hope that people will see the sense of respecting the trees and feeding the poor. Today, it seems, even utopia has become a very modest proposal.

Of course, not all radicals are prepared to abandon any concept of meaningful change. Traditionalists like Callinicos are rightly scathing of the new left's love of the market and its abandonment of reality. But they are so pre-occupied with looking to the past for solutions (a problem captured in the title of Callinicos' *The Revenge of History*) that they find it difficult to reply without also adopting a distinctly utopian flavour.

Accepting that the 'case for socialism' rests primarily upon the terrain of the past means it is difficult to justify its relevance to today. Unless the need for an alternative system is presented as a response to the problems of our time, we can only confirm the prejudice that Marxism is a force for the dead rather than the living. In short, we need a critique of contemporary capitalism. From this will emerge a Marxism for our own times instead of one suitable for the situations confronting Lenin, Trotsky or Luxemburg.

The first thing to do is to accept that the collapse of Stalinism means we do not have to apologise for ourselves. True, our opponents will continue to suggest that any experiments will lead to catastrophe, and hold up the Soviet experience as evidence that revolution leads to dictatorship. But the force of one historical argument can only fade in relation to the pressing problems facing society in the here and now. There is no more of a relationship between the Russian Revolution and bureaucratic dictatorship than there is between crossing the road and getting run over. It may happen, but does that mean we are to exclude the possibility of reaching the other side? Is it fate, or is there a possibility that human beings have the capacity to change their destiny?

We certainly no longer need self-consciously to dwell upon the limitations of the Soviet experiment to the exclusion of confronting the central problem of modern capitalism. Such an orientation, as is clear with Callinicos' work, can at best lead only to an academic and abstract discussion of the most appropriate forms for the extension of working class democracy, and confirm the prejudice that Marxism is an outlook rooted in the past rather than the present.

Today's radical politics bears more resemblance to a religion than a serious alternative to capitalism. It is appropriate that contributors to these volumes feel able to quote approvingly the words of priests. Bronner chooses Martin Luther King to conclude his volume. Eduardo Galeano adds that 'Jesse Jackson championed the right to dream: "Let us defend that right", he said....And today more than ever it is necessary to dream.' (*After the Fall*, p254). We should remember that it is the slave who is able only to dream. With no prospect of abolishing servitude it is only possible to live a life of freedom in the imagination or the afterlife.

Marxism is not a dream or utopia because it is able to identify the potential for progress in the present, and to isolate the capitalist market as the obstacle which prevents that potential being realised. On that basis it is possible to provide a rather more practical and inspiring vision of a better future than the unappealing world of eco-friendly *Guardian* readers which seems to be the limit of the left intelligentsia's exhausted imagination.

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