

LIVING

MARXISM

Bosnia
THE WEST
IS THE
PROBLEM

US \$5 DM7 FF25

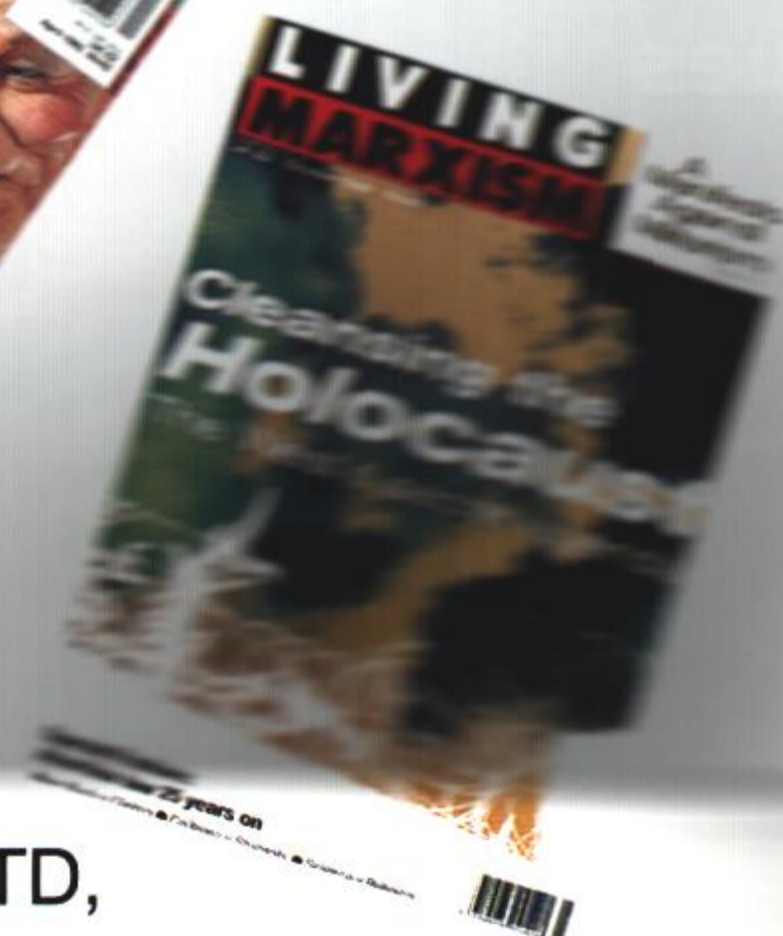
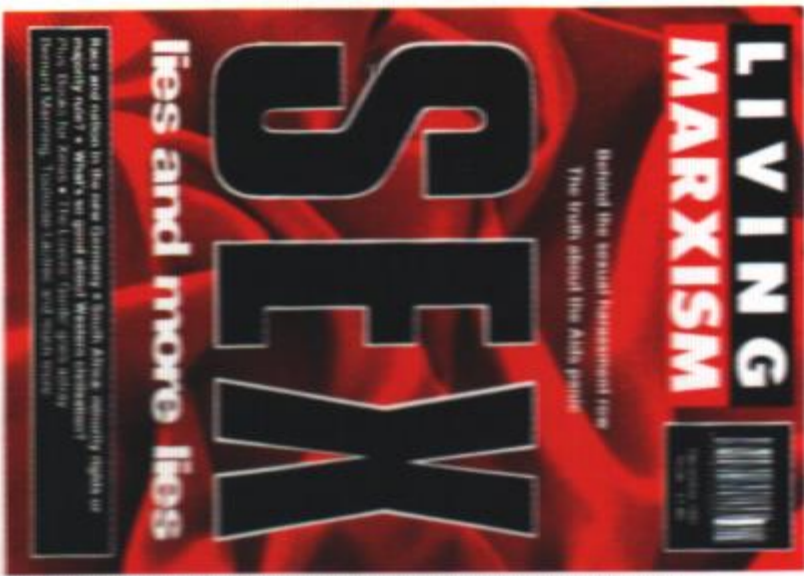
UK £2 June 1993 No56

WHEN PEACE MEANS WAR

Ragga and the race war
Police torture in USA
Recession over—
slump continues



Subscribers



● A subscription to *Living Marxism* is now better value than ever; at £19.50 for a year, it saves you almost 20 per cent on the cover price. Write to *Living Marxism* Subscriptions (56), BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX or phone (071) 278 7699

CONTENTS

- 4 **Editorial**
- 6 Letters
- 8 Ragga and the silent race war
Kate Lawrence
- 10 Crack scare in Nottingham
Joanne Hayes
- 13 Ann Bradley
- 14 Police torture in the USA
Christian Parenti
- 16 **When peace means war**
Pat Roberts
- 20 **Bosnia: a mess made in the West** *Joan Phillips*
- 23 The diplomatic circus
Joan Phillips
- 24 Towards 2000
- 26 Left, right, left, right
Mike Freeman
- 30 South Africa: funeral for freedom
Charles Longford
- 32 No peace for Palestine
Daniel Nassim
- 33 Toby Banks
- 34 **Recession over—slump continues** *Phil Murphy*
- 37 What's wrong with a job for life?
Andrew Calcutt
- 38 **Living:** *Romper Stomper* interview;
Suede; Larkin
- 41 Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV
- 43 **The Marxist Review of Books**

COVER PHOTO: GILLES RIVET (REX)

Our Yugoslav peace plan

PHOTO: SIMON NORFOLK



1 Get the West out: Western intervention has been the primary cause of the conflict; it cannot be the solution (see page 20).

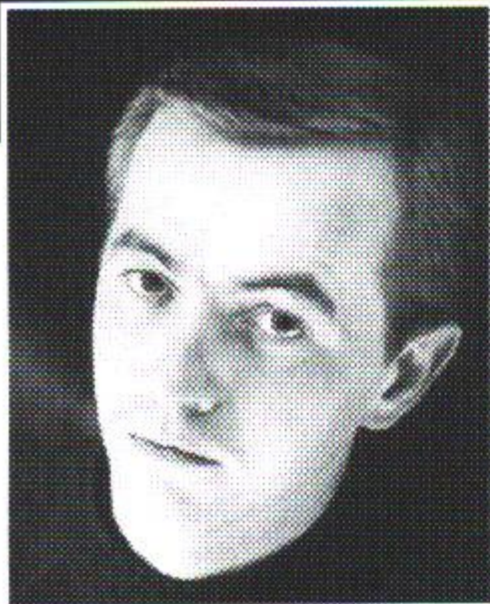
2 Expose imperialism: The most practical contribution we can make today is to expose the fraudulent propaganda used to justify intervention, and publicise the militaristic motives now hidden behind the humanitarian language of Western governments (see pages 16 and 26).

3 Appeal to the East: At the same time we must attempt to convince the peoples of the former Stalinist world that looking to the West to solve their problems will only make everything worse.

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

Subscription rates: Britain and Northern Ireland £19.50 ● Europe (airmail) £27 ● Outside Europe (airmail) £37 ● Overseas (surface mail) £23 ● (Institutions add £7.50) ● Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX; Fax (071) 278 9844 ● Distributed in the UK by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE; Phone: West Drayton (0895) 444 055; Fax (0895) 445 255; Telex 881 3787 ● Distributed in the USA by Bernhard DeBoer Inc, 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA; Phone (201) 667 9300 ● Typeset by Junius Publications (TU) © copyright Revolutionary Communist Party
Printed by Russell Press (TU), Nottingham ● ISSN 0955-2448 June 1993. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed

**LIVING
MARXISM**
Monthly review of the
Revolutionary Communist Party
Editorial: (071) 278 9908
Subscriptions: (071) 278 7699



Mick Hume

From the Falklands to Bosnia

A lot of people who would have opposed British and US invasions in the past now support military intervention in Bosnia. They might do so out of a desire for peace. But the hard truth is that they are allowing themselves to be used as patsies by the war-makers of the Western governments.

Times change. When, in April 1982, Margaret Thatcher commanded the British people to 'Rejoice, rejoice!' because the royal marines had recaptured South Georgia from a few Argentine conscripts, she set the triumphalist tone for public discussion of the Falklands War. When Argentina surrendered two months and many deaths later, Thatcher told cheering crowds in Downing Street that 'Great Britain is great again'. The celebration of carnage made some people proud. It made others want to vomit.

Today, in the public debates about military intervention in the former Yugoslavia, the tone is very different. Those calling for Western military action in Bosnia do not ask us to rejoice over war, but to care about its victims and to help bring peace. They do not boast of making Britain great, but of getting Britannia to act as a sort of armed social worker in the Balkans. Many who would have been sickened by the Falklands War seem the most enthusiastic about intervention in Bosnia.

The irony is that politicians who organised past Western war efforts and peace activists who opposed them, now use the same language to call for the UN, EC or Nato to take firmer action in Yugoslavia. Why? Is there really anything

so very different about Western intervention in other people's affairs today?

In April, Thatcher called for the West to stop prevaricating, arm the Muslims in Bosnia and threaten the Serbs with airstrikes. These demands won Thatcher enthusiastic support from a variety of Labour MPs and radical journalists who had treated her as a hate-figure for the previous 15 years. This change of heart seems all the more surprising, if you look a little more closely at what she said about intervening in Bosnia.

'I felt angry when the Falklands were invaded', Thatcher told American television. 'We took action. I felt angry when the Iraqis invaded Kuwait. President Bush and I took action.'

'We had the weapons. We also had the will. We have the weapons now. Where is the will?'

Thatcher put Bosnia on a par with the Falklands and the Gulf, as a crisis to be resolved by Western firepower. Do those who support her call for military intervention in Bosnia today also concede that she was right to send Britain into war in the past? And if not, what's changed?

Was she right to send a task force to the South Atlantic, to recolonise the Malvinas Islands? Was she right to send British forces to the Gulf, to help the USA destroy Iraq? And what about 'the weapons' Thatcher spoke of; was she right, too, about Cruise missiles and the rest of the arsenal she assembled?

At the time, the Labour left and the peace movement opposed Thatcher's war against the Argentines and her preparations for war against the Iraqis

(a war waged soon after by John Major), and bitterly criticised her rearmament programme. Now most of these same people champion her militaristic attitude towards the Serbs.

In reality, the motives pushing Western governments to intervene abroad today are as insupportable as they were at the time of the Falklands. The peace-loving British authorities which have sent troops and aircraft to Bosnia are no more concerned about saving lives than they were when they sank the Argentine cruiser *Belgrano* with all hands in 1982, or massacred fleeing Iraqi conscripts on the road to Basra in 1991. The Western governments' recent displays of gunboat diplomacy, whether directed at Iraq, Somalia, North Korea or Serbia, are all part of a self-serving crusade to assert their own authority.

What has changed is not the bloody reality of military intervention, but the way in which it is perceived in the West. The key factor in altering perceptions has been the collapse suffered by former critics of Western imperialism. Their conversion to the cause of Western intervention has gone so far that Margaret Thatcher, for so long the devil incarnate, can now be hailed as a guardian angel. And in the process, Thatcher's record of militarism has, at least in part, been retrospectively vindicated.

The consequence of all this is to create a uniquely pro-interventionist political climate, one which allows the Western authorities to interfere in other people's affairs and pass it off as doing a lot of good work for charity. This is truly

a godsend for the governments concerned, at a time when they are all undergoing political crises.

Today governmental institutions and parties are suffering a loss of public respect right across the West. That makes it hard for them to win support for foreign adventures by mobilising traditional, tub-thumping nationalism. Thatcher's Falklands War rhetoric about Britain being great again could have little impact today, when symbols of the British state's greatness from the monarchy to the police force are the subject of public contempt.

The conversion of the old opposition to the cause of intervention provides Western governments with a partial solution to this tricky problem. It enables them to present their aggressive foreign policies in the new language of humanitarianism, peace and famine relief. With the assistance of liberal commentators and Labour politicians, the British military and its gunboat diplomacy can now acquire a gentler image and a place on the moral high ground.

The punchline of this process is not funny. Just as the Falklands triumph stood the Tories in good stead at home during the eighties, so the consensus supporting military intervention in the nineties allows very conservative conclusions to be drawn in Western societies. Of course, this does not mean that expressing concern about Bosnia can win John Major a by-election in Newbury. The danger is far more serious than that.

The unspoken assumption behind support for intervention is that the West knows what's best for Eastern Europe and the third world, that Western states are the force for civilisation on Earth, with the right and responsibility to save others from themselves. The widespread endorsement of such conservative sentiments today is better than money in the bank for Western capitalists.

What has changed is not the bloody reality of military intervention, but the way in which it is perceived in the West

The new consensus supporting foreign interventions means that anti-war arguments have suffered a serious loss of edge. Nobody even raises questions any more about the way in which the Western states and their central agency, the United Nations, are tearing up the old rules of international affairs and trampling across the sovereignty of nations, which the UN charter still declares to be sacrosanct. Nobody objects that the Western missions in places like Somalia and Cambodia are really colonialism by another name. Instead, the former critics of Western intervention concentrate on chanting 'we must do something' over and over again. And with the support of that sentiment, the Western powers set about staging a free-for-all in the former Yugoslavia.

What do they mean, 'we must do something'? Who is 'we', and what is the purpose of the 'something' that must be done?

In today's debate about intervention, those who argue that 'we' must do something about Bosnia in fact mean that the British and other Western governments must act on our behalf. But why should we suddenly share the same interests as the government over Bosnia, when our concerns conflict with theirs over every domestic issue? Why should we believe that a government which is prepared to run down the NHS and throw psychiatric

patients on to the streets of British cities is really concerned about the welfare of the sick and the weak in Srebrenica?

The British government will pursue its own narrow interests in Bosnia, as it does at home, seeking to preserve its power and prestige rather than to save lives. No amount of humanitarian appeals will alter that iron law of international politics. So let us forget about begging the government to take constructive action, and redefine the 'we' who needs to do something.

As people who are concerned about militarism and war, 'we' should be trying to organise a popular movement *against* our government's trouble-making foreign adventures, not applauding them. We ought to demand that the West gets out of the former Yugoslavia altogether, not encourage it to take more military action.

Wringing hands over Bosnia and demanding that the Western powers do something might sound like a constructive and positive approach. But such demands for action really represent a passive acquiescence to the influence of British militarism—the same reactionary influence which prevailed over the Falklands. As a result, the warmongers can allow yesterday's peace activists to front today's campaigns for military intervention. And that really is something for them to rejoice about.

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 truth about Yugoslavia

Edo Bosnar (letters, May) misses the point of what Joan Phillips has been trying to say. Serbian atrocities, real or imagined, are beamed into our homes by the media almost before they happen. We heard all too briefly about the Croats and Muslims shooting down three UN planes carrying humanitarian aid last year. Or that the majority of UN personnel have been killed by either Croatians or Bosnian Muslims so as to provoke Western intervention on their side. A blatant attempt is going on to co-opt us into supporting intervention. A position which most of the left seems happy to go along with.

The media claim that they are giving us the full picture about what's happening. As they claimed to be doing during the Basra highway Bar-B-Q called the Gulf War. It's no surprise to learn that we were lied to, then as now. All—note this Edo—all of the leaders in Yugoslavia are nationalist tub-thumpers with blood on their hands. Perish the thought that the Bosnian government's mouthpieces can take some time out from collecting their various awards, to start objectively reporting the conflict.

F King *South-east London*

Edo Bosnar's request for 'the whole truth' about former Yugoslavia sounds reasonable enough. But he should bear in mind that *Living Marxism's* coverage of events there is in response to the biased reporting in the Western media as well as to the events themselves.

Bosnar seems to suggest that *Living Marxism* should mark out a level-playing field in reporting the war. This would make sense if *Living Marxism* operated in a vacuum, with no one else commenting on the subject. Unfortunately, there are hundreds of voices clamouring to vilify the Serbs as a nation of Hannibal Lecters. When every other news outlet is packed with accounts of alleged Serbian atrocities, *Living Marxism* has a responsibility to tell the other side of the story, and to show how the official version of the war is heavily slanted to favour the interests of various Western states.

The Serbs are the target of a propaganda war waged by Western commentators. Hype, lies and insinuation are their chosen weapons in the character assassination of Serbian people. It seems to me that we need to counter-attack, not by duplicating these methods from the opposite perspective, but by challenging the most influential anti-Serbian myths—such as those about 'rape camps', 'death camps' and the equation of Serbs with Nazis. Joan Phillips' pursuit of this line of investigation seems just about right.

Greg Murray *Bedford*

Ban something

Mick Hume's 'Ban nothing' (May) is confused. Hume argues that censorship should be shunned because it is a ready instrument of state control. Given that state control is an evil, prior questions arise as to whether and how censorship may operate as an aspect of collective action independently of the state. These are large and important issues which Hume wholly fails to engage.

For another thing, Hume puts the classic Enlightenment value of freedom of expression on a pedestal, without offering us any justification. Arguably, freedom of expression is a profoundly important value, but one value among many. Is a tunnel-visioned pursuit of freedom of expression as a value exalted above all others really right? Or do other values need to be taken into account, such as the need for a community to be sensitive to the passions and deeply held beliefs of individuals. Hume blindly steamrollers intelligent concern about these questions; but he is right to draw attention to the grave dangers of endorsing censorship as it is. And he is right to draw attention to the obscenities of current censorship.

Paul Tappenden *Leytonstone, London*

So you don't mind women and children being mutilated, degraded and murdered in porn films, but you still seem to want to ban war? Now you've got me really confused.

Sarah Felstead *London SW20*

Crimes of our times

Tracey Lauder ('When were the good old days?', May) uses historical data to argue that the perception that we are suffering a crime wave of unprecedented proportions is unfounded. Moreover, Frank Furedi ('Prime time for crime panics', May) argues that the incipient conservatism of referring to some past golden age is really just a way of scapegoating society's powerless for the social crimes of the ruling class.

But don't 85 per cent of people who think crime has worsened in the last 20 years have a point? As you have argued, we are currently experiencing a slump qualitatively and quantitatively worse than any previous. If crime is related both to economic austerity and social disintegration then we should expect an increase in crime of most kinds.

I can see that a moral panic has been created over specific kinds of crime, eg, juvenile and sex crimes, to political ends. But surely this represents the ruling class' recognition that their institutions cannot contain the effects of slump, that society is indeed disintegrating,

authority has little meaning and crime has increased. As a teacher I am very conscious of the low esteem in which the state's institutions are now held by ruling and working class alike.

Perhaps restating the social origin of crime (and not just its economic aspect) in a historical context is not such a bad thing—as Marxists we do believe in learning from a historical perspective. While the ruling class may place its own moral interpretations on historical decline, we should not be nervous about the idea that capitalism and its institutions change for the worse. Why else look for social change?

Paul Morris *Manchester*

PS Give Frank Cottrell-Boyce a raise!

Anti-racist posturing

If I had a subscription to *Living Marxism*, I would cancel it. Craig Owen's article ('Anti-fascist backfire', May) berates anti-racists for trying to remove a racist fellow-worker by appealing to management, without himself suggesting any alternative or better strategy.

Tell me *Living Marxism*, please, what exactly do you mean when you say 'racism...is a serious problem we will have to sort out ourselves'? Real anti-racists are out and about now trying to combat racism, whereas the armchair anti-racists of *Living Marxism* just seem to observe other people and criticise them. I wouldn't mind so much if it was constructive criticism. You offer no ideas as to possible lines of action that could have been considered.

Living Marxism is affiliated to an organisation called Workers Against Racism. I live in Birmingham and the closest that I've ever got to WAR is seeing their stickers plastered around the city centre; if this is anti-racism then I'm an Englishman (which I'm not).

Lev Davidovich Bronstein *Handsworth, Birmingham*

The kids are not alright

Whilst agreeing with your editorial statement that incidents such as the James Bulger murder are rare ('Frightening the life out of us', April), I would argue that a general malady is afflicting the nation with the result that a large and increasing number of crimes go unreported. So although government figures suggest juvenile crime is falling, it is actually rising.

Instead of attacking the conscience of the public (the very public whose support we need), you should be highlighting the enforced hardships suffered by today's youth, and showing the public how tomorrow's hopes are being smashed.

As you rightly say, the slump has pulled the rug from under people's lives, but you don't acknowledge the particular impact this has on young people, who are often denied all benefits and significantly more exploited than their elders in the employment market.

It saddens me that organs of good knowledge and opinion such as yours continually overlook the value of young people and their problems. Socialism, after all, is concerned with the well-being of everybody. The future may be more enticing if the government were forced to U-turn on its steady dismantling of the Youth Service and the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit.

Let's not just 'get on with life', let's fight for a better future.

John Bradshaw *Leeds*

Wrong role models

I was very disappointed by the letters on Malcolm X in recent issues of *Living Marxism*. What PJ Coles and Maxwell Pringle fail to see, is that there never has been, nor are there now, any effective role models that could be recommended to black youth in the US to emulate.

When I was younger, it was always impressed upon me to have role models, so as to better myself in particular and the black 'community' in general. The 'role models' generally came in either of two varieties.

The first and the most common was the wealthy liberal patriotic type, the kind of people who identify themselves with the red, white and blue of the Stars and Stripes at every given opportunity, and who tell us to obey the law, work hard, and we'll make it in the end. The other role model was of the 'radical' nationalist type, generally calling for some sort of separatism, either within America or outside of it.

So the only role models we were offered were political reactionaries, either American patriots or nationalists.

If Coles and Pringle want role models for American youth, they had better start getting busy and do something now to inspire a new generation. Reactionary and exclusivist politics are not the way—we have to expose the

inadequacies of such politics, which Emmanuel Oliver made a start with in his article ('The resurrection of Malcolm X', March). Let's have more exposures of backward ideas, their consequences, and the airing of newer alternative arguments.

Theo *West Midlands*

It is art

Like Kenan Malik ('The good, the bad and the avant-garde', April), I too heard a ghostly rattling whilst walking stupefied through the galleries of the Tate—only to look down and find to my amusement that I was standing smack bang in the middle of the sculpture '144 Magnesium square'. I too have trouble appreciating the point of such art, but the fact is that it *is* art.

Seen within the context of a gallery such utterly mundane objects can (to the initiated) acquire a meaning above and beyond their existence as material things. Abstract art, unlike much representational art, cannot contain within itself the image of its inspiration. For this reason, a great deal of abstract art, if seen out of context, is open to complete misinterpretation (even to the extent of failing to recognise it as art).

The infamous pile of bricks raises this issue of context and makes it the subject of a work of art. The ensuing debate shows just how pertinent a comment this was. Like it or hate it (I personally don't know what to make of it), there is no doubt that the 'Tate bricks' does represent a potent intervention and also a logical step in late modernism's discovery of its own essential emptiness, and as such it has acquired an additional, almost tragi-comic poignancy.

Rather than get involved in a senseless debate as to whether or not such things constitute art, it is much more constructive to ask the question: is this the most fruitful avenue for art to explore, given the changing historical scene? I personally believe that art can only continue to survive by reaffirming its commitment to life and to lived experience.

M Hughes *Sussex*

Calling all Chartists

Anyone interested in the development of the Chartist movement and the study of working class history, could they send a stamped, addressed envelope to the address below?

George Mitchell *Hollingworth House, Tydd St Giles, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 5LE*

PC is OK

Political correctness should have the support of the left. In capitalist society language is used to actively denigrate women and peoples of colour. The power of such language offends, hurts and oppresses people, and is used as a tool in legitimating the status quo.

The right-wing fight against PC is a fight against the inclusion of peoples who are presently left out. The opposition to PC is logically an opposition to genuine democracy and decency. It also opposes the aspirations of women and peoples of colour for dignity and respect.

Marc Deith *London*

Scousers are no joke

The final paragraph of Alan Renehan's article ('Liverpool lament', May) reads like the script to a 'Scousers' sketch by Harry Enfield. Perhaps Renehan is trying to make his name as a comedian. The fact is that this city has been hit harder than any other by the Tory government. That experience has reinforced our positive local identity which Renehan has no right to make fun of.

Raymond Ainsworth *Liverpool*

Relegation issues

Isn't Toby Banks' deep sociological analysis of the Bobby Moore tributes (April) simply his resentment of the fact that as a Crystal Palace supporter, his team have never produced a player of similar ability or standing in the game?

Richard Ryan *Edgware*

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

Ragga and the silent

The media criticism of ragga music is not as worthy as it might appear, says Kate Lawrence

Since ragga artist Shabba Ranks received a public dressing down for defending anti-gay lyrics on *The Word*, the sentiments expressed in black popular music have once again become a focus for widespread criticism in the media.

The gay protest group Outrage is campaigning to have ragga stars banned from the airwaves. Less predictably, many mainstream commentators have also complained loudly about songs such as Buju Banton's 'Boom Bye Bye', which suggests that gays should be shot. But why should the media have suddenly become so concerned about reactionary song lyrics?

'Tribal rites'

Behind the 'politically correct' (PC) criticisms of the prejudiced images of gays and women in ragga songs, the debate is serving as a new focus for demonising young blacks. It is the latest episode in the silent race war. The hidden message implicit in media attacks on ragga is a familiar one; you can take black people out of the jungle, but you can't take the jungle out of black people. Or, as one journalist wrote after a visit to a ragga event, 'In this nightclub in Croydon, and in the slum dancehalls of Jamaica, the rites of tribal Africa are still being acted out' (*Sunday Times*, 2 May 1993).

In the liberal press, critics have focused on ragga's aggressive and sexually explicit lyrics about women, its celebration of guns and its macho image. *Guardian* music critic Caroline Sullivan complains that ragga 'tends to dwell on the male preserves of guns, money and girls, especially "slack" (fast) girls....Ragga is further sullied by a vein of homophobia' (16 April 1993).

When rap artist Ice Cube came to Britain in March commentators expressed a similar mixture of concern

over violence, anti-gay sentiment and explicit sexual images of women. A bitter Playthell Benjamin typified the tone: 'Instead of frankly identifying the excessive posturing of hardcore rappers like Cube for what it is—the testosterone-driven rhetorical aggressions of ego-maniacal and intellectually under-developed young males—legions of misguided pop music critics have become willing apologists for their transgressions against reason, manners and civility' (*Guardian*, 11 March 1993).

Strangely silent

In conservative newspapers never known for their progressive views on women or gay rights, journalists have expressed the same apparent concern to protect minorities from being abused by rap and ragga. In the *Sunday Telegraph*, James Munro quoted at length both the anti-gay lyrics of Buju Banton's 'Boom Bye Bye' and a spokesman from Outrage who claimed that Banton's lyrics have increased intolerance towards gays among British youth. British ragga artists, added Munro, 'are also guilty of using misogynistic lyrics to put across their "slackness"' (18 April 1993).

Despite the sudden upturn in concern about ragga lyrics, the mainstream press have strangely shown little interest in other songs which offer a reactionary view of the sexual roles of women and men. Take the recent song 'Born to Breed'—hardly an advert for greater sexual freedom or a rebuttal of prejudice about a woman's place. Yet it climbed the charts with hardly a raised eyebrow. And white cock-rock groups like Guns 'n' Roses continue to broadcast their neanderthal opinions on women and gay men, without attracting serious heat from the new PC pundits.

The real issue

Meanwhile, writers in every national newspaper are going to great lengths to translate Caribbean patois for their white readership, so as to enable them to get properly outraged about the most reactionary lyrics on slack records.

The fact that song lyrics are less than liberal about women and gay men is incidental to the current mainstream media preoccupation with ragga. What commentators are really

reacting against is the expression of black aggression towards white society.

Ragga's macho posturing and the celebration of violent images is a degraded form of black pride. Within the culture of the black ghetto, homosexuality in particular is regarded as a disease of wealthy, white society. When Buju Banton says gays should be shot, it is a perverse way of those at the bottom putting two fingers up to the standards of polite society. An aggressive sexual attitude towards women, with frequent reference to 'bitches', is another reaction against the dominant culture.

Slack artists couch their rejection of white culture in the reactionary language of prejudice. Equally the real concerns motivating mainstream criticism of ragga have become mystified by the focus on anti-gay and sexist lyrics.

Shabba Cliff?

After a shooting at a ragga concert in West London's Le Palais in April, the media was full of images of young black club audiences as seething, volatile masses. Pundits place great emphasis on trying to explain the 'rules' of ragga, which are somehow beyond the comprehension of normal white audiences. The *Sunday Times* journalist quoted earlier, who suggested that ragga is all about African tribal rites, also found it necessary to interview an anthropologist to find out why a lot of young black women like dancing to slack records.

Even the more sympathetic articles about ragga maintain the sense that it is all incomprehensible. 'Jamaican dancehall DJs carry the hopes of a dispossessed underclass in a way it is sometimes difficult for Europeans to understand', writes one music critic: 'This is a musical culture that expects vying DJs to clash: it is hard to imagine, say, Phil Collins and Cliff Richard battling for lyrical supremacy in front of a baying crowd, saluting them with live ammunition.' (*Independent*, 15 April 1993)

The underlying concern in all this is that the 'baying crowds' of the 'dispossessed underclass' are in danger of spilling on to Britain's streets, Los Angeles-style. In an article after the Le Palais shooting, an *Independent on Sunday* journalist carefully pointed out that most ragga fans were bewildered

race war

as to why anyone would take a gun to a concert. Yet he thought it necessary to remind them that 'while reggae fans are angered by the media reports, it is easy for the casual observer not to be too surprised by what happened' (*Independent on Sunday*, 18 April 1993). In justifying the remark, he managed to dig up three examples of shots being fired at ragga concerts in Britain in the past three years. Clearly it's not that easy.

Ragga is not the first kind of music to serve as a focus for demonising the black population. It is hard to imagine in these days when Bill Clinton embraces jazz in the White House, but jazz was once a focus for anti-black hysteria. So was rhythm and blues, and so, too, was reggae music.

Dangerous message

It is ironic that now, in an article headed 'Ragga: the music of guns and sex', the *London Evening Standard* can describe ragga as 'the malevolent child spawned from the cheerful woolly-hatted rastas of the late seventies', and argue that ragga 'has little of reggae's dreadlocks and brightly coloured charm' (14 April 1993). It is barely a decade since those cheerful, colourful, charming and reggae-loving rastas were being criminalised as drug-pushing rioters in the same newspapers. Yet today they are described as if they were as traditional and unthreatening as the boy from the Hovis ad, in contrast to the uppity young blacks who adhere to what the *Sunday Times* calls the 'foul-mouthed machismo of slack ragga'.

There is a dangerous message behind the row about ragga. The implication is that the prejudices of black men from the ghetto are somehow responsible for creating chauvinism against women and gays; that some of the least powerful people in society are to blame for social problems. In this scenario, the way that a racist system forces many black people to live degraded lifestyles is not the problem. Instead, the problem is the degrading outbursts of young blacks themselves. Or, as Playthell Benjamin said about rap star Ice Cube's anti-police response to the Los Angeles riots, 'one could argue that he is part of the problem rather than the solution'. ●

Shabba Ranks



These days it seems that one national newspaper article can be enough to start a serious scare about drugs, crime and video surveillance in a British city. Joanne Hayes reports from Nottingham

It is 4.20 on a Thursday afternoon in the St Anne's (*sic*) district of Nottingham, a poor area known to locals as Crack City'. So Melanie Phillips began her article in the *Guardian* at the end of February. Phillips may not have known how to spell St Ann's, but she was certain that crack cocaine is a new threat to people in that part of Nottingham. And what, she demanded to know, 'are the police doing about crack?':

'The answer appears to be that they are gathering huge amounts of intelligence but—to the bafflement and anger of many in the affected community—producing few court cases.' (27 February 1993)

It is a sign of the times that a leading columnist in a liberal newspaper should be leading a law and order campaign. And it is another sign of the times that such a lightweight article can start a serious public discussion about the need for firmer policing and more video surveillance in Nottingham. It seems that, in the present climate of insecurity, there is always a crime panic just waiting to happen. Anything can spark it off—even a *Guardian* article.

The catalyst

The Phillips piece proved to be the catalyst for reopening a discussion about introducing surveillance cameras all along the Radford Road in Hyson Green—the location of the Black and White cafe cited in her article. The Hyson Green Traders Association, police, community leaders and local journalists all met in response to the bad press Nottingham had received.

The traders suggested that cameras could demonstrate that people in the area were serious about cracking down on crime. They have been attempting to get a video system introduced for three years. They have backing from the police and all they need now is the funding. The Nottingham press picked up on this suggestion: 'City dealers

may be filmed', 'police spy cameras could soon be homing in on drug dealers on Nottingham's streets' (*Evening Post*, 18 March 1993).

None of the local bodies involved in the debates about crack and surveillance agrees with the view of Nottingham presented by Phillips. However, dismissing the article as hype or just wrong misses the point. The article and the debate it has provoked have fuelled the consensus that crack is a major problem which people in Nottingham should be worried about, and that tough law and order measures are needed.

Trace the development of the concern about crack in Nottingham, and the superficial character of the panic becomes clear. In April 1989 a representative from the US Drugs Enforcement Agency met chief constables in Britain to outline the danger of an explosion of crack use based on the American experience. This seminar was followed three months later by the publication of the Stutman report by the home affairs

committee, in which MPs described crack as the 'single most addicting drug available in the US' and a major cause of violent crime and family breakdown. They predicted that the use of crack in this country was likely to increase significantly.

The detective inspector of the Nottingham drugs squad at the time was also a member of the National Drugs Intelligence Unit, and he initiated a clampdown on crack in Nottingham in 1990. This, however, proved to be an embarrassment for the police. Before the high-profile campaign, the number of arrests for crack-related offences in Nottingham was just five in 1987, five in 1988, and eight in 1989. After the crackdown, these figures soared to eight in 1990, and seven in 1991. The seizure of crack which Nottinghamshire police claimed as the biggest in Britain in 1990 was in fact an insignificant catch amounting to only about 60 doses.

According to official figures published in *Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs: Seizures and Offenders*



Radford Road could soon
have more cameras than
Coronation Street



No 'Crack City'

dealt with, United Kingdom 1990 (HMSO), the absolute seizures of problem drugs in Nottinghamshire were generally very low compared to other English police force areas. Nottinghamshire had the fourth lowest total after Durham, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire, none of which contains urban centres comparable in size to Nottingham city.

The anti-crack crusade has proved a fiasco. But the response from local commentators and politicians has been that the police should put even more effort into it. The approach now widely advocated is to forget about chasing after elusive major drug suppliers, and instead go for the small fry which at least would boost the arrest figures.

Melanie Phillips has added her voice to this call.

So what is all the fuss about in relation to crack? Central to Phillips' claim of a major increase in crack use in Nottingham is a report by Philip Bean and Yvonne Pearson, commissioned by the Home Office. They carried out two studies in Nottingham, in 1989-90 and 1991-92, in which they interviewed local crack users. Phillips says that 'this small-scale study suggested a huge increase in crack use in Nottingham, maybe as much as doubling between 1989 and 1991'.

In fact, there is no hard evidence of any 'huge increase in crack use in Nottingham'. The two studies on

which the report was based involved interviews with a handful of users; 29 in the first study and 34 in the second. The report did state that both these users and Drugs Dependency Anonymous (DDA), which supplied contacts for the 1991-92 study, suggested a considerable increase in crack use. But the report also qualified these findings:

'Given that we contacted our subjects through drug services and criminal justice agencies it is likely that they were not representative of the Nottingham crack-using population in 1989-90 and 1991-92. In both groups we interviewed, most of the users were in their late twenties to mid-thirties, ►



few were in regular legitimate employment and many were engaged in drug-dealing or prostitution.'

We spoke to various Nottingham agencies and professionals in the field, such as the Alcohol and Drugs Team, Drugs Dependency Anonymous and the Bail Support Unit for juvenile offenders. Although some suggested that there had been an increase in crack use in the city, none could provide any hard evidence. Indeed, the DDA

Selling crack as the major problem facing people in Nottingham is nothing short of criminal

pointed out that the biggest increase in drug addicts coming to them over the past year was among Chippendale lookalike bodybuilders, who have used too many steroids for their own good. Yet it seems unlikely that we will see police raids on gyms.

Let us concede for a moment that there might have been an increase in crack use among a small number of people in Nottingham. So what? Why should this rare drug now be elevated into one of the biggest problems facing people in Nottingham, as suggested by the label 'Crack City'? It is absurd for Phillips or anybody else to conclude that crack is a justifiable excuse for more repressive policing, arrests and surveillance in Nottingham. The closer you look, the more the crack scare looks like a classic crime panic.

No coincidence

Nor can it be a coincidence that coverage of crack tends to be concentrated around deprived inner-city areas with large black communities, reinforcing the public criminalisation of the people who live in these areas. A 1990 report by the Nottingham Alcohol and Drug Team observed that the known use of drugs was only marginally higher in the city than elsewhere in Nottinghamshire: 'although 67 per cent of known problem drug users reside in greater Nottingham, this area has just under 60 per cent of the county's population. The prevalence within the population of Greater Nottingham is comparable with that in the rest of the county.'

The lack of hard evidence of a crack epidemic has not prevented prominent commentators condemning a new wave of drugs and degeneracy in Nottingham. Phillips' detective novel-style description of inner-city life suggests her contempt for the people

of these areas. Nobody in Nottingham would recognise her account of sleazy streets where 'crack appears to be available in the city all day and all night', where cafes seem to sell more drugs than food, gun crime has flourished, and dealers zip around in flash cars with mobile phones delivering crack rather than pizzas.

Author Alan Sillitoe, originally from Nottingham, recently contributed to the crime debate in the Nottingham *Evening Post*. His concern was to contrast the present to the past:

'The violence was less; your body wasn't targeted. You wouldn't be mugged. Kids threw stones, and you might be bullied, but it was play rather than serious harm.'
(16 March 1993)

One glance at Sillitoe's most famous novel of working class life in Nottingham, *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1958) tells a slightly different story. Among other episodes, Sillitoe's main character, Arthur, helps a drunk home and steals his wallet on the way; downs 12 and a half pints and seven gins and throws up over a woman; and shoots a neighbour in the face with an air rifle for gossiping. Like many others, Sillitoe now seems to suffer from selective amnesia. He also advocates putting today's offending youth into ex-army camps converted into borstals—a 'solution' which Sillitoe himself once ridiculed in his other great Nottingham novel, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*.

The bandwagon

Along with authors and journalists, Nottingham politicians have leaped aboard the law-and-order bandwagon. The Labour-led city council organised a major event at the end of April on the theme of safer cities, and many candidates of all parties for the May local council elections emphasised the issue of crime in the city.

All of this has inevitably had some impact upon public opinion in Nottingham. While most local people want nothing to do with Phillips' contemptuous description of their city, many do express new worries about drugs and crime. They appear to be projecting their own fears and insecurities about inner-city decline and the wider decay of society on to these issues.

Phillips interviewed a couple of drug users and used a survey that interviewed only 34 people. We conducted an equally scientific survey of around 80 people in 'Crack City'—shopkeepers and shoppers along the main part of the Radford Road associated with drug dealing. Only eight could say from their own

experience that they knew of crack dealing in the area. The rest either had not heard of crack, or thought that there might be dealing and use in the area... because they had read that there was in the newspapers. Nice one, Melanie.

Asked, unprompted, what they thought were the biggest problems in the area, people tended to volunteer that it was tatty and that there was too much unemployment and poverty. Drugs came lower on the list than all of these; in fact, there were fewer people who mentioned drugs than said that there were no big problems in the area at all. When we introduced issues of crime into the discussion, however, most people did identify this as an equally big problem for them. Even though they had usually 'experienced' crime as a problem that happened to someone else, like vandalism or drug use, fear of it was common.

Selling crack scares

It seems that people's worries about the day-to-day problems which they experience in the slump tend to become confused with fear of crime when public debate is refocused onto drugs and other law-and-order issues. This is the dangerous offence committed by those now peddling scare stories about crack. Nottingham is a city where unemployment stands at almost 20 per cent and rising (six more pits are now going with the loss of three thousand jobs), and where more than 2000 single people aged 16-18 are registered homeless. When the media and politicians start selling crack as the major problem facing people in Nottingham, it is nothing short of criminal.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of our informal survey was that nearly two-thirds of the people we spoke to supported the introduction of surveillance cameras. Yet almost the same number thought that their introduction would not stop crime. It seems that, in these times of mass unemployment and economic insecurity, people are prepared to accept anything that seems to offer them some measure of control and protection, however illusory it might be.

The unfortunate irony is that, while more policing and cameras might appear a tempting short-term solution, they will in fact mean that people experience an even greater loss of control over their lives, as the authorities take a firmer grip on life in inner-city Nottingham. It will be little solace to know that someone will be watching your misery on a screen at the other end of a closed-circuit television system.

(Additional research from *Living Marxism* supporters in Nottingham)



Aids panic over?

Until recently when anyone involved in the provision of public services wanted money they would try to hook it to an Aids-related budget. There was no money in the corporate pot to house the homeless—but if you set up a project to stop the spread of HIV among the homeless, grants started flowing. Hospices for Aids sufferers mushroomed while funds for care for the elderly shrivelled. Health spending on Aids has risen while virtually every other area of health spending has been axed. Last month, junior health minister, Tom Sackville confirmed that the government had spent £886m on its Aids campaign since 1986—probably enough to have kept us all in free condoms.

However, the Aids gravy train seems finally to have been pulled off the tracks. The government has announced plans to reduce spending on the Aids publicity campaign. Britain's largest Aids charity, the Terrence Higgins Trust is to have its three-year grant of £450 000 cut by £300 000, and the London Lighthouse hospice is also to feel the knife. 'We need to refine our strategy', said health secretary Virginia Bottomley, announcing plans to target Aids funding at high-risk groups.

Has the Department of Health just woken up to the fact that the projected Aids epidemic among heterosexuals has not materialised? As we've indicated many times in *Living Marxism*, projected increases in the number of Aids cases in Britain have always been wildly off the mark. In 1988 it was officially estimated that up to 50 000 people in Britain had already been infected with HIV, of whom 5000 had allegedly been infected through heterosexual contact. Now, five years on, estimates from the same official sources put the maximum number of HIV carriers at 30 000.

Move from guesstimates to hard data, and the picture becomes clearer. New figures from the Public Health Laboratory Service reveal that there hasn't even been an epidemic among those in high-risk groups—mainly homosexual men and intravenous drug users—let alone the rest of the population. The number of reported Aids cases among homosexuals seems to have plateaued at about 1000 a year, and there are still just 63 Aids cases in Britain among people who have no known connection with high-risk groups. During the time that the government spent that £886 million, 7731 cases of Aids, and 16 164 cases of HIV, were reported in the UK.

It is inconceivable that the government's reversal of health spending policies is based on a sudden realisation that Aids is not a rampaging epidemic. Nor is it likely that they only recently discovered they had spent more than £37 000 for each HIV/Aids sufferer. Every quarter the Public Health Laboratory Service and Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre issues statistics demonstrating the incidence of HIV and Aids. *Living Marxism* has often used these figures to demonstrate that the Aids panic has been wildly out of proportion to reality. The Department of Health, meanwhile, has ignored or distorted every set of figures that didn't back up their 'safe sex or death' message.

So why the change of heart? A central motivation is the desire to save money. The economic slump has put the squeeze on all areas of

public spending, and health services have been granted no immunity. Bottomley has already announced plans to ration health services in the future. But the Treasury wants action to save money, not just in the future, but now. Although spending on the Aids publicity campaign has developed the status of a sacred cow, it is one that can be sacrificed with relatively little bloodshed today because it has largely served its intended purpose.

The panic about Aids was never rooted in a genuine desire to prevent the spread of a deadly epidemic. Right from the start of the government's safe sex campaign in 1986, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick has both exposed the medical myths about Aids and pointed out that the government's concern was not with public health. Its main motivation for sponsoring an Aids panic, he argued, was to manipulate people's fears of a sexually transmitted disease in order to popularise old-fashioned family values. The government didn't invent Aids. But it recognised that Aids had a useful quality as a vehicle for a moral

message. The message was that if you lived a 'blameless life', restricted sexual relations to those you could love and trust and stayed clear of drugs, you were safe. However, those who rejected 'decent' standards, were at risk. And to an extent it has worked. Sexual conservatism has become fashionable again, in words if not in deeds.

But the limitations of the moral panic are becoming clearer with every report that is published. It is no surprise to find the Department of Health now trying to put

a bit of distance between it and the 'use a condom or die' predictions.

All the latest studies into sexual behaviour have shown that while we talk about the problems of casual sex, we still engage in it. And while we understand the 'need' to use a condom, when push comes to shove, many of us can't quite bring ourselves to roll on the rubber. Yet we're still alive and uninfected.

Epidemiologists are also now identifying a link (first revealed in *Living Marxism* four years ago) between the safe sex campaigns and a rising rate of teenage pregnancy. It seems that teenage girls have taken the safer sex message closest to heart and switched from the pill to the condom. The consequence: lots of teenagers with great protection against HIV (which they're unlikely to encounter) but miserable protection against sperm (which they are very likely to meet). The result: a rising rate of teenage pregnancies and abortions—not something which the Tories want to be associated with. When leading gynaecologists start admitting in their own journals that they seem to have got the safe sex message slightly wrong, it's time for the government to shift emphasis.

Taken together, all of these factors provide the government with a reason to scale down the Aids panic and save some money. Don't expect Aids to drop out of the headlines. The 'moral message' is far too useful for the government to abandon altogether. But moral panics run into trouble when their message flies in the face of people's experience and of the facts—and the Aids panic is looking increasingly short of facts to support it. ●

Aids has been a useful vehicle for a moral message

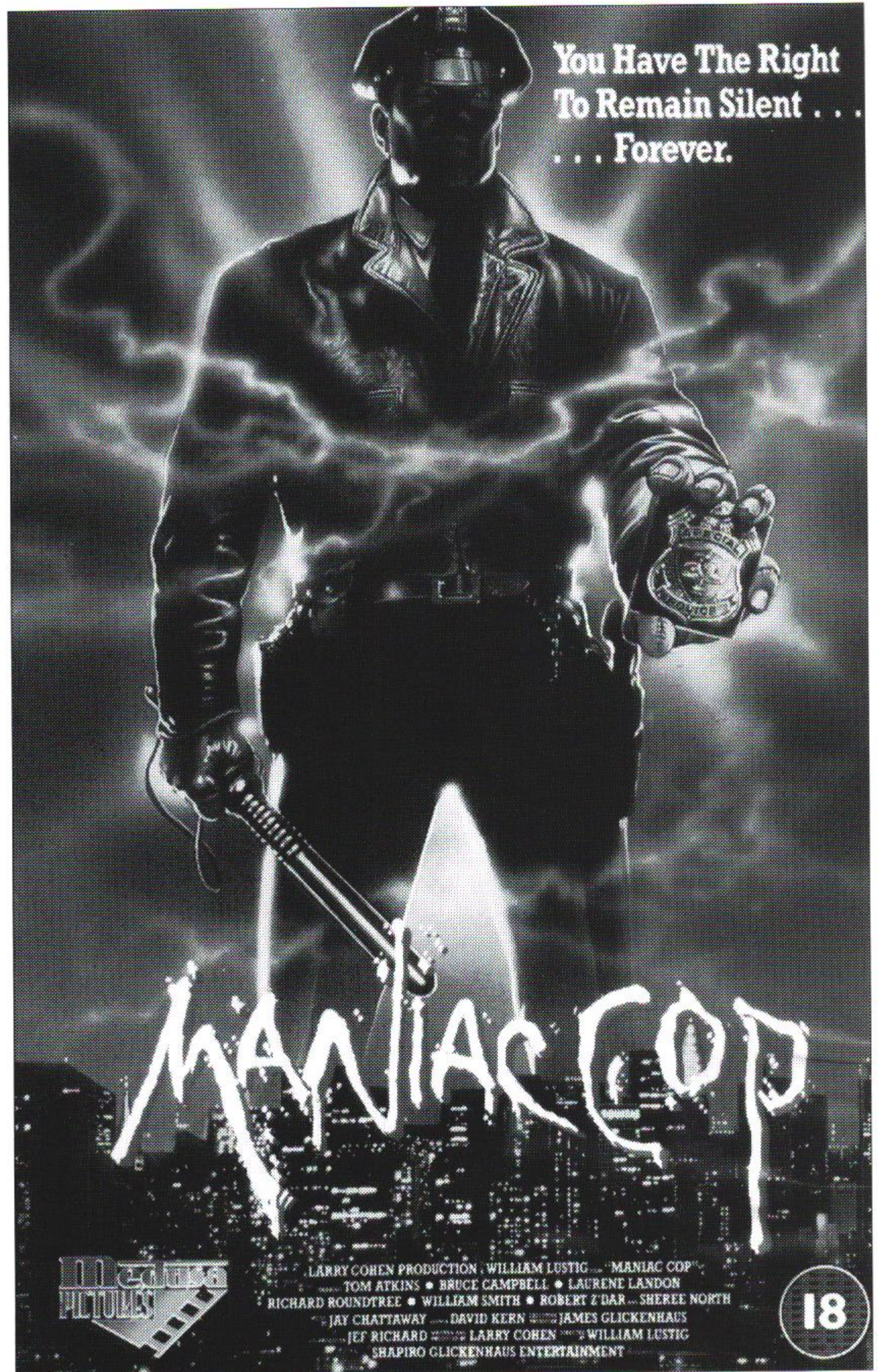
Police torture,

The brutal beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department was no isolated incident; the only unusual thing was that it was videotaped and so made headlines around the world. Christian Parenti reports from New York on the systematic police terror against black Americans that goes unreported

The scars on Andrew Wilson's chest and thighs were so bad that on 10 February 1993 Commander Jon Burge of the Chicago Police was found guilty of 'physical abuse'. Wilson had been accused of killing a cop. After beating, smothering and performing a mock execution on him, Burge and his men handcuffed Wilson face-first to a hot radiator and applied electric shocks to his body. Commander Burge's dismissal came only after 15 years and upwards of 60 allegations that he and his colleagues were torturing confessions from black suspects. Burge's two accomplices in the Wilson case, John Yucaitis and Patrick O'Hara, were both busted from detectives down to patrolmen.

Pinochet-style policing

The latest of Burge's victims to come forward was 13 year-old Marcus Wiggins. Wiggins, who had no previous record, was caught in a police dragnet following what was reported to be a gang-related murder. Once in the custody of Commander Burge, Wiggins was beaten and tortured with electric shocks. After several hours the youth confessed to murder. Wiggins has since recanted, yet may still waste away his youth in a criminal finishing school, even though his confession was conjured forth with Pinochet-style encouragements.



Despite the fact that Commander Burge, one of the top cops in Chicago, was found guilty of bona fide torture, this case was hardly picked up by the national media. The only paper to give prominent coverage to the last act of the Burge story was the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago's paper of record) offered a cursory mention on page seven. The *New York Times*, The *Washington Post*, National Public Radio and even progressive Pacifica Radio were silent. Though some of these sources may

have covered the initial allegations, only local papers caught the finale, and so brought the story from the realm of 'accusations' to fact.

This lack of interest in one of the most horrendous cases of police terror ever proven is unfortunate but not surprising. Given the increasingly important role played by police in the day-to-day maintenance of the American status quo, it makes sense that those benefiting from present social arrangements—that includes the owners of most media outlets—would

press silence

not rake about in the muck left by the forces of law and order.

'Rogue cops' like Commander Burge are not aberrations, but rather main characters in the torrid drama of America's 'urban crisis'. After all, last autumn in New York City, 10 000 armed and drunken off-duty police officers rioted at city hall, insulting the mayor and a city councilwoman with racist epithets and impunity.

A footnote

All too often police brutality of this sort is reported as a metro-section footnote to the war on crime. Never does the mainstream media draw links between the nature of police work and the oppressive nature of the larger society. Articles about police abuse tend to focus on the particulars of specific cases. Very rarely does the press connect these individual cases of 'misconduct' to the general epidemic of police abuse.

The fact is that abuse is built into the very core of police work, and this is reflected in the attitude of many cops. As one San Francisco police officer told me, his job consisted of 'cleaning up garbage'. With such a contemptuous view of the public it is no surprise that brutality is routine and terror a favoured tactic.

The cover-up of police brutality does not start with silence in the press, but rather with the structure of policing. In New York City cops are given a 48-hour 'cooling off' period before filing reports about violent altercations. This allows the officers two days to coordinate their stories and build their alibis against any charges of abuse.

Even when victims of police brutality are courageous and organised enough to file charges, the paperwork is often lost, left incomplete or otherwise botched by police officials, with the effect of protecting their colleagues.

Take for example the case of Rodney King. After the infamous beating in Los Angeles, both King's

brother and George Holliday, the man who videotaped the police assault on King, tried to file complaints at the Foothill police station. Both times the paperwork was fumbled by the cops. The station sergeant, who personally received the complaint from King's brother, reported in the station log that 'no investigation was necessary'. Cases similar to this are so numerous, and so under-reported that when they do make the press they have an air of absurdity about them.

Often there is police cover-up even in cases of negligence. For example in 1991 political activist Victor Vasquez was being held in San Francisco's North station. Victor's cellmate, a homeless African-American man, attempted to hang himself from the cell door. When police responded to Vasquez shouting for help they slid the cell door open with such force that the hanging man broke his neck.

A day or two later when Vasquez was released from jail, he enquired after the man whose name he did not know. The sergeant on duty during the night of the 'accident' denied that such an event had occurred, telling Vasquez he was 'crazy'. It was only with the help of lawyers that Vasquez was finally able to locate the injured man, in the bowels of a public hospital.

Blank stare from TV

That sort of brutality and neglect followed by a cover-up happens all the time. It is the first tier in a colossal wall of denial about police cruelty. The final tier being complicit silence in the national press and a blank stare from the cathode-ray scribe of history—television.

Many city governments help to perpetuate the denial of police terror. They will pay-off the victims of police abuse who sue for damages, so as to keep them quiet. Yet they do not use the evidence collected in these civil suits against the offending officers on their police forces.

Amnesty International's 1991 report on the Los Angeles Police Department

was based entirely on investigating brutality cases that had been prosecuted by suits in civil court. According to the report, of the more than 60 cases investigated 'virtually none' had been prosecuted in a state criminal court. In other words, police officers are routinely found guilty of abuse in civil suits, yet never face criminal charges or even internal discipline. The American press has almost nothing to say about this.

Three of the four officers in the King case were repeat offenders, having faced abuse charges in the past; one officer had even been suspended for 60 days. The fourth, Officer Wind, was a rookie and still learning the ropes as it were.

\$44m pay-off

According to Citizens' Alert, a Chicago-based police accountability group, and reports in the Chicago press, a similar dynamic exists in that city. Chicago mayor Richard Daley has just requested a tax hike amounting to \$28.7m, \$11.6m of which is for police pay rises. Yet in the past five years Chicago has spent \$27.69m as a result of lawsuits filed by alleged victims of police abuse. So while the taxpayers pick up the tab for police brutality, the city rewards the perpetrators.

New York has the same problem. According to the *Village Voice*, a report by New York City comptroller Liz Holtzman shows that from 1987 to 1991 New York City paid \$44m in damages to the victims of police abuse. The New York Police Department won't comment on the fate of officers involved in these civil cases, but all evidence indicates that most officers went unpunished. Furthermore most police accountability groups believe that civil suits are just the tip of the iceberg, representing perhaps only 10 per cent of all police brutality.

It is high time the national media started to examine the scope and horror of police violence and torture in America.

It is no longer fashionable to question the motives for Western intervention in Bosnia, Somalia or Iraq. What would once have been condemned as gunboat diplomacy is now widely embraced as humanitarian peace-keeping. Yet the consequences for those on the receiving end of Western militarism seem as painful as ever.

When peace means

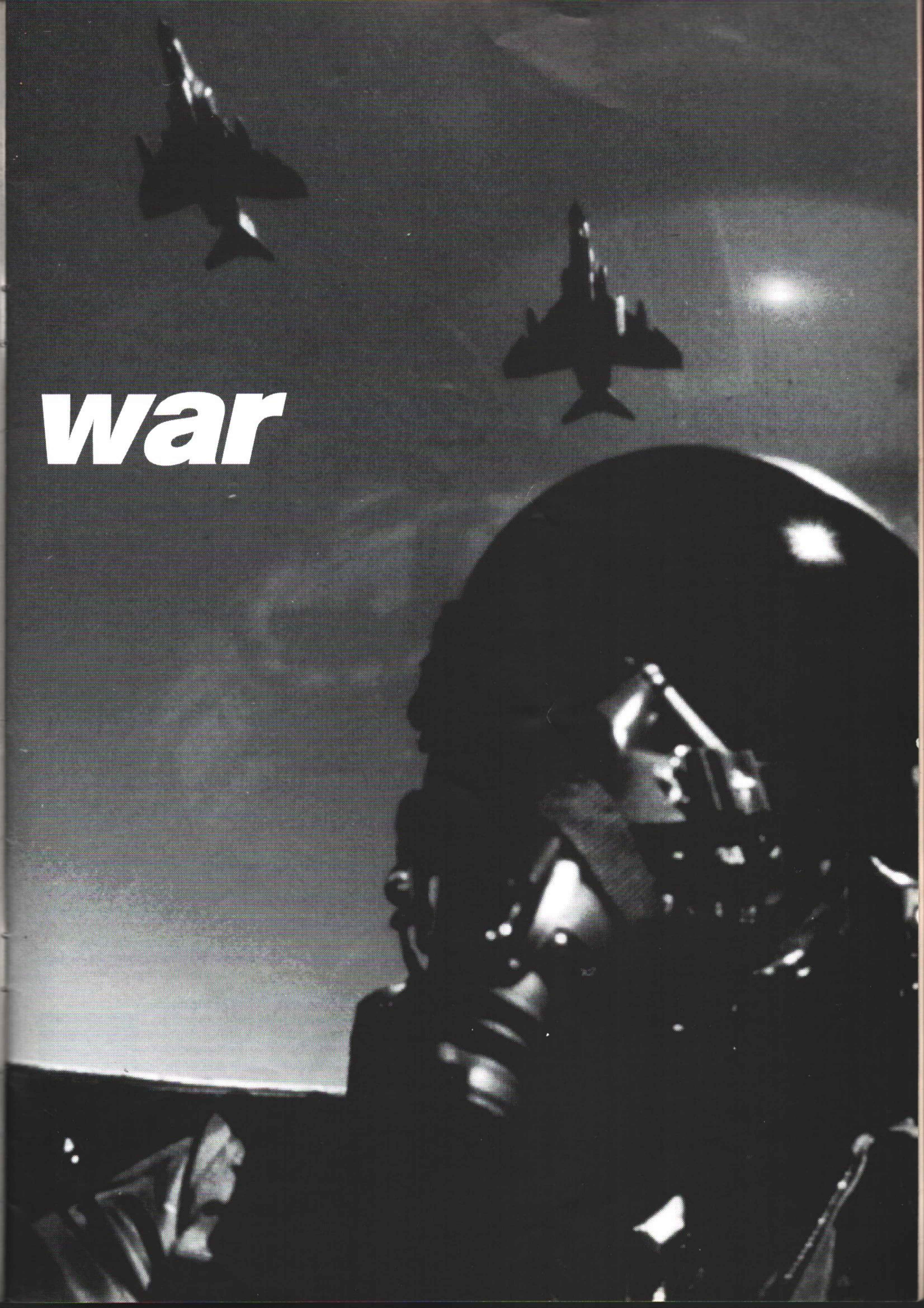
Pat Roberts looks behind the moralistic language in which Great Power diplomacy is now couched, to identify the real aims of increased Western intervention. The foreign adventures of Western governments today, he finds, have nothing to do with saving lives abroad, and everything to do with salvaging the authority of ruling parties and institutions at home

In the old days at least you knew where you stood. It was called the War Office. Today it is called the Ministry of Defence. Back in the old days wars of intervention were called military invasions—today we live in the era of peace-keeping forces. No Western power ever goes to war any more; their actions are purely defensive. Soldiers are peace-keepers, and if we are to believe what we are told their careers are devoted to saving lives, feeding the hungry and caring for the infirm. Armies are really composed of humanitarian missionaries disguised as men of the sword.

The confusion of peace with war is widespread. For example, nobody has commented on the fact that almost 200 000 Iraqis lost their lives in the Gulf War, while the Western peace-keeping forces suffered a relative handful of casualties. Once upon a time such a disproportionate difference in the number of deaths would have alerted people to the fact that this conflict was not what it seemed. It would have been described by sensible people as a massacre. Today, by contrast, the reaction is one of studied indifference. Even the old-fashioned pacifists are conspicuous by their absence. Paradoxically, often it is the old pacifists and leftists who are most vociferous about calling for military intervention in Bosnia.

It is no longer fashionable to question the motives behind Western intervention. The obvious question as to why Western peacemakers are preoccupied with Bosnia, rather than the far bloodier confrontations in Angola or Azerbaijan or Cambodia, is seldom posed. There is a similar ►

war





lack of questioning as to what has happened to the past targets of Western intervention. Six months ago Somalia was world news. Today, it is just a dim memory. And who can recall Panama?

The absence of debate on the rights and wrongs of Western motives suggests an unusual degree of public acquiescence towards military adventures. Above all this has led to a situation in which one of the defining characteristics of our time—the militarisation of international

to intervene in Bosnia. As far as most Americans were concerned Bosnia was a soft drink. Yet it would be wrong to see Clinton's high international profile as simply the product of a cynical manoeuvre. He is reacting to the intractable nature of America's domestic problems. Everything in America, as in other Western capitalist societies, is spontaneously pushing governments in an external direction.

For any Western government today the domestic arena is fraught

into international affairs.

On most issues in Britain and other Western nations today there is no obvious consensus, and certainly no positive one. Even questions traditionally considered to be outside political debate—like teaching methods or the monarchy—are now subjects of controversy. The issue of Europe divides the political class. There is no strategic conception of where society ought to be going. There are no goals to be worked towards. There are merely negative goals. So full employment is now renounced as utopian. But nobody indicates what is the best way of employing the creative potential of human beings. The absence of consensus on domestic matters is shown by the inability of even the ruling parties to agree on matters of substance. Today 'good government' means managing to avoid major political rows within your own party ranks.

In contrast to the confusion and incoherence of domestic politics, there is a powerful consensus behind the notion that the West has the moral right to intervene in the third world and the East. There is some public criticism of certain forms of intervention, but not of the basic premise that the West has the right to determine the future of the rest of the world.

Claim the high ground

According to this consensus, 'they' are the problem and the West possesses the solution. This view has been boosted by the collapse of any other pole of moral authority. Even former third world liberation movements, which would once have denounced Western imperialism, sometimes appeal for Western intervention today. Many Muslim figures have criticised the United Nations for not intervening in Bosnia. Some Palestinian leaders have criticised the West for ignoring their predicament while adopting a high profile elsewhere. Criticisms such as these only endow the Western powers and their international institutions with more credibility and moral authority, since they imply that their intervention could make the situation better.

The fact that the West can now present its military engagements and diplomatic manoeuvres as a reluctant but necessary response to a plea for help ensures that such interventions become a unique source of moral authority. It is in this sphere that Western capitalism can claim the moral high ground.

Not so long ago the cry directed at the USA and the other Western powers was 'Get out!'—of Vietnam, of Lebanon, of Central America. Now pictures of freezing

It is far easier to be seen to do some good in Iraq or Somalia than to tackle urban decay in America

politics—has gone virtually unnoticed. The reason for this development is the forging of a powerful moral consensus behind the Western powers.

It is worth noting in passing that the emergence of the Western moral consensus was predicated upon the decline of the West's competitors. The disintegration of the Stalinist bloc, the collapse of the third worldist perspective, and not least of the Western left and labour movements, served to affirm Western capitalism. After all, of the postwar world order, only the West remains intact. So the power of the moral consensus is based not on something authoritative *within* Western society, but on the apparent absence of any alternatives external to it.

No conspiracy

From the point of view of ruling elites in the West, intervention abroad makes sense. There is no need to resort to conspiracy theories to explain the recent intensification of foreign intervention. When Bill Clinton criticised president George Bush for spending too much time abroad he really meant what he said. When Clinton promised to spend more time dealing with the internal problems of America, he no doubt meant every word. And once he got elected, Clinton probably never saw any inconsistency between these promises and the fact that in practice his policies became preoccupied with Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Russia.

There are of course manipulations and lies. After the publication of a series of opinion polls in the USA, Clinton could no longer claim that popular pressure was forcing him

with difficulties. There are no obvious economic policies for tackling the problems of stagnation, lack of productive investment and unemployment. Most societies demonstrate a considerable level of fragility, and appear immune to any positive effects of government action. Under these circumstances governments appear at once irrelevant and ineffective. But in relation to abroad, things seem different. For Clinton, as for Bush, it is far easier to be seen to be doing some good in Somalia or in Iraq than to deal with the problem of urban decay. Politicians in all Western countries are increasingly drawn towards such conclusions.

There are various other forces at work which reinforce the trend towards militarisation. The growing rivalry among Western powers and increasing global economic anarchy boost international conflict. But these long-term trends are given shape and force by the domestic malaise in Western societies.

The place to be seen

It is important to emphasise that we are witnessing something more than the traditional manoeuvre of using foreign adventures to distract from domestic problems. Today the crises facing governments at home are far worse—and the chances to act abroad are greater. What is distinct about the present is that while Western governments lack the basis for forging a viable consensus of support within the domestic arena, on the international plane such opportunities still exist. So, simply to be seen to be doing something, governments are drawn

Kurds, starving Somalis and brutalised Bosnian Muslims help to strengthen the public impression that *not* to intervene would be an act of callous cruelty. The conclusion which politicians draw for their public is that, whatever problems might exist at home, the state of the rest of the world shows that the West is still the best of all possible societies. Today this conclusion is not likely to be contested by any significant forces in the West.

Probably the only 'achievement' of the Thatcher era that has not yet been undermined by subsequent events was the invasion of the Falklands. The consensus behind such operations is even stronger today. At least there were critics of the Falklands adventure. Yet many who criticised that operation are now calling for the deployment of force against the Serbs. What this means in effect is that, however low the government's esteem might be on domestic matters, there is a total acceptance of its right to intervene abroad.

Churchillian speeches

As erstwhile left wingers queue to express support for Margaret Thatcher's demand to hammer the Serbs in Bosnia, it is clear that distinctions between left and right have even less relevance in the international sphere than in any other. Consequently it is in this realm that support for the Western political system may best be consolidated. These days it seems as if the way to gain political stature is by making bold, Churchillian speeches demanding international sacrifice on behalf of the helpless people of the Balkans. Alternatively

humanitarian missions are getting in each other's way and making matters worse in Somalia is neither here nor there. It is enough to feed the Western public with a few pictures of grateful children receiving aid packages.

The public consensus behind the moral authority of the West is not a particularly dynamic or active one. Opinion polls and anecdotal evidence suggest that there is a high degree of cynicism towards many of the claims which politicians make about their international posture. The Western public is largely indifferent to international developments.

Crisis of legitimacy

However, this indifference and cynicism tends to be targeted at individual politicians or institutions. The basic authority of the West to act as the arbiter of the affairs of others is not put in question. As a consequence, regardless of the state of public opinion on this or that international issue, there is at least a broad consensus on the fundamentals. And, at a time when even the future of the Anglican Establishment is in question in Britain, a consensus on anything significant becomes a precious political asset for the authorities.

The militarisation of politics and the quest for a moral consensus is bound up with the key problem facing Western political institutions. That central problem is the crisis of political legitimacy. In the post-Cold War world order, the dominant Western political systems appear more fragile than previously. This fragility coexists with a manifest dearth of political ideas and solutions. The exhaustion of Western political institutions is

find a major political party anywhere in Europe that genuinely enjoys the affection of the public. Governmental parties seem to bounce from one corruption scandal to another. Even institutions that used to be beyond reproach, such as the British royal family or the Church of England, are regarded with increasing cynicism.

What is at issue is not an isolated political scandal. It is easy to see the collapse of the political institutions of Italy as some exotic affair to do with the mafia. However, this institutional disintegration, along with the exposure of Italy's corrupt political elite, is only the clearest symptom of the malaise that affects the whole of the West. That malaise has to do with the inability of political systems to reproduce legitimacy for their institutions. This problem of legitimacy now acts as the main stimulus for projecting domestic problems on to the international sphere. The high international profile adopted by the Western powers is part of the process of recasting the legitimacy of Western political institutions.

A hi-tech Crusade

The preoccupation with the problem of legitimacy explains the peculiar character of Western militarism today. Unlike in the past, there are no predatory mass movements demanding that the West goes to war. Most governments are keen to emphasise their opposition to increased military spending. The public rhetoric is not about military valour or a national crusade, but about upholding the humanitarian duties of a civilised society. The focus is on saving lives rather than on building spheres of influence. It is as if traditional *realpolitik* has given way to the diplomacy of self-sacrifice and altruism. In reality the objective is to occupy the moral high ground. In this way the new hi-tech Crusade against selected barbarians can help the Western authorities to negotiate their problems of legitimacy at home.

The moral language with which Western intervention is justified today appears to contradict the aggressive spirit of militarism as much as the dogged zeal of the Victorian missionaries who went out to Africa to save the souls of the savages. But just as the activity of soul-saving a century ago had unpredictable consequences written in the blood of hundreds of thousands, so the humanitarian gestures of today will not end with the distribution of food packages. Unless the morality of the new imperialism is contested, the consequences for humanity will be no less barbaric than the effects of the colonialism of the past.

The new hi-tech Crusade can help the Western authorities to negotiate their problems of legitimacy at home

it looks good to be seen on primetime television giving a dressing down to Serbian politicians or Balkan militiamen.

The militarisation of politics is a way of consolidating a degree of support for the discredited political institutions of the West. It is only on issues such as Iraq, Somalia and Bosnia that any positive consensus has been created in recent times. That is why no Western government wants to be left out. The fact that numerous competing

suggested by the new wave of criticisms of the relevance of democracy for the societies of Eastern Europe, China and the third world.

The exhaustion of Western political systems is shown by the strong anti-political cynicism that seems to infect public discussion. The parties of the left have lost the most credibility. But the parties of the right are not immune to the process of political corrosion. It is difficult to

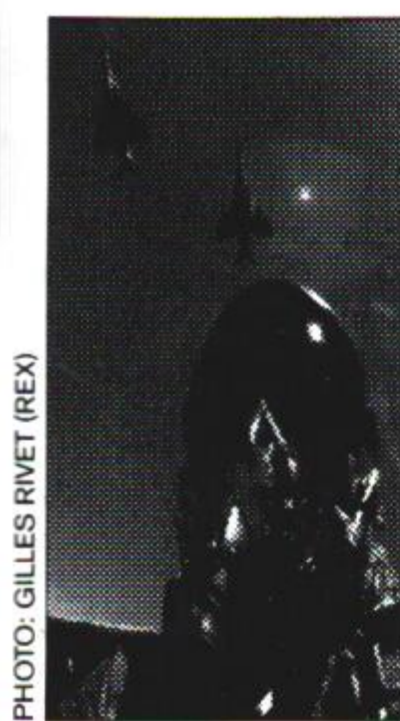


PHOTO: GILLES RIVET (REX)

A mess made

Recent developments reveal that Western intervention is the problem not the solution in Bosnia, says Joan Phillips

Almost everybody agrees that Western intervention is the only way to sort out the mess in Bosnia. The debate is about what form that intervention should take—sanctions, safe-havens, arming the Muslims, air-strikes or an army of occupation?

But the West has been intervening in Yugoslavia for the past two years—and to catastrophic effect. Intervention has taken many forms, from diplomatic recognition for secessionist states such as Croatia to trade sanctions against Serbia. And the more the West has become involved the more the conflict has escalated.

Any further Western interference will make matters worse not better in Bosnia. The West cannot provide a solution to the war because it is at the heart of the problem.

Western intervention destabilised the delicate balance that existed in Yugoslavia. Every student of international relations knows that each region of the world depends upon a certain equilibrium. If that equilibrium is disturbed the fallout can be fatal.

Balance of power

Yugoslavia worked as long as a regional balance was maintained—a balance of power among the six republics which subscribed to a unified federal state, as well as a balance of rights and religions among the peoples intermingled throughout the republics.

That balance was already being strained in the late eighties and early nineties by the increasingly vocal claims made by some members of the federation, Slovenia and Croatia, for more autonomy. The resort to nationalism by politicians in all republics was also tipping the balance, instilling fear among communities such as the Serbs in Croatia and contributing to inter-communal tensions. But it took the intervention of outside powers to destroy the balance entirely, internationalising a regional conflict and fanning the flames of war.

The diplomatic backing given by Germany to the secessionists in Slovenia and Croatia was decisive. While publicly endorsing the EC policy of maintaining the integrity of Yugoslavia, behind the scenes the German foreign minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, was urging the Croats to secede and declare independence. Bonn's support for the secessionist states polarised the situation inside Yugoslavia, and removed any possibility of a compromise solution along the lines of a looser confederation of republics.

All up for grabs

Once the internal balance had been destroyed by outside intervention it was inevitable that Yugoslavia would implode. First, Croatia itself disintegrated as the Serbs established their own autonomous areas inside the republic. The ensuing civil war in Croatia had the effect of polarising communities in Bosnia. And the moves towards secession in that republic accelerated fragmentary tendencies elsewhere. And so the splintering process went on.

By calling into question the old borders, the Western powers created a situation where everything was up for grabs. A good example of how Western meddling has created a process of destabilisation is in the one republic which everybody thought had escaped unscathed. Slovenia is now at loggerheads with both Italy and Croatia in separate disputes about borders. The Slovenian defence minister Janez Jansa, has threatened that the army will defend Slovenia's borders by force if necessary.

The forces of fragmentation unleashed by Western interference have had repercussions beyond Yugoslavia. Other Balkan states—from Albania and Greece to Bulgaria and Turkey—have become embroiled in the Yugoslav conflict. Apart from trying to cash in on the carve-up by pursuing irredentist claims, as Albania has done in Kosovo, neighbouring

states are also seeking to improve their standing in the chancelleries of the West, as Turkey has demonstrated by its decision to send F-16 fighters to join Nato operations over Bosnia (antagonising the Greeks in the process).

Western intervention has also made the situation worse in Yugoslavia by encouraging a client mentality in a region with a history of weak states attaching themselves to great powers. German backing for Slovenia and Croatia acted as a green light to other republics to opt out of Yugoslavia and seek Western patronage.

Before the West began meddling in Yugoslavia, local politicians still publicly supported the integrity of Bosnia and its place in the Yugoslav federation. The Muslim leader, Alija Izetbegovic, and the Serbian leader, Radovan Karadzic, were agreed that as long as Yugoslavia was intact, Bosnia should not try to secede.

By June 1991, however, when it became clear that Germany supported the break-up of Yugoslavia, Izetbegovic began soliciting international support for an independent Bosnia. In October 1991, he pushed a declaration of sovereignty through the Bosnian parliament. In December 1991, after the EC had agreed to recognise Slovenia and Croatia, the Bosnian presidency requested recognition too, in the face of opposition from its Serbian members. This polarised the situation in Bosnia even further, and encouraged the Bosnian Serbs to declare themselves part of Yugoslavia.

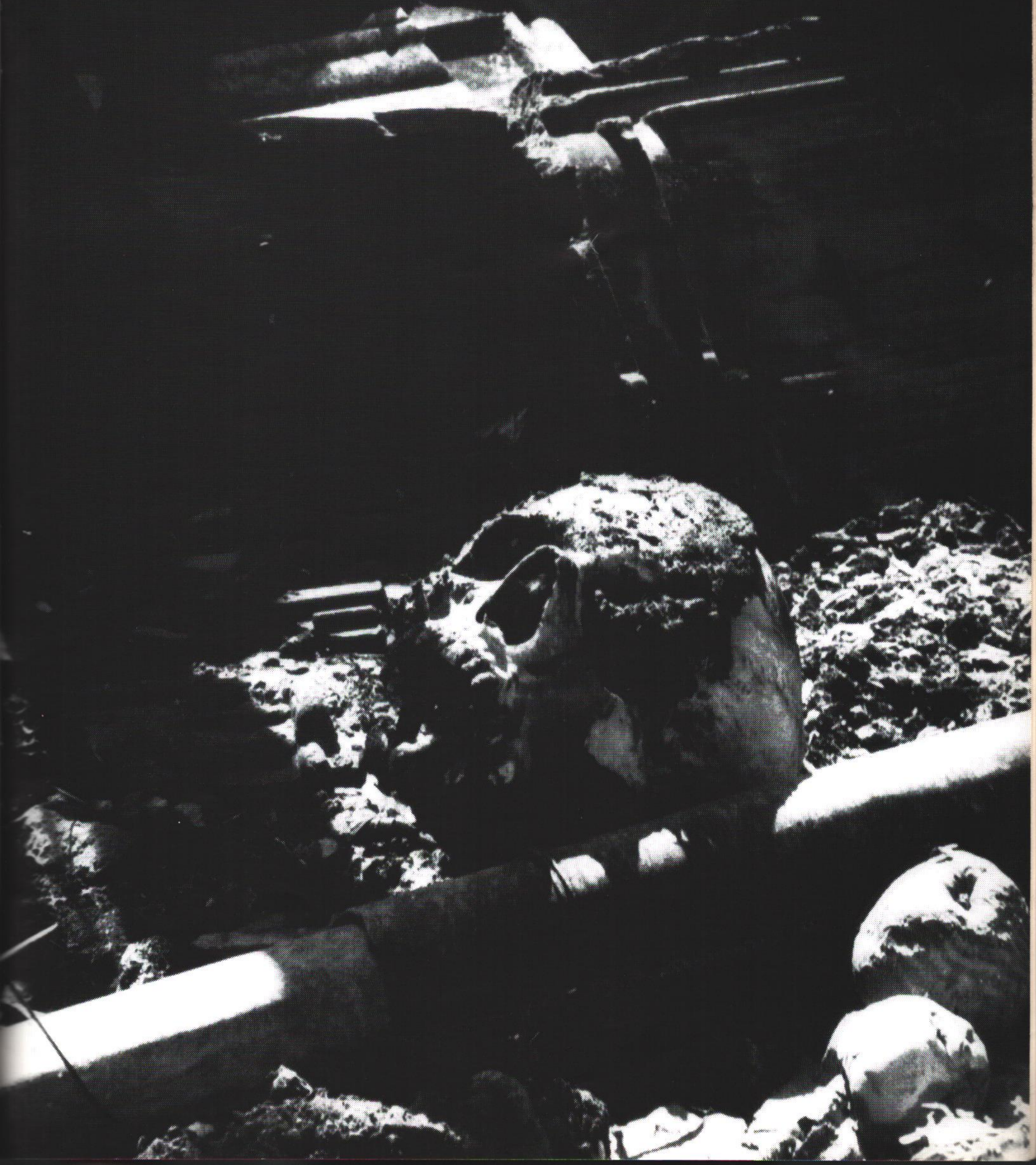
Invitation to secede

At the same time as it recognised Slovenia and Croatia, the EC issued a virtual invitation to all the republics in Yugoslavia to apply for independence, saying that it would recognise those republics which met the required criteria. This was a recipe for trouble: given the choice of applying for a place in the Western-run world order or sticking it out in rump Yugoslavia, it was obvious which option any self-seeking politician would choose. After Bosnia, Macedonia was soon applying for independence, while Albanian politicians in the Serbian province of Kosovo began agitating for more Western support.

What has really inflamed the war are the fissures that have opened up ▶

(Right)
Human skull,
Rogatica,
Bosnia
September
1992

in the West





in the Western alliance. Until July 1991, all the Western powers supported the unity of Yugoslavia. They also steered a more or less neutral course between Croatia and Serbia, taking neither one side nor the other in the conflict.

After July 1991, all this changed. In a reversal of previous policy, the

for firm action in Bosnia, others have felt obliged to respond with another initiative, threatening the Serbs with war crimes trials, tougher sanctions or air-strikes.

A recent sordid example of Great Power politicking over Bosnia has been the row about who would be in charge of the forces implementing the Vance-Owen plan. While UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali insisted that the UN should have direct control of the troops, the USA insisted that the chain of command should run through to Nato's supreme commander in Europe, who also happens to be the commander of all US forces in Europe. The dispute brought into sharp focus the jockeying for position among the Western powers which has done so much to aggravate the conflict in Yugoslavia.

West against Serbs

The fact that bashing the Serbs has become the measure of every Western leader's authority has further inflamed the conflict. Western politicians and the media have presented a black-and-white picture of the conflict in Yugoslavia, vilifying the Serbian regime and the Serbs. They have been denounced as communists, fascists and rapists, and accused of atrocities as bad as the Holocaust. Meanwhile, Serbian victims of the war have been written out of the story. Set up as the sole guilty party, only the Serbs have been subject to sanctions and other Western punishments.

This one-sided intervention by the West has intensified and prolonged the fighting. For instance, early in the war in Croatia, German minister Genscher condemned the Serbs as aggressors and pledged that Germany would recognise Croatia if the fighting continued. Croatia then had a vested interest in prolonging the hostilities to gain international recognition.

Deadly propaganda

The same has been true in Bosnia, where the Muslims had an incentive to intensify the bloodshed in order to persuade the West to intervene militarily and pacify the Serbs. This has undoubtedly increased the death toll on all sides. It has resulted in horrendous atrocities, such as the bread queue massacre in Sarajevo, which a secret report prepared by UN officers concluded was carried out by Muslim forces as propaganda for Western consumption. At the time, the Serbs got the blame and the Western powers used the occasion to impose sanctions against Serbia.

It seems likely that that most of the ceasefire violations around Srebrenica and Zepa in early May were also the fault of Muslim forces. The Serbs were blamed for launching the attacks, but it

would appear that Muslim forces were provoking them in order to keep up the pressure on the Western powers to intervene militarily against the Serbs.

There are other examples of how the West's biased intervention has made the fighting worse. In Srebrenica, for example, the Serbs were accused of all sorts of crimes; but when Serbian villages around Srebrenica were being burned down and Serbian civilians slaughtered last autumn, nobody was interested. It was hardly surprising that, in response to the recent accusations, enraged Serbs razed the mosques in the eastern Bosnian town of Bijeljina.

It would seem that Western intervention did not simply cause the war in Yugoslavia: it has also polarised the belligerents, intensified the fighting and prolonged the hostilities. In this context, it is hard to understand why the prospect of further Western intervention in Bosnia, in the form of a proposed 70 000-strong UN force to police the imposition of the Vance-Owen plan, has been welcomed by so many people in Britain.

Call it colonialism

What would the implications of the Vance-Owen plan be for the people that Western intervention is supposed to help? The plan provides for the division of Bosnia into 10 'ethnic' cantons under UN supervision. This is taking the colonial tradition of partitioning other people's countries to absurd lengths. If the partition of Ireland into two states could not resolve the underlying problem, the splintering of Bosnia into 10 nonsensical cantons will surely solve nothing. Indeed, it entrenches communal divisions and guarantees a multiplicity of future conflicts.

The notion that all 10 'self-governing' cantons will submit to a central authority in Sarajevo is ridiculous. Any such body will be symbolic, as the authors of the plan concede: the real power in the land will be the UN. All kinds of sugary phrases, such as protectorate and trusteeship, have been used to describe the establishment of a UN authority in Bosnia. But we should insist on calling it by its proper name: colonialism.

Many supporters of Western intervention in Bosnia are also critics of the Vance-Owen plan. Why the complaints? This is the only Western solution on the table. And it is also the inevitable consequence of the Western-sponsored process of secession from the Yugoslav federation which many of these same critics supported. The cantonisation of Bosnia under the auspices of a colonial administration brings home the sordid consequences of two years of Western intervention in Yugoslavia.

Jockeying for position among the Western powers has aggravated the conflict

EC endorsed the disintegration of Yugoslavia into independent states, and shifted from a neutral stand to condemn Serbia as the guilty party. This volte face was executed by Germany, which, in an unprecedented demonstration of its authority, demanded EC support for the secessionist states.

Power play

America responded to Germany's power play in Croatia by making a high-powered intervention in Bosnia. In a letter to EC heads of state in January 1992, US president George Bush still advocated the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and appealed to the EC not to recognise Slovenia and Croatia. In March, however, the USA suddenly changed tack, adopted a stridently anti-Serbian tone and led the campaign to recognise Bosnian independence.

What was going on? For Germany, breaking ranks and forcing through the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia was a way to establish its authority as an independent world power and master of Europe. For America, making an issue out of recognition for Bosnia, and turning the screws on the Serbs, was an attempt to get back in the saddle of the Western alliance and contain German influence.

Germany's intervention did more than polarise things inside Yugoslavia. It made Yugoslavia the focus of the internecine disputes among the Western powers, all of whom have used the conflict to bolster their authority. Intervention in Yugoslavia has become a game of one-upmanship by Western politicians desperate to establish their credentials as world leaders. Every time one statesman has urged the need

Hidden agenda

Joan Phillips exposes what's behind the West's diplomatic circus over Bosnia

Western politicians have spent the past two years threatening increasingly punitive action to stop the war in the former Yugoslavia. Yet every time an air-strike against the Serbs has seemed to be in the offing they have pulled back from the brink, and another round of diplomatic wrangling has begun. Why?

The explanation is simple enough. All of the Western powers want to use the Yugoslav conflict to establish their authority. But none has any desire to get bogged down in a war in the Balkans.

Yugoslavia is not like Somalia, where the US marines can just about manage to go in and out without things getting out of hand. A concerted Western military intervention in the Balkans would not only destabilise an entire region which borders on the EC, it could also destabilise the entire world order.

Experts have often cited logistical and military impediments to a full-scale Western engagement in Bosnia. But these arguments have always been overstated. Geopolitical factors carry far more weight with politicians debating whether or not they should intervene. What has acted as a deterrent for them is the fear that all-out military intervention in the Balkans could create a global crisis, accelerating the breakdown in the international order and bringing to the surface underlying conflicts among the great powers.

Nevertheless, despite these fears intervention has acquired its own momentum, which means that by the time you read this the Western powers may yet have launched air-strikes in Bosnia.

Western diplomacy over Bosnia has been a deadly game. Each new initiative is put forward to make a Western politician appear resolute, but without committing his government to a major intervention. The problem with this, however, is that every initiative further inflames the war and so increases the pressure on Western governments to intervene even more to sort out the mess they created. The other problem is that each time a Western politician initiates action it provokes a rival to do likewise, leading inexorably to an escalation of intervention.

Since the start of the conflict in June 1991,

there have been literally dozens of Western initiatives, all designed to boost the authority of the state which is sponsoring them. The initiative which sparked all others was Germany's



The UN has been going round in circles in Yugoslavia

decision, from the summer of 1991, to bully the rest of the EC into granting diplomatic recognition to Slovenia and Croatia, signalling Bonn's arrival as an international power.

Most of the subsequent initiatives have come from America, which has intervened to restore its authority as the global policeman. On 10 March 1992, the USA issued a joint statement with the EC which marked the start of a more active role in the conflict for America. After this there was no stopping the Americans. They took the initiative in recognising Bosnia-Herzegovina; in imposing sanctions against Serbia; in pressing for a war crimes tribunal;

in enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia; in policing the Danube against sanctions-busting by the Serbs; in organising air-drops of aid to eastern Bosnia; in demanding changes to the Vance-Owen plan; in appointing their own special envoy to the negotiating process; and in insisting on a bigger role for the Russians. The USA has also led the debate about lifting the arms embargo against the Muslims and bombing the Serbs.

The Europeans have occasionally tried to seize back the initiative from the Americans, by launching their own diplomatic forays in Bosnia. In June 1992, Francois Mitterrand flew into Sarajevo and started the humanitarian relief effort. The French president had breakfasted with other Western leaders on the morning of his visit, but had told nobody of his plans, so concerned was he to take all the glory for leading the relief effort to the Bosnian capital. In January 1993, the French foreign minister, Roland Dumas, threatened to use force to liberate prisoners from detention camps in Bosnia. In February, the French sponsored a UN resolution allowing for the greater use of force by UN troops in Bosnia and Croatia. In March, the French commander of UN forces in Bosnia, General Philippe Morillon, became the hero of the hour by holding up in the besieged town of Srebrenica.

As the war has progressed, the diplomatic manoeuvring of the Western powers has become increasingly frenetic. From establishing a naval blockade against Serbia in the Adriatic (July 1992) and expelling Serbia from the UN (September 1992), to enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia (March 1993) and establishing safe havens for Muslims (May 1993), the UN has been pushed by permanent members of the security council into taking more and more actions in the former Yugoslavia. Yet each time, the West has dug its heels in and stopped short of all-out military intervention.

The diplomatic circus has been about establishing the authority of Western governments, and the pecking order among the great powers, and not about solving the problems of people in the former Yugoslavia. This has been

confirmed by the increasingly public fracturing of the Western alliance as the conflicts over what to do and who should do it have grown more intense.

In May, while the UN and the USA were arguing over who should be in charge of forces policing the Vance-Owen plan in Bosnia, it came to light that America and France had both drawn up rival plans for their own forces to 'liberate' Sarajevo. So cynical are the Western powers about using the plight of Bosnia to raise their profiles that the French had even been practising the 'liberation' in a town in France which resembles the Bosnian capital.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

TOWARDS

ROO

A week of discussion and debate organised by
the Revolutionary Communist Party and sponsored by

**LIVING
MARXISM**

WHERE WILL THE WEST STRIKE NEXT?

At Towards 2000 this year, the opening weekend discussion will focus on the trends which are making militarism the number one issue at home and abroad

Plenary session: **The politics of militarism**

Workshops include:

- The West's post-Cold War blues
- Yugoslavia—a Western nightmare
- Who's besieging Fortress Europe?
- Eastern Europe—a new third world?
- The uncritical, lying media
- The slump and world affairs
- Imperialism—what it is and isn't
- Iraq after Desert Storm
- Remember Panama?
- The culture of militarism
- Trade wars
- Clinton's America abroad
- Russia and the West

Sixteen courses run through the week, alongside dozens of workshops

MORNING COURSES

- An introduction to Marxism
- The Americanisation of Europe
- Biological politics
- Marx's critique of political economy
- Race, history and culture
- The age of doubt
- Reactions to the slump
- Feminism: the incorporation of radical politics

AFTERNOON COURSES

- The crisis of economic thinking
- The wild East
- Capitalism today
- Africa in the New World Order
- The moral stalemate
- End of the American century
- The degrading of democracy
- The origins of contemporary social thought

Entertainment: Towards 2000 ticket-holders can enjoy bands, films, discos and cabaret every night of the conference. It's all included in the ticket price.

Transport and accommodation: if you live outside London you can travel to Towards 2000 on cheap transport arranged from all major British cities. We may also be able to find you a place to stay.

For information contact Linda McAlpine on (071) 278 9908.

Creche: there is a free, professionally run creche available for Towards 2000 attendees. But places are limited—so book early.

Tickets and information: Tickets cost £47 waged/£36 unwaged before 23 July and £50/£38 on the door. Special rates for school parties. Make cheques payable to RCP Association and send to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or contact Linda McAlpine on (071) 278 9908. Tickets are also available from The Edge gallery, 92 Cromer Street, London WC1H 8DD, and The Angle, The Arcadian, Ladywell Walk, Birmingham B5 4ST.

Friday 23 July—Thursday 29 July 1993
University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1

Feminists, socialists, peace activists and other assorted radicals have all marched in step with the likes of Margaret Thatcher in demanding Western military intervention in the former Yugoslavia.

Mike Freeman thinks their arguments are absurd

Either the international community stands aside, allowing the weak to go unprotected and aggression and ethnic cleansing to be rewarded, or it makes a clear commitment to take whatever steps are necessary to stop the killing. To do nothing is to be complicit in genocide.'

'Time for the stick', editorial, *New Statesman and Society*, 23 April 1993

'In effect the statement [in a full-page advertisement by 200 feminists calling for further United Nations action] endorses military intervention, going against the grain of women's traditional alliance with pacifism....

'Most of the women who have signed this statement feel that inaction is collusion in genocide....

'A UN force empowered to protect the victims of war and to disable Serbian aggressors is preferable to a UN force weeping over incinerated children and its own impotence.'

Rosalind Coward, 'Loud and clear', *Guardian*, 30 April 1993

For many years the left and the women's movement were closely linked with campaigns against imperialism and war. Not any more. One of the most remarkable features of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia is that some of the loudest calls for Western intervention are coming from individuals and journals long associated with socialism and feminism. Ken Livingstone and John Pilger,

Tribune and the *New Statesman*, prominent figures from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, veterans of the Greenham Common women's peace camp and members of the editorial board of the *New Left Review* have all demanded tougher measures from the Western powers.

'She's right'

Margaret Thatcher's strident criticism in April of the British government's embargo against supplying arms to the Bosnian Muslims provoked a chorus of approval from her erstwhile radical critics. Thatcher was immediately congratulated by Labour left winger Tony Banks for 'at least articulating the deep anger and frustration that many people in this country feel' (*Guardian*, 15 April). 'Margaret Thatcher is right', opened an editorial in *Tribune*. 'Baroness Thatcher was right', declared the more respectful former editor of the now-defunct *Marxism Today* (*Sunday Times*, 18 April). A group of left-wing Labour MPs wrote to the *Guardian* supporting military action, emphasising that 'the left has a particular duty to stand up against the kind of pure, racially motivated fascism which the Serb aggressors embody' (17 April).

A group of international radical celebrities (including Palestinian intellectual Edward Said, veteran anti-imperialist campaigner Noam Chomsky, former CND activist and Labour leader Michael Foot and May 68er Daniel Cohn-Bendit) rallied around the

New York-based Committee to Save Bosnia-Herzegovina, calling for the arming of the Bosnian Muslims. In London, radicals and feminists, including veterans of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement, launched the Coalition for Peace in Bosnia, demanding more military action by the Western powers under the auspices of the United Nations.

Whatever their differences of emphasis, all of these people seem to agree that the solution in Bosnia lies with action to be taken by the Western states or their front organisations, the EC, the UN or Nato.

The *New Statesman* invokes the 'international community' as the agency that should act over Bosnia. But where is the evidence of any community of interest among the international forces active in the former Yugoslavia? While British radicals dream of big nations acting in harmony, the role of the Western powers in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia provides a graphic illustration of the intense rivalries that characterise the post-Cold War New World Order. The current conflict is a direct result of Germany's unilateral recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, which in turn provoked the USA's unilateral recognition of Bosnia, leading to the eruption of longstanding internal tensions into civil war. The 'international community' is a fantasy of wish-fulfilment projected by British radicals to disguise their affinity for the Western governmental organisations whose interference has catalysed the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

New consensus

The new consensus behind intervention by governments reflects the demise of the left as a force in Western affairs. It is true that for many years the left looked to the state as the key agency of progressive reform at home and abroad. Yet, until recently, the left could mobilise mass movements against particular state policies—most notably in the sphere

(Right) Thatcher's former critics have joined the ranks of her admirers over Bosnia

Left, right,



PHOTO: PRESS ASSOCIATION

of foreign affairs (South Africa) or militarism (nuclear disarmament). At the very least these movements helped to sustain a climate of opinion that was critical of the government line, and which refused to take official propaganda at face value.

Indeed, there was a time when the left itself actively intervened in international conflicts. In the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s volunteers went from every Western country to fight against the fascists. In a bizarre echo of this movement, one of the signatories to the feminist petition for Western intervention in Bosnia later made the suggestion of 'a volunteer international brigade of thousands of European women' to go to Bosnia (*Guardian*, 3 May). The suggestion was fanciful, but at least it contained a glimmer of the notion that some initiative should be taken by people themselves, rather than by governments supposedly acting on their behalf. Yet it rapidly became clear that, so complete is the left's loss of confidence in its own capacities, even this fantasy project was conceived of as something to be organised by the UN.

White feathers

The collapse of the old labour movement and the left as a focus of opposition within Western societies is the key to the paradox of the peace movements of the past turning into movements for war in the former Yugoslavia. The ending of the Cold War has discredited the left and given new authority to the Western powers to dictate what happens in Eastern Europe and the third world. Having lost confidence in their own capacity to change the world, former radicals now look to the governments they once opposed to act on their behalf.

Following the collapse of the labour movement at the outbreak of the First World War, some of the previously pacifist Suffragettes gave out white feathers signifying cowardice to men who refused to join the call to fight for Britain in the trenches of Flanders. ►

left, right



In a similar spirit today, veterans of the women's peace movement of the 1980s are trying to mobilise popular support for British military action in Bosnia.

The collapse of the old opposition to military interventions abroad means that debate over Bosnia in the West is narrowed to quibbling over the most effective coercive measures. It also means that the absurdities of official propaganda go largely unchallenged and rapidly become entrenched in public opinion.

It is, for example, absurd for radicals and peace activists to expect the West

in Northern Ireland augur well for its chances in Bosnia, confirming that the state which is the source of the problem is never going to come up with a solution. The recent bomb outrages in India and Sri Lanka also indicate the lasting legacy of British colonial rule: Britain fomented the sort of ethnic, national and religious conflicts that have been unleashed in Bosnia in virtually every colony it ruled, from Guyana to Hong Kong.

The spectacle of British soldiers, who have raped and murdered in every corner of the globe, in tears at the sight

relatively prosperous regions—Slovenia and Croatia—have broken away. Other Western powers retained close economic and political links with Nazi Germany right up to the outbreak of the Second World War—and in the case of sections of the British establishment, even afterwards. By contrast, feeble Serbia has been ostracised and ravaged by sanctions which have brought it to the verge of ruin, with hyperinflation, devaluation, rationing and mass unemployment.

Parallels between the Nazi extermination of several million Jews and events in Bosnia are based on gross exaggeration of the scale of atrocities in the former Yugoslavia. Such parallels trivialise the Nazi Holocaust. As well as trying to justify militarism today, they retrospectively exonerate the vacillation of the Allies in the face of the Nazi slaughter of the Jews.

There has been a relentless media focus, echoed by the liberal and radical press, on 'Serbian aggression' and 'Serbian expansionism' in Bosnia. When the conflict between Croats and Muslims has come to the fore, it has been depicted on all sides as merely another example of the strength of historical hatreds and bloodlust in the Balkans. The reality that there was no war before the West interfered has been conveniently forgotten.

Off their backs

'To do nothing is to be complicit in genocide' is the common conviction of the post-socialists and the post-feminists alike. This is simply hypocritical: all the former radical peace campaigners now calling for full-scale war in Bosnia are not in fact planning to do anything in the martial line themselves. The something they have in mind is to be done by somebody else on their behalf, by the British government, the US government, the UN, anybody but themselves. To call upon states that have a record of responsibility for military barbarism on a scale that has often approached genocide to take action to crush puny Serbia is to invite them to repeat the colonial slaughter of the past in the heart of Europe.

To do nothing would be a great advance on the something recommended by the *New Statesman*, *Tribune* and the *Guardian* women's page. However, a great deal needs to be done. It is up to the people of the former Yugoslavia to decide their own future. The only contribution that we can make in the West—and it is an important one—is towards getting David Owen and Douglas Hurd and Colonel Bob Stewart and everything that these men represent off their backs, so that they can get on with their lives.

The old left has created the image of the British state as concerned vicar

to solve the problems of Bosnia when, as explained elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the West is largely responsible for the conflict currently raging in the former Yugoslavia. The argument that the West has a particular duty to sort out the mess in Bosnia precisely because it is largely responsible for it is one of the more curious justifications for increased Western intervention (see J Pilger, 'The West is guilty in Bosnia', *New Statesman*, 7 May 1993). The same logic would surely dictate that Norman Lamont should remain Chancellor of the Exchequer in perpetuity.

Colonial legacy

Many on the left appear to have accepted the pacifistic posture of the Western governments at face value. This is absurd when account is taken of the record of the major states threatening to bring peace and harmony to Bosnia. In the USA, Bill Clinton presides over urban areas riven by ethnic strife which brings an annual death toll comparable with that of the war in the former Yugoslavia. Yet Clinton is threatening military action over 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia. The American state which slaughtered up to four million people in Vietnam and perhaps a quarter of a million only two years ago in Iraq now pretends to be appalled by 'genocide' in Yugoslavia.

Britain too poses as a valiant fighter for civilised values and humanity in Bosnia. Yet these values seem in short supply in Northern Ireland, Britain's most immediate experience in supposedly benign colonial administration. Nor indeed does Britain's record of abject failure

of dead bodies in Bosnia is yet another absurdity. Does a butcher need counselling when he sees blood? Yet, now that the old left has created the image of the British state as the concerned vicar, the way is clear for Colonel Bob Stewart to step forward as the New Man in uniform.

The fact that veterans of the peace movement are now earnestly pleading with the British government to go to war confirms the collapse of anti-imperialist politics. Whether or not the British government takes up the call, its moral authority to interfere in the former Yugoslavia—or anywhere else—is greatly enhanced. The convergence between the remnants of the old left and the Thatcherite right of British politics around the call for military intervention overseas indicates how far the 'moral rearmament' of imperialism has proceeded.

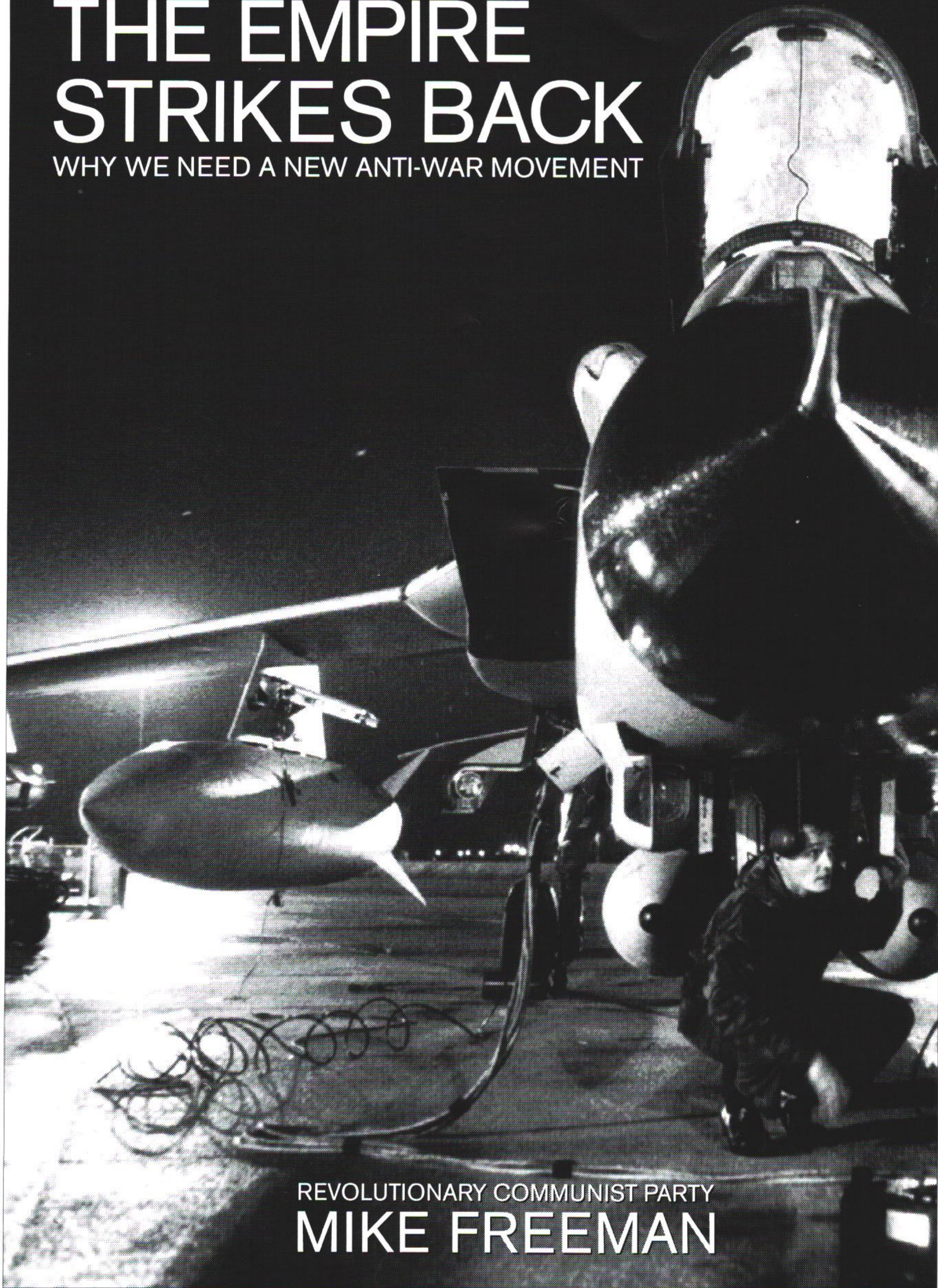
Not Nazis

Another dangerous consequence of the radical endorsement of Western interference in Bosnia is that it has encouraged the rewriting of history. The key feature here is the representation of Serbia as a fascist regime; the left has been to the fore in drawing direct parallels between Serbia and Nazi Germany. This has the effect, not only of demonising the Serbs, but also of mystifying the truth about Nazi Germany—and its appeasement by the other Western powers in the 1930s.

In fact any parallel between Nazi Germany and today's Serbia is quite absurd. In the late 1930s Germany was one of the world's major capitalist powers. Today's Serbia is the impoverished rump of a backward Stalinist regime, from which the only

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

WHY WE NEED A NEW ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT



REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY

MIKE FREEMAN

Pamphlet: £3 plus 50p postage & packing
Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd, and send
to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX

The response to the slaying of Chris Hani confirms that the 'peace process' is about South Africa's new black leaders making their peace with the ruling white elite, says Charles Longford

After black leader Chris Hani was murdered outside his Boksburg home in April, a million blacks stayed away from work to attend rallies and protest marches across South Africa. The government of FW De Klerk and the world's media issued dire warnings of impending race war. Amid the mounting tension and sporadic violence, African National Congress (ANC) president Nelson Mandela appeared on state television again and again to appeal for calm.

Mandela has been interviewed on state television many times. But until Hani's death, only president De Klerk had been allowed to address the country directly on the state's religiously guarded airwaves. The fact that Mandela now appeared on screen in presidential guise, to tell black South Africans to restrain their anger, illustrated the extent to which the De Klerk regime has cohered a partnership with the new black leadership—a leadership increasingly at odds with the black masses themselves.

Who fingered Hani?

Chris Hani was a member of the ANC executive, the former head of its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and current chief of the South African Communist Party. His killing illustrates what the regime's strategy of trying to moderate the liberation movement is all about. The debate about whether there was a conspiracy by the white right to kill Hani and other black leaders, misses the point. A Polish emigré may have fired the gun but it was De Klerk who fingered Hani as an extremist and who, despite the problems Hani's death created, stands to gain the most from it.

Hani had been set up as a target by the De Klerk regime long before he was killed. It did not matter that he was an enthusiastic advocate of the negotiations strategy who had been in the forefront of selling it to the ANC's more sceptical supporters. In fact,

weeks before his death Hani had been on a tour of the Border area addressing suspicious audiences about the necessity of supporting 'the mother of all mass struggles'—by voting for the ANC in the forthcoming power-sharing elections.

Despite his support for the government-sponsored 'peace process', the De Klerk regime demonised Hani and the South African Communist Party in an attempt to split the liberation movement and isolate its own most determined opponents. The government continued to publicise Hani's past links with the armed struggle and militancy, because he remained what Peter Mokaba, leader of the ANC's youth league, called 'an umbilical cord' between the ANC and the masses.

Severed links

Hani did not oppose the ANC strategy of pursuing negotiations and power-sharing instead of struggle. But he retained a relationship with the black masses which made him susceptible to pressure from them for action. This relationship, rather than any political principle, is what sets a 'radical' apart from a 'moderate' in the ANC today. De Klerk's strategy of moderating the ANC has really been about solidifying that distinction, by cultivating those who are immune to mass pressure and cutting out those, like Hani, who can still act as 'an umbilical cord'.

The aftermath of Hani's murder revealed that most of the black political leaders in the new South Africa have long since severed whatever cords once bound them to the masses. The relationship between the ANC and the mass movement has undergone a fundamental transformation. Only last June, after the massacre of black civilians in Boipatong township, the ANC felt under enough pressure immediately to withdraw from negotiations with the government and launch a programme of mass action. By contrast, after the killing of Hani, the only thing the ANC did immediately was to call for more talks with De Klerk, talks to set a date for the elections for a power-sharing government of national unity.

Safety valve

The six-week programme of mass action that the ANC announced would follow Hani's funeral was even more telling. In the past, mass action was presented as a display of the power of the black majority. This time the ANC admitted that its primary aim was simply to provide a safety valve which would allow the masses to let off some steam. As Joe Slovo, former general secretary of the Communist Party and now one of the chief ANC negotiators put it, doing nothing would be 'the

shortest route to an explosion', while organising token action could both contain the anger and apply some pressure on the government to speed up the confirmation of an election date.

South Africa is now entering another phase in the evolution of its new politics. The ANC has made its peace with the white elite. It has agreed that, after multi-racial elections to be held sometime in the next year, a national power-sharing government will run South Africa until 1999. In effect this concession means the continuation of white minority control, and the postponement of black majority rule, until the end of the century and probably beyond.

Attacking their own

The ANC is no longer just the target of De Klerk's strategy, but its main executor. ANC leaders have now joined De Klerk in criminalising militancy and condemning those who oppose the acceptance of a power-sharing government in place of the longstanding aspiration for black majority rule.

In the weeks before Chris Hani's death, leading members of the ANC made forceful speeches about the ANC's role in fostering a climate of violence in South Africa. It appeared that there had been intense internal discussion about how far ANC members, often organised within township self-defence units, were responsible for the recent conflict in the country. It subsequently emerged that this 'internal' ANC issue had in fact been raised by De Klerk during talks with Mandela! Mandela's speech at the funeral of executed guerrilla Solomon Mahlangu showed that he had been listening carefully. Addressing a crowd of thousands at the newly named Solomon Mahlangu Park, on the edge of Mamelodi township, Mandela 'lumped ANC killers with all others as "animals" and pledged to root them out of the ANC' (*Weekly Mail*, 8-15 April 1993).

Loud boos

When anger burst out after Hani's murder, the ANC proved that this was no idle threat. As De Klerk warned that black 'anarchy' would lead to a racial bloodbath, the ANC accepted that the challenge was to demonstrate its capacity to control its own people. What followed illustrated the transformation of the relationship between the ANC and its mass base of support.

When Mandela repeated his message of restraint at a mass rally in Sebokeng, it earned him loud boos instead of the usual adulation. The obscure leader of the Pan Africanist Congress, Clarence Makwethu, whose slogan 'One settler, one bullet' has won

Funeral for freedom



Just months after black marchers were massacred at Bisho, the ANC is cooperating with the South African security forces

some support among South Africa's township youth, received the kind of reception which until now had been the exclusive preserve of Mandela and Hani. Mandela's words, meanwhile, were soon followed by actions.

In Johannesburg, during one march which was allowed to proceed after agreements between ANC leaders and the police, youths involved in some looting were handed over to the police by ANC marshals. And in an unprecedented episode, three suspects in the murder in Sharpeville of a black journalist, Calvin Thusago, were handed over to the police by Sharpeville ANC and the ANC youth league after a citizen's arrest.

The ANC collaborated with the police force of the apartheid state in controlling many of the demonstrations that followed Hani's death. The black leadership has clearly become more dependent for its survival upon its links with the South African state than on its relationship with the black masses.

New ANC elite

State repression now appears to have received the stamp of approval from erstwhile critics of apartheid. It was remarkable that the emergency measures which De Klerk imposed after Hani's death were hardly commented upon. While commentators noted that there were victims of police violence, nobody pointed out that De Klerk had declared more magisterial states of emergency than were imposed during the height of the uprisings in the 1980s.

It was not Hani's funeral, but that of Oliver Tambo, the ANC's elder statesman and president during the years of exile and banishment, that best symbolised how far and fast things have changed in South Africa. The ANC leaders announced that Tambo had been 'very disturbed by the looting, vandalism and violence' which had accompanied the Hani funeral, and warned their followers that 'criminal and hooligan elements' would not be allowed to desecrate Tambo's burial. As it turned out the contrast between the two burials spoke volumes about the new South Africa. Both funerals were held in Soweto's sports stadium. But while Hani's was marked by tens of thousands of mourners who queued for hours to get near the stadium, Tambo's was marked by their absence, and the presence of foreign dignitaries and diplomats.

Events surrounding the Hani and Tambo funerals demonstrated the accelerating transformation of the ANC into a new political elite, immune to mass pressure, prepared to take its lead from De Klerk, and more at home in the television studio than the township.

A prison camp for Palestinians

Whatever happened to the Middle East peace process? Daniel Nassim reports

A year ago, the prospects for a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians were being talked up. In June 1992, the Israeli Labour Party defeated the right-wing Likud for the first time since 1977. The *Guardian's* verdict on the election summed up the prevailing mood: 'Israel's change of politics casts a shaft of good news on a gloomy world.' (24 June 1992). Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian negotiator in the US-sponsored talks that were already under way, said that 'it looks like the peace process has been rescued from the Likud's attempt to sabotage it'.

A year later, the negotiations are continuing in Washington, but the Israeli authorities seem to be pursuing the very opposite of a peace process. They have instituted mass deportations of Palestinians, dumping them in a Lebanese

by Israelis. Palestinians may be given limited autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but only on the condition that they are subject to even tighter Israeli control.

The very existence of the Israeli state implies the denial of Palestinian rights. The problem is not one of Jews and Arabs living together. It is the exclusivist character of Israel, which defines itself as a Jewish state. This means that non-Jewish inhabitants will always be treated as second class citizens. It is a relationship between a state of colonial settlers and its subjects.

An individual's legal identity in Israel depends primarily on whether or not he is Jewish. This determines his access to jobs, land and to welfare benefits. Even the minority of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are not treated equally with Israeli Jews. Palestinians

This is the reality of the 'two-state' solution advocated by everybody involved in the peace process, from the Palestinian leadership to the American government. As Rabin's statement makes clear, the existence of a Palestinian statelet alongside a state of Israel would not provide an equitable solution to the conflict.

It is quite conceivable that the Western powers, which are pushing the Middle East peace process, could decide to repartition Palestine. But such a move would not bring peace to the region or freedom to the Palestinians. A Palestinian statelet would be too weak to resist Israeli intervention in its internal affairs. It would not be viable economically or politically. It might be able to manage refuse collection or deal with traffic offences, but it would not be truly sovereign. In practice it would be more like a homeland on the South African model.

There is an even more fundamental problem with the 'peace process'. It looks to the West to implement a solution. Many supporters of a Palestinian homeland believe that if the West puts pressure on Israel to make concessions then the Palestinians can achieve their aspirations. Recent events appear to have given some credence to this view. The Americans are threatening economic and diplomatic reprisals against Israel if it refuses to compromise with the Palestinians at the negotiating table.

Think again

However, the Western powers have not hosted peace talks because they are genuinely concerned with the rights of the Palestinians. Their real concern is that Israeli recalcitrance may hinder their attempts to alter the arrangements through which they have traditionally dominated the Middle East. In the aftermath of the Cold War, with the collapse of Soviet influence in the region, the USA is trying to forge closer relations with Arab states and downplay Israel's role as the West's policeman in the Middle East. The festering Palestinian problem is an obstacle to cementing new relations, which is why America is leaning on Israel to negotiate.

Anybody who thinks that the West has a positive role to play in bringing peace and freedom to the Middle East should think again. For 40-odd years the West has sponsored the most brutal repression of Palestinian rights by bankrolling the Israeli state. As a result of Western intervention in the Gulf War, 200 000 Iraqis were slaughtered and thousands of Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait. Even now, the USA is only proposing cosmetic changes in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship; Washington has pledged to defend the integrity of the Israeli state.

Peace in the Middle East can come only when the Palestinians win the right to self-determination, and when the future of the region is mapped out by the people who live there. The first step towards Palestinian liberation is to reject the right of the Western powers to determine the future of the Middle East. ●

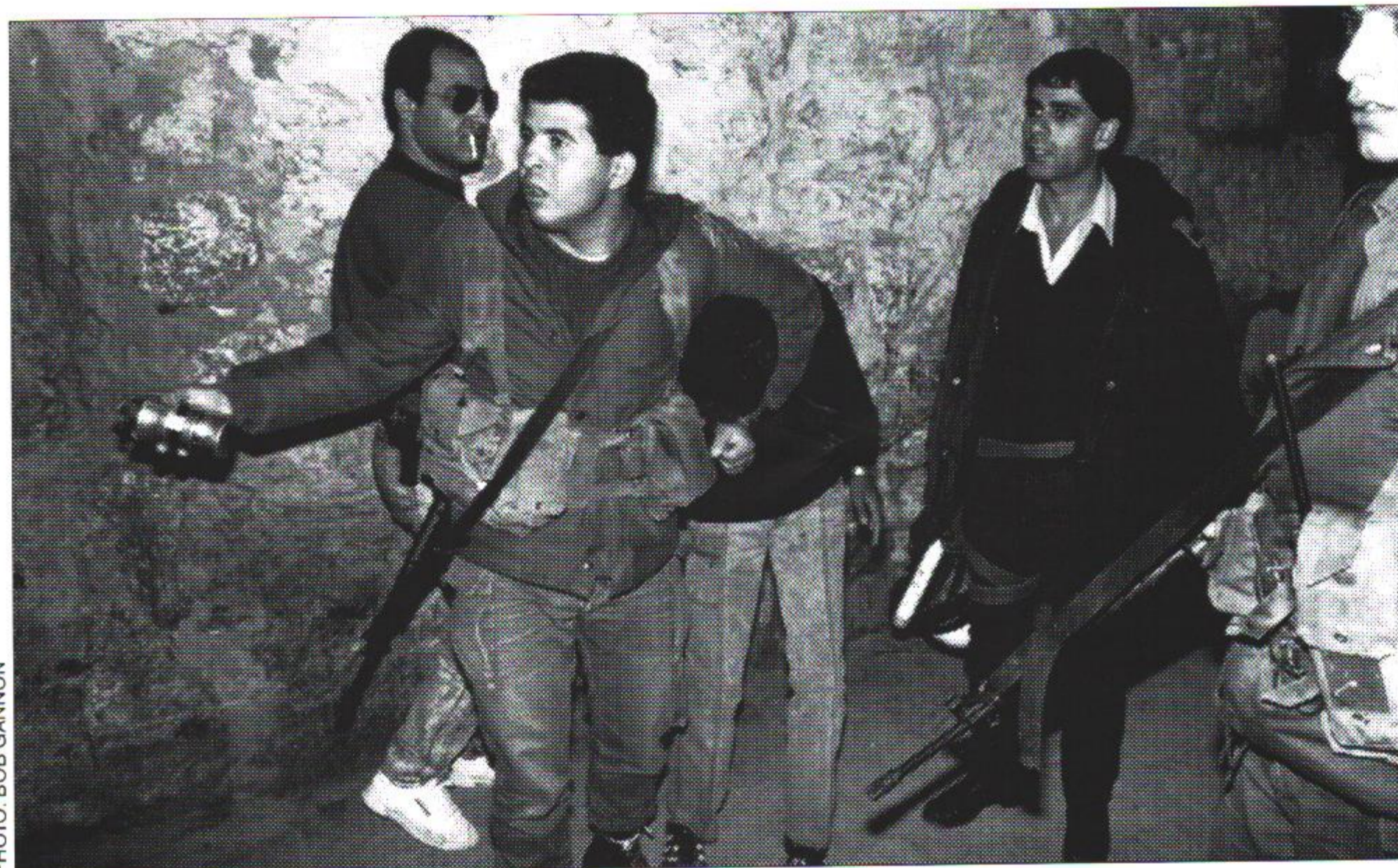


PHOTO: BOB GANNON

An 'autonomous homeland' would still leave Palestine in an Israeli headlock

no-man's land. They have stepped up their routine harassment of the Palestinian community, with beatings, shootings, curfews and internment. Israel has turned the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into giant prison camps, sealing off territories which are home to about 1.8m Palestinians. Most of the 120 000 Palestinians who used to cross the 'green line' every day to go to work in Israel have been barred from entry.

What has happened in the space of a year to derail the peace process? In fact the peace process is still going on. What is happening is the *consequence* of the peace process.

The problem with the peace process is that it accepts the existence of Israel. Once it is accepted that the state of Israel is here to stay, then Palestinian autonomy can mean only one thing: a prison camp for Palestinians policed

and Israelis live in the same land but lead separate lives—living in different areas, attending different schools, hardly ever socialising.

The Labour Party, which people looked to as the harbinger of peace, constantly proclaims the need to defend the 'Jewish character' of the state of Israel. From this perspective it makes perfect sense to talk about making territorial concessions to the Palestinians while separating the two communities still further. This is the gist of what Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister and defence minister, said recently when he advocated substituting Jewish for Arab labour in Israel: 'Now is a time we can bring about substantial changes through separation. We must see to it that the Palestinians do not swarm among us, so that the Jews begin to work and increase their ability to do so.' (*Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 17 April 1993)



Young people today

The latest revelations of junior illiteracy should be treated with caution. Prophets of doom have been banging on about this for years, and there is little evidence that things are getting worse. There have always been children who can't spell 'car' at seven, and the vast majority are able to do so by the time they leave school. The first law of British politics is that 'standards' continually fall: always have done, always will. I have never felt any temptation to join in this chorus of alarm—at least, not until now. Maybe I'm getting old, but I can't help feeling that our kids really aren't being set the right example.

A new survey shows that most teenage schoolchildren drink about three pints a week. That's right, three pints a *week*. Maybe my memory is playing tricks, but when I was at school, and a pound was still a pound, the pub opposite was packed, lunchtime and evenings; and the only time anybody drank less than three pints a *day* was when they couldn't fight their way through the mass of school blazers between them and the bar.

And what are we to make of David Roe, the English teacher who told his class to shout out 'wanker' and other rude words while he wrote them on the blackboard? Surely, if teachers have to use valuable lesson time teaching 14-year olds basic swearwords and obscenities, it is a clear sign that role models are failing in their responsibilities.

We are used to pop stars and footballers lecturing us about smoking, drink, drugs and sex. However, at the root of the problem are modern parents. Misguided people like the Guests of Edinburgh, who have 'taken a stand' by getting rid of their television, and are now a *cause celebre* after refusing to buy a licence. A typical evening chez Guest involves Simon (12) playing violin, Nicholas (15) on cello and mother Alison on piano.

Mr and Mrs Guest claim that their sons are quite happy about this, and who's to say they are not? Quite possibly they will turn out as normal well-balanced adults—we'll have to wait and see.

The Guest cult reportedly has a million followers already, and the press are working hard to convert more parents to the cause. One potential recruit, writing to *Sun* agony aunt Deidre, despairs of her son, who 'is only happy when he's given something, or going to a football match'. She has tried sending him to bed, stopping his pocket money, preventing him from watching TV or going out, and various other punishments, yet still he is unhappy. Deidre sympathises, and recommends Parentline.

As with all radical experiments, there are potential dangers here. Inevitably, other important areas of life will be neglected. By all means let kids collect stamps, play violins and so on if they wish, but they should be expected to show a basic knowledge of traditional subjects. What kind of a school life awaits a child who can't swear and smoke, or display a normal healthy interest in TV, sex, drink, drugs, Nintendo, shoplifting, vandalism, etc? Who will take responsibility for the resulting bloodshed?

Another study revealed that teenagers believe people who drive big cars to be more intelligent than those who drive small ones. Support for

this depressing theory comes from a police officer recently accused of harassing a man after a gay festival. The officer's representative explained that he had been upset at the time, because he hadn't been allocated a bigger car. This can now be added to other officially recognised syndromes, including the psychological strain caused by sitting in riot vans, and 'post-traumatic stress' (suffered by police after shooting people).

This sensitivity extends to public relations too. Certainly, nobody who was present at the Bow Street police station 'fun day' with its truncheon race through Covent Garden could accuse the police of neglecting their image. After the eighties riots, the home office even looked into the possibility of a friendly looking truncheon for use in sensitive areas (geographical areas, that is). This is an idea whose time has now come. American-style nightsticks (as used during the angry scenes at the Grand National) are now to be joined by telescopic 'ASP' truncheons, which cause 'bouncing trauma', a condition which affects the person holding the handle rather less than the one at the other end.

If all this sounds a bit, well, heavy, don't worry. Home secretary Kenneth Clarke has resisted police demands for side-handled batons (as tested on Rodney King in LA) because they look 'too aggressive'.

And thorough market research will be done on the ASP before it is introduced, to make sure it has the full support of inner-city populations. At least, I assume that is what the Metropolitan Police mean when they say they will be 'carrying out tests this summer'. So if you happen to be randomly selected as a guinea pig, be sure to let them know what you think. Policing is a two-way thing—it can't work without your co-operation.

Finally, on the subject of discipline, a postscript to last month's comments on corporal punishment. Anybody still under the illusion that good behaviour can be beaten into children should consider the examples of Bruce Dickenson and John Selwyn Gummer. Dickenson describes the regime at his expensive school as 'Whacko! Mass floggings everywhere....' Upon leaving he set a poor example to younger boys by wreaking havoc around the world as a member of the heavy metal band Iron Maiden.

John Selwyn Gummer (later an outspoken member of the Church of England's general synod and now Secretary of State for Agriculture and Fisheries) went straight to Cambridge. Freed from the constraints of his school days (and funded by profits from his father's *Pulpit Monthly* magazine), he soon made up for lost time, earning the nickname 'Rowdy Gum-Gum'. *Varsity Magazine* reported that the former union president had been fined for his antics, and quotes one member as saying: 'This had to happen. Gummer has been misbehaving in the Chamber all term, and thoroughly deserves this imposition.' It is interesting to reflect that despite his lucrative garden pond arrangements and all the other perks of office, Gummer's fine remains unpaid.

I suspect that certain hardened cases are beyond redemption. Even if they are fined at rates corresponding to their income, as magistrates have now been instructed to do, they simply refuse to pay. I fear that birching would only make troublemakers like Gummer rebel more. ●

What school life awaits a child who can't swear or smoke?



Recession over— slump continues

The statistics seem to suggest that the British economy is on the up. But that is far from the whole story. Phil Murphy explains the facts behind the figures

What a difference a half of one per cent can make to assessments of the British economy. One week in April it was all doom and gloom about the longest recession since the Second World War. The next week, most commentators were finally agreeing with chancellor Norman Lamont's vision of the green shoots of recovery. Within days the shoots seemed to have become branches and then trees of sturdy growth.

What occasioned this dramatic change of mood? A 0.6 per cent rise in national output during the first three months of 1993. This miserable



The economy is on the move again

increase in national wealth made possible the official triumphant declaration that 'the recession is over'—a claim quickly followed by assertions that Britain is back on the road to boom.

The fact that a minor statistical movement could cause such exuberance reflects the persistently weak and unstable character of British capitalism. The volatility of economic assessments stems from the frailty of the real economy. Unable to point to any substantial revival of productive capacity, desperate commentators and politicians exaggerate the importance of small statistical changes. They are

so nervous about an economy which, over the past couple of years, has proved to be beyond their control that they are prone to bouts of animated confidence based upon the flimsiest of evidence.

Such euphoria couldn't last long. But it was replaced by an even more bizarre mood. Within days the tenor of public discussion changed from an unsubstantiated celebration of recovery to the surreal expression of concern about a runaway boom that could 'overheat' the economy. These mood swings indicate that, although it's easy enough to write headlines declaring that a recession is over, it is far harder to tackle the deep-rooted nature of the slump.

The publication of a series of more positive spring statistics—for retail sales, manufacturing output, unemployment, exports, house building, and a few others—might have exhilarated economists, but they don't impress much when set against the long-term structural decay of the British economy. A few healthier-looking figures cannot change the fact that British industry remains well down the league table of international competitiveness (a weakness which led to sterling's embarrassing exit from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism only last September). Nor do they alter the reality of Britain's current trade deficit—its biggest ever at the end of a recession.

'Fatuous boast'

April's positive statistics are evidence of only one thing; that a capitalist economy cannot shrink for ever. The problem with capitalism in a time of crisis is not that it will never expand again. But what growth there is will be uneven and sporadic and, in the process, will create more destabilising imbalances to disrupt steady growth.

As *Financial Times* columnist Samuel Brittan has correctly pointed out, 'the tendency in modern capitalist economies is for output to grow in most years—which enables the governing political party to make the fatuous boast of record output' (15 April 1993). It also means that they are guaranteed to be able to boast about recessions ending. This is especially so when they give 'recession' the narrow technical definition of two or more successive quarters of falling output, rather than its more literal meaning of receding or slackening economic activity.

Even during an era of slump like today, capitalism cannot experience constant decline. This is not due to any 'natural' powers of dynamic revival. It is because of the effect created by the economic crisis itself. The crisis is more than a symptom of capitalism's problems; it is also

a partial cure. By closing down the least efficient factories and boosting unemployment, the crisis clears the way for production to rise again.

However, what the crisis can't necessarily do is create the conditions for durable and sustained growth. The last recession failed to do so in America; it has also failed to do so in Britain. It has not been able to overcome the slump.

Nothing resolved

The statistical end of a recession tells us nothing about the prospects for sustainable growth. All it means is that the economy has entered a different phase of the business cycle. But the most striking feature of the business cycle in the 1990s is that its positive effects are swamped by the severity of the crisis.

The underlying root of the tendencies to stagnation in a capitalist economy is falling profitability; capitalists will not invest in production or labour if they cannot get a satisfactory return. Nothing has happened during the latest recession to resolve the fundamental problem of poor profitability today, so the main features of the slump will continue. The British economy (and most other economies with the exceptions of Japan and Germany) will remain sluggish. The artificial mechanisms which have long been used to keep economic activity going—most notably credit expansion and state spending—have become less and less effective. And the recession hasn't restored the vitality of these capitalist survival measures either.

When an economy is in slump it's not like a bout of bad weather which will pass naturally, to be replaced by sunshine. The slump expresses the severity of the crisis of profitability. It can only end if conditions for profitable production are re-established. This entails a critical period of capitalist restructuring, both domestically and in the international sphere.

Winners and losers

Governments and capitalists everywhere sense that such a radical shake-up in their economic and political affairs would be an extremely destructive and disruptive process, producing both winners and losers, with no certainty as to who will survive. Hence the leaders of the Western nations are doing what they can to postpone this destructive phase for as long as possible. It is impossible to predict how long the slump will last in the interim. But we can be sure that there will be much more bumping along at the bottom.

This is why it is illegitimate to translate the end of the technical ►



recession in Britain and the publication of some positive economic statistics into signs of a genuine upturn. Doubtless more numerical indicators will 'turn upwards' in coming months, but these should not be confused with signs of a restored capitalist vitality.

A good indication of what's in store in Britain can be seen in the lacklustre character of the American 'recovery'. Three months ago, buoyed by Bill Clinton's election victory, all the talk there was of a strong and sustainable economic upturn. Now the discussion is of relapse, of recovery petering out.

What's in store in Britain can be seen in the lacklustre American 'recovery'

In some places they are even saying that the US recession never really ended. In California, where a quarter of a million military-related jobs have gone, with possibly more than that number still to go, the prognosis is especially gloomy. Across the USA, business construction, residential building, retail sales and consumer durable orders have all experienced renewed downturns recently. The deficit in America's foreign trade has widened, as exports fall further than imports. At under 2 per cent, first quarter growth in 1993 is less than half of that recorded in the final quarter of 1992.

No take off

It is now almost two years from the official date given as the end of the US recession. Yet economic activity remains sluggish and uneven. In comparison with previous upturns, the impact on employment has been marginal. Since the US recession ended, the economy has generated less than a million jobs, compared with an average of about eight million in the first two years of previous recoveries.

This is the type of recovery we can expect for Britain too: one in which apparently positive statistics are interspersed with setbacks, and things never seem to take off. Such a performance indicates that there has been no revival of economic dynamism. The recession has formally ended, but in conditions where the business cycle is dominated by stagnationary tendencies.

The sort of progress we can expect in a slump-constrained economy can be likened to a clapped-out car. It can

move but it will never pick up much speed. From time to time it will slow down and may even stop occasionally. The end of recession suggests that the car is moving again, but it doesn't mean that the car has been rebuilt with a new engine.

A lot of wind

The end of the British recession corresponds to what happens when you push your old car to the top of a hill with the wind behind it, and then start rolling down the other side while keeping the accelerator flat on the floor. By the force of economic circumstances, rather than design, the government has had every artificial stimulus in the textbooks working to push the economy forward over the past few months: a lower exchange rate, lower interest rates, and a high level of government borrowing. It should come as no surprise that these stimuli can have the same temporary effect on the economy as the forces of gravity and wind power have on the car. Indeed, in the circumstances, it would have been truly shocking if British capitalism had continued to contract.

The devaluation of sterling, after it became impossible to defend its exchange rate inside the ERM, has given a temporary boost to the competitiveness of British exports. (When the government tries to claim credit for this improvement, it is worth recalling how, as the storm clouds gathered over sterling last summer, the Tories declared that the ERM and opposition to devaluation were 'at the centre' of economic policy.) The forced deprioritising of a high exchange rate also allowed the government to cut interest rates by 4 per cent between September and January. On top of this, public sector borrowing figures have shot through even the enormous levels targeted by the government. Although all these measures were contrary to what the government wanted, together they have been enough to get output moving slowly again. The dilemma for the authorities now is that, with the British economy growing, more imbalances are going to appear, probably in the form of accelerating inflation or a balance of payments crisis.

Too fast!

One indicator of the unusually stunted and irregular character of today's statistical upturn is the way in which mainstream debate has moved so swiftly from the prospects for recovery to concern about recovery being too fast. Commentators talk of the dangers of a return to the boom-and-bust cycle. To worry about a boom-bust scenario in Britain even before the recession has been officially declared over suggests more than pessimism. It is a recognition

of how weak is the productive sector of the economy.

What do they mean by recovery being 'too fast' or 'too heated'? There are no technical constraints on increasing output. It is not as if factories are working to their capacity, or people have all the goods and services that they need. In April's *Living Marxism* BBC economics editor Peter Jay estimated that the statistical GDP gap—the gap between the present level of output and a healthy level—is between three and seven per cent of total output. Most factories' production lines have plenty of unused capability and there are, of course, more than enough workers on the dole to fill any jobs that might be created now the recession is over. Behind their empty talk about the danger of too rapid recovery is the fear that British industry is no longer competitive enough to make enough profit to sustain an upturn.

No upturn for us

The surreal-sounding preoccupation with expansion coming too fast leads to another distinctive feature of the current discussion: the call for us to make sacrifices. The problem of a weak, low-profit capitalist economy is being portrayed as a spurious problem of too much high living by the British public. The *Financial Times* summed up the case for austerity even before the recession was officially declared over:

'Too many [British recoveries] have ended in the same painful way, with excess consumption, balance of payments crises and rising inflation....The way out must be export-led growth. But export-led growth means growth without soaring real wages. It means resisting excessive appreciation of sterling, if necessary by cutting interest rates again. It means closing the fiscal deficit aggressively.' (24 April 1993)

In case the first point of advice hadn't sunk home sufficiently to its readers within the establishment, the editorial reiterated that 'above all, it means that this recovery must not end in a spurt of wage inflation'.

The biggest indictment of capitalism as a slump system today is that the discussion of a recovery has not tempered demands for more wage cuts and immiseration—it has reinforced them. Whatever the statistics might say about output or inflation, it is clear that there is to be no upturn in the living standards of working people. Indeed we seem set for a boom in attempts by employers and ministers to cut wages, slash welfare spending and reduce living standards.

What's wrong with a job for life?

Andrew Calcutt thinks we should all be 'demanding the impossible'

'British Rail has repeatedly said that the unions are demanding the impossible—jobs for life. Jimmy Knapp, RMT's general secretary, rejects BR's claims.' (*Guardian*, 16 April 1993)

During talks to avert further one-day strikes on the railways, British Rail chairman Sir Bob Reid announced 'there can be no question of jobs for life'. The trade unions' response was to deny that they were asking for any such thing. The unions began by saying they only wanted a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, but in the event they were prepared to make do with even less.

Reid wrote to tell Labour transport spokesman John Prescott that BR 'has no plans currently for any compulsory redundancies'. But, Reid warned, that could not always be the case: 'No employer can give such an unqualified guarantee on job security as no compulsory redundancies.' On this basis, Prescott judged 'there is no reason why an agreement should not now be reached'. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) duly went back into talks with British Rail and postponed plans for more one-day strikes.

It seems as if management, union officials and Labour Party leaders all agree that 'jobs for life' is an impossible demand. But they are the ones who are being unrealistic.

Being a railworker or any other kind of worker is not a lifestyle choice which working people can afford to give up. On the contrary, a wage packet every week or salary cheque every month of our working lives is the only chance most of us have of a half-decent existence.

It's a living

We go to work to earn a living. The reverse is also true. If there's no work to go to, we cannot make a living and we don't have much of a life. Life without a job is, to borrow a phrase, 'impossible'. Which suggests that the demand for 'a job for life' is eminently sensible.

The same authorities who now tell us that it is impossible for them to guarantee us 'a job for life' also insist that we must fulfil our own responsibilities 'for life'. Marriage is 'till death'. The only way most people can get decent housing is by accepting a mortgage as a 25-year millstone around their necks; are those who decry the idea of a job for life prepared to let us stop repaying our lifetime's debts?

Throughout our working lives, we are expected to make payments towards our old age pension. Are the employers who say they cannot guarantee our jobs willing to pay our pensions out of their own pockets? (It would be a start if we could get them to stop ripping off the money we have paid into our pension funds, Robert Maxwell-style.)

In these days of health and welfare cuts, looking after the sick and elderly is increasingly considered part of our life's work. What the



Some people just don't want to work

Department of Health calls 'community care' is a strategy of piling more financial and physical responsibility on to the family, and especially on to women's backs. The financial costs of parenthood are also considered to be 'for life'. The inappropriately named Child Support Agency has been set up to track down 'feckless' fathers who do not regard the upkeep of children as a lifelong commitment.

These days we are always being told that there is no more 'something-for-nothing society', that we are permanently responsible for our own lives and for the welfare of those who are close to us. It seems as if the only thing that cannot be 'for life' is the job (and the wage packet) which is our only means of paying any of the bills associated with staying alive, keeping a roof over our heads, bringing up children or helping the aged.

True to type

Of course, there are people who don't want to earn a living. They are called capitalists. Their whole lives are devoted to exploiting the rest of us and living it up on the proceeds. Not only do they normally enjoy their 'wealth for life', but it is also carried over from one lifetime to the next. This is not regarded as an impossible demand; it is known simply as 'inheritance'.

The case against 'jobs for life' is woefully out of touch with reality. Yet in today's climate it is endowed with the status of unassailable truth. Why?

Sir Bob Reid was only being true to type. His invective against 'jobs for life' is what we should expect from capitalists in this era of

slump, when the postwar commitment to full employment has long since been scrapped. The real problem is that the unions and the Labour Party front bench have completely conceded the case put forward by the likes of Reid.

If there is no counter-argument against the capitalists' point of view, their prejudices can readily be accepted as common sense. Anything which goes further then seems to be 'impossible'.

Acquiescent rump

The defensiveness of the old labour movement has had a cumulative effect. Every time the unions and the Labour Party back off from the argument, the government and employers take another step forward. In recent years they have managed to advance their arguments a long way, thanks to the collapse of the opposition.

Norman Tebbit caused shock waves when he told the unemployed of the eighties' recession to 'get on your bike' and look for work. A decade later, there were far fewer quibbles when chancellor Norman Lamont declared unemployment 'a price worth paying' for lower inflation. Now Reid's dismissal of 'jobs for life' as a fantasy has reduced all of our jobs to the status of temporary employment—with the acquiescence of the rump of the old labour movement.

It ought to be clear by now that expecting compassion from the employers or resistance from Labour and the unions would truly be 'demanding the impossible'. It is high time we spoke up for ourselves, and demanded jobs for life. ●

'Burning me at the stake is no response'

When *Romper Stomper* first appeared in Australia one of the country's leading critics denounced the film as Nazi-style propaganda. It has stirred up similar controversy in Britain. Anti-fascist groups have picketed showings and Strathclyde council has imposed a ban on the film, fearing that it will incite a wave of copycat racist violence.

Kirsten Cale spoke to *Romper Stomper's* director, Geoffrey Wright, about racism, violence and censorship



Kirsten Cale: Why did you make a film about skinheads?

Geoffrey Wright: I had watched the evolution of skinheads from the mid-eighties to the present. Early on they were not interested in race, they were just bored kids who wanted a tribal identity. As the decade wore on and unemployment got worse, they drew more and more inspiration from the British prototypes and developed racist policies and attitudes. I watched astonished as these characters gradually started talking about themselves in a historical way, as the new standard-bearers of a crusade that had begun in the first half of the

century. This made them increasingly compelling as a subject for drama.

Kirsten Cale: You are accused of portraying skinheads as heroes—was that your intent?

Geoffrey Wright: Many people would have been happy if Hando [the skinhead gang leader] had displayed less raw courage when caught up in the film's street battle but denying him courage would scarcely make me—as storyteller—more moral. Contradictions in the film abound. Gabe [a woman who falls in with the gang as her previous life unravels] is a vulnerable, almost frail



figure; yet she partakes in anti-Asian violence like the boys. Davey [Hando's hang-dog lieutenant] brutally knifes a Viet kid yet is awkwardly groping towards some kind of intimacy with Gabe. Hando is a tower of strength—as a charismatic leader should be—but when he's faced with losing Davey to Gabe on the beach he actually resorts to pathetic, panic-driven pleading. The Viet kids who don't want to get caught up in a revenge attack on the skins, turn out to be right in the thick of it anyway!

Contradictions abound—like life really. The Anti-Nazi League has dreams of a simpler world where the evil enemy can be easily categorised. Well, dream

away! Getting on a pedestal with an obvious, verbalised anti-Nazi message would satisfy them but I'd never get under the skin of this issue. 'Monsters' have certain qualities which would, in other circumstances, be regarded as positive. The gulf between 'monsters' and us is not as wide as the ANL would like. Anyone can become a Nazi, they don't come from Mars. They're not a different species. To think so is close to the Nazis' own thing about 'inferior minorities'.

Streamlining culture as the ANL wants to do only contributes to the 'simpleness' which I think is the beginning of the end, paving the way for the simple-minded doctrines like fascism. A culture that is

capable of circulating ideas is a dynamic one and far less likely to be dangerous to its members than one where ideas are choked. If I choose to tackle a serious problem in an unusual way, then wanting to burn me at the stake is not good enough as a response.

Kirsten Cale: There is a growing moral panic about violence on film. Where would you draw the line on screen violence, if any is to be drawn?

Geoffrey Wright: At the point at which it can no longer serve a dramatic paradigm. I myself was disturbed by the torture of the young cop in *Reservoir Dogs*. Tarantino [the director], however, ultimately made his violence work as a dramatic element. Prior to the torture scene, one could find the company of criminals casually reassuring, but when the torture happened you were jolted in to the realisation of just how rough these shuffling kind of amiable guys can play. On one level they are not so very different to us, on another they're appalling, but that's the stuff of drama. Otherwise we're left with newspaper headlines which would be (if *Reservoir Dogs* had been based on a real event), 'Brutal gang wipes itself out'. And we'd have no further feel for these characters at all.

The thing about drama is that it is supposed to read between the lines, it's supposed to de-abstract the world around us.

Kirsten Cale: Nuns used to picket *The Exorcist* because they believed that the film would inspire people to commit devilish acts. Today anti-facists picket *Romper Stomper* because they believe it will inspire cinema-goers to beat up immigrants. How susceptible is the public to cinematic brainwashing?

Geoffrey Wright: It's interesting that the anti-facists believe that *Romper* will inspire skinheads. Naturally I don't agree, I wouldn't have made the film if I did. Not a single ANL member will admit that the film encouraged them to become Nazis, yet they insist that it will happen to some other group of people.

Kirsten Cale: Do you think there is any case for censorship?

Geoffrey Wright: Bad, stupid and repugnant films are the price you pay for a dynamic culture. No successful insights without lots of dud or repulsive exploitation films. Let's try and talk more rather than ban films.

I seem to remember reading that Hitler's regime was most concerned about the 'adverse effects' of jazz and modern art on the occupied and home territories. The ANL and Hitler both appreciate creative endeavour in a similar way—something to be suppressed or streamlined. ●

White suede blues



Steve Banks on the new darlings of British pop

In the mid-seventies, David Bowie immortalised his performances of the time by designating himself the 'Thin White Duke'. 'The return of The Thin White Duke/ Throwing darts in lovers' eyes', he would croon, and the critics swooned. Bowie has been out of favour for several years now, having produced a series of motley albums under different guises. But, if the British music press are to be believed, the spirit of the Thin White Duke is with us again in the form of four young fey men who call themselves Suede.

'Suede', gushed *Melody Maker*, 'are only the most audacious, androgynous, mysterious, sexy, ironic, absurd, perverse, glamorous, hilarious, honest, cocky, melodramatic, mesmerising band you're ever likely to fall in love with'. The band itself has no doubt about its greatness. 'We always knew what kind of band we'd be', claimed bassist Mat Osman. 'An important, celebratory, huge rock band.' To emphasise the transmutation of lead singer Brett Anderson into the new David Bowie, *NME* photographed and interviewed the two together, as if to suggest that the wisdom of age was being handed over to the virility of youth. Meanwhile, the band's eponymous debut album went straight to Number One, and sold four times as many as its nearest rival in the first week of release.

So what is it about Suede that has the critics salivating so? Well, it's certainly not their sense of musical adventure. Suede's music can politely be described as small-time English rock, more in the

tradition of music hall than glam rock. 'We have a strong sense of where we come from', explained Anderson. 'We are champions of ordinary life. We find England strange, unique and beautiful.'

Where Bowie was exciting, glamorous, ambiguous, even dangerous, Anderson is ordinary, parochial and boring. Explaining why he would rather be English than American, Anderson put it like this: 'It's like exploring your own kitchen rather than becoming an astronaut, finding some interesting pieces of mould rather than a new solar system.' And this is the man who is supposed to be the Ziggy Stardust figure of the nineties?

In the seventies Bowie's ambiguous, androgynous persona (both on stage and in his private life) provided a frisson of sexual excitement. Anderson would make Jason Donovan seem a figure of sexual decadence. 'I see myself', he has claimed, 'as a bisexual man who has never had a homosexual experience'. Yes, and I see myself as an Albert Einstein who can't add up.

So, if they are neither musically interesting nor sexually adventurous, what have Suede got going for them? Well, for a start they have a publicist who shows a bit more flair and adventure than the band would ever dream of. Long before Suede had put a note down on vinyl, their PR company, Savage & Best, had won the trade paper *Music Week's* award for the best press campaign of the year.

But Suede's most important asset is that they are not black and they can't rap. At a time of a gathering backlash against rap and ragga—according to DJ Danny Baker, Virgin 1215, Richard Branson's new national radio station, has refused to

play any black music—Suede cannot fail.

The attitude of the British press to contemporary black music is a bit akin to poet Philip Larkin's attitude to modern jazz. Larkin was a great fan of jazz—up till the era of Charlie Parker and bebop. For Larkin jazz was about the black man entertaining the white man. After Parker, however, jazz changed. 'From using music to entertain the white man, the negro has moved to hating him with it', he complained. 'Anyone who thinks that an Archie "America's done me a lot of wrong" Shepp record is anything but two fingers extended from a bunched fist at him personally cannot have an appreciation of what he is hearing.'

Today's music press is imbued with the same prejudices. Black music was acceptable so long as it was entertaining and didn't put two fingers up to white society. But today Ice T is to *NME* and *Melody Maker* what Archie Shepp was to Philip Larkin. 'The slavish acceptance of all things American', claimed *Select* magazine recently, 'has damaged the way we see our own culture'. For 'American' read 'black'. Again and again in Britain, black rappers have been castigated for their violence, their separatism and their 'loathsome and provocative racism and sexism' (*Select*, April 1992). Funny how these same critics manage to overlook Bowie's 'provocative racism and sexism', such as the Nazi chic pose he adopted in the early seventies.

Suede provide the perfect antidote to Ice T. They are not black, they are not dangerous and they wouldn't dream of putting two fingers up to anyone—the perfect pop icons of the nineties. I bet they get plenty of airplay on Virgin Airwaves.



Nun entities

What have the following got in common: the most successful film musical ever made; the second most lucrative comedy ever made; and the most grindingly violent, nihilistic film ever made? Yes, they are all about nuns (*Sound of Music*, *Sister Act*, *Bad Lieutenant*).

For centuries, the nun has been an important landmark in the geography of our imagination. In 1797, for instance, Matthew Lewis popularised the story of the Bleeding Nun, in his novel *The Monk*. The story goes like this: a young aristocratic girl is sent to a convent by her parents because she is in love with an unsuitable young man. The unsuitable young man hears that the convent is haunted by the ghost of a bleeding nun and persuades the girl that the best way for her to escape is to dress up as the ghost, and simply walk past her holy jailers, who will faint in horror, allowing her to stroll out of the front door, where he will be waiting in his carriage. On the night, the figure of the bleeding nun climbs into the carriage and it is only when he tries to kiss her that the young man realises that this is not his lover, but the actual bleeding nun.

Lewis was a progressive Protestant, writing out of hatred for the feudal Catholic church. But the ideas in his story—sexual repression, compulsion, and the association with death (nuns and ghosts are interchangeable because neither is actually alive) remained part of the cultural definition of the nun for 200 years. The *Nun's Story*, for instance, is an account of one woman's struggle to lever herself out from under a regime that was repressive to the point of perversion. Even in the pro-Catholic *Song of Bernadette*, it is clear that Bernadette was coaxed into the wimple by Joseph Cotten, against her own judgement. Once inside, she is denigrated to the point of death by a cadaverous Mother Superior who regards Bernadette's gangrene as an affectation.

Why have nuns come in for such venom when monks (who are a lot worse in Lewis' book) have been relegated to a Derek Nimmo sideshow of red-nosed Christmas bell-ringing? Well, nuns have rejected men and opted for communal living. As such they are an affront to phallogocentric, individualistic Protestant capitalism. A very successful affront at that, having been going now for 1600 years (Leninism lasted 72 years). The sexual element, of course, is what gives the idea its power. Men find it impossible to believe that there are women who don't want to sleep with them. Most nuns' stories show that these women are whirlpools of desire, at the edge of insanity. In *Black Narcissus*, for instance, the sight of David Farrar in a pair of shorts makes Deborah Kerr go all funny and drives Kathleen Byron totally insane. She covers her face in lipstick and pushes another nun off a cliff.

In the fifties and sixties, all this changed. The basic matrix of sex and violence remained but the emphasis shifted to the individual (young, attractive) nun's struggle against the kinky system. This was the definitive *Nun's Story*. It reached its camp apotheosis with the *Sound of Music*—a film which drenched the two great sex-fantasy costumes of our age (the SS uniform and the nun's habit) in the stinging disinfectant of innocence.

All these films (there's even an Elvis version I can't remember the name of, but Mary Tyler Moore played the nun) ended with the heroine walking bravely out into the World. The implication here, of course, is that the World is better than the cloister. The World in question was the newborn consumer capitalism, so confident of its own attractions it could seduce the nuns from their cells. In fact, it wasn't even a seduction. It was more of an enlightenment. The World was the Way.

During the eighties, this feeling was still strong enough to make a bestseller out of Karen Armstrong's squalid little rip-off *Through the Narrow Gate* and you still came across posh ex-convent girls trying to grab themselves a bit of credibility by claiming that they too were oppressed—not by poverty, the police, or racism but by...nuns (imagine telling that one in Bedford-Stuy or Soweto, or anywhere other than Medialand). The phrase 'Catholic guilt' became a big hit with successful lapsed Romans at the time. This was a way of turning the usual middle class guilt into something more exotic and cocktail-worthy. In fact, Catholics don't have guilt. They have confession. Matthew Lewis could have told you that. About 80 per cent of the world's Catholics also have extreme poverty. Guilt is for arts graduates.

Suddenly, all this has changed. On TV there is Sister Wendy Beckett, 'critic, Poor Clare and Wogan Vet'. Sister Wendy fronted the first ever exploitation arts show. Every week, the toothy old sister would stand in front of another modern nude and wax lyrical about its 'lovely fluffy pubic hair' or 'perfect, pert bottom'. As criticism it was at best basic. As TV it was a work of genius.

At the movies, there was *Sister Act* and *Nuns on the Run*. In both cases, refugees from the underworld hide out in a convent. In the sixties, this would have led to the nuns putting on mini-skirts and going out on the rob. Instead, the criminals were redeemed and the nuns went on pretty much as before, though in *Sister Act*, they got a better choir and improved diet. The Mother Superior in *Nuns on the Run* is an interesting case. Played by the strong, beautiful Janet Suzman, she soon clocked Robbie Coltrane's scam and took his money for the poor, liberating it from Babylon; a course of action that implies a strong opposition to the state as well as sin, in short to the World—which is here presented as tacky and violent. The fact that Coltrane is dressed as a nun makes a young woman confide her troubles in him. So even the derided wimple is presented as an effective agent of good. Just to underline the point, one of the criminals' girlfriends tries to become a nun herself.

The ultimate expression of this comes in *Bad Lieutenant*, where a nun is raped and then forgives her assailants. Once this would have been an occasion for jokes about how she had liked it really. Here she transcends what the World can throw at her—a kind of spiritual Terminator, indestructible and self-repairing, putting herself back together in front of the broken, impotent Harvey Keitel—a representative of the male, police state.

And now we have *Body and Soul* (Carlton), which reverses the thesis by having a nun go out into the World and try to save it. The nun figure is glamourised. She is played by Kristin Scott Thomas. She comes from a convent where the sisters spend the evening weaving and singing medieval ballads, and she wears a wimple of such baroque complexity that she looks like one of those naff aliens from a late *Doctor Who*. In fact, nuns nowadays go for crimplene A-line skirts, sensible shoes and discreet cruciform badges. To say that she is not representative would be to miss the point.

In *Body and Soul*, the nun as Great Healing Mother aims to save the nation by restoring its manufacturing base (represented by a mill—as in 'there's trouble at t'...'). Just as she has resolved the contradictions in her own life (between body and soul), so she must now heal the contradictions of capitalism by creating a new, more caring, greener version. The mill will be run using natural fibres and dyes. The story perfectly expresses the desires and projects of nineties capitalism. Of course this is good for nuns. But I do think it reflects badly on the nation that the only saviour we can conceive is a knitting nun. God help us. ●

A very English poet

Philip Larkin personified the postwar predicament of the English middle class, believes Alistair Ward

Prison for the strikers,
Bring back the cat,
Kick out the niggers,
How about that?

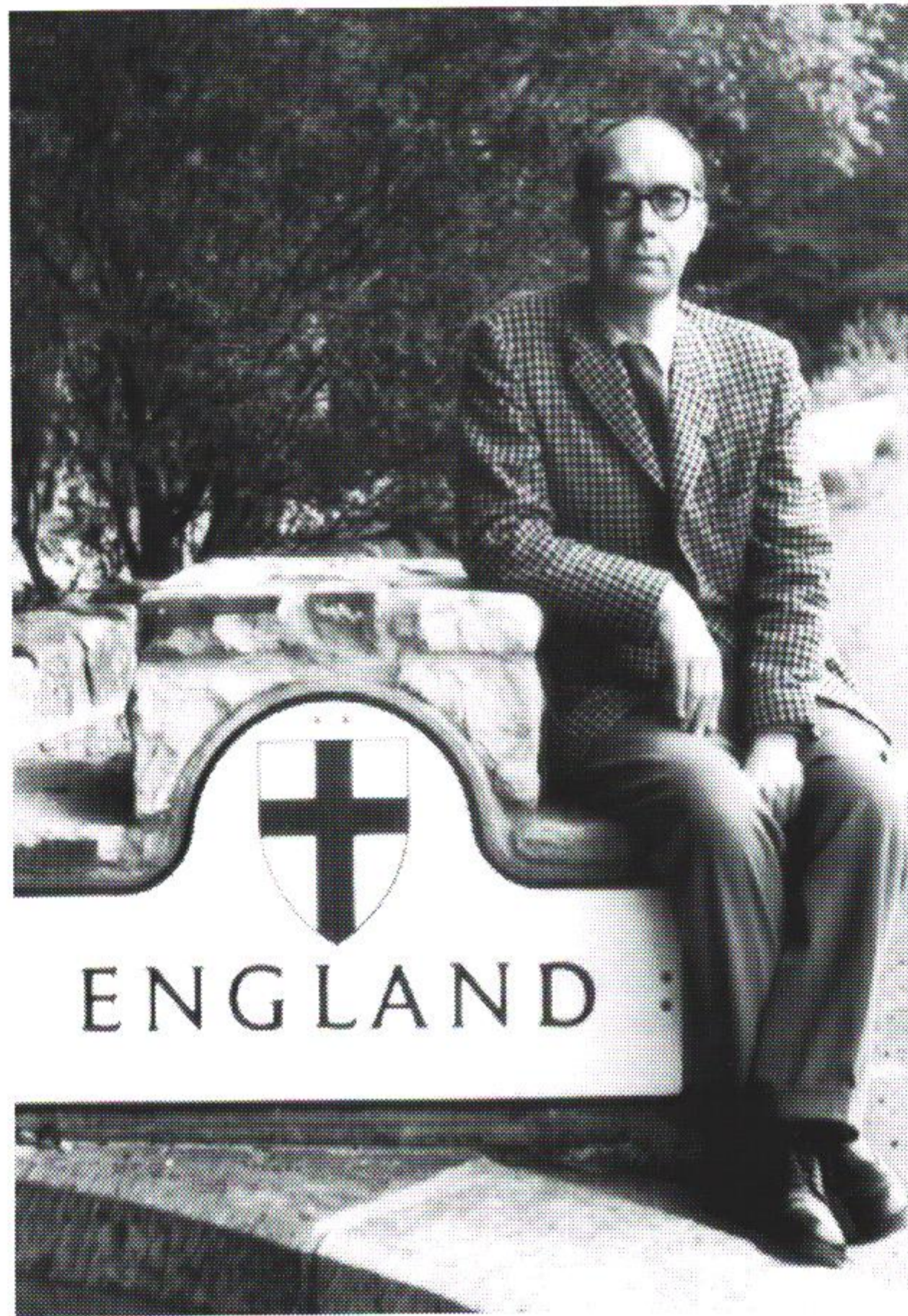
Philip Larkin, 1970

A retiring librarian from Hull, and a former unofficial laureate of the literary fraternity, Philip Larkin would appear to be an unlikely target of middle class outrage. But the racist doggerel, misogynist observations and base anti-working class prejudices that litter his newly published private correspondence have suddenly elevated him to the first rank of offenders against respectable taste. Everyone from the literary editor of the *Guardian* to the Wharton professor of English at Oxford University has taken the opportunity to sound off against Larkin.

Of course this is not the first time that Larkin has come under attack from critics and fellow poets. Throughout his career, he was lampooned by figures like Charles Tomlinson and Donald Davie as someone whose work was symptomatic of Britain's diminishing cultural horizons. An academic community nurtured on the grandiose literary pretensions of prewar giants like Yeats and Eliot had long been affronted by Larkin's rejection of the 'alien' influence of modernism in favour of an insular tradition of English pastoral poetry.

During Larkin's lifetime, however, such criticism tended to be muted and resigned. Most commentators recognised that Larkin's very popularity and significance depended upon his dry and measured evocation of the drab and comfortable world of the postwar consensus. They accepted that the stifling of the elitist presumptions and inaccessible difficulty of modernist writing beneath the provincial stuffiness and jaundiced conformity of poets like Larkin was the price they had to pay for the more egalitarian outlook of the postwar era.

Or such was the case until the publication late last year of Larkin's private correspondence. The exposure of one of



England's most eminent poets as racist, misogynist and misanthropic has deeply shocked and embarrassed the literary community. Critics have lined up to denounce Larkin as an unfortunate aberration from the pluralistic, tolerant and humane values of twentieth-century British poetry. They have suggested that his bigotry was linked to his rejection of modernism and of its celebration of the diverse, experimental and cosmopolitan.

In fact, Larkin's prejudices differ little from those of the earlier generation of poets. Eliot, Pound and Lawrence all held an elitist conception of the role of art in a society which they believed was besieged by the barren mediocrity and soullessness of the modern. This led them to a deep suspicion of democracy and contempt for the common man. The

modernist belief that the inclusion of the majority into the cultural life of society heralded a new barbarism acquired sinister political connotations in their private correspondence.

Most of the writers of the prewar period dabbled in notions of racial superiority and eugenics. DH Lawrence's private jottings contain fantasies about 'lethal' chambers the size of 'Crystal Palace' for the disposal of 'the sick, the halt and the maimed'. HG Wells advocated an ethical system 'shaped primarily to favour the procreation of what is fine and efficient and beautiful in humanity...to check the procreation of the servile types':

'And for the rest—those swarms of black and brown and yellow people who do not come into the needs of efficiency? Well, the world is not a charitable institution, and I take it that they will have to go.'

That Larkin shared many of these prejudices should come as no surprise. Even his parochialism and anti-modernism are not distinct. Larkin stands in the tradition of quintessentially English poets running from Wordsworth, through Tennyson and Hardy to Alden and Houseman and such contemporary figures as Roger McGough.

If anything, the passionate venom of Larkin's private correspondence comes as a refreshing tonic after the stale preoccupations, torpid cynicism and humdrum civility of his public writings. Certainly the exposure of his personal obsessions makes Larkin into a more interesting figure.

The contrast between the civility of his public writings and bigotry of his private correspondence gives expression to the dilemma of the English middle class in the postwar years. The postwar generation was no less racist than the prewar writers. But they lived in an age when the searing experience of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust made the public espousal of such bigotry unacceptable.

The metamorphosis of the strident chauvinism and hatred of the common herd which inflects the work of prewar writers into Larkin's insular pastoralism and eccentric misanthropy provides an insight into the predicament of the middle class throughout the postwar years. His painful sublimation of a lasting fear and contempt for the working class which was no longer in keeping with postwar values of decency, equality and tolerance makes Larkin not the *enfant terrible* of English letters, but rather its most apt representative.

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Kenan Malik examines how a critic of Western imperialism has ended up supporting Western intervention in Bosnia

The myth of the 'Other'

Culture and Imperialism, Edward W Said, Chatto & Windus, £20 hbk

In Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, one of the characters, Saladin, finds himself in a detention centre for illegal immigrants. Here, all the inmates have been transformed into beasts—water buffalo, snakes, manticores. 'How do they do it?', Saladin asks a fellow prisoner. 'They describe us', comes the reply, 'that is all. They have the power of description and we succumb to the pictures they construct'.

Like the inmates of Rushdie's fictional immigration centre, contemporary cultural theorists have a great fear of the 'power of description'. As Edward Said observes in *Culture and Imperialism*, 'representation itself [keeps] the subordinate subordinate, the inferior inferior' (p95).

Culture and Imperialism is a study of the role of Western culture in maintaining the subordination of the non-Western world. Imperialism, Said believes, is not just about physical subjugation. The power of the West over the third world arises from its ability culturally to represent the non-Western world as the 'Other'.

Western thought, argues Said, cannot allow anything to be defined in its own terms. When Western intellectuals seek to understand the non-Western world, they do so by creating such a world in terms of Western thought. They create a world, not as it actually exists, but as they see it. In so doing they rob non-Western people of the right to define themselves. Instead, such people simply become the silent 'Other' in Western thinking, distinguished solely through their antagonism to the dominant self:

'Without significant exception the universalising discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonised people should be heard from, their ideas known.' (p58)

This cultural appropriation of the other, argues Said, is akin to, and indeed an indispensable part of, the physical

occupation of foreign territory. Just as the West's politicians and generals annex foreign lands, so its intellectuals and philosophers colonise the field of knowledge.

At the heart of Said's argument in *Culture and Imperialism* is the view that there is an unvarying way in which Europeans have always viewed non-Europeans:

'Throughout the exchange between Europeans and their "others" that began systematically half a millennium ago, the one idea that has scarcely varied is that there is an "us" and a "them", each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident.' (pxxviii)

The whole of Western culture, writes Said, has first prepared the ground for, and subsequently validated, the quest of imperialism. Culture—literature, philosophy, music, visual art—is therefore an integral part of Western subjugation of the third world. Said trawls through the great works of the Western canon—from Austen to Verdi, from Conrad to Camus—to demonstrate their place in the imperial project.

An understanding of Western culture requires what Said calls a 'contrapuntal reading'—in essence, reading a work with mind to its social and political context. It means recognising when we read Conrad, for instance, that 'far from *Heart of Darkness* and its image of Africa being "only" literature, the work is extraordinarily caught up in, is indeed an organic part of, the "scramble for Africa" that was contemporary with Conrad's composition'.

Said's plea for contextual reading is useful. But rather than following his own stricture, Said removes culture from its historical and social context. He tries to force authors as different as Austen and Conrad, Defoe and Dickens into a single framework with a single view of the 'other', and thereby loses the particularity of each. You are left wondering why an author who extols the virtues of contrapuntal reading has apparently opted not to use the method himself. ►

In reality, the European view of non-Europeans has been anything but 'settled, clear and unassailably self-evident'. At different times over the past 500 years European society has viewed foreigners in many different ways.

Fifteenth-century Europe was a world characterised by its irrational premises, static nature and parochial scope, where all manner of prejudices attached themselves to anything out of the ordinary. In his book *European Encounters with the New World*, Anthony Pagden relates the tale of Bemoin, a Wolof prince from West Africa who in 1488 came to Portugal to ask for assistance in a war in which he was engaged. While in Portugal, Bemoin converted to Christianity, with the King and Queen acting as his godparents. Four days later he was made a knight. 'In Portugal then', observes Pagden, 'he had become a noble, a member of the Royal Household and a Christian Vassal of the "Lord of Guinea". He had, that is, become, European in everything but his skin colour' (p4).

Bemoin returned to West Africa with a fleet of ships, men and military equipment to help him prosecute his war. When the fleet had almost reached its destination, however, the Portuguese commander killed Bemoin and set sail back to Portugal. 'Once poor Bemoin had slipped away from the mouth of the Tagus', Pagden concludes, 'he had, for all those in Portugal, already...become part of another world' (p5).

Bemoin's story shows how society's view of strangers is more complex than Said suggests—the Portuguese clearly did not treat Bemoin simply as the 'other' despite his strangeness in terms of colour, religion, dress, habits and so on. At that moment in the development of European society, irrationality underpinned social

powers' (quoted in A Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Fallacy*, p44).

This conception of humanity led to a radically new perception of non-Europeans. In his book *Persian Letters*, published in 1721, the French philosopher, Montesquieu, presents a series of fictional letters in which two Persian visitors to France describe to a friend back home their impressions of a strange society. Through these letters Montesquieu provides his readers with a fresh understanding of their own society. For Montesquieu, Persians, though foreign, were not 'other' at all. They were rational beings whose insights and sensibility could shed light on his own society.

How very different is this view from that expressed by British naturalist, Thomas Huxley, a century later. Huxley was a liberal, a humanitarian and one of the most progressive men of his age. Yet his concept of the negro as naturally inferior was diametrically opposed to the humanistic outlook of Humboldt and Montesquieu:

'It is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed, and our prognathous relative has a fair field and no favour, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest that is to be carried out by thoughts and not by bites. The highest places in the hierarchy of civilisation will assuredly not be within the reach of our dusky cousins, though it is by no means necessary that they should be restricted to the lowest.' (*Lay Sermons, Addresses and Reviews*, p24)

Here at last we find a European view of the non-European that fits Said's description. But it is one that is specific to its time. Understanding it, and how it manifests itself in culture, requires a method that Said dispenses with—examining social consciousness in its specificity.

Looking at imperialism in terms of 'the other' eternalises Western domination. It also reduces the political and social processes of imperialism to the level of ideas.

For Said, imperialism expresses not a social or economic relationship, but a geographic one. More precisely, Said regards imperialism as the geographic expression of the dominance of self over other. 'The enterprise of empire', he argues, 'depends upon the *idea of having an empire*' (p10, emphasis in the original). This is why 'culture is in advance of politics, military history, or economic processes' (p241).

By seeing power as residing not in social relations, but in 'discourse', 'language' or 'representations', Said makes the material world disappear. Language and culture become reified into the only reality while social beings become illusions, constituted in the world of language and symbols. Viewed in this fashion, knowledge itself can become oppressive.

Because knowledge is implicated in imperialism, science, as the high point of knowledge, is at the forefront of Western domination:

'At the heart of European culture during the many decades of imperial expansion lay an undeterred and unrelenting Eurocentrism. This accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories, it studied them, it classified them, it verified them...but above all it subordinated them

Said makes the material world disappear

perceptions—Bemoin was one of 'us' so long as he was in Portugal, but became a stranger during the course of travelling to Africa. Bemoin's story demonstrates how a society's view of outsiders is historically contingent—a West African immigrant to Portugal today would clearly be seen and treated very differently.

Three centuries later we find a very different conception of non-Europeans. The Enlightenment, the intellectual wind of change that swept through Europe in the eighteenth century, ushered in a new age of thought which tried to bury the prejudices and superstitions of the past and to establish the study of nature, humanity and society on a rational foundation. Unlike medieval writers, Enlightenment thinkers like Wilhelm von Humboldt stressed not difference and strangeness but 'our common humanity' and the need 'to treat all mankind without reference to religion, nation or colour, as one fraternity, one great community, fitted for the attainment of one object, the unrestrained development of the psychical

by banishing their identities, except as a lower order of being from the culture and indeed the very idea of white Christian Europe...Eurocentric culture relentlessly codified and observed everything about the non-European or peripheral world, and so thoroughly and in so detailed a manner as to leave few items untouched, few cultures unstudied, few peoples and spots of land unclaimed.' (pp267-68)

Said wants us to believe that there is an intimate connection between the scientific method and the imperialist project, between 'Eurocentric' knowledge and a racist outlook. But there is no such logical connection. The ability of nineteenth-century European scientists 'to learn about other people, to codify and disseminate knowledge, to characterise, transport, install, and display instances of other cultures' (p130), far from being oppressive, was a great step forward for humanity. Only by studying society can we have the understanding necessary to change it.

The problem is not science, but its use by the capitalist class to legitimise its rule. In the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie increasingly press-ganged science into service, to justify capitalist society as 'natural'. Victorian positivism held that society could not be any other way because it was governed by natural laws. Scientific racism proclaimed the natural fitness of the capitalist class to rule over the working class and of the white race to rule over black. Such arguments demonstrate not the oppressive nature of science, but the primacy of social forces over ideological ones.

The problems arising from Said's methodology are not simply matters of academic concern. The political consequence of Said's approach can be seen in his discussion of the relationship between culture and the anti-imperialist struggle. Having removed imperialism from its social and political context, and reduced it to the cultural appropriation of the 'other', Said is forced to view anti-imperialism in a similar fashion. The struggle against imperialism, too, is removed from the real world and becomes an issue not of political or social liberation, but of challenging 'discourse' and 'reclaiming' culture.

The project of anti-imperialism, writes Said, lies in 'the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the natives' past by the processes of imperialism' (p253). Anti-imperialist movements need to 'rechart and then occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of the designated inferior Other' (p253).

Anti-imperialism used to mean the struggle against Western domination of, and intervention in, third world states. Liberation was acknowledged as political, economic and social emancipation. In Said's hands, it means reclaiming history and liberating the 'other'. In transforming the meaning of liberation in this fashion, Said signals his willingness to accept the inevitability of imperialist domination:

'There is the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world, in which imperialism courses on, as it were, belatedly in different forms (the North-South polarity of our own time is one), and the

relationship of domination continues, but the opportunities for liberation are open.' (pp277-278)

In practical terms, Said's accommodation to 'the relationship of domination' can be seen in Palestine. A leading member of the Palestine National Council, Said has been a key figure in urging Palestinians to recognise the state of Israel, to give up the struggle for liberation and to accept 'autonomy' on the West Bank. In place of self-determination, Said settles for 'space' within the imperialist framework.

But it is in relation to the current struggle in Bosnia that the reactionary consequences of Said's understanding of imperialism are best revealed. As a member of the Committee to Save Bosnia-Herzegovina, Said recently signed a letter which called on the West to arm the Muslims in Bosnia. 'The United Nations, the United States and the European Community bear a heavy responsibility', the letter argued, 'for pursuing a policy of pseudo-evenhandedness that has, in fact, strengthened the side of aggressive Serbian expansionism'. In the place of 'pseudo-evenhandedness', the authors made a plea for 'a progressive US foreign policy and a just and democratic international order'.

Suddenly, half a millennium of an 'undeterred and unrelenting Eurocentrism' is forgotten. The system which 'subordinated' the non-Western peoples by 'banishing their identities except as a lower order of being' has now become a potential champion of Muslim rights in Bosnia, and one that can be 'progressive', 'democratic' and 'just'.

There is no contradiction between Said's academic critique of imperialism and his practical support for Western military action. His call for Western intervention is the logical outcome of his idealist concept of imperialism. For all his insistence on the centrality of imperialism to Western society, Said regards imperialist domination less as the historical necessity of capitalism in the twentieth century than as a policy option pursued by certain governments. If only the major powers would stop seeing the rest of the world as the 'other', he suggests, then it would be possible for them to pursue a progressive foreign policy.

The corollary of this is that once imperialism is stripped of its historical specificity, any act of aggression can be seen as imperialist. Thus the actions of Serbia, an impoverished, isolated rump of a backward Stalinist regime, are seen as a greater threat to peace than the military firepower of the most powerful nations on Earth. Since, according to Said, Serbian nationalists view Muslims as the 'other', then their actions in the Bosnian conflict are the equivalent of American atrocities in Vietnam or German treatment of Jews. Meanwhile, the nations who, just two years ago slaughtered thousands of Iraqis and reduced their country to rubble, are seen as potential friends of Bosnian Muslims. This is a grotesque inversion of reality.

Said's idealist methodology leads in practice to an accommodation with imperialism. It should be a warning that debates about theory and method are not arcane and academic, but can have ominous practical consequences. The concept of the 'other', which seems at first reading to fix its sights upon imperialism, is in the end a barrier to understanding and opposing it.

The Fate of Hong Kong, Gerald Segal,
Simon & Schuster, £16.99 hbk

Gerald Segal, Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and editor of the *Pacific Review*, like many other commentators on Hong Kong, believes that the fate of the British colony could change the way China is governed. This is putting the cart before the horse. The hope that Hong Kong could drag China towards democratic capitalism is just the hope for a 'white knight' to come and save the world economy from recession.

Segal places far too much emphasis on Britain's role in Hong Kong's fate. Britain may have ensured the conditions for Hong Kong's success—by maintaining a repressive system of colonial rule for the past 100 years—but Britain cannot influence its future. That much was shown when governor Chris Patten kow-towed to China's gerontocracy over his proposed democratic reforms.

Segal does not answer the key question—why should Britain want to introduce democracy less than five years before handing Hong Kong over to China? He merely parrots what Patten and the British government say: that for some (unstated) reason a democratic Hong Kong would have more chance of survival as an independent part of China than it would with its present non-elected government.

In fact, Britain wants to demonstrate the moral superiority of capitalism over Chinese 'communism'. This is a last gasp of the Cold War—the sort of crusade that is designed to make a worn-out country like Britain look like it counts for something in the world. Unfortunately for Patten, Deng Xiaoping is less of a pushover than Neil Kinnock or John Smith. Anyone can look hard berating the Labour Party; taking on China is not so easy.

Segal leaves us with a choice of scenario for the future of Hong Kong. He places his bet on the slowing down of Hong Kong's economy to match that of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and the eventual convergence of Hong Kong with China. This area would then become a new 'Natural Economic Territory' and 'develop into the next economic powerhouse in East Asia'. But every indication is that the development of the market in China's free enterprise zones is tearing the country apart.
Sheila Phillips

Latin America in the Time of Cholera: Electoral Politics, Market Economics and Permanent Crisis, James Petras and Morris Morley,
Routledge, £35 hbk £12.99 pbk

This book is a useful introduction to the continent that time forgot. While most of the capitalist world celebrated the eighties boom, Latin America dubbed those years the 'lost decade'. The same image of Latin America prevailed in Europe and the USA—the only things that seemed to boom there were government debt and the drug trade. Yet the changes that have hit the world in recent years have not failed to touch Latin America.

The collapse of socialist visions of society gave a boost to economic liberalism. From Pinochet's Chile to Castro's Cuba, politicians, technocrats and intellectuals discovered the advantages of the market. But, as Petras and Morley show, 10 years of free market discipline have

delivered plummeting production and living standards instead of the promised prosperity. Political liberalisation, often encouraged by the old dictatorial regimes, gave credibility to austerity measures and left the repressive state structures intact. The effects of letting capitalism loose are shown by the growth of casual labour—to over 80 per cent of the region's workforce according to the authors—and by the appearance of diseases, as with the cholera epidemic in Peru, not seen for a century.

The flipside of the triumph of capitalist ideology is the weakening of American power. Petras and Morley point out that 'whereas in the 1950s and 1960s Washington provided large-scale economic aid to allied regimes pursuing "appropriate" development models, today it demands massive changes to benefit US capital and commerce in return for historically low levels of funding support' (p70). Latin America was a net exporter of capital in the 1980s. US dominance is increasingly exerted not through the power of its investment, but through ideological and military campaigns like the invasion of Panama in 1989.

Latin America in the Time of Cholera is a useful examination of the collapse of the left and the consequences of the free market. But Petras and Morley condemn the role of Western governments in sponsoring militarism throughout the region, and at the same time demand the West put the Latin American 'state terrorists' on trial.

Paola Martos

The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe, Jacques Derrida, Indiana University Press, £13.95 hbk

The process of unifying Europe has probably found its ideal commentator in Jacques Derrida, the father of deconstruction. Derrida makes a virtue of prevarication, thinking that to be conclusive is necessarily dogmatic. Just as European countries edge towards unity, interrupted by setbacks and conflicts, so Derrida ruminates over his doubts and worries about whether Europe is too definitive and exclusive a proposition.

Derrida has been promising an investigation of nationalism for some time. Last year he published a 'Prolegomena to an hypothesis' on the 'Onto-theology of national humanism' in the *Oxford Literary Review* (Vol14). Before that he worried, in *Of Spirit*, about the Nazi affiliations of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, in other respects an influence upon Derrida. Now in *The Other Heading* he returns to a supra-nationalism of Europeanism.

Derrida is keen to avoid the politically correct debate in which his ideas have been implicated to date. So he distances himself from the 'exhausted programmes of Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism' (p13). His cynicism about Europe is quite intelligent in that he sees Europe as the outcome of national strategies rather than an unalloyed pan-Europeanism. He parodies Europeanism thus: 'I am all the more national for being European' (p48). But Derrida prevaricates to the end, protesting that 'I am not, nor do I feel, European in every part, that is European through and through' (p82). His personal ambiguity about the project is a poor analysis, but an accurate reflection of today's Europe.

James Heartfield

**LIVING
MARXISM**

back issues

No52 ● February 1993

'Rape camps': What will they dream up next?

Behind the West's humanitarian mask; The ANC: freedom postponed indefinitely; The economyth of recovery; Churchill and white power; Apache Indian; Vampires

No53 ● March 1993

The pictures they don't want you to see

The hidden side of the Yugoslav war; America v Europe; The PC presidency; Abortion in the USA; Malcolm X

No54 ● April 1993

Slump special: Frightening the life out of us

The experts on the chances of recovery; Welcome to the workfare state; Britain; war economy; Breaking the selective silence; Avant-garde art; Movie violence

No55 ● May 1993

Ban nothing

Who's making the news in Bosnia?; Where will the West strike next?; Crime panics; The framing of Moss Side; After Warrington; Medved makes censorship PC

£2.50 includes postage and packing

binders

The best way to keep your magazines safe from the perils of everyday life is to get into binding.

New, improved *Living Marxism* embossed binders with optional yearly stickers are just £7 plus 80p postage and packing, two for £14 post free.

index

Issues 1-44; November 1988-June 1992
£2 plus 40p p&p

Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX

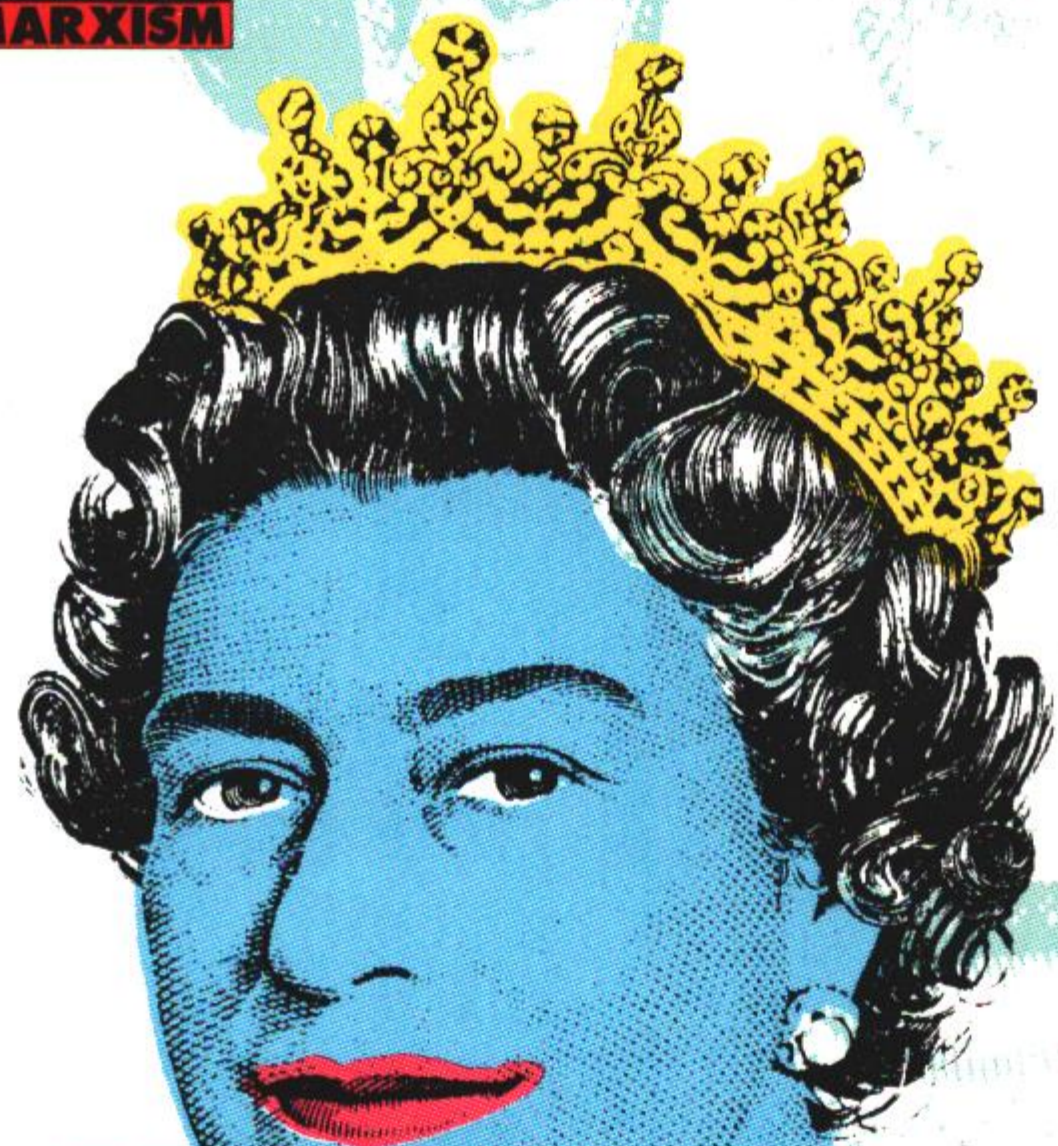
Abolish the Monarchy t-shirts

**Single size extra large
t-shirt £7 plus 80p
postage and packing**

Black, red, blue and yellow on white

**Make cheques payable to
Junius Publications Ltd, and send to
BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX**

**LIVING
MARXISM**



**Abolish the
Monarchy**

THE
**NATIONAL
GALLERY**

**TRADITION
AND
REVOLUTION
IN
FRENCH ART**

1700-1880

**PAINTINGS & DRAWINGS
FROM LILLE**

24 MARCH-11 JULY 1993

Monday-Saturday 10am-6pm
Sundays 12noon-6pm

Admission: £4 Concessions £2

Sainsbury Wing Entrance
Trafalgar Square, London WC2

Recorded Information: 071-389 1773



Géricault: Race of the Riderless Horses (detail)