

LIVING

MARXISM

Yugoslavia

BREAKING
THE
SELECTIVE
SILENCE



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UK £2 April 1993 No54



Teenage crime wave
Mother condemns one-day sentence as 'outrageous'
TWO TEENAGERS who kidnaped and tortured an eight-year-old boy in a bid to get away with it, were sentenced to a one-day term in a court in London last week. The judge said the boys' actions were 'outrageous' and 'brought the law into disrepute'. The judge said the boys' actions were 'outrageous' and 'brought the law into disrepute'.

3 million unemployed
Two of Britain's largest cities, Manchester and Liverpool, were exacerbated by 6,500 army job losses and led to calls for a new strategy.

TWO-YEAR-OLD MURDERED
A GREY-HAIRED granny saw murder
away screaming
He had a terrific bump on his head, and a terrific bump on his face.

FRIGHTENING THE LIFE OUT OF US

SLUMP SPECIAL: Is the recovery coming? We ask the experts
The Great Jobs Robbery ● The workfare state ● Life on the scam
Cuts in the community ● Child support slashed

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COVER PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

This month's *Living Marxism* focuses on the continuing crisis in the economy—and its dire consequences for working people.

We ask Britain's economics experts how they see the prospects for recovery. And our own experts explain why they don't see the slump coming to an end.

We also go beyond the debate about statistics, to look at the human cost of the capitalist slump which is being borne by millions. Mass unemployment is one consequence; we examine how it is now being blamed on the jobless themselves. Welfare spending cuts are another; we show how the cuts are being disguised by such policies as 'Care in the Community' and the Child Support Act.

Finally we reveal some links between the slump in the economy and the dangerous rise of militarism. It seems like the sound of gunfire is the only boom we can expect for the foreseeable future.

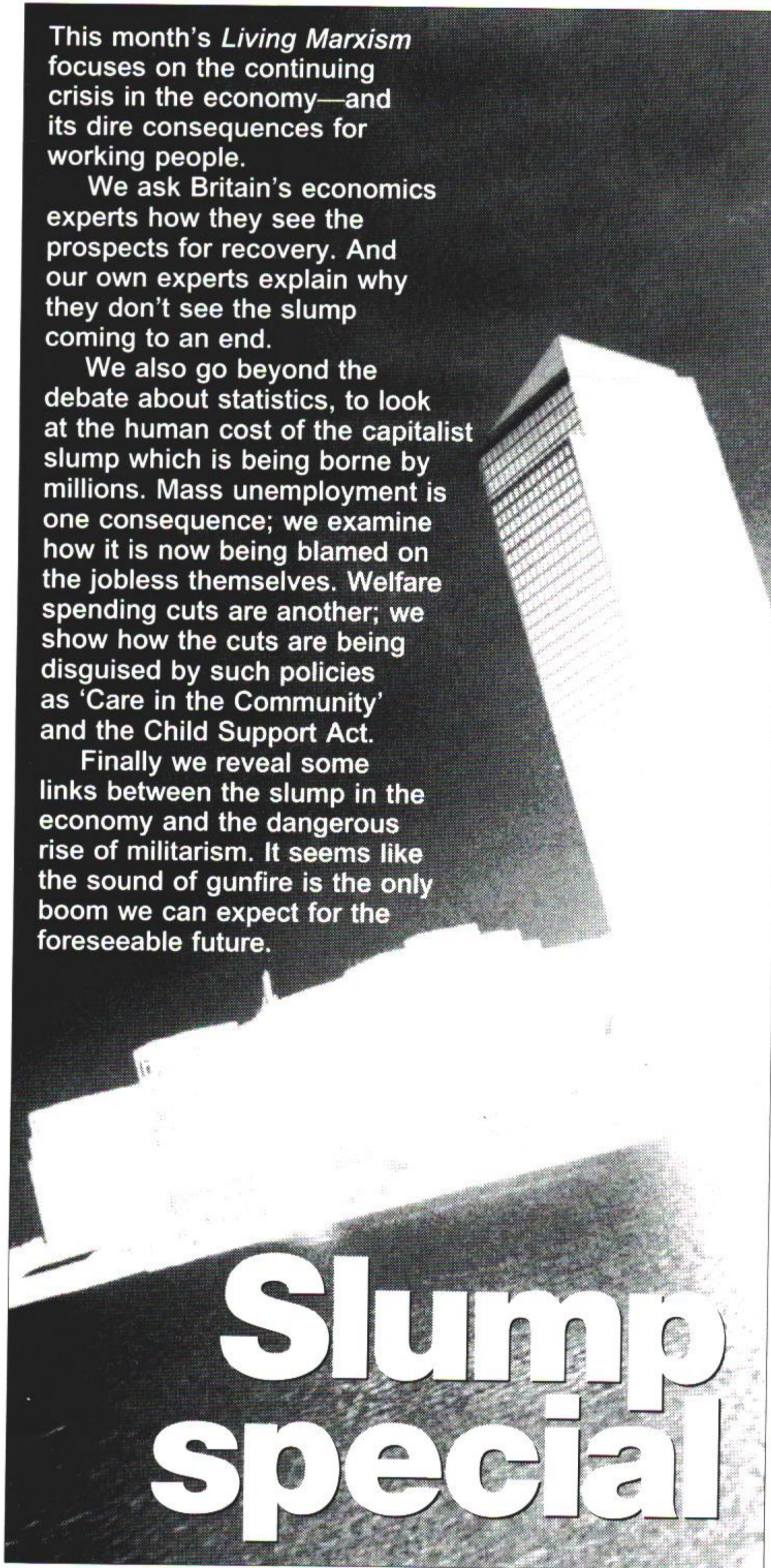


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

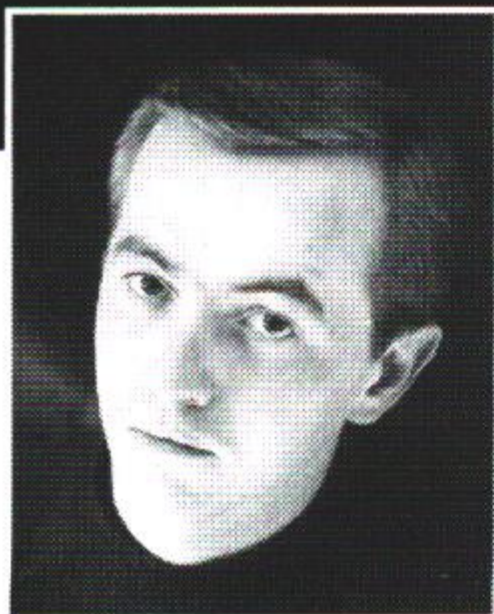
Slump special

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mick hume

Frightening the life out of us

A wave of panic about juvenile crime and the moral collapse of modern society is sweeping Britain. This culture of fear is a far bigger problem than any crime. If it is allowed to go unchecked, it could sentence us all to a kind of life imprisonment.

Crime panics appear in the popular press almost as regularly as guides to sexual bliss. And there have always been voices complaining about the decline of standards. ('The morals of the children are tenfold worse than formerly', Lord Ashley told parliament in February 1843, exactly 150 years before the latest furore about juvenile delinquency began.)

The question is, why have these things suddenly made such an impact on the public consciousness today? What is it that people are really so scared of in the nineties?

After the abduction and death of two-year old James Bulger in Liverpool, for example, parents everywhere locked up their children and cast fearful looks at the kids from next door. Yet as Ann Bradley points out in this month's *Living Marxism*, the likelihood of any other child suffering the same fate is as near to nil as it is possible to get.

What's more, similar cases have not prompted similar reactions in the past. Amid all the millions of words written about the Bulger abduction there were a few bewildered sentences from Ora and Geoffrey Joseph, wondering why nobody had seemed interested when their two-year old daughter was taken and killed by a 12-year old boy five years ago.

It is clear that the recent bout of hysteria

has not really been based upon experience, but on the popular *perception* that crime and behaviour in Britain are much worse than they used to be. The important thing here is not what is happening, but what people think is happening. A climate has been created in which many are now predisposed to interpret any event through the belief that the moral order has broken down.

So when Home Office figures suggest that juvenile crime has declined since 1985, everyone refuses to believe them. And when an elderly woman in Oldham is injured and loses her pension book, the police, the papers and public opinion all accept without question that she has been mugged by three 10-year old girls. Even when it emerges that she hurt herself in a fall, and that her pension book was pocketed by a woman who took her to hospital, the facts fail to dent the firm belief that three wicked children are robbing Lancashire pensioners.

This irrational response, rather than any explosion of juvenile crime, is the true sign of our times. It reflects the deep-seated insecurity and fear which now has Britain in its grip. The underlying factor responsible for this climate of fear is not child murder or granny-mugging, but the impact of the economic slump upon British society.

The slump has pulled the rug out from under people's lives. Mass unemployment means that nobody is safe. Millions are already out of work, and millions more are worried about hanging on to their jobs and homes at all costs. More and more employers are able to get away with cutting wages and increasing working

hours, simply by threatening redundancies as the alternative. It is getting scary out there.

The insecurities created by the slump have atomised communities. People feel that they are on their own, each getting by as best they can in a hostile world. Even though a problem like unemployment touches all of us, the collapse of the old labour movement has ensured that as yet there has been no collective, organised response to it from those on the receiving end.

Instead, every individual has been left to cope, to look out for themselves and their families. This sense of isolation helps to explain why many now seem to experience the crisis of capitalist society first through fears about an issue such as crime.

When people begin from the stance of isolated and vulnerable individuals, they will tend to see other individuals as the threat to their well-being, rather than locating the problem at the level of society. That individual outlook can leave them vulnerable to panics about crime, and particularly about violent crime against the person. And the panic will be all the worse when the persons in the spotlight are the most vulnerable individuals of all—the young and the elderly.

The same tendency to react as insecure individuals can be spotted in current responses to redundancy and unemployment. As illustrated elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the first response of people whose livelihoods are threatened today will not be to call for a united strike against redundancies. They will be more inclined to adopt an 'it's me or them'

attitude of hanging on to their job and hoping that somebody else gets sacked instead.

A fatalistic atmosphere is being created in which people seem only able to relate to society as potential *victims*, rather than as active participants who might do something to change their circumstances. And as potential victims, our priorities will be clear. We will put our children on safety leads, retreat behind locked front doors, and wait for the car alarm to go off. We will all be home alone.

This is a very vicious circle. The more conservative and fearful we become, the higher we build our private fortress against the world, the more cut-off we become from the rest of society. And that in turn can only further intensify our sense of vulnerability and isolation, and encourage us to withdraw further into our shells. We are in danger of having the life frightened out of us.

Forced to live life under siege in this way, people are capable of inventing the most fantastic fears about prowlers, horse maimers and other things that go bump in the night. And they are likely to vent their anger against some petty criminal or other misfit set up for sacrifice by the media, rather than focusing on the deeper causes of social problems.

Shrouded in an atmosphere of insecurity and recrimination, society is turning in on itself. Vulnerable people who feel unable to do anything positive about their situation will often hit out blindly at the first thing that comes to hand. This can be the force behind violence within the family. Now it is being writ large in society.

Wider social problems such as unemployment seem out of reach, impossible for threatened individuals to do anything about. What does seem real and immediate, however, is the existence of immoral, 'evil' people like the boys accused of

A fatalistic atmosphere is being created in which people seem only able to relate to society as potential victims

killing James Bulger; so at least we can vent our spleen against them.

What we are witnessing in the fearful climate of today is a reversal of reality. The most powerless of people are being held responsible for the problems of capitalist society.

At its most extreme, this involves a hate campaign against 10-year olds, children who are treated as the devil's offspring. Alternatively it might mean accusing an impoverished 'underclass' of causing decay in the inner cities, or blaming 'greedy' credit card-holders for causing the financial crisis. In any case, the finger seems always to be pointed at working people rather than those who exploit them. Those who press the buttons and make the decisions about whether the pound goes up or down, or how many thousands should be sacked this week, never seem to be brought to book.

Worse still, the panics about crime and degeneracy invite the authorities to introduce yet more measures of repression and control, to give further powers to the police and the courts. They are able to accelerate the trend towards militarising modern Britain and regimenting society

under the guise of a campaign to restore law and order and bring back discipline and decency.

It may mean the extension of video surveillance into every corner of our cities. It may mean a revival of the old gits' call to 'bring back National Service'—or 'compulsory community service', as Labour Party spokesmen now prefer to call it. In any case, it means that the authorities prey upon public fears to gain more control over our lives.

Instead of looking to the authorities to sort things out for us with repressive measures, we need to try to find new ways to overcome our isolation and act together, to start to tackle social problems such as unemployment for ourselves. The trouble today is that, in a nation full of insecure and fearful individuals, the sort of 'collective action' that appears to be in fashion is a crowd baying for the blood of children outside a courtroom.

Despite what you read in some Scouse-bashing newspapers, such behaviour is not caused by living in Liverpool. We are all living in a society temporarily gripped by the spirit of the lynch-mob. Let's break it up, and get on with life.

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) 278 9908

The pictures you don't want to see?

Sensationalism sells everything (even Marxism)—that seems to be the thinking behind your bad-taste coverage of the conflict in former Yugoslavia (March).

The caption proclaimed 'The pictures they don't want you to see'. Photographs of human heads severed at the neck are the kind of pictures which no one in their right mind wants to see. But in your quest for sensationalism you are quite happy to print such images on the front cover of your magazine. Imagine the traumatic effect it could have on the mind of a young child.

Talk of 'breaking the ban' and challenging censorship is just an excuse. It may well be the case that there are innocent civilian victims on all sides of the conflict. But *Living Marxism* clearly has no empathy with the sufferings of any of the victims, whatever side they are on or whichever ethnic group they may be part of.

As far as I'm concerned, it's not a problem when someone like Malcolm McLaren tries to manipulate the music media—after all, it's only rock'n'roll. But you are dealing in matters of life and death, and issues of such magnitude should not become the playthings of editors in search of a 'sexy' story to make their reputation.

After reading your March issue, I can only conclude that, if *Living Marxism* is a progressive publication for daring to publish gross pictures, then so is the *Sunday Sport*.

Charlie Coss Nuneaton

I want to offer my praise to *Living Marxism* for daring to expose the Western media cover-up of the atrocities against the Serbs. The uncomfortable truth for those of us on the political right is that only the far left is eager to know the full story of this brutal war. Sadder still to think that *Living Marxism's* courage may result in a large fine or worse, while worthless journalistic accolades are heaped on trendy New World Order moralists competing for prime-time television in Sarajevo.

Steven Vujacic Peckham, London

Amnesty's neutrality

With reference to Amnesty's stance on Bosnia which has taken up column inches in *Living Marxism* recently. I always find their insistence on their being a neutral organisation hard to bear when I recall their posture during the Malvinas War of 1982.

I was at that time a member of Amnesty International but withdrew my membership

when they refused to take up Argentinian cases so that their 'neutrality would not be compromised'.

Apparently, so-called 'neutrality' leads to situations where the prisoners of 'enemy' nations have to suffer in silence whilst imperialist nations go to war.

Gareth Clumo Eltham, London

Socialists and Serbs

Tom Carter's letter (March) is a prime example of everything that is wrong with conventional left-wing argument today. He starts off by attacking *Living Marxism's* support for 'greater Serb hegemonism'. As the March issue makes clear, '*Living Marxism* takes no side in the Yugoslav conflict'. It doesn't take a BA in South-East European Regional Studies to work out that Carter is inventing positions which *Living Marxism* doesn't have. Just for good measure he tries to lump Mick Hume in with Sir Alfred Sherman to establish guilt by association.

Then it's time for a round of 'spot the socialist'. This is a parlour game developed in response to events in the former Soviet bloc following 1989. Instead of working out a response to the carnival of nationalist reaction and anti-communist hysteria, left wingers cast around for groups of Trotskyists to support. When none materialised, people like Carter made do with harping on about the 'socialist traditions' which have proved inadequate to an increasingly brutal situation.

Carter refuses to take the specific pressures of British politics into account, preferring instead bellicose statements of principle. In particular he seems to forget the previous two years of vicious anti-Serbian propaganda. As a result his carping ends up reinforcing the poisonous hysteria which, as *Living Marxism* has pointed out, has transformed the Serbs into the 'white niggers' of Europe. With socialists like that, who needs the Tory press?

G Bishop South Yorkshire

Too slack

Reading Mary McCaughey's interview with Apache Indian ('An Apache from Handsworth', February), I was struck by the uncritical and relativist use of the comments on slack lyrics.

Shabba Ranks was, to my mind, justly criticised by *The Word* presenter, Mark Lamarr, for his very straightforward, anti-gay comments. The interview followed a piece filmed in Jamaica with clips from Buju Banton's massively popular 'Boom bye-bye'. This song is unashamedly about shooting gays.

Homosexual scapegoats are common in

a relatively affluent country such as Britain, and so I can well understand that the third world poverty of Jamaica will give rise to desperate prejudices towards 'outcast' groups. Buju Banton has adapted and articulated these prejudices as a shrewd career move to escape that poverty. Although this is understandable, it is not something which I sympathise with or condone.

I would have been happier if McCaughey had even just issued a rider to Apache's comments that the media concentration on slack lyrics reinforces the idea that the Caribbean is populated by gun-toting, gay-bashing bandits—an idea that compounds the moral high ground of Western culture; music included.

However, the interview implied, by omitting to comment, that reactionary views are valid in a repressed environment. The refusal to critically challenge the comments of Banton, the explanation by Apache (or the emphasis of Terry Christian), was an unfortunate and cowardly evasion.

Wanda Nielson Darlington

Downbeat syndrome

I accuse Mike from Essex of being Mencap's advertising copywriter (letters, February). Their latest posters, featuring a grinning Down's Syndrome kid with the legend 'We think differently about ourselves nowadays', display the same low horizons masquerading as in-yer-face PC that he uses to attack Toby Banks.

Promoting Down's Syndrome as a positive contribution to society may appear preferable to the kind of 'innocent victim' ads we are more familiar with. It also neatly avoids the demand for sufficient resources in medical science to overcome genetic abnormality. In the face of harsh economic realities it appears that what was a campaign is tightening its belt and settling back to be a mere representative body.

And this is where we end up. Postmodernist Mike thinks that people with mental impairments have the right to be different. He also asserts that there is nothing abnormal about being illiterate or unemployed. Just how low can those horizons go?

Manda Kent London

Anti-IRA ranting

I have been dismayed to see *Living Marxism* continually devalued by pro-IRA rantings by Mick Kennedy and, most recently, Steven Hepburn (letters, March 1993). I would like an opportunity (as a nationalist Irishman) to point out the general inaccuracy of the views aired on Ireland in *Living Marxism*.

There is *not* a war ongoing in Ireland. The IRA/UVF are big businesses, especially since they met to carve up territory for racketeering and drug-trafficking (despite public announcements condemning drug dealers).

The IRA do not strike solely at 'legitimate' targets such as army units, RUC stations *et al*, but tend to indiscriminately plant bombs which often kill 'their own people'. They have destroyed countless numbers of Catholic-owned businesses, killed fathers in front of their families, pensioners at a Remembrance Day parade, soldiers at a charity fun run, as well as terrorising 'their own people' with their unique brand of justice (steal a car—get your legs blown off; offend an IRA man—get accused of 'anti-social behaviour' and be given 24 hours notice to leave Ireland).

Finally, despite the numerous atrocities carried out by the British state, the IRA are *not* seen as saviours of 'the people'. Like the UVF, they represent a tiny minority of an Irish nation sickened by continuous bloodshed and the killing of innocents. The Catholic clergy, SDLP, Irish government and people (Sinn Fein have no MPs and poll very poorly) all reject the IRA. Yet *Living Marxism*, sitting cosily in London, informs its readership that the IRA are not to blame for the carnage...which is justified!

Northern Ireland is no longer a state under Unionist hegemony; the Tory Northern Ireland Office calls the shots now (ask any local MP). Protestants and Catholics both are fed up with being snubbed by the English Tories—as are the Scottish, Welsh and Northern English. In the heartfelt words of U2's Bono: No More.

Dave Burrowes *Scotland*

The letters in reply to Mick Kennedy's article and the article itself ('Bomb warnings', December 1992) inadvertently highlighted the one major weakness of militant republicanism.

When the wish for 'the British to leave Ireland permanently' was expressed, this in essence was asking the 900 000-odd Protestants in the North to pack their suitcases

and leave as well. Which it must be assumed is also the desire behind the phrase 'Brits out'.

When England moved *en masse* hundreds of thousands of Scottish Presbyterian planters from the Scots lowlands to the north of Ireland during colonisation, they were in effect, as Seamus Heaney echoes, creating a mini-Britain in Ireland, for good. So a withdrawal of troops will not lead to the 'de-Britishing' of the Six Counties (even though it's a beginning). I'm afraid it is deeply embedded in Protestant culture and is only reinforced by the actions of the IRA.

Until the author of the article *et al* recognise that the Protestants' 'Britishness' needs to be considered and not simply ignored (possibly in terms of dual citizenship on an Andorran model), then they are only fooling themselves.

Armchair politicians who suggest cosy, miracle-cure united Irelands, without considering the Protestants and the deeper cultural/nationality issues, have little usefulness in the debate on the nationality crisis of all Northern Ireland's people.

Thomas Gibson *Sunderland*

Modernists and Marxists

As the thrust of modern criticism, and especially Marxist criticism, has been to study texts, I am surprised that the views recently expressed in your pages have gone along with accepting the Tory concept of a modernist intellectual elite and its accompanying agenda.

We can now see how so many of the modernists' theories were not to prove the foundations for new understandings—often they realised this themselves. But two things remain: first, many works produced in this climate do have a passionate creative force and social value; secondly, we can derive hope from seeing how the bonds of social control can be breached. While regretting their failures in not being good Marxists, we should not write off their significance and their aesthetic achievements.

Denis Bridge *Weymouth*

Cheek to speak

In his December 1992 editorial on the increasing threat to jobs and wages, Mick Hume asks the reader 'so what are you going to do about it?'

What is he going to do about it? Go out and sell a few magazines? Cheeky bastard!

Paul Williams *Kennington, London*

The Malcolm X factor

Emmanuel Oliver ('Resurrection of Malcolm X', March) may be right to criticise those making a mint from manipulating and merchandising the memory of Malcolm X. Selling baseball caps will not make a revolution; only a mockery of Malcolm's real legacy.

But whatever these people do, it does not diminish Malcolm himself. Every young Afro-American needs to know the significance of Malcolm X and the truth about his contribution to our culture. This is equally true for the youth in Britain. At a time when neither Hollywood nor the rappers can provide powerful or satisfactory role models, we need the example of Malcolm X and we have a right to know about him.

Or perhaps Oliver thinks that our youth would be better off imitating Mike Tyson?

PJ Coles *Los Angeles, USA*

Before I saw the film, I thought Emmanuel Oliver was probably right to puncture the rhetoric and the hype surrounding Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*. Now that I have seen it, I feel that Oliver was wrong on at least one count. He forgot to mention that this is one lousy movie.

Rick Lamberton *Birmingham*

Tokyo calling

The Tokyo *Living Marxism* readers' group is being reconvened. Those wanting to take part should contact Lynn Robson on Tokyo 03-5388-6828.

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) 278 9844

The March issue of *Living Marxism* caused a storm (and sold out), after we published photographs from an exhibition which had been banned from Britain under UN sanctions against Serbia. Joan Phillips, who went to Belgrade and brought back the pictures, reviews the affair in the light of recent reporting of the Yugoslav war. She concludes that the campaign against official lies and media distortion has only just begun

was picked up by the press and broadcasting media, tried to smother the issue with silence.

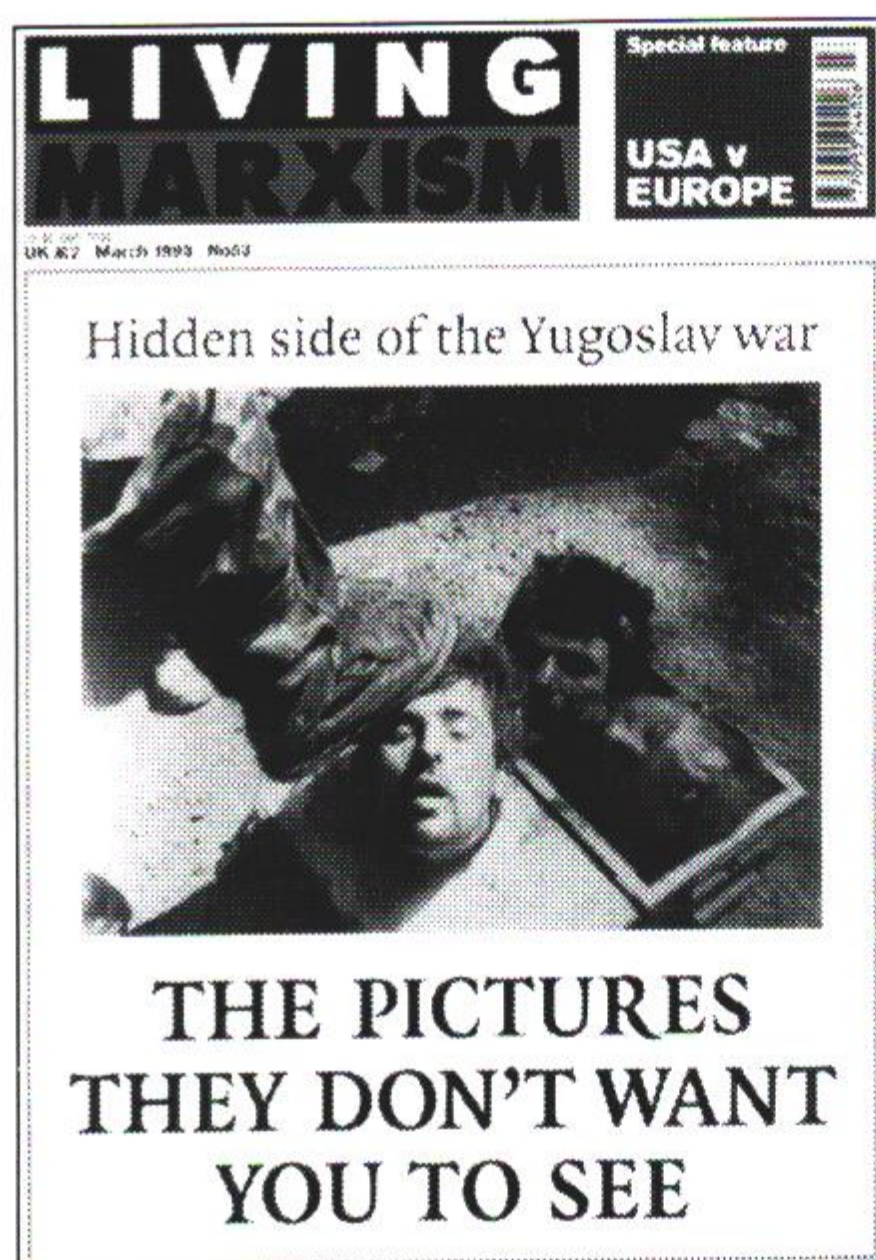
Meanwhile, WH Smith decided to take *Living Marxism* off its shelves, saying that the photographs were 'gruesome and unacceptable'. The magazine was on sale, but only from under the counter on request.

Infuriated by, or just curious about, the government's use of sanctions to censor the photographs, large numbers of people bought the magazine and went to see the exhibition. 'If the government doesn't want us to see these photographs, I want to know what's going on', was a common response from people who read about the ban in the papers or heard it on the radio. In London, 500 people attended a public meeting about the media, war and censorship.

Living Marxism broke the ban by sponsoring the exhibition and publishing the forbidden photographs because we thought it was important to take a stand against government censorship and expose the hidden side of the Yugoslav war.

When libel writs, controls on the press and official cover-ups are becoming the order of the day, some media commentators agreed that it was about time somebody registered a protest. 'For showing the pictures,

Breaking the se



In March, *Living Marxism* broke the British government and media blockade that has covered up one side of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

The magazine published a selection of photographs from a Belgrade exhibition showing atrocities committed against Serbs, photographs which had been banned from Britain by the government under United Nations sanctions against Serbia. A larger selection of the photographs was exhibited at The Edge gallery in London, before moving on to Birmingham and other cities in Britain.

Our decision to publish and exhibit the forbidden photographs caused a national controversy. The Department of Trade and Industry, which banned the original Belgrade exhibition from coming to Britain, first issued threats against us and then, when the story

ludicrously banned by the government because they are from a Serb exhibition and are deemed to come under the UN-imposed sanctions, *Living Marxism* should be congratulated', stated the *UK Press Gazette*:

'It is doubtful if a national newspaper could have run these pictures—the political fallout, given their power to sicken and shock, would have been enormous. But someone needed to and we hope that they have circulated copies to every MP and opinion-former to contribute to a more balanced view of the conflict.' (8 March 1993)

We also felt it was important to break the selective silence about what has been happening to the Serbs in the war in Yugoslavia, a silence which the government ban on the Belgrade

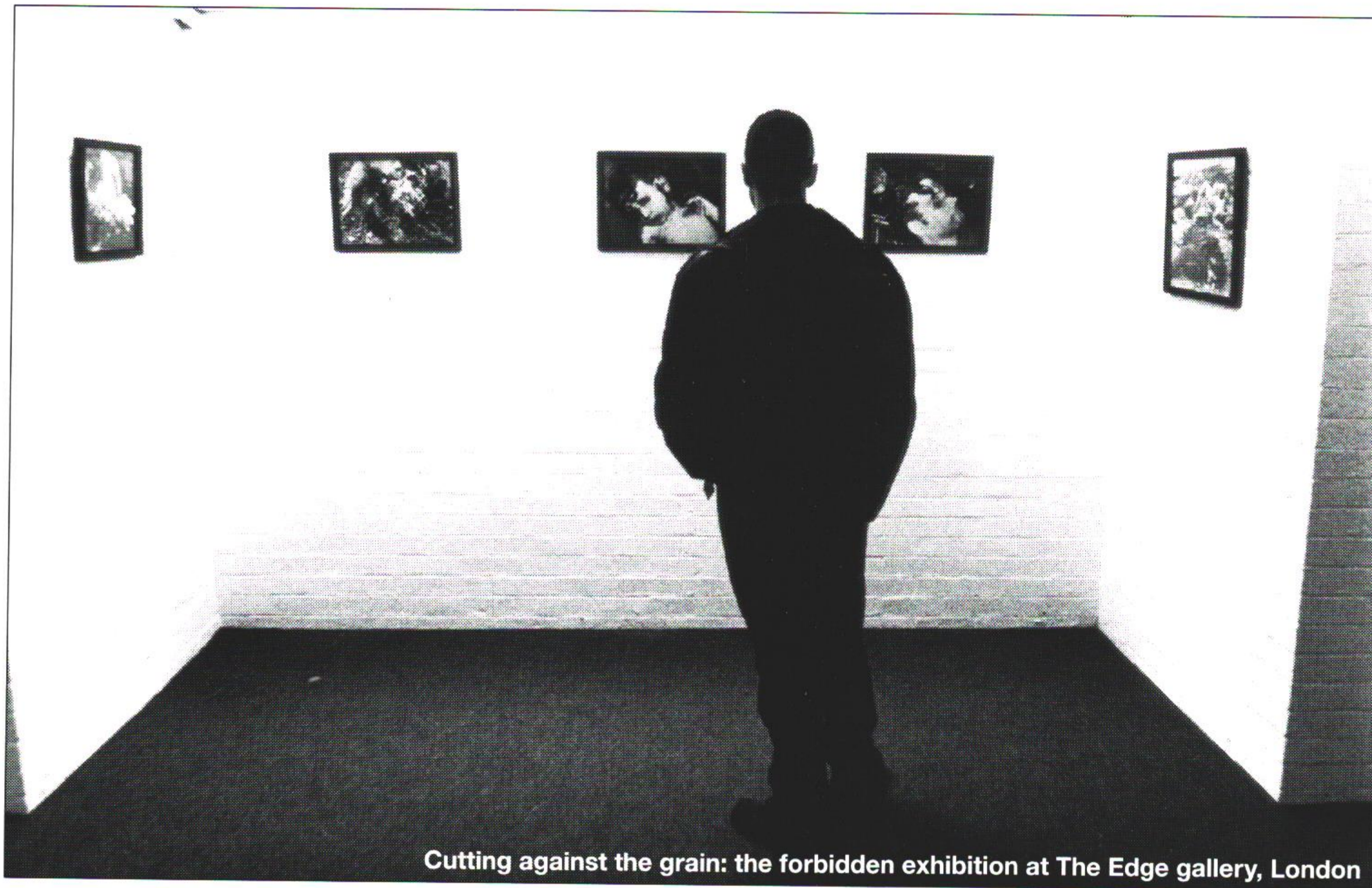


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

Cutting against the grain: the forbidden exhibition at The Edge gallery, London

lective silence

exhibition could only reinforce. By publicising the banned photographs, we wanted to draw attention to the fact that people are being told only one side of the story about the war in Yugoslavia.

While the Serbs are constantly accused of committing atrocities, we never hear anything about atrocities committed *against* the Serbs. *Living Marxism* has always taken exception to this dishonest campaign by governments and journalists to demonise and scapegoat the Serbs as the sole guilty party in this war. We are in favour of an open discussion about the war in Yugoslavia—and especially about the West's role in the conflict. In order to have that discussion, people need to hear all sides of the story.

Our exposure of official censorship and bias has been a step forward in opening up a discussion of the war.

But the activities of governments and journalists over the past month indicate that there is still a lot of work to be done in exposing the West's war lies.

In early March, the British press was full of stories about terrible things the Serbs were supposed to be doing in eastern Bosnia; laying siege to towns like Zepa, Cerska and Srebrenica, and starving, shelling and massacring their Muslim inhabitants.

Newspapers reported that famine was ravaging eastern Bosnia, and that starving Muslims in the Zepa area had started to eat human flesh. The lurid tales of mass starvation and cannibalism were used to justify the USA's decision to step up its involvement in Bosnia. Washington began airdrops to the beleaguered Muslim enclaves of eastern Bosnia, an operation whose farcical character was confirmed when it transpired that more

Muslims were killed trying to reach the food than had died of starvation.

Journalists eager to broadcast the cannibalism stories ignored several denials from authoritative sources. Neven Kulenovic, a Muslim diplomat in Zagreb, said the stories were not true. So did General Philippe Morillon, commander of United Nations forces in Bosnia. Morillon said that when Unprofor members visited Zepa in January they found local people living among chickens and cows. He added that the Muslim government of Alija Izetbegovic was deliberately exaggerating the food shortage in order to persuade the West to do more; but that the mountain villages of eastern Bosnia were used to harsh winters and were usually able to feed themselves.

In a similar vein, when the town of Cerska fell to the Serbs in March, journalists printed stories about ►



hundreds of Muslims being massacred and thousands expelled. There were rumours about awful atrocities in Cerska and mass starvation in nearby Konjevic Polje. Since no outsiders had managed to visit the two towns, it was impossible to confirm whether or not the reports were true. Nevertheless, they continued to be widely aired by the British media.

When an outsider finally did visit the area, the rumours appeared to have been largely unfounded. Again it was General Philippe Morillon, who went to verify the claims of genocide and starvation. After a brief visit, Morillon said he saw nothing to suggest that civilians were killed when the Serbs took Cerska, and that there was no question of hunger being a problem in Konjevic Polje.

The response of the media to Morillon's statement was to rubbish it. Journalists suggested that he could

there is no doubt that Muslim and Croatian civilians are suffering. But so are Serbian civilians. People on all sides have lost everything: their families, homes, land, possessions, health and dignity. So why do we hear little or nothing about the suffering endured by the Serbs?

When large numbers of Serbian civilians in eastern Herzegovina were expelled from their homes in February we didn't hear a word about it. There are just a few hundred Serbs left in Mostar, where once there were 23 000. Not a single Serbian home is still intact between Metkovic and Konjic in the Neretva valley: they have all been burned.

At the start of February, columns of Serbian civilians were driven out of Mostar, and the refugee convoys shelled and shot at by Croatian forces. Yet in contrast to the endless stories about the plight of Muslim civilians

Bosnia was premature. But the truth is that there was *never* a right time for the West to get involved.

The problem is not that the Western powers got their timing wrong, but that they have interfered in Yugoslavia's affairs for their own cynical ends. Germany recognised Croatia not because Helmut Kohl had a deep empathy with the Croatian people, but because the German chancellor was keen to demonstrate to Europe and the world that Germany had arrived as a world power in its own right. America then recognised Bosnia not because George Bush felt sorry for the people of Bosnia, but because he was worried by Germany's power play over Croatia and was keen to demonstrate that America was still the arbiter of world affairs.

Western interference in the former Yugoslavia has become a game of one-upmanship. All the Western nations are using the war to advance their own claims to Great Power status. Serbia has become the whipping boy in this game of tit for tat being played by the Western powers. Each of them is trying to establish its position in the international hierarchy by taking a pot shot at Serbia.

War crimes

This explains why there is such intense competition among the Western powers to come up with yet another initiative against Belgrade. So in March, the Americans threatened to tighten sanctions against Serbia; meanwhile the Germans announced that they would join in the airdrop. Neither the move to make the Serbs suffer more, nor the escalation of the airdrop charade, had anything to do with what was happening in the war in Bosnia. Rather these initiatives were part of the diplomatic jockeying for position that has characterised Western intervention in the former Yugoslavia.

One of the West's latest brain waves is to stage a war crimes tribunal. It came as no surprise to discover that the people the West thinks should be put in the dock are mainly Serbs. If there was any justice, the leaders of the West would be the ones in the dock for the deaths and suffering they have caused from Iraq and Bosnia to Somalia and Angola.

What is really needed today is a war lies tribunal, that could expose the way in which the Western powers are distorting the truth about Yugoslavia and other international conflicts in order to back up the case for intervention. Every atrocity story adds to the clamour for even more intervention against the Serbs. It's time people started asking a few questions about why the media is telling only one side of the story, and about what the West is up to in the Balkans.

Western journalists see only what they want to see—Serbian atrocities everywhere and Serbian victims nowhere

not possibly know what really happened in Cerska because he spent only a limited amount of time there. The fact that he was the only Westerner to have spent *any time* there did not seem to count for much with the journalists who had written horror stories about the place without having been anywhere near it.

It is probably only a matter of time before General Morillon is despatched back to France. He has already been accused of having been 'duped' by the Serbs and of 'whitewashing' what happened in Cerska. Like the Canadian General Lewis McKenzie, another straight-talking military man in Bosnia who upset a few people because he said what he saw, Morillon is not likely to last his tenure as UN commander in Bosnia.

What was objectionable about the media's coverage of events in eastern Bosnia was not simply the willingness of journalists to publish unsubstantiated atrocity stories as fact. Just as galling is their ability to close their eyes to what is happening to Serbian civilians in Bosnia at the same time as they are writing reams about what is happening to Muslim or Croatian civilians.

While many of the tales told by journalists are of dubious authenticity,

in eastern Bosnia, we were not treated to a single story about the plight of the Serbs in eastern Herzegovina.

Western journalists go to Bosnia to get a story. But they have just one story in mind. The story is simple: the Serbs are the bad guys and the Muslims are the victims. Their governments have all declared the Serbs to be the guilty party in Yugoslavia, and journalists, almost without exception, have swallowed this story without question. That's why they see only what they want to see—Serbian atrocities everywhere and Serbian victims nowhere.

The consequence of the media's selective silence is not simply that the Serbs have been criminalised. Even worse, those who are mainly responsible for the bloodshed in Yugoslavia—not the Serbs, Croats or Muslims, but the Western powers—are depicted as saviours.

From the moment the Western powers got involved in the Yugoslav conflict everything they have done has made things worse. At every stage their diplomatic and political meddling in the internal affairs of the Yugoslav peoples has escalated the conflict. Many have said that the West's recognition first of Croatia and Slovenia and then of



Childwatch UK

It took just 24 hours for the media to turn murder victim James Bulger into a symbol of the 1990s. It wasn't just the death of a little boy (allegedly at the hands of boys only just old enough to be prosecuted) that led the *Guardian* to describe the sordid affair as 'The murder of innocence'. It was the mob, the sight of angry 'common' people straining to deal out street justice to the accused. 'What has happened to the middle class values of restraint and decency?' 'How have we come to live in a society where 10-year old boys batter infants to death, and working class mothers—their own babies in prams—join lynch mobs?'

The answer penned by journalists from the *Mirror* to the *Mail* is essentially simple: the family has broken down. It started, they would have us believe, with the blurring of 'right' and 'wrong' in the 'anything-goes-society of the sixties' and has ended in a total breakdown of relations between parents and children today. We need the family, they say, to teach children the unwritten rules of life. Who, if not mum and dad, will teach them to respect their elders and betters, abide by the law, and stick to an acceptable moral code?

The relationship between parents and children has become a leitmotiv of Britain's decline. In the days of Empire, we are told, when Britain was truly great, everybody knew their place. Colonies respected imperial powers, the working class knew its place, women respected men, children respected adults and the world was a safe place in which to live. Now, all is chaos in a savage world. Husbands neglect their wives, mothers neglect their children, and the whole fabric of British society is threadbare.

The Mother has the starring role in this immorality play: maternal neglect makes victims of children, and fails to quell the savagery of adults. And all that prevents a child from falling into the clutches of such savagery is its mother's apron strings.

Evil, we are told, stalks our offspring. In the week of the Bulger killing we read of a nine-year old trying to strangle a baby and a nurse who got kicks from killing kids in a Nottinghamshire hospital. The message to mums is clear: 'Your kids aren't safe anywhere out of your sight.'

A mother's responsibility is there by implication even if it is not made explicit. Mrs Bulger has not only lost a son, she has been put in the dock for leaving her baby outside a shop. Social commentators may not have openly pointed the finger of guilt, but the implication rang through the police warnings for parents not to let their kids out of their sight. Almost every caller to one Liverpool radio phone-in condemned her for neglect.

James' mother will take her share of the blame, and the mothers of the boys who took him will probably pick up the rest. They've already been pilloried for not recognising their offspring from the video pictures taken by a security camera. The *Daily Mail* was quick to point

out that the accused were accompanied to court by social workers—no loving parents in sight. No doubt when the personal details of the alleged young killers are released we will find that they come from 'dysfunctional' families and were never taught right from wrong.

Last month was to mothers what the Glorious Twelfth is to grouse: the announcement of open season. The collective wail of despair in response to the Liverpool murder combined with a tirade against that other irresponsible mother: the infamous Yasmin Gibson, mother of 'Home Alone' Gemma. If Mrs Bulger was meant to symbolise a woman whose unconscious 'neglect' led to tragedy, Ms Gibson epitomised conscious neglect.

We were invited to stand back in amazement at the heartless audacity of a woman who would trot off on a Spanish holiday leaving 11-year old Gemma at home, alone. Well, not quite alone. She was, on closer inspection, spending the nights with one of two neighbours but going home to her own flat to change her clothes and do her homework. The staff at her £860-a-term theatre school didn't notice anything even slightly unusual about her. On the day that the story broke, when the press were crucifying her mother for neglect, and hounding the child to uncover the depth of her distress, Gemma was unobtainable because she was recording the voice-over for a TV commercial. Hardly a case of gross abuse.

The great panic about parental neglect is precisely that—a panic. The James Bulger case was tragic, the Home Alone case was ridiculous, but neither represent 'moral decline'. Mothers have been leaving children outside shops for decades, and will continue to do so (what else can they do?). Mothers will also leave 11-year olds under the watchful eye of neighbours. And the chance of any ensuing tragedy is slight.

The reason why we don't usually hear about it when 11-year olds are left alone is because *nothing* happens to them. By the same token, nothing usually happens to toddlers waiting outside shops. In the 10 years between 1982 and 1991, according to Home Office figures, just 10 children under five have been killed by strangers, while 571 have been killed by someone known to them, usually a family member or neighbour. Statistically you could argue that a kid is safer waiting outside a shop, or indeed 'Home Alone' than in the bosom of its family.

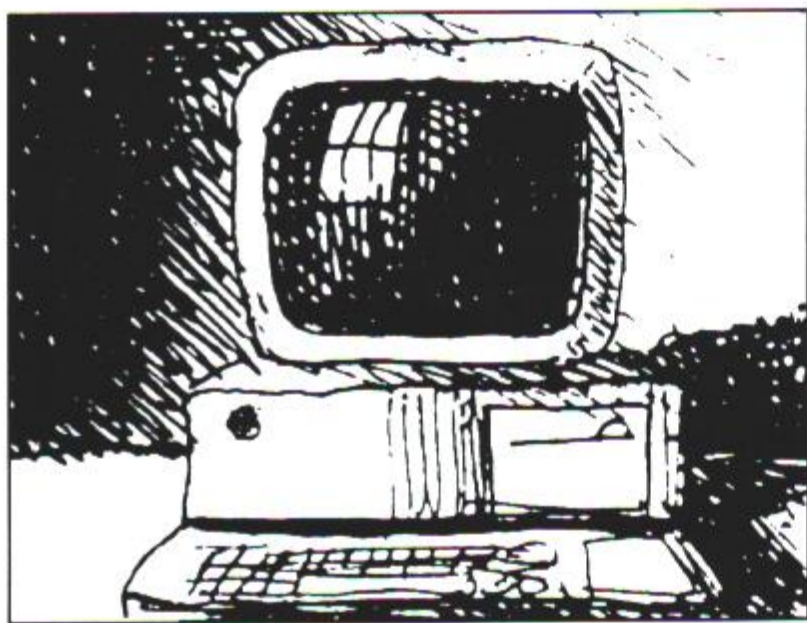
Mothers have quite enough problems to contend with, without being made to feel guilty every time they take their eyes off their offspring. There are no lessons for them to learn from the recent great child-neglect/moral-collapse scandals, except perhaps this one: whether or not you have your child under surveillance, you can be pretty sure that someone is watching you. Mothers in Liverpool may feel comforted that the abduction of an infant, and his subsequent route through the city can be recorded on videotape with such precision, but it makes you wonder what else, who else they are watching the rest of the time. ●

Last month was open season on mothers

An expert opinion poll

Is the British economy really on the road to recovery? We asked expert witnesses from the media, academia and the City to sift the evidence and give us their verdict. Interviews by Kate Lawrence and Kirsten Cale

Peter Jay
BBC Economics Editor



The prospects are dismal. The Gross Domestic Product gap—the gap between the present level of output and a healthy level—is between three and seven per cent of total output. That means if the economy grew at three per cent a year for up to 10 years it still would barely get back to where we were in the second half of 1990.

The consequence is that the GDP gap is getting wider, and more unemployment is being pumped into the pipeline. It takes between one and four years, if we judge by the eighties, for what has been put into the pipeline to come out—therefore unemployment is likely to continue to rise for a number of years. Even if it stops rising at some point, it will remain very high and there is no prospect of any return to full or high employment in the sense in which it was defined in the 1944 employment policy white paper and understood for 30 years after the war.

There will quite soon be some tendency for spending and output to rise rather than fall, but that is a very long way from anything that is properly defined as economic recovery.

There are two basic goals of economic policy—one is to improve the long-term rate of growth and the living standards that depend upon it and the other is to achieve high employment. In terms of unemployment we are further away from it now than we were in the 1980s. The 1980s and 1990s are worse than the previous four decades and are comparable more with the 1930s, although the absolute percentage level of unemployment is not as high.

In terms of the goal of increasing the annual rate of growth, the situation is no different or slightly worse than it has been since the end of the war. We probably just got to 3.5 per cent growth in

the 1960s and since then we have fallen back to 2.5 per cent—that means in absolute terms output and living standards are higher than the 1930s—but then they are also higher than 1066 and that's largely thanks to the advance of science! The purpose is to speed up growth and that has not happened. The only supposed source of comfort is that other economies supposed to be more dynamic than Britain have slowed down too.

I don't believe economics has a definite answer. It does have a fairly definite negative answer to some of the solutions you hear at the local pub. Some things are not the problem—foreign competition, automation, the changing size of the workforce, industrialisation. When you come to say what is the key thing I don't believe at the moment we can do much better than surmise that it has something to do with the relationship between skills and pay. Either we are paying ourselves too much in relation to the skills we bring to the labour market, or we are not bringing enough skills to the labour market to justify what we think of as a decent or even modest standard of living.

In the armchair, it is probably correct and relatively easy to say the key thing is closing that gap—preferably by the route of raising skills rather than lowering pay—but one way or other it has to be part of a strategy for restoring high employment over the next 10 or 20 years.

Economic policy-makers have to be very humble—we have delivered ourselves of decades of failure or at least culminating in failure. Clearly in terms of our ability to achieve our employment goals in particular, we are going backwards. In terms of higher growth we are not going backwards, but we are continuing to fail to go forwards.



ILLUSTRATIONS: ST JOHN

Will Hutton
Economics Editor,
the *Guardian*



I think the economy is on the turn. It is recovering, although I don't like the word 'recovery' because it suggests that there's something natural about the recession. The recession was entirely induced by bad policy, and so we are returning to the kind of condition which we might have been in had there not been these man-made mistakes.

I don't accept this language of green shoots and spring and darling buds of May, which suggests there was a long winter which was nothing to do with the government; now spring is here and we can get back to the good times. It suggests there is something structurally wrong with the economy which is not my view. But, a two-and-a-half year recession is drawing to a close. We've had the most amazing relaxation of monetary policy. There's been nothing like it this century. Interest rates have dropped from 10 to six per cent at the same time as a 16 per cent devaluation. I can't think of a parallel relaxation, even in the early thirties.

In macro terms government policy is not wildly off course any longer—apart from locking in the devaluation so everyone was secure it was going to happen—and I would be prepared to have some kind of additional public expenditure boost of £3 billion or £4 billion.

Recessions don't go on for ever, not after this kind of relaxation in policy. There's no doubt that the economy is on the turn. The question is whether recovery is sustainable and where it will lead. My own view is that by the end of next year

we're going to find that the gains in inflation made over the last two years were wholly due to the loss of output. Nothing structural happened at all and we're going to see inflation right back at five, six, seven per cent. How the government responds to that is a very interesting matter.

I also think that the gains in output will be disappointing from a devaluation of this size, so that by 1994 you're going to see a very big trade deficit—current account deficits of £20 billion or more. So you're going to see very big and barely financeable trade deficits, not much growth in output despite the huge boost the economy has been given, and the whole thing dissolving in higher inflation.

The huge debt overhang is the major difference between now and the 1930s. Secondly we haven't got captive markets—the old Empire was a captive market which helped us bounce off and out of recession in the thirties. We haven't got that this time round.

So we have a very unfavourable world outlook, we have no captive markets, we have consumers manacled by debt, we have an extraordinarily weak manufacturing sector. Whilst there has been a major policy relaxation, which I think will put a floor under the economy and prompt some kind of up-tick, it's going to be very disappointing. So the new story in town is not to talk about this endless recession, but how structurally weak the whole damn set-up is.

Phil Murphy
Economics Editor,
Living Marxism

Any statistical comparison with the recessions of the 1970s or the 1980s, or even with the 1930s slump fails to do justice to how bad things are for Britain today. The problem with the use of historical statistics is that you are never comparing like with like. When you look at what makes up the British economy today, it's not much more than an offshore financial centre for the rest of the world and a manufacturing platform for a few foreign capitalists.

In structural terms the productive base of the economy has been getting weaker for a very long time. Look at manufacturing, the key sector for assessing the prospects for any national economy. Not only is it smaller than ever, but what remains is finding it difficult to survive in the world market. When John Major declared in his interview with the *Independent* in March that 'we are uniquely competitive in a way we have not been in my lifetime' he was right, but in exactly the opposite sense to the one he intended: British industry has never been as uncompetitive. As Lord Prior told the House of Commons select committee on employment in the same week, 'manufacturing industry is no longer there'.

This is a key factor explaining the secular rise in the trade deficit, so that today, even when we're in recession and domestic demand is low, Britain is importing more than it exports. And, as a recent *Financial Times* study showed, even in Britain's supposedly strong sectors like pharmaceuticals

and chemicals, which are still in surplus, the pattern is for decline.

With the economy in such a state it is inconceivable that there could be a sustained recovery. This would need to be driven by real productive investment, but low profitability is too great a barrier for that. This is why the slump will continue and mass unemployment is here to stay.

Output can stop falling—the recession is self-correcting in that sense—but that won't establish the base for recovery. In fact any short-term upturn that might happen is certain to compound Britain's balance of payments deficit, and so will only emphasise how bad things are at the structural level.

The government has no solution to the slump, its policy vacuum is starker than ever. Low interest rates can make the burden of past debt easier to carry, but it won't encourage new investment when the profitability isn't there. A lower pound won't be decisive either: for 20 years devaluation and a declining trade balance have gone hand in hand. What the government and employers will do is try to make us pay for the crisis with our jobs, our wages, our living standards, our pensions, and with worse healthcare and education. Unemployment is already three million in Britain, or four million as it used to be measured. There seems little reason why it won't edge upwards towards the five million mark.



An expert opinion poll

Simon Ward
Senior UK Economist,
Lombard Street
Research



We are relatively optimistic. Since we came out of the ERM the authorities have been able to cut interest rates substantially by historical standards, and from a policy perspective we have the basis for economic recovery. The problem this year is exports will be held back by recession in Europe. There will be some recovery in output during the year but it is not likely to be very dramatic. But next year I think things will be a lot more optimistic—the European economy should start to recover and the full effect of interest rate cuts here should start to be felt. So we are quite optimistic about growth prospects next year—we're looking for one per cent this year and over three per cent next.

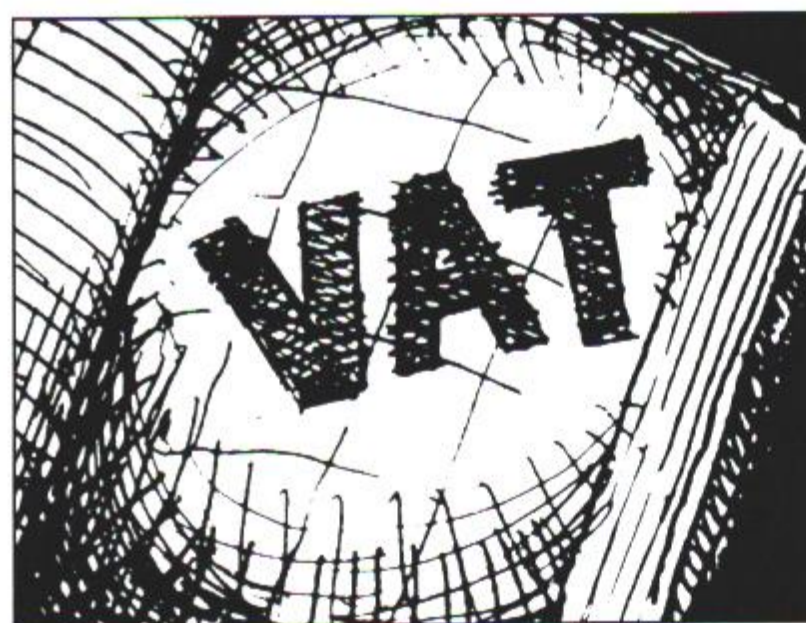
This is the deepest recession since the war. We estimate the GDP gap is between five and six per cent. In the early eighties recession the peak was

four per cent. But the overall position now is better than the eighties particularly because of inflation. In that recession inflation was double digit—now it's very low.

Now that interest rates are at a sensible level, the basis for recovery is there. I don't think there's a lot for the government to do. The best policy is to wait and see. I would favour some tightening of fiscal policy. My advice to the government would be to do nothing except a little tax raising.

In the long term the growth rate of the economy will be determined by growth in capital stock and availability of skilled labour. Our investment is relatively low by international standards and our education system is not keeping pace with the competition. I don't see it as government's role to boost investment—I think the best thing it can do is create a stable environment for investment.

Bob Rowthorn
Professor
of Economics,
King's College,
Cambridge University



There's no doubt that output is beginning to improve now, and exports have been improved by devaluation. From that point of view, output recovery is beginning. But the problem is unemployment. It is difficult to judge what the long-term future of unemployment is. In the 1980s recovery, output rose from 1981 to 1986 at about three per cent a year, and yet unemployment carried on rising and only stabilised by about 1986. If we were to repeat that experience even with quite a strong recovery in output, unemployment would rise to four million.

Even with strong recovery 3.5m is quite an optimistic picture. And where it might go afterwards is difficult to say. I would be very surprised if on present trends unemployment was less than 2.5m by the end of the century.

One way to reduce unemployment is to get a more effective manufacturing sector. The manufacturing sector is actually much better than it used to be—I don't share the view that it's going down the drain, but it's too small. What we need is a lot of investment in manufacturing.

The Thatcher period knocked out manufacturing sectors. Some of these were redundant—it was brutally done but it was necessary. But others were swept away which weren't out of date. The sectors that were left saw a massive improvement in productivity—chemicals and electrical engineering did particularly well. The problem today is we've got half the team—the players are not bad but we need more. That's a depressing prospect, but one doesn't have to despair, it's not a totally insoluble problem.

We also have a problem with unemployment because of the neglect of public services and infrastructure. This can be financed by higher taxes

or making people pay for public services. You could tax benefits such as child benefits and disability or reform the pension scheme so better off people don't get pensions. I'm not in favour of that—but I do think taxes should be higher.

We need more public housing and the state could clearly encourage that. There's a shortage of teachers and so on—when you add them up together you are talking of three quarters of a million people. Taking them off the dole and giving them work in the public sector for an extra, say, £10 000 a year would cost around £7.5 billion. It's quite a lot but not gigantic if you consider what a huge social problem it is. You could increase tax to cover this or make people pay for public services. I've got nothing against road tolls for example.

In a capitalist economy you encourage investment by making it secure and profitable. You need an economic regime which will guarantee some security that the process will not be severely interrupted—which is why I am against excessive economic stimulation at the moment, because we could just repeat the late eighties experience where you zoom upwards and then come crashing down. I would be in favour of tax incentives for manufacturing across the board. A low pound is a good stimulus too.

The Americans managed to create so many jobs because they had very low productivity growth, and the counterpart of that is very low wage growth. If you said in Britain that real wages are not to rise for 10 years you would have a lot of job creation—the counterpart of unemployment is rising pay for wages in work. It is a great inequality in society that people who have got jobs are getting better and better off.

An expert opinion poll

Wynne Godley
Professor of
Economics, King's
College, Cambridge

Britain's economic problems are very serious. Things are worse than the recession of the 1980s. But it's not so severe as the thirties, since the unemployment percentage is not as high.

I'm not more optimistic, I would just say that today's recession is not as deep as the worst of the Depression in the 1930s. Then there was a big financial crash.

However, the position now is potentially more serious than the 1930s because such an enormous improvement is required in the performance of

industry. Our industry is in a state of decline—it is failing to compete successfully in world markets in some dynamic sense. Unless that improves on a very large scale, the recession will get very much worse.

The prospects are moderate. Maybe more competitive exchange rates, policies to improve industrial performance and so on would make a difference. I think there will be a recovery in three or four years.

Michael Hughes
Chief Economist
at top City firm BZW

The statistics make the present comparable with the 1930s. But the advantage now is that we have the lessons of the thirties. To me the difference between a recession and a depression is that a recession is self-correcting, a depression needs a kickstart. The kickstart you had in the thirties was a fiscal one—that isn't feasible now, you have to have a monetary one and you have to increase the supply of risk capital.

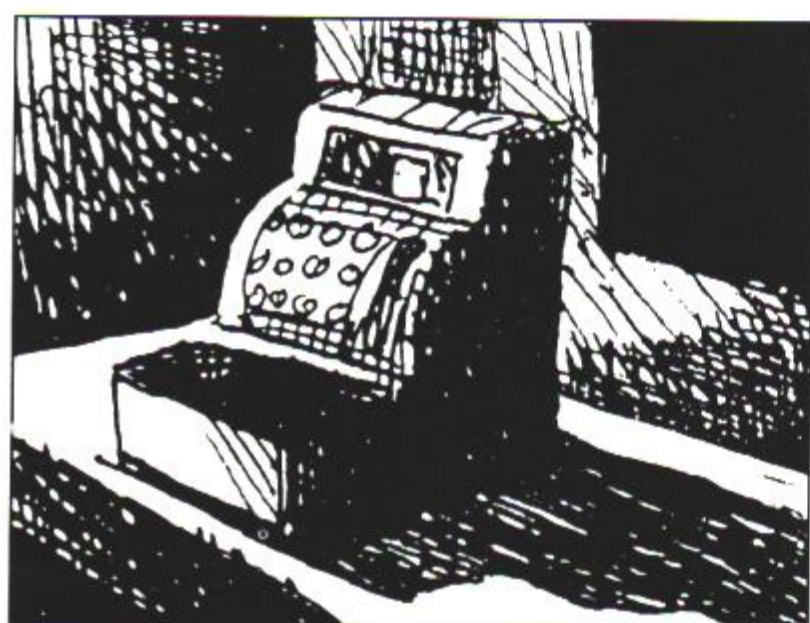
The areas that are most in need of risk capital are small companies and the property sector. We need a very low level of interest rates for quite some time but also a tax policy which encourages the stock market. Never has it been as important to have a buoyant stock market as it is now.

The key policy to turn the economy around would be an improvement in the supply of credit. That can take two forms: one is to have a tax policy which encourages risk-taking (lower interest rates and a change in taxation of dividends for

companies), and the second is to reduce government's demands on the capital markets, providing more money to go into the corporate sector. That requires a tightening of fiscal policy.

I think the recovery has started. The irony is if you look at average estimates for Gross Domestic Product, the low point was the second quarter of 1991—two years ago. But people don't view the last two years as a period of recovery. That's mainly because domestic demand continued to fall until the fourth quarter of last year—but that does look as if it was the low point. To that end the recovery has started.

What's different is that the degree of job creation associated with recovery will be less than in the past. So it is quite conceivable that unemployment will continue to rise next year. If eight per cent unemployment is the norm, we're on 11 per cent now, I don't see us going back to eight until later this decade.



Charles Bean
Professor of Economics
at the London School
of Economics,
Deputy Director of the
Centre for Economic
Performance

It would be absolutely amazing if the cuts in interest rates coupled with the fall in the exchange rate doesn't start feeding through to increased activity. Even though consumption is still subdued partly because of rising unemployment, it would be an astonishing break with the past if the depreciation did not get things going somewhat. I am certain growth will start resuming this year or next, although it will probably be a sluggish recovery right through the next five years.

The problem in the medium term is how you manage the recovery. We have a big balance of payments deficit despite the recession and also a budget deficit which is not entirely cyclical. These have to be corrected, which basically means some increase in taxes or cuts in government spending. It is also important that as recovery starts, wages don't start growing again in an attempt to recoup the devaluation which has raised

import prices. In the short term wages will be kept in check by unemployment. The question is what will happen when unemployment starts falling, whether those inflationary pressures will be kept in check when the economy recovers.

This recession is different from the 1979-81 recession in that it is the natural consequence of the boom in 1989-90, when consumers over-borrowed in the expectation that income growth would continue at high rates and that was not fulfilled. It was inevitable there would be some slowdown—the government compounded it by raising interest rates too much.

In terms of debt it has been a long-lasting recession. But our experience is recessions don't go on for ever. By and large there are certain inherent self-correcting forces in the economy. The reduction in interest rates and fall in exchange rates should help to get things going again.

The truth about the causes and consequences of unemployment is being buried beneath a blanket of lies, damn lies and statistics, says Sharon Clarke

The missing million

Figures released on 18 February showed that official unemployment in the UK had passed the three million mark again in January. That would be bad enough. But, in fact, real unemployment is far higher than the government's phoney statistics suggest.

Since 1982 the Tories have made more than 20 changes to the way in which unemployment figures are calculated. Almost all of these statistical tricks have had the effect of reducing the headline total. Then there are the large numbers of 'hidden unemployed', who have never appeared in the official statistics.

The hidden unemployed include thousands who are working for their dole money on government 'training' schemes, particularly 16 and 17-year olds on compulsory work programmes. And a large number of unemployed women do not appear in the official figures either.

In order to be registered as officially jobless, you must be claiming benefit. But many women cannot claim benefits, either because their partner

claims (married or cohabiting women have no independent right to social security), or because the women have not paid sufficient national insurance contributions in the past. Why don't women pay enough national insurance to get unemployment benefit? Usually because their responsibilities for childcare and housework trap them in low-paid, part-time jobs, or because they have time off work to raise children. When it comes to adding up the unemployed, wives and mothers simply don't count.

The upshot of all these statistical sleights-of-hand is that the real unemployment figure, instead of just inching past the three million mark, is over four million and rising.

The myth of the 'yuppie slump'

A widely accepted idea about unemployment in the nineties is that architects, lawyers and other middle class professionals in the south-east of England have been among the hardest hit.

This is a useful notion for the authorities. It endorses the view that 'we're all in this together' which the government has used to press us to make sacrifices. It can be presented as a sort of advert for Mr Major's 'classless society', in which we all reap the benefits of the good times and all tighten our belts in the bad. And it can even serve as a populist palliative to unemployed workers, who can console themselves with the thought that at least 'those bastards' are suffering too.

But the 'yuppie slump' is largely a myth. Although unemployment rates among middle class professionals have risen this time around more than in past recessions, it is working class people,

north and south, who have taken the real hammering.

The service sector has lost a lot of jobs—yet manufacturing industry has lost still more, despite the fact that it employed only a third as many people as services when the slump began in 1989. Since then, almost half a million jobs have gone in the service sector; meanwhile, manufacturing employment has fallen by more than 700 000. The unemployment rate among manufacturing workers has risen by 5.8 per cent, compared with a rise of 2.4 per cent in banking and finance.

Even those figures don't tell the whole truth. Most job losses in services have not touched the professionals. They have hit the newer sections of the working class—the thousands of bank clerks, VDU operators, shop staff and others who might wear a suit to work instead of overalls, but are still at the bottom of the pay ladder and the top of the redundancy list.

The south has certainly been hit hard by this recession; more than 40 per cent of total job losses in the past two years were in the south-east (including London). As a consequence, regional variations in unemployment rates have narrowed significantly. This only goes to prove that, contrary to modern prejudice, the south is not entirely populated by middle class professionals. Instead it is home to the largest section of the working class, who have joined workers in the rest of Britain in the firing-line.

Jobless scapegoats

The job fraud is not only about fiddling the figures. Just as importantly, it involves spreading

The Great Jobs Fraud

misleading arguments about who and what is to blame for unemployment.

The fact that mass unemployment has become a permanent feature of British life is a serious indictment of capitalist society. The government, the media and the employers have had to come up with a diversionary explanation. They have hit upon the handy idea of blaming the unemployed themselves for unemployment.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, Kate Lawrence examines how the debate about workfare schemes has been used to scapegoat the long-term unemployed in particular. And the fraud goes further. On the day the three million jobless figures were released, for example, the *Financial Times* asked why unemployment now seemed so hard to reduce. 'The explanation', it concluded, 'lies in the attributes and aspirations of the unemployed themselves' (18 February 1993).

The essential argument here is that unemployment is high because workers in Britain do not have the skills or the will required to work today. That patronising assumption is implicitly shared by all those, such as the Labour Party leaders, who stress the importance of 'training' as a solution to unemployment.

The underlying message seems to be that the capitalist economy has plenty of jobs to offer, but that workers in Britain are somehow unfit to do them. It conjures up images of Jobcentres full of vacancy adverts which the illiterate unemployed

cannot even read. This is obviously a convenient line of argument for the authorities. But it turns reality on its head.

The reason why millions of jobs have been cut is that, however skilled a workforce might be, capitalists will not employ labour unless they can make a sufficiently high profit. As profitability has fallen for British companies, so unemployment has risen. And as the government seeks to ease the tax burden on corporate profits, so it is cutting back spending on jobs in the public sector.

Unemployment today is not caused by inadequate workers. It stems from the inadequacies of a system that is based upon production for private profit rather than social need.

The upturn illusion

The last resort of the government fraudsters is to suggest that, even if unemployment is rather bad just at the moment, things will soon improve when the economic upturn comes. What they fail to point out is that, in the nineties, one person's upturn is another person's ticket to the unemployment statistics.

In these times of slump, any upturn in the British economy will be purely

statistical. It will not involve a genuine regeneration of society. It might benefit those few whose fortunes depend upon the upward movement of shares on the stock market. But it will not come to the rescue of those desperately looking for an increase in decent vacancies on the job market.

Worse still, any such upturn will be brought about partly by increasing unemployment. By closing unprofitable enterprises and cutting back costs, employers might be able to give themselves a short-term boost to productivity and profits. But their breathing-space will be bought at the expense of working class living standards.

This is why an upturn for them would be nothing much for us to get excited about. Whatever happens next on the swings and roundabouts of other economic statistics, we can be sure that real unemployment will continue to rise. And, despite their assurances to the contrary, nobody knows where it will stop. There is no natural barrier to rising redundancies.

The one thing for certain is that the more jobs are lost, the more fiddles and lies will be found to explain away the mass unemployment which blights all of our lives. ●

(Additional research by Tracey Lauder)



How do you react when your job is transferred abroad? Kirk Williams talked to Hoover and Nestlé workers in both Scotland and France

Responses to

I've spent all my youth working for Hoover. I'm now 47. Joined when I was 21, that's 26 years. These days you're finished at 47.'

Spitting in the fire inside the gates of the doomed Dijon Hoover plant, Michale Jousard begins another day of protest with his wife Yvette. They are one of 35 married couples in the workforce of 500 dependent on the double wage from Hoover. A BMW speeds by. 'Bosses off to another fat lunch', spits Michale, but his words are drowned by the turbo engine.

The clamour over the transfer of jobs between Glasgow and Dijon has not been so muted. In January American giant Hoover announced the transfer of production from Dijon to its Cambuslang plant. The next week Nestlé said it would shift production to Dijon from its Scottish factory in Kinning Park. This tale of two cities has Dijon and Glasgow at war, or so it seems.

The Hoover deal included a 12-month pay freeze, temporary contracts with no sick pay or pension scheme, compulsory overtime and a £50-a-week pay cut for the night shift. French workers simply shake their heads at the deal accepted in Scotland. 'We would never have accepted pay cuts or employment with no rights.'

'Us or them'

The Hoover deal does seem to fit into a pattern. Figures released recently by the International Labour Organisation suggest that UK hourly wages are now 18 per cent lower than in France and 42 per cent lower than in Germany. British workers enjoy less job security, and work longer hours on average. Pension, redundancy and sickness benefits do not compare with France or Germany.

Some see more underhand motives. 'America has always been closer to you than us', says Mohammed Zenasmi. Above him a banner 'L'Amérique assassine la région' greets visitors to the Dijon protest.

Scots are reported as not understanding what all the fuss is about. Two French Hoover workers brought over by the BBC to meet workers in Cambuslang were disheartened at their reception. 'They didn't seem to care or think about it', said one. A Cambuslang worker keen to get into work simply said, 'it was us or them. I'm just pleased it was us'.

Meanwhile, Nestlé jobs in Kinning Park are heading for France. Union official John Glass saw the move as a sop to the French. 'I would need a lot of convincing that this is pure coincidence.' A woman worker starting the



twilight shift agrees: 'this is politics, no more, no less.' At the Dijon plant they don't agree. Marie said, 'it's no swap. I'm afraid it's just about money'. The situations maybe basically similar in Scotland and France, but the responses appear to be at odds.

Are we that different? On the surface Dijon and Glasgow do seem to be worlds apart.

Dijon is promoted as the centre of Burgundy cuisine. It's an enchanting city, a mix of the medieval and the modern. The Hoover and Nestlé factories are on opposite sides of the city. Both are reached along tree-lined boulevards. Speeding along cours General de Gaulle and course du Parc, you pass chateau after chateau.

Nobody could claim to have discovered beauty in Cambuslang, the kind of town which has never seen better days. Made famous by heavy industry, it is now reliant on Hoover as its biggest employer. More than 80 per cent of the workforce live locally.

For Dijon's chateaux find Cambuslang's high-rise flats; for Dijon's 'fruits de mer' find Cambuslang's fish supper; Dijon's Burgundy and Glasgow's Buckfast. What could they have in common? A lot more than poor weather when it comes down to it.

At 10 per cent, Dijon's unemployment is catching Cambuslang on its heels. The Hoover factory is the latest casualty. Philips next to Hoover has just laid off 200. The state tobacco company, Seita, has announced the closure of its plant. Even the city's most famous product, Dijon mustard, is closing one of its local factories.

Workers in Cambuslang have suffered a similar haemorrhage of jobs. In 1981 over 6000 people walked through the gates of the Hoover plant. Today only 970 clock on. Unemployment in the town stands at 14 per cent. The slump unites the French and the Scots. Unemployment knows no language barrier.

Alain Cheviers is known as 'the black sheep', having worked at every one of the Dijon factories shedding jobs. Now it's Hoover's turn. 'Maybe I should move to Glasgow. We might beat you at rugby but you have the jobs and whisky. You're no different to us.'

It's a pleasant surprise to hear this at a time when national differences are being promoted. French politicians and newspaper editors have called for greater safeguards against 'Anglo-American companies'. In Britain politicians of the left and right unite against Maastricht and the Brussels demon. The message is: safeguard national sovereignty and national difference at all cost.

In fact you are struck at how similar ordinary people's fears, frustrations and hopes are—Scots, French or English. Strip away the language and custom and we are left with much more in common than many would like to suggest.

Who's next?

In Cambuslang and Dijon no worker I spoke to had any optimism that life for themselves or their families would get better. Whether they had a job or not, it all looked pretty grim. Two women outside the Hoover plant in Cambuslang were resigned to the deal their union had agreed, but 'if that's a good deal, then I'd like to see a bad one', said one. Both believed it was only a matter of time before a third world country made a bid for Hoover jobs: 'then it could be our turn to lose out.'

At Nestlé in Dijon one woman said: 'I feel really sorry for the Scots, but we need the jobs.' Across the city at Hoover, the seven workers who sat around the fire totalled nearly 150 years employment for the company. Now they joined the 2000 made redundant locally in three months. Back in Scotland, the last worker into Kinning Park echoed their sentiments: 'What hope for me now? I'm 52. What future do I have?' The economic slump suggests common problems whether you cook biscuits or build vacuum cleaners.

In desperate situations people are forced to accept desperate measures. But in Dijon and Glasgow many at least sense that this squalid struggle for jobs has little to do with national differences and everything to do with company policy. That is a start.

(Thanks to Louis Roche for his assistance in Paris and Dijon)

redundancy

Leyland DAF workers in Lancashire and Birmingham variously blamed the Dutch, the Tories, and each other for the latest job losses. Ian Scott reports



Visitors to Leyland in Lancashire could be forgiven for thinking they had stepped back into 1977, Silver Jubilee year. Every shop window was a blaze of red, white and blue and Union Jacks. 'Don't throw away our future, save Leyland Trucks', the posters pleaded.

The receivers were called in at Leyland's Dutch parent company, DAF NV, at the start of February. On Thursday 11 February workers were told there would be a 'head count reduction' of 30 per cent. Next day, 1635 Leyland DAF employees were handed their notice.

Paul had worked at the truck factory in Leyland for 16 years: 'When I was handed my notice I was in a daze. We were just called out one by one and given a brown envelope.' His workmate Alan recalled how 'when I started as an apprentice a foreman said to me "you'll be here the rest of your working life". Now what am I going to do? There's no demand for my skills round here any more'.

At the Leyland DAF van factory in Washwood Heath, Birmingham, workers were told of their redundancy 15 minutes from the end of the shift. 'We were lined up, and those who were going were told in front of all their mates, some of us were in tears', said Shane, a 26-year old door fitter. 'I was angry and scared', says Alston, 'we were expecting something but it was still a shock when you get the sack and someone next to you escapes. Some who could see me holding the envelope with my redundancy just looked

away, others came up and said how sorry they felt. It was like a funeral'.

The 20 workers attending the South Ribble borough council Leyland DAF New Start group meeting in Leyland were mystified about how the sacked workers had been chosen. 'In 32 years I have never been in trouble', said Alan who had worked in the drawing office. Paul who had worked there for 20 years was the only one sure why he had been sacked. 'I was a union convenor and those bastards were just waiting for the opportunity to get me.'

Eric, a press operator who worked for Leyland in Birmingham for 26 years, thought he had been sacked because 'they don't want old men like me. I can't work as fast'. But Alston was angry: 'I was told management decided who to sack based on absenteeism, age, attitude and time-keeping. But I have only missed four days through illness in the last 13 years and never been in trouble.' There were many similar stories as workers tried to find some personal fault to explain their situation.

The message on the posters in windows all over Leyland makes it clear that they are only concerned with the local, truck part of the company. 'Birmingham was already finished', says Harry, 'the Dutch were going to close the factory and buy Mercedes vans—everybody knew that. But our trucks are the best in the world. And you've got to look after your own first, haven't you?'

'Dutch destroyed us'

This sentiment was shared by many in the New Start group. 'Our standards were the highest until the Dutch took over', said Paul. 'They have used our profits to keep themselves going and now they have destroyed us.' Sheila, a typist, said 'we have heard that they are very wasteful in Holland and money could have been saved there. The DAF management have let this company run down'.

In Birmingham workers marching against the threat of closure altered posters from 'Save Leyland DAF' to 'Save Leyland Vans', and carried banners saying 'Save our vans'. As far as they were concerned the Dutch and other parts of the company were responsible. Barry, a press shop worker laid the blame at the feet of the truck workers in Leyland and Glasgow: 'All our profits keep going up north where they have always made a loss.'

In the New Start group it seemed the Tories were even worse than the Dutch. Alan said, 'if I

had to point the finger at the person responsible for what has happened to the economy it would be Nigel Lawson and then the rest of the Conservative Party'. Stephen an engineer thought the condemnations were a little hollow: 'Half the people in this group voted for the Tories in the last election.'

In the canteen at the truck factory in Leyland, Dave, a driver, was clear who was to blame. 'The Dutch, they bled this company. I hate them. My boss is a bloody Dutchman and he hasn't got a clue.' But Gary and Adrian, who had both been at Leyland since they left school six years ago, disagreed: 'You can't blame the Dutch for looking after their own, can you? I just wish this government was a little more like the Dutch one.' 'I hope we get bought by the yanks', said Dave, 'lots of US dollars—that's what we need'.

Workers in Leyland quickly dismissed the idea of strike action. 'If we went on strike we would be guaranteed to lose everything', said Dave. Paul summed up the mood of the New Start group: 'I was a union convenor and I voted against strike action. The vote was four to one. They all knew that if they voted for strike action then the receivers would have closed the factory immediately.'

Strike action was rejected in the Birmingham secret ballot, despite the huge show of support for it at a mass meeting. 'As we left the meeting to cast our vote, everyone was given a letter from the receivers saying that if we took any action redundancies would be immediate', recalls Alston. 'Within half an hour many of my mates had decided that they would vote against strike action.'

Look after number one

Some workers blamed other factories for voting against action. 'Leyland sold us out, if we'd been united we could have done something', said one. Brian expressed a more prevalent view: 'I didn't care about the other factories—it's every man for himself today. You've got to look after number one.'

The workers in Leyland are subdued about the future. 'If I get laid off I am going to university for three years—there's no jobs anyway', said Gary. His workmate Adrian said that if he got laid off he would 'go abroad, I can't stay here'. There was no more optimism in Birmingham. 'I'm off abroad—Britain is finished', says Shane. 'It's all right for me, I'm divorced, but for blokes with families it is going to be really hard going.'

'I almost wish they had sacked me', says Brian, 'it's so bad in the factory now. They sacked two skilled tool-makers today for refusing to do unskilled work'. 'The factory is finished', Alston added. 'What chance do I have with 45 people applying for every job in this area? And those who have a job will be working harder for less. Not much of a future is it?'

At the Leyland DAF New Start seminar the counsellor was telling them they would have to accept lower wages in any future job and travel to work out of the town. 'Here's a little saying I want you to remember. It will keep your confidence up: "What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us doesn't matter, what matters is what lies within us."' It didn't sound like much comfort.

Care in the Community policies are designed to save the government money at the expense of women's lives, says Fiona Foster

When I look back, I suppose my obsession with incontinence pads and rubber sheets just didn't turn him on.' Doreen was explaining how her husband left her three years after her ailing mother came to live with them.

Doreen was 32 and had three children when her mother had a severe stroke. 'I found out very quickly that mum wasn't ill enough, and we weren't poor enough to get her into a home—so we had no choice, she moved in.' Doreen's mum has just died, but eight years of caring for her full time have taken a high toll. 'I lost my job, my husband and very nearly my sanity.'

As her mother grew more and more dependent, needing to be washed, dressed and taken to the toilet, Doreen

million carers in Britain, over half of whom gave up jobs to care for relatives full time. The National Association of Carers claims that 80 per cent of these are women, the typical carer being the daughter or daughter-in-law. Two thirds of those who do more than 20 hours a week caring get absolutely no help, financial or otherwise, from the state. In surveys conducted by care organisations, nearly half of carers say they are at breaking point, 13 per cent admit that they have felt like being violent towards their relatives, and a small proportion claim to have considered suicide.

Hospitals are reporting a small but growing incidence of what has been dubbed 'granny-dumping'. Carers, pushed to the limits of their endurance, abandon their charge in the accident

working to care, 'not that it was any great shakes, cleaning offices, but we had a laugh, you know, the girls'.

Now, as the government seeks to slash public spending under the pressure of the slump, its reforms of the NHS and social services will force even more women to live like Doreen and Brenda.

Over the next two years 'community care' is set to replace most of the state-run long-stay institutions for the elderly or mentally infirm. It sounds a progressive move. Nobody likes the idea of institutionalising the elderly. Old people's wards conjure up visions of bleak institutions full of threadbare furniture and neglected people. Institutions sound horrific, community care sounds great. In practice it's a disaster.

When Kenneth Clarke first floated the proposals three years ago he insisted that 'the reason for developing care in the community and reducing dependence on institutional care for so many patients is the welfare of the patients'. Clarke's successor as health secretary, Virginia Bottomley, has kept up the claim that the reforms will be of benefit to the elderly.

Who cares?

had to give up her job as a radiographer at a local hospital. 'My mother was brain damaged after the stroke and couldn't speak properly. It was like eight years of caring for a 15-stone baby, but without any of the nice bits.' The first time Doreen was offered any help was when she threatened to take a knife to her mother's throat. 'My youngest ran next door screaming. The social workers came running quick enough then.' The social services offered to take Doreen's mum into care for a fortnight to allow the family to take a holiday. It was her first holiday in two years and all she did was worry about how her mother was being treated, and dread going home.

Doreen is 40 now, and feels anxious about 'starting again'. She says she can't imagine 'normal life for other people. Normal life for me was looking after mum and talking about looking after mum.'

In fact Doreen's life is horrifyingly normal and is becoming more so. There are estimated to be almost seven

and emergency department of a hospital in the hope that the hospital will simply have to take them in. There is also a rising incidence of assaults against the elderly—not by teenage sadists, but by women like Doreen pushed to the point where they lash out.

Brenda can understand how it happens. She's 37 with two children and a 56-year old husband who has suffered from Alzheimer's disease for four years. He has degenerated quickly and now needs to be fed, washed, dressed and kept under Brenda's eye 24 hours a day to prevent a repeat of the time he went out with no clothes on, or the time he tried to put his arm in the fire.

Brenda says she's aged 20 years in the last four. She is tired and worn and hates her life but can see no way out. 'My marriage is dead. I feel as though my husband is dead but there has been no funeral and I'm not allowed to mourn. There are times when I've been a split second away from bashing him.' Like Doreen, she had to give up

But community care is not about improving the quality of care or putting the old and infirm back in touch with life. It is about cutting costs, at a time when the state can no longer afford even the miserly levels of care which it previously provided.

There are two aspects to the savings plan. One is the transfer of responsibility for the elderly infirm from the NHS to local authorities. The other is the transfer of responsibility from the state to the family.

From April, responsibility for the elderly infirm will be transferred from the NHS to the local authorities, which will have to put contracts out to buy places in nursing homes from the private sector. It is obvious that when putting services out to tender in this way, councils will be looking for services to fit their budgets rather than the needs of the elderly. Some money will also be clawed back from the elderly themselves. As long-stay geriatric wards are closed, the elderly



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

The bitter end

infirm will be means-tested, and those with savings will have to pay for their care.

At the same time, families are being encouraged to take direct responsibility for elderly relatives. When challenged, the Department of Health has insisted that nobody is suggesting that families *must* care, that the transfer of responsibility has been made from the NHS to the local authority, not to the family. But in practice families—and that means women—are under pressure to pick up the pieces.

Rhona Barnett's mother and husband have spent seven and five years respectively in a Dudley hospital. Her mother at 91 is very frail, her husband's Alzheimer's disease has reached the stage where he doesn't know who she is. But when she was informed that the hospital was to be reorganised, she wasn't even told that there was the possibility of further state care. 'I was simply told I would have to make other arrangements. I honestly thought that

I was going to have to have them here with me. I was beside myself', she says. 'I couldn't have coped with one of them, let alone both. If my daughter hadn't stepped in and said there was no way either of them were coming home I don't know what would have happened. I feel that guilty, but I just couldn't have managed.'

Why should she have to? The reorganisation has been a cynical way of saving money, legitimised by undermining the idea that the state should take on responsibility for the sick and elderly.

In principle there is nothing wrong with the concept of state institutions. The diabolical state of many old people's homes and long-stay wards is a consequence of years of underfunding and poor standards of care. With adequate funding it's quite possible to see how old people's homes could be pleasant enough places.

There is everything wrong with making the family the focus of care.

Even if the government extended further benefits to carers or provided them with more support, as Labour's health team constantly demands, 'caring' would still be a diabolical life.

Even if you are paid for it, caring for someone at home isn't like a normal job. If you are a secretary, a teacher or a nurse, however much you hate your job, you've still got your home to come back to. When you shut the door you can cook a meal, watch the TV, go out for a drink. It's your own time, your life. Women carers are more like slaves than workers. There's no clocking on or clocking off, and no escape—the responsibility is yours, 24 hours a day.

The intended goal of the switch to community care for the elderly and infirm is to cut billions off the social security bill. Each old person looked after by their family represents a saving of £4000 to the state. That is the sort of reform the government really cares about. If it gets away with it, the cost to women's lives will be immeasurable. ●



An irresponsible act

The Child Support Act, which comes into force in April, has been widely welcomed as a step forward for single mothers. Debra Warner sees it as another attempt by the government to shift the costs of childcare on to the backs of impoverished families

Under the new Child Support Act, any single mother claiming Income Support will be forced to shop the father of her children to the Department of Social Security and receive maintenance payments from him, whether she likes it or not.

If she refuses to name the father, she risks having her benefit cut by 20 per cent for six months and by 10 per cent for a further year. If she does name him, however, the absent father will be forced to pay maintenance—and this will be deducted from her Income Support anyway.

The government has presented the legislation as an act of compassion towards children (the act was first proposed in the 1990 white paper

entitled 'Children Come First'). But its central purpose is to save the both single mothers and 'errant fathers'.

There are currently 895 000 single parents claiming Income Support, 90 per cent of them women. Maintenance payments procured under the new act will save the government an estimated £400m a year. The Child Support Agency (CSA) is the government body set up to enforce the legislation. It will not only deal with single mothers on income support. But these are the only people who will be forced to claim maintenance.

By replacing Income Support with maintenance, the act establishes a web of financial intrigue that not only penalises the single mother,

but also hits any subsequent families the father has. More and more second families on lower incomes will also be forced to exist at poverty levels.

The CSA has breathtaking powers to pursue maintenance. As the Child Poverty Action Group has warned, 'The CSA's ability to intrude into the privacy of day-to-day life will be extensive' (*Welfare Rights Bulletin*, January 1993).

Employers, local authorities and the Inland Revenue are all required to disclose information about both parents. Inspectors can enter premises, including those of private businesses and charities (but not private homes), question anybody there and inspect documents as they see fit. Obstructing a CSA inspector is an offence. Maintenance payments can be directly deducted from wages by the CSA, obliging employers to police their workforce. Payment can also be procured from 'errant fathers' by selling off their property, or seizing their bank accounts. Absent parents who don't pay up can be jailed.

Ros Hepplewhite, the director of the CSA, complains that the agency has been unfairly depicted as 'a moral crusade to punish feckless fathers for irresponsible behaviour', and insists that the CSA is only trying to do right by single parents (*Guardian*, 30 December 1992). However, if you are living outside the traditional nuclear family as part of what Ms Hepplewhite calls 'the social trend of serial relationships', the clear moral message is, don't expect the welfare state to support your children.

Despite Ros Hepplewhite's complaints, what is really striking is how little criticism, unfair or otherwise, the act has attracted. Commentators may quibble over the sums involved, or the way it is implemented, but the principle that parents should be brought to account in this way has been widely accepted. Many feminists welcome the act as long overdue. They argue that men have got away with leaving women holding the baby for too long.

A closer examination of the act, however, shows that its purpose is not to relieve the burden on women struggling to bring up children alone, but to relieve the government of one more social security bill. Much of the act is taken up with enforcement of the regulations for women on Income Support, and as the excerpts from documents reprinted here show, the authorities are not going to give sympathetic treatment to women who are reluctant to name the father.

The Child Support Act will introduce an even greater degree of

Documents produced by the Department of Social Security advise staff to lecture single mothers along the following lines:

'[Emphasise] the benefits to the Parent With Care (PWC) of providing the information, for the PWC and Absent Father (AF) may be friends now, but things may change in the future...the PWC may be involved in a new relationship and their new partner may not be happy about maintaining another person's child....

'If the PWC will not name the father, try and find out why. Does the PWC consider it 'none of our business'? Is he married? Is he violent? Does the PWC have worries over access or custody? Is/was a sexual offence involved? Does the PWC want no further contact with him?'

And finally, if the interview 'is getting heated, leave her to cool down'.

Information required by the CSA in tracking down the errant male includes nicknames, photographs, present and previous employers, parents/relatives address, car registration number, clubs or hobbies, name of accountant, bank details, details of probation officer or other 'officials'.

harassment and interference in people's lives. Anything which hands more powers to the state can only reinforce the misery officialdom has already caused the single mother. What with dole snoopers checking the bedroom to see if she's had a man staying so they can cut her benefits, constant police harassment of her kids if they happen to live on a council estate, and a legion of petty officials from the social services to the education department telling her how and how not to bring up her children, the last thing the average single mum needs is more state interference.

Faced with the economic slump, the government desperately needs to cut back on welfare spending. By pointing the finger of blame at

'irresponsible' fathers, the authorities aim to justify spending cuts as being in the best interests of women and children, and so get themselves off the hook. But a state which refuses even to provide decent public childcare facilities has no interest in solving the problems facing single mothers.

Those who support the Child Support Act as a step forward for single mothers are being, to coin a phrase, nothing short of irresponsible. Rather than arguing for higher benefits for single parents, too many have been reduced to supporting an act which treats like criminals women who struggle to bring up children on their own, and which attempts to make families, rather than the state, pay the price for the slump.

Maria has a three-year old son:

'I don't want the father of my child to have more access to him. At the moment he has some access but it's on my terms. He'll ring up maybe once a month and take my boy out. It gives me a break.

'If he's forced to pay maintenance he might think he's got more rights. We split up because I started having an affair with a woman. Now he's never been violent to me as such but I'd say he's on the brink. So what if the fact that he has to pay maintenance makes him want to fight for custody? I'm an out lesbian now, and he's in a heterosexual relationship. I just don't stand a chance.'

Patricia has a one-year old girl and is expecting another baby in September:

'There must be thousands of women like me. My boyfriend wants to give us as much as he can but he doesn't want it knocked straight off the money I claim. You can't survive on Income Support. If I comply with the act it's going to impoverish my child and her father, and he's on disability benefit. Now they're going after cuts in that too. They say even if the father is on benefit he has to pay £2.20 a week.

The thing is, they caught me out. I went up to the DSS about something else and they asked me into an interview room and started asking me questions about her dad. The interview was over before I realised what was happening. They'll be after me again now I'm having another baby. They've got a copy of my daughter's birth certificate so they know who her father is anyway.

'It makes me so angry but I can't do anything, and they can cut the only regular money I get any time they like. What they want is to force people off benefit. I see women earning money on the streets near where I live and I wonder if I'm going to have to get out there myself tomorrow. And then they call it the "Child Support" Act. It's outright child abuse, that's what it is.'

When did you last see your father?

Welcome to the workfare state

The debate about introducing compulsory 'workfare' schemes for the unemployed has already helped to scapegoat the long-term jobless and undermine the welfare system. Kate Lawrence looks at the coercive drift of policy and attitudes towards the unemployed



The central message of the debate about workfare is that the unemployed are largely to blame for their plight and must take responsibility for their own welfare. Under workfare schemes run in some American states, the unemployed are obliged to take part in non-profit making employment to 'pay off' any welfare benefits they receive.

In Britain it is likely that the cost of running comprehensive work schemes for the unemployed will prohibit the introduction of full-blown workfare for all of the jobless. But the significance of the debate lies in the way that it has helped to shift the responsibility for unemployment—especially long-term unemployment—away from structural factors and on to the shoulders of the jobless themselves. This can only legitimise the use of increasingly coercive measures to 'encourage' the long-term unemployed

back to work, and pave the way for further benefit cuts.

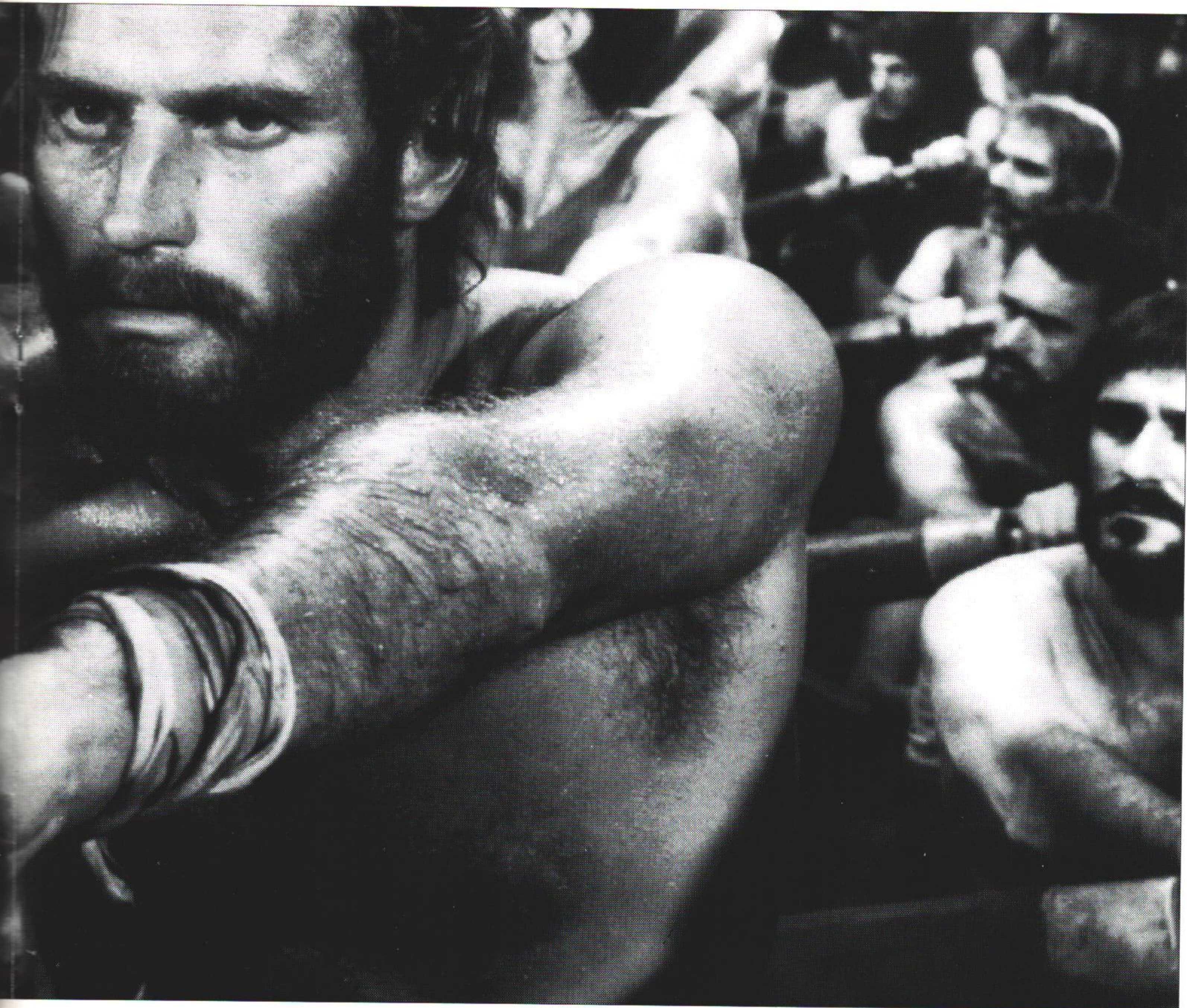
John Major gave official approval to a more coercive approach to the unemployed in his Carlton Club speech to the Tory faithful in February. It appears that while the rest of us were wondering how many more people had been turned out of their jobs and on to the streets, Major was wondering 'whether paying unemployment benefit, without offering or requiring any activity in return, serves unemployed people or society well'.

In case that sounded a bit harsh, Major threw in his usual Citizen's Charter style two-way contract: 'Of course, we have to make sure that any conditions imposed improve the job prospects of unemployed people and give good value to the country.' Presumably if the conditions imposed fail to improve the job prospects of unemployed people they can fill in a service complaint form.

In fact the thinking behind the workfare proposals already underpins the government's increasingly punitive policy towards the unemployed.

Just two weeks after Major had been wondering whether the state should hand the unemployed their benefits without 'requiring any activity in return', the Department of Employment revealed that the number of people out of work for over a year had topped one million. The same day, the press reported that the government was due to unveil new compulsory temporary work and training programmes for 18 to 25-year olds who have been unemployed for over a year.

Officially, the unemployed are not required to participate in most of the government's existing training and employment schemes. But the independent Unemployment Unit noted in January that it 'continues to receive information that many individuals are



pressurised into joining inappropriate programmes especially during Restart and other “counselling” interviews’ (*Working Brief*, January 1993).

Currently anyone unemployed for two years must attend a Restart course—a week-long programme which teaches the unemployed many useful things including how to write CVs and look for jobs which don’t exist. The course comes with a 40 per cent cut in benefit for anyone who fails to attend.

This month, the new Training for Work programmes will bring the date for compulsory attendance forward by a year. Anyone who fails to attend the new Jobplan programme after they have been out of work for one year may forfeit 40 per cent of their unemployment benefit for up to three weeks.

Last summer the Employment Service stopped sending out letters which warned claimants suspected

of failing the ‘actively seeking work’ rule that their benefits were about to be suspended. This means that claimants no longer have the chance to prove they have been looking for work before their money is cut. The Employment Service’s own statistics show that up to 90 per cent of claimants suspected of failing the rules were subsequently able to prove, after they received their warning letter, that they had looked for work.

Last November the government introduced new rules allowing officials immediately to withdraw Income Support hardship payments from single adults and childless couples thought to have failed to look for work. Meanwhile, people who ‘travel in groups’ (New Age hippies, not the royal family) can now lose their benefit for moving ‘to an area where they are extremely unlikely to find work’ (‘ES Circular 83/6’,

September 1992). Presumably this rules out anywhere in Britain.

Social security secretary, Peter Lilley justified some of the tougher rules as a way of giving ‘a short, sharp shock to single claimants or childless couples who have failed to actively seek work’ (statement to Social Security Advisory Committee, November 1992, quoted in *Working Brief*, January 1993). He said that these claimants must ‘behave in a more socially responsible manner’, and warned that those ‘who seek to evade their personal responsibility to look for work, and turn to crime, will face the full force of the law’.

None of this will have come as a surprise to anyone who heard Lilley’s remarks to the Tory Party conference a month before he met the Social Security Advisory Committee. There, Lilley entertained his audience with a song—to a tune by Gilbert and Sullivan—about the different kinds ►



of benefit 'scroungers' he intended to seek out and destroy. These included, of course, New Age travellers, errant fathers, benefit 'fraudsters' and 'young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list'.

By making popular fears and prejudices about New Age travellers, unmarried mothers, 'scroungers' and juvenile criminals the focus of the debate on the direction of social policy, Lilley and his supporters have sought to make unemployment a moral issue.

If every time you tighten the benefit system you raise the spectre of 'criminals' and 'deviants', eventually the message gets through that a lot of unemployment exists

crime, illegitimacy and other kinds of 'deviant' behaviour become the norm.

This is a view broadly shared by commentators across the political spectrum. 'The state has become passive, both in providing jobs and pastoral care', argues the former editor of the now defunct *Marxism Today*, Martin Jacques, proposing workfare schemes in the *Sunday Times* (24 January 1993). 'The unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed, respond in kind, with declining morale, sullen resentment and a frequent willingness to beat or fiddle the system', he added.

Attitude problem

Much of this discussion about workfare assumes that the major difficulty with long-term unemployment is not that it reduces people to dire poverty, but that it encourages 'declining morale' and 'sullen resentment'. For these commentators, it seems, the most serious problem among the long-term jobless is not the shortage of a decent income, but the lack of a proper attitude. The solution proposed is an invigorating and disciplinarian dose of forced labour.

Few contributors to the workfare debate have asked how much people would be paid on such schemes. All appear to have assumed that the unemployed would be working for their miserly giros. The stream of proposals for workfare ignore the real problem of poverty among the unemployed, and concentrate instead on broadcasting a modern equivalent of the Victorian moralists' warning that 'the Devil makes work for idle hands'.

Far from improving the economic circumstances of the long-term unemployed, the debate about workfare points towards things getting worse. Behind the attempt to associate Britain's long-term unemployed with a variety of social problems lies an attack on the welfare state, which 'underclass' theorists and others deem to be responsible for encouraging the bad behaviour of the poor.

'Underclass' community

At the Tory conference in October, social security minister Lilley made a direct link between the availability of benefits and the 'break-up' of the traditional family unit. 'Now is the time to pursue our Conservative vision for the future...a Britain where we help families to grow together, not pay them to split asunder', he told the conference. In other words, the existence of the welfare state has encouraged individuals to reject traditional family values. For Lilley and others, this rejection lies at the

heart of the 'underclass' community with its single mother households and jobless, joyriding, juvenile delinquent offspring.

In his Carlton Club speech, Major attacked the welfare state for undermining personal responsibility: 'it is where, over many years, the state has intervened most heavily, that local communities have been most effectively destroyed. It is where people feel no pride in ownership; where they are stripped of responsibility for the conditions in which they live.'

Hostility to the welfare state informs many of the suggestions for workfare schemes. And, ironically, that same hostility lies behind the resistance of many Tories to compulsory workfare.

In a parliamentary debate on workfare in November, Tory MP and former director of the Centre for Policy Studies David Willets said the state should not be responsible for making 'idle hands meet...unmet needs'. He argued that Britain needed a 'free economy', not 'an enormous command economy directing people into jobs that politicians decide are useful'.

Meanwhile, ministers rejected a workfare plan presented by consultants Full Employment UK in January on the grounds that it was too expensive and that it implied that the unemployed had a 'right to work' and a right to receive a minimum statutory wage—both outrageous proposals, of course.

Blaming the poor

While commentators tie themselves in knots over how to get tough on the unemployed without losing the Conservative Party's vision of a new Britain free from 'welfare dependency', the debate on workfare is serving as a focus for shifting the responsibility for unemployment and poverty on to the backs of the poor. The unchallenged assumptions behind the debate that unemployment means crime, delinquency and depravity are already assisting the introduction of more draconian measures in the treatment of the jobless.

The desperation of establishment commentators in the face of persistent mass unemployment shows through their attacks on the jobless. Everyone knows that for all the Jobclubs, Jobplans, Restarts, youth training schemes, skills choices, workfare and endless other schemes dreamed up by the government, nothing has made the slightest difference to the growing tide of unemployment. The renewed talk of compulsory workfare confirms that the only thing the people who are to blame can do is try to point the finger at those at the rough end of British society. ●

The message of workfare is 'the Devil makes work for idle hands'

because scroungers, single mothers and juvenile delinquents exist, rather than because of any fundamental flaws in the economic and social system. Hence instead of unemployment having something to do with the structure of society, the blame for lengthening dole queues is placed fair and square on the shoulders of the jobless.

Linking unemployment to a variety of social problems such as illegitimacy, petty crime, violence, joyriding and drug abuse has become a popular pastime among commentators increasingly concerned with issues such as long-term unemployment and urban decay.

The consensus of today's commentators is that there is a behavioural link between different social problems which can be explained in terms of the moral shortcomings of those at the bottom end of society. At the heart of their concern lies the fear that a demoralised and dangerous layer of people, or 'underclass', is growing at the outskirts of British society.

The thrust of the current debate on workfare is that, unless something is done about the long-term unemployed, more and more of Britain's housing estates will sink into a state of 'welfare dependency' where

Unemployment and compulsory work training schemes are all the official economy can offer more than a million under-25s. No wonder many opt for scams instead, to make a cash-in-hand living in the underground economy. Andrew Calcutt lists some scammy ways to try to survive the slump

Scamming

Anne Summers parties: 'Ladies, earn £20-£50 per evening'. The underwear economy.
Avon: 'Selling Avon is very easy. You earn super money in hours to suit'. But nobody who uses Avon will open the door after 6pm.

Bar work: £10 per session, plus tips. Fewer of either on offer now that even pubs are closing down (see Stripping).

Busking: If you can't play, try miming to a cassette.

Car boot sales: Money for old tat. The spirit of Warsaw, Bucharest and other Eastern European markets comes to Britain's car parks.

Car repairs: You'll need a toolbox, maintenance manual, and a lemon to suck on when estimating the cost to your customer.

Cassettes: A suitcase of dodgy dance music tapes is perfect for flypitching—and for flying when a policeman starts raving.

Catering: Casual labour, pays cash-in-hand, by-the-day. The queues start forming before dawn outside the agencies.

Cigarette lighters: The man with the tray of plastic lighters is today's equivalent of the Victorian matchseller. That's progress for you.

Cleaning: Today's 'daily' is probably under 30 and under £3 an hour.

Despatch-riding: Life on the open roads of Britain's cities. Exhausting. (See Signing-on)

Drugs: Your ticket to a screen-test on police surveillance cameras (perhaps the only films still being made in Britain).

Enterprise Allowance: The government will give you £40 a week (less than income support) for six months, if you invest a mere £1000 in 'a viable enterprise'. A what?

Escort agencies: If the groping doesn't get to you, the passive cigar-smoking probably will.

Flyposting: Sticky—can lead to conviction for criminal damage.

Flyers: £5 an hour for distributing flyers outside London nightclubs after midnight. The photocopier replaces the sandwich board.

Gardening: Bob-A-Job for grown-ups.

Guinea-pigs (human): Teaching hospitals pay you to take part in experiments and test drugs. Unconfirmed rumour that £5000 is on offer for allowing your heart to be stopped momentarily.

Insurance: Making bogus/inflated claims on 'stolen'/broken musical instruments (see Busking).

Ironing: 75p per pound—this one will crease you up.

Jewellery: 'Market top-notch designer costume jewellery...have fun and make money in your spare time.' After you've spent your spare cash buying the stock, that is.

Language-teaching: Private English lessons—one way graduates can still make their education pay.

Market-survey interviewing: Ask people questions about what they like, and then try to sell them something they don't.

Marriage: Find a sugar-daddy or get hitched to an 'illegal' immigrant for around £4000. (See Ironing)

Mental illness: Feigned or not, this may be the only way to boost your points-score on the housing waiting list.

Minicabbing: Pay £50 a week rent to the controller for the privilege of hanging around all night playing the fruit machines in his waiting room.

Mobile hairdressing: Have curlers, will travel. Tracy from *Brookside* as a role model.

Nannying (live-in): Going 'into service' is back on the agenda.

Nannying (part-time): Pick up kids from school and give them tea before power-dressing parents get home. The return of wet-nursing may be imminent.

Paper round: Just because the paper-boys are older, it doesn't mean you're getting any younger.

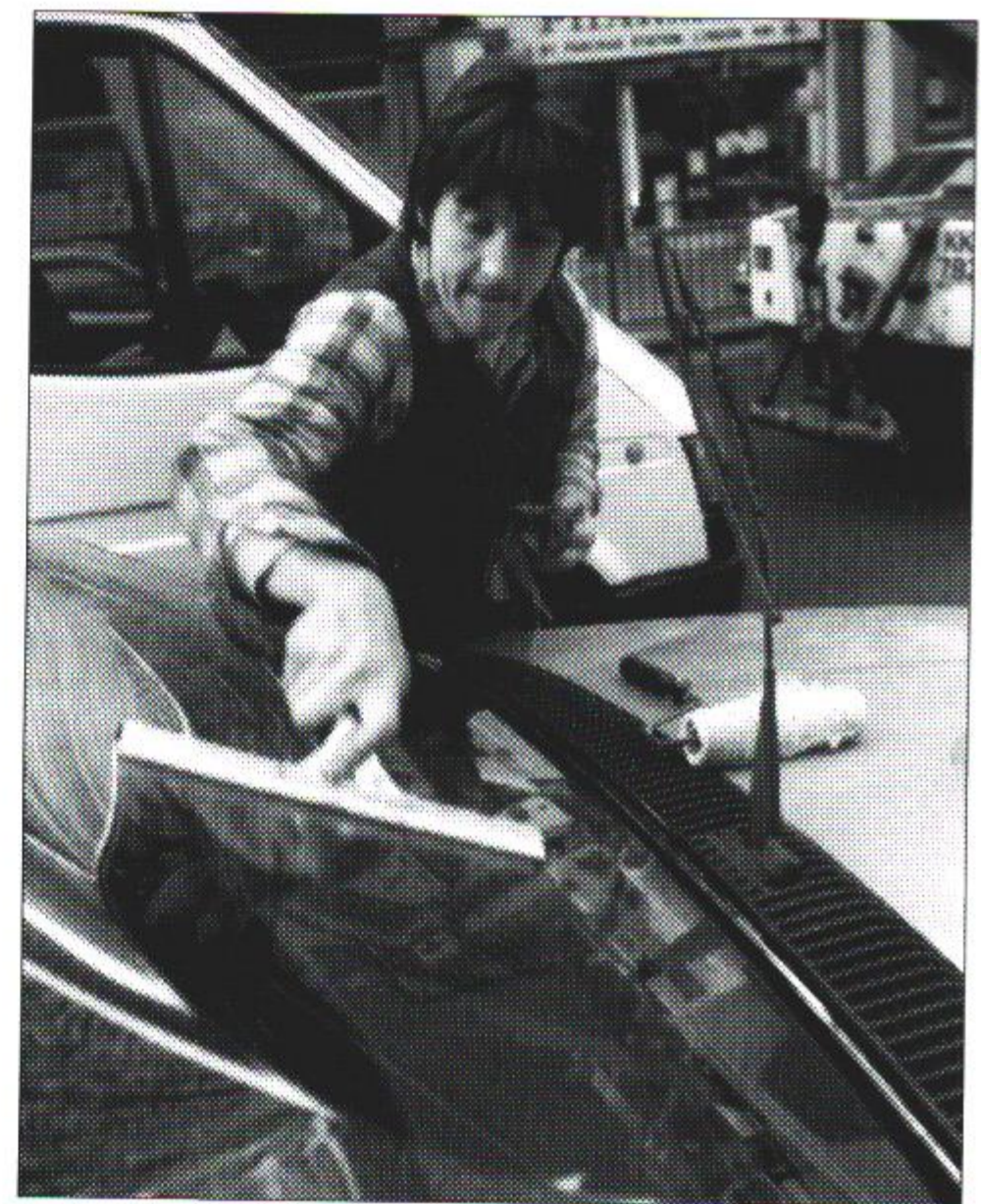


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

'The pictures': Inner-city wide-boys selling 'modern art' prints to suburban/rural housewives. 'It's all in the flirting', says one.

Pirating video games: Become a Streetfighter doing battle with the agents of The Federation—the Federation Against Software Theft, that is.

Prostitution: It's no game.

Ram-raiding: In some districts, it may be difficult to find a shop that hasn't closed down.

Rubbish-clearance: A skip, a strong back, and a catchy small-ad along the lines of 'let's talk rubbish'. £30 a load.

Sex cards: £40 for putting 200 cards ('busty masseuse') in West End phone boxes. (See Telesales)

Signing-on: Many dole-office workers turn a blind eye to claimants earning on the side. 'You can sign on in a paint-spattered overall, and no-one will pull you up unless you're raking in £300 a week benefit. We know that massaging the truth starts at the top.' (See all of the above, and below)

Sperm-selling: Wankers wanted. Potential donors will be strictly vetted at licensed clinics.

Stripping: Many pubs are trying to recapture lost trade by hiring 'exotic dancers'. Not as strictly ballroom as it sounds.

Stripping empty houses: Break in, then sell bathroom furniture and materials.

Telesales (evenings and weekends): Put on your best telephone voice, pretend you're Al Pacino in *Glengarry Glenross*, and get the phone slammed down on you 20 times an hour.

Territorial Army: Pays an activity allowance. (Not recommended)

Travelcard-touting: Ask commuters for used travelcards, then sell them to other travellers for £2. Fat Stan Flashman it ain't.

Video piracy: Satellite dish, blank cassette—and you're in showbusiness.

Windscreen-washing: Some drivers may try to run you over. Have a nice day.

The slump is

Many economists are hailing the end of recession in America and the beginnings of an upturn elsewhere. But even if they can demonstrate some statistical improvements, says Phil Murphy, it will not mean a recovery from a global depression that is deeply rooted in the workings of the capitalist economy

Although more people now talk about the world economy being in a slump, what has happened over the past couple of years is not yet fully appreciated. The word slump is still most often used as a synonym for a particularly bad recession. As a result, people wrongly assume that, as the end of the recession draws nearer, so the slump is ending too. This mistaken assumption rests upon the popular prejudice that however bad the economic news is now, things will improve at some time. Recessions end, and recoveries follow. This sentiment is so strong only because the alternative seems so forbidding.

The idea that the slump is something much more profound, that the economy has reached an impasse, is one which few are prepared to countenance. After all, if that is true, it means that whether or not statistics can show that the recession has technically ended, things will carry on roughly as they are now. With mass unemployment and stagnant, if not falling, living standards the order of the day across the Western world, this is not an inspiring prospect. So people avoid such a conclusion.

Wishful thinking

Hence the apparently bizarre co-existence today of a general mood of gloom about the immediate future—especially a fear of losing your job—with wishful thinking that the economy will get better sooner or later. Some think that time on its own will be the healer; others may be inclined to give time a helping hand with lower interest rates, higher state spending or whatever. But the common assumption is that things will eventually come right, and an upturn will put the horrors of today behind us.

With the standing of contemporary economic science at an all-time low it is perhaps not surprising to find professional economists and politicians merely repeating a more pretentious version of this 'commonsense' attitude towards the economy. The Group of Seven international finance ministers, meeting in London at the end of February provided a good illustration.

Hard facts

This gathering exuded the general, and well-founded, sense that the world economy is in a worse condition than at any time since the Second World War. Indeed the meeting was convened specifically to review the uncertain prospects for economic recovery in the industrialised world. But the participants also managed to retain an underlying faith in capitalist renewal. The 'good' news that the recession is over in America and, technically speaking, has been for over a year, was used to declare that a world recovery must emerge some time. Set against this, the hard fact that Germany is in recession and is now being joined by the rest of continental Europe and Japan was presented as if it was a minor inconvenience.

In America all the talk this year is of a recovery based on 'sound fundamentals'. American commentators now refer to rapid productivity growth and the low level of inflation as the strongest proof that their new president Bill Clinton 'seems set to preside over the healthiest economy of any president since Lyndon Johnson' in the 1960s (*Newsweek*, 22 February 1993). On this side of the Atlantic this translates into the Major/Lamont line that 'all the vital ingredients are in place for recovery'. In reality the fundamentals that matter are not so healthy. One vital

ingredient, the most vital ingredient in a capitalist economy, is missing.

The record losses announced recently by key companies of America's industrial base—including IBM and General Motors—point to the drag which is preventing sustainable recovery: the problem of low profitability. Unless and until profitability levels are restored to where they were in Lyndon Johnson's time—in America and everywhere else in the industrialised world—there is no escape from crisis and slump.

It is quite conceivable that there could be bursts of output growth in different countries in the 1990s, but the world will remain in slump. Recessions can come and go but the slump will continue. Those who today are speculating about the advent of the 'roaring nineties' might recall how the US economy had four years of statistical growth from 1933 to 1937, yet still remained stuck in the Great Depression. But, of course, memories of and lessons from the past tend to be very selective.

Bottom line

The fall in profitability has been behind all of the problems experienced by world capitalism over the 20 years since the recession of 1973. And it is this same fall in profitability which shapes the full-blown slump today. The ability to make sufficient profits is the driving force of capitalist society. Capitalists will only invest in productive capacity if they can make a decent profit. And, in turn, if they do not make sufficient profits, they will not have sufficient funds for future investment.

Profitability is the bottom line in company accounts, determining which individual businesses grow and prosper and which founder and collapse. ►

here to stay



**Tip of the iceberg:
the problems of British capitalism
go much deeper than the
financial chicanery that brought
Canary Wharf down**

This is the normal process of capitalist production. But when profit levels fall across society as a whole, it creates a period of systemic crisis. The less the system is able to generate sufficient profits for continued expansion, the more sluggish economic activity becomes.

The average profit rates of society cannot be precisely captured in a statistical sense. Apart from the

and taking them together, real investment has fallen steadily since the 1960s. Figures for gross fixed capital formation as a percentage of gross domestic product were lower in 1980-89, compared to 1974-79, which were themselves lower than in 1968-73. And on the back of slower investment come all the other features of an economy seizing up: lower productivity growth, more closures of firms which

in wages. The amount of profit created for his or her employers by one worker can vary within certain limits; for example, it depends upon how many hours he or she works a day. But bearing in mind this scope for some variation, as a general rule the more workers employed the more profits will be created. And vice versa.

The problem is that capitalism tends to undermine its own capacity for profit-making, by reducing the number of workers employed relative to the amount of machinery and plant used. Here we are not just talking about redundancies imposed in a recession. We are identifying an inherent feature of the capitalist economy which can be observed even during the times of boom.

Every employer seeks to raise productivity, so as to be more competitive in the marketplace and realise more profits. At the overall level of society, this is expressed as the replacement of profit-creating labour with investment-intensive technology. Of course, more and better equipment for each worker means each one can produce more. A worker in today's hi-tech, computer-organised factory will be far more productive than one in the low-tech factories of a century ago. However, he will also have far fewer others working alongside him. And that is storing up trouble for the capitalists.

Although an employer who raises productivity by replacing workers with technology is increasing his total investment, a smaller proportion of it is going into the one factor which creates new profits: human labour. The company's all-important profit rates are measured by setting the overall mass of profit produced by the workforce against the *total* outlay on employing machines, inputs and people. Which means that these profit rates are bound to tend to fall over time, as the ratio between labour and technology shifts.

Iron law

The workings of this law of capitalist economics can be temporarily offset by various factors, but in the end falling profit rates will be the dominant tendency. The point comes when profit rates fall so far that there is not enough profit to fund the next phase of investment in new and more costly plant and machinery. This is what caused the business downturns of the nineteenth century, and it has also ultimately been behind the series of economic crises in the twentieth century. The very drive to make more profit will unleash the forces which create the crisis.

Bearing in mind the limitations which apply to all analogies between social processes and natural

The point comes when profit rates fall so far that there is not enough profit to fund the next phase of investment

vagaries of different accounting procedures, there are numerous features of everyday market relations—price volatility, credit, the banking system, etc—which complicate the picture. However, published figures for the rate of return on investment do provide an approximation to the movements in the rate of profit. They do not make good reading for capitalists.

Golden age

Across the Group of Seven leading industrial countries, average profit rates measured in this way reached their postwar peak in the late 1960s; then secular decline set in. A few years later, from 1973, the world drifted into recession. The golden age of the postwar boom was over. Since then profit rates have fallen fairly steadily. Upward blips in reported profit rates, such as occurred in the latter half of the 1980s, have never been sustained and renewed profit downturns—from the winter of 1988-89 in most countries—have foreshadowed the re-emergence of recession.

The reassertion of national and international profitability problems has set in motion the trends underlying today's economic slump. As profitability fell from the late sixties, so falling investment followed. In just about every major country,

have fallen behind in competitiveness, higher unemployment.

Any economist who looks at the figures objectively would have to admit that profitability has fallen in recent times. 'But so what?', they might say. You have upturns and downturns, good years and bad, and it doesn't signify anything profound.

However, when you have such a sustained trend towards falling profitability over a period of 25 years, it suggests something more than a cyclical downturn or statistical blip. It points towards falling profit rates as being a problem at the heart of the modern capitalist economy. This is the key point to be grasped in understanding the slump. The fall in profit rates is an intrinsic feature of an economy driven by profit.

Crisis is not an occasional abnormality of the system. It is the inevitable by-product of the process of capitalist production. Indeed, the seeds of a period of economic crisis are laid in a time of prosperity. This is because of the peculiarities of the capitalist way of raising productivity, the amount produced by each person at work.

Capitalist profits are ultimately derived from labour. They come from the difference between the wealth created by working people and the amount that they are paid

phenomena, think of the capitalist economy as an animate body. It is the normal process of life itself which brings the end closer. As the body grows older so it becomes more frail. Various factors can prolong its vitality. Even in a period of senility you can see temporary revivals. But nobody should be fooled into thinking that the body has regained its youthful dynamism. You can look

A precarious, overstretched financial system is pointed to as another cause of the current problems. In fact financial activity by the banks and other big institutions got so out of hand because there was so little happening in the productive sphere of the economy; when the system can no longer succeed in making real profits from producing real things, it turns to producing paper profits from producing bits of paper.

Today the old palliatives have themselves created unfortunate side-effects. They are not the prime cause of the contemporary difficulties, but they don't make life any easier. For example, high interest rates don't cause the crisis, but if high levels of state borrowing keep them up they do make it harder for businesses to use credit to tide them over today's problems.

Symptoms of decay

There are no silver linings to the clouds of depression. The 'sound fundamentals' they talk about are really symptoms of decay. Look again at America. Its recent high productivity growth is not a sign of dynamism, but of weakness. It has not been brought about by any significant boost to real productive investment. Instead, capitalists have been closing older, less productive plants and cutting back on the labour force. By simple arithmetic these cuts provide an inevitable one-off boost to productivity figures. But they are hardly a sign of economic health.

Low inflation is also a source of pride, but this too is more a sign of feebleness. If the economy is so stagnant that nobody can get away with putting up prices to try to boost profits, then inflation rates will fall. How a low level of price rises could ever translate into a revival of profitable production is a secret which none of the experts appears to be prepared to divulge.

Worse and worse

If there are no grounds for wishful thinking, there are none for complacency either. The feared notion that things might carry on as at present is only partially true. For most of us, things can get worse, as governments and employers take emergency measures to ease their problems. State expenditure is under the axe across the West, especially spending on welfare rather than aid to business. From a capitalist perspective, cutting levels of social provision can at least curb some of the pressures of high taxation, government borrowing and high interest rates which exacerbate the problems posed by low profit levels.

Rationalisation, reducing capacity, and above all cutting jobs is another capitalist survival measure which hits most of us hard. Job-cutting cannot restore profit levels decisively, but it can temporarily boost the accounts. This is why mass unemployment is here to stay. And, as the recent spate of redundancies across the industrialised world highlights, there is no reason to suppose that it will stop rising at the current level of about one in ten of the workforce. The slump which began with a fall in capitalist profitability has moved on to the savaging of working people's living standards. ●



Eastern Europe comes to Oxford Street: hard-up workers pay out for tat

better for a while, but a relapse is inevitable. (Unfortunately the major difference between capitalism and a body is that, no matter how old and sick it becomes, it will not die of its own accord. It requires an outside agent to finish it off. But that is a separate question.)

Falling profitability has been behind the economic crisis experienced across the industrial world over the past two decades. For much of that time its most severe consequences were held back or disguised by various offsetting mechanisms. As the beneficial effect of these counter-crisis measures has worn off, so the economic crisis has developed into a slump over the past couple of years.

Most of the things pointed to as causes of the current difficulties are really the products of past attempts to solve the crisis. For example, too much taxation and national indebtedness are often blamed for today's slowdown. But these are products of the high levels of state spending which have been vital to prop up an increasingly undynamic economic system. Too much personal and company debt are also blamed. But these liabilities were built up during the years when easy credit helped to oil the workings of an economy which would otherwise have dried up.

In sum, all of the so-called structural problems which afflict economies today are simply the repercussions of past measures which were used to help sustain a system which had lost any positive momentum of its own. The crisis has turned into a slump in the past few years as these measures have become exhausted.

The old medicines—state spending and credit expansion in particular—are no longer very effective. They have been used so much that, while the patient is dependent upon them, they lack the positive kick which they once stimulated. They can no longer hide the chronic condition of low profitability.

Lease of life

For as long as these measures did have some effect—between 1975-79, and 1982-90 especially—they provided the economy with an additional lease of life. But it was rather like taking drugs to kill pain so that you can continue running despite an injury. You are building up problems for the future; and, in the long run, ignoring the underlying problem makes it worse. The longer unprofitable economic activity was kept going with credit and state spending, the more profound the impact of falling profitability was going to be in the end.

The British government needs to slash its budget deficit. Yet it seems unable to carry through big cuts in defence spending. Helen Simons examines some links between militarism and the slump

At first sight, cutting military spending seems to make sense for the British government. During the slump public spending on dole payments and aid to flagging industry has soared, while government tax receipts have plummeted as companies go bankrupt. The government is now borrowing an estimated £1 billion a week simply to meet its running costs. Next year the budget deficit will be close to 10 per cent of Britain's gross domestic product—a figure usually associated with third world 'banana republics'.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) appears to be a prime target for treasury cuts. Last year military spending was about 10 per cent of all public expenditure. And, unlike other high-spending departments, MoD spending does not seem to be shaped by the recession itself. The Department of Social Security, for example, has seen costs escalate as the dole queues lengthen. By contrast, military expenditure appears to be more discretionary. In the middle of a debt crisis, a massive military machine looks like a luxury that Britain can no longer afford.

Relegation fear

The government has set about curbing military spending since 1990, when it adopted the 'Options for Change' plan which sought a reduction in military personnel of 18 per cent by 1995. Last November's public spending white paper singled out the military for a further 10.5 per cent cut over the next three years. Having already pared down personnel, most of this saving is expected to come from cutting current military hardware spending (figures quoted in *Financial Times*, 13 November 1992).

These cuts have pushed Britain down the world league table of military powers. It now ranks below France as a military spender. At times even Tory government ministers have seemed prepared to countenance a more modest role for Britain's war machine. Defence minister Malcolm Rifkind has conceded that Britain might have to re-examine its military role in the world in the harsh light of economic reality. He recently admitted that Britain's problem was 'trying to do too much. If you could reduce commitments you could reduce resources' (*Independent*, 9 October 1992).

So is economic necessity about to create a more demilitarised Britain, on a par with say Sweden or Norway? After all, the critics argue, there is something faintly absurd about British troops strutting around the globe as though Britannia still ruled the waves, when back home Britain is bankrupt and forced to beg from the world's money markets to make ends meet.

In fact, rather than the economic crisis delivering some kind of peace dividend to British society, Britain is likely to become if anything more militarised as a consequence of the slump. Major's government is already learning that it is one thing to announce cuts in military expenditure, but another thing to implement them.

Shot in the arm

Trying to implement policies of even partial demilitarisation poses both economic and political problems for the British government during the depression.

Even in simple economic terms, cutting military expenditure is not as straightforward as it first appears. Rather than alleviating Britain's economic ills, cuts in the military budget are likely to worsen things for British industry.

For years military spending has been a key component of every British government's industrial policy. By handing out major defence contracts to British manufacturers, successive governments have managed to prop up Britain's few remaining industrial giants. Capitalism in Britain, as in the USA, has depended upon the shot in the arm provided by defence spending. This has been especially marked under the supposedly 'free market' regimes of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Last year, for example, 37 per cent of the total defence budget of £24 billion was handed over to British manufacturing firms. What is more, as a glance at any of the signatories to such contracts would demonstrate, the firms involved are the leading lights of British industry.

Take the £20 billion European Fighter Aircraft (EFA) project. Today there are 9400 British manufacturing jobs tied up in this contract. Rolls-Royce has been commissioned to design and make the engines, GEC Ferranti are making the radars, while British Aerospace will assemble the planes at its Warton plant in

Lancashire. In fact by the time the plane is finished no fewer than 27 000 manufacturing jobs will depend upon this project alone.

British industry treats military contracts as a vital lifeline, especially in time of recession. British Aerospace, for example, is the biggest manufacturing employer in the country. Yet it has already had to announce thousands of redundancies, and most experts concede that British Aerospace could easily go under without the EFA contract. Indeed, without the guarantee of defence contracts the remains of Britain's heavy engineering and shipbuilding industries would all but disappear in the face of more efficient foreign competition.

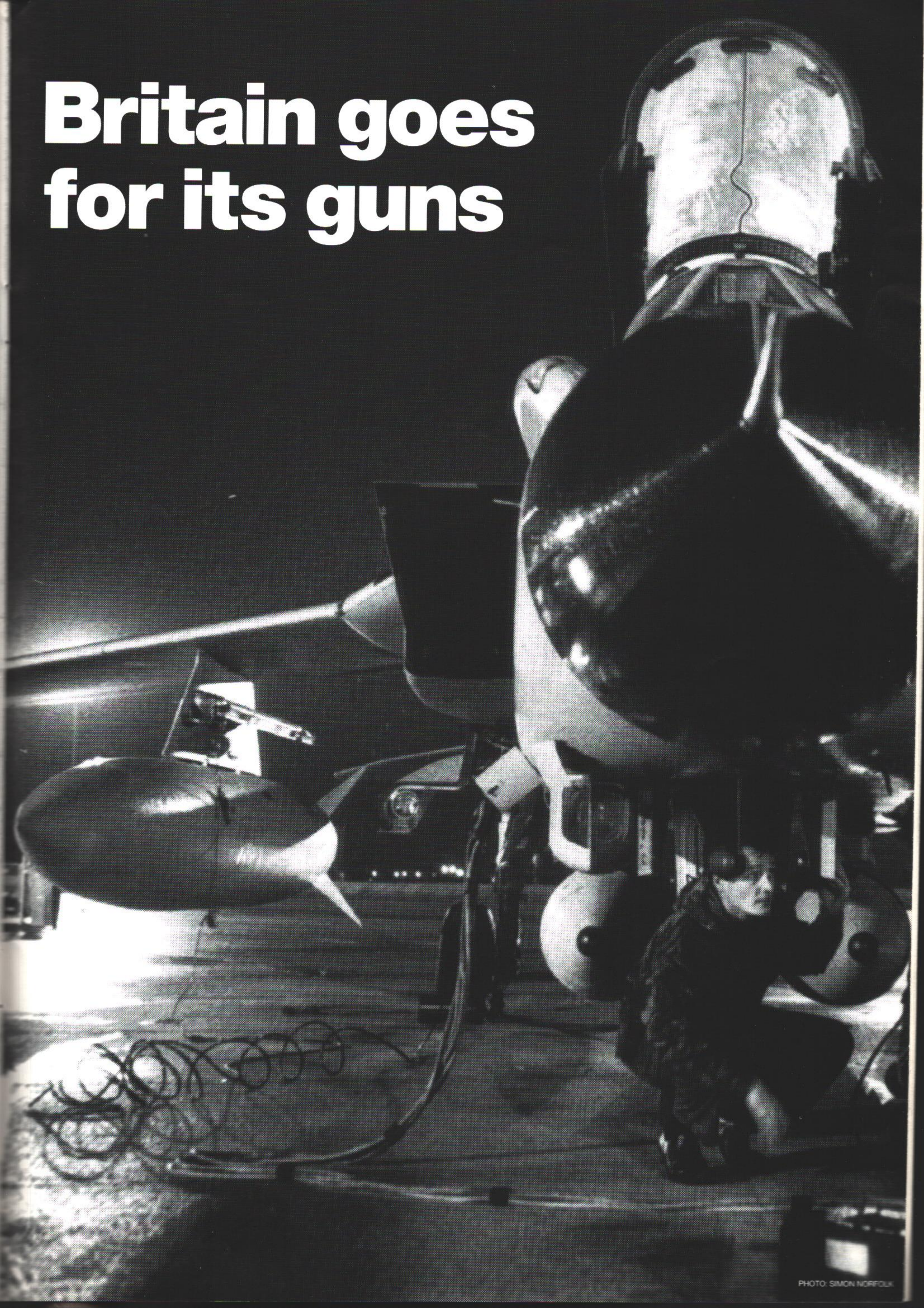
It is for this reason that, despite all the announcements of cuts and savings in the Ministry of Defence's equipment budget, many commentators find it hard to see where the substantial savings will come from. Project after project has been 'ring-fenced' by the government, making them immune from treasury cuts. As a result, all of the military programmes that really matter are going ahead.

More Tridents

Work has started on the fourth Trident submarine, which many politicians thought would become redundant at the end of the Cold War. The Trident programme will cost £10.5 billion in total and 14 500 jobs hang directly on this contract. With a further 11 500 jobs indirectly dependent on the project, it is hardly surprising that the government has had to think twice about wielding the axe. Still more striking is the fact that the European Fighter Aircraft programme is going ahead, even though its leading paymasters in Germany have got cold feet about the project.

While the military budget will be trimmed here and there, a major curtailment of military contracts will be difficult to carry through. Unless the government is prepared to pull the plug on Britain's leading manufacturers, it seems unlikely that it can contemplate a significant saving in this department. No doubt there will be further shake-outs of thousands of jobs as the authorities seek to maximise the efficiency of military spending. But the militarisation of Britain's manufacturing sector means that defence contracts are likely to come ►

Britain goes for its guns





before, say, the coal industry when the government is deciding where its money goes.

The need to prop up British industry is not the only consideration holding back significant demilitarisation measures in Britain during the slump. The political situation at home and abroad makes it even more difficult. Lacking any economic answers to the

Militarism will dominate the political response to the slump

crisis facing the country, politicians and commentators are increasingly turning to more militaristic solutions to the problems confronting British society. This can be seen both in the arena of international relations and here at home in current responses to domestic problems.

In the international arena, Britain is losing out fast. Britain's economic slowdown has been worse than that of any other European nation. British capitalism is feeling the squeeze from all of its major competitors. The British establishment no longer has the productive manufacturing base necessary to keep up with more potent economic powers such as Germany. With no economic solutions to its crisis available, the British government has looked for other ways to bolster its fading position in world affairs.

A 'wider role'

The one card remaining to the British authorities has been to use their military might. Only by parading what is left of its armed strength on the world stage can the British government justify its position at the top table of international relations.

The need to demonstrate that Britain is still a major player in world affairs explains why, despite the end of the Cold War and all of the economic constraints which the slump has imposed on military spending, defence minister Rifkind has promised a 'wider role' for Britain's armed forces in the world. As well as supporting UN initiatives, British

forces can expect to be 'involved in joint actions, possibly involving military deployment against terrorism and proliferation and in humanitarian emergencies as well as crises requiring the evacuation of British nationals' (*Guardian*, 8 July 1992).

The results of this government strategy of finding a 'wider role' for Britain's military forces can be seen everywhere from the Gulf to the former Yugoslavia. Worried about the prospect of being totally marginalised in world politics, the British government has often been the first to commit its troops to Western overseas missions.

No dropping out

Even in the face of recession, Britain spent £2.4 billion on the Gulf War of 1991. Despite the fact that it got other nations to foot much of the bill for this expedition, the cost to Whitehall was still £615m more than budgeted spending. Although the British government could not afford such an adventure, it had no choice but to follow America's lead in declaring war on Iraq. Whatever the economic cost to the treasury, in strategic terms the British authorities simply could not afford to drop out of the Western military alliance without seriously damaging their standing in all of the world's institutions and markets.

Some of the benefits which Britain has gained from its continued military involvement in the Gulf were illustrated in January, when the government's securing of a £4 billion contract to supply Saudi Arabia with aircraft and other military hardware was just about the only good news for British industry.

Wars of prestige

In the former Yugoslavia today, we see the same tensions between cost and strategic interests being played out. The British government has no wish to be sucked further into an expensive and damaging military conflict. Yet it has to keep pace with the Americans and the French, or risk a serious loss of international prestige and influence. So British forces have been sent in. With Britain's economic weakness exposed by the impact of the slump, such exercises in military one-upmanship are pretty much the only option left for the British government in world affairs.

Whatever cuts in defence spending are promised, the demands of foreign policy will ensure that the British war machine is kept well-oiled by government money. Already the current defence commitments have forced Rifkind to alter the Options for Change plans. In February the government announced a revised scheme which reduced the numbers of military personnel to be cut and reversed the decision to do away with some historic

British regiments. Rifkind cited Her Majesty's extensive military commitments abroad as the reason for the reprieve. As Britain seeks to maintain its toe-hold in world affairs, further overseas military engagement is a certainty. So any further cuts in military personnel will be equally difficult to see through.

In the domestic arena too, it is now clear that militarism will dominate the political response to the slump. In the face of mounting problems at home the government and the pundits have nothing to offer but the increased militarisation of society. This does not mean that we are about to see troops patrolling the streets of our inner cities. It means that British society will be organised along more regimented lines. The police will get yet more powers and technology, while politics will be dominated by issues of law and order and reactionary morality.

Retribution

Even an apparently straightforward economic matter like unemployment is no longer discussed in economic terms. This is not surprising, since the government clearly has no economic solution to unemployment. Instead of even discussing such matters, John Major has floated the idea of 'workfare' as a way to discipline the unemployed and regiment society. Labour spokesmen reflect the same outlook. In fact Labour front bencher David Blunkett has gone further than Major's workfare plan, and called for a kind of national service for the young unemployed.

The same sentiment can be seen in the current preoccupation with crime. Crime has now become the number one issue of public discussion. Every ill of society is explained as an increase in criminal behaviour. And every solution is posed in terms of punishment and retribution. The fact that such a militaristic outlook pervades all discussion points towards only one answer. Everyone from feminists to social workers today calls out for greater police powers. And as the law and order panic grips the nation, the demand for a greater role for the police grows louder. It is a call to which the government will be happy to respond.

In a climate where all of the problems of society are explained in terms of a lack of discipline or authority, no politician will seriously consider curbing state powers whatever the economic constraints. Maintaining military spending will be fraught with tension as the financial state of Britain gets worse, and the government will do whatever it can to make as many savings as possible. But militarised British society is not about to turn into a Norway or a Sweden. ●



Moore's the pity

A bleak afternoon at Selhurst Park, home of Crystal Palace Football Club. The bloke in front of me has been grumbling incessantly about 'northern scum'. Today's opponents are Coventry—honorary northerners rather than the real thing—but then nothing surprises if you've witnessed a Palace fan, purple face screwed up in rage, screaming 'fuckin' norvenahs!' at Arsenal's ground.

There is a special one-minute silence, before the usual 90, in memory of Bobby Moore. Somebody—a long way off and probably not a Coventry fan anyway—makes a sound, and the bloke explodes: 'Fuckin' norvern carnts! No fuckin' respect!' The 'scum', you see, have no respect for Moore, a 'gentleman'. It's a breathtaking display of hypocrisy, and he'd get a booking for ungentlemanly conduct if he was on the pitch. Still, in its blunt way, it is a fairly accurate reflection of the national mood.

For a quarter of a century, the 'gentleman' in question has occupied a special position in the midfield of the national heart, as the clean-cut captain who led England to victory over the Germans. Bobby the icon sits forever upon the shoulders of Wilson and Hurst, brandishing the golden Jules Rimet trophy under the English summer sun. Just behind them, supplying the pathos and reminding us that this is not a display of foreign-style nationalism, is a grim old jobsworth in peaked cap and braid, looking as if he'd rather be playing bowls.

Since then, of course, England has achieved nothing of note on the football field, or any other field, come to that. With each anniversary—10 years, 15, 20, 25—the commemorations grow more desperate, as past success becomes a reminder of current failure. It is customary to describe deaths as untimely, and yet Moore's could hardly have been timelier. It has spared us the embarrassment of a 'twenty-seventh anniversary', and allowed the newspaper editors to put That Picture on the front page, where they really want it, rather than tucked away in the sports section.

Somewhere along the line, though, something happened that went beyond mere nostalgia. On Thursday the radio reported the death of a great ex-footballer. Friends called him 'Mooro', and Jimmy Greaves, who knows about these things, knew him as 'king of the bar stool'. Before liver cancer stole his life, he had retired, run a shop, written a ghosted column for the *Sunday Sport* and done radio commentaries for Capital Gold. By Friday morning, the British way of life was officially pronounced dead.

Moore's demise, following that of Roy of the Rovers a week earlier, and the poll showing a collapse in national pride, crystallised a national crisis. It became a handy symbol of the death of decency; of old-fashioned working class communities where people left the back door open. Bermondsey boy Johnny Speight, the man behind Alf Garnett, remembered a sort of Bobby-as-'bobby', who ran 30 yards to blow the whistle and restore order when the ref was knocked out, and refused to retaliate when Argentines spat in his face. 'These were the values we were brought up with in those docklands streets', said Johnny, who must have been thinking of the Canning Town Sunday School or an Ealing comedy. While some Eastenders may admire a gent, they'd be surprised to hear about a great tradition of aiding referees and turning the other cheek.

Invariably Moore's death was linked to another death, of a boy who

had never heard of him, but who Moore, like everyone else, would have known all about. Graham Gooch, himself now a stubbly symbol of English failure, was the first to make the connection explicit. 'When someone like that dies', he reflected sadly, 'it puts things in perspective, as did the murder of that little boy in Liverpool. We couldn't have done worse than lose three-nil to India, but it's of little account compared to things like that'.

There was a televised minute's silence for James Bulger at a Liverpool match. There were pictures in all the papers of a six-year old girl, who couldn't possibly know about Saint Bobby, kneeling before the shrine of scarves, wreaths and mementoes at West Ham's ground. There is a horrible fatalism abroad that has got nothing to do with grieving the dead. It's as if people are just waiting for the next excuse to mourn and wail and wallow in despair and self-pity. Who gains from all the hopelessness, frustration and suppressed anger? With every contemptuous sermon about the evils of modern 'Giroland', the answer becomes clearer.

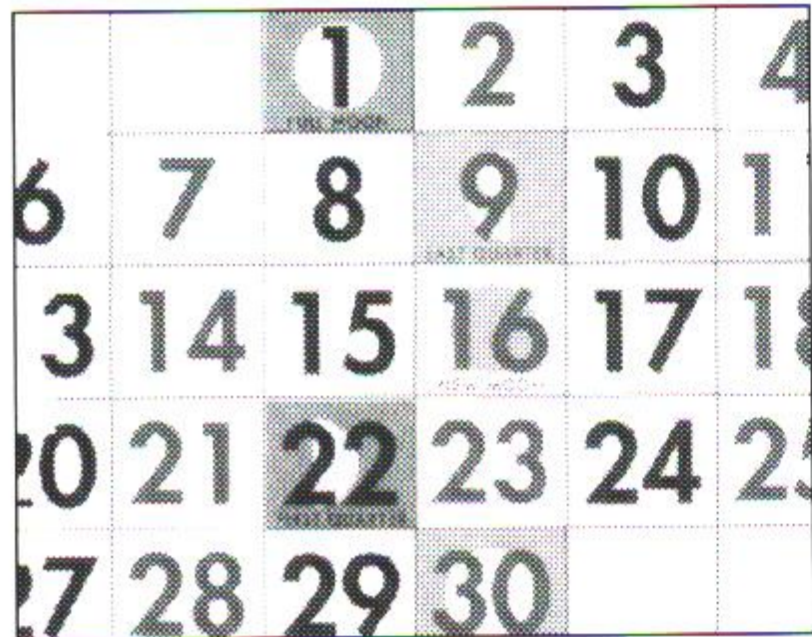
With hindsight, even the producers of the BBC's consumer programme *Watchdog* would probably admit that their enthusiasm got the better of them when they exposed the dangers of Pop-Tart breakfast snacks, which—wait for it—become very hot when toasted. Apparently some 'consumers' (ie, morons) have been burning themselves by taking Pop-Tarts out of the toaster too soon.

Instead of keeping quiet about their embarrassing injuries, they decided to 'come out' on national TV, indignantly displaying their bandaged hands and blaming society. Having cynically assumed that no 'trauma' was too trivial to be shared with a TV audience, I was pleasantly surprised when the show was held up to ridicule. What a contrast to the response that greeted Channel 4's so-called 'love weekend'. There had already been a national Aids day: for weeks I've avoided people with tattered red ribbons, who have replaced the nutcases who wear dog-eared poppies all year long. But Channel 4 clearly thinks one Aids day isn't enough, so they held their own Aids weekend.

I didn't think anyone would have the nerve to make yet another programme with dismal sketches about men asking directions to the clitoris, full and frank discussion of condoms, and tame snippets of untillating titillation. By the end of the weekend my disbelief had turned to hysteria, as the safe sex insertions became increasingly ridiculous.

At one point a woman brought on her male 'slave', blindfolded, trussed from head to toe and only allowed within arms length for a custard cream or a light spanking. No drugs, no sex, and every orifice bound in rubber—hardly a prime candidate for HIV. In fact, the biggest threat to this man's health is his mistress feeding him an overheated Pop-Tart. None of which was allowed to distract from the key question: 'What about the dangers of Aids?', demanded the interviewer impatiently. The highpoint came in the poignant Sunday afternoon slot, featuring readings from Second World War love letters and poetry. During the closing credits a voice interrupted the classical music to announce: 'If you are worried about HIV or Aids....'

Well, if you're not worried yet, you never will be.



What's in store before 1994?

We asked our readers what impact they thought the slump would have on our lives this year. Here are some of their thoughts. If you want your say, keep it short and send it to *Living Marxism*, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX, or fax it to (071) 278 9844

Genevieve, London

Councils of war

There was a time when a position in local government was thought to be a good little number. What with flexitime, time off for trade union meetings, generous holidays and a better sickness allowance. Not any more. The council I work for is a clear example of how local government jobs, terms and conditions are being slashed in a climate of never-ending cuts.

Flexitime? The manager in my office insists that everyone gets in before 9am and does not leave before 5.30pm. Anyone more than 10 minutes late three times faces disciplinary proceedings.

After five days sick leave staff are asked to attend a 'discussion' with management (otherwise known as a verbal warning). After 10 days sick it's either a written or final warning depending on the circumstances. Management assure us this isn't a disciplinary procedure—it's the new sickness procedure!

As yet the holiday entitlement hasn't been cut—officially. However, holiday requests are being refused because management say there is insufficient cover. When you try to carry over the 15 days (which have been refused) at the year-end, they say the limit is five days—the rest must be lost.

The threat of compulsory contract-tendering looms large. When management say you must double your workload to compete with the private sector, you must not refuse because it is a disciplinary offence. With big spending cuts coming, my manager told us to expect 'massive' compulsory redundancies. People with high sickness levels and disciplinary records will go first.

On this basis he won't have any staff left to manage in 1994. ●

Heather Owen, London

Human sacrifice

In 1993 I think we will see more of Human Resource Management, as opposed to the Personnel Management style, now dubbed 'welfarist'. This means that we will increasingly be encouraged to identify with the needs of 'our' organisation, through a conscious strategy of worker participation.

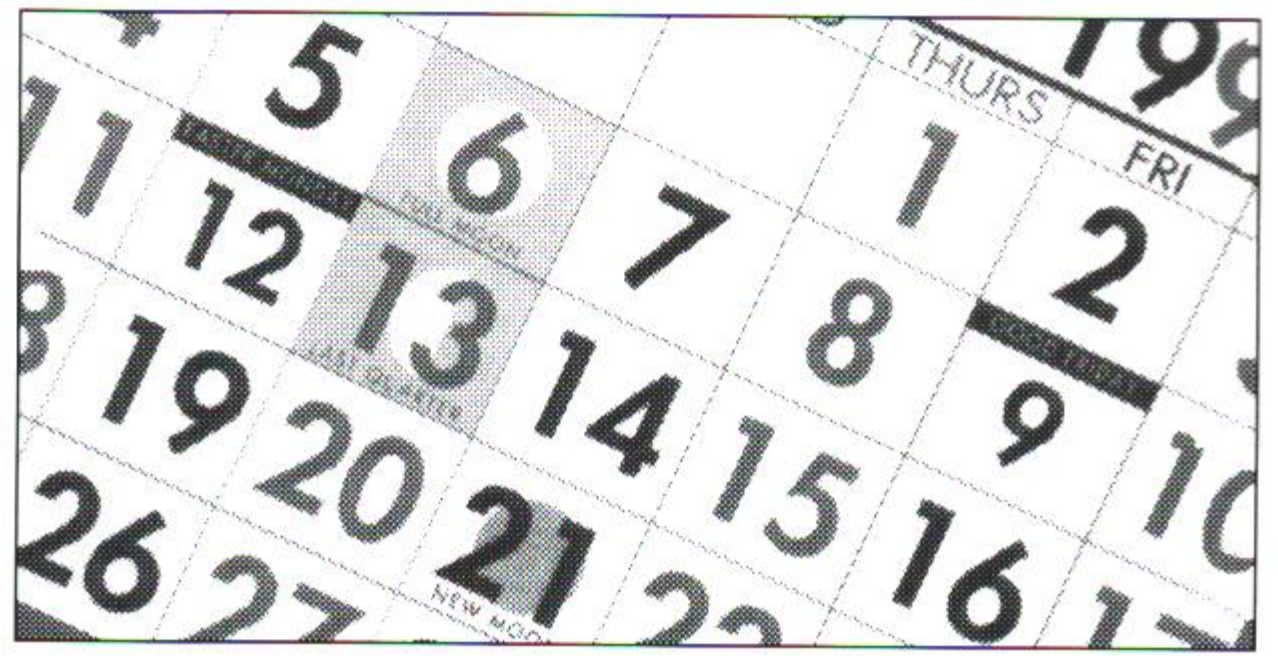
Human Resource managers will spend 1993 inventing new methods of attempting to cohere workers around the aims of the organisation. We will be encouraged to accept that we all need to make sacrifices in order that the organisation can remain viable; whether this is by accepting pay cuts, putting in extra unpaid overtime, putting up with worsening safety standards, or allowing fellow workers to be 'outplaced' without a fight.

At the same time many employees are being 'empowered' to take a more active role in decision-making. Giving individuals some say over the control of work practices or budgets is simply a cosmetic measure aimed at making us take responsibility for the slump. It is vital that we are not taken in by these tactics. ●

Rebecca York, Barrow-in-Furness

Horse sense

We will all be living in fear for our horses and ponies. The sick knife-attacker and crazed master of rope-burns and bondage is omnipresent and 'knows horses'. Even sleeping with your horse in the safety of your home cannot stop him. One owner contemplated having her horses put down to avoid suffering and this is jolly good advice. Other ideas include putting a padlock on the stable door, although some owners worry about the risk of fire. Still, if your horse is a non-smoker then it is a precaution worth taking. ●



Paola Martos, Brighton
Slump style

The fashion houses will be empty of ideas and the public will be empty of pocket. Wearing good, expensive new clothes will be considered a provocation; instead, we will be encouraged to spend less, to buy second-hand clothes, to dig out our mothers' flares. Designers once considered daring and innovative will follow Marks & Spencer's lead, producing sensible clothes at affordable prices with no pretence of originality. Others will follow the ecological route, selling garbage dressed up as recycled wear.

Quality will suffer, so will quantity. The supermodels will lose their height, their prefix and possibly a few noughts off their salaries. In utter desperation, fashion nostalgia will rediscover the good old working classes. Naomi Campbell will go down the catwalk in sequined cloth cap and ripped boilersuit. This won't stop the decline of British fashion or the financial difficulties of retailers. Along with every other aspect of our standard of living, fashion will be impoverished in spirit and in matter. But grunge-like attempts to make poverty acceptable will not be much inspiration to those of us at the sharp end of the recession. ●

Robert Lockwood, Nottingham
Heads down

Where's the fightback? The collection of veterans of the labour movement I spoke to on the Nottingham miners' rally didn't seem to have an answer. But nobody was there for answers—they were just there to show their support.

The members of Nalgo who had just turned down strike action to defend their wages didn't seem to have an answer either. Every worker in every department knows there are cuts going on, but nowadays cuts are just a part of life—not something to fight (ie, risk your job) over. Some people are even accepting the idea that we all need to tighten our belts and make sacrifices.

People won't take strike action because they are scared; they want to keep their heads down. And that affects all of us, whether we'd like to go on strike or not. Behind the apathy is a feeling of dread about what's to come. One woman told me she didn't want to talk to other workers about the cuts because it might make them even more worried about it.

I predict that in 1993 we will see this sort of mood get worse. The idea of 'keeping your head down, you might keep your job' will become more entrenched.

On a more positive note, I also predict that there will be more people open to new ideas. Nowadays it is very rare that I meet anyone who has anything good to say for either Labour or Tory. The cynicism that the vast majority have for old-fashioned politics is the one positive thing that stands out today—and with it the possibility of creating a new opposition for the future. ●

Linda Hargreaves, Kent
Ill-health service

Health service workers will continue to bear the brunt. While their pay and working conditions decline, there will be more talk about 'patients' rights' courtesy of PR-style management.

The theoretical doublespeak will have nothing to do with access to decent healthcare. Instead the endless meetings will have on the agenda vitally important matters such as the greeting the patient should receive as he or she enters the hospital.

This laughable logic has a sinister meaning. Blame for mistakes will be put firmly on to the shoulders of NHS workers. The fact that someone receives crap medical treatment will matter less than if the receptionist didn't smile at them.

Increasing workloads will ensure mistakes are made. Trained nurses will be replaced by untrained staff on rock-bottom grades. The casual 'bank' system will replace permanent posts, with no sick or holiday pay and no guarantee of work.

'Community care' will force even more people to forfeit their own lives to look after sick dependants. Those who have nobody to care for them will be left to fend for themselves, with increasing numbers of psychiatric patients turfed on to the streets as more hospitals close.

And the meetings will continue with such things as 'quality assurance' and 'patient throughput' under intense discussion.

Meanwhile, in the real world of lost case notes, three-hour waits, computer breakdowns and overnight stays on casualty trolleys, public frustration will be fuelled still further. In the absence of any positive outlet for this anger, it will be the health workers with their painted smiles who will have to deal with it.

Graham Lovejoy, West London
Hi-tech/low prospects

Not very long ago, people who worked in the new hi-tech industries enjoyed relatively high salaries and good job security. The lack of workplace organisation did not present a problem to those who used the skills shortage to bargain for better pay.

In the last year or two, more and more of these skilled workers have joined their unskilled counterparts in the dole queue. Today a degree in computer studies will not guarantee a job. Hi-tech industries such as electronics and computing are now experiencing the consequences of the slump. Computer-giant IBM recently announced massive losses, and others are bound to follow.

We can expect salaries to deteriorate. There will be more moves towards performance-related pay and individual assessment. And because most of the workers in this sector have never been involved with unions, their response is likely to be even more individualistic than those who have. ●

The renewed debate about contemporary art is missing the point, argues Kenan Malik

Is contemporary art meaningful or is it just fit for the skip? The spit and fury of the current debate between the champions of avant-garde art and their critics has been amusing to watch.

The spark for the debate came with the decision of the Tate Gallery to put back on show Carl Andre's 'Equivalent VIII' as part of a new exhibition of minimalist art. Better known as the 'Tate bricks', 'Equivalent VIII' is a sculpture consisting of 120 fire bricks (arranged into two layers to give the work 'greater mass' according to the guide). When the Tate bought the piece back in 1972 it caused an almighty 'Is this Art?' furore.

This time criticism of Andre's work is part of a wider disquiet about the whole idea of avant-garde art. A number of recent exhibitions and awards—the prestigious Turner prize, the Barclays Young Artists competition, the Gravity and Grace retrospective of sixties and seventies sculpture at the Hayward Gallery, an exhibition of New British Artists at the Saatchi Gallery—have all drawn the wrath of more conservative critics. 'Let's return this rubbish to the dump', thundered the veteran London *Evening Standard* critic Brian Sewell.

The backlash against the avant garde has prompted a vigorous defence of contemporary art by critics who consider themselves the guardians of progress.

contemporary art is not that it is 'bad', but that it simply does not function as art. To debate the worth of avant-garde figures like Damien Hirst or Sarah Lucas as artists is a bit like trying to discuss the merits of *Neighbours* as drama. There is simply no connection.

The basic function of art, I would argue, is to communicate. The artist takes an aspect of life and attempts to recreate it in such a way as to provide the audience with a fresh insight into their experiences. What we consider to be 'good' art are those works that manage to illuminate our experiences more profoundly. But whether we consider a work of art to be 'good' or 'bad', we must surely demand of all art that it communicate some understanding of our relationship with the external world.

Contemporary art does not set out to communicate. Take Carl Andre's 'Equivalent VIII'. What can it say to us? At best it can say, 'Make of me what you will'. What insights we might achieve are entirely dependent on what we project on to the piece. Our appreciation has nothing to do with the sculpture itself. Had there been 120 garden gnomes arranged on the floor of the Tate, the form of the piece might have been different but it could have said nothing different to the viewer—because the artist has made no attempt to speak to the viewer. It is this arbitrary nature of artistic endeavour that makes contemporary art so pitiful to me.

So arbitrary is art today that it is impossible to visit a gallery without first consulting a catalogue. Take the current exhibition of 'New British Artists' at the Saatchi Gallery in London. The catalogue is as essential to making sense of the works here as a phrase book would be to an English tourist in Paris or Rome.

The good, the bad a

'You can't turn the clock back', argues Sarah Kent, art critic of London's *Time Out* magazine. True enough. Many of those throwing up their hands in horror at the state of contemporary art are the kind who believe all our problems began in the sixties—the 1860s, with Manet's exhibitions at the Paris Salon. However, the champions of the avant garde are as conservative and backward-looking as their critics. We don't have to turn the clock back to the days of Rembrandt and Michelangelo. But nor do we have to delude ourselves that just because a work of art is 'contemporary' it must be meaningful.

The problem for me with much

One of the key pieces is a steam installation by Rose Finn-Kelcey. It looks like a huge steam press, with steam wafting between the perforated floor and a metal canopy. What are we to make of it? Better consult the catalogue. 'An almost miraculous union between technology and poetry, stasis and spontaneity, order and chaos', it explains. 'A metaphor, if you like, for a state of balance between the masculine and feminine principles.' The artist, it adds, is playing God, directing a wilful element—steam—and celebrating its glorious energy. 'Was it to appease His wrath', demands the catalogue, 'that she offered God a house?'

Phew! John Lennon once said of the avant garde that it was French for bullshit. Whoever wrote the Saatchi catalogue has evidently managed to translate it into English.

Whether we are talking about Sarah Lucas' 'Two Eggs and a Kebab' ('demonstrates a healthy lack of pretension and pomposity that makes masculine self-aggrandizement and myth-making seem absurdly narcissistic') or Mark Wallinger's pastiche of Stubbs' racehorses (a model, apparently, both of the class system and the operations of capital), whatever meaning these works have are contained not in the works themselves, but in the catalogue. But what is

nd the avant-garde

the point of a work of art if we can only appreciate it once the artist has told us what we should appreciate in it?

I am not arguing that a work of art should be understood spontaneously, or that formal criticism or scholarly study have no place in appreciation. But when external commentary is all that makes a work comprehensible, it is worth asking what the purpose of the artefact is. It would have been as illuminating for me to sit at home with the catalogue as it was to walk around the Saatchi gallery.

I am not making a case here against abstract or even minimalist art. All art, after all, is an abstraction. For art to have an impact, the artist must go beyond

**Steam
installation
by Rose
Finn-Kelcey**

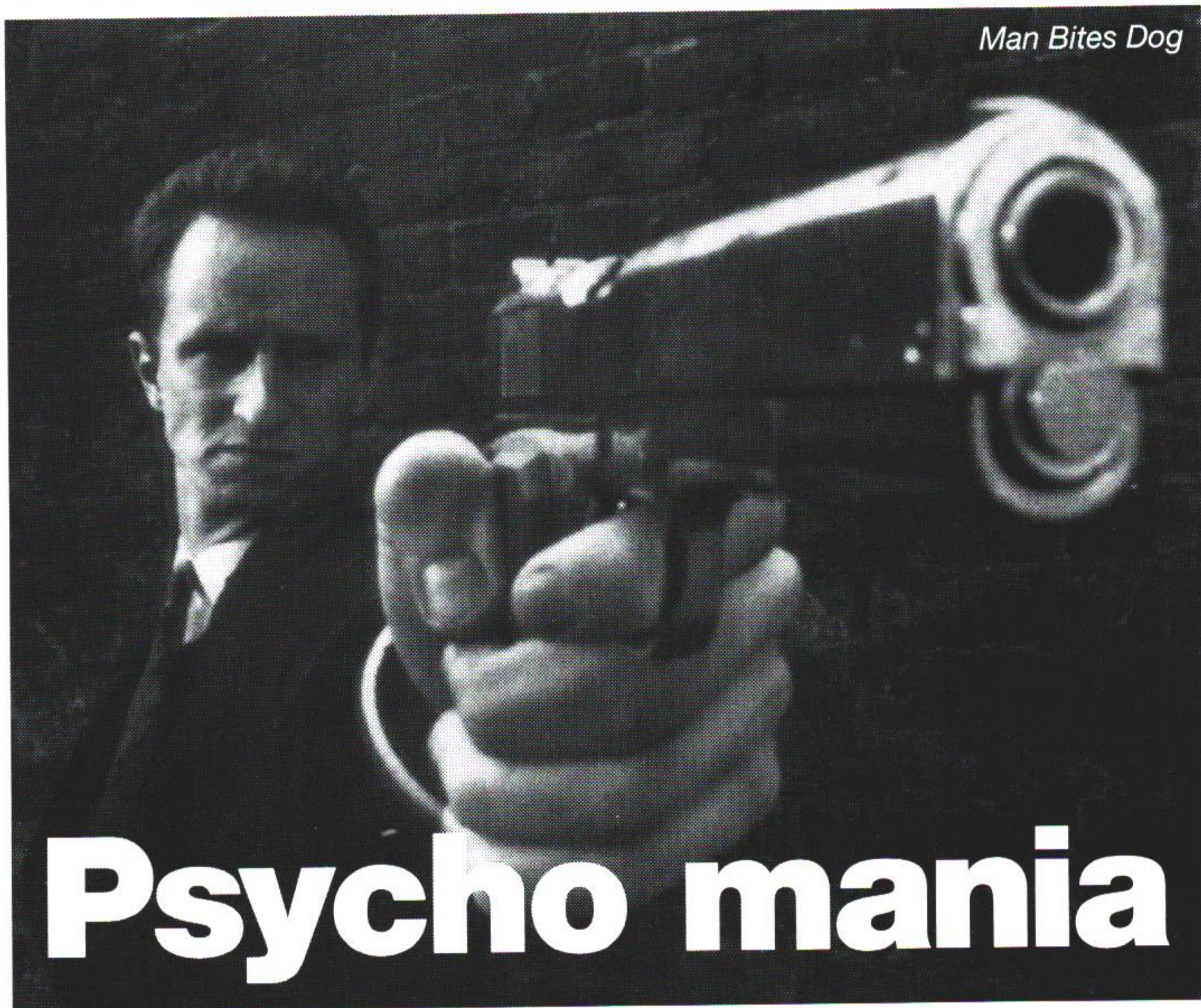
superficial appearances and present a more profound insight. The major artists of the twentieth century have all confronted the problem of how to make sense of a world that appears increasingly fragmented through greater and greater abstraction. Joyce and Picasso, Stravinsky and Brecht—all tried to use fragmentary and abstract forms to convey a deeper understanding of the reality beneath the surface.

The problem with modern-day art is, paradoxically, that it is not abstract enough. Karl Marx once said of the nineteenth-century writer Adam Muller that his 'profundity consists in perceiving the clouds of dust on the surface

and then having the presumption to assert that all this dust is really very important and mysterious'. The same could be said of today's avant garde. Unable to move beyond the superficial, the avant garde serves us up with art for art's sake, with no connection to any broader themes.

Back at the Tate, Carl Andre has another piece—'144 Magnesium Square', consisting of 144 tiles laid across the floor. I stumbled across it, literally, only realising it was there after walking right over it. Most visitors don't even know that they have stepped on an exhibit. I wonder what the catalogue has to say about that? ●

Man Bites Dog



Psycho mania

Are films getting too violent? Alka Singh enters the debate

As these films are about men who rape, murder and rob without remorse a certain amount of hysteria about cinema reaching new extremes of violence was inevitable.' So wrote Jim Shelley in the *Guardian* recently, talking about films such as *Reservoir Dogs*, *Man Bites Dog* and *Bad Lieutenant* which, according to some critics, herald the emergence of a 'New Brutalism' in the cinema.

The way some critics write, you would imagine they had never seen a Martin Scorsese film in their lives. When it comes to the depiction of explicit, casual violence, of throwaway humour combined with a gritty realism, few directors can match Scorsese. 'New Brutalists' like Quentin Tarantino and Abel Ferrara openly acknowledge their debt to films like *Mean Streets* (just re-released in Britain) and *Taxi Driver*.

So there's nothing new about New Brutalism. So is there anything brutal about it? Well, yes these films are brutal in a literal way. But again, that's nothing we've not seen before. While the hoo-ha continues over Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*, his earlier *Driller Killer* still awaits certification.

The new wave of films touch on well-worn themes of camaraderie, loyalty and a search for some sort of salvation, but in a context in which conventional morality is bankrupt. Any positive impulse in these films only exists in a twisted form, and ends up creating more mayhem. In *Reservoir Dogs* Mr White's desire to do good by the injured Mr Orange backfires and ends with everyone getting killed. Harvey Keitel's *Bad Lieutenant* can only express his intense confusion at the rape of a nun by committing an obscene act of his own. In this sense the films reveal a wider cynicism and withdrawal from definite statements about 'right' and 'wrong'.

In fact these films are actually quite moral in their own way. Their creation of a credible morally perverse world only reinforces the idea that certain things are morally unacceptable. And just to ensure that the message is driven home, all the baddies in all these films get killed. But these moral endings are not clear-cut enough for America in the nineties.

The controversy around these films has little to do with what happens on-screen. The real fuss is about what is happening in off-screen America. What the critics of New Brutalism fear is not so much violence on screen as moral uncertainties in society. What they want are films that are less ambiguous and more affirmative of basic American values.

Critic Michael Medved's new book, *Hollywood v America*, sets the tone. Medved brings Pat Buchanan's 'cultural wars' to Tinseltown, adding Hollywood to

the list of conservative bogeys—such as the sixties, liberal education, single mothers, welfare programmes and blacks—supposed to have caused moral degeneracy in America. 'The ominous view of the world conveyed by popular culture', writes Medved, 'contributes powerfully to the insecurity and paranoia that in turn facilitates increased levels of criminal activity. A fearful attitude makes it far more likely that average Americans will huddle protectively in their own homes, taking no responsibility for the state of their neighbourhoods and their communities'.

Medved lets the cat out of the bag here. What he is really worried about is that middle America has nothing positive to hold on to or to aspire to. The moral certainties of the American way of life, he feels, are shakier today than ever before. And Hollywood is to blame for undermining them by producing films that seem to denigrate traditional values and mores—films like *Fatal Attraction* and *Cape Fear*.

The irony is that Hollywood itself is prey to the very fears that haunt Medved—which is why it cannot act as a guardian of the nation's morals. The fearful siege mentality of the American middle classes is now the central theme in many Hollywood films. From *Fatal Attraction* and *Pacific Heights* to *Unlawful Entry* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, Hollywood presents a view of America as a nightmare nation whose values are constantly threatened by unstable, unpredictable, irrational psychopaths.

Of course, Hollywood has long dealt with the theme of middle America under threat from psychopathic outsiders. Norman Bates in *Psycho* is only the best-known example. But these were psychos clearly outside the boundaries of decent society. Similarly, the science fiction and alien genres presented the danger as external. Through the resolution of the narrative American values and, especially, family values would be reaffirmed.

Today's psychopaths are different, not so much because they are more brutal or more violent, but because the line between who is decent and who is a psycho is more blurred. Far from being an outsider, the contemporary psycho is likely to be your nanny, your flatmate or your friendly neighbourhood cop. And far from the narrative resolving the distinction between 'good' and 'evil', in today's films the heroes often end up looking as evil as the supposed baddie (think, for example, about Michael Douglas in *Fatal Attraction*).

The moral superiority of American middle class life and values is no longer assured. Such ambiguity in the face of an increasingly uncertain reality is too much for Medved and his fellow critics. ●



Raw nerves

Last month I said that the nation was twitching in the grip of a collective psychosis. This month there is a TV series which is fiddling on the raw nerves of that crisis. *Century Falls* (Children's BBC) tells the story of a Pennine village in which there are no children, the result of some atrocity which took place there 40 years ago. The trauma has given the villagers psychic powers but left them all barren. They live forever in the shadow of the past, with no hope of renewal.

Then the local squire brings his nephew and niece to stay, and a pregnant woman and her teenage daughter move in. These incoming children are both feared and desired. They are a taunting, dangerous presence that might unlock the door of memory. At the same time, they offer the possibility of escape from the tyranny of the past. It's a version of *The Prisoner* for the eighties, with atrophy and decay in place of conspiracy and deception. The acting is wooden to the point of ritual and the script humourless as a sacrament. A worn-out community enthralled by guilt and history, physically incapable of any sort of future—it's like watching the News.

The image of a town with no children is a particularly poignant one in Liverpool, after the murder of James Bulger. Whatever else was wrong with this city, it was always very big on children. Working class mothers here subscribed to a fashion cult I have never seen anywhere else, namely, Antoinetting. This involves smothering every inch of their baby girls (from hat to socks and even pushchair wheels and rain covers) in net frills, so that they look like Marie Antoinette on First Communion day. The semiotics of the style code are clear. These are not people who are going to let their children take second place.

This is not just a case of the powerless compensating for their lack of status by breeding potentates. Go to the most austere trendy jazz bar and you will find toddlers running around. At least they would have been running around until a few weeks ago. Now everywhere you look, kids are straining and panting like pit bulls on leads or firmly strapped to their pushchairs like Hannibal Lecter on his restraining frame. Nobody is going to let their children out of their sight round here any more. I can give you other images: the local papers suddenly swollen to *Sunday Times* proportions by page after page of condolence notices; the half a mile of railway track buried overnight in flowers; the thick black smoke uncurling from votive racks where there are normally only a couple of slim candles. For the other thing about Liverpool is that it is a city that has learned how to mourn.

But this is not a local matter and the images that count are not the ones I see on the street, but those you see on the screen: James being led away to his death on a security video; the little illuminated tent covering his body; the mob outside the courtroom. The stories that have been built around these pictures are different from the simple ones of loss and fear I have been describing.

First of all there was the Liverpool angle. This took its cue from two 'mob' incidents, the first in Snowdrop Street, the second outside the court. I have no time for courtroom mobs; I've always assumed that they were composed largely of the same nutters who turn out for the Queen Mother's birthday and so on. But I have never seen the media disapprove of a courtroom mob before. This time everyone from the BBC to the *Sun* homed in on it, suggesting that this was a further glimpse of the violent environment which did for Jamie. It was not enough that this had happened to us. We had to be blamed for it as well.

But the story proved too mesmerising to leave it to Liverpool. By the weekend, the *Mail on Sunday* had tried to raise the issues to

a universal level by hiring a Nobel laureate—William Golding—to discuss the implications of the case. Golding said 'I told you so' and shamelessly used the death to puff his old novel.

The vision of feral packs of Lords of the Flies in shell suits, brains fried by Nintendo, stomachs full of pot noodle, roaming Britain's shopping malls became part of a new moral iconography. There were promises to crack down on young offenders and their useless parents (this from politicians who dump their kids in public schools knowing that they are going to be raped and flogged). Major asked for less understanding and more condemnation, blaming the sixties and soft social workers. Except of course these kids were only born in the eighties and the last big social worker story was 'Pin down'.

There is the rub. There have been child murderers before, and, of course, children have been murdered before. But this story has an extraordinary resonance because the issues it appears to raise and the landscape in which it took place seem inextricably bound up with the current moral order, with the choices the nation has made.

It didn't happen on the Lancashire moors, but in the shopping mall, the sanctuary of the consumer society. The mall is to civic life what the enclosures of the seventeenth century were to rural life. Where the High Street was a thoroughfare and the Market Square a meeting place, the mall is a cul de sac with security guards on the door and surveillance cameras in every niche.

The fortified mall made it possible to attract big-name chains into run-down areas (if there's a riot you just close the main doors) where land was cheap and parking plentiful, and thus, in theory, regenerate the inner city through the service sector. The Metro in Gateshead and the Meadowhall in Sheffield were hailed as the Chartres and Notre Dame of the consumer economy. These were not the hideous precincts of the sixties, but places where shopping was promoted as a peaceful, life-enhancing pursuit, a kind of meditative exercise played out amid waterfalls and banana plants, beneath cascades of ambient muzak.

Of course we know now that the service economy did not work, that places like Bootle are as bad as ever. The murder of James Bulger is a hideous announcement of the failure of mall culture. The images from the Strand Shopping Centre security video (what kind of security and whose?)—'enhanced by Gulf War technology'—leave you with a humiliating sense of impotence. Here is footage of a child being walked to his death. What use is it? It's a horrible insight into the full implications of the idea of 'society as spectacle'. The Bulger case is a new version of the old modern myth about the baby-sitter who is terrorised by obscene phone calls, bolts all the windows and doors and then discovers that the caller is in the house with her. Except the killers are not merely in the mall, but of it, bred by the mall's own culture, wearing its clothes, the culture that Britain elected.

I have no idea whether this feeling is true. I have no idea whether the boys arrested were guilty or not. The thing that is indisputable is the depth of fear which the case has revealed. The morbid fascination with the death (GMTV kept going over live to the funeral on the day as though it were an emergency debate in the commons), people's eagerness to believe the worst, to have their nightmares confirmed gives a worrying impression of a society terrified for and of its own children, a society in fear of itself. The collective feelings unleashed by the killing are a salutary reminder: there is no such thing as an individual, ask not for whom the bell tolls.

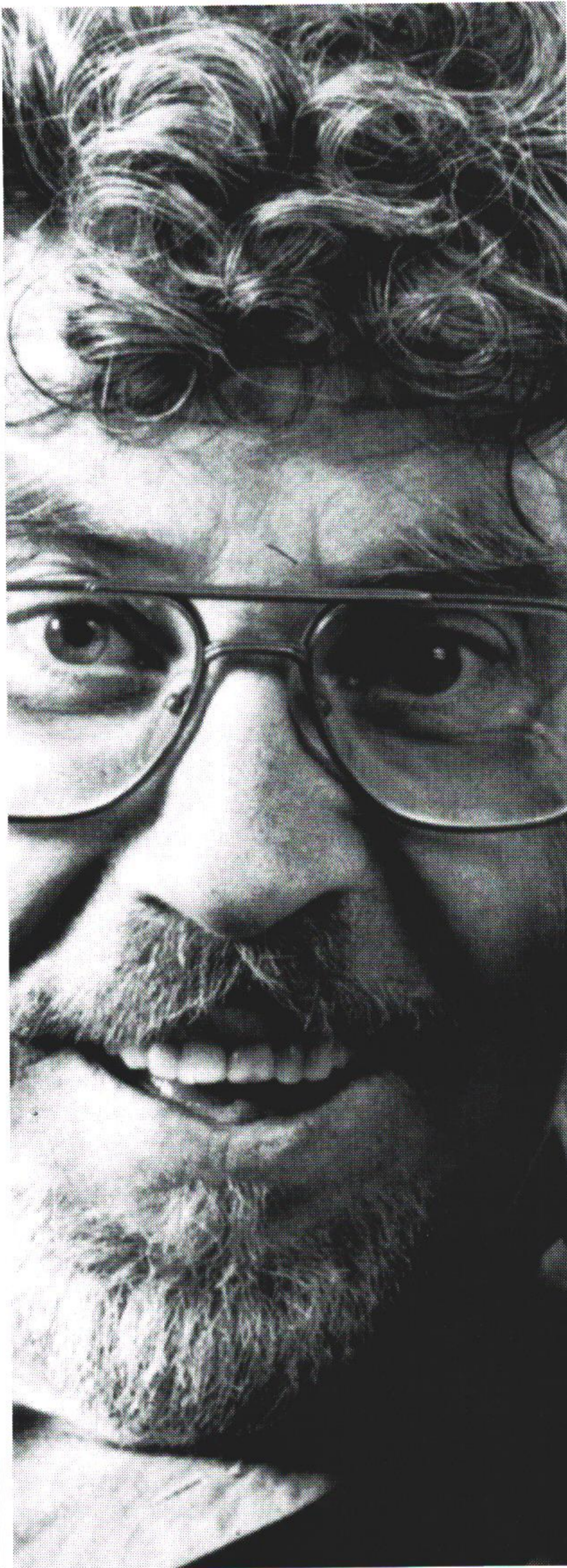
Rave is out, Rolf is in. Alan Renehan is down

Never in the history of pop music has so much bullshit been created by so few.' I am usually of the mind that musicians should stick to what they are good at and forget the polemics. But on this particular occasion Bono's comment on the recent Brit Awards is a worthy opening to an obituary for pop music.

They were all there at the Brit Awards: Genesis, Eric Clapton, Kate Bush, Annie Lennox, Mick Hucknall and, in spirit at least, the Shh!...you know who. Never mind a tribute to Ebenezer Goode, there wasn't even a mention of any music that wasn't white, safe and boring. If you are listening to Shabba Ranks mixing up Deborah Glasgow with the vinyl master Dave Morales you would think that this was just a back-slapping session for the old school tie brigade of the majors in the record industry. Watching the Brit Awards you would never have guessed that 2-Unlimited was at Number One or that Felix's 'Don't You Want My Love' is probably as well known (and as annoying I might concede) as 'Brown Girl in the Ring' was in its day.

Today, no major label is willing to throw money at a new face or sound. Virgin has halved its number of contracts, Pop Will Eat Itself has been shown the door by RCA and Talkin' Loud has dropped Omar who, if you cast your mind back a year or two, was plugged as the new darling of the industry. Even Norman Jay has been ditched from Talkin' Loud due to orders from 'above'.

The point, it seems, is that slump Britain means not only austerity measures and redundancies. It is also reflected in (and I hate the phrase) our culture. Bankruptcies, mergers, roster-trimming are all occurring across the board in the record industry. Friends of mine have started new labels, or are in the process of doing so. But the demise of Manchester's Factory Records, the largest independent label in the country, is at the back of many people's minds.



When the pillar of the 'centre of the universe' comes tumbling down few remain unaffected.

As for the major labels, who is going to invest in 'potential' when you can guarantee that rolling out the wheelchair brigade will ensure an easy payback? So we are served up with stale, crusty Rod Stewart and as many cover versions as possible. When Rolf Harris can get into the Top Ten and appear on *The Word* you know society is up shit creek, and when Buddy Holly zooms into Number One...well you've lost the paddle.

Cover versions and revival mania are not confined to the pop establishment. Sister Sledge, Heaven 17, Sunscreen, Bizarre Inc, The Stereo MCs have all taken from or been heavily influenced by the seventies. The seventies is cool again and that, to be honest, is a nightmare. And just when you think it can't get any worse, along comes the Abba revival.

So what has happened to creativity and innovation? What has happened to rave and all that? Now, I never imagined that raving and all the offshoots from those hazy days of '88 and '89 would change the world, but I did hope it might change the content of music a little. And for a while it did seem that people getting hold of samplers, decks and other equipment would provide a lifeline into pop which was vitally needed.

But music can only reflect the ideas and aspirations of society at large. And today society is obsessed with and, to a large extent, living in the past. The latest fashion supplement from *Elle* is so concerned with the retro look that every section looks like it could have just emerged from a time capsule: 'hippy', 'florals', 'flares', 'stripes'. It is symptomatic of our age. Whether it's commemorations of some obscure event in Britain's history or a repeat of a naff seventies sitcom on TV, there is nothing fresh or innovative in our culture.

So why expect there to be anything fresh or innovative in music? Pop like everything else has become part of the heritage industry and survives by reselling its past. At least producer Pete Waterman is happy. Cover versions are not stale rip-offs, he says, they're 'tributes'. And recycling old dross is sound because it's 'environmentally friendly'. Only the man who brought you Kylie and Jason could have thought of that.

Is pop dead?

THE

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Joan Phillips examines how a left-wing intellectual has become an apologist for Croatia in the civil war in Yugoslavia

I'm not a nationalist, but...

The Destruction of Yugoslavia, Branka Magas, Verso, £39.95 hbk, £12.95 pbk

Branka Magas has written a book which she claims goes beyond the superficial explanations of Yugoslavia's demise that we have been offered to date by other journalists and authors. In *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Magas, until recently a member of the *New Left Review* editorial board, has brought together her published writings on Yugoslavia from the past decade, adding a few previously unpublished pieces. Given that her book is the fruit of 10 years' rumination on the subject, the analysis it offers is breathtakingly vacuous.

According to Magas, Yugoslavia did not die a natural death: 'it was destroyed for the cause of a Greater Serbia.' (pxiv) In essence, this is Magas' argument, which she repeats like a mantra at every opportunity. The rise to power in Serbia of Slobodan Milosevic in 1987 is presented as the beginning of the end for Yugoslavia. 'Of the many causes of Yugoslavia's destabilisation', says Magas, 'there is one which is of particular salience: the decision of the League of Communists of Serbia to challenge the postwar national settlement' (pp337-8). The seeds of the federation's destruction were planted in Kosovo and Vojvodina, argues Magas, which were deprived of their autonomous status by the Milosevic regime.

Given that this is the centrepiece of Magas' thesis about the destruction of Yugoslavia, she marshals little material to substantiate her argument. We are not let in on the secret of why Serbia would suddenly want to tear up the postwar settlement. Nor are we told why Belgrade should have become the epicentre of an apparently voracious expansionist power. Perhaps Magas concluded that Serbia has already been sufficiently damned by Western press and politicians for her not to have to explain her assertions. In any case, we are left wondering what it is about the Serbs that makes them such an aggressive lot.

In order to support her view that all the problems in Yugoslavia began in Belgrade, Magas makes out a case for Serbian exceptionalism:

'What is unique about this regime—at least as far as Europe is concerned—is its particular combination of strident nationalism with a recidivist Stalinist ideology,

embedded above all in the only structures of the Yugoslav communist state that managed to escape the process of democratisation: the Serbian Communist Party and the army high command. The Serbian party had escaped the modest democratisation undertaken from 1986 on in Slovenia and Croatia, where the principle of multi-candidacy for all party posts was introduced.' (p323)

This emphasis on the singular character of the Serbian regime is insupportable. In Magas' view, Croatia appears to be an island of enlightened reform and democracy, while Serbia is a backwater of unreconstructed centralism and nationalism. In reality, almost every liberalising-measure in the sphere of economics, politics and culture in Yugoslavia, from the fifties to the nineties, emanated from Belgrade rather than Zagreb. It is a matter of fact that the Croatian regime and party were far more rigid than their Serbian counterparts, and to this day it is Zagreb more than Belgrade that seems to have an aversion to decentralisation, freedom of the press and democracy.

Overall, however, the similarities are more striking than the differences. To any impartial observer of the unfolding conflict in Yugoslavia there would have seemed little to choose between the regime in Belgrade and that in Zagreb. After all, both are led by former Stalinist politicians, Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, who have converted to the nationalist cause and championed market reforms, like so many of their colleagues in the East, in order to secure their political careers.

Yet Magas insists on finding differences where none of substance exists. The double standards inherent in this approach come out most clearly in her attitude towards the various nationalisms being flaunted in Yugoslavia. Magas is vehemently hostile to any manifestation of Serbian nationalism. Yet she is strangely uncritical of any display of Croatian nationalism. While she writes at great length about the Serbian regime's appalling treatment of the Albanian population in Kosovo, she has next to nothing to say about the Croatian regime's vindictive treatment of the Serbian population in Croatia. ►

Evidence of Zagreb's mistreatment of the Serbs in Croatia is too compelling to be ignored. But Magas circumvents this difficulty with a sleight of hand of which any professional propagandist would be proud. She begins by acknowledging that the victory in the spring 1990 elections of Franjo Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Party, 'running on a Croat nationalist programme', created a strong sense of unease among Croatia's Serbs. But the fears of the Serbs are put aside in the next sentence with the observation that the Croatian majority had good cause to be just as fearful of 'Serbia's aggressive expansionism' (p315). What grounds the Croats had to fear Serbian expansionism at that time are never explained satisfactorily, since there were no grounds, while the good grounds the Serbs had to fear the Croatian nationalist regime are not explored.

In another argument which minimises Zagreb's mistreatment of Croatia's Serbs, Magas claims that it cannot be compared to Belgrade's mistreatment of Kosovo's Albanians: 'Whatever criticisms can be made of the

200 000 live in Serb-controlled Krajina? She doesn't explain it, she ignores it. Instead, she prefers to emphasise that, 'in Croatia, "ethnic cleansing" was to produce some 300 000 refugees in the course of a year'. Magas is keen to highlight the exodus of Croats from areas such as Krajina, but she is silent about the larger numbers of Serbs expelled from Croat-controlled areas.

There are many other examples in *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* of the double standards applied by Magas to the protagonists in the civil war. For example, the Serbs are accused of violating the borders of Yugoslavia by proclaiming their own mini-republics in Serbian enclaves like Krajina in Croatia. Yet nothing is said about the fact that it was Slovenia and Croatia which first called all borders into question by seceding unilaterally from the Yugoslav federation and establishing their own independent republics.

Elsewhere, Magas accuses the Serbs of having designs on Bosnia-Herzegovina long before the war erupted there. However, the fact that the president of Croatia had stated very clearly that he coveted areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina is downplayed: 'Whereas Serbia never hid its territorial ambitions towards Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia's position was more ambiguous.' (pxvii) There was nothing ambiguous about Tudjman's demand for Bosnia to be partitioned between Croatia and Serbia.

The establishment of mini-statelets by the Croats in Bosnia is treated in the same fashion by Magas. We are told that the Croats were acting in 'self-defence' when they seized tracts of the republic. Yet the Serbs living in Bosnia who did the same are not given the benefit of the doubt. Nothing is said about the fact that there are 40 000 Croatian troops *from Croatia* fighting in Bosnia. Yet Serbia, which has *no* armed forces fighting alongside Bosnian Serbs in that republic, is accused of being the aggressor there.

There are other examples of Magas' double standards too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say that her support for Croatia seems to have led her to lose any objectivity she might once have had as a commentator on events in Yugoslavia. The extent to which her reading of the situation there has been coloured by her identification with the Croatian side comes out most clearly in her discussion of history.

Magas rewrites the history not just of the current war, but also that of the Second World War. Who would have thought that a former *New Left Review* editor would end up repeating the tired old tales of Croatian nationalist history? Yet in her efforts to convince us that Croatia is now on the side of right, Magas effectively plays down aspects of Croatia's fascist past.

The consensus in the West today is that the Serbs are to blame for everything bad that has ever happened to the peoples of Yugoslavia. Indeed, Yugoslavia is now being recast retrospectively as Greater Serbia. Magas appears to subscribe to this new orthodoxy. 'Even though "Yugoslavia" was formally to prevail in 1918', says Magas, 'the circumstances of the new state's creation made it into a *de facto* Greater Serbia.' (p352) *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* is littered with casual asides about Great Serbian nationalism being at the source of all of Yugoslavia's problems.

Magas rewrites the history not just of the current war, but also that of the Second World War

Croatian government's treatment of the Serbian minority, there have been few signs of systematic persecution, certainly not of the kind suffered by the national minorities in Milosevic's Serbia.' (p316) Belgrade's chauvinist policies towards the Albanians in Kosovo are used to excuse or gloss over Zagreb's chauvinist policies towards the Serbs in Croatia.

Magas' denial that the Croatian government systematically persecuted the Serbs means turning a blind eye to the way in which Serbs were hounded from their jobs, drummed out of their homes, bombed out of their shops and driven from their land—and all of this well before the war began. Magas' reference to the 'insensitivity' of the Tudjman government must be a contender for the understatement of the year award. 'Insensitive' hardly seems the word to describe the harassment, vilification, purges and provocations suffered by the Serbs in Croatia after the election of Tudjman's regime.

Perhaps the biggest provocation to the Serbs was the Croatian government's official adoption of the chequered flag, the same banner carried by the Nazi-sponsored Ustashe regime of Ante Pavelic during the Second World War. Why should it be so incomprehensible to Magas that the Serbian inhabitants of a region like Krajina, which had up to a third of its population wiped out during the war, would refuse to become a minority in a new Croatian state, especially when that state adopts as its national symbol the local equivalent of the swastika?

Magas can insist all she likes that there has been no systematic persecution of the Serbs in Croatia. But how then does she explain the fact that, of the 600 000 Serbs living in Croatia before the current war began, only about 70 000 remain in Croat-controlled areas, while about

History is turned upside down in this analysis. We are told by Magas that Great Serbian nationalism was 'the old enemy in Yugoslavia, which the partisans thought they had slain on countless battlefields across Yugoslavia' (p305). I rather think that the enemy which the partisans thought they had slain in the Second World War was Great Croatian nationalism and fascism. After all, it was not the Serbs who were in power in Zagreb, nor the Serbian flag which hung over the gates of the Jasenovac concentration camp—it was the Croatian Ustashe regime and their chequerboard flag.

Following the path trodden by the Croatian revisionist historians, Magas implies that all sides were equally guilty in the Second World War. 'The Second World War witnessed simultaneously mass killings of innocent Serb civilians by the Nazis' Ustasha puppet state (NDH), Chetnik massacres of innocent Croat and Moslem civilians, and a high degree of cooperation between the two nationalities within the communist-led partisan movement.' (p314)

This equalisation of the crimes of the Ustashe and the Chetniks cannot be sustained on the basis of logic or fact. The implication of Magas' argument is that no side can be singled out for special blame because all sides suffered equally. It is conveniently forgotten that it was not the Serbian Chetniks who were in power in Yugoslavia, but the Croatian Ustashe. The fact that the Zagreb regime implemented a policy of genocide against the Serbs, Jews and Gypsies is apparently deemed beside the point.

The facts also fly in the face of the equalisation argument. Magas indignantly accuses what she calls the Serbian propaganda machine of 'trying to create the impression that Serbs were the chief victims of the war' (p314). But even going on the wartime casualty figures cited by Magas in her book, it is evident that the Serbs were indeed the chief victims.

Playing the numbers game is one way in which Magas ends up minimising or relativising the crimes committed by the Croatian Ustashe regime; another is her attempt to suggest that just as many crimes were committed by the Serbs, including the extermination of the Jewish community in Serbia (a crime which was in fact carried out by the Nazi occupiers of Belgrade).

The suggestion that there was a high degree of Croat participation in the partisan movement puts another undeserved positive sheen on the reputation of Croatia. Some anti-fascist Croats certainly did join the partisans, but they were always a very small minority. Larger numbers of Croats joined only when it was clear that the Ustashe was losing the war. Some of the partisan leaders might have been Croat communists, but the foot soldiers were mainly Serbs.

Magas' revisionist history of Yugoslavia culminates in her summation of the lessons of the interwar and war years:

'After the 1941 debacle, to forestall any renewal of the Great Serb stranglehold over a reborn Yugoslavia it was not enough to mobilise the non-Serb nationalities in a common partisan struggle, it was necessary also to win the Serb nation to the alternative programme of a Yugoslav federation. Postwar Yugoslavia was thus born from the ashes of Greater Serbia.' (p352)

You could read this passage and conclude that Yugoslavia during the war had been in the grip of a Greater Serbia instead of a Greater Croatia.

Magas adds an 'Oh, and by the way...', as if it were not that important a detail, about the fascists who had been in power in Croatia.

'To be sure, it required also the defeat of Hitler's New Order in Europe, in which the Ustasha Greater Croatia had played its part. The Yugoslav communists, however, did not see Croatian expansionism as a lasting problem. Great Serb nationalism, by contrast, remained a permanent threat.' (p352)

This interpretation does not make sense. The idea that Serbian nationalism was *the* overriding problem jars with the fact that the nationalists lost out to the communists. There were nationalists aplenty in Serbia before and during the war. But they were not in the ascendancy. In case Magas hadn't noticed, it was the communist partisans to whom the majority of Serbs gave their allegiance.

And why should Serbian expansionism have been seen as the major threat by communists, when Serbia had never expanded anywhere outside of its own borders? Especially when Croatia, the state which did realise its expansionist aims by incorporating Bosnia-Herzegovina and parts of Serbia, was apparently not considered to be a threat. Croatian nationalism surely represented a greater threat to the idea of equality between nations in a unified Yugoslavia than Serbian nationalism.

Why should somebody of the left like Branka Magas start rewriting history in this way? If you are a former supporter of the Yugoslav project who has become a convert to the Croatian cause, history must be rewritten to justify Croatia's unilateral exit from the Yugoslav federation. A mythical Greater Serbia becomes the bogeyman and the destroyer of Yugoslavia, while the real Greater Croatia is unwittingly rehabilitated.

The main problem with Magas' book is not its incorrigible bias against Serbia. This is just the consequence of an individual decision to take sides with Croatia. The main problem is that Magas puts all her eggs in the Yugoslav basket. She fails to see that the disintegration of Yugoslavia fits into a common pattern of change happening in the East as a result of Eastern European elites orienting themselves towards the West.

For the record, if any republic is to be singled out as the source of Yugoslavia's disintegration it should not be Serbia. Contrary to the conventional interpretation, which Magas faithfully reproduces, the forces pulling Yugoslavia apart were concentrated in Croatia and Slovenia which were demanding autonomy and more long before Slobodan Milosevic came to power in Serbia. At a certain point, politicians in Croatia and Slovenia decided to push for secession because they felt they had more to gain from cementing a new relationship with the West and the capitalist world market than from relying on the old relations with the other republics.

The most forceful dynamic behind the destruction of Yugoslavia did not come from Serbia, and ultimately it did not come from Croatia or Slovenia either. It came from the West. But that is another story which Magas has not seen fit to tell.

The Poetry of Survival: Postwar Poets of Central and Eastern Europe, edited by Daniel Weissbort, Penguin, £7.99 pbk

These 28 poets are collected in a challenge to Theodor Adorno's adage, 'After Auschwitz to write poetry is barbaric'. Their subject is the Nazi Holocaust, and the personal impact of having observed and survived is explored throughout.

The sense of the precariousness of life after the Holocaust creates a feeling of guilt for the survivors, even from someone as hard as Bertolt Brecht. At the same time there is amid the guilt a more compelling glee at being alive. Vasko Popa writes: 'We smile like conspirators/ And whisper to each other/ Be seeing you/ We don't say when or where.'

Much of the work is refreshingly simple with strong imagery, like this from Tadeusz Rozewicz: 'In huge chests/ clouds of dry hair/ of those suffocated/ and a faded plait/ a pigtail with a ribbon/ pulled at school/ by naughty boys.' These are the intimate observations of camp inmates, told without embellishment.

Daniel Weissbort's collection is a good one, but he expects too much of these poems. He invites us to draw lessons from what are really just individual experiences of suffering. He asks of his chosen poets: 'that they will exert a positive influence on the political and social restructuring that is now under way.' These poems are personal and moving, as well as being by far the best translations I have read, but they are no guide to social change.

Katy Margam

Beauty, Brian D'Amato, Grafton, £4.99

This is a thing of rare beauty: a big novel unassumingly packaged as an airport lounge potboiler. Protagonist Jamie Angelo is a sensational mix of high art and low cunning. He is a graduate of 'that school' (Yale), and a narcissist. As an artist he inhabits the New York Viz Biz—the image-obsessed art/fashion world as seen in magazines like *Vogue*, *Interview* and *Flash Art*. He is also an unlicensed plastic surgeon performing 'procedures' on women's faces.

Angelo's procedures are the meeting point for avant garde art and the cutting edge of surgery. His greatest achievement is the remodelling of Jaishree ('kind of Indian Julia Roberts') into Minaz—an icon of beauty for all mankind. The ensuing problems are as monstrous as Frankenstein. Angelo describes his creation as the Uberwench; this is D'Amato performing a sex-change on Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or Superman.

Beauty bridges writing levels which usually remain unconnected. The plot is fast-paced and suspenseful, even though it is interspersed with asides on subjects from Aztec human sacrifice to technique in Renaissance painting. Sex scenes are under-done (and all the more flavoursome).

Angelo is a genius for our times, but his genius is skin

deep. This is the world according to Warhol, where surface is everlasting and there is no depth. D'Amato's take on the nineties is that this is the decade which has reduced sincerity to yet another superficiality.

Andrew Calcutt

The Condition of the Working Class in England, Frederick Engels, Oxford World Classics, £5.99 pbk

The re-publication of Frederick Engels' classic account of the nineteenth-century working class is an excellent contrast to today's patronising journalism of inner-city deprivation. Engels, friend of and collaborator with Karl Marx, drew upon his own experience of Britain's industrial revolution, as well as a wealth of official and trade statistics, to expose the manufacturers' social warfare against the working class.

Engels' adopted home of Manchester features as the worst example of the impact of the new manufacturing upon the working poor. At first sight not much seems to have changed there: the little Ireland off the Oxford Road is gone today, but other immigrants take the place of the Irish. Hulme, if anything is more desolate than when Engels wrote his report in 1844, most of it waiting to be knocked down.

The impoverishment of Engels' day, though, is a product of the birth of industrialisation. Nowadays the memory of Manchester's cotton mills is relegated to the Museum of Labour History and the big hope for the future is the bid for the 2000 Olympics. Then poverty was the outcome of workplace exploitation, as the mill-owners held consumption to a minimum—and sometimes below that—to keep their profits high. Today, too many in Moss Side and Whalley Range would be grateful to be exploited instead of being on the scrap heap.

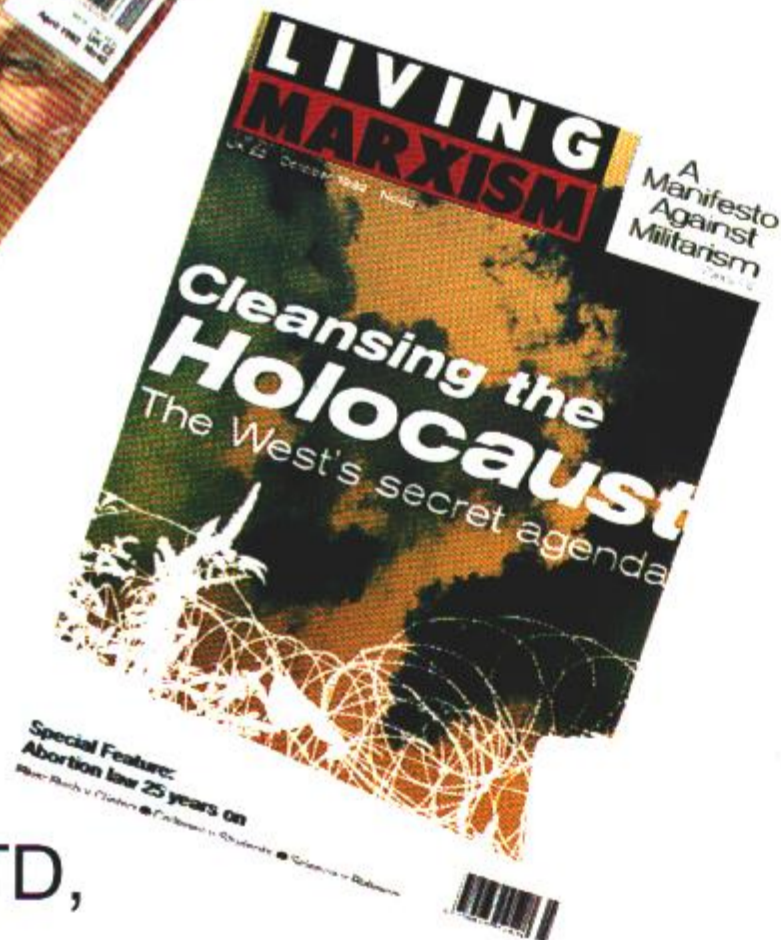
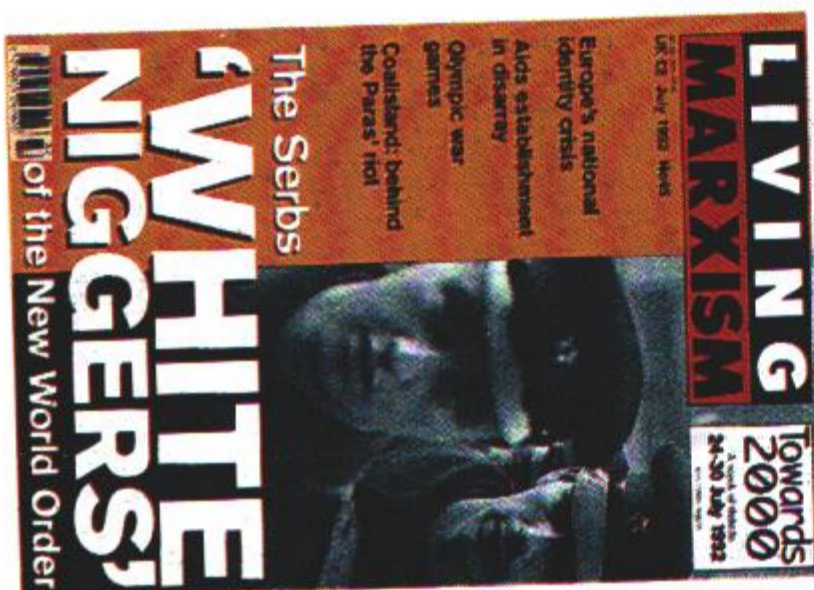
Now, as then, the poverty draws journalists to record the problem. Where Engels' account differs from the latter-day reports of 'Gunchester', or James Bulger's last days in Liverpool's North End, is that the big crime he describes being committed is the social crime against the working class. Engels describes in miserable detail the overcrowded and decrepit housing stock, the inedible food and even the moral degeneration of the poor. But these are seen as consequences of a society organised to exploit the greater part of its own people.

Today's accounts of the poor fix instead upon the personal failings of the victims. Dirty houses, crap food, cheap clothes are all used to show how feckless inner-city dwellers really are. The robberies and the violence are hyped up as moral lessons about the personal failings that carry hopelessness from one generation to the next.

Engels' comprehensive barrage of statistical evidence illustrates the social causes of infant mortality and shortened life-spans—the capitalist system. He concludes: 'The English bourgeoisie has but one choice, either to continue its rule under the unanswerable charge of murder and in spite of this charge, or to abdicate in favour of the labouring class.'

Kate Lawrence

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