

**LIVING**

**MARXISM**

**NO  
CUTS  
IN OUR JOBS  
OR PAY**

US \$5 DM7 FF25  
UK £2 December 1992 No50

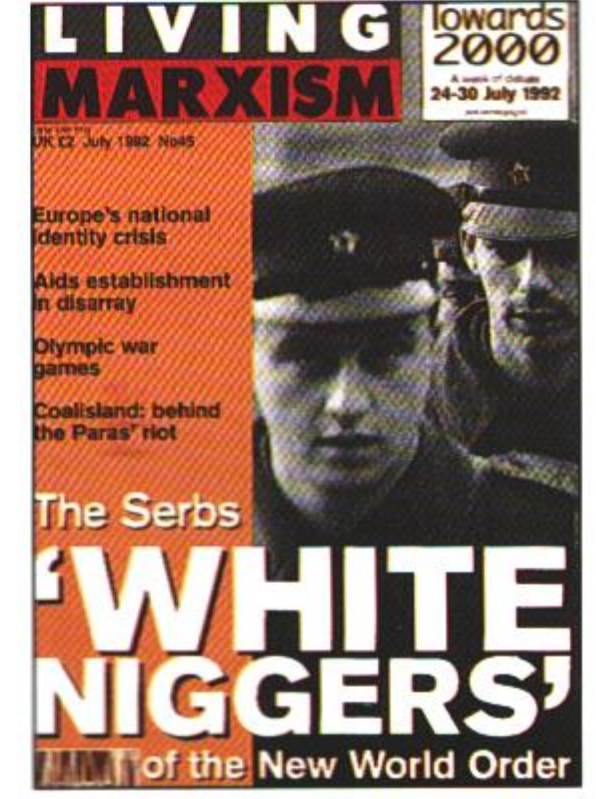
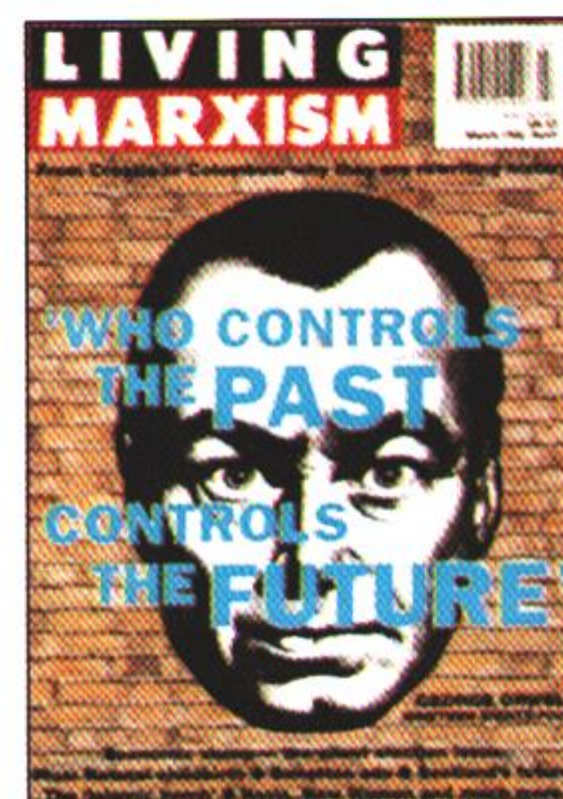
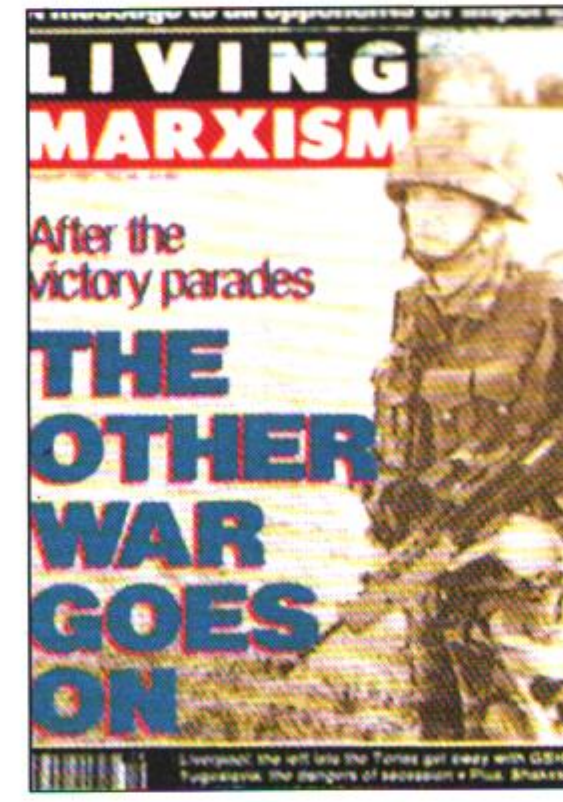
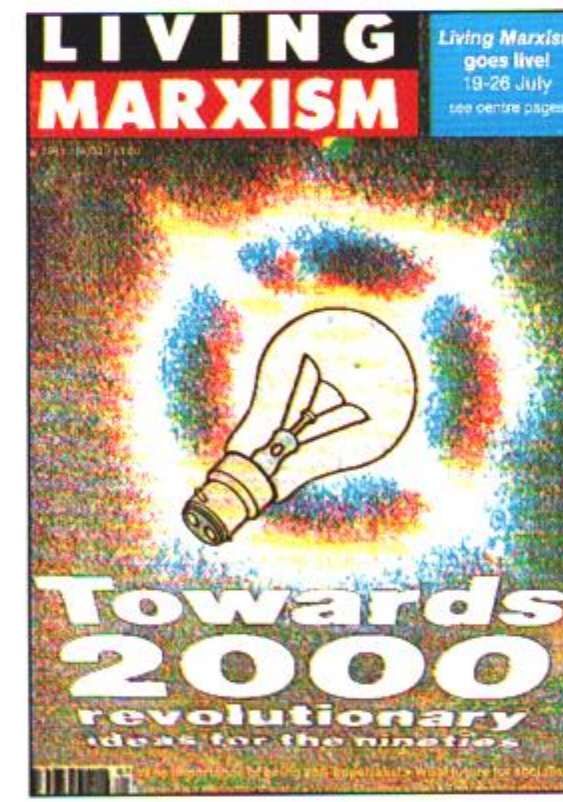
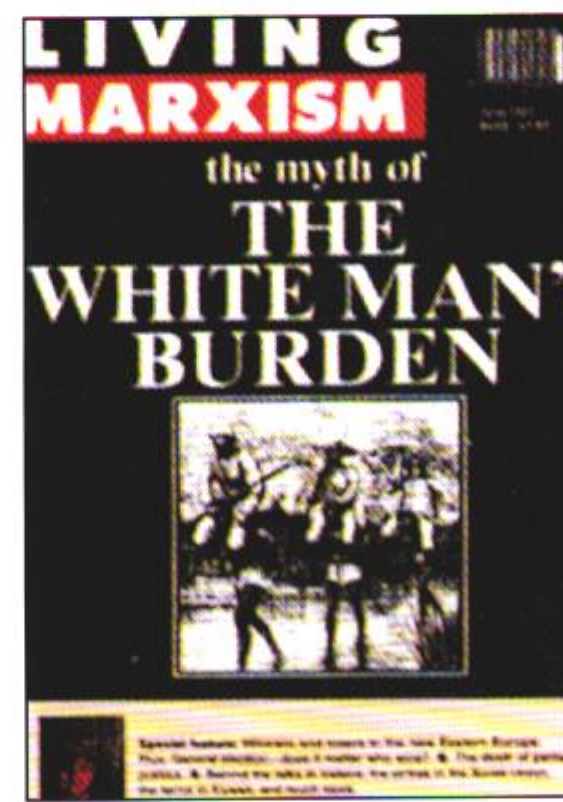
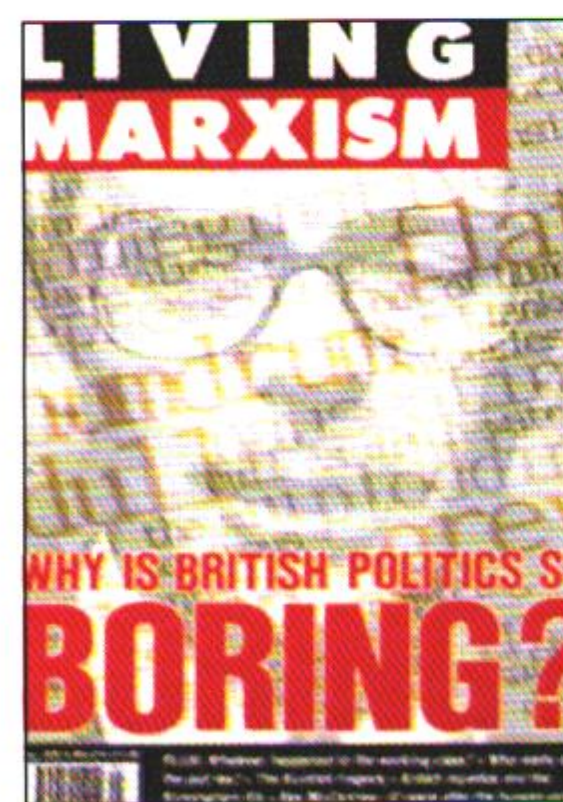
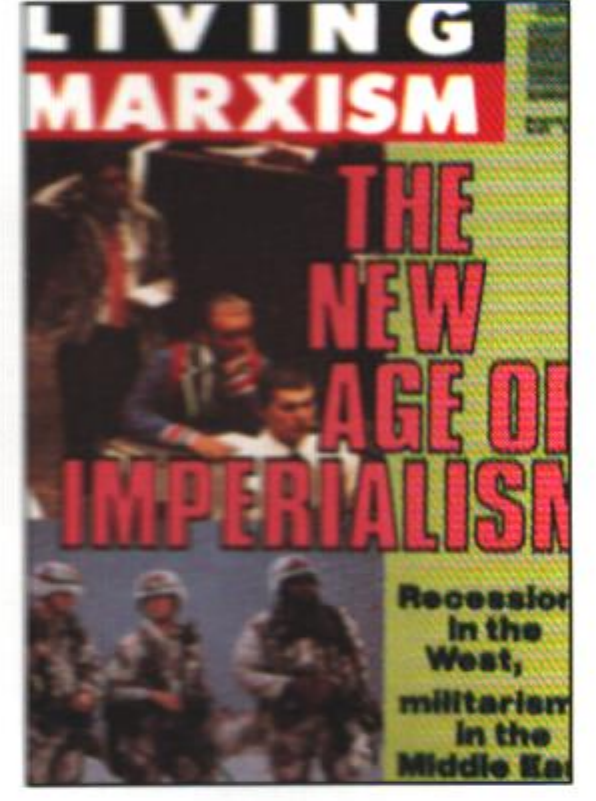
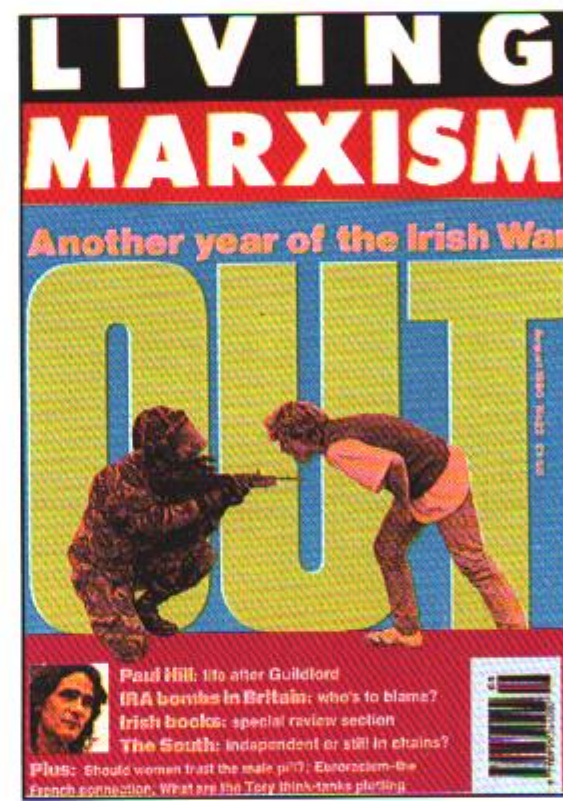
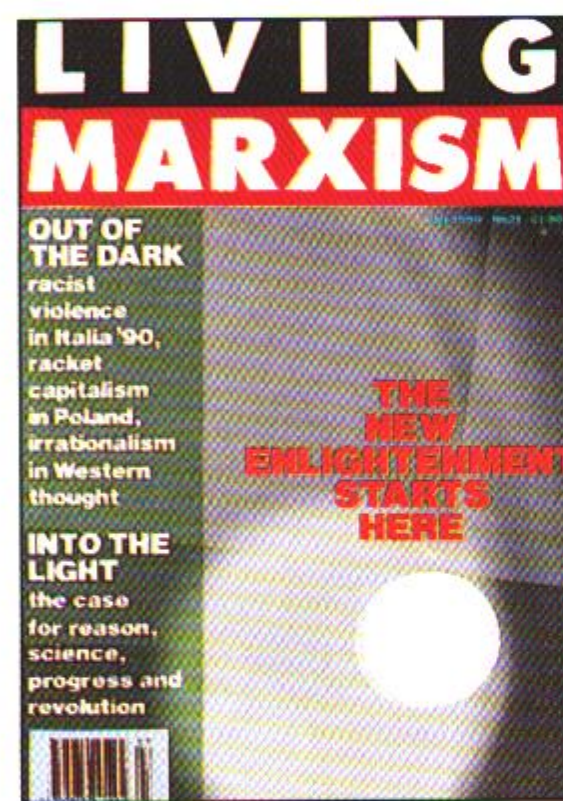
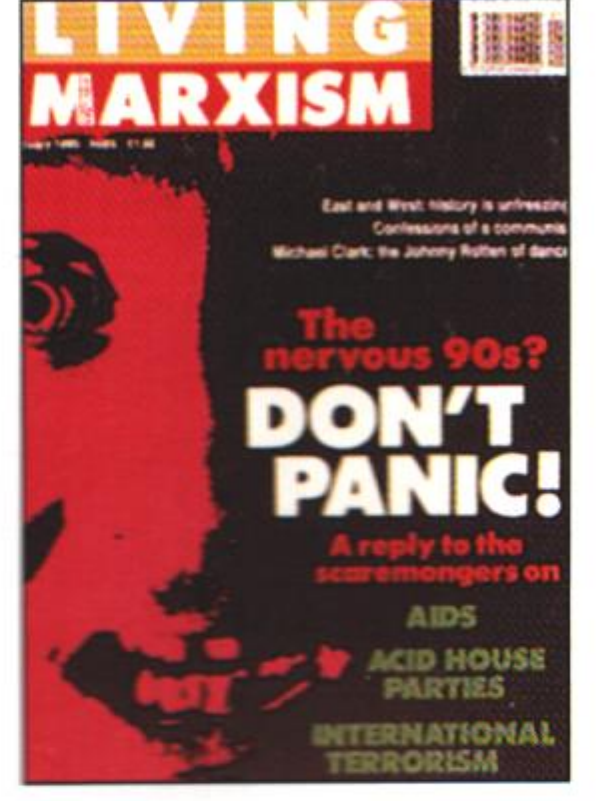
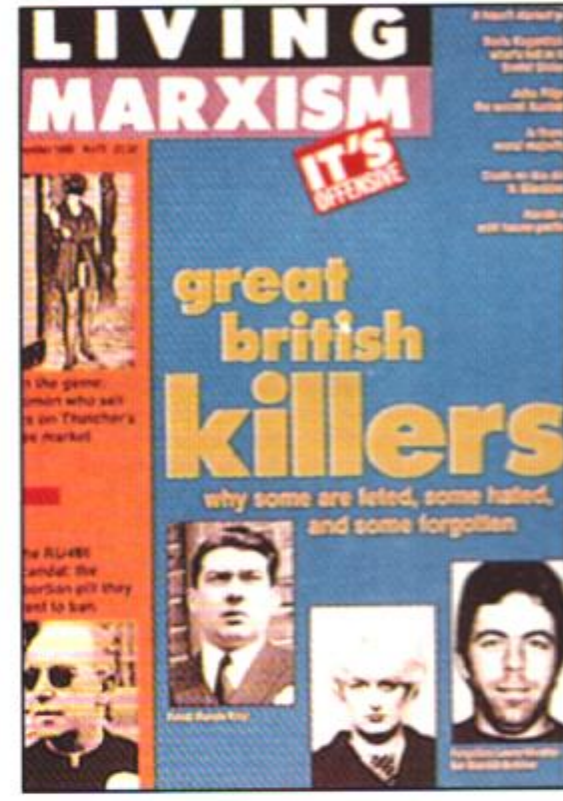
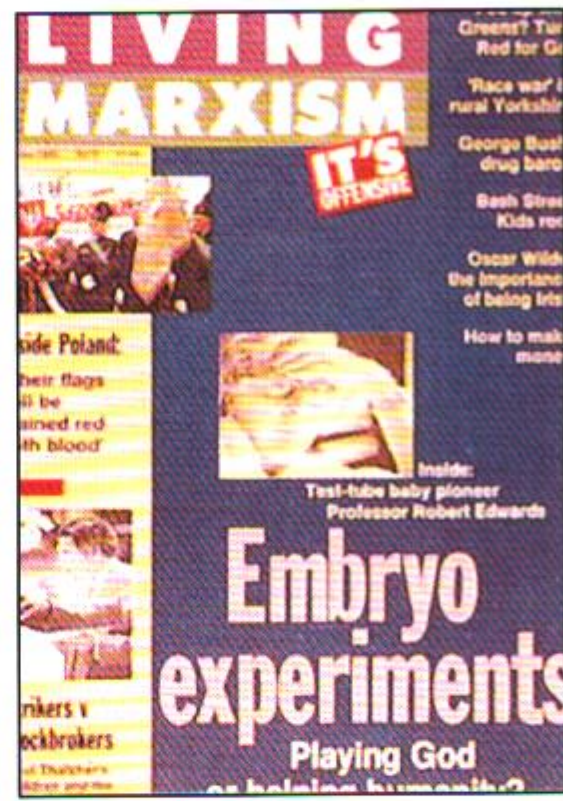
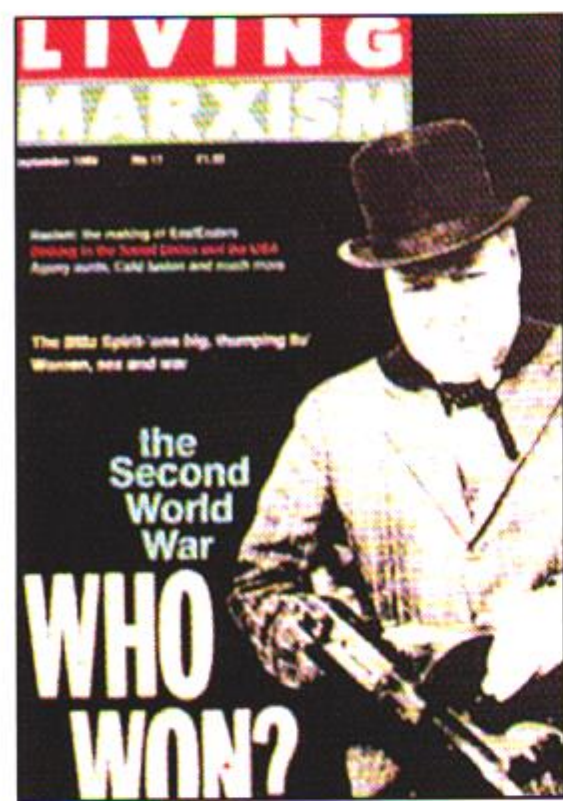
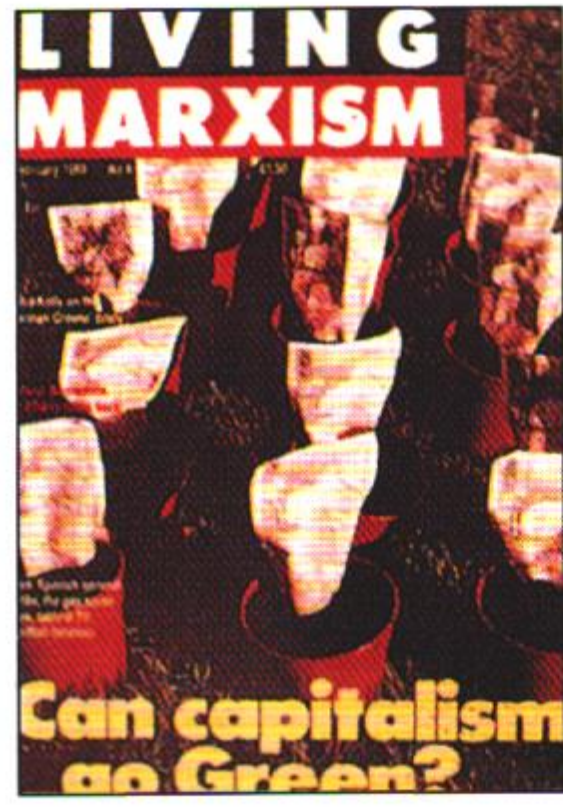
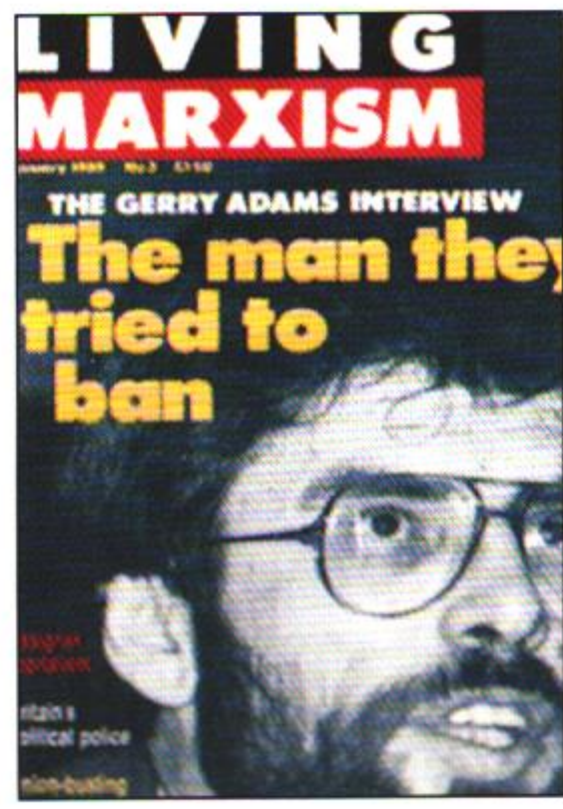
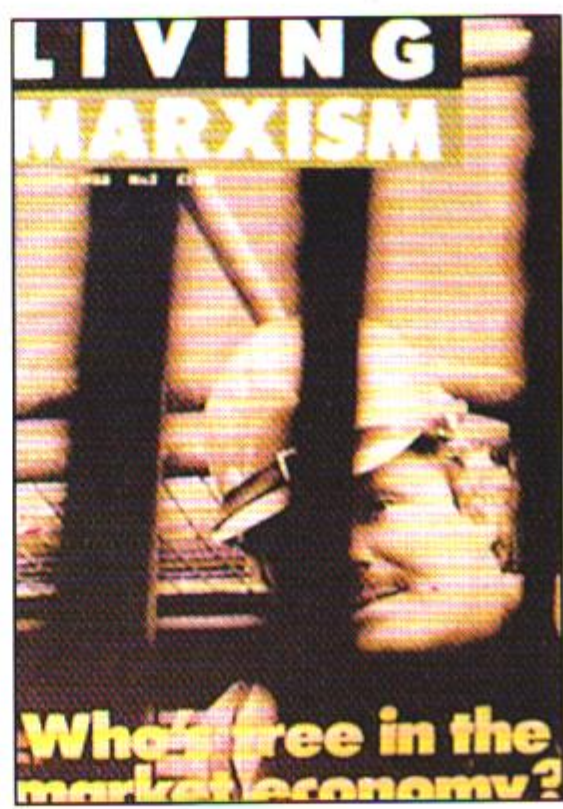
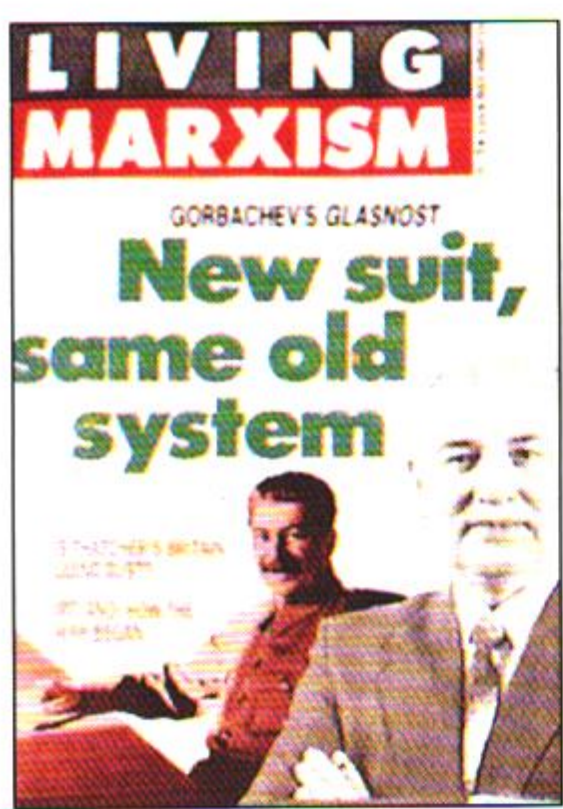
**Popular protests are going nowhere**

**THE MEEK  
INHERIT  
NOTHING**

**Clinton ● Homosexuality ● Asylum  
IRA bombs ● Darwin ● Madonna**









# LIVING MARXISM

# at 50

This is the fiftieth issue of *Living Marxism*.

When we launched the magazine in November 1988, the general opinion was that it wouldn't last six months. Within 12 months, the Berlin Wall came down and everybody agreed that Marxism was dead.

Four years on, *Living Marxism* has proved them wrong, surviving and even thriving in an environment that has seen many older left-wing publications wilt and die.

There are two reasons why *Living Marxism* has made it to 50. The first is you, our readers, who have been prepared to go against the grain and back the magazine. The second is that *Living Marxism* has given you a good incentive to support us, by getting it right about every important development of the past four years.

This fiftieth issue contains some important arguments about developments in British politics. That is a theme which provides an impressive illustration of our record.

At the end of 1990, when John Major replaced Margaret Thatcher as prime minister, many relieved people believed that things must now get better. On the contrary, *Living Marxism* said, 'life under the Major government is going to get even worse than it was under Margaret Thatcher' (January 1990).

When the media commentators finally cottoned on to the fact that we were right, they decided that the

recession meant Major's Tories could not win the 1992 general election. On the contrary, argued *Living Marxism*, 'whenever the general election is, one thing now seems certain; the Labour Party cannot win it' (October 1991).

When the election results proved us right again, the pundits swung to the other extreme and declared that, after four consecutive election wins, the invincible Tories had scaled fresh heights of authority. Wrong again, said *Living Marxism*, 'there are far worse times ahead for the one-party rulers of bankrupt Britain. The new Major government has to manage a historic capitalist slump without any policies of substance or any sense of where it is going' (May 1992). Were we right or were we right?

If you want to stay ahead, you cannot afford to miss the next 50 issues of *Living Marxism*. And the best way to afford them is to take out a subscription (see page 22).

In the meantime, thanks for your support, and have a happy holiday.

**4 Editorial 6 Letters 8 IRA bombs 11 Ann Bradley 12 Quotes of '92 14 US election  
16 Dash to austerity 18 Maastricht and asylum 19 Tory press v Tories 20 BT's redundancies  
23 Trade war 24 Post-Cold War politics 28 Manifesto against Militarism 30 Homosexuality  
33 Darwinism 34 Burt scandal 37 Toby Banks 38 Living: Madonna; Lyndon; Japan  
41 Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV 43 Marxist Review of Books**

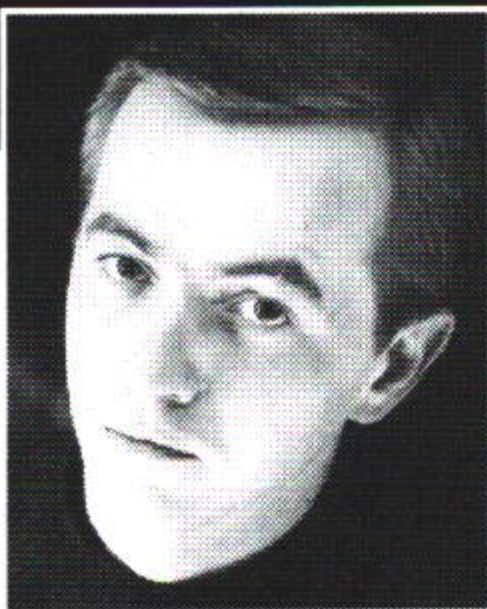
Editor: **Mick Hume** ● Assistant Editor: **Joan Phillips**  
Editorial Assistant: **Tessa Myer** ● International Editor: **Daniel Nassim**  
News: **Andrew Calcutt** ● Living: **Kenan Malik** ● Books: **James Heartfield**  
Design: **Richard Stead, Charles Longford**  
Production: **Michael Kramer, Peter Ray**  
Managing Editor: **Phil Murphy** ● Advertising Manager: **Manda Kent**

**LIVING  
MARXISM**

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

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





**mick hume**

# The meek inherit nothing

**In a year from now, you may well have no job. And even if you have one, you may be paid less than you are today. So what are you going to do about it?**

The 200 000 people who marched in London on Sunday 25 October must have felt that they were doing something about it. But they were led up the garden path. Never has so big a demonstration made such little lasting impact.

They came out in their thousands in the rain, not just to oppose the planned pit closures, but to register their bitterness over unemployment and the economic slump. There was talk of the weakened Tory government being brought down by this huge display of 'people power'. 'Smile, the junta is collapsing' was how one much-photographed placard summed it up.

Then, nothing. The popular rising over the miners issue finished as suddenly as it had begun. Within a week, it was as if that mass demonstration had never happened. The only thing which was collapsing was the infrastructure of the 10 pits which British Coal had gone ahead and closed. The closure of the other 21 pits on the hit-list had merely been postponed for a few short months.

Another week on, and the scenes of 200 000 marching for the miners had been replaced by the image of a single examiner with a gun trying to occupy the doomed Markham Main colliery in South Yorkshire. His desperate solo protest was a grim symbol of how the miners had been left isolated and defeated, despite the wave of public support.

Why did the biggest demonstration

seen in years turn into a case of 'now you see it, now you don't'? How could such a popular protest be so easily contained by such an unpopular government? A lot of people clearly wanted to have a go. But they have been misdirected down a dead-end by the political approach which the campaign adopted.

The latest attempt to defend the miners has failed because it was influenced by the Meek Tendency in British politics, so that the campaign was organised around the politics of appearing pathetic. Unless we come to terms with this mistake, it is likely to be repeated as others look for ways to defend their jobs and pay against the axe being wielded by the government and employers.

The Meek Tendency insists that those whose living standards are attacked should not hit back with anger, but rather should ask for a little compassion. They should respond not as fighters, but as victims; as charity cases seeking to shame the authorities into making some concessions.

The consequence of adopting the politics of appearing pathetic is that you must forget about calling for a solidarity struggle, and set about asking for public sympathy instead. Strikes and other sorts of aggressive action are out. Petitions, token days of protest and well-behaved walks around Hyde Park are in.

The politics of appearing pathetic can seem attractive because they offer the easy option. Following the Meek Tendency's line is definitely the shortest route to creating the appearance of a popular campaign.

Anybody can see that it is far easier to get thousands of people to sign a petition asking for a moratorium on pit closures and an inquiry than it is to start a campaign of industrial action against redundancies. It is obviously a lot more comfortable to join a respectable protest campaign, which is being patronised by the newspapers, than it is to be pilloried in the tabloid press as left-wing loonies and militant wreckers.

There is one slight problem with the politics of appearing pathetic, however; they don't work. A campaign led by the Meek Tendency cannot beat the government and the employers in the battle for jobs and pay. But it can dissipate the anger of those who want to do something about the havoc being wreaked by the slump. That is what happened to the initial wave of public support for the miners.

The recent revolt against the pit closures was fronted by rebel Tory MPs like Elizabeth Peacock, Bill Cash and Winston Churchill, and by Tory papers like the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. They set the 'respectable', Meek Tendency tone of the protests, patronising the miners as keepers of a Hovis-advert heritage and victims of a national disaster, who deserved some more charitable treatment.

Eager to ingratiate themselves with such establishment opinion-makers, the Labour Party and the trade unions fell in behind this moderate approach. The result was the huge but downbeat march in London, which ended with a muted rally at which everybody from Paddy Ashdown and a priest to a representative of the Confederation of British Industry asked for mercy for the miners.



And what was achieved by this inoffensive style of campaigning? In practical terms, nothing. Those pits are still set to close next year. In political terms, the results are even worse.

An outburst of popular anger against the crisis-stricken Conservative government has been constrained within terms set by disaffected Tory MPs and newspaper editors. These people could not care less about the jobs of miners or any other workers. They backed the government to the hilt against miners fighting redundancies in the 1984-85 strike, and have since said nothing while more than 100 000 jobs have been cut in the coal industry. They simply picked up the latest pit closures announcement as a convenient stick with which to beat John Major and Michael Heseltine in their internal Tory Party rows.

When they had achieved their aim of getting the government to repackage its policy, the Tory rebels just dropped the miners' issue and moved on to the next intra-establishment battle over Maastricht. The thousands of angry people who had been used as a stage army by a handful of Tory MPs were left with nowhere to go next. Without a fighting political focus of its own around which to organise, the campaign to defend the miners simply evaporated, and an opportunity to hit back was lost.

When the terms of a campaign are dictated by the Meek Tendency, it will always end in disaster like this. Petitions, opinion polls and polite protests cannot defend jobs and wages against a government which, whatever other U-turns it might make, remains determined to protect the profits of British capitalism at our expense. No group of workers, whether miners or nurses, has ever won anything worthwhile from the authorities through the politics of appearing pathetic and appealing for public sympathy.

## The politics of appearing pathetic don't work

Roy Lynk, leader of the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), had a sudden insight into the way capitalist politics work when he heard the October announcement about pit closures. Lynk had previously been rewarded for his strike-breaking services to the government with an OBE. Now he was to be rewarded in a very different way, by having his Notts coalfield decimated. This just shows, said the shell-shocked Lynk, that if you behave like a moderate 'they treat you like a soft touch'. Which is another way of saying that the meek inherit nothing.

The approach favoured by the Meek Tendency won't protect jobs and pay, yet it is still supported by many people because they can see no alternative. So, when it became clear that the few dissident Tories had 'won' no more than a temporary reprieve for the threatened pits, one Grimethorpe miner interviewed in the press could only conclude that what was needed was more Tory MPs like Mrs Peacock.

The prevalence of these conservative attitudes among miners, who were once Britain's leading trade union militants, bears testimony to the death of the old labour movement. The TUC might still be able to issue a press release calling a march to Hyde Park. But the contrast between the militant, tightly organised trade union demonstrations of the past and the passive, shambolic ramble of 25 October confirms that the TUC is now an empty shell.

The old trade unions have become little more than friendly societies, issuing financial advice and special-offer insurance to their members. They will even sell you

insurance against redundancy; the idea that the unions themselves were supposed to be our insurance against being sacked has long since been forgotten. Even Arthur Scargill's National Union of Mineworkers now eschews industrial action and tries to court public opinion instead—the approach pioneered by its old enemy, Roy Lynk's UDM.

The death of the official labour movement means that, even when people are as angry as they were over the miners, their anger can quickly be dissipated by a handful of Tory rebels. Many feel alone and powerless in their protests. Yet we have the power to do something positive, if we can throw off the politics of appearing pathetic, and get organised together for a proper fight with the government and the employers.

Our collective fighting strength is the only defence we have against the wave of cuts in jobs and pay. To be effective, any campaign will need a cutting edge of industrial action that can hit them where it hurts. It is no good looking to the old labour movement to lead such action; we might as well ask the churchman on the Hyde Park platform to summon up an act of God to save us. Instead, those of us who can see the need for more than a mass walk in the rain are going to have to take matters into our own hands.

If we don't get ready to fight now, we could all be for the chop. That is the blunt message which needs to go out loud and clear as the Tories try to put many more in the same boat as the miners. This is no time for acting like sheep, disaster victims, vicars or any other members of the Meek Tendency.

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, write to Penny Robson, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (071) 375 1702.



## The miners and the ballot

Re your comments on 'The pits' (November). I played a very active part in the 1984 miners' dispute both as an individual and because my brother spent the whole strike on strike. Scargill was right not to ballot on strike action. If he had, the vote would have been 'no'. He didn't lose the strike, his enemies and so-called allies won, if that's the word. If the whole movement had backed the miners, they would have won even without the scab Notts miners and their friends. What Scargill said was right. He is now said to be not so militant. I would say he is wiser now, not less militant.

Nothing has changed. Pits have closed, some privatised and even more than planned will close before '93 is out. Communities will die—the Welsh valleys have, garden festival or no. Social unrest will rise. For all Scargill's and the NUM's faults in the past, this country needs them both, because no single person or union can galvanise the country as he and his union can. I remember my grandfather started work at 14 in the mine, walked over two miles to work and back each 12-hour shift for 50 years, sometimes working in seams no more than a foot high.

We as a movement need Scargill and the NUM (not the UDM who knew the score in '84 and are now bleating that the Tories have done the dirty—what can they expect?). I say more power to Scargill and the NUM. Without them there would be no opposition to the three Tory parties we have in the House of Commons. But let's have some more passion, confrontation and anger on marches.

**Paul A Hinge** *Gwent*

It is strange to still be reading 'if only...'s after 13 years of Thatcherism. The contents page leader 'The pits' closes: 'if [the NUM executive] had called a ballot in Spring 1984, and let miners campaign for a united national strike, they might not be in this mess today.' This seems a 'might' hopeful.

Say there had been a ballot with a heavy vote for the strike nationally, but little enthusiasm in Notts, would this have been enough to prevent a breakaway? Would the TUC have delivered a general strike? Would Ramsay MacKinnock have arrived to address the South Wales miners? Would liberal opinion have turned out to be worth a toss? Would Norman Willis have—well, would Norman Willis have done anything? I don't think so.

The miners' strike demonstrated the fatal flaws in the Labour Party and labour movement. Seven years on, *Living Marxism* should stop denying the logic of its own arguments about these bodies.

**Paul Farmer** *Cornwall*

## Queer subversion

Hugh Mitchell and Kayode Olafimihan declare that 'queer tactics serve only to raise hostility and further isolate lesbians and gays' ('A queer view', November 1992). This seems an extraordinarily conservative point of view. Indeed, whether the authors intended it or not, their argument can easily be interpreted as a plea for lesbians and gays to accommodate to lifestyles judged acceptable by straight society.

The entire article was shot through with a tone both snide and superficial. It is all very well to say that lesbian and gay identities are not enough to change everything. But we have to start before we can finish. Queer politics is our starting point, because it is a confrontational declaration of a lifestyle which is outside the norms of the straight world; and by celebrating the outside, we are subverting what's inside.

After a queer cinema all-niter, or a carnival like this year's Pride, I feel confident and in control. I get the impression that Mitchell and Olafimihan actually enjoy feeling powerless and dominated.

**Gerry Clarke** *Hammersmith*

## The trouble with history

I agree with the three main points in Frank Füredi's article on 'Cleansing the Holocaust' (October), about the rewriting of history, the cleansing of the Holocaust, and the demonising of the third world. But this process is risky for the establishment.

If the Holocaust does become a topic of discussion, it is possible that capitalism's growth into fascism is exposed, not hidden. And there is a danger in labelling every barbarism around as a holocaust and every bad man as a Nazi. If Yugoslavia is a holocaust, what was Vietnam? Moreover the establishment can come unstuck by misappropriating words and concepts, which are so inapplicable that people question the authority of those who deploy them. The left does not help by its own use of the word Nazi as a swear-word. How long will it take for the Tories to be called Nazis and mass unemployment to be called a holocaust?

It is a bit restricted of Füredi to talk of the rewriting of history as peculiar to the present. Accurate history is a rarity, as he well knows. The masses are ignored in much historical writing, which is largely about generals, politicians and businessmen. I doubt that the process of rewriting going on today is qualitatively different from long-established practice. What is different is how much more today the establishment needs a cohering moral and ideological platform.

I think Füredi is in error when he argues that

liberal ideology after 1945 constituted a compromise by the right, which led to moral uncertainty. It is more accurate to say that economic expansion after the war fostered liberal ideas in the establishment and undercut the need for stringent authoritarianism. Rather than a period of moral uncertainty it was a period of moral change. The old ideas were no longer adequate to the new conditions.

**Jon Proctor** *London*

## What's new in the Irish War?

Kenneth May (letters, November) is quite right to criticise the knee-jerk, misty-eyed nationalism of James Lynch (letters, October), and to argue that 'times move on'. Unfortunately though, Ken's pitch for democratic common sense repeats the same narrow focus upon the most superficial aspects of the Irish conflict, but from the opposite end of the spectrum.

We 'must build on our present foundations', says Ken, rather than some imaginary Gaelic past; quite so. Perhaps we should start with this year's Fair Employment Commission report, which shows the labour force of Harland & Wolff as 94.3% Protestant, with 549 appointments in the previous year, 95% of whom were Protestant. In other words, the sectarian bias became more, not less, pronounced.

Or perhaps we should dwell on the Brian Nelson case, which highlighted the fact that British security forces effectively run Loyalist death squads, and have done for years. Colin Wallace, who is in a position to know, points to numerous examples which confirm this, including the May 1974 bombs in Dublin and Monaghan, which killed 33 (*London Review of Books*, 8 October 1992).

Such examples, and there are many, have one common factor. The British government has a vested interest in propping up the rotten foundations of a state which can only survive by granting marginal privileges to one section of the population and oppressing the rest. This is the reality of the present foundations, and it needs to be thoroughly excavated in order to allow for time to move on.

**Steve Bowler** *Belfast*

## Reactions to race attacks

Andrew Calcutt's report on the hypocritical condemnation of racial attacks by the establishment (November) stands in marked contrast to the reaction of the authorities in the north east.

In late August, Asian pensioner Mr Khoaz Miah was brutally beaten to death when walking the few yards from his home to pray at the Newcastle mosque. The next day the local rag, the *Evening Chronicle*, headlined the attack as 'City gangs clash'. The Asian 'gang' apparently



referred to his family and friends who came out of the house to care for him.

The police officer in charge denied there was any evidence of a racial motive despite a spate of attacks on Asians in the area that evening. When the police finally got to the scene, racist youths were taunting the family, shouting 'is he dead yet?'. The police made one arrest of a young Bengali for not leaving the area.

Far from expressing mock revulsion at the attack, the main concern of the local media and dignitaries was the need for calm in the Asian community which, the *Chronicle* editorial said, should 'not blow the matter up out of all proportion'. In the north east there is hypocritical concern for victims of racial attacks, but only if they are living in Germany. You get short shrift if your assailants happen to be Geordies.

Dave Clark *Newcastle*

### Rolling with the slump

If the economy is a roller-coaster, the unskilled section of the working class have long realised that they have the front seat. The complacent climb of consumerism is long past. The first terrifying drop into unemployment and debt is a vague memory. Now, as the semi-skilled and professional sections plummet off the top, there is nothing that the operator, the government and the bosses, can do or say to stop the ride. Nor, sitting in the last car, can they get off.

First they slashed wages. Many professionals have taken cuts of £2000 and more. Then they slashed jobs. One company of architects paid off 195 of its 200 staff. In desperate attempts to slow down the ride, contracts have been quoted at a loss, builders are literally giving houses away, engineers and surveyors are closing down the 'non-profitable' areas of their businesses. To no avail. Private housing developments lie half-empty, building sites sit half-completed and engineering firms merge, shedding half the jobs. The quoted figure of 60 000 unemployed in the building trade, like the 2.9m generally, does no justice to the reality.

As the fat cats console themselves with huge pay rises, the government consoles itself with the belief that the lead car is on its way up

again. Those in the front are the only ones who know the truth. It's a long way down and we ain't stopped yet. It's gratifying to know that the last car drops the fastest and always offers the most terrifying ride.

A Paterson *Glasgow*

### Alger Hiss and Horatio Alger

I find it difficult to accept Graham Bishop's argument that the Western was an 'Alger Hiss story with a six-gun' ('How the west was unmade', November). Hiss was a former state department official and then president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was named as a communist during the McCarthy witch-hunts and was eventually convicted of perjury after conducting his legal defence. While red-baiting and frame-ups played a large part in the class relations of the 1880s, Alger Hiss' frontier connections are even less substantial than George Bush's links to Texas.

One suspects Bishop was referring to Horatio Alger stories, morality tale dime novels based on how clean living and thrift lead to the fulfilment of the American Dream. The common factor among Alger's characters was their instinctive restraint and hard work leading to upward mobility and a place in the sun. The Alger legends today provide a cultural resource for racism through invidious comparisons between Korean immigrants and the 'black underclass'.

Perhaps Graham Bishop should go gremlin-shooting with Clint Eastwood before he next ventures out into the Living section.

G Barnfield *Leicester*

### The use and abuse of science

John Gibson's article looks at the rationale behind the right's attack on 'scientism' as being an attack on reason as opposed to faith ('The scapegoating of science', October). This is true; however 'scientism' has played a more important role than just being the receptacle of reason.

Science is charged by the right as having strayed into areas to which it is unqualified. They have a point. With the erosion of

the authority of postwar social institutions, it was fashionable to answer social questions, not with political or moral answers, but to leave it to the 'objective' authority of science. From social planning to morality, scientists and the medical profession were called in where the politicians and clergy could no longer comfortably go.

The same issue of *Living Marxism* contained an excellent example. Ann Burton describes the 'clinical and ethical decisions' a doctor makes in denying an abortion. The 1967 Act recognised the insufficiency of the old religious/moral code and handed authority to the doctor. Although the medical profession can still be relied upon to restrict women's access to abortion, it does so in the name of scientific ethics, rather than the holy scriptures.

The current project of the right is to revive respect for those discredited institutions and attack past concessions. To do so, they turn history on its head—the scientific veneer, covering up an authority vacuum, becomes the 'expansionist power' of science. This is a dangerous game. Scientism allowed establishment values to persist when the establishment's authority was at an all-time low. There is no guarantee that their authority can be revived.

Craig Barton *Lewisham*

### Bob, Bill and Norman

Did anyone else notice the remarkable similarity between Bob Dylan's 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' and one of the discs that Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf shared with Sue Lawley on his Desert Island? Could this mean that the protest songs which marked Dylan's entrance onto the music scene 30 years ago may have failed to shake the pillars of the American establishment to their foundations? Surely not. Or is it the case that first the Pentagon and now the White House have been infiltrated by the sixties counter-culture? What with a general who singsalongs Bob and a president-elect who may have smoked dope (but didn't inhale), Pat Buchanan's cultural warriors had better get a move on, or the recipe for Mom's Apple Pie will be destroyed forever.

Richard Jeffries *Harlow*

## We welcome readers' views and criticisms.

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



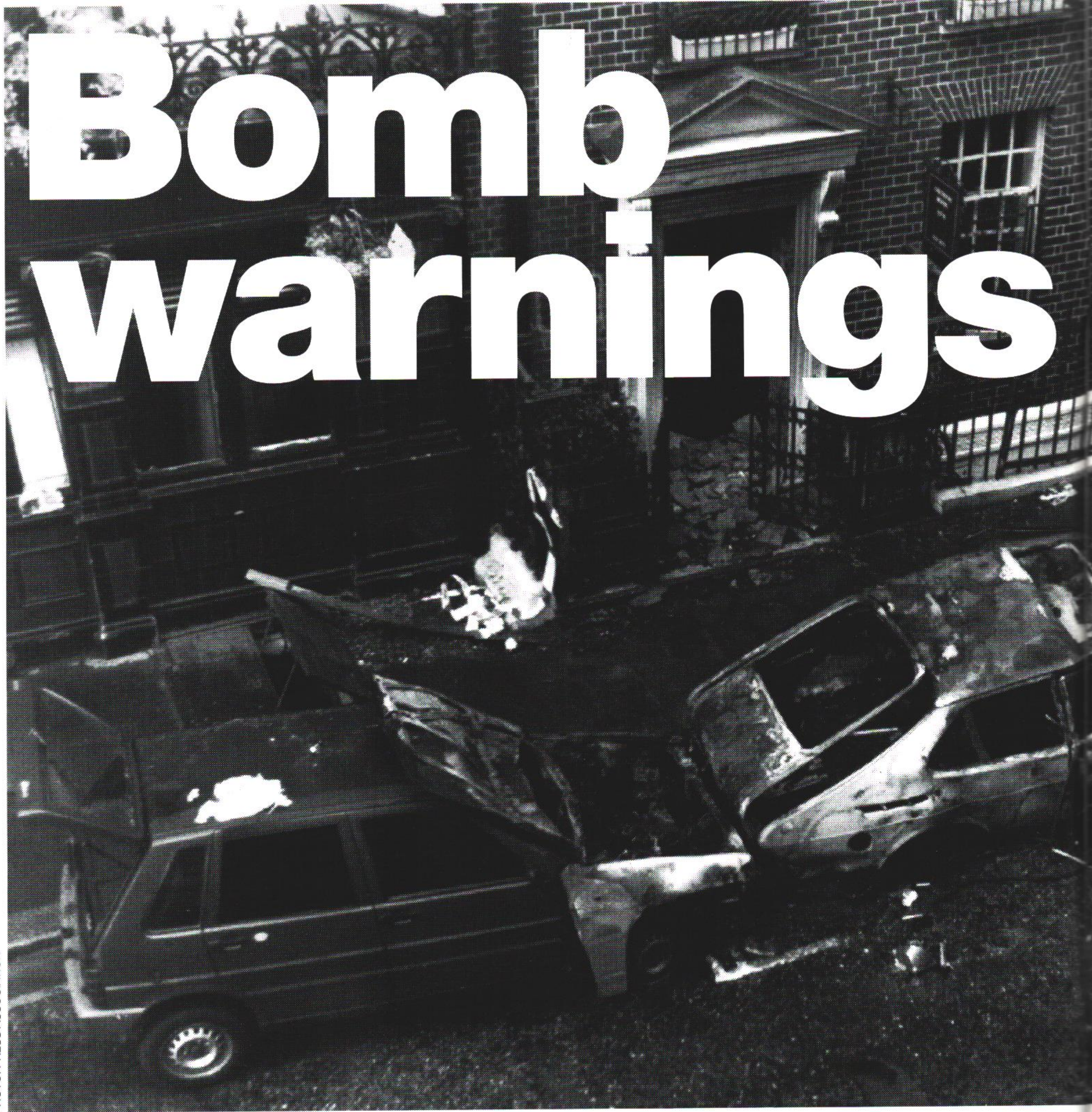


PHOTO: PRESS ASSOCIATION

# Bomb warnings

The recent spate of IRA bombs in London raises serious questions about the broader direction of the Irish republican movement today, argues Mick Kennedy

In the month of October some 15 explosions in London were attributed to the Irish Republican Army. Only one—the bomb at the Sussex bar in Covent Garden, which led to one fatality and several serious injuries—caused major casualties. The rest were mostly small bombs left on streets, railway lines, in rubbish bins or outside buildings. They caused relatively small-scale local damage and some traffic disruption.





'The cost of Britain's occupation of Ireland has once again been carried to the doorstep of the aggressor', claimed the republican movement's newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News (AP/RN)* in its front-page celebration of the IRA's London bombing campaign on 15 October. Yet, by comparison with past IRA campaigns in Britain, the current campaign has a number of distinctive characteristics.

First, most of the targets seem to lack any clear focus. In previous campaigns, IRA units have usually attacked military or political targets—particularly barracks, regiments or individuals linked to the British occupation of Northern Ireland. Though there have been occasional disasters leading to civilian deaths, in general IRA actions have been clearly directed against the British establishment and its representatives. Operations such as the bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the Conservative Party conference in 1984 had a dramatic impact in bringing the Irish War home to British people.

Many of the targets of the recent bombs have no military significance and no discernible relationship with Ireland. Some—a Territorial Army barracks or a British Legion club—have only a remote connection. Disruptions to rail, tube and road traffic scarcely stand out from the familiar day-to-day chaos that now characterises the capital's transport systems.

### Whodunnit?

When *AP/RN* observes that the Sussex bar is next door to Stringfellows nightclub and 50 yards from the Garrick club, this seems only to underline the rather trivial nature of the target. In the past when a bomb went off, people in Britain knew it was the IRA straight away because of the target selected. Nobody except Irish republicans blew up British Army barracks. Now, by contrast, Londoners puzzle over whether the latest dustbin explosion was the work of the IRA, the animal liberation front or some terrorist or criminal group. Blowing up a minicab outside the Downing Street security barriers is the closest the October campaign came to a traditional IRA attack on a symbol of the British state.

The second distinctive feature of the current bombing campaign is the lack of any significant chauvinist response in British society. In the seventies and eighties, IRA attacks in Britain generally provoked a ferocious reaction, carefully promoted by establishment politicians and the media. Bombings causing civilian casualties resulted in a particularly intense outpouring of anti-Irish hysteria, which had a widespread popular resonance. The introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) after the Birmingham pub bombings of 1974 provided a permanent framework for mobilising anti-Irish prejudice in response to every upsurge in IRA military activity in Britain.

The recent bombing campaign produces routine, almost token denunciation from politicians, cursory newspaper and television reports and virtually no popular interest. Most

Londoners have come to regard IRA bombs as a nuisance on a par with leaves on the line or suicides on the tube. Irish people still experience prejudice, and the PTA is still used to intimidate potential sympathisers with the liberation struggle, but anti-Irish responses are now much more subdued compared to the hysteria of the past.

The third distinctive feature of the current campaign is the way in which it appears to diverge from the course being taken by the struggle in Ireland itself. In the past there was generally a close link between bombing campaigns in Britain and developments in the war in Northern Ireland.

For example, the first bomb attack in Britain—carried out by the old Official IRA at the barracks of the parachute regiment at Aldershot—followed shortly after the massacre of 14 civilians by the paras in Derry on Bloody Sunday in January 1972. Again the Brighton bombing took place after a summer of open conflict between republican crowds and British forces on the streets of Northern Ireland; the IRA declared that the Tory conference bomb was a response to the deaths of 10 men on hunger-strike three years earlier.

The current campaign appears to have no direct relation to events in the North. There the military struggle has reached something of a low ebb in the past couple of years. Much of the IRA's activity seems to have been restricted to defensive actions, punctuated by occasional gestures of defiance like a spectacular bomb in Belfast or an audacious sniper attack in South Armagh.

### Peace talks

For its part, the leadership of the republican movement in Sinn Fein now constantly emphasises its commitment to a negotiated settlement. Its current strategy is codified in the document *Towards a Lasting Peace*, which appeals to the British government to recognise Sinn Fein as a legitimate participant in talks. Towards this end, republican leaders have engaged in a series of discussions with the leaders of the moderate Catholic SDLP as well as with prominent church figures.

The chimerical character of the republican movement is illustrated in the 15 October issue of *AP/RN* that celebrates the bombing campaign on page one. This front page also advertises a three-page interview with Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams. Throughout that interview Adams never mentions the bombing campaign, but emphasises once again his commitment to a negotiated solution to the Irish conflict.

Adams appears to believe that there is a fresh opening through which Sinn Fein could gain access to peace talks, since he judges that the British ►





government is now under renewed pressure to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. This, however, is surely a serious misreading of the new international situation opened up by the end of the Cold War.

In fact, now that separatist conflicts are breaking out all over Europe, and the USA is preoccupied with its own decline, Britain is under less international pressure over the war in the North of Ireland than at any time in the past 20 years. Indeed the British authorities have used the eruption of national and ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe, and the widespread calls for Western intervention, to bolster their own spurious claim to be playing a 'civilising' role among

## Popular liberation movements are being defeated through government-backed 'peace processes'

the 'warring tribes' of Northern Ireland.

Adams also justifies his enthusiasm for negotiations with the argument that 'from South Africa to Palestine we are witnessing the beginnings of what could become processes for democratic resolution of these conflicts'. On the contrary, in these two cases, and elsewhere in the third world, we are witnessing the defeat of popular liberation movements through the device of government-backed 'peace processes'. The longstanding leaders of those movements, such as Nelson Mandela and Yassir Arafat, now risk being integrated into thoroughly undemocratic resolutions of these conflicts, often imposed by Western powers from without.

The talks which the British government has initiated with all of the Northern Ireland parties except Sinn Fein have similar motives to the bogus 'peace process' being pursued in South Africa or Palestine. The aim is help the authorities defeat the Irish republican movement, not to reach an accommodation with it.

As Adams asks that Sinn Fein be granted a place at the British government's negotiating table, and plays up the prospect for real peace talks, the warning signs should be flashing. The danger is that, despite the extraordinary and heroic resilience which the Irish republican movement has displayed against the might of the British state for more than 20 years, it now risks being dragged into some form of British-imposed solution.

So where does the current London bombing campaign fit into the strategy

of *Towards a Lasting Peace* and talks with Presbyterian ministers?

The front-page celebration of the bombing campaign indicates that such military activities strike a popular chord in places where *AP/RN* is sold—in the pubs and clubs of Catholic West Belfast, Derry and the Border areas where the experience of the British occupation is immediate and intense. Meanwhile, the republican leadership is looking for a solution to the conflict, not through mobilising those who support the struggle, but through seeking intermediaries to the British government, whether in the form of clergymen, diplomats or politicians. There is clearly a conflict here, which is reflected in the rather defensive tone of the Adams interview in relation to Sinn Fein's diplomatic policy.

Some have suggested that the tension between the IRA bombing campaign and Sinn Fein's diplomatic initiatives could explain why many of the London bombs have hit targets that are low profile, to say the least. One seasoned observer of Irish affairs thinks that the republican leadership is doing a difficult balancing act.

'It looks as if they want a British bombing campaign that does enough to keep the folks back home happy and keep Ireland in the newspapers', he suggested to *Living Marxism*, 'but that at the same time doesn't do anything too drastic which would scupper what they see as their chances of talks.' Whether or not that is an accurate assessment, there are clearly new problems for those who oppose British rule in Ireland to consider today.

## The right to fight

What can we say about a bombing campaign which seems to choose most of its targets at random, and proceeds in isolation from, if not in contradiction with, trends in Ireland? In the past, it has never been appropriate for supporters of the cause of Irish freedom in Britain to criticise IRA bombings. This stance had nothing to do with the virtues or otherwise of the particular tactics employed. The point has been that, in the prevailing climate of intense anti-Irish chauvinism, any criticism from the left could only reinforce such prejudice. In these circumstances, nothing could have been gained by supporters of Irish freedom appearing to echo the popular anti-IRA rantings of British politicians and the media.

British socialists who have joined in the chorus of condemnation of particular IRA tactics over the past 20 years have effectively denied the Irish liberation movement the right to fight for freedom as it sees fit. Incapable of challenging British chauvinism on this issue, many on the left have proved unable to render

their professed solidarity with the Irish cause anything more than a sentimental gesture. Those of us in Britain who have consistently refused to criticise the IRA have experienced intense hostility, not least from the rest of the British left.

Today, some important principles remain unchanged. It is still the case that all of the deaths and destruction connected with the Irish War are the ultimate responsibility of the British authorities. Their occupation of a part of Ireland started the conflict and sustains it still. At its simplest, if there were no British guns in Belfast, there would be no Irish bombs in London. And it is still the case that the people fighting for liberation must decide upon what methods they use to achieve it. Those who live under military occupation cannot be denied the right to use force in their efforts at resistance.

## A change of climate

However, some equally important considerations *have* changed, both in Britain and in Ireland, and supporters of Irish freedom should point a few things out.

Within Britain, anti-Irish chauvinism is now at a relatively low ebb, reflecting the fact that the current Irish struggle does not pose the same threat to the establishment as it has in the past. British people are not more sympathetic to the Irish liberation struggle; they are just less bothered about it. This change of climate makes it possible to conduct a more critical, public discussion of developments in the republican struggle, without the same fear of fanning the flames of anti-Irish chauvinism.

This change of climate coincides with the dangerous developments outlined above in the republican movement's political thinking and tactics. The leadership of the republican movement is now seeking negotiations with the British government, on terms which could only be to the disadvantage of the nationalist people of Northern Ireland. In this context, it must be said that a bombing campaign largely directed against trivial targets in Britain is unhelpful to the cause of freedom, and a distraction from the real issues at stake.

When so much confusion abounds about the true nature of the New World Order, it is important to draw these criticisms to the attention of anti-imperialists in Britain, Ireland and elsewhere. In today's peculiar conditions, the cause of winning support in Britain for self-determination in Ireland is best served by making such points candidly.





# I'm for Frankenstein's baby

**A** brain-dead pregnant woman placed on a life-support system until her child can be born alive has caused a political storm, which has united feminists and religious bigots and left anti-abortion groups not knowing which way to turn.

Marion Ploch, aged 18, was killed on her way to work in a car crash in October. Her death certificate has already been filled out. But the 13-week old fetus survived the crash unharmed and doctors at University clinic in Erlangen, Germany, are intending to keep Marion's corpse functioning artificially until it is sufficiently developed to survive outside the womb. At this point, expected to be next March, the baby will be born by Caesarian and its mother's life-support will be turned off.

It's not the first case where a woman has been kept alive to have a child, but it's the first time it's been tried from so early in the pregnancy. In Finland in 1984, Marko Ylitalo's mother was kept alive artificially for 10 weeks before he was born. In Britain, too, Deborah Bell was on a life support system for five weeks in 1986 before her daughter Nicola was born, but doctors avoided controversy by postponing tests to confirm that she was dead, so they could avoid the completion of a death certificate.

Doctors say it's technically not too difficult. As long as blood circulation through the womb is adequate, oxygen and carbon dioxide levels controlled and nutrients maintained, the pregnancy should progress—but until it's been tried, they'll never really know.

The case has provoked outrage, uniting opposition across the political and social spectrum. Nobody except the doctors seems to be in favour of the 'heroic intervention'. Opinion polls in the German yellow press showed that 80 per cent of readers thought that the life-support should be turned off. There have been abusive phone calls and letters to the clinic, accusing doctors of 'Nazi-style' experiments to produce 'Frankenstein's baby', and the clinic walls have been daubed with graffiti.

Senior figures in the Free Democrats, members of Germany's ruling coalition, have described the procedure as an 'intolerable perversion of humanity'. The president of the Catholic doctors' association in Germany has condemned the use of the woman as a 'breeding machine' and the Social Democrats have called for an emergency parliamentary debate on 'post-human motherhood'. Women's rights groups argue that the decision to sustain the pregnancy has reduced women to the status of mere 'baby machines', and that Marion's right to a dignified and peaceful death has been denied.

Personally, I'm on the side of the doctors. I'm sure critics are right when they claim that the doctors are motivated by a desire to experiment rather than by compassion—but so what? Medical science still has a lot to learn about fetal development, and if this can provide some answers that will be of benefit to pregnant women, so much the better. Marion is beyond caring what happens to her body.

My only reservation about the 'Erlangen Baby Case' is the consequences it may have for *living* pregnant women.

Professor Scheele, the responsible consultant, has justified his actions with the argument that the fetus, 'was life. We couldn't and simply shouldn't have pulled the plug'. It remains to be seen what consequences this approach will have, as the German parliament braces itself this month to review its abortion law yet again.

If it is accepted that Marion's baby has a *right to life*, then the argument that women have the right to end unwanted pregnancies will be severely dented.

Fortunately, perhaps, the anti-abortionists have been loath to take this approach. In both Germany and Britain, the supposedly absolute moral principles about the 'right to life of the unborn' are less than absolute when they conflict with other traditional values. Those who argue that abortion is unnatural, a sin against God and a medical aberration, are somewhat flummoxed by the fact that in this case the maintenance of fetal life depends on 'anti-natural' intervention.

It's a sign of the anti-abortion campaign's unease that in Britain the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC)—who never usually miss the chance of a headline—has declined to comment on Marion Ploch. It seems rather sick that SPUC is so coy in this case, where everyone concerned wants the outcome to be a healthy child, when it has no compunction about trying to force pregnant women to have babies that they don't want.

I find no contradiction between supporting doctors striving to push back the frontiers of medical science, conceding to the desire of the prospective grandparents to raise their dead daughter's wanted child, and supporting the rights of living women to end unwanted pregnancies. Marion is dead and her body no longer has any rights. Her fetus will not acquire any rights until after it is born. No action in respect of either of them should be allowed to prejudice the situation of living women. But neither should mystical notions of what constitutes life and motherhood be permitted to interfere with potentially useful medical developments. ●

**M**ale rape 'could happen to any man, any time' according to the *Independent*. I don't think so.

To read the papers over the past few months, you might imagine that London in general, and the Underground in particular, is full of rampant homosexual men, possibly riddled with HIV, forcing 'respectable' citizens into 'unnatural' acts at knife-point.

Perhaps it's a little cynical to imagine that the sudden concern about 'male rape' is a way of culling more funding for the Met. No doubt its new Male Sexual Abuse Project, training 26 officers to act as 'chaperons' to help male rape victims is motivated by genuine concern.

My genuine concern is that the impression left by the salacious reporting of this newly discovered crime leads the world to believe that a straight guy on the Underground has more to fear from sodomites than a gay man has to fear from queer-bashers. ●





**Bosnians 'tortured with batons and fed to dogs'.**

*Times* front page, 7 August

She may have had a gentle face and been a pretty young woman, but the 18-year old Serbian would laugh in pleasure as she used broken bottles to gouge the eyes from Bosnians at the Luka concentration camp in Brcko.

First sentence of *Guardian* story, 7 August

**Almost all massacre reports in Bosnia's ethnic conflict have come from second-hand sources or from individual refugees and have been difficult or impossible to verify independently.**

Oh, by the way...last line of *Guardian* story, 12 August

**Scores of hungry Bosnians queuing for bread in Sarajevo were killed or wounded yesterday when mortars fired from**

Pouring in food to relieve immediate distress will prolong the pain of adjusting to free market economics.

Advice from the *Times* on famine in Africa

We have to do away with the old idea that strikers are national heroes, fighting for a free Poland against communism. Poland is now a normal country. Strikers' right to wave the national flag really ended with the first free elections.

Polish deputy premier, Henry Goryszewski

**The Stasi were guarantors of social peace.**

Peter Michael Diestel, leader of Brandenburg Christian Democrats

**In South Africa rioters regard the cool water as welcome relief.**

Lieutenant-General J Swart (Internal Stability) on the joys of being water-cannoned

**The market system is in fact characterised by a highly developed but decentralised**

**Serb-held positions overlooking the city slammed into a crowded marketplace.**

*Guardian*, 28 May

UN officials and senior Western military officers believe some of the worst recent killings in Sarajevo, including the massacre of at least 16 people in a bread queue, were carried out by the city's Muslim defenders—not Serb besiegers—as a propaganda ploy to win world sympathy and military intervention.

*Independent*, 22 August

**Belsen '92**

*Daily Star* on Serb camps

**To call the camps 'concentration camps' is a minimisation of Nazi concentration camps, because not even the gulag camps could be compared with the Nazi camps.**

Veteran Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal

planning system, which successfully manages productivity processes and service functions within the chosen area of activity.

The ANC discovers capitalist planning

**As the troopers of the 18th cavalry took back the streets of Los Angeles street by street and block by block, so we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.**

Republican Pat Buchanan declares 'cultural war'

**The lawless social anarchy we saw in Los Angeles is directly related to the breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility and social order.**

Dan Quayle

**As you know, I planned a trip out there for some time, so it fits in very nicely.**

George Bush on his post-riots visit to Los Angeles

**I have opinions of my own, strong opinions, but I don't always agree with them.**

George Bush

**If people don't work, if they can work, they shouldn't eat.**

Bill Clinton

**A man who can smile in your face while he pisses down your leg.**

Bill Becker, head of the AFL-CIO, on Bill Clinton

**It has been an honour to be your grain of sand in this process.**

Ross Perot on 19 per cent of the presidential vote

**We both have our problems.**

Princess Diana empathises with a male client at a counselling centre

**The freedom to which these 'hippies' aspire is not the freedom of mankind in a civilised society. It is the freedom of bandits or wild animals.**

Auberon Waugh

**Fear of damnation was a message reinforced through attendance at church each week. Loss of that fear has meant a critical motive has been lost to young people when they decide whether to try to be good citizens.**

Education secretary John Patten

**We shall fight and win this election.... It is time for Labour.**

Neil Kinnock launching his election campaign

**John Major last night caught the unmistakable whiff of election defeat and the looming prospect of a Kinnock government.**

*Guardian* political editor Michael White, April-fooled by the polls, 1 April

**So long John. It was nice knowing you.**

Sarah Baxter in the *New Statesman*, which came out the day after the election

**He should have been a candidate...in Wolverhampton, where his colour would have been more appropriate.**

Former Tory mayor Dudley Aldridge endorses Cheltenham's doomed black Tory candidate John Taylor

**The Revolutionary Communist Party has produced its analysis of the general election. Working on the good old Marxist principle that every cloud has a silver lining, it concludes that the Tories are facing 'a major crisis of confidence' and will be hit by 'fragmentation' as the recession turns to slump. Oh dear.**

*Sunday Times*, May

**Oh, what a shambles!...[the government's] authority was shaken and its lack of political astuteness laid bare. For three days last week, effective power passed to the 1922 executive committee of Tory backbenchers....Not a single minister challenged the *Sunday Times* survey that said recession was turning into depression.**

*Sunday Times*, October. Oh dear



**This department is about the people who are currently in work.**

Employment secretary Gillian Shephard shuns the jobless

**With the election behind us, with confidence coming back, Britain's economic future is certainly brighter.**

Norman Lamont, 13 May

**John Major has embarked on an economic strategy designed to see the British pound replace the German mark as the hardest and most trusted currency in the European Community.**

*Sunday Times*, 2 August

**There are going to be no devaluations, no leaving the ERM.**

Norman Lamont, 26 August

**It's a cold world outside the ERM.**

John Major, 10 September, less than a week before Black Wednesday

**There is no question of any change in the central parity of the pound against the Deutschmark.**

Norman Lamont, 13 September, three days before Black Wednesday

**Lamont pound victory: the chancellor won a spectacular victory over the Germans last night...should ease pressure on the pound in currency markets...a major boost for Mr Lamont.**

*Daily Express*, 14 September, two days before Black Wednesday

**Consumers and businessmen can now wake from that nightmare and start getting on with the job again, confident of eventual recovery.**

*Times*, 15 September, the day before Black Wednesday

**The government has concluded that Britain's best interests would be served by suspending our exchange rate membership.**

Norman Lamont, 16 September, Black Wednesday

**History is just a series of unique events.**

Norman Lamont, October

**The *Sun* salutes John Major as he heads back to Downing Street.**

10 April

**U TURN-IP**

The *Sun* salutes John Major, 28 October

**If the royal family doesn't change many aspects of its style, it will simply disappear, like its relations did across the Continent.**

Harold Brooks-Baker of *Burke's Peerage*

**Our minds are not closed and the mines are not closed.**

John Major postpones the cutting of 30 000 miners' jobs

**Against the background of the market, we are quite clear that unless the market**

**changes, these collieries will close.**

British Coal chairman Neil Clarke tells a commons committee what the result of the government's 'full and open' inquiry will be

**We can't afford to have people lingering around [in hospital] for a recuperative holiday.**

Health minister Virginia Bottomley

**A cheap and cheerful service at one moment in the day for typists, and perhaps a more luxurious service for the civil service and businessmen.**

Transport minister Roger Freeman's plans for railways in the classless society

**Waiting for the world economy to recover is beginning to feel like waiting for Godot.**

*Barclays Economic Review*

**No, I have no regrets....My method and evidence have not been discredited.**

Dr Frank Skuse, home office forensic scientist whose evidence helped convict Judith Ward and the Birmingham Six

**The blokes would go the full whack of eliminating these people if they could get away with it.**

Former British paratrooper on Irish people in Coalisland

**Shoot first, ask questions later.**

*Sun* editorial after the arrest of five Irish people later released without charge

**It's always difficult making predictions, especially about the future.**

Sir Charles Powell, former adviser to Margaret Thatcher

**One does not wish to have homosexuality in the armed forces, particularly across the ranks.**

Andrew Robathan, Tory MP

**It's all about saving human life.**

Merseyside chief constable Jim Sharples on police use of guns

**Economical with the truth...shot through with corner-cutting and expediency.**

Chief Inspector of Police Sir John Woodcock on police procedures

**I can't see the sense in it really, as it makes me a Commander of the British Empire. It would have been more sensible to make me a Commander of Milton Keynes. At least that exists.**

Spike Milligan

**That's fine phonetically, but you're missing just a little bit.**

Dan Quayle tells a schoolboy to spell 'potato' with an 'e'

**These filthy books don't do any good.**

Barbara Cartland on Madonna's *Sex*

**Fuck off.**

Paul Gascoigne's 'message to the Norwegian people'

What they said in '92

Compiled by Andrew Calcutt



## Nancy Morton advises her fellow Americans not to believe the hype about Bill Clinton's presidential victory

Let's get a couple of things straight. Despite what the media says, Bill Clinton has not won a popular mandate for any radical programme of change. Nor is he about to lead America into a new golden age. Things will be different: but for many Americans, life under the Clinton presidency is likely to be even harder than it was under George Bush.

Clinton's success in defeating the Republicans was a big breakthrough for the Democrats, who had won only one of the previous six presidential elections. However his much-vaunted 'mandate for change' looks shaky, even in narrow electoral terms. Despite the highest turnout of voters since 1972, 45 per cent of eligible adults—some 85m people—didn't bother to take up the offer. America has the highest abstention rate in the industrialised world.

### Mr 24 per cent

Among those who did vote, Clinton won 43 per cent compared to the 57 per cent who voted either for Bush or Ross Perot. That gave the Democratic Party's president-elect the support of under 24 per cent of those Americans eligible to vote. It was hardly a popular landslide.

If the electoral arithmetic doesn't quite sustain Clinton's claim to a popular mandate, the notion that his political programme captured the hearts and minds of the American people is entirely unfounded. Clinton did not win a positive endorsement. He won because many Americans (including those backing Perot) voted negatively, against the incumbent Bush and the Republicans.

Why did so many people reject Bush this time around? All of the pundits seem to agree that the depressed state of the American economy was the major factor. 'It's the economy, stupid' read the legend hung

on the wall of Clinton's campaign HQ. This was partly a response to Bush's attempt to revive the glories of the Gulf War in the early stages of the presidential race, and partly a reminder to the Clinton camp to focus their attack on the issues of jobs, bankruptcies, healthcare and pensions. Everybody now says that this was the key to Clinton's success, as Bush paid the price for presiding over a slump.

The recession has indeed had a devastating impact on the US economy and the lives of many Americans. Yet why should this necessarily lead them to vote for Clinton? As John Major can testify, an economic slump is no reason why the leader of a traditional conservative party should lose an election, particularly when his opponent offers no distinctive alternative policy in the economic sphere.

### No more Cold War

Over the past two decades, many Americans who were worried about the economy would have been more likely to trust the Republicans to turn things around. The most important change this time was not in the economy, but in politics. The Republicans have lost the political authority and coherence which made them pre-eminent in recent times. That was why people's economic fears took the form of an anti-Bush vote. This political shift is largely a consequence of the end of the Cold War.

Cold War ideology created the political framework within which the Republicans could easily defeat the Democrats in the last three presidential elections. First Ronald Reagan and then George Bush was able to polarise debate around a package of issues, like crime, terrorism and Soviet expansion, which were all underpinned by the 'us and them' mentality of Cold War politics. The result was to put American

liberals on the defensive, and distract from other domestic problems such as poverty and unemployment. The Democrats were routed.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and crumbling of the old world order has changed all that. It means that an issue like the economic slump is more likely to be seen in its own terms, rather than being distorted through the prism of Cold War politics. The Republican Party's capacity to win by polarising things in the old way, around the old issues, has been badly undermined.

Contrast the fate of Bush's propaganda campaigns in the 1988 and 1992 elections, and the change of climate becomes clear. Four years ago, the Bush campaign went for Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis in classic baiting style. Bush declared war on 'the L-word'—liberal—while the infamous advertisements about Willie Horton depicted Dukakis as soft on black rapists. Bush won easily.

### No New Deal

This time, when the going got rough, the Republicans tried a similar line of attack. Clinton was portrayed as a womaniser without 'family values', as anti-American, as a man with past links to the Kremlin and the KGB. But it made little impression in the polls. The Republican right launched its 'cultural war' to try to recreate the atmosphere of the Cold War. It only succeeded in making the Republicans seem ludicrous and out of date, and in alienating the uncommitted. Where Dukakis had been crushed by the power of Cold War politics, Clinton emerged as the first post-Cold War president of the USA.

It is important to appreciate that Clinton's victory reflected a negative reaction against the remnants of the past, rather than a positive endorsement of his plans for the future. Those who



# Why Clinton

# WON



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

Americans in London overcome by the excitement of election night

claim that he has won a popular mandate for his policies of radical change miss the point about how little Clinton has promised to do for the majority of American people. His commitment to salvaging American capitalism from the slump means that, for millions, the future looks even grimmer than the present.

Clinton's vague programme of economic action and welfare reform has been hailed by many as a model of how government intervention can combat the slump. Clinton's 'New Covenant' has been carefully named to conjure up images of the New Deal with which Democratic president Franklin D Roosevelt sought to end the Depression of the 1930s. But the comparison stops at the word 'new'.

FDR's New Deal involved a massive injection of state funds into the American economy, at a time when government investment on such a scale was unheard of. Even that was insufficient to cope with mass unemployment and poverty. Clinton's pale imitation can achieve far less today.

The proposal to spend \$20 billion

a year for four years on infrastructure investment might sound impressive. But \$20 billion will add just *one per cent* to the massive total which the US authorities already spend in a year. It is hard to see why that relatively small shot in the arm should make much difference to an American economy which is already doped up to the eyeballs with state spending.

Clinton's spending plans are held in check by the massive government budget deficit, which is currently adding another \$325 billion a year on to a total debt of some \$4 trillion. The president-elect has pledged to halve the deficit in four years. Whatever new spending there is will go to help business. The American people, meanwhile, are in for hard times of austerity and cutbacks.

Clinton's approach to welfare sums up his economic priorities. He denounces the idea of 'government handouts' and says that 'if people don't work if they can work, they shouldn't eat'. His plan is that people should get low-paid job training and welfare money for no longer than two years. After that, they have to find a job. If

they cannot, their money will be cut off, and they will be press-ganged into a 'community service' labour scheme.

Clinton's emphasis on individual responsibility has more in common with Reaganism than with traditional Democratic liberalism. He asks Americans to be concerned about 'not just placing blame but...assuming responsibility'. In other words, it's down to the individual to pull himself up. This theme runs through all of his vague policy statements to date.

Clinton's education plans include fining parents who don't attend the regular meetings of their Parent Teacher Association. He would link college loans to community service, and plans a sort of domestic task force to deal with teenagers who drop out of school. In his home state of Arkansas, this 'help' involved prohibiting drop-outs from getting a driver's licence, something tantamount to making it impossible for them to earn a living. The bottom line in Clinton's America is that if you can't get a job, or your children get a poor quality education, it's largely your own fault.

## Bad to worse

Much has been made of how Clinton's relative youth, his baby-boomer sensibility and his talented wife, Hillary, will make for better government. But remember how Bush was going to create a kinder, gentler America post-Reagan, or how that nice Mr Major was going to change Britain for the better after Margaret Thatcher? In reality, the combination of economic slump and political exhaustion today ensures that, regardless of the personalities involved, every capitalist government makes things even worse than its predecessor. America is certainly in for some changes under Clinton. But they won't be what the pundits expect. ●



## The government has a range of new economic policy options, says Phil Murphy: it can cut, or cut, or cut again

**I** feel more uncertainty about the real state of our economy than at any time I can remember', somebody said in November. Coming from the man in the street, this view would be a revealing enough comment about the current crisis and the anxieties it is causing. What makes these words more significant is that they were uttered by Robin Leigh-Pemberton, governor of the Bank of England.

Leigh-Pemberton's candid expression of doubt says something about the extent to which British capitalism is now out of control. When the country's No1 banker is reduced to a sigh of despair along with the rest of us, the economy really is rudderless. The Tories and their allies have no ideas about how to cope with the slump.

### 'Dash for growth'

This sense of impotence in senior establishment circles is the backdrop against which to view the Tory cabinet's fabled economic U-turn and new 'dash for growth' policies. The fact is that the possibilities for any government to intervene and kick-start an economic recovery are extremely limited today. Across the capitalist world, governments are trying all kinds of conventional economic policies: cheap money in America, a strong currency and high interest rates in Germany, fiscal expansion in Japan, etc. Yet everywhere the world is sliding deeper into slump.

It's not exactly the same the whole world over: matters are much worse

in Britain. In the two countries with the strongest productive base, Germany and Japan, the governments can at least try to manage the impact of the crisis, and use their greater economic resources to give a boost to recession-hit industries.

However, in the more decayed and weaker economies like Britain, government 'strategies for recovery' are as effective as blowing in the wind. About the only thing in their power is the capacity to make things worse. It is quite conceivable that John Major could do something stupid to trigger off, for example, a financial collapse in the banks; or that Norman Lamont could keep interest rates higher than is necessary and help push more indebted businesses to the wall. But this ability to make the slump worse is not matched by any capacity to influence things in the other direction.

### Hotch potch

Over the past 20 years British governments have tried just about every policy in the economics textbooks: interventionist and free market; monetarist and fiscal; supply side and demand side; floating currencies and fixed exchange rate systems. Some of these policies did a little to slow down the pace of economic decline for a while, others were just ineffective, and some could never go beyond the stage of rhetoric. The end result is that Britain's real economy is weaker than in 1970, both in absolute terms and relative to the rest of the industrialised world.

Today many experts are calling upon the government to revive one or another of those past policies. But yesterday's economic doctrines were not just retired to the shelf, ready and waiting to be picked up and used again at some future date. They were dropped because they weren't working any longer.

Keynesian policies of state-financed expansion were tried in the Tories' short-lived 'Barber boom' in 1972 and later by the 1974 Labour government; they failed to regenerate the economy and were abandoned. Next, monetarist policies of tight

financial control were tried, first by Labour premier James Callaghan and chancellor Denis Healey from 1976, then by Margaret Thatcher and her chancellor Geoffrey Howe between 1980 and 1982. They also failed and were abandoned.

Nigel Lawson's 'do anything' pragmatism came next. He reduced sterling, raised sterling, cut interest rates, raised interest rates; this ended in the ignominy of another recession from 1990. Then the Tories tried to hitch a ride with Germany by joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System in 1990. September's sterling crisis and Britain's withdrawal from the ERM represented the latest reversal in the long list of failed and abandoned policies. Each time a government policy collapsed, the remaining options were more restricted, and policy became more reactive and more desperate.

Nothing has happened to stabilise the British economy so that the old policies could somehow work more effectively now. On the contrary, the slump means that such attempts to tinker with the workings of capitalism will make even less of an impact. So if all the traditional economic policies have failed, where does the Tory government go from here?

### Dynamic duo

The dynamic duo of Major and Lamont will be more circumspect than the governor of the Bank of England about admitting their helplessness in the face of slump. But after the experience of the past few months, they must sense that they have no real policy choices left. The Tory leadership would prefer not to mention the economy at all, but to prattle on about Maastricht or something else instead.

However, with everybody else talking about the economy, the government has to say something. Hence the Tories pontificate about new 'policy' plans and even admit to supposed U-turns. In other times this would be a big embarrassment for a government. Today they would rather get people to think they are changing course on the

# Dash





economy than come clean and admit that they cannot really control or determine anything.

More importantly, all of this talk of U-turns and new policies represents a rhetorical device for implementing cuts and other austerity measures at the expense of working people. When the Tories promise new policies, they are giving notice that the screws are about to be turned. There will be no U-turn when it comes to attacking jobs and living standards—especially through cuts in state spending.

Here is a brief guide to what the Tory government's recent economic pronouncements really mean for those on the receiving end.

● **'Going for growth'** This means that the government wants people to know that it shares their aspirations for a stronger economy—but it wants them to understand that austerity has to come first. In November, when trade union leaders had their first meeting with a chancellor for five years, TUC sources said government and unions were now starting to 'talk the same language'. As they talk the common language of growth, it is certain that one thing which won't be growing as a consequence is our standard of living.

Up to now, living standards for those in work have generally continued to rise. Even some welfare benefits have been index-linked to inflation. The authorities have maintained public sector employment and some state-backed private employment to prevent a return to unemployment of 15 or 20 per cent. All of these hangovers from the postwar era are now set to go. The abolition of the wages councils for two and a half million low-paid workers, a few days after the TUC/treasury 'meeting of minds', is a sign of what is on the cards. Much worse is to come.

● **'Controlling public spending'** This means reducing the burden which state spending imposes on private capitalists. Government spending is financed either from taxation, which comes out of company profits, or by borrowing, which will have to be repaid with future taxes from future profits.

The government cannot take positive action to revive the profitability of British capitalism. But it can take the negative step of axing a few billion from welfare spending, to reduce the drain on corporate profits.

● **'Curbing the rise in the public sector borrowing requirement' (PSBR)** On present plans the PSBR will easily exceed £30 billion this year and will be in the region of £40 billion next year (this time last year their projections were for only £10 billion and £19 billion respectively). To limit the soaring national debt, and the government's interest payments, the Tories will have to raise taxes. And they will do their best to ensure that it is the employees rather than employers who pay the extra.

The government may raise national insurance contributions and, despite previous pledges, it is conceivable that it will raise income tax and VAT again. In normal economic conditions, an increase in the tax which workers pay is usually passed on to the employers by way of higher wage settlements. But in today's climate of austerity, wage freezes and pay curbs, things will be different. Higher personal taxation will hit our pockets rather than business profits, and help to fund state expenditure at the expense of falling living standards.

● **'Safeguarding capital spending'** This means that the government may throw a few billion into construction contracts which boost private businesses. More importantly, it is a way of saying that some public spending—capital spending—is okay. But a lot of it—current expenditure—is a luxury that must be cut back. This little 'luxury' just happens to encompass the bulk of government spending: the running costs of the health and education services, the public sector wage bill, social security and welfare payments.

So far the government has got away with presenting talk of an economic U-turn as if it means an early Christmas for us all. But in this sort of Christmas we have as much interest as turkeys. ●

PHOTO: THE GUARDIAN

# to austerity



# Maastricht: a bullshit issue

**D**espite all the heat and thunder generated by the Maastricht treaty, the debate is not what it seems. Both for the British establishment and the British people, Maastricht is not the issue.

The Maastricht treaty has become the latest focus for the disputes inside the British establishment. The economic and political crises confronting the government are causing fissures in the Tory ranks on all sorts of issues. Maastricht has provided one more pretext for the government's critics to wash the Tories' dirty linen in public.

In itself, the debate about Maastricht is

lacking in substance. Home secretary Kenneth Clarke's admission that he had not even read the treaty indicates that there is no great issue of principle involved. This is confirmed by the regularity with which so many politicians have changed their positions on this matter—from cabinet ministers to Tory rebels and members of the opposition.

In so far as the Maastricht debate holds any significance, it is a symbolic one. The real issue at stake for the British establishment in its relations with Europe is not this or that clause of the Maastricht treaty, but the decline of Britain as a leading international player. Yet this problem is

not being fought out in the open, because the authorities cannot look it in the face. Instead, a manufactured debate is taking place about Maastricht.

Maastricht should also be a non-issue for ordinary people in Britain. The details of the treaty are the last thing keeping most of us awake at night. While ministers prattle on about Maastricht, the really important issues are hardly being debated. It is redundancies, unemployment, wage freezes, spending cuts, mortgage payments, and housing repossessions that really make a difference to our lives.

Whatever happens to the Maastricht treaty, and regardless of what arrangement the British government has with Europe, these problems will still be with us. It is worth recalling that, when Britain joined the ERM in 1990, John Major said it would mean holding down wages and cutting public spending. Since Britain left the ERM in September, Major has emphasised that it will mean...holding down wages and cutting public spending further still. In or out of Europe, for or against Maastricht, the working class gets the short straw. ●

# Asylum: a real one

**U**nlike the Maastricht treaty, the Asylum Bill is a real issue. Yet it has generated none of the sound and fury of the debate about Europe.

The Asylum Bill has been used by the government as a sweetener to try to make its critics

fall into line behind Maastricht; the idea being to stress that the government will not be making any concessions on immigration at a time when Europe's borders are likely to become more porous. In this sense, it too has become a focus for settling disputes within the establishment.

Unlike Maastricht, however, the Asylum Bill is going to have serious consequences for all sorts of people. It will make it harder for asylum-seekers to come to Britain, and easier for the government to deport them. People detained by the authorities will have only two days to lodge an appeal. People who travel through other countries before reaching the UK will not be able to apply for asylum here in any circumstance. All those applying for asylum, and their children, will be fingerprinted on arrival. The law will also remove rights of appeal from all visitors and many students.

Some have suggested that the Asylum Bill will not make much difference, because the main laws controlling immigration to Britain have been in place for a long time. But any curtailment of the rights of immigrants and refugees to enter Britain is insupportable. Once we concede the state's right to impose even the most tinkering restriction, we have lost the argument.

More importantly, by initiating a debate about bogus refugees, the government is creating a climate in which immigrants are seen as a drain on resources at a time when resources are already stretched to the limit.

When government ministers attach the label of 'scrounger' to refugees and immigrants to Britain, it is hardly surprising that others draw the conclusion that they are fair game. Afghan refugee Ruhallah Aramesh, beaten to death with iron bars by a gang in Thornton Heath in the summer, was a victim of the racism which has been given an official stamp of approval by the anti-immigrant debate around the Asylum Bill (see 'In the shadow of the Asylum Bill', *Living Marxism*, November 1992). It is a matter of fact that every time the authorities introduce a new piece of anti-immigrant legislation in parliament, the number of attacks on black people rises. ●



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER



# A 'dog bites dog' story

Tessa Myer watches the Tory press attacking the Tory government

**'D**ear Mr Major, *do you have a plan to get us out of this bloody mess?*'—*Sun* editorial.... 'When are you going to resign, you hopeless little git?'—*Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn on Major.... 'The chancellor is wrong. The government is wrong.'—*Daily Express* editorial.... 'This government is losing its marbles.'—Bernard Ingham, *Daily Express*.... 'Mr Major...looks weak. He is weak.'—*The Times* editorial.... 'The people are 'lions led by donkeys''—*Sunday Telegraph*....

A measure of politeness and servility is the usual tone adopted by the Tory press in its coverage of the Tory government. But no more. During the rows over everything from the miners to Maastricht, relations degenerated into a slanging match. Normally, when the Tory Party blames the media for its troubles, it's the BBC that gets the flak. This time Tory MPs are turning on their fair-weather friends in the newspapers.

The Tory press has been accused of worsening, if not causing the splits within the government. Fighting for his political life, David Mellor cried out 'who decides who should be a member of the British cabinet—the prime minister or the editor of the *Daily Mail*?' (*Daily Mail*, 25 September). He blamed the crisis on 'a barrage of tabloid stories'.

The fact that editors from the Tory tabloids to the *Times* are lashing out against the government's lack of leadership shows the scale of crisis within the British establishment. Gentlemanly rules between Tory Party HQ and editors' offices have been rewritten as a string of four letter words. The Tory press has become the Tory Party's worst PR agent—and they know where it hurts.

However, the response by the Tory press to the government's political incompetence has been as confused and troubled as the Tory Party itself.

The *Sun* has revealed its utmost contempt for John Major's gutless leadership by presenting him as a root vegetable on the front page, under the heading 'U Turn-ip'. This is the newspaper that originally championed the Tory Party agenda in the eighties and reserved its turnip jokes for England football manager Graham Taylor when England lost to the Swedes.

The *Sun* now champions the small man against insensitive government policies. 'Newspapers are the voice of the people.' (*Sun*, 24 October) 'We fight for your rights', proclaims the newspaper that has previously agreed with the government that unemployment is a price worth paying for Britain. These days, the *Sun*

often sounds as if it is setting itself up as an alternative to the Tory Party. Perhaps Gary Bushell will run for the leadership next time.

The Tory papers have been flailing about as wildly as Tory MPs for something meaningful to say. While criticising government policies, the *Daily Mail* is involved in U-turns of its own. It regretted that 'Lamont will have to go' (2 October), then two weeks later congratulated the chancellor, who had followed the *Mail*'s advice to cut interest rates. The *Mail* can no longer even whip up enthusiasm for the Citizen's Charter, which it hailed as a visionary manifesto during the election campaign. Now it asks, 'What is the use of sacks of citizen's charters to the millions who want work and who don't know how they can pay the mortgage?'

Some pundits have carried a more elitist but equally alarmist line. Their criticisms of the government are designed not simply to blame

a lesson and kicking it when it's down' (*Daily Mail*, 20 October).

Meanwhile, the *Daily Express* has sprung to the defence of the innocent—John Major and Norman Lamont. It's the 'grey men' of the treasury who have 'presided over the shambles of Britain's economic policy' (18 October), and Tory rebels are simply a 'ragtag band of political headbangers'.

Amid the chaos, the *Express* at first tried to carry on describing the prime minister in robust terms as 'Sergeant Major' (8 September) who was 'not for turning' (11 September). That was before the changes of policy over the ERM and pit closures. When those U-turns came, *Express* chief Lord Stevens of Ludgate sought to blame the mistakes on the prime minister's 'cronies and buddies', rather than Major himself (21 October), while his paper ended up defending the indefensible. 'The government has painfully but successfully blundered towards the right way of handling this most difficult issue' (22 October). Sounds more like the *Express* has blundered towards making what's rotten smell of roses.

The divisions within the establishment are reflected by infighting among the Tory papers. In response to Mellor's vitriolic attack on its loyalty, the *Mail* declared that all of the Tory newspapers had contributed to the downfall of a cabinet minister. The *Daily Telegraph* criticised the *Times* for publishing a shallow piece of journalism on John Major's loneliness and feeble character. Now Simon Heffer, *Spectator* columnist, is under attack from former *Spectator* literary editor Ferdinand Mount for calling the PM a 'berk'.

Many people believe that a monolithic Tory media is all-powerful in setting the political mood. However the recent rows and confusion within the Tory press reveal that the media reflects the wider political climate rather than dictating it.

Back in the eighties, a bold, confident Tory government gave the lead to papers like the *Sun* and the *Mail*. They could sing the praises of the British economy and hammer the 'loony left'. Today, by contrast, the crisis within the Tory press reflects the establishment's problems of economic slump and political incoherence, as editorials contradict each other and analysis gives way to rude remarks about politicians and other commentators.

The rewriting of the rules of engagement between the Tory press and the Tory Party shows the weakness of old alliances in the face of the new crisis. There are few loyalties to losers. The more elitist Tory papers can hardly disguise their shock at the inadequacy of cabinet ministers. The one thing which prevents them going even further in their attacks is the lack of answers to the question worriedly posed by the *Daily Mail* on 4 November: within the Tory Party, 'what is the alternative to backing John Major?'. ●



U Turn-ip: Major as seen by the *Sun*

the nearest Tory politician or his personal inadequacies, but to emphasise the implications of the present crisis for the stability and coherence of the Tory establishment as a whole.

William F Deedes, former *Daily Telegraph* editor and Tory Party grandee, has voiced concern at the lack of press support for the government. He has called for a 'rough balance to be struck' between the papers and the cabinet: 'We of the media have every right to call upon ministers to make fresh assessments. We also have, I think, one or two of our own to make.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 October) The *Daily Mail* has also warned that 'there's a world of difference between teaching the government



# Release

This year 62 500 British Telecom staff applied for voluntary redundancy—40 000 more than the company asked for. Andrew Calcutt spoke to some of those who have been 'compulsorily retained'

**W**hy was 'Please Release Me, Let Me Go' this year's hit song in the corridors of British Telecom? Because 50 per cent of staff expressed an interest in the company's voluntary redundancy package, Release '92. In February and March, all 200 000 BT employees received a glossy brochure advertising the benefits of Release '92. Aiming to slash the workforce to 135 000 by the end of 1994, the company expected that around 20 000 would take voluntary redundancy this year. In the event, more than 100 000 said they were interested; 62 500 applied; 46 000 pursued their applications. Management allowed an extra 9300 applicants on to the scheme, but resentment remains rife among those who were refused entry. Where there used to be anger over compulsory redundancies, in BT this year there have been complaints against 'compulsory retention'.

Why was Release '92 so heavily over-subscribed? With official unemployment once again touching three million, it might seem extraordinary that so many of those

currently in work should be prepared to risk an indefinite stretch on the dole.

Compared to most offers, Release '92 was a good deal: eight weeks' salary for every year of employment; a bonus of up to 25 per cent of annual salary; pay in lieu of notice. A senior clerical worker in his late thirties could expect around £50 000 (£42 000 after tax). Many employees in their mid-twenties received £15 000. Upwards of £4000 was the going rate for staff with just a couple of years' service.

These are the sort of lump sums which most people can only dream about. One clerical worker fondly remembered the cosy feeling of 'sitting at home and working out what you were going to get'. He had been looking forward to around £15 000. He also said that, looking back on it, it wouldn't have stretched very far.

## Then what?

His £15 000 would go some way towards paying off the mortgage. Then what? In the middle of a slump, he would have little prospect of another job. Yet tens of thousands were willing to put themselves on the scrapheap so long as they could escape the clutches of BT. That is a clear illustration of how deeply people dislike their working conditions in these times of strongarm management. It also shows how little they feel they can do to alleviate their position at work. For many, Release '92 was not so much a new lifeplan, more a barely plausible escape attempt.

'Most people would like to be able to pack their jobs in', said one engineer. BT employees are particularly fed up with the current management strategy which originated in the mid-eighties.

BT was privatised in 1986. In 1988-89, management started a campaign to do away with 'the civil service attitude'. 'We had the introduction of total quality management—TQM', recalled one employee. 'Targets all the time. Constant emphasis on stringent financial controls. Overtime cut right back—you had to get the work

done during normal hours. Now there's a recruitment freeze—nobody to replace colleagues who've left.'

'There have been three or four rationalisations in as many years', said another BT worker. 'The last one was called Operation Sovereign. None of these improve efficiency. But they result in new tasks and practically a new job description along with new managers and increased workloads.'

BT managers are aware of 'low morale'. Last year's annual survey of employee attitudes ('Care') made for miserable reading. The company's internal newsletter, *BT Today*, reported that group managing director Michael Hepher is not optimistic about the results of this year's survey: 'He believes, on balance, the answers will be worse.'

To many staff, the worst influence on 'morale' is BT's attempts to raise it. There is widespread contempt for management's campaign to develop a company ethos. This includes workplace discussions on 'mission statements' such as 'living our values, saying thank you', and 'first time, on time, every time'. Male staff are encouraged to wear white shirts and grey slacks, jokingly referred to as 'BT image clothes'.

## Apricot preserve

BT workers reserved their most bitter contempt for the thousands of glossy presentation packs sent out to staff. The posed pictures of BT workers apparently captivated by 'our values', the 'saying thank you' commendation forms, the jars of apricot preserve awarded to conscientious employees—these and other management ploys produce hoots of derision rather than company loyalty.

The October issue of *BT Today* contained an angry letter complaining that company freebies (£200 worth of shares, tickets to the theatre) are no substitute for good pay. An engineer bemoaned 'derogatory pay rises—£204 plus three per cent this year, zilch compared to the company's huge profits'. The belief is widespread that BT offered generous redundancy



# me

terms in an attempt to offset resentment against its super-profits of £97 a minute.

Even Release '92 has rebounded against the company. A clerical worker explained: 'They started by saying nobody would be held back, then they said we couldn't all go. A lot of people were told late—they'd made plans which they had to abandon. There were horror stories of people buying air tickets and selling houses, and then being turned down at the last minute.'

There are bitter rumours that nearly all managers who applied for redundancy were allowed to go. Many workers believe they were penalised because of a good work record: 'Blokes were getting on to the scheme because they had bad records and the company wanted shot of them. So working hard for the company made you worse off. This caused a lot of resentment.'

## Hidden agenda

Many of BT's remaining staff are looking forward to next year's redundancy scheme, although the terms are not expected to be as good. Some are wondering whether 'a poor work record would put me in a better position. But how far can you go before you get disciplined?'. Senior managers are not trusted. There is talk of a 'hidden agenda'. 'You don't feel you have job security, just general disaffection'.

Resentment, distrust, disaffection—these are traditional elements of the employer/employee relationship. One aspect that is missing, however, is the recognition on the employees' part that they could get organised together to do something about it.

In September 1992 there was a four-to-one vote against taking action for more pay. 'Industrial action', said an engineer, 'is giving the company an excuse to get rid of you'. He remembered a round of victimisations in April 1987. Another engineer said: 'There's fear your card will be marked if you speak out of turn.' Many employees were apprehensive even about speaking anonymously to *Living Marxism*.

The National Communications Union (NCU) has been largely discredited since its strategy of dividing clerical and technical staff, and its obsession with negotiating rather than fighting, scuppered the telecom engineers' three-week strike in February 1987. Nowadays, say union members, it is 'more like a service company offering discounts', or simply 'not discussed'.

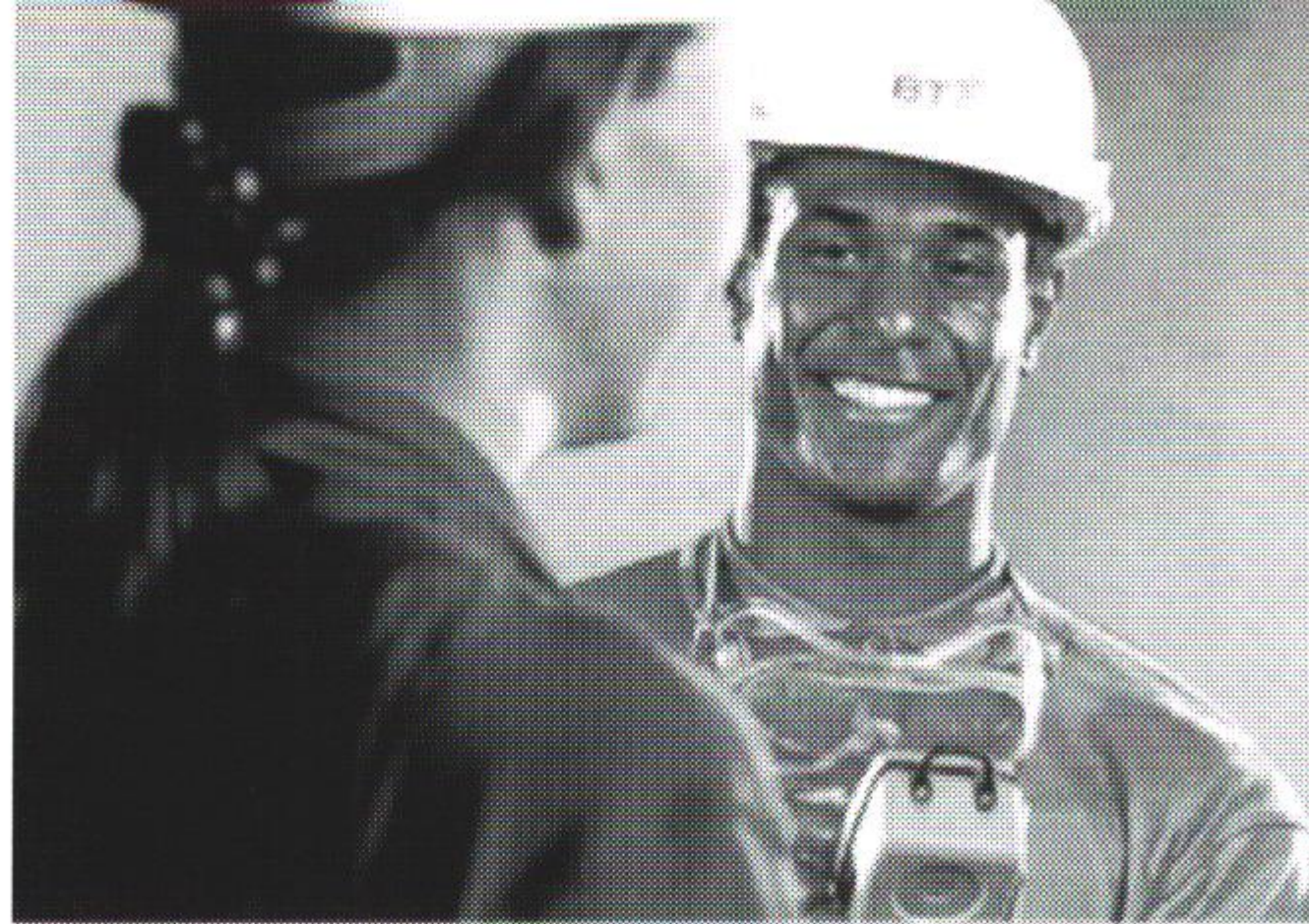
Rather than talking to their members about how to defend wages and working conditions, NCU officials have advertised their role in putting together Release '92. Now even this has rebounded on the union, as thousands of its members are angry about not getting the redundancy deal they were promised.

They might not admit it, but the NCU's own officials recognise how useless the union is. The Release '92 intake included 60 branch officers and two members of the NCU national executive. Many more are likely to have applied. In a desperate attempt to offset falling membership, the *NCU Journal* (October 1992) pleaded with ex-BT employees to maintain their connections with the union.

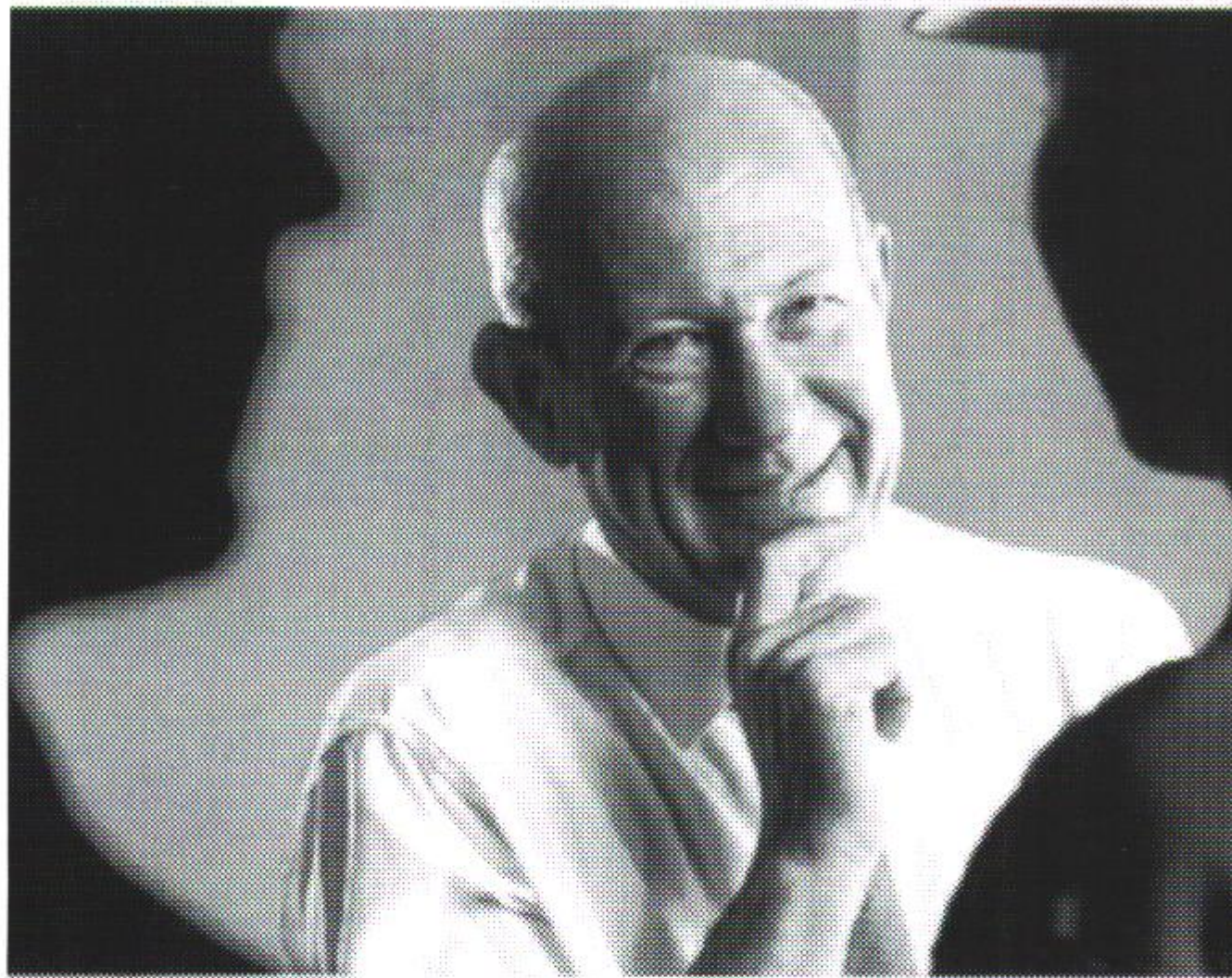
## 'Release '93'

For the time being, collective action doesn't figure much in the minds of BT workers—hardly surprising given the mess the old unions made of it. But that doesn't mean they have become middle class company men. They despise management and feel contempt for the union. The only way they feel able to show how fed up they are is to take the redundancy money and run with it—for as long as it lasts.

A clerical worker who applied for redundancy had planned 'to go away for 18 months and hope the recession was finished by the time I got back'. He had hoped to be on a beach in Australia this Christmas, and resented being stuck in a BT office instead. As far as he could see, the only thing going for him was his chance for a place on the next redundancy package—'Release '93'.



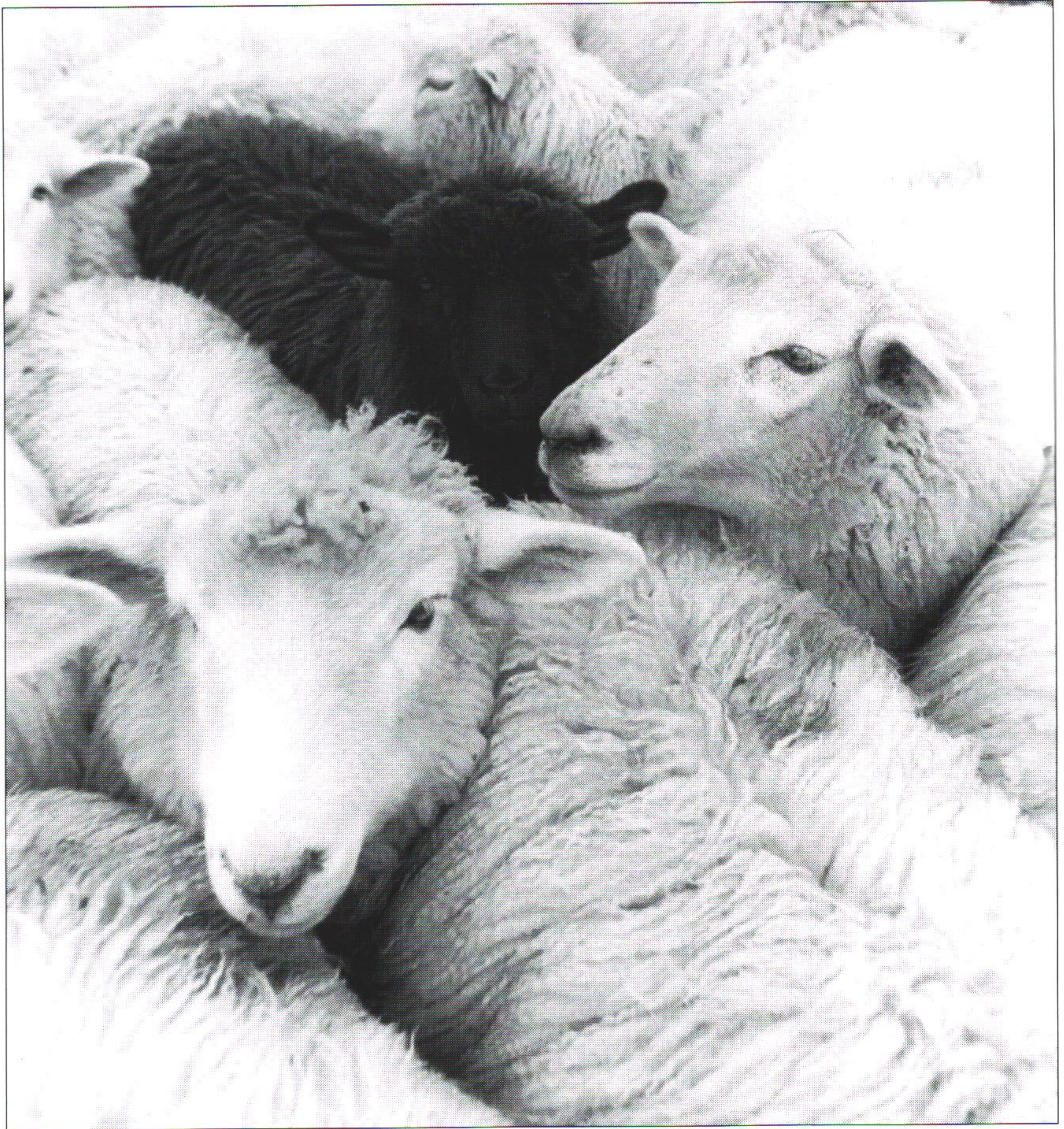
*'Living our values*



*- saying thank you*



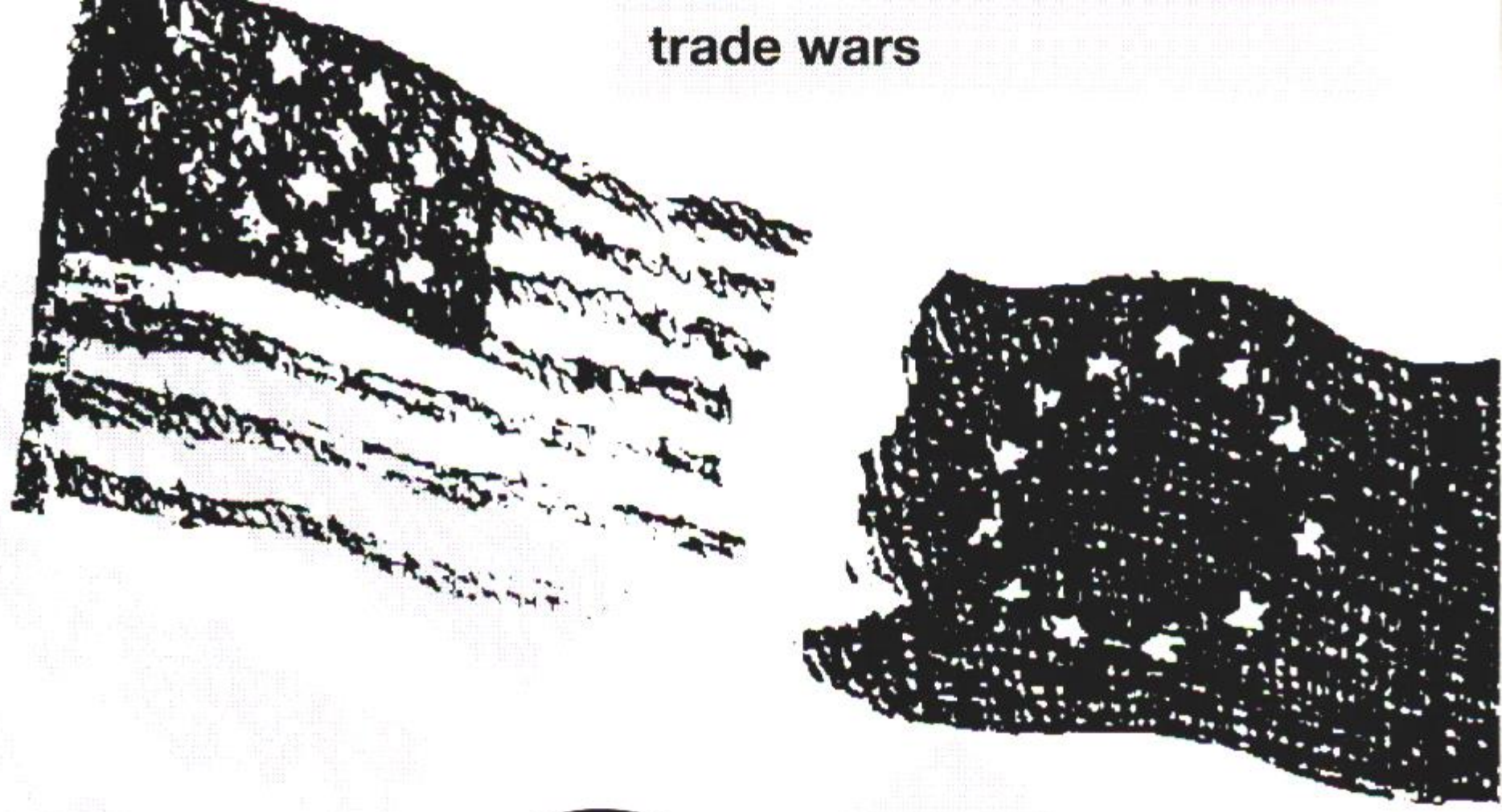




# Subscribe

A subscription to *Living Marxism* is now better value than ever; at £19.50 for a year, it saves you almost 20 per cent on the cover price. Write to *Living Marxism* Subscriptions (50), BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX or phone (071) 375 1485 (ansaphone)





# Tit-for-Gatt

The row between the European Community and America over trade is a dangerous sign of the times, says Sharon Clarke

**T**rade war between America and Europe? But that is all supposed to be a thing of the past. Trade wars belong in the 1930s, don't they? They're all mixed up with protectionist blocs, imperialism, and the road to a shooting war itself. Surely those times are not coming back?

Then again, as it suggests at the start of the Manifesto Against Militarism, 'what was unthinkable yesterday seems to happen quite often today' (see page 16). The Great Depression was also supposed to be sealed up in the thirties vault as an historical artefact. The Western world was meant to have entered an indefinite age of prosperity. Yet now we are enduring a capitalist slump at least as serious as the one of 60 years ago.

The threat of a trade war between the USA and the EC followed the breakdown of the latest round of talks about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gatt). The problem has been ascribed to various causes.

## More than Delors

Some described it simply as a row over exports of rape-seed oil. Many others, including most of the British press, accused European Commission president Jacques Delors of causing the trouble by putting the narrow interests of French farmers before broader concerns about world trade. But the problem goes much deeper than any of this.

The return of 'trade war' to the language of modern diplomacy is the first public expression of what has been an underlying trend for some time. It is a trend towards more direct economic rivalries and open conflicts among the major capitalist powers. The difficulties they have experienced in cobbling together a Gatt deal, even over matters such as oil seeds, is a sure sign that the old arrangements for papering over the

cracks and keeping these tensions below the surface no longer work very well.

Many observers have expressed fears that failure to find agreement would lead to a multi-billion dollar loss of trade all round, and plunge the world into a deep and damaging economic slump. This is getting things back to front. The truth is that the world economy is already in slump—and that is why the Gatt talks have run into so much trouble.

Exports of goods and services from the seven biggest industrial economies currently total around \$3000 billion a year. These figures represent a real increase of something like three quarters over the past decade. That might sound like a symptom of healthy economic growth. In fact, it reflects the unhealthy state of the leading capitalist economies.

## Secret war

As each country has slipped into recession and then slump at home, they have fought harder to compensate by making more profit from trading in overseas markets. With the Europeans, Americans and Asians all trying to get a bigger piece of world trade, tensions have inevitably risen among the major players.

For some years, a sort of secret trade war has been fought out, as governments take steps to protect their national economies against fierce competition from foreign trade. They have rarely imposed old-fashioned tariffs on foreign imports—which is one reason why the Gatt agreement, which deals with such things, has survived for so long. Instead, governments have sought to boost their nation's trade by subsidising exporters, or by using administrative regulations and standards to keep imports out—for example, by banning a foreign aircraft or foodstuff on 'safety' grounds. However these

measures are justified in public, the real motive is protectionist.

A more serious development has been the consolidation of regional trading blocs. The moves to form a single market in the EC mark the development of a German-led European bloc. Japan is encouraging the formation of an informal trade bloc in Asia. And the recent formation of the North American free trade zone (free trade inside the zone, protection from the outside) indicates that the USA is making similar arrangements. The Americans were always the champions of global free trade when they ran the world economy; now they too are retreating towards a defensive bloc, under pressure of competition from the EC and Japan.

## Cut-throat world

Until now, the underlying trends towards trade war have been shielded behind formal worldwide agreements such as Gatt. The recent public rows show that this arrangement is getting seriously strained. It is becoming more and more difficult for the rival trading powers to keep up the facade that all is well around the conference table, when the reality is that they are at each other's throats in the slump-hit markets of the world.

The governments of the EC, the USA and Japan do not want a trade war. They suffered too much in the thirties, and have benefited too much from the economic cooperation of the post-1945 era, to relish a return to cut-throat competition. That is why the mere mention of possible US sanctions against the EC had them running around in an effort to cobble some sort of deal together.

But whatever paper deals they might be able to do, the real trend in world trade is now clear for all to see. And the deeper the depression becomes, the more difficult it will be for them to prevent all of their old arrangements from coming apart.

Are we in for a rerun of the thirties? Of course not. Things change, and history never repeats itself like an old movie, frame for frame. However, the threat of trade war does confirm that we are in for a dangerous new era of international conflicts, global slump and instability. And it's not over oil seeds. ●



It's not just the Tories who are in deep water. Economic slump and political crisis are afflicting every capitalist government today. Yet, in the absence of a political alternative, the crisis at the top doesn't necessarily benefit those at the bottom.

Frank Richards puts the new developments in the context of the 'Midnight in the Century' analysis which has been developed in *Living Marxism*, and points to the need for a new politics of opposition

# The contours of post-Cold War



Both Heseltine and the miners are in trouble—but the Tories still have the initiative

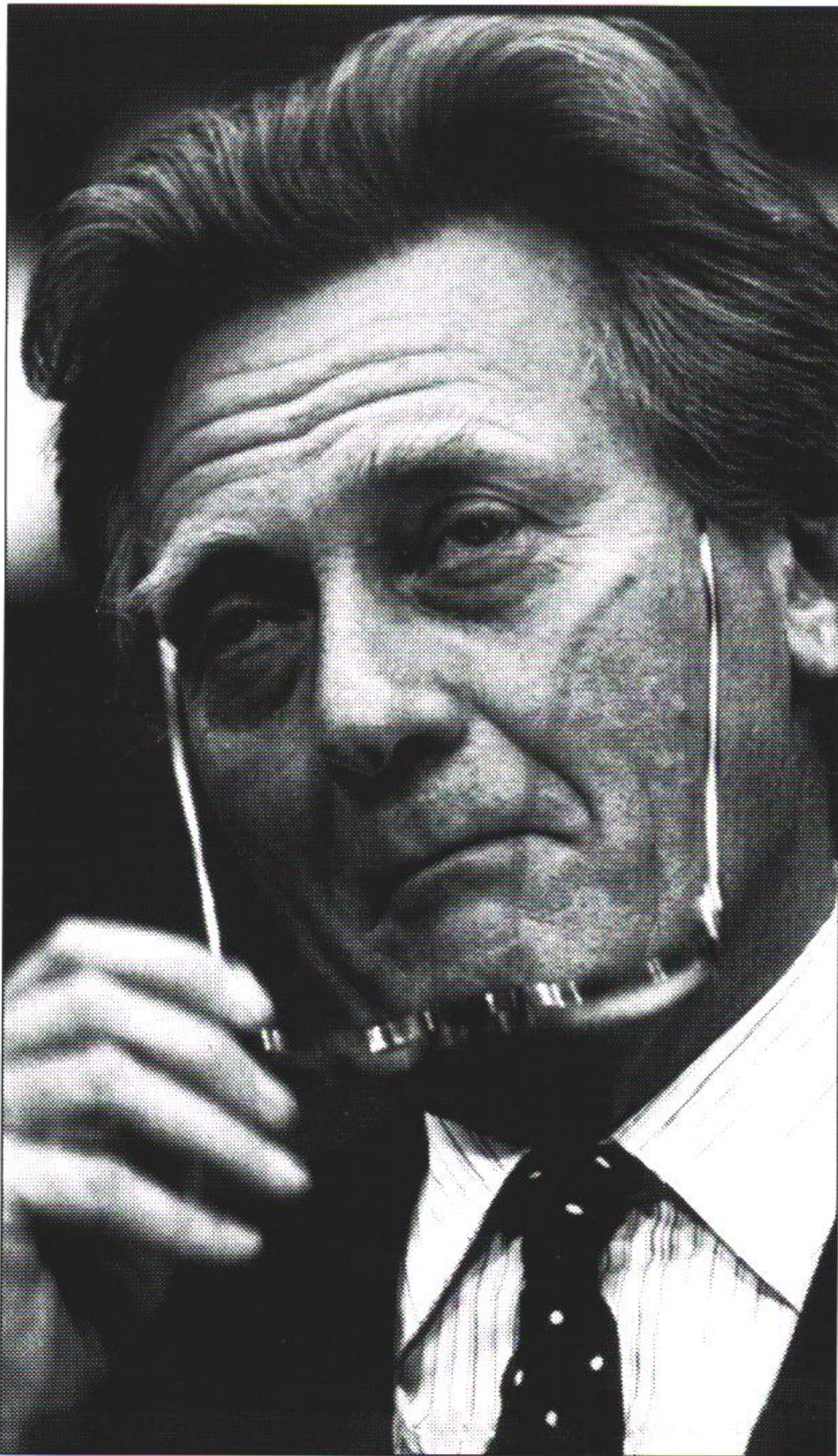


PHOTO: THE GUARDIAN

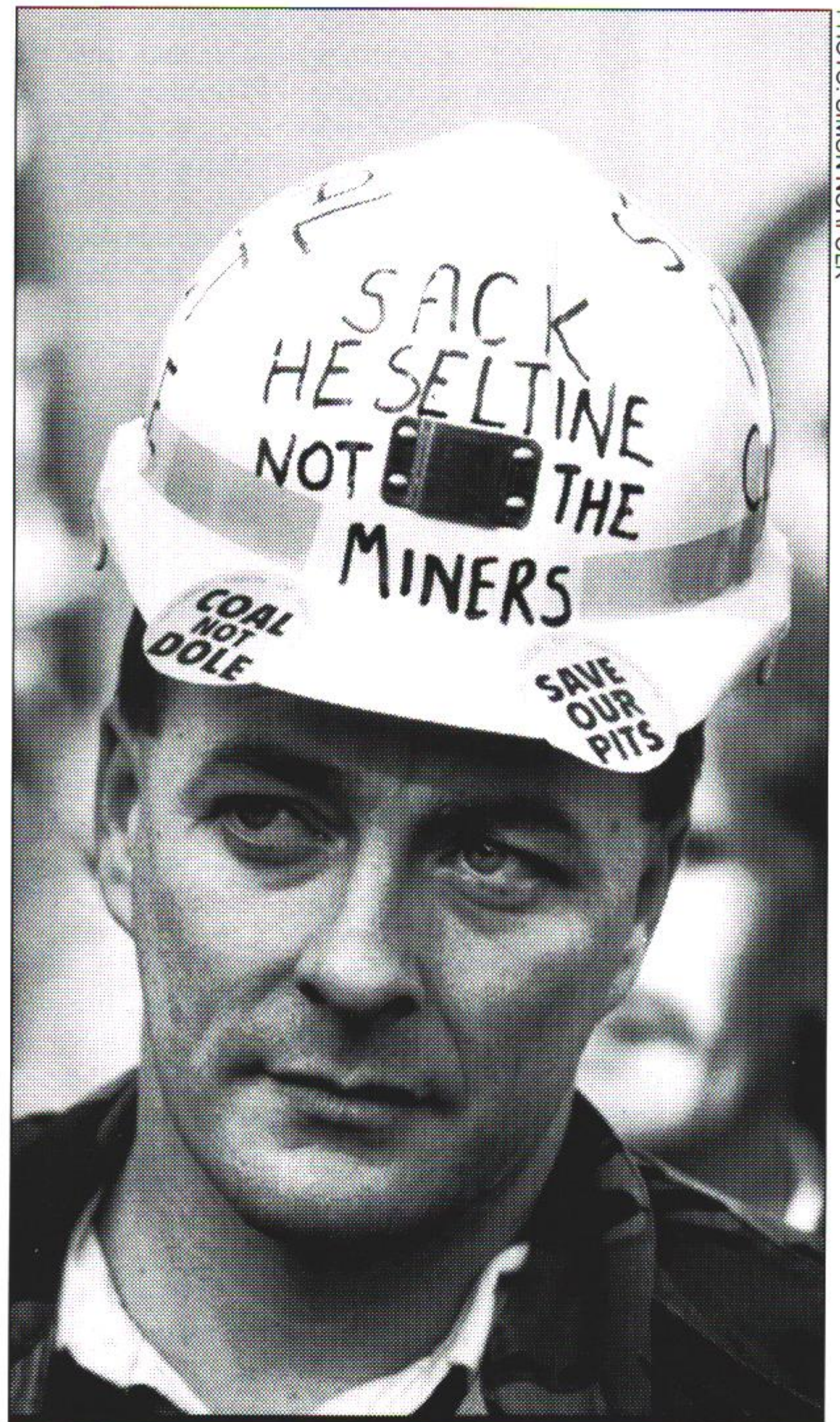


PHOTO: SIMON NORFOLK

# War politics

**D**uring the past three years *Living Marxism* has elaborated a clearly focused analysis of the present political situation. Through a series of articles written around the theme of 'Midnight in the Century' (see in particular *Living Marxism*, December 1990 and April 1991), we have pointed to the end of an era and the beginning of a new political cycle.

The central argument of the Midnight in the Century thesis is that the patterns of politics which have been evident since the Second World War can no longer operate in the old way. Instead, the end of the Cold War has consolidated the trends towards

a reorganisation of relations between the rulers and the ruled in Western society.

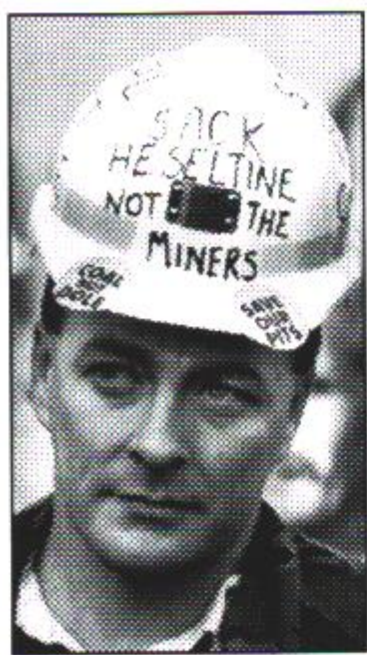
The downside of the new political cycle is that the balance of forces has shifted very much in favour of the ruling class. This is why the Midnight in the Century thesis has emphasised that ours is an era of reaction, an essentially dark hour for those who support human liberation. It is a period in which the old labour movements have collapsed, but have not yet been replaced by other dynamic forces.

As a result of these developments, ordinary people have been left without effective organisations or a political voice of their own. At least temporarily,

the working class has been unable to play a progressive role by fighting to change society. This has had a major impact on the intellectual mood in this period. It helps to explain why so few people seem conscious of the possibility and importance of fundamental change, and why we are living with a general mood of conservatism and a fear of experimentation.

Many radical critics have attacked the Midnight in the Century analysis as defeatist or excessively pessimistic. In particular there has been strong resistance to *Living Marxism's* argument that the old labour movement lacks the capacity to regenerate itself. ▶





When this magazine has argued that there can be no 'upturn' in trade union militancy along the old lines, it has been accused of somehow writing off the class struggle and of declaring that the working class is dead.

In fact, far from being pessimistic, the analysis of *Midnight in the Century* has pointed a positive way forward for those seeking to challenge the status quo. It offers an explanation of why contemporary politics are so stagnant,

strongly held views or of organised political passions.

It is evident that there are no crusades or big ideas today. Politicians would rather say nothing than risk offending anybody. It seems that in the present situation ideas do not so much mobilise as divide. George Bush lost the American presidential election partly because, during a weak moment, he allowed his right-wing colleagues to go too far with the 'cultural war'

For example, in the summer the French lorry drivers' strike was supported by people from the far right to the far left. What did this action represent? What concerns led millions of people in France to identify with a lorry drivers' protest against a system of motoring penalty points?

The same questions can be posed about the popular reaction against the Tory government's announcement that it was closing 31 coal mines. Why did everyone oppose these closures? Why did Tory backbenchers take a lead in forcing the government to alter its plans? And what possessed thousands of middle class people in places like Cheltenham to march against the pit closure programme?

In both cases people have seized upon a convenient issue as a way of expressing other concerns for which they have no ready outlet. Today most people's hopes and fears exist in isolation from any political programme. Since they do not believe in any particular solution to their problems, their concerns attach themselves to whatever issue happens to be going. In this way, what is really a *politics without shape* can acquire a temporary form through supporting a variety of handy causes.

### Flavour of the month

The absence of strongly held views is paralleled by the sudden shift and fluctuation in the fortunes of politicians and parties. The rollercoaster electoral campaign of Ross Perot is paradigmatic. It seems that as soon as parties such as the European Green parties or the Scottish Nationalists become the flavour of the month, they become marginalised.

The difficulties facing the ruling parties across Europe and in the USA indicate a general pattern. The old parties seem incapable of responding to the new demands of the times. This problem is well illustrated by their repeated failure to come up with any policies that can even unite their own base of support, never mind draw others in behind them.

The splits and divisions which today afflict governing parties everywhere are symptoms of their internal weakness rather than of a dynamic political struggle. The debates themselves usually contain little substance. The fact that these intra-party rows are often conducted in furious fashion does not mean that they represent clashes of deeply held principle on vital issues. The fury is simply evidence of the absence of any accepted rules for the conduct of political debate in today's changed circumstances.

Take the row over the Maastricht treaty within the Tory Party. This has

## It is the turn of ruling class institutions to go through the experience of disintegration



and identifies the instability of existing political arrangements. In short, it exposes the underlying weakness of the ruling class.

In the trauma accompanying the birth of a new political cycle, nobody escapes unscathed. To be sure, the main victims of the new period have been the old labour movements. But since the institutions of the political elite are no less out of date, they are equally irrelevant to the new era. They too have to face the harsh reality of a political crisis.

### Who benefits?

Recent events in Britain, America and elsewhere in the West allow us to develop the analysis further. There is now considerable evidence that it is the turn of ruling class institutions—their political parties, their parliaments, their governments—to go through the experience of disintegration. Their institutions are no more immune than the labour movement to the corrosive effects of the collapse of the old order. The consequences of the decay in conventional mainstream politics is an issue to which we will return in the months ahead.

The big question for now is, who will benefit from the disarray of establishment politics? After all, in the absence of credible alternatives, the crisis at the top of society does not necessarily work to the advantage of those at the bottom.

These days the term 'political malaise' has become something of a platitude. Western society feels ill at ease with all of its politicians, its institutions, its governmental policies and its social values. This feeling is neither clearly focused nor defined. Indeed one of the chief characteristics of our time is the absence of any

rhetoric. The targeting of liberals, and of permissiveness, as a menace to American civilisation had the effect of weakening rather than strengthening the Republican electoral base.

Since principles have become a rare commodity, ideas can come and go in quick succession. Not so long ago a European vision was supposed to be the Big Idea. Today, Europe does not seem so attractive. The shift in attitudes towards the Maastricht treaty illustrates the general instability.

These days it is often argued that the politics of extremism are gaining ground. No doubt terrible things are happening throughout the world. Conflict and strife are a menace in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. However, it should be clear that the strongest political idea is that of apathy.

### Apathy rules

Despite appearances, even nationalism is not a particularly dynamic political movement today. The violent scramble for resources among local elites in, say, Croatia and Serbia should not be confused with popular nationalist fervour. So too with racism.

Discrimination against immigrants and refugees is now a central plank of government policy everywhere. Yet racism as a political movement is not gaining ground. The recent decline of the French Front National, the most successful of the current crop of racist movements, indicates that there is nothing inexorable about the rise of the European far right.

In the absence of political debate on issues of principle, most problems remain unclarified. It is not clear which response is left-wing and which is right. Events can no longer be interpreted through the old vocabulary of politics.



little to do with different attitudes towards Europe. It is a free-for-all made possible by the fact that the old forms of intra-party conduct cannot be enforced if the rules of politics are no longer clear. The failure to maintain party discipline is a Europe-wide phenomenon, as rows break out in public all over the place. This is the clearest evidence marking the end of the party politics of the post-1945 period.

The weakening and incoherence of the old parties means that the conflict between them no longer monopolises mainstream politics. In many instances individuals or coalitions of individuals have emerged as the key players, in separation from their parties. Today, conflicts which are not about distinctive ideologies are often not about parties either.

### The party is over

Bill Clinton has succeeded without a coherent Democratic Party machine. And in the various debates over Europe, politicians of different parties have banded together against colleagues from their own organisations. The campaign around the French referendum on Maastricht united politicians from different parties, not around any specific organisation, but around the alternatives of saying Yes or No.

Within Britain, major political debate has for some time been confined to the various controversies within the Conservative Party. The other parliamentary parties have become increasingly marginal to most of the key developments. The irrelevance of

discipline of traditional party politics, individual behaviour becomes more erratic and unpredictable. There are no fixed standpoints, nor any stable party alliances. The old rules no longer apply.

A number of interconnected crises account for the current incoherent state of capitalist politics. The most profound problem facing the system is the economic crisis. One reason why there is no real debate, or any projection of contending political alternatives, is the complete absence of any plausible ideas about how to tackle the economic slump. In fact nobody wants to discuss the economy. This is far more than a failure of imagination on the part of Norman Lamont. It is testimony to the strength of the depression.

### Playing safe

The absence of any serious political ideas, or any policies with mass appeal, is due to the refusal of the capitalist mind even to consider the serious implications of what is going on with the economy. It is safer to talk about Maastricht or just about anything else, so long as a critical examination of the stagnation of the capitalist system can be avoided.

The economic crisis is in continual interaction with a political one. The crisis of politics is intimately linked to the inability to elaborate a policy or strategy for solving the depression. But the political crisis is also being shaped by the shift into a new cycle of politics.

The political ideologies and parties of the post-1945 era cannot be adapted or reconverted for use in

This has been a source of many problems for John Major. The party political crisis is exacerbated by the difficulty that leaders have in recognising just how much the political environment has changed. Their attempt to carry on in the old way tends to bring to the surface the uncomfortable realisation that the old way has little relevance for today.

Despite all of the political confusion and governmental instability, the situation has not yet developed into a full blown life-or-death crisis for the ruling elites. This is all the more remarkable, given that all capitalist countries are confronted with some huge economic problems.

### Opposition in limbo

The paradox is, however, that the current instability within the establishment coexists with the serious weakening of all opposition movements. There are no radical critics of capitalism exercising influence over significant sections of society. Even in the midst of slump, it is difficult to encounter any serious attempts to criticise the basic economics of capitalism.

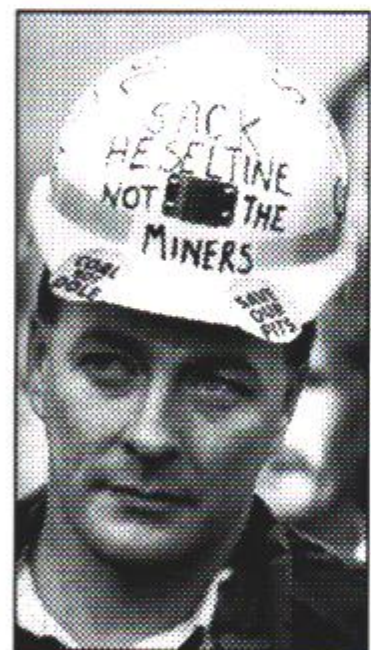
The lack of any credible anti-capitalist ideas is the ideological reflection of the fact that no anti-capitalist movement exists. That is why there is no effective political opposition. And without political opposition, the existing tendency towards instability within the ruling elite will not be converted into a full-blown crisis of authority.

The coincidence of instability with an absence of alternatives, the observation that neither government nor opposition has any answers, can easily demoralise people. It will confuse even those who would like to see things change. However, regardless of first reactions, such confusion also creates a bigger demand for some answers.

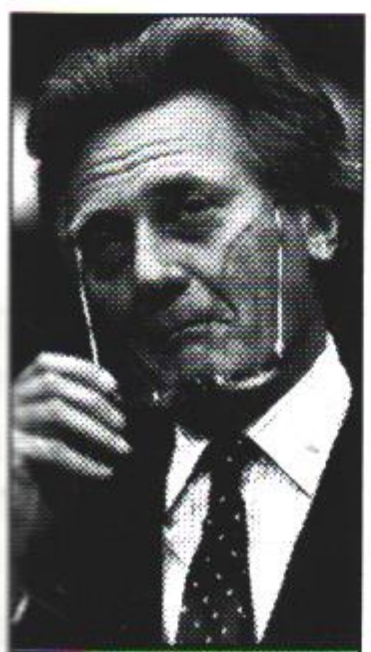
### Looking for answers

The fact that more people are demanding answers and explanations of our confusing times does not mean that they are ready to take serious action to change the situation. But it does suggest that there now exists at least a semi-conscious sentiment that some sort of new politics are needed. This represents an important step away from the more consolidated mood of reaction which prevailed in the immediate post-Cold War period.

Although the essentially conservative character of the period remains the same, people now want to understand this new world that confronts us all. How their questions are answered will determine how long the present inconclusive and unresolved political framework can operate. ●



## People now want to understand this new world that confronts us all



Labour was dramatically emphasised during the dispute over pit closures, when opposition to the government's plans was monopolised by a group of Conservative MPs and newspapers. The telling blows against the government came not from John Smith or Paddy Ashdown, but from Bill Cash, Elizabeth Peacock and Marcus Fox. The old tradition of party political conflict has given way to a far narrower process of argument among Tory individuals.

Who would have predicted that normally invisible Tory backbenchers would rebel and try to hold the government to account? Without the

the contemporary age. These are essentially Cold War constructions. They have little capacity to relate to situations which are not polarised in the old way. The need for the construction of a new political system appears to be most clearly grasped by the German elite who, fearing a loss of their system's legitimacy, have launched a debate about the crisis of the 'political class' and the need for new arrangements.

The underlying political problems often reveal themselves at the level of party affairs. Party managers now have great difficulty in conducting the essentials of internal party life.



# A MANIFESTO AGAINST

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.

## 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.



# MILITARISM

## 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.

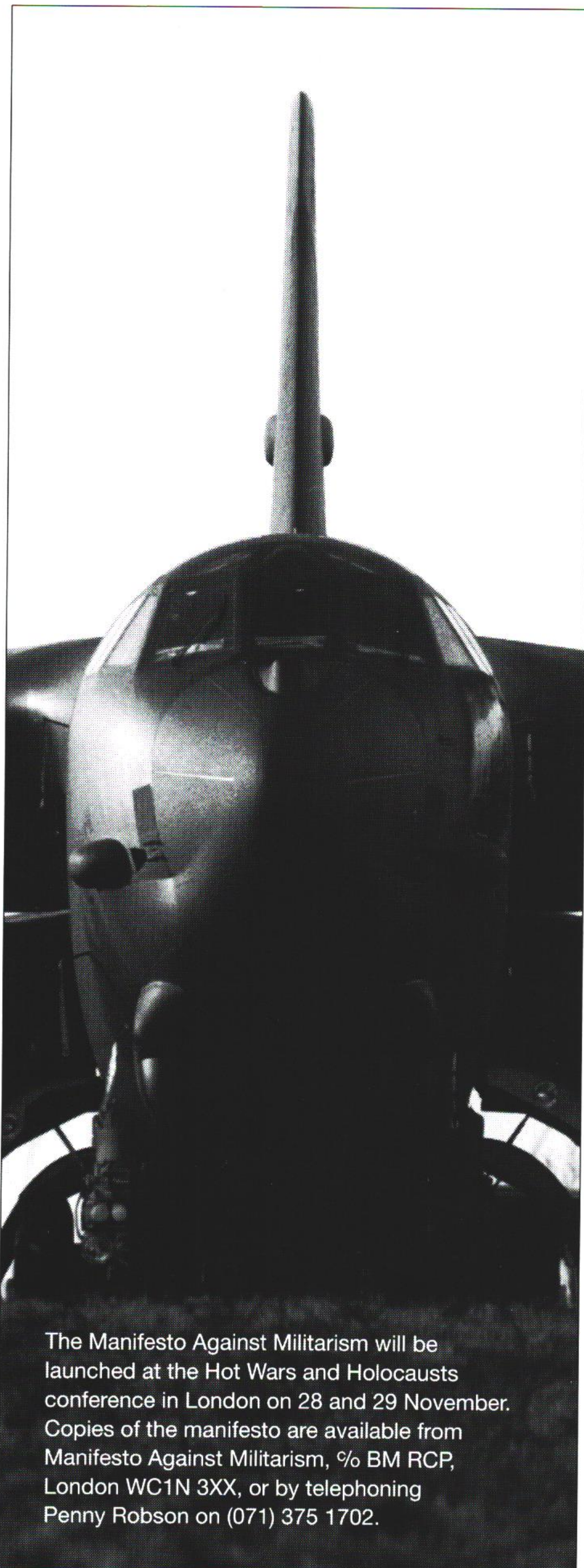
## 5 Against the cultural war

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.



The Manifesto Against Militarism will be launched at the Hot Wars and Holocausts conference in London on 28 and 29 November. Copies of the manifesto are available from Manifesto Against Militarism, % BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or by telephoning Penny Robson on (071) 375 1702.



# It's



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER



# not natural

New research claims to prove that homosexuals are born and not made. Peter Ray thinks that idea is unscientific, irrational—and very dangerous

**O**ld chestnuts don't come much older than the question 'what causes homosexuality?'. In recent months, while the Western right has launched a 'cultural war' against lesbians and gay men, this issue has been receiving renewed attention as a result of the efforts of California-based neurobiologist and gay campaigner Simon LeVay.

LeVay claims that research carried out by himself and other scientists demonstrates that the cause of homosexuality is biological. The media like what they hear. In America LeVay's results were greeted by *Newsweek* magazine with a front cover picture of a baby and the question 'Is this child gay?', while LeVay himself has been interviewed by everybody from *Oprah* to *Donahue*.

In Britain too LeVay's results have received an enthusiastic press reception, and in October he presented a Channel 4 documentary about his ideas. More recent research done by LeVay's colleagues, Laura Allen and Richard Gorski of the University of California Medical School, was reported by the *Guardian* as seeming 'to confirm what the gay community has maintained for decades: that homosexuals are born not made' (3 August 1992).

## All in INAH3?

The truth is that none of the work LeVay has drawn attention to tells us very much about homosexuality. However, the enthusiastic reception he has received provides striking confirmation of the conservative and defensive approach to the right's attacks on homosexuals which is now being adopted by liberal opinion.

In an attempt to test for differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals, LeVay measured the size of certain cell nuclei known as INAH3 found in the hypothalamus area of the brain. The hypothalamus is closely linked to the pituitary gland which is one of the regulators of

hormones involved in the human reproductive system. The results were described by *Newsweek* as showing 'that [this] tiny area believed to control sexual activity was less than half the size in gay men than in the heterosexuals' (24 February 1992).

In fact, LeVay's results are not so clear cut; are based on a dubious sample; and cannot demonstrate that homosexuals are 'born different'.

The cells which LeVay measured varied massively in size even among the male homosexuals. Although the cells of a third of the gay men clustered around the lower end of the range, some of them had large nuclei when compared with the straights. If some homosexuals also have large nuclei then, as leading science journal *Nature* commented, this means that 'nuclear size...is neither a unique nor an unambiguous determinant of homosexual behaviour' (J Maddox, 'Is homosexuality hard-wired?', 5 September 1991).

## Sample size

The sample that LeVay tested was very small. The cells of just 19 homosexual men were compared to those of only 16 heterosexual men and six heterosexual women. And the validity of the tests depended on the presumption that the individuals who reported themselves as straight were in fact exclusively heterosexual; a less than reliable source of information.

To the very limited extent that LeVay's results demonstrate a correlation between the size of the INAH3 nucleus and sexual orientation, that is all they demonstrate, as LeVay himself has cautioned. A correlation is not a cause; it could be that rather than the size of the nucleus determining sexual orientation, sexuality is the determinant of the size of the nucleus, or that both are a consequence of a third factor.

It should not be surprising that LeVay and his fellow researchers are having difficulties coming up with

convincing results. As science, their whole approach is misconceived.

In the first place, since Alfred Kinsey researched the sexual experience of American men in the 1940s, it has been known that human sexual behaviour is more varied and complex than suggested by the simple concepts of hetero and homosexuality. How would LeVay's cells account for bisexuality? Do the nuclei change in size according to mood? Can they change suddenly and once and for all when a middle-aged married man 'comes out' as gay? Or do bisexuals fall in the middle of the size range?

And what about people who've got a thing for sheep, or men who like to have cream cakes thrown at them by prostitutes wearing Nazi uniforms? What will their INAH3 look like? You don't have to go to the wilder shores of desire, either. Apparently there are heterosexuals who get off on pretending to be football players during copulation, and why not? But exactly which gene is it that accounts for that?

## Sex and society

These questions cannot be answered because the things that turn us on are not the product of unchanging, natural processes. Everything to do with sex is continually shaped and reshaped by social pressures and developments. Even the question of which physical characteristics are regarded as sexy is more influenced by society than it is by biology. Consider for a moment such standard contemporary fantasy objects as the Chippendales or page three girls, and ask yourself where the boys got those muscles or how anatomically well-suited the girls are for child-bearing. Nature has nothing to do with why people find them attractive.

What people consider to be desirable changes with society, both over time and between countries. A European woman who epitomised beauty a couple of centuries ago would today be regarded as almost obese. Where just a century ago, a glimpse of a woman's ankle was regarded as sexually provocative, today Madonna's posturing borders on the conventional. Things that might drive the English into a sexual frenzy would mean nothing to a native Amazonian.

It is difficult to see how nature could provide genes, cells and hormones able





to distinguish, let alone determine preferences, between qualities that are the product of human history and social development. Indeed LeVay and his colleagues have hardly tried to come up with an explanation. As he admits, 'we do not....understand what makes people straight or gay' (*Guardian*, 9 October).

So why the disproportionate reaction of the press to the meagre and inconclusive results and the non-explanations that this research has produced? This is a particularly interesting question in the light of what is known about sexuality.

The *Guardian's* history is a little selective when it states that the 'gay community' has always maintained a natural view of homosexuality. The modern gay scene emerged in the wake of the militant self-assertion of the gay liberation movement in the early 1970s. Many gay liberationists explicitly rejected the idea that sexuality and even gender itself were natural.

## Difference will always mean inequality in a social order as oppressive as capitalism

They believed that sexual liberation demanded the transcending of these categories.

Since the seventies, historical research has demonstrated that the entire project of trying to find biological factors that determine whether an individual will be homosexual or heterosexual is illogical because such categories of people were unknown before the nineteenth century.

Of course, from the ancient Greeks to Shakespeare's Elizabethans, there were always some people enjoying sex with others of the same sex. But the modern idea of homosexuality, as characteristic of a particular type of person (rather than just a sinful act that anybody might engage in) did not exist. This was because the possibility of living a modern homosexual lifestyle did not exist for any significant section of the population before the emergence of industrial capitalism.

In the backward, rural-dominated societies which predated capitalism, the traditional family was the institution through which economic production and survival were organised. While the odd sexual act was possible outside of the family's confines, there was no other way of life available for most people.

The industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries broke down the traditional bonds and constraints of a society which had been

tied to the land by economic necessity. Millions began to work in the cities for money wages, and for some at least the possibility arose of living outside the traditional family arrangements. Heterosexuality and homosexuality were concepts developed by the medical, moral and legal authorities at that time, in order to police the new society by demarcating acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Male homosexuality was not specifically outlawed in Britain until 1885.

If the modern characteristics of hetero and homosexuality did not exist a couple of centuries ago, what sense can it make to project them backwards and try to discover their origins in humanity's biological make-up? In the 1990s, the attempt to do so marks a step backwards in our understanding. The fact that it is widely accepted as plausible is symptomatic of the profound conservatism that predominates in discussions of sex and sexuality today.

Faced with the right-wing attacks on lesbians and gay men, many liberals are welcoming the new 'scientific' proof that homosexuality is natural, since it appears to offer a way of getting around the right without having to fight its arguments. Liberal opinion hopes that by endowing the sexual patterns of today with the unchanging, eternal validity of a natural scientific discovery, the fears of the fundamentalists can be assuaged. They can be told that, since homosexuality is inborn, persecution is doomed to fail and is also unnecessary if nobody can 'adopt' or be 'converted' to the homosexual lifestyle.

### Naive and dangerous

LeVay himself has a clear political agenda, believing that 'a better understanding of the innate differences between gay and straight people' may produce 'a rejection of homophobia based on religious or moral arguments' (*Guardian*, 9 October 1992). American gay activists like Randy Shilts welcomed the research because 'it would reduce being gay to something like being left-handed, which is in fact all it is' (*Guardian*, 3 August 1992). They hope that a demonstration of the 'immutability' of homosexuality will afford lesbians and gays constitutional protection against discrimination as a sort of ethnic minority.

The naivety of this idea is astonishing. In the first place, how have anti-discrimination laws prevented the continuing oppression of America's blacks? More dangerously, to argue that straight and gay are 'innately different' in a society where prejudice remains powerful can only reinforce the idea that one is innately superior and the other inferior.

Of course, LeVay or Shilts will argue that they are using the new research to ask for mutual toleration and respect between those who are 'different but equal'. But the hard fact is that difference will always mean inequality in a social order as fundamentally oppressive and exploitative as capitalism.

In case there is any doubt about this, the experience of the very first representatives of the *Guardian's* 'gay community' should be borne in mind. The world's first homosexual law reform campaign was started in Germany in 1897 by a doctor called Magnus Hirschfeld, who went on to found the prestigious Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. Hirschfeld and his colleagues firmly believed that the route to justice was natural science. The demonstration of the naturalness of homosexuality, they thought, would destroy any rational argument for oppression.

### 'It's nobody's fault'

In the event, it was Hirschfeld's campaign and institute, not to mention many thousands of German homosexuals, which were destroyed by those most fervent believers in natural differences between people, the Nazis. History may not repeat itself, but it is certainly the case that turning social distinctions into natural ones can only ever reinforce existing divisions and antagonisms.

LeVay and Shilts accept the conservative agenda that the cause of homosexuality is the problem to be dealt with. The *Newsweek* article caught the defensive character of the discussion among liberals. One sympathetic researcher observed that:

'There is a tendency for people when told that homosexuality is biological, to heave a sigh of relief. It relieves the families and homosexuals of guilt. It also means that society doesn't have to worry about things like gay teachers.' (24 February 1992)

In other words, the important thing is to reassure bigots that while there is, naturally, something wrong with a fag, it's nobody's fault and it's not contagious.

This is some way down a slippery slope. To turn things around will require the recognition that the real problems to be identified and dealt with are not the origins of homosexuality, but the causes of bigotry and oppression. Those problems cannot be avoided with talk about natural difference. They have to be challenged through the struggle for a society in which lesbians and gay men have the right to live on exactly the same terms as everybody else.



# Why doubt Darwinism?

Toby Adams on the renewed assault against a great theory

**S**cientists threaten to make Darwin extinct', trumpeted one review of a book on evolution published in the summer (*Sunday Times*, 23 August 1992). The book in question—*The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myth of Darwinism* by Richard Milton—has been presented as a scientific work, not some creationist tract. And yet the 'facts' are a joke.

Richard Dawkins conducted a useful demolition job in another review, pointing out that 'anyone who believes the Earth to be less than 10 000 years old needs psychiatric help' (*New Statesman*, 28 August). The interested reader can turn to Dawkins for the remaining gory details. Yet, at the same time as the book was being ridiculed, the *Times* could write an editorial claiming that 'the search for a better theory [than Darwinism] is now wide open'.

Attacks on Darwin take two forms. Either evolution itself is questioned, or else evolution is accepted but doubts are raised about Darwin's mechanism—chance mutation and natural selection. The first approach is taken by the increasingly vocal creationist lunatics in the USA, and other religious fundamentalists. Milton's approach comes close to this. The second approach is, however, more widespread, not least because the fact of evolution itself is hard to contest given all the fossil evidence.

Darwinism continues to upset religious people today because Darwin's explanation for evolution rules out any plan or purpose within nature. Darwin's theory established that nature is directionless—and therefore, by implication, Godless. From Karl Marx in the nineteenth century to the existentialists in the twentieth, secular thinkers have used Darwinism to support the conclusion that any purpose in the world must be the result of human action. And the only standard against which to measure such actions is humanity's own judgement, not God's. What we do with the natural world is up to us.

It was this kind of vision that the Catholic theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin responded to in his influential book *The Phenomenon of Man*, published in the 1950s. He argued that evolution was goal-directed, leading inevitably to mankind, and that Darwin's was a bleak vision, condemning humanity to 'cosmic loneliness'. Today, objections to Darwin voiced by both Greens and conservatives echo



Victorian cartoons lampooned Darwin as a monkey-man

de Chardin's points (see, for example, vice-president elect Al Gore's book *Earth in the Balance*, or FA Hayek's last major work *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*). By questioning Darwin, they are united in seeking to impose limits upon what humanity can achieve.

So how does Darwin's theory stand up today? Darwin's ideas have stood the test of time brilliantly. Modern science has done nothing other than confirm his basic propositions.

## Natural selection

Darwin argued that small variations occurred between organisms of a population. He thought that these small variations arose from chance fluctuations. He observed further that more offspring are produced in all animal populations than can hope to survive, due to competition for natural resources. 'Natural selection' would then ensure that, within a population, those organisms better suited to survive in the given conditions would tend to do so over their more unfortunate competitors. He drew an analogy with the 'artificial selection' of animal husbandry. The crucial difference being, of course, that natural selection is the result of a random process rather than a plan (as in animal husbandry).

Darwin assumed that the chance mutations in question were small changes in a blueprint within the organism, and that such changes were passed on to the offspring of the individual in question, ensuring that any advantage vis-à-vis others in the species was also passed on. This ensured that over time those with the advantageous features would come to dominate the population. An extreme example is provided by the greater survival rate of dark-coloured moths over light ones when the industrial revolution changed the habitat to the advantage of the former.

At the time, Darwin had no idea what the unit of inheritance could be. It had to have some very special properties—an ability to (almost) faultlessly reproduce itself, and the ability to determine the development of the individual organism from conception to adulthood. We now know that the unit in question is the DNA contained within the organism, and the sub-units—genes—which make it up. Science has advanced to the point where it can begin to determine the function of individual genes within the genetic material.

(There are between 50 000 and 100 000 genes in the human genetic material).

As far as humans are concerned, Darwinism tells us that we are an accident, rather than an inevitability. The universe, the Earth, could have happily existed without us. Our existence is contingent.

Nevertheless, we are here, and should make the most of it! There is no need to look to religion, nor to genetics, to explain the unique purposive abilities which set us apart from nature. The explanation lies in our recent history—the development of human society. What's more, we should celebrate our purposive potential, our capacity to dominate nature and to change the world for our benefit.

From this perspective, Darwinism can help to provide the basis for a liberation from the stifling influence of religious, ecological, and conservative ideas. After all, if it is argued that there is some cosmic purpose at work, then who are we to interfere? Such ideas relegate humans to bystanders, fit only to contemplate the working out of some grand scheme. By contrast, Darwinism tells us that there is no natural plan. This means that the world is there for us to use—for good or bad. ●



# The Burt

Is human intelligence innate? As charges of scientific fraud against pioneer educational psychologist Cyril Burt are withdrawn, his beliefs about people's inborn abilities are being rehabilitated. But, says John Gibson, Burt and his co-thinkers are still guilty of gross distortion

In February 1992 the British Psychological Society withdrew the charges it had made against Cyril Burt in 1980: 'Twelve years ago the society assumed that Burt was guilty of fraud. We no longer hold that view.' The society took this decision after the publication of new material defending Burt.

At around the same time, John Major, in a letter to Fred Jarvis, former general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, condemned the comprehensive education system in words that could have been taken from Burt's writings in the late 1960s: 'I want to ensure that we *actively* recognise pupils' differing ability and aptitudes and create the means for this diversity to flourish. This is the way to genuine equality of opportunity.' As the saying goes, could these two events be in any way related?

Cyril Burt's educational theories emphasised the *innate* character of human intelligence and ability. On that basis he defended the grammar school system, and also argued that wider divisions in society were a reflection of innate differences in intelligence. Burt's ideas were out of fashion long

before he was accused of producing his results through fraudulent experiments. Yet now he is being rehabilitated.

Burt's return to respectability has little to do with educational matters, or with the discovery of any substantial new evidence in his defence. Instead, Burt has been brought back into fashion as part of the wider attempt to reconstruct a more openly conservative, elitist perspective on the structure of society. Major and the rest are telling us that, in egalitarian Britain, the reasons why some are at the top and others at the bottom has to do with their natural abilities, not with the workings of a class system. They are calling on the late Sir Cyril to speak on their behalf.

## Eugenics pioneer

What did Burt do and say? During his 60-year career he helped to pioneer crowd psychology and eugenics, before becoming professor of psychology at University College London in 1932. He was knighted in 1946 and elected a fellow of the British Academy in 1950. During his long retirement he continued to publish a prodigious amount and entered the debate on

education in the 1960s through his contribution to the *Black Papers*.

Burt argued that the predominant influence on intelligence was genetic, as he wrote in 1933:

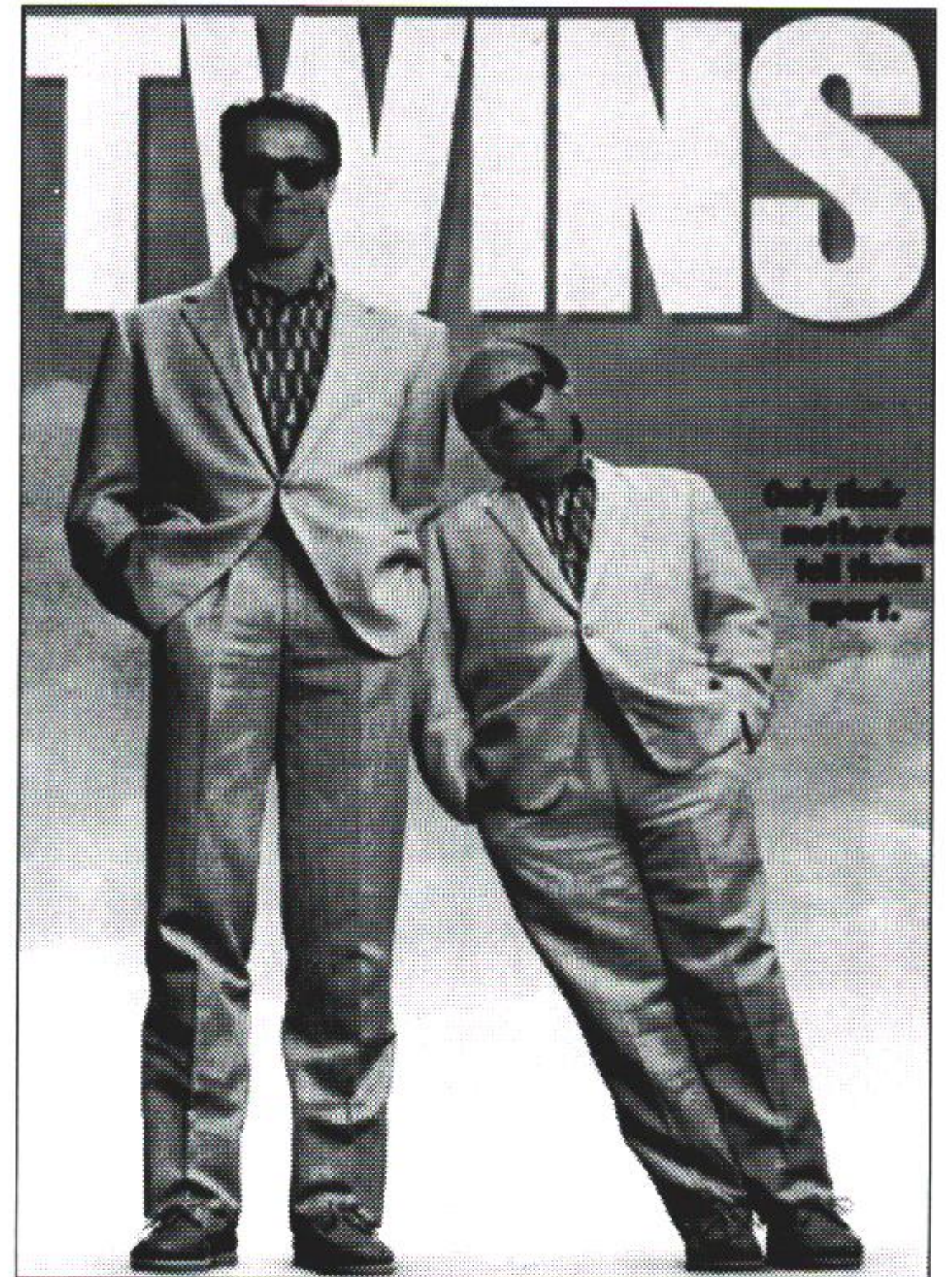
'The psychologist understands inborn, all-round intellectual ability. It is inherited, or at least innate, not due to teaching or training; it is intellectual, not emotional or moral, and remains uninfluenced by industry or zeal; it is not limited to any particular kind of work, but enters into all we do or say or think.' (Quoted in B Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-90*, p157).

In an article in 1943, 'Ability and income', Burt broadened this out to an explanation of inequality in society which, he said, seemed 'to be largely, though not entirely, an indirect effect of the wide inequality in innate intelligence'.

Burt's views carried weight for two reasons. They chimed with the prejudices of the educational and psychological establishment. And they were backed up by an unrivalled collection of experimental data,



# scandal



Burt's study of twins was shown to be a fraud, but his method has yet to be fully exposed

especially regarding the similar achievement of twins who had been separated and brought up in different circumstances.

## All equal now

After 1945, however, things began to change. Under the postwar liberal consensus, the authorities and educationalists tended to play down the importance of innate difference and to emphasise instead the educational potential of all children. The key factors in determining educational and social achievement now came to be seen as the environment in which a child lived, rather than natural abilities. Even Edward Boyle, Tory education minister in the early 1960s, rejected the notion that intelligence was some fixed thing given at birth. 'All children', he wrote, 'should have an equal opportunity of *acquiring* intelligence, and of developing their talents and abilities to the full' (*Education and the Social Order*, p275, emphasis added).

By this time Burt was fighting a rearguard battle to defend his case. In the *Black Papers* he joined with similarly minded educationalists to

argue for grammar schools, on the basis that some children were cut out for different roles in life than others. In particular, they emphasised the idea that the grammar system allowed the innately bright child from a working class background to get on in life. This argument was used to back up the notion that British society was a meritocracy.

HJ Eysenck, for example, argued that it was the new comprehensive system and the values of liberalism which were causing social injustice: 'The bright dustmen and miners, and their children, are the victims of social injustice; the dull doctors and lawyers, and their children, are the beneficiaries...greater, not less, use of IQ tests would seem to be the answer to this problem.' (*Black Paper*, No2, p38)

## Rehabilitating Burt

Burt and his co-thinkers didn't manage to change the intellectual climate, but, at his death in 1971, he was still a respected figure. However, in 1976 an exposé in the *Sunday Times* accused him of falsifying and inventing his data. This accusation was confirmed by Burt's official biographer Leslie

Hearnshaw in 1979, and he was condemned by the British Psychological Society in 1980.

There were always those who were unwilling to accept the verdict, and now they claim to have been vindicated. The decision to lift the official condemnation followed the publication of two books which have sought to refute the accusation of fraud: *The Burt Affair* by Robert Joynson (1989), and *Science, Ideology, and the Media: The Cyril Burt Scandal* by Ronald Fletcher (1991). Fletcher hopes that a personal rehabilitation for Burt will bring a rehabilitation of his ideas: 'If the charges of fraud are shown to be false, if the allegations of his detractors are shown to be sheer calumnies resting on no foundation, then the case for the rehabilitation of Burt and his work will be incontestable.' (p17)

Despite the mass of information and anecdote accumulated by Joynson and Fletcher, they have established nothing. Indeed they have skirted around the main issues raised by Burt's biographer, Hearnshaw. He argued that Burt set off on his fraudulent activity in the postwar period in response to attacks on his views by those who emphasised the





importance of environment. The key charges were that Burt fabricated data on twins, as shown by the fact that he got identical correlation coefficients when the sample size changed (statistically very unlikely); that he rigged data on the intelligence of parents and offspring to fit a genetic model; and that he invented two assistants who were supposed to have done much of the fraudulent field work for him after the war.

To cut a long story short, all Fletcher and Joynson have managed to do is to show that at least one of the assistants did exist. They do not question the fact

## Are we seriously supposed to believe that the country is run by people who reach the top on their natural merits?

that Burt published material, that he had written, in the assistants' names. They do not even establish whether or not the assistants did any research after, rather than before, the Second World War. All the other matters are open to interpretation, and likely to remain so. As Fletcher says in his 'Case for the defence': 'It will be found here, unfortunate though this is from the point of view of every side of the argument, that some aspects of the matter lie unavoidably, given the present state of the evidence, in the realm of the unprovable.' (p11)

### Man and method

Fletcher's best line of defence is that if Burt was a fraudster, he was either totally incompetent (unlikely), or else so arrogant that he thought nobody would examine his methods, which he made no attempt to hide (more likely). Whichever way you look at it, it is hardly a brilliant vindication of Burt. In the words of the science journal, *Nature*, Fletcher's and Joynson's work 'seems unlikely to shed new light on the debate over the roots of intelligence' (5 March 1992). Which, lest we forget, was what they claimed to have achieved through rehabilitating Burt.

Most of the renewed debate around Burt has missed the point about what Stephen Jay Gould has called 'the real error of Cyril Burt'. Critics of Burt have in general been over-preoccupied with the issue of fraud at the expense of taking up his procedure and assumptions. The consequence has been that while Burt was discredited, his approach has been insufficiently challenged. The issue of fraud is in fact a minor matter compared with method.

Burt and those like him argue that intelligence is innate and therefore fixed; you've either got it or you haven't. Yet the issue that should concern us is not how much intelligence people are born with, but the failure of modern society to realise anything like the potential of the majority of people, whether or not there is any innate component to differing human abilities.

In fact, a body of scientific evidence suggests that there is no such thing as innate intelligence, but that intelligence itself is shaped by the society in which the brain develops. What is being increasingly studied today is the way in which the brain is physically only partially formed at birth, and the consequences this has for child development. In particular, it seems to indicate that even in its physical formation, the brain is subject to a wide range of social ('environmental') influences.

### Forget biology

A more significant point is that all genetic models of human capacity represent a static and crude view of human beings. The fact that our biology is the same as primitive man strongly suggests that, in studying uniquely human characteristics like intelligence, we need to move away from biology towards a developmental and social perspective. This was the view of the great Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky:

'Properly organised learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organised, specifically human psychological functions.' (LS Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*, p90).

In other words, what people like Burt call innate intelligence should in fact be seen as a very plastic social phenomenon.

And even if you were to accept that there are innate differences between people, there is no basis to the assumption that the divisions in society reflect this. Modern society is not a meritocracy. It is based upon the rule of the propertied capitalist minority. Only a rank apologist for the system could try to claim that it is 'natural' for some to be poor and some rich.

This brings us back to the debate today, and the real reason why Burt is being rehabilitated.

As *Living Marxism* has noted before, contemporary conservative thinkers who talk about the problem of the 'underclass' are trying to

re-establish the idea that poverty is not caused by society but by the innate deficiencies of the poor themselves. The debate about educational achievement is now following a similar trajectory, towards 'naturalising' differences among children.

### Sign of the times

The Burt revival is a consequence of this rightward drift of opinion, rather than a vindication of his ideas about psychology. The change of attitude towards Burt has nothing to do with the status of his research; as we have seen, there is no convincing new evidence in his defence. Instead, the change reflects the shattering of the postwar liberal consensus, and the conservative shift in the broader intellectual climate over the past few years.

It is important to see the Burt issue in a wider context than a debate about education. When John Major wrote to Fred Jarvis about the failure of the comprehensive system, he was seeking to make a wider point. Like Eysenck before him, Major wants to promote the view that Britain is, or is becoming, a meritocracy based on differing abilities; the poor are poor because of their own shortcomings, and anybody can get on if they have it in them (cue Tory election broadcast of Major's Daimler cruising the Brixton backstreets from whence he came).

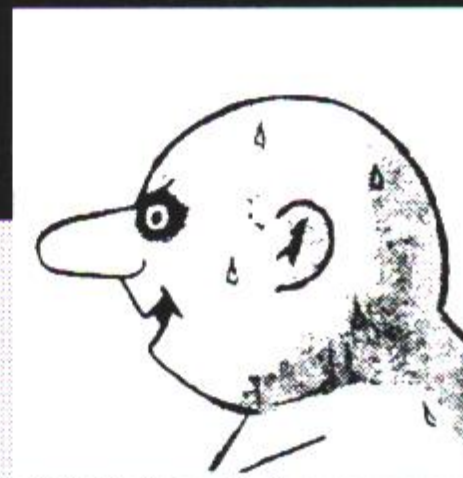
The failure of the comprehensive education system can then be put down, not to a lack of investment in schools and teachers, but to the false assumption that all pupils are equal. In the seventies, Eysenck was on the fringe arguing that, since society was becoming more egalitarian, social divisions were coming more and more to reflect innate differences in ability. This argument is now in the Tory mainstream.

### Brixton boy

The right has only been able to get away with broadcasting such elitist rubbish because of the moral collapse of its old liberal opponents in the educational establishment. This retreat is evidenced by the Psychological Society's climbdown on Burt, and more explicitly by the endorsement of Burt-style ideas by *Guardian* columnists. They have allowed Burt's defenders to claim victory without firing a single effective shot.

The boy from Brixton who failed his eleven plus done well in becoming the political frontman for the British establishment. But that doesn't prove Burt right, nor does it make Britain a meritocracy. After the brilliant governmental record of recent times, are we seriously supposed to believe that the country is run by people who reach the top on their natural merits? ●





**H**aving been asked to 'put the Christmas into *Living Marxism*', I was about to pen a traditional seasonal greeting when I discovered that Basildon's local paper, the *Standard Recorder*, now refers to its readers as 'fans'. Our magazine prides itself on keeping abreast of cultural developments, and has never shared the general media snobbery about Essex. So, on behalf of everyone here: Merry Christmas to all *Living Marxism* readers and fans (except the ones who pretend to read it in WH Smith's with Madonna-style publications inside). May you go forth and multiply. Now for a round-up of the year's events.

● **The other 'come-back kid'**

How sad that Radio 4's Man of the Year poll was abandoned following a vote-rigging scandal. There would have been just one serious contender: the poignant figure who stood pumping coins into a public pay-phone, waiting to talk about the pit closures on a radio phone-in, only to be ejected before he could get on air when an old lady called the police. Undeterred, he tracked down news crews outside Congress House. 'The laws in this country', he wailed, 'are the worst in the world for people who want to give a bit of help!' Step forward big-hearted Norman Willis, general secretary of the helping, caring TUC. We salute you.

● **Nanny broadcasting**

The encroachment of the nanny state continues apace in the world of TV, where, contrary to popular belief, a lot of people get rich underestimating the intelligence of the public. First there were unsavoury reports on how to use toilet paper (folded over so fingers can't break through), and, worse, Claire Rayner's unprompted demonstration of how to use a bidet (it's not for washing your feet). Then came the bizarre late-night government information film with two villainous figures discussing planning a 'job' for the weekend. Suddenly they produce a drill, hammer, etc, and a voice says: 'If you're planning some DIY, get the right tools for the job.' And that's it. To recap, use the right tools, not the wrong ones: hammers for nails, screwdrivers for screws...

Topping the lot for sheer fatuousness is Anneka Rice's 'Play it Safe', which warns viewers not to let children eat batteries or drink bleach, and shows examples of what happens to them if they do. Perhaps this worthy show could be improved along the lines of *Treasure Hunt*. Anneka could eat a battery somewhere in the countryside, and teams of blindfolded army personnel could then compete with local ambulance services to track her down. All for the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital appeal, of course.

● **Economic miracles**

'Equality of misery' is how one cabinet minister describes his vision of the future, and the great and the good are already adjusting to financial pressures. Princess Anne's daughter Zara advertises Sugar & Spice, the perfume for six to 12-year olds who 'want to attract boys'. More controversial is the unholy alliance of Salisbury cathedral and McDonald's. Visitors donating £1.50 to the cathedral fund receive a parchment-style scroll and a Big Mac Meal voucher.

Ad of the year must be Range Rover's American campaign, headed: 'Buy something'. It suggests a Range Rover, or 'if that's not on the cards, a microwave. A basset hound. Theatre tickets. A Tootsie Roll. *Something*. Because if we all wait for the recession to be officially declared over to start spending again, the problem will simply keep feeding on itself.'

● **Year Zero**

Slumps are caused by a lack of prophets, so let's not forget the few we have. David Icke predicted the collapse of capitalism this year, but it wasn't enough to save his political career, and all in all it was a bad time for Greens. The low point was surely when four Essex boys stood as Green candidates in a school election and were accused by a Tory of dropping litter and intimidating voters. Litter-dropping jibes are fighting talk in Essex, and the Greens responded in time-honoured fashion. I am pleased to report that the Tory did not stoop to their level and is now out of hospital. The Green lads, however, were charged with GBH, which has nothing to do with the fight against CFCs. Common decency was the loser once again.

● **Crimewatch**

The police have taken a lot of stick this year, and have even been thrown out of a London football league for corruption. ('Give a policeman a bit more power and you know he'll abuse it. It's in their nature'—Jimmy Greaves, writing in *Shoot*.)

I've often criticised them for using crime panics to scapegoat minorities, so it's nice to be able to offer the coppers a helping hand in a genuine case of wrongdoing. A man and woman have been stealing from jewellers, using their young children to distract the shop assistants. Although all the thefts have been in Buckinghamshire, the national press have printed the police warning in view of its seriousness. In case you haven't seen this, the couple have *Irish accents* and 'look just like any other couple'. Keep 'em peeled.

There has been a lot of talk about the right to privacy, but what about the right to snoop? After all, the flick of the net curtain and the Neighbourhood Watch sticker are as British as the Union Jack. Hats off then to Cyril Reenan, the retired bank manager at the centre of the 'Dianagate' scandal. Mr Reenan is a 'radio ham' who innocently monitors other people's phone calls using 20-foot aerials in his back garden. When he intercepted Princess Di's Squidgy-talk, the ardent royalist promptly sold the tape to the *Sun* for safe-keeping. That he escaped prosecution through a legal loophole is a relief, but also an indictment of our police state.

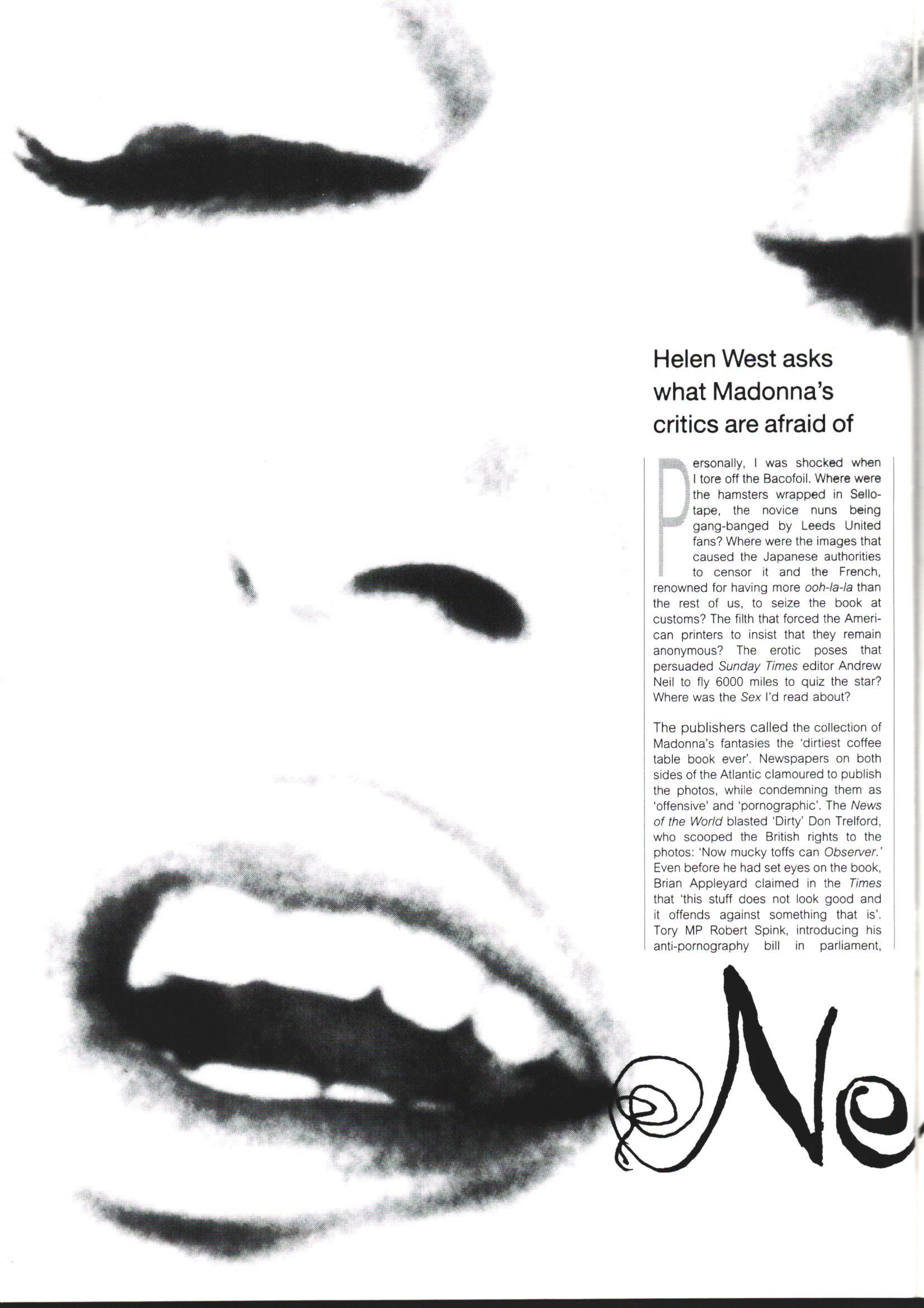
A blow was struck against freedom of religious expression when the courts accepted the police case against a London man accused of frightening a chicken with a stick, an alleged Mayan religious ritual. The prosecution argued that killing animals is lawful if done humanely, but causing a bird to 'fear for its life' is not. The defence argued that the chicken was incapable of being in fear of death, since it could not think and would not have the slightest cognisance of what the born-again Mayan was up to. The court threw out that nonsense and found the man guilty, presumably on the grounds that poultry can think just as well as policemen.

Mistreating pets is a topical cause, and it has reached the point where even ordinary animal-lovers are now seen as legitimate targets by the zealots. After an anti-social couple were prosecuted for smoking in a crowded train carriage (having just had sex), the press seized this opportunity to persecute a perfectly harmless minority by printing a stream of salacious stories about people having sex with their pets on public transport. There hasn't been a single report of these people lighting up, and yet the papers are determined to portray them as monsters.

● **Farewell, then....**

Lord Snooty, made redundant by the *Beano* for not being relevant to today's kids. A career in the upper house beckons, where his insights into questions of class and race will surely be better appreciated. 'His Pals' face an uncertain future. ●





## Helen West asks what Madonna's critics are afraid of

**P**ersonally, I was shocked when I tore off the Bacofoil. Where were the hamsters wrapped in Sello-tape, the novice nuns being gang-banged by Leeds United fans? Where were the images that caused the Japanese authorities to censor it and the French, renowned for having more *ooh-la-la* than the rest of us, to seize the book at customs? The filth that forced the American printers to insist that they remain anonymous? The erotic poses that persuaded *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil to fly 6000 miles to quiz the star? Where was the Sex I'd read about?

The publishers called the collection of Madonna's fantasies the 'dirtiest coffee table book ever'. Newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic clamoured to publish the photos, while condemning them as 'offensive' and 'pornographic'. The *News of the World* blasted 'Dirty' Don Trelford, who scooped the British rights to the photos: 'Now mucky toffs can *Observer*.' Even before he had set eyes on the book, Brian Appleyard claimed in the *Times* that 'this stuff does not look good and it offends against something that is'. Tory MP Robert Spink, introducing his anti-pornography bill in parliament,

*No*





*Shadows* as a 'testament to his love of women': 'there are lots of women, many of them naked, some of them in lesbian poses: some of these are of his wife Catherine Dyer, in black underwear or nothing at all.'

But the women Bailey and the *Telegraph* celebrate know their place in society and the photos they commend picture women as passive and iconic. 'It's because I'm so heterosexual', Bailey told the *Telegraph*. 'I don't mind them doing it with other women, but I don't want them doing it with men.' Bailey depicts lesbian desire as a bit of harmless fun for the lads to watch.

Madonna, however, is something else. She's not just explicit, she's brazen. She enjoys sex and wants to tell the world about it. She likes to experiment, and to hell with strait-laced morality. (Let's not forget that the Jason Donovan response to discussions on sexuality is the norm for the nineties.) She ruthlessly exploits her sex appeal. And she does it all to an audience of millions. 'Madonna has authority', warned Appleyard, 'a popular right to endorse the virtues of bad behaviour, to celebrate adolescent excess. If Madonna is "doing" pornography, it acquires a certain kind of virtue'.

Madonna's critics are furious because she has made sleaze respectable and she shows no shame about it. 'Women in your business', Andrew Neil pontificated in his interview with Madonna, 'sometimes flaunt their bodies—or are forced to flaunt their bodies—to further the start of their careers. When success comes they usually regret they did so. But you...'. 'My career and the choices that I make are not based on what other people do', snapped back Madonna. 'Where is the rule that you can't use your mind and your body from start to finish?'

And there is the nub of the problem for the moralists: Madonna refuses to be straitjacketed by the unwritten rules about the roles that women should play. Unlike many female icons, Madonna is in control, and wants everyone to know it. 'Marilyn Monroe', she once said, 'was a victim and I'm not'. That is just why the

Andrew Neils of this world can celebrate Monroe and condemn Madonna.

From her first hit single, 'Like a Virgin', through the 'blasphemous' video 'Like a Prayer' and the sadomasochistic 'Justify My Love' to her latest film *Body of Evidence* (in which she plays a sadomasochist accused of murdering her rich, old lover during sex), Madonna has caused the guardians of morality to skip a heartbeat. Throughout her career, the questions about Madonna have never been 'Is she a good singer, dancer, actress?', but rather, 'How appropriate is she as a role model for young women today?'

The publication of *Sex* coincides with a growing conservative backlash against liberal morality and in defence of 'family values'. From Middle England to Middle America, sexual promiscuity is held up as a mortal threat to society. 'The clutched crotch', claimed Brian Appleyard, 'is to today's youth what the clenched fist was to yesterday's'. Madonna has become the latest whipping girl in this new cultural war in defence of moral standards.

Andrew Neil of the *Sunday Times* lectured Madonna as if she were single-handedly responsible for the decline of Anglo-Saxon civilisation. 'So many social problems we face—the ghettos being the worst—are the result of the collapse of the nuclear family. A lot of what happened in the Sixties—and what you are doing is a continuation of that—helped to destroy the nuclear family. The result is a society with too many welfare mothers bringing up kids without a man in the house.' In other words, Madonna is not just a dirty cow, she's also somehow to blame for every problem from unemployment to the Los Angeles riots.

Madonna, as usual, has the last word. 'I'm getting the flak from the people I mostly don't respect at all', she has said. 'In fact if I wasn't criticised by them I'd be mortified...All the things I find shocking, they don't at all. Like poverty, exploitation and conventional morality, which actually makes people accept these things. If they are shocked by me, they can go to hell.' ●

condemned Madonna as 'a confused and perverted woman'.

Yet inside its shiny aluminium covers, *Sex* is surprisingly tame. Pictures of bondage, of masturbation, of lesbian desire, all artfully posed. Pictures of Madonna hitch-hiking in the nude, eating a pizza in the nude, looking over a wall in the nude. Some of the photos are certainly erotic, some are naff, a few humorous. But they are not that different from what you might find in *Playboy* or *Penthouse* or even *Health and Efficiency*, though they are shot with considerably more glamour and panache. Let's face it, this is the stuff that top shelves are made of.

The text that accompanies the photos is often embarrassingly gauche. 'My pussy is the temple of learning', gushes Madonna. 'Sometimes I sit at the edge of the bed and stare into the mirror.' Me and my teenage girlfriends came up with more convincing stuff than this before we'd even had sex.

There is nothing in *Sex* that Helmut Newton and David Bailey haven't already put in the Unipart calendar or on the coffee table. A week before *Sex* hit the bookshops, the *Telegraph* magazine celebrated Bailey's new book *If We*

urotica



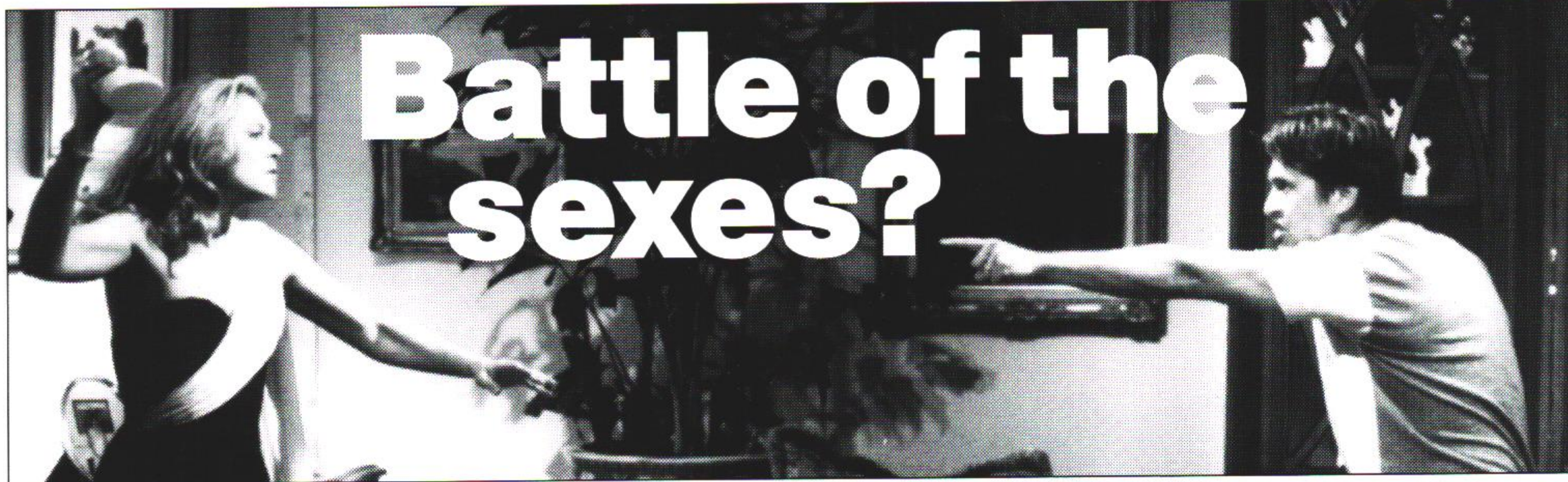


PHOTO: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

# Battle of the sexes?

Neil Lyndon has created a storm with *No More Sex War* a tirade against 'the failures of feminism'. Tracey Lauder surveys the debate and talks to one of his critics, writer Yvonne Roberts

Neil Lyndon is a man with a chip on his shoulder and acid on his tongue. In *No More Sex War* he argues that feminism is a form of totalitarianism comparable to Nazism, and draws parallels between the Holocaust and the abortion of thousands of fetuses.

Feminism, argues Lyndon, is the incubus that has visited our society, destroyed the hopes and dreams of a generation of sixties radicals (like him), and subjected men to untold injustices.

Lyndon says that the pill and the 1967 Abortion Act liberated women in Britain, but that men are denied equal rights. Men cannot retire at 60, fathers are denied equal access to their children, and so on. Today, writes Lyndon, women use the myth of oppression to excuse 'all the nightmare excesses, the poisonous hostilities and vicious aggressions' which feminists have heaped upon men over the past 20 years.

Lyndon has a particular bee in his bonnet about domestic violence, which he claims is another feminist myth. His main evidence is his personal experience of fights with various girlfriends. 'I was the one who got more badly hurt', he wails, hence proving conclusively that wife-beating is feminist propaganda. He has another interesting line of argument to prove that rape is not really a problem. 'What if the statistics are wrong?', he asks—and goes on to demonstrate that if the statistics were wrong, then rape cannot be of real concern to women.

The crudity of Lyndon's misogynistic arguments occasionally makes you think he must be a skipful of bricks short of a full load. His book generated predictable outrage everywhere from the *Guardian* women's page to the BBC's *Late Show*. Yet the arguments in *No More Sex War* are symptomatic of a wider reaction which is eroding the climate of liberalism that first gave rise to feminism.

While many critics of Lyndon are incensed by his misogyny, the debate has rarely moved beyond the immediate parochial concerns of the chattering classes. The economic and social roots of women's oppression have rarely been addressed. Issues such as abortion rights, nursery facilities or equal pay—issues that are crucial to the vast majority of women in Britain—have featured little in the debate. Instead, much of the discussion has focused on problems of personal relationships and on the individual qualities or failings of men and women. While Lyndon blames women for the problems facing men, most of his feminist critics blame men for the problems facing women. Both sides are united in playing down or ignoring the role of society in shaping women's lives.

This was strikingly illustrated in a public debate between Lyndon and journalist Yvonne Roberts, whose book *Mad about Women* is a response to *No More Sex War*. Roberts at one point told the audience that she was going to use the 'C-word—capitalism'. 'My heart leaped for a moment', responded someone from the audience. 'I thought you were going to talk about children.' The pressure which capitalist society puts on working class women raised little debate; the impact of family breakdown on children excited much concern. When a speaker from the floor raised the need for 24-hour nurseries, she faced opposition not just from Lyndon, but from many women in the audience who wanted to celebrate the 'caring, nurturing' side of women's personalities through motherhood.

Yvonne Roberts is aware of the need to break out of the traditional view of women as carers and nurturers. 'The main success of the women's

movement', she told me, 'has been to give women a sense of themselves, the feeling that we aren't all born to be mothers and carers'. Economic independence, she observes, is the only real security a woman can have: 'You can't get security from another person.' Roberts argues that the very nature of family life in our society creates tensions between men and women. 'I have seen it with my relatives. As the first, then second, child comes along, the lives of the two people would grow further apart, climax perhaps once a week when he gets his leg over and she gets resentful.'

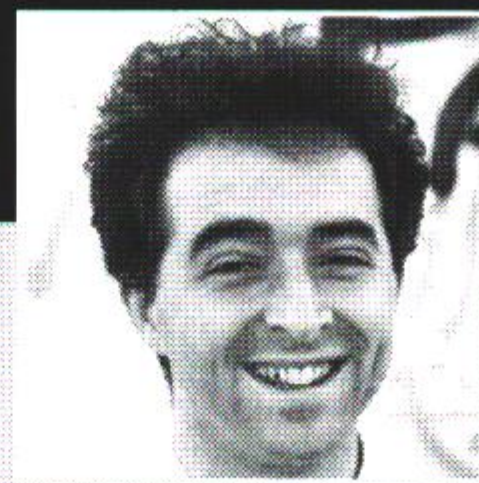
Roberts herself sometimes slips into seeing men as the problem—for example, she blames the 'male media' for distorting the message of feminism. But she also recognises that the fight against oppression cannot be reduced to a 'battle of the sexes'. In the public debate, Roberts called for a united struggle between men and women on issues like low pay. What does she regard as the feminist agenda for the nineties? 'Childcare is probably the most important issue. It should be subsidised by local authorities, employers and government.' True, though most working class women cannot afford even the 'subsidised' facilities that some councils and employers now provide. What women need is free, round-the-clock childcare.

As for the women's movement, Roberts feels that one of its biggest failings has been its willingness to see women as victims rather than as fighters. 'I hate the whole victim thing', she said. 'One of the ways they try to solve the position of women is to imply that all women were somebody's prey, about to be raped or murdered, or that they aren't responsible for themselves. Somewhere down the line you have to stand fast and say "This is me, I am responsible for myself, I deserve better".'

● Neil Lyndon, *No More Sex War*, Sinclair-Stevenson, £14.99 hbk

● Yvonne Roberts, *Mad about Women*, Virago, £5.99 pbk





# Gladiators don't wear jumpers

**S**aturday evening TV has changed. When the Normal family were allowed on to *The Generation Game* in the seventies, they remained grateful and shy while the host chaperoned them through his good-humoured, non-competitive games. At no point did any Mr Normal say 'you're going to get your \*\*\*\*ing head kicked in, Brucie', nor did the little Normals ever express the desire to 'kick ass' while learning to make noodles. This sort of behaviour is expected, however, on *Gladiators*, an American import hosted by John Fashanu and somebody called Ulrike.

Ulrike is blonde to the point of abstraction. She has the presence of ectoplasm. Fashanu interviews the players with the bored, unhearing grandeur of royalty ('So you think I'm going to get my \*\*\*\*ing head kicked in. Great. Super. And over to you, Ulrike'). But, unlike traditional Saturday night game shows, *Gladiators* is about the competitors, not the hosts.

This time the members of the public are not introduced via a patronisingly jokey interview with the star; they address their remarks directly to camera in a pre-shot interview, as though they were championship boxers. This is only fair because they aren't going up against the Cardigan family of Crinkley Bottom. They are going up against the Gladiators. On the night I watched, one of the competitors was called Derek. Derek weighed in at ten and a half stone. His opposition was the Cobra (20 stone). Derek v the Cobra. Really, you feel that Derek should have guessed.

Derek and his co-competitor Terry had to climb inside huge metal cages (Atlaspheres) which they had to roll around a kind of huge pinball table picking up points. The Gladiators' job was to stop them, which they did more or less immediately. When Fashanu came up to interview the competitors, however, they had still not learned their lesson. 'The Gladiators are scared now', they said, 'we'll beat them with the poles'.

This is a game in which you stand on a narrow platform on top of a pole and the Gladiator whacks you with a padded shillelagh. It's a sort of *Blade Runner* pillow-fight. One clout and Derek was down. The crowd roared—in another astonishing departure from Saturday night tradition, the audience sticks up, not for Derek and Terry, but for the Cobra and his cohorts.

After this, Derek and Terry were replaced by two women called Carol, and the Cobra gave way to Lightning, a female Gladiator. The audience chanted her name and stamped their feet, in robotic unison, as though at a Queen concert or the Nuremberg Rally. Lightning wiggled her bottom and did a somersault in response, and the crowd went crazy. She either had an awful lot of relatives in the stadium or the warm-up man had fancied her.

In the newsagent's the next morning, it became obvious why the adulation was being directed towards Lightning and not Carol. *Gladiators* merchandising is already available. Posters, chewing-gum cards and little models are on sale—of Lightning and the Cobra (and the Scorpion and Flame), but not of Carol or even of Derek (who did shoot down the Cobra with a tennis-ball bazooka).

I should have known this from watching the show. Most of the Gladiators are body-builders who have built their bodies to resemble blown-up plastic stocking-fillers. When Lightning wiggled her bum, it was oddly asexual. Her gesture was honed to the point where it could be easily replicated with a ball and socket joint. She was recommending her body not to randy viewers, but to corporate toy manufacturers.

What have the BBC put up against this *Judge Dredd/Jeux Sans Frontières? Noel's House Party*, brought to you from Noel's house in Crinkley Bottom. The name says it all, a pungent stew of heritage, Englishness and smut. Despite the cosy name, the *House Party* is a far cry from the Tupperware jollity of, say, *The Big Breakfast*. For a start, the house is no semi, but a stately home. This Toad Hall comes complete with low beams and oaken doors through which the guests are admitted.

Noel does not come on as the friendly neighbour but as the squire, indulging the local peasantry in a few revels. The games are designed to emphasise the client status of the competitors. In one of the games, the guests are asked to guess the identity of the celebrity who sings to them from the cellar. I could see the celebrity on my screen and I still couldn't guess who she was.

In another game called 'Wait Till I Get You Home', a little boy was asked about his parents' shortcomings. One of these was spending too much time examining 'page three'. So here we had a child accusing his father of masturbation on primetime TV, while Noel chortled indulgently and the father blushing admitted it. In case you don't get the message at any point, Noel turns to camera, arching his eyebrows and pursing his lips, to clarify his contempt for what Coriolanus called the 'mutable, ill-scented many'; of course, being looked down on by Coriolanus is one thing, being looked down on by a guy with a seventies haircut and a hideous jumper is quite another.

In fact, for most of the show, Noel doesn't have to share air time with 'the many' at all. 'Grab a Grand' and other spiritually uplifting mainstay games of the show are played via a phone-in, as though on the radio. I can think of no more eloquent statement of the BBC's current attitude to the mainstream audience than this—we are expected to pay to be humiliated by an ageing DJ in a feudal setting. The Corporation was always patronising, but there was a time when it had something to be patronising about. Being patronised by Noel Edmonds is like being given advice on self-motivation by a two-toed sloth.

*Gladiators* on the other hand has the fundamentally democratic thrust of films like *Beethoven* or *Home Alone* in which a helpless child or woefully inadequate parent is suddenly faced with incredible odds, and wins through. The scoring system of *Gladiators* (you get points for simply enduring the beating), coupled with the costume (knee pads, football helmets) means that most people come out of it looking good. Indeed, when Carol knocked Flame off the pole, and when Derek took out the Cobra in one shot, they looked more than good; they looked heroic. ●





## Helen Carradine reports from Tokyo on how the Japanese are turning cuddly

The streets of Osaka and Tokyo are full of wannabe cuties. Paranoid young women and ecstatic anorexics alike are squeezed into frilly skirts, cuddly tops and ankle socks. Young men sporting flares scamper across the pavements, snuggling their hands inside their jumper sleeves in an attempt to look like small furry animals. Being cute and cuddly has become a national obsession. Even the punks smell of soap.

Two themes have converged in Japanese fashion in recent years: the ferociously, stylishly modern (that's the good news) and the infantile regression cult. Far from being inscrutable in the traditional po-faced sense of Western stereotypes, people here seem to alternate between pulling the innocently amazed face of a six-year old that has just discovered a dandelion and the look of a one-year old baby who has just mastered the single expression, 'I don't understand anything I'm looking at'.

The bizarre popularity of anything soft, cosy and reminiscent of the nursery is not limited to the youth who actually get to dress up like toddlers. I know a stressed-out office worker in his thirties whose desk is covered with protective glass. Peering from under the surface are the meltingly pretty faces of all the schoolgirl pop idols he has cut out from magazines. On top of the glass sit cuddly animals, bendy rubber Mickey Mouses, a soft patchwork cloth tissue box holder, and pink and white stationary. On his chair is a giant cushion in the form of a blue furry pig.

All right, he is a little extreme. But most people do have a collection of cute thingamibobs hanging around the place. In many ways they have little choice. It is

# The cult of the cute

often impossible to buy ordinary things other than in primary colours with a cheerful little chap like 'ampan man' or 'mina tabo' waving at you from it. Take *kerompah*, the resident imbecile frog (predictably a very childish version of Kermit): he pops up in so many places that I wouldn't be surprised to find his stupid face printed on the end of a condom.

Young people have an almost hysterical obsession with physical appearance. Even your soundest friends will drive you crazy as they lay into their fifth consecutive conversation about what they look like, about what you look like, about what the television weather man looks like. You might think that popular magazines in Britain are obsessed with the question of personal appearance—but wait till you see Japanese magazines. Here, the equivalents of *Cosmo* or *Marie Claire* simply do not have the space to advise on those other staples of British magazines, such as how to be good in bed or how to get on in the office. Magazines here are like mail order catalogues, for clothes, cosmetics and anything else to improve your appearance.

Physical self-obsession is so rampant that it has lost all its embarrassing connotations. Guys and girls stare at themselves in little portable comb and mirror gadgets wherever they happen to stop and feel the need to minutely adjust the hair that is likely to be washed twice a day. It's not even as if fashion and style and image are about self-expression: they are more about the need to conform earnestly, thoroughly and flamboyantly.

Noticing Japanese cuteness is not, by the way, my prejudice about a people who happen to be smaller and smoother than your average European. There was certainly more than an element of that prejudice in general MacArthur's remark in 1945 that 'measured by the standards of modern civilisation [the Japanese] would be like a boy of 12 as compared with our development of 45 years'.

The striking thing today, however, is

that a cult of immaturity should have blossomed over the very years during which we have seen a dramatic convergence of Japanese society with that of the West. Indeed in some ways the cute phenomenon is a reaction to the Westernisation of Japan.

In the mid-eighties the big pop idol here was Seiko Matsuda. She was called the leading *burriko* (pretend child) and *kawaiiko-chan* (little miss cutie). Her decision to have eye operations to give her a more Western appearance signalled her decline. Not only did that offend national sensibilities, it also made her less cute and attractive to her audience.

The term *kawaii* derived from a word meaning pathetic, vulnerable or weak. Today it means 'desirable' in the most general sense of expressing approval about something. It is not only used to signify being childlike and happy, but also to indicate an attitude of hard-working jollity, upfront simplicity and polite submission. And, surprise, surprise, it is often used in these ways in the context of work.

Many commentators have remarked upon the extent to which *kawaii* assists the smooth and efficient functioning of Japanese capitalism. Some have even questioned whether the full formation of an adult subject is really necessary. Others have suggested that the cult of the cute reflects Japan's problematic political and cultural relationship with the USA, which has encouraged the growth of a distinct, independent cultural trend which is not challenging or threatening to the senior partner.

Personally, I think that Japanese people have been coping with their lives of tedium and toil by trying to escape into fantasies of sweetness and light, into the childish state of innocence and ignorance where you don't have to think or take responsibility, or even care. In a nation that has become a byword for capitalist advance, personal survival requires a return to the nursery. ●



# MARXIST

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

Alan Harding on how a Tory academic has exposed the illiberal prejudice of the liberal intelligentsia

### The fear of the masses

*The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939*, John Carey, Faber & Faber, £14.99 hbk, £5.99 pbk

*The Intellectuals and the Masses* is a great read. John Carey is enthusiastic in praise and scorn. The text is shot through with insight and humour. And the Merton professor of English has got something to say. Carey is a lifetime Oxford don. He has, however, always been outside the charmed circle of social connection that is endemic in Oxford life. He is immune from the precious aestheticism that pervades Oxford English studies.

Alongside his academic position (studies on Dickens, Thackeray and Donne) he has a reputation for plain speaking amounting to a vendetta against intellectuals. After all, runs the argument, he is chief book reviewer for the Murdoch *Sunday Times*—he must be a philistine! This philistine is so old-fashioned, they say, that he is still fighting the alliance of High Modernism and High Society from the corner of a saloon bar.

‘Anti-intellectualism has always been available on tap in the saloon bar, of course, but it is sad to find a professor of English who is so desperately keen to buy his round.’ (S Collini, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 17 July 1992)

With this confrontational background it is not surprising that Carey’s latest book met with almost universal hostility in the ‘quality’ press. Carey has executed a scathing attack on the attitude of intellectuals to the masses.

‘The intellectuals could not, of course, actually prevent the masses from attaining literacy. But they could prevent them reading literature by making it too difficult for them to understand—and this is what they did. The

early twentieth century saw a determined effort, on the part of the European intelligentsia, to exclude the masses from culture. In England this movement has become known as modernism.’ (p16)

This is John Carey’s sin: he has exposed the most grotesque prejudices against the common people held by the leading lights of the literary intelligentsia. In this book you will read that Flaubert thought that ‘the mass, the herd will always be despicable’ (p5), and that this hatred is shared by all of the sensitive, literary people in various degrees. The contempt for the masses is not restricted to their numbers, but extended to every aspect of working class life. Elementary education is despised by TS Eliot and DH Lawrence for ‘lowering our standards’ (p15) and producing what Aldous Huxley called ‘the New Stupid’ (p18). The growth of the popular press was denounced by FR Leavis and Evelyn Waugh for the same reasons. Underlying the detestation of mass literacy and of mass-circulation newspapers is an opposition to democracy, premised upon the idea that the masses are not to be trusted with too much knowledge.

Even tinned food became a hallmark of everything cheap and vulgar about the clerks from Croydon. Carey lists characters in the works of EM Forster, TS Eliot, John Betjeman, Graham Greene, HG Wells who are all damned to mediocrity by enjoying a can of ‘Deep Sea Salmon’ or pineapple chunks. To the sculptor Eric Gill, Bird’s Custard Powder was a blasphemy, while George Orwell wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that ‘we may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun’ (pp21-22).

I have quoted the reaction of Stefan Collini in the ►



*Times Higher Education Supplement* above. In the *Independent* Jonathan Keates wrote that this book was 'an apology for the vendetta conducted against our culture...by the Baroness of Finchley, whose idea of a good book was *The Day of the Jackal*'.

James Wood, chief literary critic at the *Guardian*, moved through spleen—'This is, in places, a vulgar book that did not have to be so'—to attempt a critique. Wood takes issue with what he terms Carey's introduction of

exclude the majority, although unmediated, is a fair enough description of an attitude. It is not an analysis. It gives no context or historical genesis for why these ideas should have become so influential.

Behind the loathing is fear of the masses. This motif in bourgeois thought emerges in the last third of the nineteenth century and becomes more pertinent in the first half of this century. It is a reaction to the growing sense that the capitalist system is spinning out of control. The bourgeoisie's sense of its own historical mission and capacity to sustain economic and social progress is undermined by material dislocation, political rivalries and barbaric military conflict.

The bourgeois order cannot hold itself responsible for these catastrophes and the despair they induce. The response of the ruling class and its intellectual elite is to blame the modern world itself and the uncivilised nature of the working class for the crisis of the capitalist system. Technical innovation is seen as the explanation for the end of civilisation. The potential agents of human progress—the working masses—are denounced as the fountainhead of barbarism.

Set in the context of such an outrageous inversion, it is legitimate for Carey, or anyone else, to hold Lawrence accountable for his reactionary jottings (though unpleasant opinions do not preclude good writing) and to draw wider implications. So Carey quotes this letter of Lawrence's to Blanche Jennings from 1908:

'If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly, and a Cinematograph working brightly; then I'd go out in the back streets and main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks; and the band would softly bubble out the "Hallelujah Chorus"'. (p12)

Lawrence's enthusiasm for gas chambers is not an eccentric or exceptional response. The Liberal home secretary, Winston Churchill, argued that a similar programme should become government policy before the First World War. Such theories of racial superiority and eugenics were the common sense of the ruling classes until discredited by the experience of the Holocaust. In the last decade of our century, however, such ideas are not scorned in the same way and have more resonance in society than they have had for 50 years. This is why Carey's book is important and substantially correct, although I have a number of differences with his conclusions. Carey leaves James Joyce half aside in his condemnation of the literary intelligentsia:

'Can we say, then, that in *Ulysses* mass man is redeemed?...To a degree, yes. One effect of *Ulysses* is to show that mass man matters, that it is worthwhile to record his personal details on a prodigious scale. And yet it is also true that Bloom himself would never and could never have read *Ulysses* or a book like *Ulysses*.' (p20)

Why should we accept the passive assumption that nobody other than intellectuals will ever read *Ulysses*. A point well made by Blake Morrison in the *Independent on Sunday*: Carey 'does not seem to have noticed...that, in

## Carey has the seed of a good idea that never germinates

moralism into his criticism. 'His reviews, though often intelligent, have a strange absence of literary argument—moralism does the work instead.'

Here Wood puts his finger on an important discussion and then gets it all wrong. The problem with Carey's book is not that it is insufficiently literary, but that it is inadequately social. He does not see the intellectual debate about the masses as a consequence of wider conflicts in society.

The text which is the touchstone for Carey's critique, and the influence of which he traces, is the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses*. The central tenet of this work is that order and civilisation are overwhelmed when any concession is made to democracy. The agent of this unrest are the unlettered masses. The result is that disaster is loosed upon the world.

This argument started life as the ultramontane reaction to the French Revolution—the apology for the feudal order. However by the end of the nineteenth century, as Carey well describes, Gasset's irrational sentiments had a wider influence in the bourgeois world. However different some of the key writers in Carey's study are in many respects (contrast, for example, TS Eliot and

DH Lawrence), they shared a contempt for democracy and the common man; and they sought refuge from an unpleasant present in elitism and mythic pasts.

Carey has the seed of a good idea that never germinates. His description of a literary conspiracy to

## It is legitimate for Carey to hold Lawrence accountable for his reactionary jottings



an age when crowds clamour to see Picasso exhibitions, his idea that ordinary people can't appreciate modernism carries its own sort of condescension'.

In fact, Carey is more sensible than his comments on *Ulysses* imply. He senses the limitations of any analysis which seeks to counterpose a high art that is impenetrable and a popular art that is about soaps and chocolate boxes. Artistic reproduction which is challenging to a Leopold Bloom is not a problem; art as a private language of the practitioners is, since it makes communication impossible.

Art confined to experts and dross for popular consumption are both the results of art being a commodity in capitalist society. This situation cannot be resolved in the aesthetic sphere. Yet it precipitates endless artistic 'crises' plus absurd debates between exponents of high and popular culture. In the aesthetic sphere good work and the ability of millions to appreciate it is not precluded, just difficult.

Carey's perspective is too limited to English modernism. This has the unfortunate effect of closing the study to the many great modernist authors from dos Passos to Doblin who celebrate the teeming creativity of modern life as well as investigating the darker corners of our century.

More importantly, the English setting leads Carey to counterpose the clerk and the suburb to the elitist project. The real fear was not of the clerk (who, as Carey points out, was often the social base of jingoist politics), but of the working class and the city. This is absent from Carey's study. It is a literary omission but more seriously a social one. It prevents Carey from establishing a context in which his insights can have a meaning.

In conclusion what are Carey's strengths and weaknesses? The best way to do Carey justice is to quote the driest of dry put downs of George Steiner which simultaneously nails the irrationality of the thought expressed.

'So how can the intellectual's preferences be vindicated? How can the natural aristocrat establish his aristocracy? At this point Steiner, like Huxley, invites God to step in....

'Steiner, then, forcibly recruits God as a cultural adjudicator, whose job is to vouch for those examples of art that intellectuals prize. What art, if any, God might like, Steiner does not inquire, and has no means of knowing (though if it is the biblical God he has in mind, the divine prejudice against graven images suggests artistic priorities incompatible with those of Western intellectuals like Steiner).' (p90)

On the down side, the biggest problem is Carey's inability to deal with the social implications of his own argument except in the narrow sense that I have indicated. Indeed this is the result of Carey's own commitment to a more conservative project. His is an old Tory argument: that the honest yeomen are the defenders of the moral and cultural values of middle England, while only the chattering classes are interested in social reform. We can agree with Carey that the clerk and the shopkeeper on the Clapham omnibus should not be the butt of snobbish jokes. But neither should they be eulogised as the model to which we should aspire.

*Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler, Pimlico, £15 pbk

The government of Helmut Kohl has just advised an American airbase in Germany that stocking Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in the bookshop is against the law. Only 'scholarly' editions of the book are available to read under the supervision of a library.

*Mein Kampf*, just reprinted in English, remains steeped in controversy because it is widely interpreted as a programme of Hitler's intentions, and the plan he realised in the Third Reich and the 'final solution'. The current German government's caution about allowing access to the book is supported by the argument that *Mein Kampf* is both a plan for world domination and a handbook of scientific racism and genocide. Such a book, say the authorities, ought not be in the hands of the untutored.

Of course one might suspect that American servicemen take a certain glee in reminding their German hosts of the past, while they in turn are embarrassed about the book. All the same the interpretation of *Mein Kampf* as a programme is shared by such eminent historians as Joachim Fest, Ernst Nolte and Hugh Trevor-Roper. It is not, however, an interpretation that the book itself will bear out.

Far from being the master plan of an evil genius, *Mein Kampf* is a chaotic ragbag of common or garden racial prejudice and reactionary mysticism. But for the events that followed, *Mein Kampf* would have been quickly relegated to the bargain bins. The interpretation of the book as a programme suggests that the descent into war and racism that followed was the conscious plan of one man. In fact, militarism and racial politics were commonplace, not just in Germany, but throughout the Western world. Today the former Allies who fought against Germany would rather forget that it was they who had already

carved up the globe and written a racial policy for the colonies, long before Hitler put pen to paper. Nazism was only a more brutal form of Western capitalist politics.

Would that Hitler's racism were extraordinary. Many of his prejudices remain unchallenged today. Hatred of the Slavs, for example, runs through the book. First Hitler distrusts the left for their undue sympathy for the Slavs (p37), then he trembles with excitement at the news that the assassins of the Archduke Ferdinand have been named as Serbs: At last 'the overwhelming majority of the nation...no longer believed in a peaceful conclusion of the Austro-Serbian conflict, but hoped for the final settlement' (p148).

*Mein Kampf* fails to anticipate British opposition to Germany's eastern expansion because Hitler thought the policy was complementary to British colonial policy: 'no sacrifice would have been too great to win England's willingness. We should have renounced colonies and sea-power, and spared English industry our competition.' (p129) Even where conflict with Britain seems inevitable, Hitler clings to the solidarity of the Western powers against the 'fantastic new invention', 'the league of oppressed nations' (p601). He insists 'that I, as a man of Germanic blood, would, in spite of everything, rather see India under English rule than any other' (p601).

Indeed, amid the reactionary climate of racial hatred and militarism of his day, the only extraordinary thing about the book is that Hitler's purple prose could be confused with a plan of action. Rather than being a cool and calculating work *Mein Kampf* gushes with adolescent patriotism, as here on the outbreak of the 1914-18 war:

'It often seemed to me almost a sin to shout hurrah perhaps without the inner right to do so; for who had the right ►



## READ ON

to use this word without having proved it in the place where all playing is at an end and the inexorable hand of the Goddess of Destiny begins to weigh peoples and men according to the truth and steadfastness of their convictions? Thus my heart, like that of a million others, overflowed with proud joy that at last I would be able to redeem myself from this paralysing feeling.' (p149)

The principal effect of the suppression of *Mein Kampf* is not to prevent the resurgence of fascism. Instead the taboo about the book preserves the myth that fascism was a grotesque aberration from Western political norms. This reprint only shows that *Mein Kampf* was characteristic of the racial thinking and militarism of its day, the effect, and not the cause of those trends.

Jacob Herzfeld

---

The Postmodernist Always Rings Twice, Gilbert Adair, Fourth Estate, £14.99 hbk

In defence of his title, Adair writes: 'quotation is very much the name of the postmodernist rose'. While punning on James M Cain's *Postman*, he name-drops the *Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco. His opening essay ('The postmodernist always rings twice') is part-celebration, part-condemnation of a world where quote and counter-quote have replaced argument and counter-argument. The remainder of this volume is comprised of previously published articles. Some subjects require a light touch, but these minor pieces are so flimsy they need to be bound together in hardback to prevent the slightest breeze blowing them away.

There is more substance in the opening essay, which characterises '*l'air du temps*' as a 'transitional period' of 'retrenchment rather than experiment'. In this context, Adair asserts, 'art...is a private matter' between, for example, the writer and his individual reader; whereas 'culture...public

and gregarious...might be described as the permanent campaign by which the arts are promoted'. He concludes that the emphasis on talking about art ('culture'), and the subsequent devaluation of art itself, are negative side-effects of what Umberto Eco called 'hyper-reality'—the postmodern condition.

Adair's art-culture divide is specious: art has never existed outside society. Nowadays the frothy gossip surrounding art does seem to have acquired undue significance, but Adair should consider whether this is due to the relative lack of substance in contemporary art. If he really wanted to take issue with the culturati and their preoccupation with surface, he could have posed a more fundamental question: isn't talking about *nothing but* art (and consequently turning everything else into a matter of style) an index of a society without direction, dynamism, or depth of knowledge?

Andrew Calcutt

---

The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multi-cultural Society, Arthur M Schlesinger Jr, WW Norton, £10.95 hbk

Arthur Schlesinger comes with many recommendations. According to the dust jacket, he was a special adviser to president John F Kennedy from 1961-64 (to little avail, I would imagine, after November 1963), taught at Harvard and has won two Pulitzer prizes. Schlesinger hopes to alert 'the great silent majority of professors' to the fragmentary dangers implicit in the gospel of separateness and political correctness. He warns that America's fate may be like that of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia unless the 'virus of tribalism' is checked. The book is impressively written, and, in places, very well observed. However, calling it 'courageous', as the *Publishers' Weekly* does, exaggerates the danger of multi-culturalism at a time when every other liberal-turned-conservative

and his dog has turned on it.

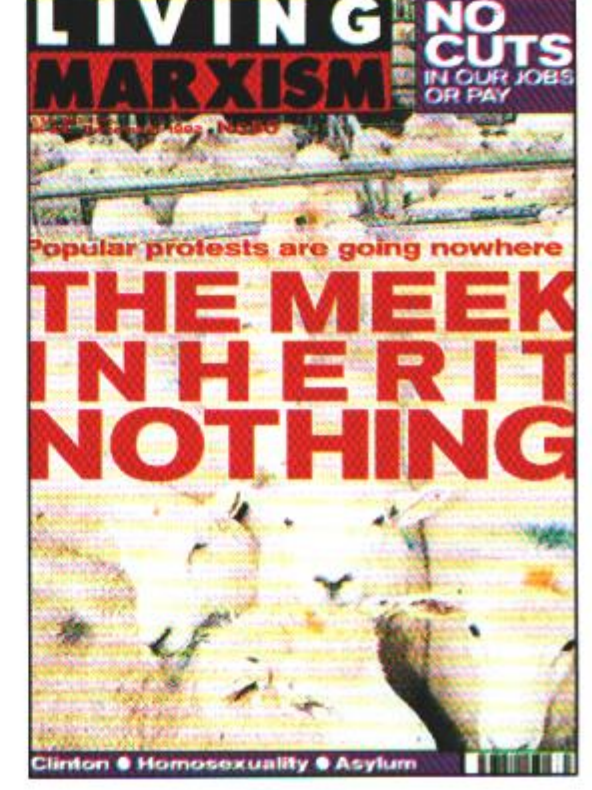
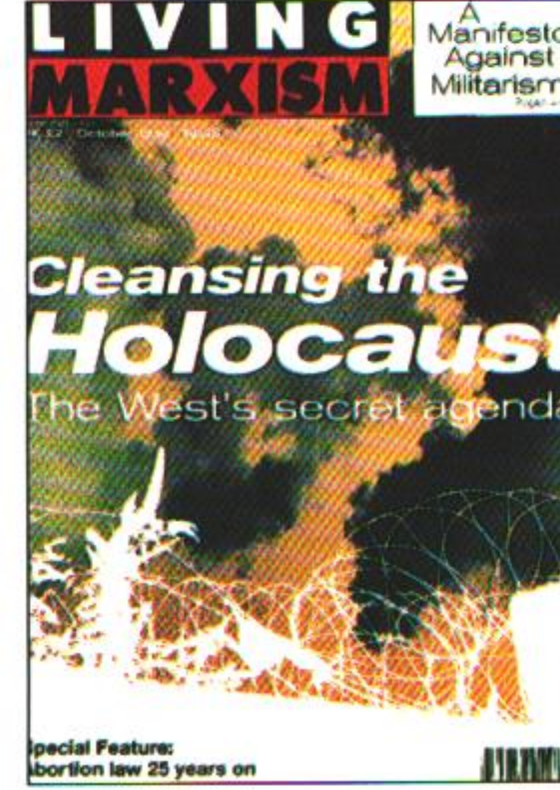
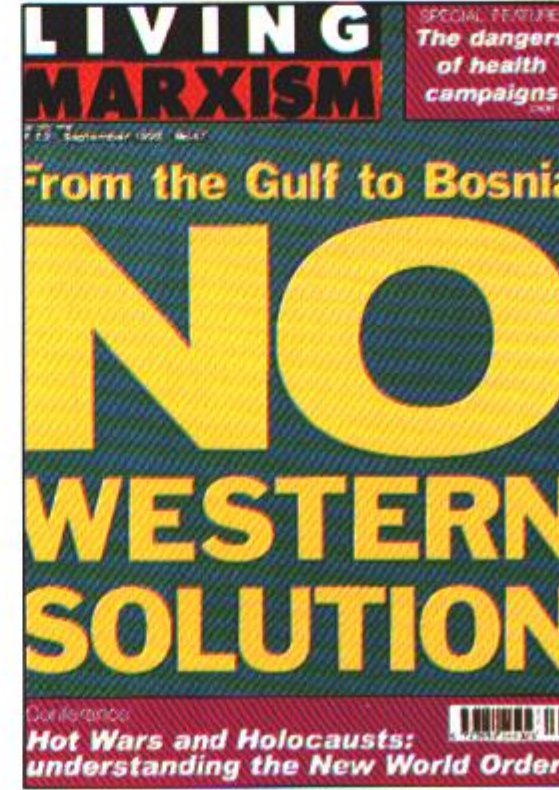
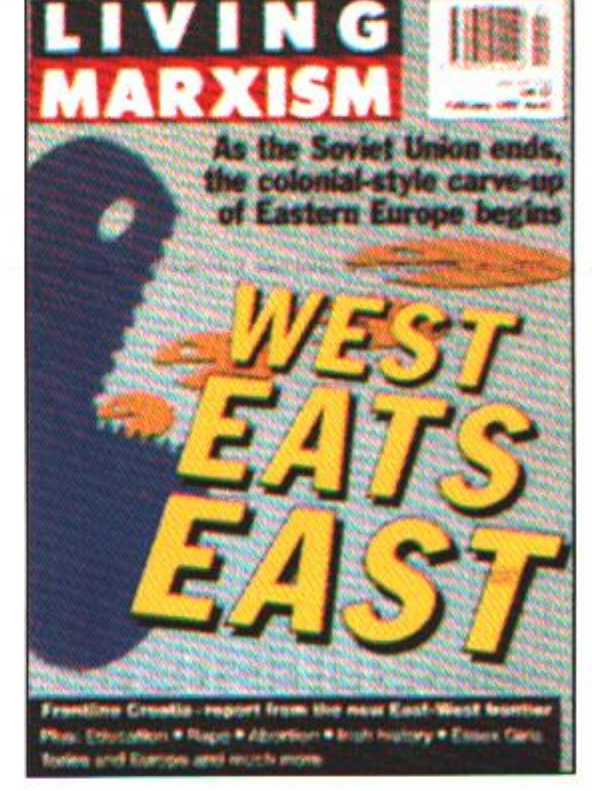
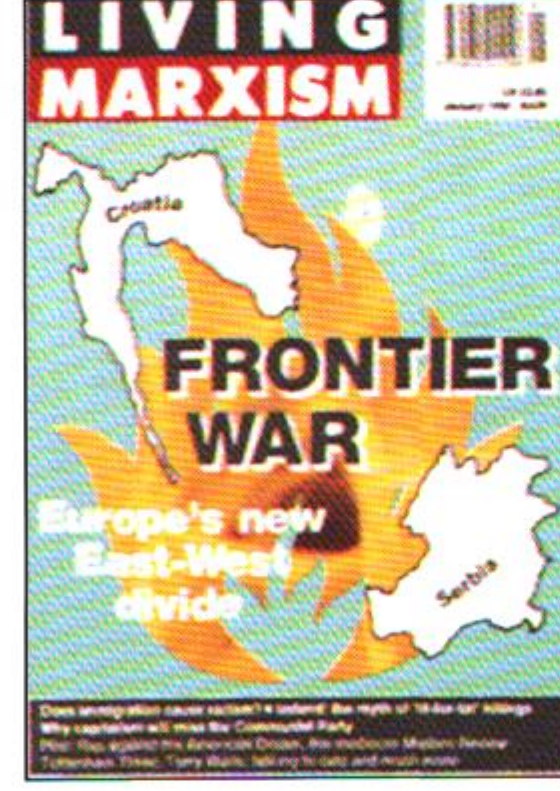
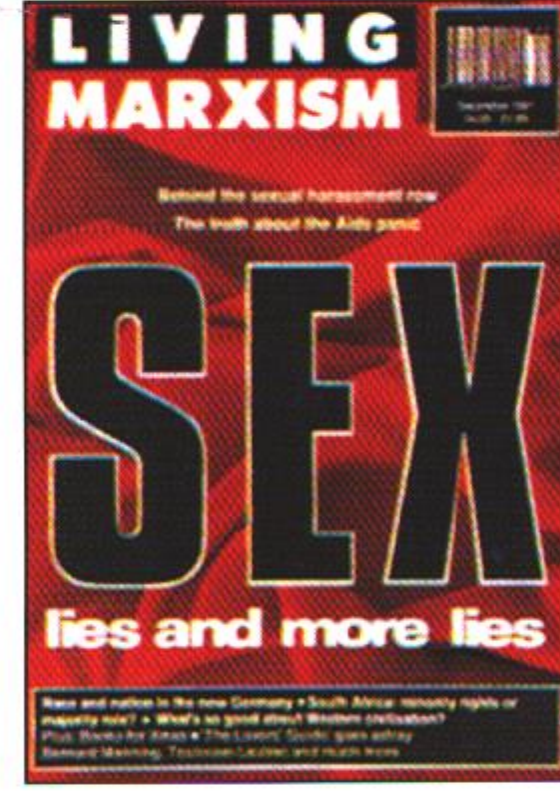
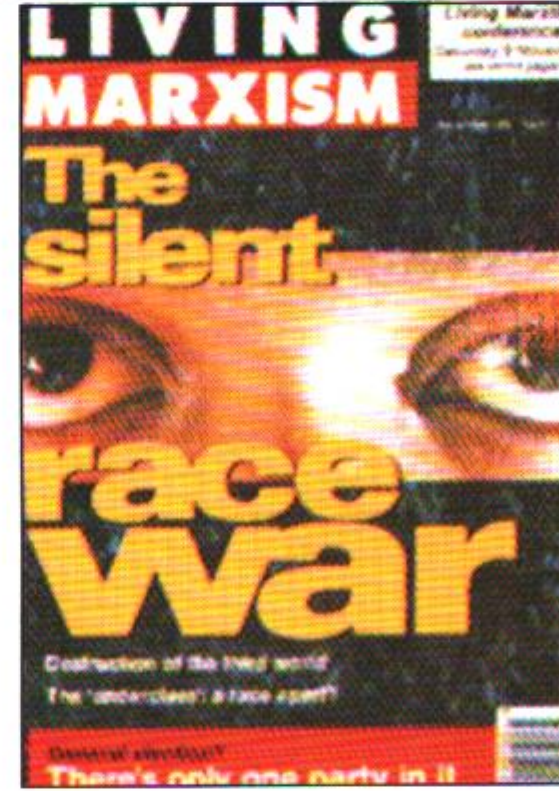
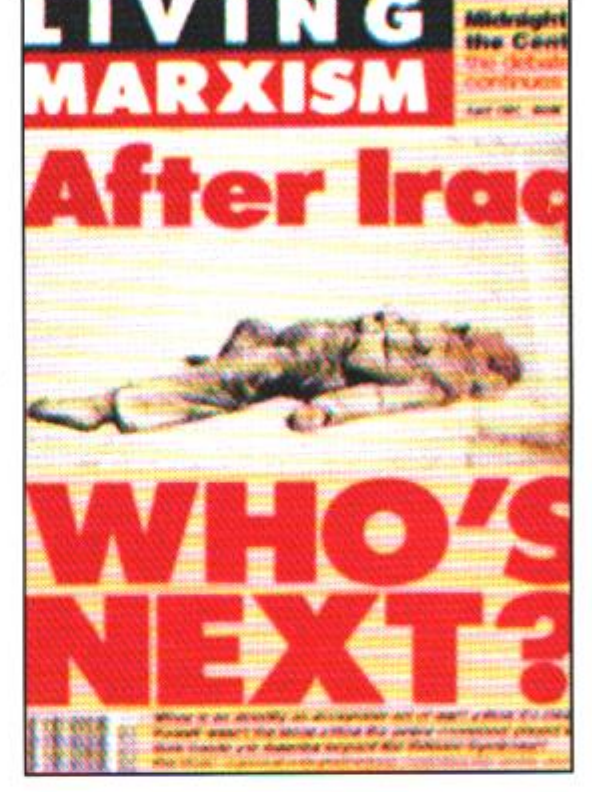
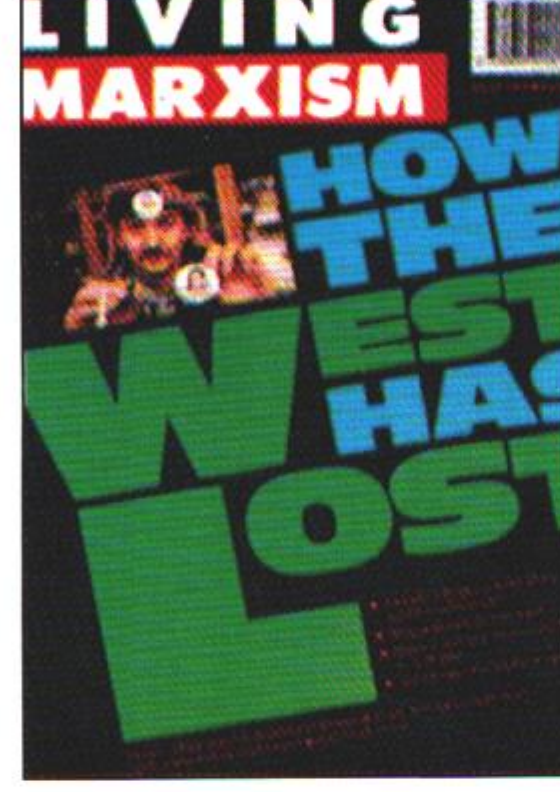
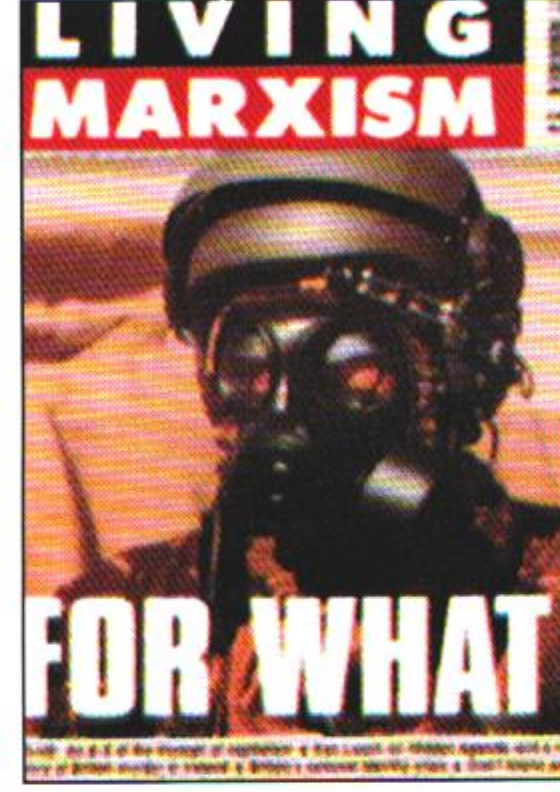
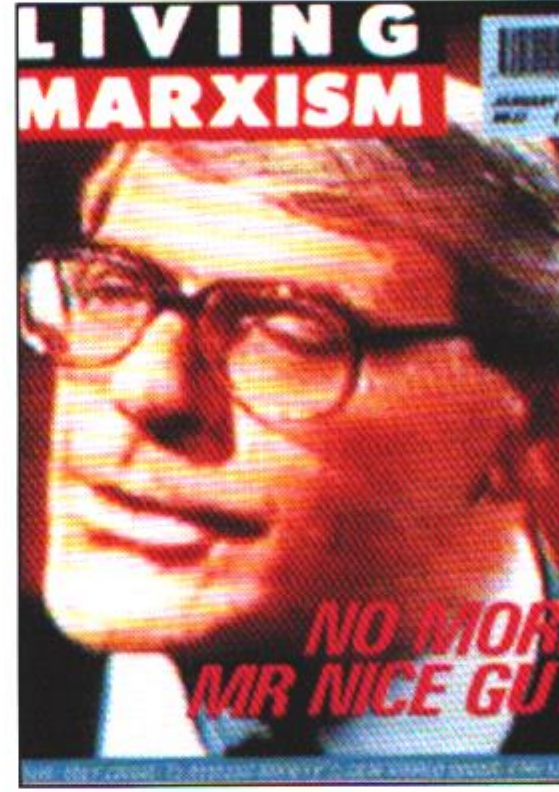
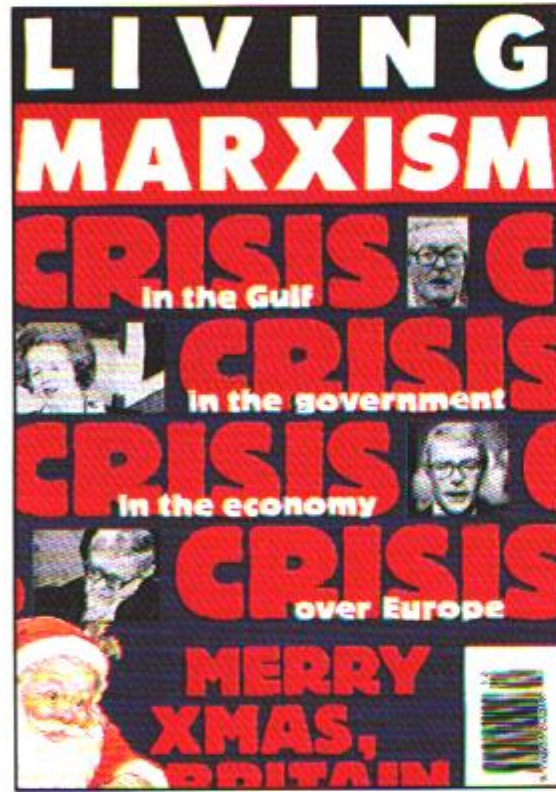
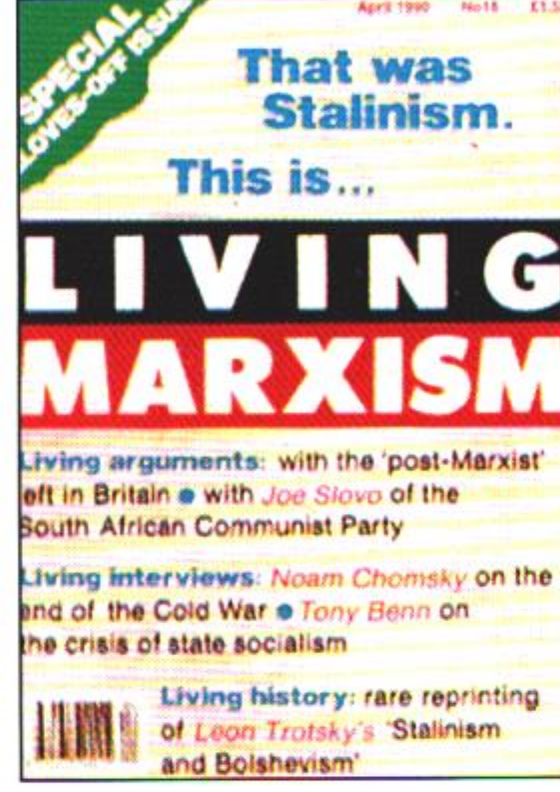
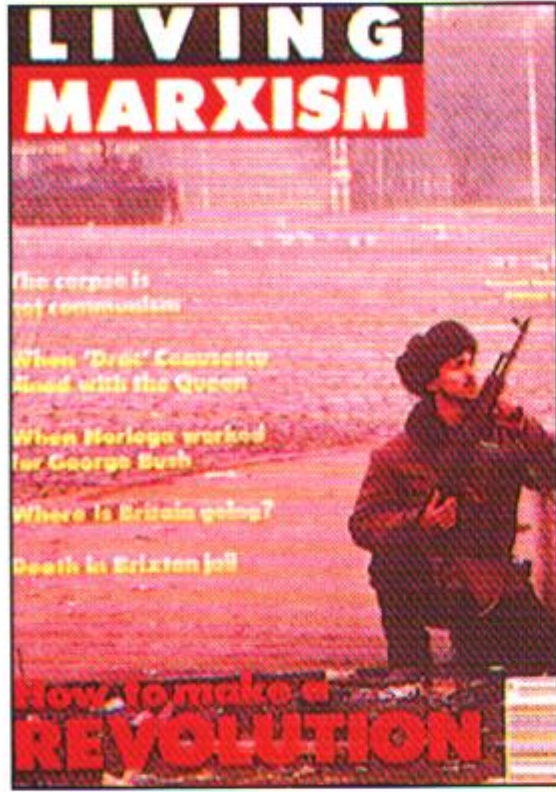
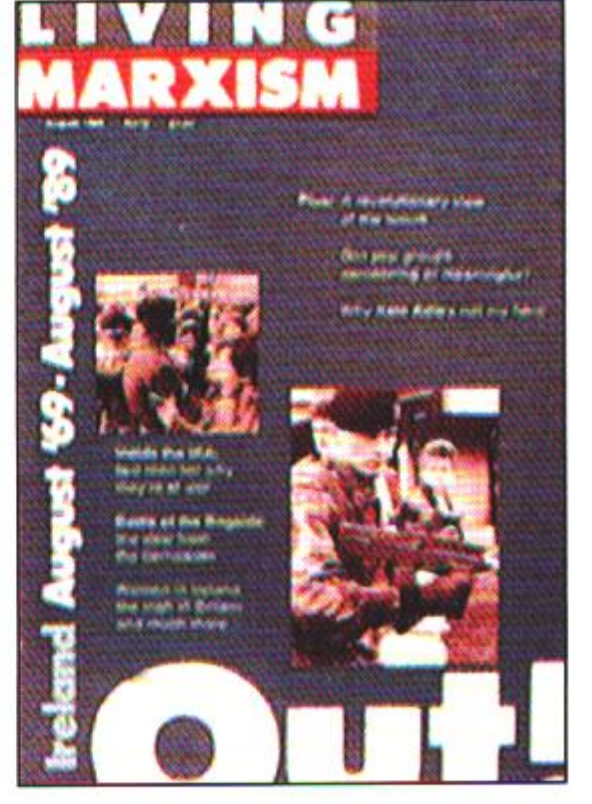
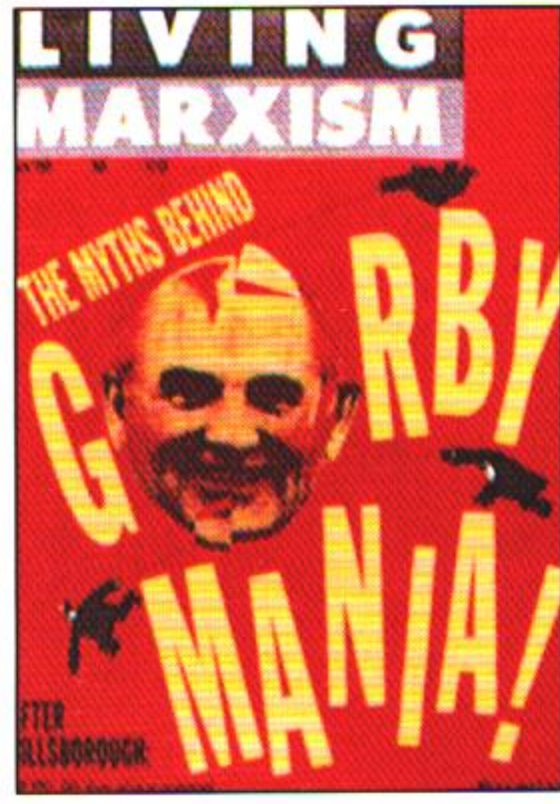
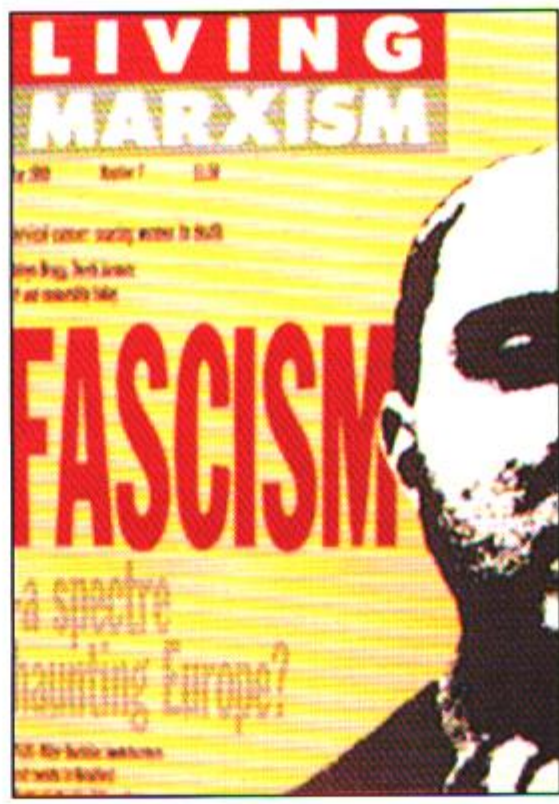
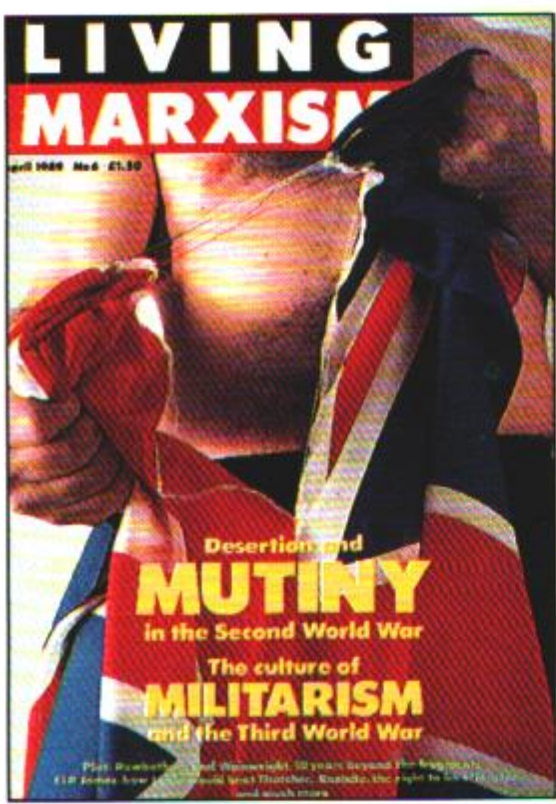
Schlesinger's best points are made in a chapter entitled 'History the weapon' that recalls many of the points Frank Furedi raised in his recent book *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*. Schlesinger attacks 'Afro-centrism', the promotion of African perspectives, culture and especially history as 'compensatory history'. He notes that Irish Americans, excluded from the mainstream of American life in the nineteenth century promoted such facts as that the continental army was 76 per cent Irish, or that Washington's closest friends were priests and nuns. As the Irish came to be included in American society these myths disappeared. Thus Afro-centric assertions, such as the one that Beethoven was black, express frustration at the inferior position of blacks in American society today.

However, Schlesinger's preoccupation with defending the status quo stops him from going any further into the problems that beset America. He asserts that 'the steady movement of American life has been from exclusion to inclusion'. Why, then, have blacks, who arrived in America long before most other immigrants, remained outside of the realms of American life, relegated to the ghettos, police harassment and attacks, poverty and shorter lives? Schlesinger chooses to avoid this obvious question.

Despite his perceptive critique of Afro-centrism and constructed history in general, Schlesinger can only replace the myths he tears down with an even longer-standing myth, the 'American Creed'. This he says has united Americans in the past and should do so in the future. But no 'American Creed' or any other ideological concepts separate from the material promise of equal participation can mean anything to anyone except the wilfully self-deluding. In the end, the tone of this book is of somebody desperate to convince himself of his own argument.

Kevin Young









# FROM HIROSHIMA TO BELGRADE

Anti-war art  
on the theme  
of the New  
World Order

Selected works  
from an open  
submission

For further details  
contact Richard  
on 071 375 1702

EXHIBITION SPONSORED BY

**LIVING  
MARXISM**

## London Opening

1 December–15 January 1993  
92 Cromer Street,  
London (nearest tube: Kings X)

18 January–28 January 1993  
Radical Art Gallery, Green Lanes, London N4