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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS? WRONG

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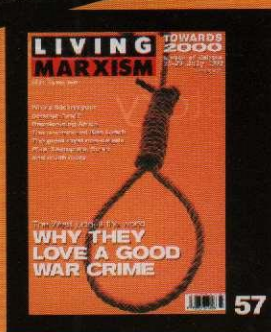
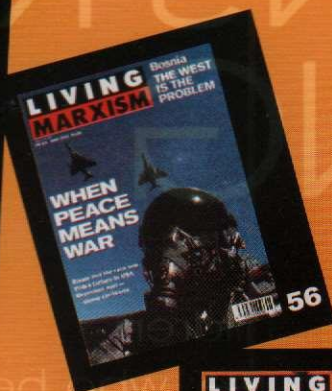
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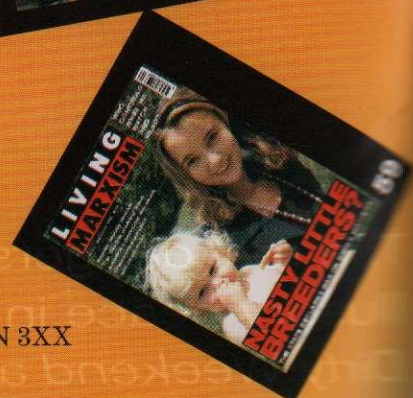
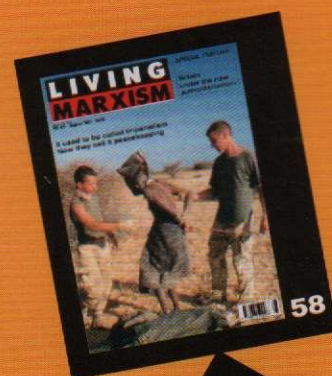
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COVER PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER



Hiding behind children

This month's *Living Marxism* focuses on the issues of children's rights, child sexual abuse, 'home alone' children and smacking kids. Our aim is to highlight the way in which children are being used as political pawns by the powers that be.

Throughout the twentieth century, British and American governments have accused their enemies of waging war against children, or of using children as a 'human shield'.

Today, however, it is clear that the British and US authorities are the ones hiding behind children. They are exploiting people's concern about the welfare of the young and vulnerable in order to legitimise more repressive laws and regulations.

Every authoritarian policy proposal, from tightening controls on television broadcasts to giving the police and courts more power, is now justified as an attempt to protect children. The fashionable concern with 'children's rights' has become the front for a state campaign to impose tighter controls on society.

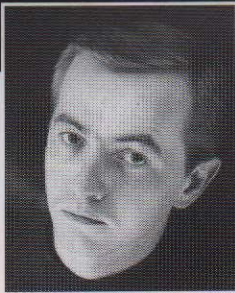
That's why we think rejecting the fraud of children's rights is the precondition for protecting the real rights of adults.

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Mick Hume

Here is the unhappy news

When top BBC news-reader Martyn Lewis first argued that television should broadcast less bad news and more 'happy news', it was treated as a bit of a joke by media insiders. But it is not funny.

The emphasis on 'happy news' is the fashionable face of censorship; not the crude bans of a police state, but the more subtle process of controlling the way in which information is presented. And enthusiasm for 'happy news' is not the preserve of a middle-aged school prefect like Lewis. It is becoming official BBC policy, and being taken on board by broadcasters everywhere.

Lewis made his original call for a change in the way news is broadcast back in May, when he told American journalism students how, with 'depressing regularity', viewers asked him, 'why is the news so gloomy? Why don't you give us more good news?'.

By August, senior figures from the BBC were telling the Edinburgh International Television Festival that Lewis was essentially right. In future the news, said Sir Graham Hills, BBC governor for Scotland, should 'give a better view of the world we live in'. Tim Orchard, editor of the BBC's *One O'clock News*, assured delegates that the corporation had effectively begun to implement the 'happy news' policy, by scaling down the violence in news bulletins.

Lewis himself has been keen to dismiss claims that he wants the news to be filled with cute stories about cats and dogs (although he is less keen to mention his authorship of a compilation of those Rantzenesque 'and finally...' bits from the end of evening news bulletins). He says

that issues like the war in Bosnia should remain high on the news agenda, but that broadcasters must also accentuate the positive stories.

All of which may sound unobjectionable to some. And indeed, the idea of playing up the positive news might be fair enough if we lived in a positive, forward-looking society. But what can the notion of more 'happy news' mean in the context of today, when we are in the middle of an economic slump and the world order is breaking down in conflict from Bosnia to Somalia?

What can the notion of more 'happy news' mean in an age of depression where wage cuts are two-a-penny in Britain or America, and in Africa life is even cheaper than that. Against such a background, pointing up 'happy news' must mean playing down the problems of international capitalism. Stripped of the smiles and the viewer-friendly presentation, 'happy news' serves as subtle propaganda protecting the interests of those who own and control society today.

Take the examples of 'happy news' which Martyn Lewis offered, in his original speech back in May, as the kind of stories which ought to be given more high-profile coverage. Among other stories, he mentioned the fact that a car manufacturer had announced record profits, the fact that British Aerospace had won a new order, and a report that EC finance ministers had been talking up the prospects for the European economy.

These reports read like a pile of corporate press packs, the sort of puffed-up bumph which is normally the preserve of hired company guns from the public relations industry. Elevating such pieces of soft soap into major items of hard news

is far more serious than reporting on trivia like dancing dogs and singing cats.

When Lewis calls for more emphasis on the good news from the car or aerospace industries—the rise in profits for the directors and shareholders—he is also saying that we should hear less about the boring old 'gloomy' news: the big job losses, wage cuts and shopfloor speed-ups on which those new profits are based.

And when Lewis suggests that news broadcasts should give more prominence to positive statements from European economics ministers, he is also implying that they should play down the negative aspects of EC capitalism: like the little matter of a continent-wide recession and about 17m officially unemployed.

Seen through the smiling eyes of Martyn Lewis, the world of television news becomes a virtual reality zone, where the colours are a little brighter and the people a little happier than in the real world, where we live. And if our experience of life in this society does not quite correspond to the images we see on television, the message of 'happy news' is that it must be our own fault, since other people (like motor corporation directors and EC ministers) clearly have good things to shout about.

In August, while top BBC executives and governors were announcing their conversion to the 'happy news' formula, Lewis was warming to his theme of the need to focus more on the few success stories in society today. 'We categorise, for example, young people as joyriders and criminals', he complained, 'while there are not many stories about young people winning top awards and really achieving things in life'.

Lewis is not, of course, against the

categorisation of young people as criminals which is now a standard news item. He simply wants broadcasters to show the other side of the story, too. The fact that the vast majority of young people are stuck in youth training schemes, dead-end jobs or run-down colleges with no possibility of 'winning top awards and really achieving things' doesn't really matter. The important thing is to highlight the handful who do get on—like, presumably, the young entrepreneurs who go into business with the help of Lewis' favourite charity, the Prince's Trust. The result of playing up these glowing reports will be to hide the waste of the rest of a generation in the shadows.

Perhaps the consequences of the 'happy news' approach are clearest in reporting on international affairs. When they are dealing with events on the other side of the world, which happen outside of their audience's immediate experience, the broadcasting organisations have more license to dictate the tone of coverage. Here, the emphasis upon 'happy news' can only reinforce the existing tendency to portray everything that the Western powers do around the world in the most positive light possible.

In this respect it was instructive that, when the BBC newsmen in Edinburgh were explaining their commitment to show less violence, the example of unacceptable images they used was a film of the carnage inside a Baghdad civilian air-raid shelter, bombed by the Americans during the Gulf War.

A month later, the 'happy news' doctrine was in evidence again in the contrasting coverage of events in the Middle East and in Africa. The specially extended news bulletins could not contain their delight at the outbreak of peace between the Palestinians and Israelis (a 'peace'

What can the notion of 'happy news' mean in the middle of an economic slump?

based, as argued elsewhere in *Living Marxism*, on the continued denial of freedom to Palestine). But those same bulletins included only a few embarrassed mumbles (and fewer pictures) about the way in which American 'peacekeepers' in Somalia had killed another 100 civilians in a helicopter gunship attack. Well, it would have spoiled the party, wouldn't it?

This is the way in which censorship is advancing today: not just through bans and proscriptions, but through the more rigorous control and manipulation of that information which they *do* let us see.

The growing influence of the 'happy news' approach is one aspect of the problem. Another is the recent instruction from BBC governors that Lewis' colleagues like Jeremy Paxman should give government ministers an easier time in interviews. Another is the culture of conformity, in which there are more and more television channels available, broadcasting less and less critical coverage or investigative reports.

There is a crying need today to challenge the stifling atmosphere of censorship and conformity which hangs over every public discussion. Without the encouragement of more critical and open debate, the proponents of 'happy news' will be able to exercise monopoly control over the terms on which issues are raised and resolved.

People are not stupid; they do not

automatically believe everything which Martyn Lewis and his chums care to tell them. But if that version of events is the only one on offer, then it will win out by default, and those in authority who have made the lives of millions decidedly unhappy will be let off the hook.

The first thing we need to do is to stand up and tell the unhappy news about what is really happening in the world today: tell the unhappy news about the continuing capitalist slump, in the face of all their flannel about the recovery; tell the unhappy news about Western barbarism around the world, and challenge the distortions about peace in the Middle East or UN peacekeeping in the third world.

Living Marxism exists to tell the unhappy news that others think is too nasty for your ears. Our aim is not to make people miserable; the government and employers need no help from us in that department. It is to expose the truth about capitalism, in order to point the way towards a positive alternative.

Living Marxism is committed to standing against the tide of conformity, opposing all censorship and control of information. And we stand fully behind initiatives like the Angle gallery in Birmingham, now under imminent threat of eviction (see page 27) because of its record of putting on exhibitions which the powers that be don't want people to see.

Let's tell it like it is, and wipe the smile off Martyn Lewis' face.

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, write to Helen Simons, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (071) 278 9908

Yugoslavia: how the West has won

Like GC Macquarie (letters, September), I too was baffled by the title of Joan Phillips' article 'How the West has won' (July). However, I actually studied what she wrote.

Nobody can deny that the Western powers are thoroughly fed up with the war in former Yugoslavia, and would dearly like to pull out. Western political leaders have been discredited by repeatedly breaking the promises which they have made. The United Nations has been discredited by its inability to stop the fighting and to implement a peace deal. The Western powers are deeply divided over what to do.

But that is not the point that was being made. Although various Western tactics are criticised by assorted commentators, military men, diplomats and politicians, what has been universally accepted is the automatic right of the so-called 'international community', that is to say, the ruling classes of the big Western powers, to interfere in Yugoslavia, or anywhere else, as if they know best.

Take one example. The appointment of David Owen to oversee the 'peace process' was a rank insult to the people of the Balkans, yet, although some people here are critical of his plans, the idea that a Western politician—and a political failure at that—should have the right to determine the future of Yugoslavia is not questioned.

How many people are actually saying that the august members of the 'international community' are largely to blame for the Yugoslav tragedy? Who is actually saying that Western intervention as a whole, and not just aspects of it, is responsible for turning a difficult situation into an impossible one? Liberal opinion, which was until recently largely opposed to Western military and diplomatic adventures, now considers imperialism as the leading force for human progress, and only condemns the imperialists for not intervening sufficiently or competently.

I am very happy to see Clinton, Major, Kohl, the UN and other imperialist politicians and bodies stand discredited. But that is not enough. What needs to be shown is that genuine peace and social justice cannot be attained through the actions and institutions of the imperialist powers.

Paul Flowers Kingston-upon-Thames

While GC Macquarie rightly blames imperialism for the Balkan war, he repeats the Western claim that there are serious cultural divisions among the Yugoslav peoples. You don't have to travel across Yugoslavia to test his theory of linguistic differences; in most cities, it is enough to call next door. If Macquarie is right, one wonders how on earth the Serbs and Croats

ever managed to talk to each other. They have long lived side by side in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia.

The fact is that Serbs and Croats speak the same dialect of the same language, the so-called Shto dialect. Two other minor Serbo-Croat dialects exist, but nearly all Serbs and Croats speak Shto. The use of two alphabets reflects the 1054 schism between the Roman and Byzantine churches, and is a red herring; people don't speak in alphabets.

I learned Serbo-Croat from a manual written by the CIA, who failed to notice the two languages Macquarie has discovered, although alternative words for theatre, doctor, etc, were pointed out.

Celia Hawkesworth, who teaches Serbo-Croat at London University, writes that the differences between Serbian and Croatian are 'somewhat approaching those between British and American English'. I think she exaggerates. The vowel length in northern and southern English might be a closer parallel.

In any case linguistic divisions are not decisive. Slovenes certainly do speak a language that is not Serbo-Croat, but the Slovene republic plays no part in the fighting. The West has fomented a war among peoples speaking the same language.

Jeff Vernon Peckham, London

Unicef censorship?

'Six months after the Gulf War ended, why are the children still dying?', said the Unicef leaflet's headline. It was sent to supporters of the UK branch (a charity) in September 1991. Inside, the letter from the director included these words: 'In Iraq, clean water supplies have been bombed out of existence, meaning that even tiny children have to drink and wash in polluted water. Health services have been destroyed or disrupted, leaving millions of people vulnerable to epidemics of diseases like typhoid, cholera, and measles...in fact, in many ways, the peace has been as devastating as the war....'

Those are not the sentiments that I would expect from an organisation that 'helps to ensure that what the West has done to the Iraqi people remains hidden' ('Three years of bombs and sanctions', August).

Three years after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and in the aftermath of the biggest aerial bombardment in history, we certainly need authoritative information on health conditions in Iraq. We need a report that assesses all the contributory factors, including sanctions. Unicef is one of the bodies from whom we have a right to expect such a report.

After comments such as those that I have quoted, Unicef is very likely to have been subjected to massive political pressure by the US and UK governments (among others). Could

that pressure have led Unicef to suppress Dr Hoskins' report? In view of Unicef's proud record of withstanding political pressure (over the effects of World Bank/IMF 'structural adjustment policies', for example), I would hope and believe that Unicef would stand firm.

I am inclined to believe that Unicef declined to release Dr Hoskins' report for the reasons given in the *Independent* (but ignored in your report), that Hoskins 'reaches conclusions not entirely based on fact'. If this is true—and I shall be taking up this issue with Unicef—the shelved report would not have been the authoritative document that we need so urgently.

Hugh Dowson Claverton Down, Bath

Consistent anti-militarism

Justin O'Hagan (letters, September) asks: 'how can you "campaign against militarism" and at the same time support the military elitists of the IRA...? Capitalism has its glaring contradictions, but so too does "revolutionary communism".'

O'Hagan's version of anti-militarism suggests equating anyone and everyone carrying a gun, be they Irish republicans or British troops, Somali riflemen or American commanders of helicopter gunships. This outlook may provide the bearer with a warm glow of moral superiority, but in the cold light of day it does nothing to improve the position of millions of people living at the receiving end of Western military might. Just the opposite. The 'pox on both your houses' position effectively gives the West a free hand to get on with the job.

In the pages of *Living Marxism*, it seems to me that anti-militarism means something else. It means thorough-going opposition to the Western system of ruling the world by force of arms, with a small number of 'elitist' big powers imposing their interests with tanks and stealth bombers.

Campaigning against militarism is therefore consistent with taking sides against Britain's military machine in Northern Ireland. For revolutionary communists here in Britain, that means supporting the right of Irish people to fight back. On the other hand, claiming to be anti-militarist while refusing to support the struggle against an army of occupation—that could be described as 'contradictory'. Cowardly is another word which springs to mind.

Joyce Shields York

Authoritarian anti-racists

Frank Richards' critique of the policing role of the voluntary sector really hit home ('May the state preserve us from ourselves', July). In my experience, working in race relations, it is the liberals that are the most keen on the strong-arm state.

At regular 'multi-agency' meetings about

racial harassment with community and tenants' representatives, social workers, local authority departments and the police, it is always the people who perceive themselves to be the most anti-racist, the more radical social workers, who demand most state intervention.

They demand more video cameras on the streets, more police with increased powers to arrest juveniles, more powers for local authorities to take young offenders into care and to evict tenants suspected of breaking the law, and all in the name of anti-racism. It is often the police that stand up as the voice of reason and moderation and explain that civil liberties have to be upheld!

Dave Clark Newcastle

Pensions: equality means cuts

John Reid accuses Andrew Calcutt of making 'misleading statements' in his article on pension schemes ('Pensioners mugged by men in suits', July), but goes on to make statements which are not simply misleading, but wrong!

Reid is pleased to announce that men's and women's pensions will gradually be equalised. In reality, employers are using equality as a cover to cut benefits. Thus, under the guise of equalising benefits, employers are cutting the pensions of women rather than increasing those of men. This strategy has been endorsed by the advocate-general's advice to the European Court which is expected to make a final ruling later this year. If this advice is followed, the implications will be felt outside the pensions area. Why would women workers fight for equal pay when employers will respond by cutting the pay of men in the name of equality?

Reid's claim that people retiring now are not affected by the European Court ruling that pensions are pay is contradicted by the experience of many women workers. For example at Avdel Systems Ltd, women who have already retired have seen their benefits cut by up to 20 per cent. They are challenging the right of their employer to cut their pensions by taking a case to the European Court. But other women up and down the country who have been similarly affected are taking the pragmatic decision to keep their heads down and keep their jobs rather than object to cuts in their pensions.

Reid's comments on money purchase schemes are equally incorrect. Not only does the pension here depend on the contribution

rates paid (and try negotiating with an employer to pay adequate rates) but also on the investment returns earned and the annuity rates on the day an employee retires. Thus the employee takes on all the risk—and although he may on retirement purchase an index-linked pension, he will find that due to the inadequate contributions made and the cost of index-linked pensions, he will generally end up with a very low level of income.

Hilary Salt Manchester

Animal crackers

Whilst I understand Ann Bradley's desire to appear as controversial as possible, I wonder whether she is able to do this without resorting to her particular brand of brattish reactionary 'logic' ('Too much monkey business', September).

The disagreement she has with Peter Singer appears to be centred on the question as to what criteria are to be used in determining whether or not something/someone is to be given significance (rights, respect, obligation or whatever). Rather than deciding that these criteria are genetic (Singer's view according to Bradley) she argues that it lies with the ability to 'organise resistance' and demand rights. Well I have yet to see a group of six week-old babies picketing the maternity ward, organising resistance and demanding rights, but I would not let this prevent me from stopping anybody attempting to experiment on them.

Simon Drew Manchester

Ms Bradley mocks Peter Singer's commitment to securing rights for the Great Apes, and then goes on to sanction the fact that they are presently tortured, imprisoned and killed *en masse* with the shockingly mindless phrase 'we dominate other animals because we have developed the capacity to do so'. Ms Bradley, for someone who purports to hate fascists and racists, you use a remarkably similar rhetoric. In less enlightened times, a common white argument, as Singer has pointed out, was that 'we dominate black people because we have developed the capacity to do so'.

The point Singer seeks to make is that the mental capacity of the Great Apes to feel pain, to hanker after freedom, even to pine away in captivity, is comparable to that of a human being. I challenge Ms Bradley to visit any

laboratory where chimps are used for testing, and then argue with Singer.

Ms Bradley closes her article by saying 'when apes demand their rights, I'll listen'. Why should they have to ask you, or any human, for their rights to freedom from captivity and torture? Who died and made you God?

Michael Galvan Canterbury

I was somewhat bemused to read Ann Bradley's article about the Declaration on Great Apes. For a magazine devoted to freedom and equality it sounded suspiciously like bigotry.

What gives us the right to dominate everything we can? It cannot be denied that apes (like all mammals) express affection, and suffer pain and psychological stress. Why should we not treat them with respect?

Next time you question the state's dominance over you, question your own dominance over animals. Please note that the animal liberation movement is invariably populated by people who respect *all* life, human or not. Bombing Iraqis or dismembering gorillas to make ashtrays—they're all obscene to me.

Marius Dorey Lichfield, Staffordshire

Glad to be celibate

I must write in to applaud Geoff Burnham's letter (September) on homosexuality and narrow-mindedness. We live in what is supposed to be a land of free thought and expression and yet we continually come up against no-go areas. I'm a celibate heterosexual, but the way I'm regarded by some sections of the community you would think I was some kind of pervert. On numerous occasions I have expressed my support for the rights of the gay population and it seems that every declaration is an announcement of my own homosexual tendencies; if you respond in anything other than a vicious negative fashion you are instantly labelled 'queer'.

Society has a severe problem when it comes to dealing with sexuality. On one hand it expounds the theory of true love, but if that love is expressed as anything other than the love between two people of the opposite sex it is classed as deviant. It is society which is twisted, not the homosexuals and sado-masochists.

Gary Wm Clark (27, single, celibate deviant and proud of it) Lanarkshire

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

On Saturday 21 August, two women left their three-bedroomed house on a council estate in Dorking, Surrey and set off to visit friends in Slough, Berkshire. Their seven children, aged between 10 months and 14 years, remained in the house. Two 16 year-old women were left to look after them.

After a report from neighbours that the children had been left unattended, officers from Surrey County Council social services department and Surrey police child protection team arrived at 1.40pm on Monday 23 August to take the children away. Next day, at Reigate county court, judge Cook granted an order under the Child and Young Persons Act (1933) empowering social services to keep the children in care for 28 days, pending a full hearing.

'Dumped by gays'

Although the court hearing was held in chambers (in private), a reporter at the Press Association (PA) received a tip-off from a local source. As a result, on Wednesday 25 August, he interviewed a spokesperson for Surrey social services who told him that seven children had been found 'home alone'. When the PA put the story out, press and broadcast journalists rushed to the estate on the outskirts of Dorking, to doorstep the 16 year-old babysitters and lay in wait for the women's return.

Also awaiting their return, the police staked out the estate. But the women walked into Dorking police station of their own accord. They were interviewed by detectives and released. Returning home in the early hours of Thursday morning, one of the mothers was described by a neighbour as looking 'bewildered and shattered'.

On the morning of Thursday 26 August, 'the home

alone seven' were headline news. Some reports named the babysitters and one revealed the identity of the mothers. The *Daily Star* report ('Dumped by gays') was one of many to stress that the mothers were lesbians. Later that day, Surrey county council applied to the high court for an order under the Children Act (1989) restricting reporting of the case. Meanwhile the women were said to be 'fully cooperating' with a criminal investigation. It later emerged that no charges of neglect would be brought against them.

Care-nots

On Friday 3 September, following a case conference and a meeting with the mothers, Surrey police and social services announced that the children would remain in foster care until the court reviewed the case at the end of the month.

In the media the mothers of the 'home alone seven' were held up as examples of today's feckless unmarried mothers, with their lesbianism thrown in to make the story even more salacious. The London *Evening Standard* broke the story of a 'new home alone scandal' on Wednesday 25 August, and then went to town on it in two major articles on successive days.

'They are not what you would call a model family. Two mothers, seven children and five dogs. The washing machine lies on its side on the front lawn and the car is an abandoned rusty heap in the drive. The mothers kiss and cuddle in public.' (26 August 1993)

'Walter Ellis reports from the Surrey estate where the latest Home Alone scandal was discovered...a place where what would once have been known as the "respectable" working class lives cheek-by-jowl with

the new underclass, and the latter doing its best to make the lives of the former a misery....The division of the community into the cares and care-nots is obvious. A few houses are exceptionally well looked after, and their gardens are a picture....At the other end of the spectrum, sour smells drift out from peeling hallways and what once were lawns now resemble small patches of the African Sahel.' (27 August 1993)

Drawing heavily on local gossip, Ellis presented a detailed sexual history of 'the lezzy house'. There were references to 'frenetic comings and goings', 'low living and loud music', and a 'revolving door' of sexual partners including 'Tattoo Tracy'. Even the babysitters were subject to character assassination: 'one had recently been released from a truancy centre. The other had a boyfriend who was a regular visitor to the house.'

Most of the residents of the estate I spoke to were singularly unimpressed by this sort of caricatured coverage about irresponsible, deviant women. Almost all had their own stories of the problems of looking after children in a society where decent childcare facilities are considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Many thought that the media and the social services had acted more irresponsibly than the mothers.

'Their decision'

'What social services did was silly', said a married woman in her forties. 'There were 16 year-olds looking after them and at 16 you could be married and have a child of your own. The children will be more disturbed from being taken away and put into foster homes.' Wheeling her toddler up the road in a pushchair, a young mother said: 'It sounds like they were provided for. Only by teenagers—I might not have done that for mine—but it's their decision. I can understand

Home

the mothers wanting to get away. For single mums, and I've been there, a week away is bliss.'

A married woman with grown-up children said 'older ones often look after younger brothers and sisters'. A young mother agreed: 'Older children looking after younger ones—it happens all over the country. I was the youngest of five. Both parents were working so I was often with elder sisters or friends up the road.' A young man visiting friends on the estate remembered 'when I was a toddler, my babysitter was 12 or 13'.

Silly season

Many residents thought the media had blown the episode out of all proportion. 'They've got nothing better to write about', said one irate young man. 'It's the silly season, there's not much else in the news', said a father with his 12 year-old daughter.

So was it simply a case of silly-seasonitis? How did the babysitting of seven children turn into a national scandal?

Buzzword

The PA reporter does not want to reveal his source. Chances are his information came from someone in the environs of Reigate county court on Tuesday 25 August, possibly connected with the police or social services. The reporter says that on Wednesday 26 August, when he telephoned Surrey council for confirmation, the spokesperson used the phrase 'home alone'. The phrase was repeated in statements made to other journalists. This was the buzzword which set the circus in motion.

At this point, officials from the local authority were happy to talk to the media, telling the press that 'the judge praised the speed at which the authorities concerned acted' (*Evening Standard*, 25 August 1993). ►



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

Many journalists thought it a 'non-story'. Yet the tale of two Dorking women and their seven children became a national 'home alone' panic in August. Andrew Calcutt asks how—and why

alone 7

— the circus



But the mood soon changed. Some of the ensuing media coverage was clearly hysterical. It also became obvious that the council's term 'home alone' was not appropriate to describe seven children and their babysitters. The reaction of the public, typified by the people on the estate, indicated that they were less than enthusiastic about the witch-hunt.

Concern for moderation did not prevent Surrey police setting up checkpoints on the estate to catch the returning mothers

As it became clear that things had been pushed too far, Surrey council changed tack and tried to put a lid on the story.

On Thursday 26 August the council asked the high court to impose reporting restrictions. While the deputy director of social services had been highly vocal on Wednesday 25 August, by the following day he 'was reluctant to discuss the affair saying it was *sub judice*' (*Daily Mail*, 27 August 1993). During the next week, officials remained tight-lipped. The 'home alone seven' slipped out of the headlines almost as suddenly as they had arrived.

The story of the 'home alone seven' was a moral panic which seemed to backfire. In the aftermath of the scandal, recriminations flew thick and fast between various interest groups, most of whom had played a part in creating it.

Blame the press

Surrey police blamed the council for its overblown description of the case: 'The county council should have been highlighting the reality not hyping it up as "home alone"', a senior officer told the *Independent on Sunday* (29 August 1993). This laudable concern for moderation did not prevent Surrey police setting up checkpoints on the estate to catch the returning mothers, and conducting a criminal investigation into the two women's affairs.

Meanwhile the social services department defended its initial statement on the grounds that 'on Wednesday it was our understanding

that the children had been left home alone'. Some might find it hard to reconcile the council's 'understanding' with the fact that, as she told the *Evening Standard* before the court banned interviews, one of the babysitters was in the house when police and social services came to take the children into care. Keen to shift the blame, a council spokesperson insisted that 'the phrase "home alone" was something that grew in the press'.

Non-story

The media also sought to absolve themselves of blame. The local press was keen to distance itself from the national tabloids' performance. An editorial in the *Surrey Advertiser* (27 August 1993) complained of 'salacious and probably libellous' national reporting. A reporter on another local newspaper admitted that he only heard about the story when 'News At Ten and Carlton phoned up simultaneously. They gave us the details from the PA'. He said he had wanted to tell the story of how the nationals exaggerated the situation, but 'our editor was keen on a low-key approach'.

The Press Association journalist was blunt: 'it was picked up because home alone stories are fashionable and because the mothers are lesbians, which appealed to the tabloids. I wish I had been freelance because I could have made a lot of money on it.' Another journalist who had worked on the story for a national paper agreed that it was not really newsworthy: 'It was the feeling among quite a few of us that it was a non-story which only got going because of that bloody film and the fact that these stories are in vogue. And if the council hadn't introduced that phrase it might never have happened.'

Policing role

Only a few days previously, journalists had been competing to get their byline on the latest 'home alone' scandal. Now their colleagues were calling it 'home, but not quite alone', and suggesting that it only made the headlines because such stories are 'in vogue'. But what created the fashion in the first place?

The 'non-story' took off because it chimed with the political culture of the new authoritarianism. It was telling that the Dorking women's moment of ignominy followed the media crucifixion of Heidi Colwell, jailed for six months (later released on probation) for leaving her two year-old daughter while she went out to work.

The trend is for the police, courts, social services and other agencies to interfere more and more in family life,

using the claim that they are protecting children to justify regulating and controlling the way in which people live.

Surrey's assistant director of social services was quoting from a well-worn script when he claimed that 'our primary concern is to look after the children, to ensure that they are safe and secure'. The 'home alone seven' scandal shows how insignificant incidents are being exploited to fuel debates about morality, the family, and the need for the state to extend its policing role. The case proved an embarrassment for all concerned, but the repressive drift of social policy was clear from the discussion it sparked.

'Make it illegal'

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) took the opportunity to announce its new guidelines on leaving children home on their own, due out in October 1993. The NSPCC is also lobbying ministers to look afresh at the question of 'parental negligence'. Meanwhile senior Barnardo's director Roger Singleton announced that 'the law needs to be changed to make it illegal to leave young children overnight or for long periods in the sole care of anyone under the age of 18'.

A spokesman for the Department of Health was not so definitive. 'It would not be possible to set an age at which all children would be capable or incapable of looking after themselves,' he told the *Times*. 'A child of 14 may be sufficiently mature but one of 15 not. It's a little like an elephant—difficult to describe but you know it when you see it. Then there are the variables of length of absence. It might not be negligent for a wife to drive to the station to pick up her husband and leave the children at home. But it would be to go away for the weekend.' (27 August 1993)

Rules and codes

Throughout this discussion of elephants and other variables, there is one factor that is always assumed: the right of the authorities to make further incursions into private affairs. Behind every debate about what parents, teenagers and babysitters can and cannot do is the creeping tendency to impose more official rules and codes of practice on everyday life.

The best chance of stopping the further advance of the new authoritarian mood is to build on the instinctive mistrust which many feel towards the state and the media—mistrust typified by the public response to the Dorking case—and turn it into a clear-cut demand for them to leave our lives alone.

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Why children's rights are wrong

The fashionable emphasis on 'children's rights' is a device for diminishing the real freedoms of adults, argues James Heartfield

'What about the rights of the child?' is a question heard again and again these days on both sides of the Atlantic. In Britain the 1989 Children Act, which came into force in 1991, has put children's rights at the centre of social policy. In the act, the interests of the child are held to take precedence over the rights of parents. Whether in considering custody between parents, or placing the child in care, the act states that 'the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration' (Children's Act 1989, Chapter 41).

The issue of children's rights is dear to the heart of the American president's wife, Hillary Clinton. As an up-and-coming lawyer in the field of family law, Hillary Clinton's 1974 essay 'Children's rights: a legal perspective' proposed a new approach to the question of children's rights (reprinted in PA Vardin and IL Brody, *Children's Rights: Contemporary Perspectives*).

Instead of assuming a child's incompetence before the law, Clinton argued that the system should start from the assumption that children are competent, so that their rights can be recognised. By putting children on a par with adults, as capable of expressing their own concerns, they are taken seriously as people with rights of their own.

Children's rights are a very recent invention. From the factory acts to the raising of the school leaving age, there has been a great deal of legislation passed to protect children. But in the past, the law assumed that children

were not competent to make decisions about their employment and behaviour, and needed protection from society. The idea that children can have and exercise rights, as adults do, is a novelty.

At first sight, the creation of children's rights might seem progressive. The move to recognise children's rights is often compared to the recognition of the rights of women or the emancipation of the slaves in America. How could a further extension of rights be anything but an improvement on what went before?

A child's word

In fact the notion of children's rights rests on a fallacy. Rights do not mean anything unless you are capable of exercising them. The idea of children's rights might look good on paper. But in the real world, children are clearly incapable of exercising equal rights.

Take equality before the law. Child sexual abuse is regarded as a crime because children are assumed to be incapable of making free decisions. If a child is cajoled or coaxed into a sexual relation with an adult it is called abuse. If an adult is similarly persuaded, she or he is generally regarded as a fool.

If we were to accept a child's competence in court, would we not be bound to accept its competence in sexual relations as well? The very idea that somebody's word counts as evidence rests on the assumption that they are competent to make their own decisions and answerable for them.

To assume the same of a child is to take the child for an adult—the same mistake the abuser makes.

In the seventies, before it was prohibited, the Paedophile Information Exchange used to argue that children were capable of making their own decisions about who they wanted to have sex with. Like Hillary Clinton, they argued that the child was competent. Most people think otherwise.

When hearing the evidence of a child, any court takes that evidence for what it is—a child's word. A child can expect to be protected from cross examination because it is unreasonable to expect a child to defend itself. Any court would be bound to hear a child's evidence with a degree of scepticism, just as you would doubt a child that swore blind he had not put a stone through your window.

Care and protection

In the everyday world, we assume at every turn that children do not have rights: they do not have the right to choose their schools; they do not have the right to watch what they want on television; and they do not have the right to go out whenever they like. When parents give them permission to make such decisions, they are educating them towards responsibility. But nobody should confuse permission with rights.

Children's rights are not just a misnomer. If that were all they were it would not matter. But in fact the growing interest in children's rights is positively dangerous. The extension of rights to children is not an increase in liberty, but a degradation of the meaning of individual rights.

Characterising the care and protection that society affords the young as 'children's rights' effectively redefines the entire meaning of democratic rights as care and protection exercised by the authorities. Under the Children Act, the state acts on behalf of the child to protect it from abuse. It is not the child that exercises the right, ►



but the state. The state steps in as a kind of super-parent, to lord it over those parents deemed to have failed in their responsibility to their children.

But the protection of the state is not what rights are about. Our democratic rights are above all the right to independence from the state. We take it as given that we are the people who

'We, the state, demand the right to decide how you, incompetents, live your lives'

should decide things like what newspapers we can read, where we can live and who we can talk to. Most women would assume that it is they, and not some government official, who is best placed to make decisions about contraception or childcare.

We demand the right to make our own decisions about our lives, free from interference from the powers that be. Protection is for incompetents.

When Hillary Clinton demands that children be treated as competents and granted the same rights as the rest of us, she reduces us all to the level of competence of a child. A child is competent before the law to the extent that an array of lawyers, social workers, and judges exercise his rights on his behalf. If these are the sort of rights that the rest of us should expect, then we had all better get used to being treated like children.

Parents' rights

The diminution of the rights of adults implicit in the elevation of children's rights is not just a question of legal jargon. In practice the whole realm of children's rights is a nightmare for parents.

Under the Children Act, the real rights of parents, as opposed to the imaginary rights of children, are denied. Once the interests of the child are held to be paramount, parents' liberties are put at risk. To attack the idea of children's rights is not to defend a parent's right to abuse a child. No such right has ever been recognised. Children are not customarily considered to be a parent's property to do with as they will.

The rights that a parent loses under the Children Act are substantial rights that have long been recognised. Above all, the Children Act undermines people's right to control their own lives,

and to make decisions about their family's welfare. Under the act, the court decides on the child's behalf 'how capable each of his parents is of meeting his needs'.

Under the terms of the Children Act parents lose other rights when faced with the charge of failing their child. The right to be tried under an agreed procedure, or 'due process', so that you can defend yourself against the allegations made, the presumption of innocence until guilt is proved, both of these are abrogated under the Children Act.

Once the interests of the child are made paramount, the suspicion of abuse or neglect is sufficient cause to break up a family. As a parent, there is no real right of appeal, or chance to defend yourself, because the courts are obliged to ignore the rights of parents and consider only the interests of the child. Parents investigated by the social services lose all control over their fate, on the fictitious grounds that the state knows 'the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned' better than its own family.

Whenever the spurious notion of children's rights is invoked these days, we can be sure that an attack on the real freedoms of adults is not far behind.

Incompetents

For example, the case for more censorship of television is usually justified with the blanket argument 'not in front of the children'. In this sad parody of family life, feeble-willed parents cannot wrest the remote control from little Kevin, and so our super-parents, the worthies of the Broadcasting Standards Council, make sure that we all watch children's TV until nine o'clock.

Consideration of a child's welfare often becomes a means to pass judgement on an adult's lifestyle. A homosexual who tries to adopt, or is involved in a custody case, soon finds that his or her private life is the concern of the child-obsessed courts or social services. In September, an American mother lost custody of her child purely on the grounds that as a woman living in a lesbian relationship she would deny her daughter the right to a 'normal' upbringing.

The rights of the child are a convenient fiction for the authorities. They are a blank page on which they can write down whatever prescription they deem appropriate for our lives. The rights of the child are the rights of the state, as the presumed custodian of a child's interests, over all of us.

But most insidiously of all, 'empowering' children is the means by which the state disguises its domination as liberation. If the argument for the curtailment of adults' rights were put without the justification

of recognising children's rights, it would read: 'We, the state, demand the right to decide how you, incompetents, live your lives.'

Few people would accept such a proposition. But put in terms of children's rights, it begins to assume the character of a reasonable idea.

Big-hearted liberals

The idea of children's rights is plausible because it appeals to the altruism that most people feel towards children. But that concern is being manipulated by the authorities to justify more interference in the way we run our lives.

The case for children's rights is all the more plausible because it is being made by big-hearted liberals rather than traditional conservatives. Hillary Clinton, the family lawyer, and Virginia Bottomley, the one-time unmarried mother, are seen to have the best interests of the child at heart. Their agenda is not the agenda of traditional family values.

The agenda of children's rights is more insidious than that of the traditional Victorian values trumpeted by old-fashioned Tories like Margaret Thatcher. The promotion of children's rights is often the cutting edge of the culture of control which *Living Marxism* has called the new authoritarianism: but it is disarming because it is dressed up in the liberal language of altruism.

In Britain, in those cases where social services departments have acted to defend what they deem to be children's rights, the effects have been catastrophic for the families concerned. Cases of alleged sexual abuse in Cleveland and the Orkneys destroyed families and left parents stigmatised.

Risk of abuse

In America the siege of David Koresh's Branch Davidian cult proved even more starkly the destructive power the state wields in defence of 'children's rights'. FBI chiefs eager to end the siege realised that there was one way to persuade their new, liberal-minded attorney-general, Janet Reno, to give them the go-ahead.

Reno's background was in family law, where she had made a reputation for overriding the rights of defendants in child abuse cases on the grounds that the child's interests take priority. The FBI chiefs convinced Reno that children in Koresh's compound were at risk of abuse. So she agreed to the use of force.

In the resulting carnage, 86 people were gunned down or killed in the blaze that followed the FBI attack. Of those, 17 were children, apparently killed in defence of their own rights.



Smacking kids

It gets worse. First you have a court case over the right of a social services agency to blacklist a child minder because she insists that she has the right to smack a misbehaving child with the parents' permission. Now we have a case in Avon where parents are being taken to court accused of assault for smacking their 11-year old after he was sent home from school for 'severely disruptive behaviour'. What next? Parents accused of mental cruelty for failing to buy Jaffa cakes for tea? Social services guidelines on acceptable ways to tell your child not to electrocute the cat?

All this nonsense is carried out in the name of 'children's rights' and consequently it has left a lot of liberals not knowing which way to turn. Suggest that it's absurd to prosecute parents for their choice of child-raising methods and you'll be told that children need to be protected against abuse. Argue that smacking a child (even with a slipper) for playing up is hardly abuse, and you're presented with the familiar 'slippery slope' argument.

It goes like this. 'But where do you draw the line—if you allow parents to smack their children for being naughty, what's to stop them beating the living daylights out of the child for a more severe offence?' Examples of the most awful cases of child battery—father strangles infant with belt for getting sums wrong, mother drowns two year-old for crying, parents starve child to death for refusing to eat his greens—are cited as evidence that once you start on the path of violence you can't get off it.

Every parent knows this is nonsense. I'm not even a parent (but I was a child) and I know that it's nonsense. We do not need a battery of police officers, social workers and medical professionals to tell us when social behaviour becomes unacceptable. It's absurd to argue that there are significant numbers of parents who don't know the difference between thrashing the living daylights out of a child and administering a short, sharp disciplinary clip round the ear. You know the difference, I know the difference, and why should we assume that the rest of the population is so stupid that they don't? Are we really so pessimistic about human behaviour that we assume that if legal guidelines are not laid down then people will abuse their kids? Are we really so uncertain about our own capacity to assess what is right and what's wrong that we need the state to draw up guidelines for how we raise our children?

Of course there are occasions where parents flip out of control. I'd be willing to bet that the vast majority of parents who smack kids lash out as a consequence of their own frustration rather than as a planned disciplinary strategy. Don't children need protecting against

this? Well, maybe they do—but it's not possible for the state to give them that protection. Unless the authorities are prepared to offer a free round-the-clock childcare service so that when mum feels a bit ratty she can drop off her charges while she takes out her bad mood on an inanimate object. Hardly likely to see this, are we?

State interest in the way parents discipline children is just one more insidious attempt to regulate how we live. It's a sign of the pessimism of modern times that so many people are prepared to accept that we are incapable of defining our own standards of behaviour and that we need a social worker or court official to do it for us. It encourages the notion that your neighbour is someone who you need to spy on, because, beneath the respectable veneer of their life, they, too, might be capable of all kinds of horrible deeds.

The fact that the parents who smacked the disruptive 11 year-old are respectable and middle class—he's a nuclear scientist, she's a nurse—gives their case an ironic twist. In the first instance it means that the media have been more sympathetic to them. Media reports have been able to focus on the right of two intelligent, articulate professional people to bring up their child in the manner they think fit. It's unlikely that there would have been the same sympathy for the autonomy of parents if they had been inarticulate and working class.

At the same time, the class background of the parents concerned has underlined the point that abuse happens in the best of families, and that even the well-to-do can be animals who need strict behavioral instructions. However, it's safe to say that as more and more precedents are set for state interference in family life—it is the working class who will remain the chief focus of attention. After all, in the eyes of those who run society, it's the poor who are the least able to exercise self-control, and who need to be controlled for their own good.

The most nauseating aspect of this discussion about standards of child-raising is that it allows the most reactionary elements in society to take the moral high ground. When, earlier this year, a child minder won the right to smack her charges (with the parents' permission), it gave a signal for the Gillick gang to crawl out from under their various stones to proclaim a victory for traditional family values and a vanquishing of lefty nonsense.

We should be clear about one thing. There's nothing left-wing about state regulation of family life. We should oppose every state measure that attempts to police the family and control our private lives. Does this mean we're happy for children to be beaten to death by parents-from-hell? Don't be stupid. ●

**It's absurd
to prosecute
parents for
their choice of
child-raising
methods**

The Michael Jackson affair has confirmed today's public obsession with child sexual abuse. Dr Michael Fitzpatrick asks what's behind the panic—and who benefits?

Who's really bad?

Did he do it? And if so, what did he do? These are the questions exercising television studio audiences, newspaper readers and people in canteens, cafes, clubs and pubs since the publication of allegations of child sexual abuse against superstar entertainer Michael Jackson in August.

The furore about Jackson feeds into the wider debate about child sexual abuse that has been raging throughout the West for the past five years.

But before entering the debate, we need to question some of its underlying assumptions. Why has child sexual abuse become a major focus of public concern, not just in Britain, but internationally? This is important because there is no evidence of an increased incidence of abuse. What is child sexual abuse? How can it be explained? And who benefits from the child sexual abuse scare?

'Satanic'

'Sexual molestation of children is the last taboo', commented one newspaper account of the Jackson scandal, seeking to explain the public impact of the revelations of abuse. It is true that tales of adultery and divorce are no longer considered damaging to celebrity reputations. Even homosexuality and drug abuse now receive a degree of popular indulgence, if not establishment approval. But a whiff of incest was enough to send Jackson's management team into a flurry of damage limitation activity and his corporate sponsors into abject terror.

In recent years child sexual abuse has rarely left the headlines. In Britain it began with Esther Rantzen's Child Watch and Child Line in 1986, and really took off with the events in Cleveland in 1987, when more than 100 children were taken into state care following allegations of abuse. There have been alleged cases of 'satanic' and 'ritual' sexual abuse, notably in Orkney and Nottingham, and

revelations about 'rings' of paedophiles and pornographers. Investigations into abuse in children's homes are now routine occurrences.

A wave of similar cases has seized public attention in the USA and in other European countries, including even Ireland. Last month's raid on a 'Children of God' community in Argentina rounded up 98 adults and 137 children of 19 different nationalities, after allegations that children were being used in pornographic videos and for prostitution. This followed earlier raids on communities in Australia, France and Spain. Though similar allegations have been made against fundamentalist religious groups in Britain, including the 'Children of God' and 'The Teachers', it is noteworthy that such cases rarely, if ever, come to court.

Incest taboo

To explain the intensity and the pervasiveness of the public preoccupation with child sexual abuse, we must look to the wider sense of moral crisis that has engulfed Western society in recent years. There is a general perception of decline and decay, together with a sense of a lack of direction and cohesion. A widespread awareness of economic and political malaise has reinforced a chronic loss of conviction in traditional values in the sphere of sexual morality and the family. The resulting insecurities have created a heightened public sensitivity to those areas of national life where the tendencies towards breakdown are most apparent. The current obsession with crime is perhaps the most conspicuous illustration of this trend.

The panic about child sexual abuse is another symptom of our anxious age. Here is the most extreme and degrading manifestation of the disintegration of the traditional family, which is also evident in the statistics of divorce

and single parenthood, and in impressions of rampant juvenile crime.

The current child sexual abuse panic confirms Freud's insistence on the key role of the incest taboo in human social development. 'Society must tame the sex instinct', wrote Freud, in his analysis of how the process of individual maturation and the establishment of social stability required the restraint and containment of the sexual urge. He explained how the resolution of infantile sexual attachments and antagonisms took place through the acknowledgement of the father in the family and hence of the wider sources of authority in society.

Freud emphasised that his concept of the incest taboo was 'a historical and social one':

'I derived the barrier against incest from the primordial history of the human family, and thus saw in the actual father the real obstacle, which erects the barrier against incest anew.' (Quoted in E Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, p526)

For Freud, the incest taboo enforced the boundary between order and chaos. In contemporary society it is the sense of growing chaos that has made the transgression of this boundary, in the form of child sexual abuse, such a source of public anxiety.

Sexual license

It is worth noting in passing that Freud developed his psychoanalytic theory in the decades around the turn of the century, in a period of social crisis with striking parallels to our own times. In the 1880s, a newspaper campaign against child prostitution encouraged legislation to raise the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16 and outlaw brothels. In 1908, the Punishment of Incest Act codified legal penalties against sexual abuse in the family, though the exclusion of step-daughters made clear that the key concern was ►

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Star says: I was blackmail victim



the policing of kin relationships, not child protection (see C Smart, *Feminism and the Power of Law*). The NSPCC, feminists, doctors and 'moral vigilance' campaigners teamed up to press for government action to 'rescue' fallen women from vice and to curtail male sexual license. If anything, there is a more pervasive sense of social crisis today.

What is child sexual abuse? There are a number of theories on offer. For supporters of the dominant

violence to restore some of the legitimacy lost as a result of the exposure of corruption and brutality in other areas. The authors remain concerned about the state, arguing that 'statutory services are essential, but they must be organised to empower not oppress women and children'. They insist that child protection work must receive adequate resources to ensure supportive work with mothers, abused children and siblings.

It is ironic that the feminists are now inviting the 'patriarchal' state to tackle the problems of the violent patriarch. In reality, the state that safeguards the running of British capitalism at home and abroad has a capacity for violence that vastly exceeds that of the most psychopathic and chauvinist husband. The notion that this state could 'empower not oppress women and children' is an absurdity. This is the same state that denies women the childcare facilities they need to go out to work and the benefits they need for an independent existence if they are unable to work. 'Child protection' will never receive enough resources to protect women and children, only what is required to maintain control of families deemed to be 'at risk'. The feminist argument combines utopian fantasy with an invitation to repression.

Family break-up

'The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation', wrote Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* in 1847. Child abuse in the most diverse forms—outside and inside the family, in factories and mines as well as in the sphere of the home—is endemic to capitalist society. The oppressive and privatised character of modern family life, where the burden of housework and childcare still falls predominantly on women, is conducive to all sorts of distorted relationships. Child abuse is part of family life in a society in which the family is forced to carry the burden of reproducing the energies of the working class.

It is the role of the family within capitalist society that conditions the way men treat women, not some transcendent ideology of masculinity. This means that the way forward in challenging abusive relations within the family lies through developing a wider challenge to capitalist society.

Who benefits from the panic about child sexual abuse? Certainly not the children. In practice, given the difficulty of securing criminal convictions against men accused of abuse, the child is commonly removed from the family. Yet all the evidence suggests that children are more likely to be abused in alternative families,

step-families or foster families, or in children's homes, than in their families of origin. 'Child sexual abuse is worse than family break-up', proclaim MacLeod and Saraga, but many children are likely to experience family break-up and more abuse as a consequence of the sort of state intervention favoured by today's feminists.

All feminists now

The real beneficiaries of the child sexual abuse panic are the media, the professionals and the state. Although the promotion of the issue of child sexual abuse ultimately failed to save Esther Rantzen's show from the Birt axe, she showed how catering to public prurience could boost the fortunes of a flagging light entertainment show and project an image of concern. The acres of coverage of the Michael Jackson scandal, with juicy details about 'slumber parties' and 'sleep-overs', confirm the continuing appeal of sleazy journalism.

For social workers, doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists, child sexual abuse is a growth area in a contracting market. It provides career opportunities, research prospects, and lots of case conferences to make everybody feel important. Back in 1988, MacLeod and Saraga complained that 'feminist theory is still "out in the cold" when it comes to the professional establishment'. Not any more. When it comes to calls for criminal proceedings, everybody can chorus 'we're all feminists now'.

'Socio-legal'

With their new anti-discrimination guidelines and their rape and domestic violence units, the police have some claim to being one of the most feminist institutions in British society. It is striking that some of the most enthusiastic—and certainly some of the most professional—participants at child sexual abuse case conferences are the police representatives. One of the most significant features of the 1989 Children Act is the enhanced role it gives the police and the courts. A leading academic authority, Nigel Parton, argues that the traditional 'medico-social' concept of child abuse has been replaced by the 'socio-legal' notion of child protection (N Parton, *Governing the Family: Childcare, Child Protection and the State*).

The result of more than five years of public concern about child abuse is the increase in state power and authority over family life. This does nothing to help abused children, but it reinforces the grip of a decadent establishment over a demoralised society.

The notion that the state could 'empower not oppress women and children' is an absurdity

medical-therapeutic approach, it is a manifestation of either individual psychopathology of family dysfunction. From this perspective, therapeutic intervention, in the form of individual or family therapy, is preferred to criminal prosecution of the guilty party or removal of the victim to an alternative family or institutional care.

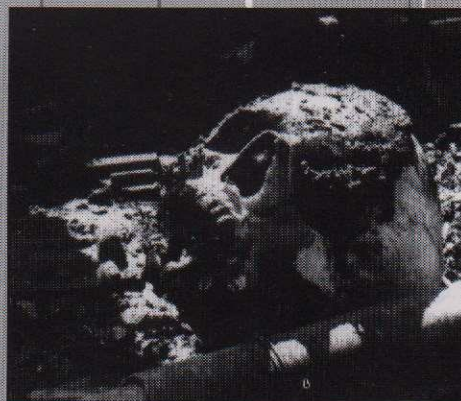
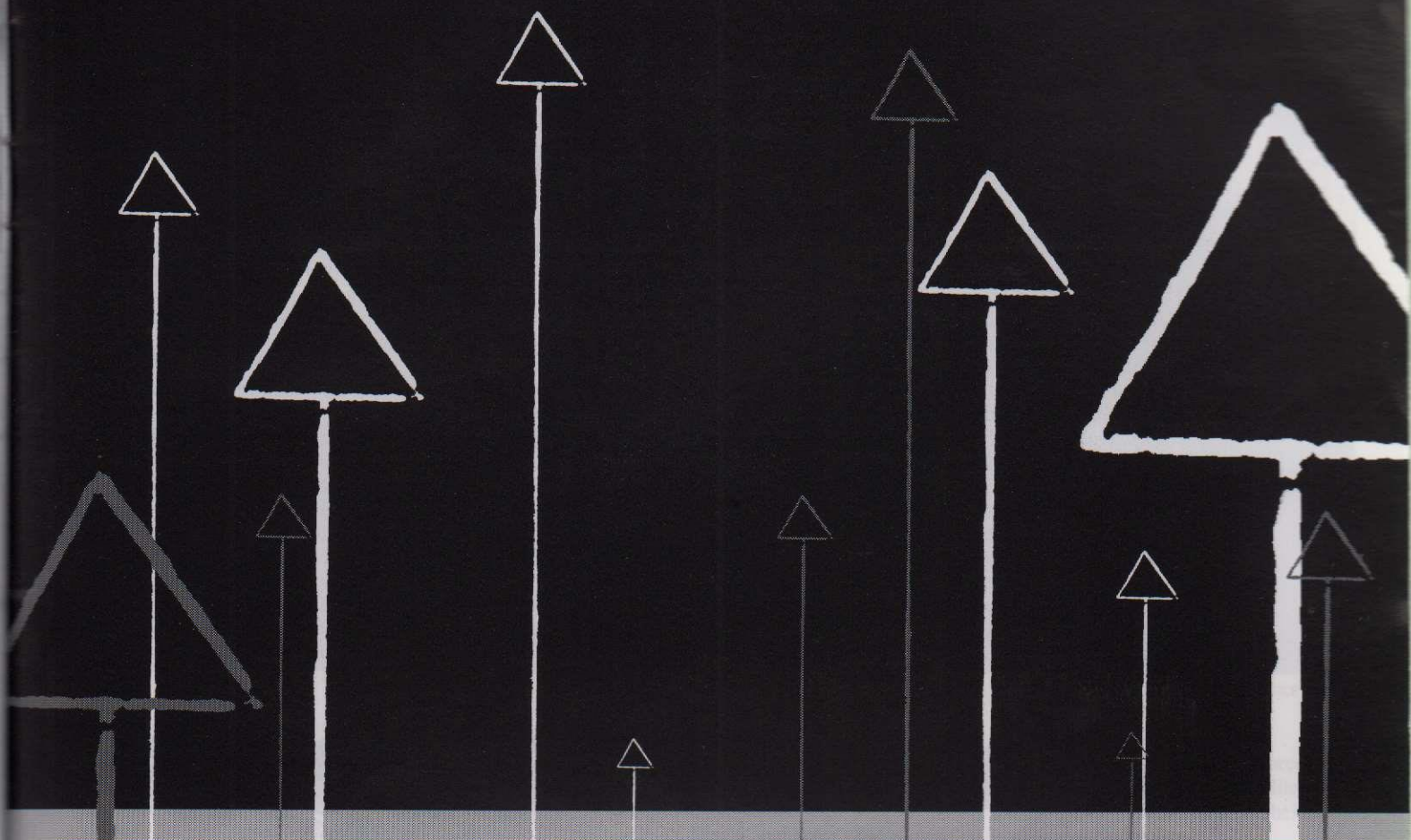
Because of its preoccupation with the role of the father and the integrity of the family unit, the medical-therapeutic approach tends to shift the blame for abuse on to the mother. It encourages stereotypes, such as the cold and aloof woman who cannot satisfy her partner's sexual urges, or the pathetic victim who colludes with the father's abusive behaviour.

Utopian fantasy

The feminist interpretation is straightforward: 'the problem of child sexual abuse...is the problem of masculine sexuality' (*Feminism and the Power of Law*, p50). The solution follows directly: at an early stage in the controversy two British feminists argued for 'the exclusion of abusive men' through criminal proceedings (M MacLeod and E Saraga, 'Child sexual abuse: challenging the orthodoxy', *Feminist Review*, No28 1988). The feminists' main challenge to orthodoxy is their demand for the use of the state's repressive apparatus within the family.

MacLeod and Saraga explicitly repudiate the traditional reticence of the left about state coercion. 'Recently', they note, 'a more complex analysis of state intervention has brought the work and ideas of feminists and some statutory agencies closer together'. In fact, there is little sign of 'a more complex analysis', simply the experience of the police taking up issues of rape and domestic

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Parts of Eastern Europe are becoming virtual colonies of the USA, reveals Joan Phillips

The strange death of Freddie Woodruff says a lot about what the West is up to in the East. Woodruff was shot dead on a lonely road in the former Soviet republic of Georgia in August. A single bullet through the forehead sealed his fate.

Who was Freddie Woodruff? A tourist who wandered off the beaten track? A businessman out to make a few bucks by exploiting one of the newest markets in the world? A journalist looking for a story?

At first he was identified as a Foreign Affairs Officer, working with the US embassy in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. But that story didn't last long after a certain Mr R James Woolsey went to collect the body and brought it back to the

We will probably never know who killed Freddie Woodruff. But the killing should alert us to the fact that there are thousands of Freddie Woodruffs all over Eastern Europe. The Cold War may be over, but CIA agents are hard at work in the old Iron Curtain states.

And they are not there to advise the old KGB operatives on the art of spying in an 'open society'. The CIA's job has only ever been to act as an arm of the US government, setting up the infrastructure of American power wherever it is operating. The old colonial methods of cultivating client states, arming would-be dictators and dividing and ruling the locals, all tried and tested in the third world, should stand US agents in good stead in the former Soviet republics and the states of Eastern Europe.

So far the real Eastern intrigue has been going on in the Balkans. The CIA's activities in Albania are revealing of US intentions in the region. The poorest country in Europe is fast becoming a colony of the USA. Symbolising the intense American presence in Albania is the massive compound in Tirana which houses the US embassy.

Military academy

The Americans first arrived in Albania as economic advisers to the government a few years ago.

alleviate the economic dereliction of their country? But the Americans are not there for the good of the Albanians. Albania is simply a convenient base from which the USA can extend its influence in the Balkans.

In fact, far from acting in the interests of any particular country, the Americans are playing them off against each other. Tirana would like nothing better than to absorb the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia, and eventually the Muslims of Bosnia, in a Greater Albania. So far, the US presence has acted as a restraining influence on Albania. American diplomats have applied considerable pressure to stop Tirana making aggressive claims on Kosovo. US arm-twisting has led the Albanian government to tone down its official statements.

Privileged information

At the same time, there has been a lot of inflammatory rhetoric from Washington warning the Serbs of dire retribution if they stir up trouble in Kosovo. Yet, while castigating the Serbs in public about the treatment of ethnic Albanians in their southern province, the Americans were handing over to the Serbs privileged information originating from US intelligence sources about the whereabouts of ethnic Albanian arms and ammunition

America's Balkan

States in a black bag. Woolsey is the head of the Central Intelligence Agency. He happened to be in Moscow at the time, discussing intelligence matters with his counterpart, Yevgeny Primakov, head of the Russian intelligence service. Woodruff was a spy.

Stray bullet

So who killed him? Sitting next to him in the driving seat was Georgia's top spy, Edgar Gogoladze. Despite the suspicious circumstances, US intelligence officials suggested that Woodruff may have been killed by a drunken soldier as his car sped past a checkpoint. Georgian officials suggested that he may have been killed by a stray bullet fired by bandits.

A rumour circulating among US intelligence officers is that Woodruff was shot by the Russians as a warning to the Americans not to stick their noses into their affairs. Some Georgian forensic experts suggested that the bullet had been fired from within the car.

American experts ensconced themselves at every level of the administration. Today every Albanian ministry has an American adviser involved in the day-to-day running of the country.

At a military level, Albania has come to resemble an American military training academy. Apart from the classical military advisers, hundreds of young Americans have taken up residence on the island of Sazan. They claim to be tourists. The funny thing is that they are all young, unaccompanied males in civilian clothes sporting the same haircut.

Meanwhile the naval station in Vlora is hosting American warships and submarines. In theory they are supposed to be monitoring the embargo against Serbia and Montenegro. In practice they are using the naval facilities to establish a military presence in the Balkans.

The Albanians seem happy enough to be colonised by the Americans. And who can blame them for thinking that a US occupation might

in Kosovo. The Serbs confiscated everything, effectively disarming resistance to rule from Belgrade.

There are other indications that Washington is moving into the Balkans in a big way and manipulating the local powers. Earlier this year the Americans insisted on sending their troops to Macedonia, despite the fact that they have consistently refused to recognise the independence of the former Yugoslav republic. Since the spring there has been a steady build up in the US presence in Skopje and on Macedonia's borders with Serbia. There are now perhaps more than 1000 US troops in the republic and facilities have been upgraded to brigade strength.

There is increasing speculation among political commentators in Macedonia that the deployment of US troops there has got little to do with UN peacekeeping operations. A recent issue of the Skopje paper, *Demokratski Forum*, suggested that the accumulation of large quantities of state-of-the-art weapons points



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

intrigue

(Above)
Serbian police
harass ethnic
Albanians in
Kosovo: the
next stop in
America's
Balkan tour?

to a long-term US military presence. Although not officially confirmed, there is a rumour circulating in Skopje that the Macedonian authorities have offered the USA a military base at Krivolak on the River Vardar.

Bulgaria has also been subjected to American tutelage in recent years. As soon as the old order collapsed in 1989, the Americans were there in Sofia with their advisers and offers of assistance in organising multi-party elections and reforming the economy. As in Albania, US advisers are everywhere in the Bulgarian administration. The US ambassador in Sofia occupies the same position as the Soviet ambassador of old.

Bill Clinton has made congress aware of his intention to grant Bulgaria permanent Most Favoured Nation status. Such a commitment to one of the less hopeful economies of Eastern Europe suggests that the USA is more interested in sealing political alliances in the Balkans than in making big bucks.

A few years ago who would have thought that anybody in Washington would be interested in the likes of Tirana, Skopje and Sofia? Today they are becoming colonial outposts of the Americans. By colonising these backwater countries, the Americans are effectively laying claim to the southern Balkans as their sphere of influence in the East.

Washington argues that US peacekeepers are needed in places like Macedonia to stop the Serbs from starting more wars. In reality, nobody wants to see war in the southern Balkans. Serbia retains control of Kosovo by virtue of a military-style occupation, and has no interest in adding to the problems already on its plate by destabilising its southern province. The last thing Macedonia wants is a war with anybody: its economy is in ruins and it has no army. Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria all have enough problems of their own without wanting more conflict on their borders.

The problem is that the entire Balkans region has been destabilised by the Western-sponsored break-up of Yugoslavia. An apparently unstoppable process of fragmentation is consuming the whole area. The involvement of foreign powers such as the USA and

Germany has been the major force for instability, encouraging local elites to seek Western sponsorship for their territorial claims.

Now the USA and the other Western powers are increasing their military presence in the Balkans on the pretext of preventing the spread of a conflict which in large measure they created. Their increasingly visible role in the Balkans has got more to do with the rivalries in the Western camp than with an altruistic commitment to bring peace to the region.

It appears that the Americans are establishing a base in as many southern Balkan countries as possible. An important element in Washington's calculations is the desire to counter the growth of German influence. It is notable that the Americans are cultivating closer relations with Greece, as Germany cements its ties with Turkey. A spiralling arms race between the Greeks and Turks is only one dangerous consequence of the drive by the great powers to consolidate client states in an already unstable part of the world.

The USA's secret colonisation of the southern Balkans contains a portent of conflicts to come.

Under the guise of clamping down on sexual harassment at work, employers who couldn't give a damn about women's rights are walking all over their workers. Kate Lawrence reports

It appears that in the battle of the sexes men are finally about to receive their come-uppance. In the wake of several high-profile cases, feminists have celebrated the fact that there has been a sea change in attitudes towards sexual harassment. According to this view, the problems facing working women are now being taken seriously.

It certainly seems that sexual harassment is an issue which employers have taken to their hearts overnight. Not long ago bans on sexist language in the office were the butt of jokes about 'loony left' councils. Today, however, many major companies and organisations are turning out employee handbooks on sexual harassment which give advice on exactly which ways of addressing women might cause serious offence.

But is sexual harassment really the biggest problem facing women at work? The evidence seems to suggest that the new focus on sexual harassment is now a problem in its own right.

Behind our bosses' new-found preoccupation with sexual harassment at work lies a much more cynical concern with increasing their powers to scrutinise every move their workers make.

Under the guise of doing women a favour, employers who would never consider financing a nursery for their female employees are extending their control in the workplace beyond the

timesheet and performance targets to everything their employees say or do.

A report published by the Industrial Society this year defined harassment as 'improper, offensive and humiliating behaviour, practices or conduct, which may threaten a person's job security, create an intimidating, unwelcoming and stressful work environment, or cause personal offence or injury'. (No, they were not talking about mass redundancies.)

Blue jokes

According to the report, sexual harassment includes everything from making sexual innuendoes, turning discussions to sexual topics, repeated requests for dates or sexual favours, winking, leering or throwing kisses, to displaying pornography or sexually suggestive materials, brushing against another's body, whistling, unwanted attention, letters or telephone calls and, in the most serious case, assault.

In fact, most of what is considered sexual harassment consists of men telling blue jokes or failing to avert their eyes from a female colleague. A BBC/Mori poll published in July found the most common form of sexual harassment is sexual comments and jokes, followed by being stared or leered at by men.

The Industrial Society admits that a tribunal 'is unlikely to find a case for sexual harassment on the basis of pin-ups alone'. Nevertheless, we are told that toleration of such materials

'gives a very clear message to all its employees regarding the organisation's attitude to women'. The organisation notes that despite many changes over the past 15 years, women are still extremely under-represented in management positions. 'Pin-ups can undermine a woman's view of herself and her ability to do a job', it concludes.

Systematic discrimination

If we are to believe this nonsense, it is the attitude of ignorant male workers who like naughty photos and don't know how to talk to women that is to blame for women's unequal position at work—rather than the systematic discrimination suffered by women at the hands of employers, who keep them in rubbish jobs with worse pay than men.

When those employers, backed by their professional employee relations experts, say that women must be protected from pornographic pin-ups, what they really mean is they must be protected from working class men. Of course, we all know that the Eton boys in the boardroom would never harass women by hanging naughty photos in the executive dining room. (Who needs photos when you can pay for the real thing.) They just use women as cheap labour, keep them in lowly jobs in case they get pregnant—and when they do, frequently sack them.

Forget about sexual harassment for a minute, and think about the far more serious indignities that women have to put up with at work. Women still earn just two thirds of the average male wage. Women still face systematic discrimination which excludes them from the best jobs. Women are still concentrated in low-paid, part-time, unprotected employment.

Under scrutiny

Yet we are constantly told that sexual harassment is the biggest problem facing women and that the answer is a crackdown on the bad behaviour of men. This focus on sexual harassment will do nothing to improve the position of women in the workplace. But what it will do is legitimise greater interference by management and create an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust in the workplace.

Who's haras



Everyone from bus drivers to bank workers is discovering that what they say and do is more and more coming under the scrutiny of their supervisor or manager. Already 41 per cent of employers have introduced a formal policy on sexual harassment.

All this might look good on paper. But in practice it is having a divisive impact in the workplace. The campaign against sexual harassment is happening in the context of a major crackdown by employers on the pay and conditions of workers. The capacity of an already fragmented workforce to respond to this management offensive is being undermined further by the introduction of divisive sexual harassment policies. By making a fuss about sexual harassment, the employers are creating an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and insecurity in which everyone is looking over their shoulders.

Unwelcome remarks

Take the example of London Buses. Last year the company introduced a workplace harassment policy, which includes a ban on 'unwelcome remarks, suggestions and propositions, malicious gossip, jokes and banter' based on sex. All managers and supervisors are responsible for eliminating such behaviour even if a formal complaint has not been made to them.

However, if you are a worker at London Buses, you might be forgiven for thinking that the threatening 'unwelcome remarks' you need to worry about are those being made by the employers.

Earlier this year, the employers at London Buses announced that they were introducing new contracts in the run-up to privatisation which would mean longer hours for even less pay. Workers were told to sign or risk the sack. The workforce, who had no desire to pay for the recession by taking a cut in their living standards, went on strike. Not surprisingly, London Buses' anti-harassment policy did not contain any reference to threats made to the livelihood of the workforce.

Elsewhere, male staff have already felt the full force of disciplinary measures. Among recent

well-publicised sackings, the pathetic case of the computer programmer at British Telecom who got the boot for harassing a female colleague was felt to merit hundreds of column inches of newsprint in every national newspaper in Britain. He gave up his case for unfair dismissal and made a formal apology to his former colleague, but not before it was revealed that he was the author of a pornographic book.

Yet when you look at the kind of treatment dished out to workers at British Telecom by their employers over the past two years, the actions of this man pale into insignificance. Tens of thousands of jobs have been cut by bosses concerned to protect their profits. Together with other measures designed to squeeze the last drop out of the workforce, such as the introduction of performance-related pay, working conditions at British Telecom have made it notorious for the rock bottom morale of the workforce. Yet you can be sure that there will be no charter defending British Telecom workers from threats to their job security.

Maternity rights

While there is no doubt that there are men who treat women in a degrading manner, it is an insult to women to suggest that the biggest problem they face at work is unwanted attention from a male colleague. As employers rush to get their policies in place to implement the EC's forthcoming recommendations on sexual harassment, we should remember that those same employers have fought long and hard against the introduction of better maternity rights for women under EC law.

Employers could not give a damn about the sexual harassment of women. Yet they are happy to use it as a weapon to inflict further discipline and division on an already frightened and fragmented workforce. The message of sexual harassment policies is that the real problem you face is not your employer who is threatening you and your family's livelihood, but the unwanted attentions of your colleagues. So think twice before you try to get together with your colleagues against the boss; they might just be trying to get it together with you.

ssing who?

Jurassic Park is a hi-tech, anti-science monster movie for our modern dark age, says John Gibson

A message more dangerous

Is *Jurassic Park* too scary for kids? That, along with whether we could really make dinosaurs, was what everyone was talking about when Stephen Spielberg's biggest-ever blockbuster was released in the summer. I don't know about the kids, but I was disturbed by the film for weeks afterwards, and then again when I read Michael Crichton's book on which the film is loosely based. No, it wasn't T-rex or those designer killer velociraptors; it was the underlying anti-science message of the film that gave me the jeeepers.

Some scientists saw *Jurassic Park* as a boon, that could get a new generation excited about natural history and genetics. Scientific results were released to coincide with the film; museums sought to cash in on the interest generated to make some cash and hopefully educate kids about dinosaurs. Other scientists marvelled at the scientific competence of the film. A reviewer in the science journal *Nature* enthused about 'the best popular explanation of DNA and cloning I have ever seen', and urged readers to 'Go and see it. It's terrifying. And wonderful'.

It would seem that they have rather missed the point. The leading American journal, *Science*, was a little more sussed about the message of *Jurassic*

Park. Its editorial put the film in the context of today's hostility towards science:

'*Jurassic Park* is not going to help. According to both the writer and producer, the movie intentionally has anti-science undertones. Press accounts say that producer Steven Spielberg believes science is "intrusive" and "dangerous".'

Jurassic Park is a film for the conservative and cautious times in which we live. It uses scientific language and arguments to push an anti-science message. And it uses Hollywood's hi-tech effects to convey the most conservative, anti-technology idea of all: that humanity shouldn't tamper with nature, because we cannot hope to understand or control it, and the consequences of tampering are likely to be calamitous.

More than 350 years after Galileo was condemned as a heretic by the church for defending the Copernican system, the spirit of the inquisition would appear to be alive and well in Hollywood. And not just in Hollywood. For such is the strength of today's cautious and conservative consensus that, in contrast to Galileo's time, in the 1990s it is often people who are scientifically informed who want to limit the appliance of science. ►

A high-contrast, black and white close-up photograph of a dinosaur's head, likely a T-Rex. The image focuses on the dinosaur's eye, which is wide and staring, and its mouth, which is slightly open, revealing a row of sharp, pointed teeth. The texture of the dinosaur's skin is highly detailed, showing scales and ridges. The background is dark and indistinct.

ous than any dinosaur



Apart from the special effects, the power of *Jurassic Park* lies in the way it mixes fact and fiction and the way it connects with popular fears and concerns. But if we were to take to heart the message of the film, what would be the implications? That we should stop scientific experimentation? That we should abandon the goal of modern science—to use and to change nature for human benefit? That we should rely on a body of wise men

People have been interfering with, and changing nature throughout human history

(appointed by whom?) to judge what can and can't be done? Or even that we shouldn't try anything new nor take risks in general?

Fact and fiction mingle in the book and film from the beginning. Park designer John Hammond, the cuddly Dr Frankenstein figure (played by Richard Attenborough in the film), heads a commercial bio-tech company called InGen financed by Japanese money which is in deadly competition with another commercial bio-tech company called Biosyn. This is a deliberate play on the real-life competition between Genentech, funded by venture capital, and Biogen. And just as geneticists are cast as the villains of the piece in the story, so they are in real life. You can't turn on the TV or open a paper these days without finding a discussion of the ethics of genetics. And as the Human Genome Project—a multi-billion dollar project to map the human genetic material—gets into full swing in the 1990s, we can expect the anti-science brigade to focus in on this issue.

Indeed, they already are doing so. As John Maddox, editor of *Nature*, recently observed, 'these days, everybody seems to have an opinion on the ethics of genetics':

'And most opinions are portentous, laden with apprehension and downright distrust. The new genetics seems to be as widely feared as were the development and deployment of nuclear weapons in the 1950s. It may not be long before geneticists enjoy the popular reputation that then attached to Stanley Kubrick's celluloid character Dr Strangelove, and when biotechnology enterprises that have proudly chosen names including

'Gene' or 'Gen' will be scampering for politically more correct alternatives.' (*Nature*, 8 July 1993).

Two arguments of a vaguely scientific character are raised by opponents of genetic engineering. They say that nature is too complex to control or manipulate, and that we don't know what will happen if we change things so we had better leave things alone. Both of these arguments are irrational and anti-scientific and should be challenged head on by the scientific community.

The prophet of the film and book, chaos mathematician Ian Malcolm (played by Jeff Goldblum in the film) bases his objections to *Jurassic Park* and the whole attitude of the scientists on the idea that nature is a complex web which we cannot possibly understand, and which we disturb at our peril:

'What we call 'nature' is in fact a complex system of far greater subtlety than we are willing to accept. We make a simplified image of nature and then we botch it up. I'm no environmentalist, but you have to understand what you don't understand.' (p93)

Because of this, says Malcolm, 'the grand vision of science, hundreds of years old—the dream of total control—has died in our century. And with it much of the justification, the rationale for science to do what it does'. (p312)

Any number of real-life environmentalists, conservatives, and some scientists can be found saying the same thing today. It has become a modern truism. And it is obviously true that nature is interconnected. But it is possible to draw the opposite conclusion from this: that if humanity can get a better understanding of the various interconnections, our capacity to control nature will be increased. We can use nature to control nature.

Harnessing energy

Indeed, this is what people have been doing ever since they learned to think. From the harnessing of energy sources, to the use of mild viral strains as immunisation against more virulent ones, humanity has used natural forces to develop civilised society. Genetic technology, if used properly, will take this process a step further. That would be the realisation rather than the refutation of the rule of modern science laid down by seventeenth-century scientist Francis Bacon: 'Nature to be commanded must be obeyed.'

What about the argument that we don't know what will happen, so we had better leave natural things alone?

This is simply irrational. People have been interfering with, and changing nature throughout human history. Indeed, what is nature? Much of the 'natural world', especially the larger mammal population, has been created through human action over the years. Different species have either been wiped out, consciously preserved, and/or changed by humanity through artificial selection. Genetic technology is undoubtedly much faster than natural or artificial selection, and might therefore call for careful scrutiny, but that is all. It is not of a different quality to the changes which people have imposed on nature down the centuries, in order to raise humanity above the condition of animals.

Breaking eggs

The 'let's not risk trying anything new' attitude is anti-science in the extreme. If we hadn't tried new things in the past there would be no science today. No advance in science is possible without trying new things, without experimenting, without tampering with nature.

When William Harvey wanted to know about the circulation of blood in the seventeenth century he didn't passively observe, he cut up. The most exciting part in *Jurassic Park* from a scientific point of view is the way it shows how making the dinosaurs led to a revolution in scientific understanding of their behaviour. There's only so much you can learn from fossils! In the twenty-first century (and back in the real world) manipulating genes will give us a much clearer picture of the relationship between genes, the development of proteins and whole organisms, and animal behaviour.

Of course, if you experiment, things are going to go wrong. But, as they say, you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs. Or, as John Hammond puts it when all hell is breaking loose in the park: 'Let's not get carried away. We've had a little breakdown from the storm or whatever, and as a result we've suffered a regrettable, unfortunate accident. And that's all that's happened. We're dealing with it.' (p227) It's only by making mistakes—and dealing with the consequences—that progress is made.

In *Jurassic Park*, of course, the story dictates that the humans can't really deal with the consequences. And to an extent, capitalist society cannot deal with some of the consequences of its uses and mis-uses of science and technology. But it is only in the fantasy that calamity automatically follows attempts to change things. When Malcolm argues that people were happier 30 000 years ago, the irrationality of the anti-progress argument is exposed. I would rather live under any form of

capitalism than be stuck back then. Not least because there is the possibility of changing things for the better now. Thirty thousand years ago, humanity really was a passive victim of nature.

Fear of trying new things, fear of the unknown, fear of ourselves in the final analysis is the ultimate point of connection between *Jurassic Park* and the anti-science brigade. This is a powerful force for conservatism.

Adam and Eve

It might appear at first sight that suspicion of, say, genetic engineering, is a reasonable response to the unscrupulous uses to which the technology could be put, or even is being put now. After all, who knows, somewhere off Costa Rica at this very moment....But, in fact, we do know that not only is the recreation of dinosaurs (sadly) not possible now and probably never will be (the interested reader is referred to V Morell, 'Dino DNA: The Hunt and the Hype', in *Science*, 9 July 1993, and SJ Gould 'Dinomania' in *New York Review of Books*, 12 August 1993), but also that there are far more significant limitations on what is currently possible. Genetic engineering is in its infancy, at best. When people get all uptight about things that are not technically possible, when you get big ethical debates about technologies that won't come on stream for 50 years or more, it is clear that

what we are witnessing is not a rational debate informed by science.

This is not to deny that there are legitimate concerns about the activities of companies (and governments!) in this field, but there is little point blaming science for any problems that arise. It would be like blaming Einstein for the A-bomb, rather than pointing the finger at the capitalist societies and states that harnessed nuclear science for their own militaristic purposes, just as they have done with all other forms of science and technology.

And yet today, people who should know better do just that. It's presented like the story of Adam and Eve; once you taste the tree of knowledge, you are done for.

'To the geneticists' claim that with this new knowledge "ye shall be gods", the public might well respond that we do not wish to eat of this particular tree. Are humans really wise enough to be as gods? Can we really cope with the power that this knowledge brings?'

No, that's not Ian Malcolm. It is in fact Tom Wilkie, science correspondent of the *Independent*, after a visit to the Seventeenth International Congress of Geneticists this year. Has Wilkie forgotten that modern science and humanism was born when humanity stopped bowing down to God and decided to make decisions for itself?

Whose side would Wilkie have been on: Galileo's or the church's?

All the concerns about playing God which surround genetic debates are indicative of a crippling lack of confidence in humanity's own capacity to determine our future. Such ideas are also a powerful force for conservatism. After all, change is going to occur, science is going to advance, whatever Steven Spielberg or indeed Pope John Paul says. The lack of faith in ourselves to make rational judgements about developments doesn't mean that scientific and social change will halt. It just means that the powers that be will make the decisions about who benefits from the changes. Let's not forget that the Catholic church's most fundamental objection was not to the heliocentric theory, but to the challenge to its God-given authority which Galileo presented when he declared that human reason and observation, and nothing more, should decide what was right and wrong.

If any spiritual guidance is needed, it is that everybody do their bit to resurrect the spirit of Galileo. We need to be informed, we need to be prepared to try new things, we need to take risks, and most of all we need to have confidence in our own capacities. Next time you are talking to somebody about *Jurassic Park* or genetic engineering, put in a good word for John Hammond.

Support the Angle gallery!

As we go to press the Angle gallery, Birmingham, is threatened with eviction because of its commitment to challenging censorship.

- Set up in November 1992 in The Arcadian centre ('Birmingham's Covent Garden'), the Angle has consistently attracted fire from the authorities because of its insistence on staging controversial exhibitions which nobody else in the Midlands will put on.
- In March 1993 the Angle staged 'A Selective Silence', the exhibition of photographs of atrocities committed against Serbs which had been banned by the British government under UN sanctions.
- In April 1993, the Angle launched the national anti-monarchy cartoon competition 'Another Annus Horribilis?', supported by *Living Marxism* and the *New Statesman*. This led to calls from local politicians and other worthies for the gallery to be closed.
- In August, the Angle began to advertise a new exhibition, 'Sex Crimes: Repression and Censorship in 90s Britain'. The gallery's landlords, property developers Avatar, quickly issued an eviction notice to prevent the show opening. The Angle went ahead with the exhibition regardless, and the gallery's supporters faced down the site agents' attempt at repossession.
- The campaign to maintain the Angle as an anti-censorship centre has won wide support from directors, actors, musicians, comedians, academics, authors and activists (see list below). Whatever the final outcome of the eviction battle, supporters of the Angle are determined to ensure that the gallery goes on. If you want to support the campaign phone the Angle on (021) 622 7187. **Georgina Brookes**

Supporters of the Angle gallery campaign include:

Bill Alexander (Birmingham Repertory Theatre) **Dr Les Back** (Birmingham University) **Winston Bailey** (DJ) **Jeremy Banx** (*Financial Times*) **Anthony Barnett**, **John Popal** (Charter 88) **Leigh Bowery** (performance artist) **Matt Bradstock** (comedian) **Jo Brand** (comedian) **Martyn Brown** (WOM Productions) **Sara Bruce**, **Jim MacSheehy** (of Gays the Word Bookshop) **Simon Callow** (actor/director) **Michael Cashman** (actor) **Louise Christian** (Christian Fisher, solicitors) **Julian Clary** (compere) **Shane Collins** (Shane Collins Association) **Janice Connolly**, **Sabra Khan**, **Polly Wright** (Women and Theatre, Birmingham) **John Cooper Clark** (poet) **Mark Cousins** (director) **Smiley Culture** (DJ) **Derek and Clive** (aka Peter Cook and Dudley Moore) **John Diamond** (*Times*/BBC) **Sarah Edwards** (of the Conservatoire, Birmingham) **Lee Evans** (comedian) **Seamus Finnegan** (playwright) **Nick Fraser** (commissioning editor, Channel 4) **Stephen Frears** (director) **Robin Fry** (Stephens Innocent, solicitors) **Annie Galloway** (artist) **Paul Gravett** (historian) **Charles Hart** (composer/lyricist) **Harry Hill** (comedian) **Paul Hill** (artist) **Hollis, Oisin, Phrase** (Marxman) **Patrick Hughes** (artist) **Mick Hume**, **Kenan Malik** (*Living Marxism*) **Peter Hunnigale** (DJ) **Nick James** (*Time Out*) **Isaac Julien** (director) **Helena Kennedy QC** **Isabelle King**, **Gordon Agar**, **L Peake**, **Nicola Hutcheson**, **A Prowse** (Camden Arts Centre) **Robert Knight** (Campaign Against Militarism) **Helen Lederer** (actress) **Nytha Mann**, **Pat Coyne**, **Paul Anderson**, **Sarah Baxter**, **Jill Chisholm**, **Susan Head** (*New Statesman and Society*) **Elizabeth MacGregor** (Icon Gallery) **Michael Mansfield QC** **Paul Merton** (comedian) **Jonathon Miller** (director) **Michael Moorcock** (author) **Mark Nash** (producer) **Angela Neustatter** (writer) **Kayode Olafimihan** (Edge gallery, London) **David Parry** (conductor, ENO) **Ingram Pinn** (*Financial Times*) **Simon Rattle** (music director, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) **Claire Rayner** (writer) **Crucial Robbie** (DJ) **Trevor Sax** (DJ) **Geoff Sims** (Midlands Arts Centre) **Andrew Sinclair** (opera director) **Tony Slattery** (comedian) **Steel Pulse**, **S Stone** (Clone Zone, Birmingham) **Mark Stubbs**, **Helen Cave** (Geese Theatre Company, Birmingham) **Dean Sullivan** (actor) **Judith Vidal-Hall**, **Santorri Chamley**, **EJ Twining** (*Index on Censorship*) **Hannah Vowles**, **Glyn Banks** (Art in Ruins) **Peter Walsh** (Triangle Cinema, Birmingham) **Gordon Warnecke** (actor) **Professor Jeffrey Weeks** (University of West of England) **Evelyn Wilson** (Lighthouse Media Centre) **Michael Winner** (director) **Niki Wolf** (Feminists Against Censorship) **Shiona Wood** (Edinburgh Filmhouse) **Chris Woods** (*Capital Gay*) **Tim Woodward**, **Michelle Oiley** (*Skin 2*) **Geoff Yeomans** (artist)



Illusory peace

The Middle East 'peace' plan is not only a defeat for the Palestinians but threatens to destabilise the whole region, argues Eve Anderson

The historic agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the state of Israel seems to promise peace in the Middle East. For the first time the sworn enemies of nearly 40 years have agreed to recognise each other. Israel has offered Palestinian autonomy on the Gaza Strip, in Jericho and, possibly, over the whole of the West Bank. The PLO in turn has promised to renounce the struggle against Israel.

It all sounds very generous and enlightened. At last, both extremes are seeing sense and coming together to end the bloodshed. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the proposal represents the defeat of the PLO as a liberation movement. But it is also an extremely high-risk strategy for Israel, and one that threatens the stability of the Arab regimes.

In the West, opponents of the deal,

whether Islamic fundamentalists like Hamas or hardline Zionists like Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, have been pilloried for their attachment to ancient hatreds. But both Israeli and Palestinian critics, from very different standpoints, have got a case.

A defeat

The main purpose and consequence of the deal is the defeat of the Palestinians. What has the PLO settled for in return for abandoning the struggle for national self-determination? The Gaza Strip is a rubbish dump for refugees and rebellious Palestinians. Nearly 800 000 people are jammed into 135 square miles of arid, dusty land—one of the most densely populated regions on the planet. The Israelis tried to give Gaza back to Egypt in 1978 but the Egyptians turned the offer down.

The Gaza Strip is a liability for Israel and a security nightmare. Now the PLO will police it and save them the trouble and expense in money and Israeli lives. In return, PLO leaders will have all the power and authority of jumped-up town councillors. Real control will remain with the Israeli state.

It is the Western powers, principally the USA, that have imposed this solution upon the Palestinian people, with the collusion of the leadership of the PLO. The idea that the peace deal was made on the basis of a personal rapport among the negotiators and their Norwegian hosts is laughable. Rather it is America's domination of the Middle East that has reduced the Palestinians to accepting a subordinate role in the Israeli state.

'The last superpower'

Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser to ex-US president George Bush, gave the game away. 'It took two wars to break the ice', he told *Newsweek*, 'the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Gulf War...we were the last superpower' (13 September 1993).

What started with the end of the Cold War was a new relationship between America and the Arab states. No longer did radical Arab regimes have the option of escaping the Western orbit by seeking Soviet support. As a result, the USA had a much freer hand in the region. That shift in relations was consolidated in the Gulf War, when Bush mobilised the support of Arab states such as Egypt and Syria for his crusade to destroy Iraq.

The end of the Cold War and the outcome of the Gulf War finally removed two vital props from under the PLO: Soviet diplomatic support, and the backing of Arab nationalist regimes. This enabled the West to press Yasser Arafat into doing a deal with Israel on such punitive terms. But it was pushing at an open door.

PLO pays price

Although the PLO has been a focus for Palestinian hatred of Israeli and Western domination, its own attitude has been far more equivocal. Increasingly over the past 20 years, the PLO leadership has deprioritised the armed struggle against the Israeli state and instead pinned its hopes on Western diplomacy. Arafat has courted first the United Nations and more recently the USA itself, seeking entry to the Western-sponsored 'peace process' in the Middle East.

The West has always made it clear, however, that the price of the PLO's ticket to the negotiating table would be the recognition of Israel and the

abandonment of 'terrorism'—here a code word for the liberation struggle. In effect, the PLO would have to cut itself off from the aspirations of the dispossessed Palestinian masses. Arafat's shift in that direction culminated in his signing of the deal. More than 40 years of resistance have given the Palestinian people the right to control over the non-existent amenities of the Gaza Strip and the traffic in Jericho.

Israel's problems

The fact that the deal is a defeat for the Palestinians does not mean that it is all good news for Israel. The Zionist state has also been affected by the end of the Cold War, which called into question its role in the region. Through the Cold War era, the Israelis were armed and funded by Washington to act as the West's gendarme in the Middle East, a counterpoint to Soviet-backed Arab nationalism. But once America was able to deal direct with Arab states, and to put US troops on Saudi soil, Israel's usefulness as a local policeman was undermined. American support for Israel has become more conditional. Washington has put pressure on the Israelis to come to an accommodation with the PLO. But the Americans may yet come to regret this.

Today, commentators who fear that the 'peace' deal may lead to instability tend to see the problem in terms of an uprising by Palestinian 'hardliners' like Hamas in the Gaza Strip. No doubt such groups will do their best to make trouble for Arafat and Israel. But the danger to Israel is far broader. The 'Gaza-Jericho first' deal may keep the lid on things in the short term. But it also brings the question of the legitimacy of the Israeli state closer to home.

Jerusalem tomorrow?

The Zionist state of Israel was founded after the Second World War on the basis of the occupation and partition of Palestine. The suppression of the Palestinians has been Israel's organising principle ever since. From the attack on Egypt in 1956 to the invasion of Lebanon which drove out the PLO in 1982, the Israelis demonstrated their refusal to make any concessions to Arab demands for self-determination.

The Israeli state is an artificial construction on Palestinian soil, wholly dependent upon Western arms and aid for its survival. To concede any right to Palestinian autonomy, however formal, must call into question the basis of the Israeli state. This is why the Israelis took such a hard line in the past—and why the Zionist right has a point when it warns that the deal with the PLO could have far-reaching consequences for Israel.

No part of the artificial Israeli state has any more 'natural' legitimacy than any other. If Gaza and Jericho can be 'given away' today, why not Jerusalem tomorrow, or even Tel Aviv the day after? That is why, whatever immediate benefits the agreement might bring to Israel, it stores up trouble and instability for the future.

And it's not only the legitimacy of Israel which is called into question by the deal. The Arab states, too, are likely to find the prospect of peace with Israel a mixed blessing.

Similar fate

For decades, all manner of Arab regimes have justified their rule by championing the cause of Arab nationalism and Palestinian liberation against Israel and the West. Through giving token support to the PLO and maintaining a hostile stance towards Israel, Arab dictators were able to pose as freedom fighters. They ran repressive regimes and reached an uneasy peace with the West, while their peoples' aspirations for liberation were directed towards Palestine.

Formal hostility to Israel at the diplomatic level leant an important legitimacy to Arab states. Egypt was the first of the Arab states to recognise Israel at the Camp David talks in 1978, and it has been beset by popular disenchantment ever since. A similar fate awaits the leaders of the more radical Arab states—Jordan, Syria, Lebanon—when they recognise Israel, as seems likely.

Unstable prospects

The old Arab-Israeli conflict has indeed been relegated to the past with the new accord between the PLO and Israel. However, the hopes that the deal will lead to a new era of stability are without foundation. The Arab-Israeli conflict was also the framework that held the region in an uneasy stalemate. In effect, the conflict was the local equivalent of the Cold War. And, just as the end of the Cold War has destabilised international relations, so, too, is the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict likely to destabilise the Middle East before too long.

Like the end of the Cold War, the formal end of the Arab-Israeli conflict will unravel the old relations—between states, between governments and the governed, between the United States and all the players in the region. The likely consequence will be an overall loss of control. Already, before the ink has dried on the accord, Washington has drawn the obvious lesson for the future by offering American troops to police the agreement. In the face of instability, the West's only solution is direct domination.

(Above)
Master of all
he surveys?
Palestinian
youth in the
rubble of his
Gaza home,
destroyed by
Israeli forces
in May

Leaner and

Defence cuts mean only that the American military machine is being refined and rationalised to give more bangs for fewer bucks, says Gemma Forest

If you believe in the peace dividend, send us just £5 today. If in two years time you can demonstrate that international relations are becoming demilitarised, we will send you a bottle of the best champagne.' (*Living Marxism*, July 1991)

Today, two years after *Living Marxism* made that offer and four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to open up a vista of East/West disarmament, the champagne is still on ice. Are we being stingy? Despite Iraq, Somalia and Bosnia, aren't there real signs, after all, that the US military is winding down?

Substantial cuts in US spending on both weapons and the armed services have indeed begun. On the weapons side, Ronald Reagan's famous Strategic Defence Initiative ('Star Wars') has collapsed amid revelations that successful experimental tests in the 1980s were faked. Under the programme of cuts agreed by Boris Yeltsin and George Bush in June 1992, American nuclear warheads are due to drop from 8772 to 3500 by the year 2003.

Among US arms-makers, the name of the game is plant closures, divestments and drastic restructurings. General Dynamics, for instance, has determined to slim down from \$10 billion to \$3.5 billion in annual turnover. The Pentagon plans to close one of the USA's two nuclear submarine dockyards, in Connecticut or Virginia. At prestigious national laboratories—Lawrence Livermore, Los Alamos—scientists are being redirected from defence to civilian projects...where they are not being sacked.

As with weapons, so with men and women in uniform. In the southern USA, engineers are finally dismantling army bases and forts whose location derived from the Indian wars. In Western Europe, US troops are pulling out of barracks, as numbers quartered in Germany and elsewhere nose downwards from a peak of 230 000 to 65 000 (*International Herald Tribune*, 11 August 1993).

Altogether, hopes are high that economies in the military can help to lower the huge US budget deficit. That, after all, is what has turned cuts which became militarily easier to justify after the collapse of the Soviet Union into a pressing economic necessity.

So far, so good. Before celebrations with *Living Marxism's* bubbly begin, however, here are five points to remember:

1 Declared figures v 'black' programmes

At the simplest level, there is no need to believe the figures which the US military publishes for the benefit of congress; there are a whole series of arms procurement programmes which cannot be found in the ledger books and which officially do not exist. These programmes, which are more secret than top secret, are called 'black' in US military circles: no chink of light ever emerges from them (for the classic study, see WE Burrows, *Deep Black*). So why, when Vietnam draft resister Bill Clinton suddenly unleashes Tomahawk cruise missiles on downtown Baghdad, should we accept the numbers so innocently given us by his Department of Defense?

2 A cheaper military apparatus by no means implies a less lethal one

More fundamental than the secrecy surrounding US militarism is a simple fact of economic life: even if the sum total of all military programmes is reduced, American firepower can still rise.

The US authorities are doing in munitions and on parade grounds what employers are trying to achieve in civilian factories and in local government or education: to do more with less. In civilian production, employers try to raise the quantity and/or quality of their output while minimising their investments in buildings, machinery, raw materials and labour-power. Similar trends are occurring in the defence sector.

Fewer weapons may be made and operated by fewer trained killers. But the drive is still on to 'service' targets with weapons which are more devastating than ever and which, too, are brought to bear more efficiently than ever. The total of bucks spent may be less, but the bang delivered by each buck will be worse.

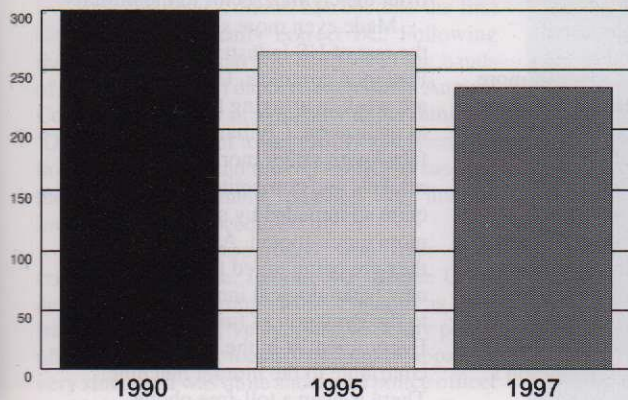
Drawing the lessons of the Gulf War, some US defence analysts 'argue that the lopsided victory over Iraq shows that American military equipment is already more than a match for any threat the US might expect to face in the next decade or more' (*Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 15 March 1993). If the Gulf War highlighted the unrivalled military resources of the USA, it also showed that if the political climate is right, and all adversaries of the White House can be vilified as sub-human, then there is no need to waste money on weapons which are 'high-tech'.

Instead of tricky and expensive precision-guided bombs destined for military installations, Clinton can get away with the bargain-basement obliteration of whole cities. Indeed he can even turn around and blame the despatch of enemy civilians on Iraqi or Somali generals, who have 'deliberately' sited HQs in densely populated areas (instead of in exposed oases or mountain hamlets, which is what fair play and the US Air Force demand).

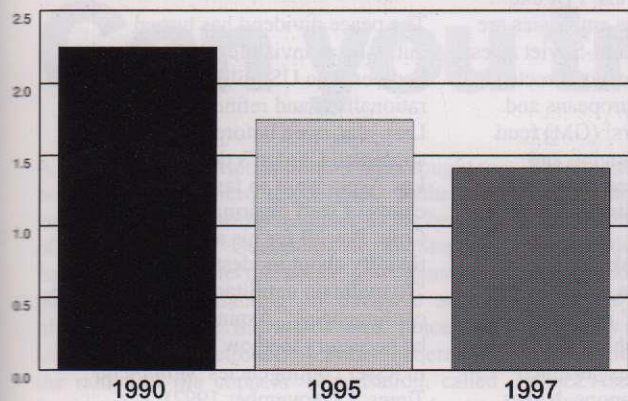
The US military wants to be 'leaner and meaner' in the 1990s. The ability to airlift troops is now held to be crucial, so Clinton will probably let the marines have a tilt-rotor transport plane, the V-22, even though Reagan and Bush demurred. Supply lines will be sharpened up: as Desert Storm chief of supply Lieutenant General William 'Gus' Pagonis observed after the event, 'logistics has now become a great buzzword and very glamorous' ('Good logistics is combat power', *McKinsey Quarterly*, No3 1991). By the same token, US weapons platforms will in future be more ►

meaner

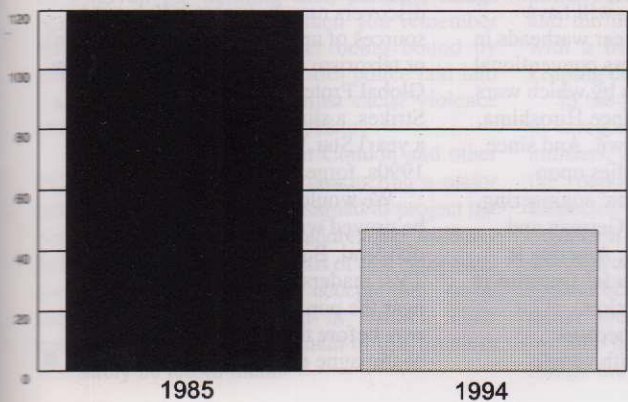
US defence expenditure, 1990-97, £bn



US armed forces, 1990-97, in millions

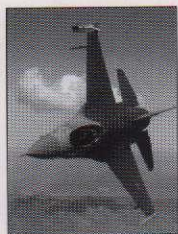


US arms procurement spending, £bn



SOURCE: FINANCIAL TIMES 14 JUNE 1998





mobile, and more 'flexible'—capable of performing a wider variety of roles.

3 Plans and realities

On paper, Clinton plans to cut spending for the financial year 1997 from Bush's total of \$250 billion to \$230 billion—quite a reduction since the start of the

'Clintonomics' means taking everyday commercial decisions from the point of view of the USA as a fighting unit

decade (see chart, p31). But \$18 billion of trimming is predicated on a freeze in armed services' pay, and 40 per cent on annual inflation of 2.5 per cent or less. Given the need to maintain morale among depleted ranks, the first assumption looks questionable. Given Clinton's inability to rein back his budget deficit—even with defence cuts—the second assumption is also a hostage to fortune. More importantly, the turbulent post-Cold War world, together with Clinton's pressing need to bolster his authority by means of foreign adventures, make it most unlikely that today's planned defence cuts will stick.

4 Getting others to pay, and cooking the books

The Pentagon is bent on forcing its 'allies' to shell out more. Once again the template here is Operation Desert Storm, in which Germany and Japan were browbeaten into financing the carnage. Today, America demands that the UN—bolstered, if possible, by larger contributions from Bonn and Tokyo—should foot more of Uncle Sam's bills.

Spreading the load does not stop with the UN. The privatisation of US naval maintenance and repair formally takes dollars out of Pentagon accounts, only for them to reappear, more surreptitiously, in the books of independent contractors. A similar manoeuvre occurs with what are called 'offset' agreements with foreign purchasers of US arms. Here, Saudis or Kuwaitis are loaned or given innocuous aid dollars with which to buy American arms.

Although the government is cutting defence spending, it is helping American arms manufacturers to make billions of dollars on the international market. Exports provide a vital source of income to US weapons-makers.

The big contracts with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and the fast-arming Far East are won on the back of America's diplomatic influence. At major festivals of militarism such as the Paris Air Show, Russian suppliers are now deemed unreliable and are under US pressure to show restraint. No wonder, then, that US arms exports have filled the gap, rising from a third world market share of 13 per cent to 57 per cent between 1988 and 1992 (*Independent*, 23 July 1993). What a wonderful, worldwide peace dividend this is shaping up to be!

5 The militarisation of the US economy

Large parts of American life are being covertly redirected towards more aggressive ends. 'Clintonomics' means taking everyday commercial decisions from the point of view of the USA as a fighting unit. For Clinton, US growth, trade and leadership in biotechnology, superconductors and computer-integrated manufacturing fall under the heading 'National Security' (B Clinton and A Gore, *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America*, p130). Clinton's new Economic Security Council operates on the same lines.

The wider issue facing US capitalism is to stem its decline by adopting more militaristic measures against its economic rivals. FBI and CIA agents and overseas embassies are being redeployed from anti-Soviet roles towards industrial espionage directed against the Japanese, Europeans and Chinese. General Motors' (GM) feud with Volkswagen over spying and stealing technological secrets shows the militarisation of business affairs proceeding apace.

GM does not just make cars; it also makes electronics and software. Here we have 'dual use' or 'grey area' technologies which, in the 1990s, exercise the Pentagon just as much as plain old nuclear weapons. Nukes are not out of the picture: the next 'super-super-black' generation of planned US planes—unmanned, wingless, 110 x 60 foot diamonds made of black ceramic tiles and capable of speeds of Mach 6-8—will have 121 flush-mounted nuclear warheads in their bellies. Nevertheless conventional warfare, the only means by which wars have been prosecuted since Hiroshima, has now come into its own. And since conventional warfare relies upon mechanical and electronic engineering, two sectors of growing German and Japanese predominance, America is anxious to steer its peaceful factories in a more belligerent direction.

America is anxious because the laptop computers with which

it organised the Gulf War were made in Japan. If US arms-makers continue to be run down, the argument continues, America may lose crucial elements of its 'defence industrial base'. The race is on to ensure a reasonable and compensating degree of autarky in US arms supply. That means the enlistment of machine tools specialists and chip-makers all over America.

In the past, to defray the costs of research and development in weapons, their makers hoped—largely in vain, it turned out—to win some 'spin-off' for their efforts by applying military technologies to civilian ends. Today, by contrast, all the talk is of 'spin-on' from the civilian sector to the military.

Made even more sluggish than the rest of US industry by years of fat Pentagon contracts, US arms-makers are weak in bringing technologies to realisation. Civilian manufacturers, faced with rather more diversified markets and competitors, and not quite so impeded by secrecy, are more quick-footed. As a result, they are being urged to pass on new technological innovations to the Pentagon as fast as possible. Every scientist in the USA can now contribute to the murder machine! There is even a toll-free phone number—1-800-DUAL USE—which men and women in white coats can dial so as to give vent to their patriotism in expeditious style.

The peace dividend has turned out to be as invisible as a B-2 Stealth bomber. The US military is being rationalised and refined, no more. Last year, even before he was appointed Clinton's defence secretary, Les Aspin went so far as to criticise chiefs of staff chairman and Gulf hero Colin Powell for his all-or-nothing timidity about modest military strikes: 'To maintain a military for the extreme contingencies', Aspin said, 'it will be necessary to show that it is useful in lesser contingencies' (*Financial Times*, 12 November 1992).

The tone this year is worse still. Aspin has, in Somalia, gained his men useful battlefield experience in blowing away 'lesser contingencies'. With each new month, the State Department discovers new and more villainous sources of arms proliferation (Pakistan) or terrorism (Sudan); to deal with them, Global Protection Against Limited Strikes, a slimmed-down (\$4 billion a year) Star Wars programme for the 1990s, forges ahead.

We would be delighted to be proved wrong about the peace dividend. But we know that, on their TVs, readers of *Living Marxism* will hear the pop of American explosives way before they hear that of our champagne corks.

Ian Scott on the dangers of anti-racist policing

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon has become the first politically correct PC. Following the death of Jamaican Joy Gardner at the hands of one of his SO1(3) deportation units in August, Condon sent a letter of sympathy to her family—‘Our thoughts go out to her family and friends at this tragic time’—and moved swiftly to suspend the entire department pending an internal investigation of procedures.

Condon's new approach won over most critics of the police. Labour MP Bernie Grant described his meeting with Condon as ‘the frankest exchange I've ever had with any police officer. He was apologetic, genuinely appalled, very sincere...I was quite shocked a police officer could behave in this way’ (*Sunday Times*, 15 August 1993).



race but are classified like that just in case’ (10 September 1993).

It might look as if Stepney police are elevating racism into a major issue. In fact their all-inclusive category of racial incidents reduces the real problem of racist violence to the same level as disputes over gardens. It means depoliticising racial oppression by lumping it in with all manner of petty crimes. In this way racism ceases to be a matter demanding public political protests, and becomes an everyday issue of copping that should be left to the police.

Behind the media discussion of what to do about Joy Gardner's death or the attack on Quaddus Ali is the assumption that the police and other state agencies are the people best able to make rational decisions in these situations. The best course of action would be to leave it up to them to sort the problem out in a responsible manner.

The flipside of this assumption is that it is illegitimate to stage anti-racist protests which are outside the control of the police and the authorities. Any response which is not sanctioned by the state must either be disarmed or criminalised.

The pressure to conform to this point of view led the organisers of a demonstration planned to show anger at Joy Gardner's death to turn it into a wake. ‘We couldn't possibly have a go at the police, so we turned the march into a memorial for Joy Gardner’, said Bernie Grant (*Sunday Times*, 15 August 1993).

Meanwhile the press denounced anyone who wanted a public campaign against the killing of

Can you trust a Condon?

A month later, the Metropolitan Police sought to boost their anti-racist credentials further by launching a high-profile response to the beating of Asian student Quaddus Ali in Stepney, East London. While the police got themselves photographed conducting an intensive search of the area where the attack took place, the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, the rank and file coppers' organisation, called for ‘exemplary penalties’ for those involved in putting 17 year-old Quaddus Ali on a life-support machine (*Guardian*, 10 September 1993).

All of this seemed in stark contrast to the old image of the police as a racist force. You could be forgiven for thinking that, perhaps, things really have changed. And then you remember how Joy Gardner died after being bound by police officers; and how the riot police laid into Asian youth protesting against racist violence after the attack on Quaddus Ali....

What has changed is that Condon and other PC police commanders are conducting a major public relations exercise, designed to project the Force as a public service addressing ordinary people's real concerns. As part of this campaign, the police now publicly accept that racial violence is a big problem in Britain. Their message is that the management of this problem can safely be left to them.

That might sound like a step forward from the bad old days of racism. In reality, however, those bad old days are still with us, only more so: the immigration authorities ruthlessly persecute people like Joy Gardner, the police have bigger clubs and more powers with which to harass inner-city youth, and the anti-immigrant climate makes the freelance racists feel even freer to attack Asians like Quaddus Ali at will.

The police PR campaign has not altered the reality of racism in British society, but it has changed the image of the authorities to that of anti-racists. The major consequence so far has been to diffuse criticism of the police from politicians like Bernie Grant and the liberal press, and leave Condon & Co with a free hand to go about the business of keeping control.

In the past, police were notoriously reluctant to categorise any offence, even clear-cut racist murders, as ‘racially motivated’. Now they take the opposite approach, as Detective Chief Inspector Edwin Williams from Stepney police explained to Maggie O'Kane of the *Guardian* after the attack on Quaddus Ali: ‘We have a new system here now. Everything that has a possible racial element is classified.’ That included, he told her, ‘disputes over property, gardens, things that may not have anything to do with

Joy Gardner as ‘demagogues’ who were ‘more interested in fomenting protest than respecting the wishes of the dead woman's family’ (*Guardian*, 4 August 1993). While the *Guardian* and the *Independent* played the righteous social worker, the *Sun* went for the jugular. Columnist Richard Littlejohn accused the left of wanting to start a riot, and called for ‘a healthy dose of police brutality’ to sort the protesters out (5 August 1993).

In the aftermath of the attack on Quaddus Ali, Littlejohn got his wish. Having assumed sole responsibility for combating racist attacks, the riot police waded into Asian youths staging ‘illegitimate’ protests outside the Royal London Hospital where he was fighting for his life. Nine of the Asians arrested were charged with the serious offence of riot. Some newspapers were quick to emphasise the role of ‘outsiders’ in stirring up trouble.

By depicting those who protest against racism as part of the problem, the police set themselves up as the only solution. Even when they have killed someone, they want us to believe that they are the only people responsible enough to resolve the matter. The implication is that there are some people who can be trusted (the police) and there are some people who cannot (the public).



A degree of optimism

The Conservatives' commitment to expanding higher education seems to go against their concern to cut public spending. Deborah Thompson and Mark Wilder identify the government's hidden agenda

Browse through any government document on economic matters and you will notice the words 'education' and 'training' appearing with monotonous regularity. No important speech, editorial or party manifesto on the future of Britain is complete without some resounding clichés on the value of expanding higher education.

More importantly, it appears that the government is willing to put at least some of its money where its mouth is. As education secretary John Patten modestly put it: 'Public spending on higher education is up more than seven per cent on last year at a time of severe

public expenditure constraint' (*Herald*, 6 September 1993).

At a time when even the Tory right is discussing the need to cut public spending in its much-favoured spheres of defence and the police, higher education is to receive a 4.8 per cent increase this year (on top of the previous two years' increases varying between nine and 12.5 per cent). Naturally, the small print contains the usual emphasis on efficiency and lowering unit costs, itself a disciplining measure to ensure expansion takes place on the government's terms.

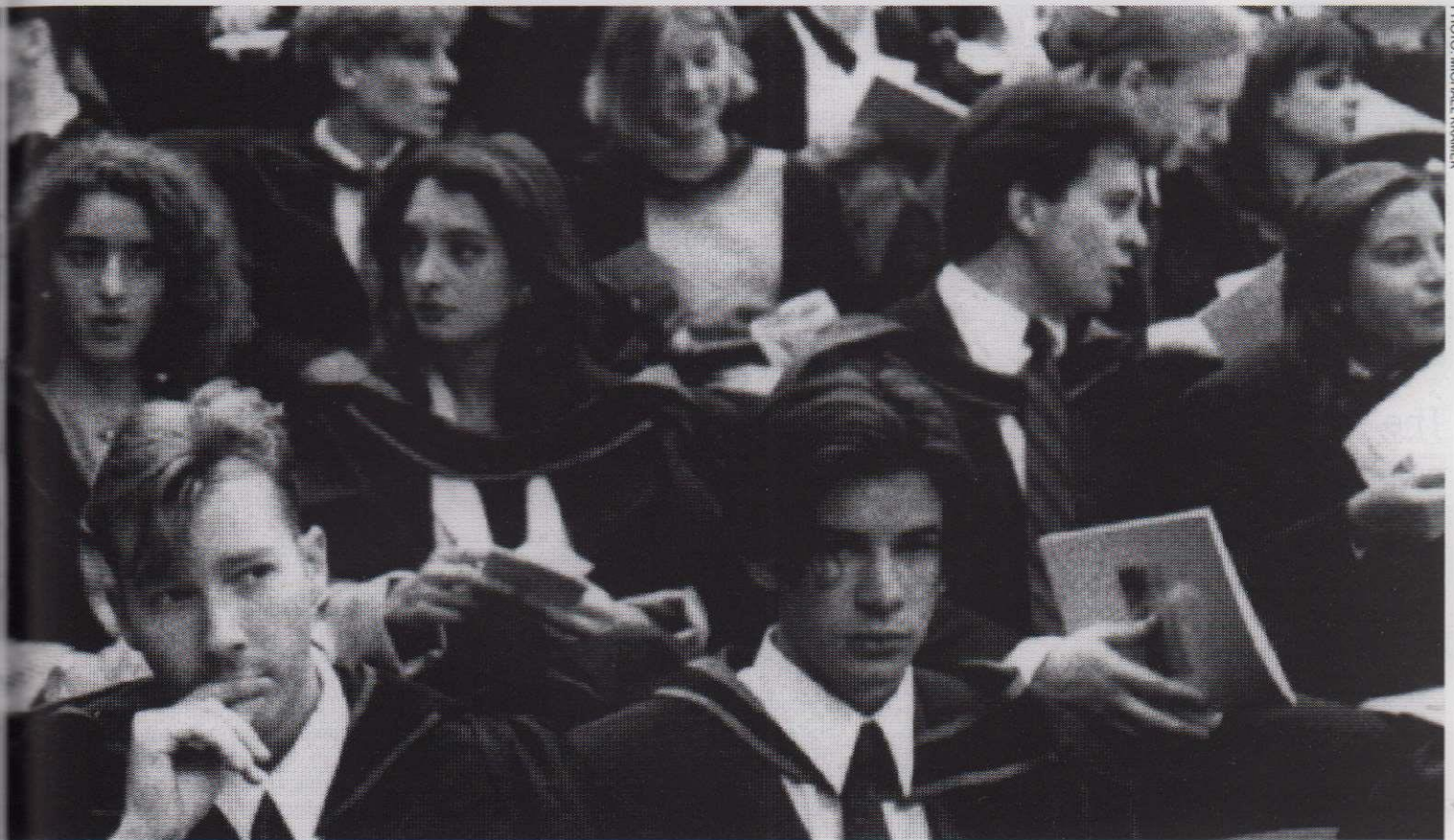
Nor do the expansion plans appear to be running aground.

The universities, according to government instructions, are supposed to be 'consolidating' the gains made in the expansion of recent years (during which the proportion of school-leavers entering higher education has risen from 17 to 22 per cent). However, in reality, the funding system which since 1991 has linked the amount of money that colleges get to the number of students they recruit, means that universities look set to expand by up to another 10 per cent this year (*THES*, 3 September 1993).

Major's flagship

In addition, the new structures of differential and competitive funding between academic institutions mean that financial increases of up to 20 per cent have been awarded to institutions which have expanded most rapidly, and have also significantly lowered teaching costs. The message to all institutions has been that, unless they fulfil the expansion criteria, they will be penalised.

Against this background, it appears as though the government's own ambitious target of getting one in three school-leavers into higher education by the year 2000 will



(Above)
The government
finds producing
more graduates
easier than
creating more
jobs

be superseded. Obviously, as a social institution, universities are becoming more significant than was previously the case.

Education has become the flagship of the Major government. At a time when the establishment appears beset by crisis and difficulty on all sides, when the government is drifting from failed policy to scandal and back again, the commitment to providing a better future through the expansion of higher education stands out as a beacon of hope for Britain.

In ruling circles, higher education is now discussed as a key aspect of the economic and social process. A mass higher education system is seen as increasingly central to the revival of Britain's economic performance and the renewal of British society. Why does the establishment seem to find these ideas so irresistible today?

Back in 1991, when the Conservative government first emphasised its commitment to the expansion of the higher education system, the *Economist* highlighted the new significance attached to education:

'Once the key to economic success was planning and nationalisation. Then it was science and technology. Only yesterday it was markets and enterprise. Now it is education and training.' (18 May 1991)

Each policy mentioned on the *Economist's* list of the changes in

economic fashion was supposed to resolve the longstanding problems of British decline. In the postwar years, nationalisation and state intervention were seen as the key to economic regeneration. By the 1960s, Harold Wilson was offering 'the white heat of technology' as a panacea. In the 1980s, it was up to the Thatcherite entrepreneur to come to the rescue. Now it is down to education, and especially higher education.

Look in the mirage

None of these policies has resolved any of the problems of the British economy. Indeed what is significant is that the mirage-like quality of the 'solutions' offered becomes progressively more pronounced from the 1940s to the 1990s, as the initiatives proposed become further removed from anything which can make an impact on the real economy. So it begins with a national planning programme to reorganise British industry, with an emphasis on investment and technology. Then it is a question of putting faith in the magic of the market, and particularly the financial markets. Now we are left with the notion that reorganising the social institution of education will somehow effect changes in the economy. 'Reskilling' and 'retraining' are the new measures to deal with decline.

From this perspective it becomes possible to see the government's new preoccupation with higher education more as a step backwards than a leap

forwards. Unable to do anything substantive to reinvigorate Britain's economic base or take British society forward, the Conservatives have had to retreat into the more ephemeral sphere of education to find their 'solution' to the crisis.

This new emphasis allows the government to repose economic problems as being located in an entirely different sphere, that of education. The commitment to expanding higher education has effectively become the modern substitute for an industrial policy. At the same time, depicting society's problems as connected to education allows the government more scope to intervene in and control the universities that are shaping young people's lives.

A positive agenda

The attractions of this discussion are many for a British elite which has long since lost its sense of mission. By connecting Britain's deep-seated problems to educational issues, the government seeks to shift the focus from a negative discussion of British decline and the lack of international competitiveness, to a positive agenda centred on educational expansion.

While looking over their shoulders at Britain's international economic rivals, all of whom have mass higher education systems, the government and its theorists now project national renewal as dependent upon the higher education system providing more ►



research and better skills, with the emphasis on science, engineering and technology.

If the problems of the economy are essentially 'educational', then reforming the sphere of education can provide the solution. The notion of education and training has allowed the government to project itself as having the policies to effect a long-term transition of the economy. The vocabulary of

argument goes, that surely must be the problem holding us back. The *Times Higher Educational Supplement* put the case explicitly last year, capturing, too, the current obsession with the American higher education system:

'America's universities and colleges, in all their diversity and incoherence, remain America's greatest asset. They are at the heart of that nation's vision of freedom, embodying individual aspiration, social opportunity and economic ambition in equal measure.

'Thanks to its universities, the United States is likely to remain the heartland of the post-industrial world.' (*THES*, 28 February 1992)

In a style that might embarrass even Bill Clinton's speech-writers, the endemic problems of racism and urban decay in American society are here vanished away. The obsession with the American model of higher education as the key to economic and social advance reveals how the transformative powers of a mass higher education system is a modern myth in the making. Like a senile old man, the British establishment looks at changes in education as a kind of wonder drug that might bring back its lost youth and vigour.

Degraded education

Mention of the American higher education system also suggests what the practical implications of the government's reforms will be for those on the receiving end. The American college system which is now looked to as a model is divided between a handful of prestigious research establishments, and a great many overcrowded, low-quality institutions providing a poor excuse for an education.

It is already clear that the expansion of the British higher education system, without adequate resources to cater for the huge numbers of new students, is well on the way to creating a similarly degraded version of higher education over here. The gap between the government's dream of educational renaissance and the reality of capitalist decay in Britain means that this is the only sort of system which the reformers can afford to create.

Despite this, the government has so far got away with selling its reforms as a good thing. It has its critics among academics and commentators, but their complaints about underfunding tend to come across as nit-picking when set against the soundbite quality of government slogans like 'Investing in the future of Britain' or the politically correct 'Access for all'.

Indeed one reason these criticisms are so easily dealt with is that the academics and experts concerned have already accepted at face value the government's argument that the reforms are really about 'empowering' people and 'extending opportunity' through higher education.

More young people are now also prepared to accept the government's arguments about higher education, though for very different reasons. Faced with the alternative of scamming in low-paid, no-future jobs or life on the dole, going to university at least presents itself as a chance to make it for those who play by the rules. What they discover in the new model universities is a far cry from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The new values of the university are long hours of study on low-quality 'vocational' courses, financial hardship, competition and social discipline, at the end of which they receive not the promised land, but an increasingly worthless piece of paper. That is the pay-off from the government's commitment to 'investing in our future'; identifying the underlying agenda of the higher education reforms is the first step towards doing something about it.

The emphasis on education switches attention from the grim present to the promise of a better future

'reskilling' and 'retraining' is here counterposed to the more pessimistic language of decay and decline.

At present this argument seems to have acquired its own dynamic. After two months of Sunday supplement debate, the view that the absence of a 'science consciousness' in British culture explains why Britain has fallen behind its competitors has become a common prejudice. Now the government is applying a mixture of the carrot and the stick (in the form of extra funding for science students), to encourage the study of science at university among the nation's reluctant youth. The national panic engendered in the quality newspapers over this year's A-level results, and the inflated fears of a shortage of university places for successful students, demonstrated again how compulsive the discussion about expanding higher education has become.

Tomorrow's world

Higher education exerts such a fatal attraction for today's commentators and policy-makers because it involves the promise of future change and improvement. Unable to locate much in the way of a successful model in the here and now, the emphasis on education implies that things can only get better and that it would be wrong to draw hasty conclusions. After all, the effectiveness of educational experiments cannot be judged in the short term. For the authorities, the emphasis on education switches attention from the grim present to the promise of a better future.

Since Britain is the only major economic power without a mass higher education system, the

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How to go to the toilet

The Americans have declared open season on Britain: one magazine describes us as 'a rundown, smelly society'. This gloomy view is supported by the news that Britain is fourth from bottom of the public toilet league. And since one of the three countries that scored worse is France, where they pride themselves on this sort of thing, the real situation is even worse.

The plucky British plan to install a toilet half way up Everest doesn't really get to grips with the problem. And although the Queen has controversially ordered some to be built in The Mall for the use of foreign tourists who spend fortunes at her new souvenir shop (buying mugs emblazoned with the misprint 'Buckingham Place'), this is little comfort to ordinary Londoners, who have had to put up with the systematic removal of their traditional khazi—the dear old red telephone box.

As always, the women suffer most. Even if they are lucky enough to find a public convenience, their problems have only just begun. Climbing Everest is nothing to the ordeal of using a toilet in 1993. In addition to mace spray, sirens, condoms, sanitary products and tissues, today's well-equipped woman must now carry a suction hook in her handbag. Why? Because, according to *Best* magazine's special toilet supplement, many women put their handbags on the floor in public conveniences, and might subsequently put the bag on the supper table, thus putting people at risk from dangerous germs.

The advice then moves into the surreal territory previously inhabited by Claire Rayner and her famous toilet paper tips for avoiding dirty fingers by folding the paper for double thickness. It transpires that if you are one of those foolhardy people who can't be bothered to carry a supply of disposable seat covers, and 'hover above the seat' instead, then you are at risk of developing bladder infections. To protect yourself against such ignominy, you must follow a series of instructions too intimate to be repeated in a family publication like this.

Only at the very end does it become obvious that the real subject under discussion has nothing to do with health—a throwaway sentence reassures us that the chances of contracting anything nasty are extremely small. The important thing here is etiquette: making sure the doctor knows you're respectable. It is the same social anxiety that kept a generation obsessed with wearing fresh underwear—not for hygiene, but in case they were taken to hospital in less than pristine condition.

The game is given away in the final section, which advises you on the correct way to address your GP when discussing 'personal problems'. A doctor writes: 'the word urine is mispronounced by many people, who think you say it "yew-rine". It's actually pronounced "Yew-rinn"—with the stress on the first syllable'. But if you don't think you can manage this, relax—terms like 'pass water' and 'pee' 'will be understood by your doctor and most certainly won't cause offence to him or her'. Unlike 'piss off' and other phrases which spring to mind

Doctors used to pride themselves on their discretion, but like judges and policemen they seem increasingly outspoken. Some now make a good living as media pundits. Before long they all

develop Bushellitis—the inability to stick to the subject which they are meant to be writing about. So while Garry Bushell digresses from his TV reviews in order to rant about the IRA and homosexuals, Dr Vernon Coleman and the rest have their own fish to fry.

'It is when I get letters from people like you—exhibiting all the wit, insight and moral courage of diseased and discarded toe nail clippings—that I realise why we have the government we have. It's frightening to think that you and your mates have the vote.'

Thus writes Coleman in his role as the *People's* agony aunt, in reply to a perfectly reasonable request for some advice on attending a stag night. For good measure, he adds: 'I hope your penis develops a temporary wasting disease and shrivels to the size of a pin on your big night out with the lads.'

The pugnacious attitude on the part of our elders and betters has extended beyond the likes of Judge Pickles, Lord Wyatt and the other rent-a-quotes who sound off in the tabloid press. There are disturbing signs that establishment figures nearing the end of their careers and with time on their hands are no longer content to fight their battles in newspaper columns. They are busy 'reinventing' themselves as have-a-go heroes.

Bernard Ingham has been the archetypal Man Who Was Not Prepared To Take It Any More for years, so his recent apprehending of a hapless faredodger 'on behalf of decent passengers' came as no great surprise. Sir Peregrine Worsthorne is a different kettle of fish. Although Perry's maverick credentials are well-established (he was one of the first people to say 'fuck' on television, and had his first sexual experience at school with George Melly), he is nevertheless an unlikely subway vigilante. Yet every man has his breaking point, and he has reached his. Perry finds it offensive when people wolf down their food on the tube, rather than retiring to their clubs to masticate at leisure. So he has hit upon an unorthodox way of discouraging this uncouth practice—sitting next to the culprit and farting loudly. 'Oh what pleasure it gave me!', he crowed, reflecting on his triumph in the pages of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

So the new authoritarianism continues apace. As if travelling in London wasn't bad enough already, the authorities are encouraging this special constable brand of 'citizenship', egging on the Worsthornes with their posters telling us not to eat on trains, give money to beggars, stand around talking, put our bags on the floor, etc. Not that everything is left to public vigilance. Passengers are now quite used to seeing people pinned to the walls by police dogs and subjected to rigorous searches, with the promise of a raid on their home if they are particularly unlucky, or just black. And to add the final nightmarish touch, commuters arriving at Waterloo are greeted by military brass band music. According to a BR spokesman: 'The theory is everyone will form into ranks and march off the platform.'

Dirty Weekend began as a feminist novel and has ended up as a vigilante film. Helen West talked to author Helen Zahavi and director Michael Winner

How times change. When Helen Zahavi's *Dirty Weekend* was first published in 1991 it was widely condemned as amoral and pornographic. Now Michael Winner has brought the story to the cinema screen as a moral tale for the nineties.

The transformation of *Dirty Weekend*, the porno novel, into *Dirty Weekend*, the morality tale, is a sign of the times.

'This is the story of Bella, who woke up this morning and realised she'd had enough.' So begins Zahavi's novel. Bella is a woman who transforms herself from victim into aggressor. At the outset she is living 'an abortion of a life', someone who 'sweltered in the summer, and shivered in the winter, and spent her evenings searching for damp'. By the end of the story Bella is triumphant, a woman with confidence and direction. What happens in between, on the dirty weekend in question, is that she murders seven men. To be more precise, she batters, suffocates, mows-down, shoots and stabs seven men, which by anyone's standards is a lot to get through in a couple of days.

The book caused apoplexy among male and female reviewers outraged by the notion of female revenge as a moral crusade. As one reviewer put it, the book would cause 'such uproar, division, grief and falling-out that one would prefer it had been released for private reading only, among women only, and highly feminised women at that'.

For Helen Zahavi the novel started as a sort of exorcism exercise. She had been through the same experience of being watched and threatened by a man who lived close by. Initially Zahavi's plot



A feminist

was simply one of role reversal—the woman breaks into the man's flat and rearranges his belongings in order to make him feel violated. However on re-reading her first draft Zahavi felt she had suppressed something. 'What I really wanted her to do', she says, 'was to take out a hammer and bash him. It was exciting, it didn't feel bad and it didn't feel wrong'.

In this spirit Bella is not filled with remorse or guilt as she goes about her business. When she encounters number one (Timothy) in his bedroom, hammer in hand, she is 'grinning like the peasant grins, before he forks the landlord'.

Zahavi denies she is anti-men. Rather, she says, the book was written out of anger with the way society is anti-women. What she wanted was to let Bella 'do what women are not allowed to do. In the final chapter she walks along the beach, and I longed to do that in the middle of the night, but I knew that if I did that and I were attacked the judge would say "she asked for it". Why am I not allowed to do that?'.

For me, the beauty of the book is that it combines this frustration and fear and isolation, and then provides a heroine who goes out and does something about it. Some of my male friends have looked at me with that 'steady on' raised eyebrow look when I have related some of the scenes to them. But without exception my female friends have urged me on to tell so and so about the one who 'get's his head caved in', and then proceeded to talk about when such and such a thing happened to them.

Any woman who has been attacked or harassed wishes they hadn't felt so powerless or vulnerable. That's why reading the book is a tonic for those of us

who have ever thought 'Shit, I wish I had a gun'. It's also one of the funniest books I've ever read. Zahavi's deadpan humour transforms the most horrible situations into ironic reflections on the woman's lot. When number three (Reggie the Dentist) forces Bella to have oral sex, Bella 'her life flashing before her, sees the copper-coloured hairs, and smells that unwashed-penis smell, and reflects that this is something else her mother forgot to mention'.

Given the tenor of the novel, Michael Winner might seem like an inappropriate choice to direct the film. After all, he has not previously been known for his feminist views either in his films or in his private life. Winner, however, claims he is much misunderstood, and that his film is about women in the nineties.

'The idea of a feminist when I was a child in the fifties was unheard of', he says. 'The so called "freedom revolution" of the sixties was one of the most male-orientated, chauvinist things ever—I know, I lived through it. It was the availability of dolly birds and hippy women, with flowers in their hair, available for intercourse. It was the most chauvinistic thing the sixties and I wasn't aware of anything going on in the seventies. This book could not have been a bestseller even 10 years ago.'

Winner thinks that the film will strike a chord with women today because 'women for the first time are saying that their position in society is intolerable, it is not acceptable that we are treated as second class citizens and patronised and put down in a zillion small ways and another zillion larger ways. We know that they got the vote but the vote didn't mean that much if you were still treated as a second class citizen, which I think most

women are by these arrogant, piggish, stupid men'.

But the real theme of *Dirty Weekend* the film, is less women fighting back against oppression than the need for all decent folk to stand up to the murderous criminals and spineless politicians who are undermining society. Winner has been much in the press of late, bemoaning the fact that the law is too biased towards criminals, that the police are too hamstrung by regulations and that vigilantism is the only way to restore social order.

In this sense *Dirty Weekend* is very much a film of our times. It shows how the radical impulses that motivated the novel have been turned into a reactionary parable about the need for more policing in society. 'If you persecute any minority', says Winner, 'you can't be surprised if they are inspired to go beyond the bounds of decency in retaliation'. Fair enough. But what starts off as sympathy for the 'minority' hitting back ends up as concern for the good citizens of Middle England, whose homes and lives he feels are threatened by the mob out there.

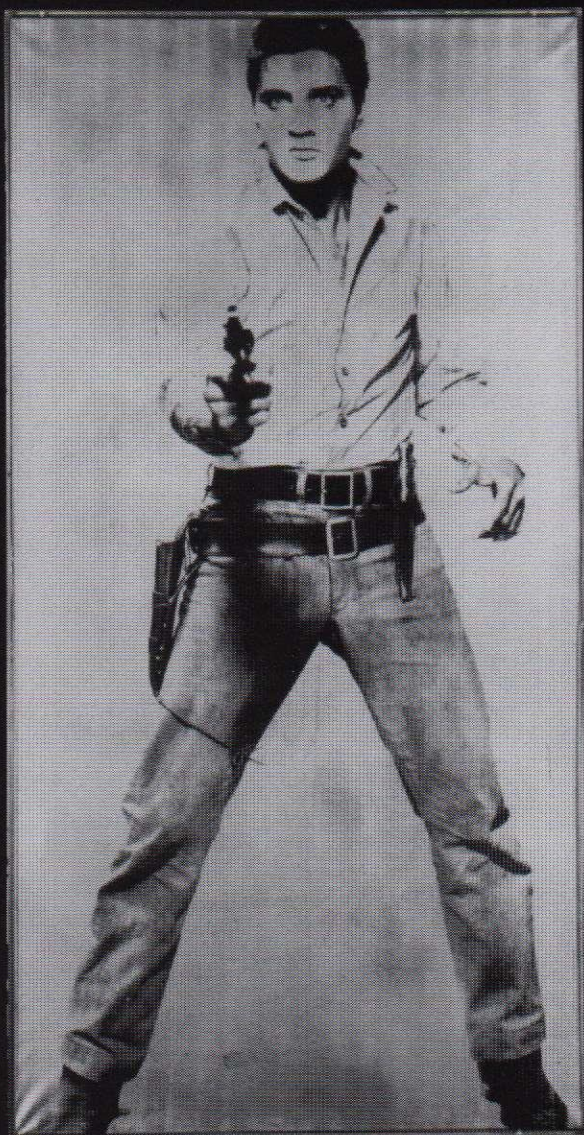
'What we dream of', says Winner, 'is the whole nation rising up and on one night suddenly there's thousands of beaten burglars all over the place and they all give up. That's a wonderful fantasy isn't it? We all wake up in the morning, the Night of at Last We've Had Enough, photograph the bloody burglars lying in the road and a few bloody rapists and they all sort of flee—like some advertisement for germs in the toilet'. ●

H Zahavi, *Dirty Weekend* is published by Flamingo at £3.99 pbk. The film *Dirty Weekend* opens nationwide on 29 October.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL KRAMER

Death Wish?



Joachim Dobberman on the rise and fall of American art

In recent years, London's Royal Academy has hosted a major series of exhibitions of twentieth-century art from Germany, Italy and Britain. The latest in the series—twentieth-century American art—is different for one reason. While in the European exhibitions the greatest works were to be found in the prewar period, American art only comes to life in the postwar years.

The first half of the new exhibition is less about American art than about European art in the USA. The works are American in subject matter, but the style is that of European modernism. They are mainly second-rate works because American painters only managed to import the styles of European

modernism but could not transform them by way of a dialogue with their native subject matter.

After the Second World War, however, while European artists struggled to innovate, America produced a series of vital new movements. What transformed American art was, on the one hand, the very decline of artistic expression itself, and, on the other, the rise of America's economic and political power.

Abstract expressionism, arguably the first authentic American art movement, demonstrates both these developments. Jackson Pollock, the most famous of the abstract expressionists, simply placed a canvas on the floor and dribbled paint all over it. He claimed that his works were

created without any conscious effort, as an expression of his spontaneous emotions. Pollock and his fellow painters abandoned the concept of art as a comment on the real world in favour of an ornamental, more or less pretty, soul deco.

What made abstract expressionism into the art movement of the fifties was not its intrinsic merit, but the ideological needs of the Cold War. In the late fifties the US government sponsored major exhibitions of abstract expressionism all over Europe, hailing it as the product of the American way of life and of democracy. A society which allowed its most renowned artists to be so free, so subjective, so modern and so provocative had to be the most progressive power on earth—especially in comparison with the Soviet Union which still insisted on a 'socialist realist' mode of expression.

In the sixties abstract expressionism was swept away by a very different school: pop art. Pop boldly snatched its subject matter from everyday American life—comic books, movie stars, Coca-Cola cans, corned beef tins. Pop art did not simply paint such articles as large as life, but in portraying them used the techniques which popular culture had pioneered for its mass-produced output. Roy Lichtenstein introduced into his canvasses the dots which we all know from crude newspaper photographs, Andy Warhol the screen-printed series which made use of few colours and could be produced cheaply in large numbers.

Warhol was also the first to present the image of the artist as a market operator. Of course there were artists before Warhol who made money, but Warhol was the first to declare that earning money was art. He put to question the mystical aura that surrounded art. For Warhol money in art was not a dirty word, but its essence. There was no difference between the clever businessman and the smart artist.

Sixties pop art remains immensely popular today. It is everywhere, on T-shirts, watches, posters and postcards. And that in a sense is where it belongs—among the cheap mass-produced articles of everyday life rather than in the grand rooms of the Royal Academy.

Since the sixties, though, no new art movement has been created that could match the vitality of pop art. The final part of the exhibition—which has been hived off to the Saatchi Gallery—features the likes of Jasper Johns and Jeff Koons. It is a shadow of the earlier sections, and a vivid reminder of how far, since the sixties, the American Dream has lost its glamour.

American Art in the Twentieth Century is currently on show at the Royal Academy and the Saatchi Gallery.

Yankee dandy doodles



Abortion of a nation

Could a work of art that expresses an evil philosophy ever be great? And if a work of art puts the case for that evil philosophy persuasively, should it be banned? I was once paid money for an essay I wrote on this very subject. I took Leni Riefenstahl's astonishing film of the Berlin Olympics as my text and I have to admit, it was a beaut. In fact, I was going to dust it off and reuse it this month on the occasion of the first British TV screening of possibly the most important movie of all time, DW Griffith's epic *Birth of a Nation*.

The day the film was premiered—8 February 1915 (I know the date without looking it up, even the place, look...)—at Clune's Auditorium, LA, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra playing the score, is universally cited by historians as 'the day the movies grew up'. Although the price of admission was an astronomical \$2, a million people saw it at the Liberty Theatre, New York, alone. It ran for 44 consecutive weeks there. The film took at least \$50m (1915 dollars). In Alabama, it ran for 12 years. This last statistic is the least surprising and the most chilling, for *Birth of a Nation* is a celebration of the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, which it dubs 'the saviour of the South'.

Channel 4 decided to show it late at night to minimise the risk of offence. They prefaced it with a sort of Open University lecture to deter the casual viewer. The lecturer exhorted us to relish the film's rhetoric while condemning its cause. It was all looking good for the recycling of my Riefenstahl piece but now, at one in the morning, with only hours to go to my deadline, I can't go through with it. Because there is a crucial difference between *Olympia* and *Birth of a Nation* and the difference is this: *Birth of a Nation* stinks.

The basic story is pure Danielle Steele—two posh families with lots of emotional ties find themselves on opposite sides in the Civil War. There is only the most cursory and mechanical attempt to integrate the personal and the political. Elephantine coincidences are its main stylistic device. For instance, at one point our heroine goes to the theatre with her beau. And what do you know? Lincoln goes, too, and guess who else? Yes, it's Nasty Booth but goodness, what is he doing with that gun? Oh no! He's shot Mr Lincoln! There are long battle scenes that have no bearing on the story and therefore no resonance whatsoever. To give us a sense of scale, these are often shot from a fixed camera position miles away from the action. They mostly look like distant roadworks. Because the story doesn't flow, each sequence ends with a cut to black, like your elbow slipping off the arm rest as you nod off.

The main black parts are played by white actors who have blacked up. Of course this is deeply offensive. It's also deeply stupid. They don't look like black people for one thing. They look like chimney sweeps. When they swagger around pushing white folks into the gutter, it looks like a nightmare version of Dick Van Dyke's big number in *Mary Poppins*. A director with half an eye would have noticed this.

When it finally gets to the KKK bit things do start to move. Men in white sheets obviously excited DW. There is a truly wonderful scene in which the Southern Gentleman comes up with the idea. His children are playing by a lake while he broods upon the fate of the South (according to the caption; actually he looks constipated). Some bare-foot baby chimney sweeps come toddling up. The white children hide beneath the picnic tablecloth and then, when the black kids get nearer, rear up, the cloth over their heads. The black kids run away. The Southern Gentleman leaps to his feet and thrusts his finger into the air. Another caption reads 'The Inspiration!!!' and we come up on the sheeted riders merrily burning down Chimney Sweep HQ. Springtime for Hitler has nothing on this; *Birth* is peppered with such moments.

I don't want to play down the evil of this film. It really is very nasty. One of the sequences in which the black actors appear in numbers comes when the council of Alabama (all black) passes a law allowing interracial marriage. The visitors' gallery is thronged with visiting Southern belles. When the motion is passed, the council men look up to the belles and lick their lips lasciviously. The women all either pass out or run out. If this is not the low point of Western culture, don't tell me what is.

At one point the KKK ride to the rescue of an embattled white homestead. Griffith builds the tension by cross-cutting from the homestead to the army of white riders galloping along to the sound of 'The Ride of the Valkyries'. It comes as a shock to realise that Wagner would not be associated with Nazism for another 30 years. Forty years later it cropped up in *What's Opera, Doc?*, and 60 years later in *Apocalypse Now*. The column of horses riding to the rescue is, of course, the cavalry coming over the hill. But once again, this is the first instance. The Western drew its imagery from *Birth of a Nation*. The most uncomfortable thing about watching the film is this growing sense of familiarity.

Most of the themes and scenes of mainstream cinema are first exposed in *Birth of a Nation*. I say 'exposed' deliberately, because this movie lays bare the real anxieties and hatreds beneath its less obviously offensive descendants. The KKK's ethnic cleansing is used as a way of formulating a 'true American' identity. Later it would be mythologised as Cowboys and Indians. Watching Griffith's film you are reminded that the Western has at its heart the celebration of genocide. Masked avengers, Lone Rangers and Batmen will never be the same again. Interesting to note, by the way, that Batman has a similar back story to Griffith's Klansman hero—rich, patrician and exercising a kind of displaced revenge (Batman's parents and the Klansman's sister were both slain by the enemy). At the other end of the spectrum, *Taxi Driver* is not far away from this—the hero returns from the war to find his struggle betrayed and decides to do a moral clean up of his own.

Birth characterises the relationship between black and white as one of sexual desire and fascination. Hollywood still has a problem with interracial sex despite the fact that a sizeable percentage of Americans are clearly the product of it. Movies are the dreams of America and in them we can read the fears and desires of the nation. In *Birth of a Nation* you can see how deep those fears run and how alarming they are for the rest of us. One of its central themes is that of the siege, of the vulnerable group besieged by a hideous 'Other'. This crops up again and again in popular American culture—the Alamo, Custer's Last Stand, the *Night of the Living Dead* and so on. It is used as an image in the most inappropriate circumstances. In Vietnam, for instance, it would be very hard to imagine the Americans as few, righteous or embattled (they were largely up in the air for one thing) but in the Rambo films and the execrable *Deer Hunter* they manage to twist things to fit this familiar pattern.

The pattern repeats itself in the mythology and architecture of modern Los Angeles which projects itself as a war zone, suffering invasions of drugs and foreign criminals. And most disturbing of all, it is there in foreign policy. Top Nation, never once bombed from the outside, never once invaded and still feeling threatened.

What is wrong with White Anglo-Saxon Protestants? Looking at *Birth of a Nation* you get a clue. For half a millennium they have been getting away with systematic murder and now it is starting to bother them.

Alan Harding reviews the work of historian EP Thompson who died in August

This book has a clumsy title, but it is one which meets its purpose. "Making", because it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.'

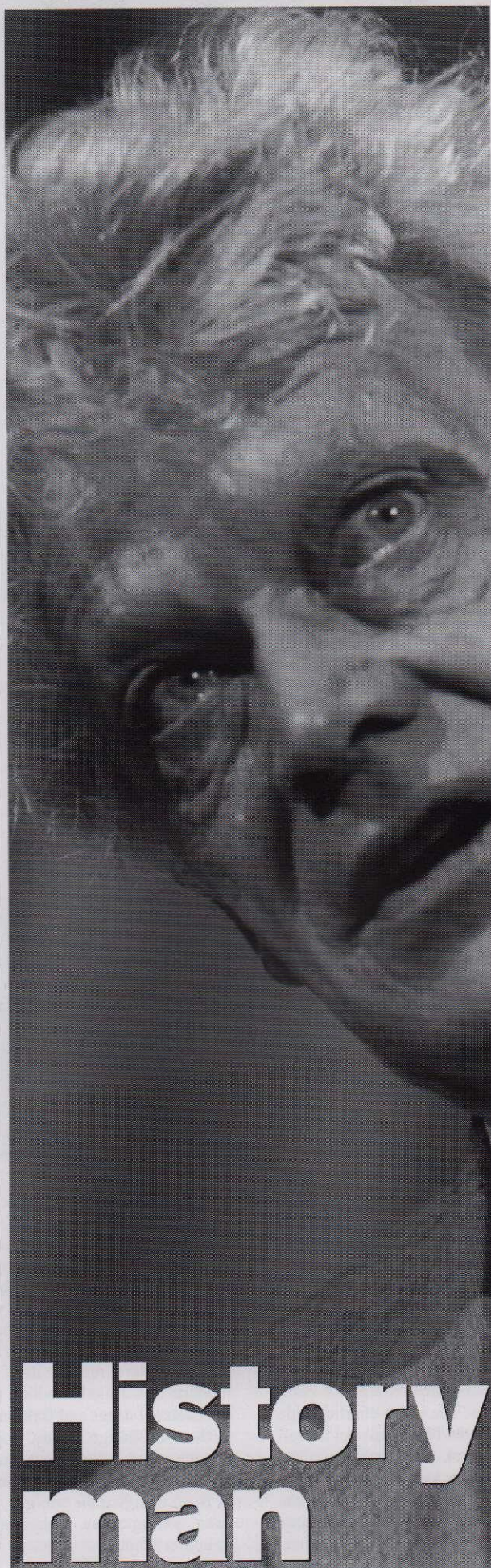
The opening words of the preface to EP Thompson's outstanding book *The Making of the English Working Class* reveal his greatest strength as a historian—his belief that human beings make their own history. Contrast that with the irrationalism of Thompson's discussion of nuclear weapons:

'Superpowers which have been locked, for 30 years, in the postures of military confrontation increasingly adopt militaristic characteristics in their economies, their polity and their culture. What may have originated in reaction becomes direction. What is justified as rational self-interest by one power or the other becomes, in the collision of the two, irrational. We are confronting an accumulating logic of process.' ('Notes on Exterminism, the Last Stage of Civilisation', in *Exterminism and Cold War*, p15)

Whereas in *The Making of the English Working Class* Thompson reveals history as created by people, in his political writings he seems to regard inert objects as having a life of their own—'Weapons, it turns out, are political agents also' (p7). The contrast between the two sides of EP Thompson tells us much about the trajectory of the postwar British left in which he was a central, if maverick, figure.

Thompson came from a family of high-minded liberal methodist intellectuals. Like many of his generation he joined the Communist Party as the best hope for the future of humanity. Thompson left the Communist Party at the time of the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and became a seminal figure in the disparate movement which became known as the New Left.

To a remarkable degree the tradition of postwar British Marxism defined itself through a discussion of history and historical method. The positive feature of this intellectual bias was the rediscovery and advocacy of the centrality of class in



the understanding of historical movement and change. At the height of the Cold War Thompson's great achievement was to demonstrate the Marxist proposition that men make history, if not in circumstances of their own making.

The downside of the preoccupation with the past was the refusal to engage with contemporary working class problems. Thompson's historical imagination was able to illuminate past struggles, but he could never break away from a political tradition which denied the revolutionary capacity of the working class to make history in the present. Even though he left the Communist Party in 1956, he retained for the rest of his life the Stalinist heritage of popular patriotism and the celebration of constitutional democracy. Each was given a new lease of life through Thompson's involvement with the peace movement in the late seventies and early eighties.

As a leading member of CND, and a founder of European Nuclear Disarmament (END), Thompson played down the necessity of creating a working class movement and sought instead to establish a broad democratic alliance that could embrace the whole of humanity in the face of the threat of nuclear extinction. Self-emancipation of the working class from the capitalist system was alright for history books, but what we needed now was to persuade capitalists that they did not need a certain type of weapons.

Fortunately for us, Thompson was too good a historian to allow his political weaknesses to undermine his historical writings. Thompson's concern for historical specificity and the importance of thorough empirical investigation made him one of the few radical intellectuals, for example, to see through the arid mumbo jumbo of structuralist Marxism espoused by Louis Althusser and his followers. His *Poverty of Theory* (1978) is a direct challenge to the whole idealist Althusserian tradition.

Whatever scores there may be to settle with Thompson's political tradition, his historical work should receive the widest possible reading as part of the struggle to remake a working class that can fulfil its revolutionary task. *The Making of the English Working Class* is one of the few books I would unreservedly recommend anyone to read. Set it alongside *Whigs and Hunters*, the biography of William Morris and the forthcoming work on Blake, and Thompson leaves an impressive legacy. We will enjoy EP Thompson the historian long after the politics he espoused are a distant memory.

The Making of the English Working Class is published by Penguin, £11.95 pbk; *The Poverty of Theory* is published by Merlin, £12.95 hbk, £6.95 pbk

THE MARXIST REVIEW OF BOOKS

Andy Clarkson takes up the White Man's burden

Africa under imperialism

The Scramble for Africa, Thomas Pakenham, Abacus, £9.99 pbk

The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation State, Basil Davidson, James Currey, £9.95 pbk

The Social History of the Machine Gun, John Ellis, Cresset, £5.95 pbk

Behind the headlines about Africa, about the civil war in Somalia, famine in the Sudan and dictatorship in Nigeria, lies a hidden agenda. Each example of the tragedy of Africa today serves to reinforce the idea that the much-maligned days of Empire, when Europeans took responsibility for the African people, were not so bad after all. Rehabilitating the imperial past is one way that the Western powers can use the relationship with Africa to try to restore their sense of pride and authority today.

During the battle of Omdurman in 1898, General Kitchener deployed 12 Maxim machine guns, 44 pieces of artillery and 24 000 repeating rifles loaded with dum-dum bullets against the spear-carrying Sudanese. Up to 11 000 Dervishers were killed compared to 28 British troops in what Winston Churchill described as 'not a battle, but an execution'. Thomas Pakenham's *The Scramble for Africa* provides a devastating challenge to the perception that Africa was much better off under colonialism.

The scramble for Africa was the race by a handful of European powers to carve up the whole African continent (bar Ethiopia and Liberia) in the final 25 years of the last century, mainly through the liberal use of the Maxim machine gun and artillery. Pakenham gives a gripping account of the race, and demonstrates how rivalries between the Western powers accelerated the conquest and domination of Africa.

Nowadays it is argued that Western intervention in Africa is undertaken for humanitarian reasons, quite distinct from the rapacious colonialism of the past. But then, as now, European aggression against Africa was dressed up as a humanitarian mission. The leading statesmen of the era, such as King Leopold of Belgium, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck and British premier Lord Salisbury justified their intervention by referring to the famous 1857 appeal by missionary

David Livingstone to 'go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity'.

The ostensible reason given for the European interference in Africa was to liberate Africans from the curse of slavery, yet the colonialists' actions were far from liberating. During Sir Garnet Wolseley's 1873 campaign against the Ashanti (in present-day Ghana), the *Times* declared, 'If by any lucky chance Sir Garnet Wolseley manages to catch a good mob of savages in the open, and at a moderate distance, he cannot do better than treat them to a little Gatling music....Altogether we cannot wish the Ashantees worse luck than to get in the way of a Gatling well served' (quoted in *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, p82). The *Times* evidently barely considered the Ashanti to be human, never mind gentlemen.

Wolseley was not exceptional. Lord Lugard committed as many atrocities capturing Uganda and Nigeria for the British Empire. In Namibia, the German general Lothar von Trotha ordered the extermination of all the Herero people in 1904. The great explorer Henry Morton Stanley—who found Dr Livingstone and rescued Emin Pasha—not only slaughtered Africans with gusto, but enslaved them as porters for his trips through the Congo basin (*The Scramble for Africa*, p332).

Stanley advised the Wolseley expedition against the Ashanti to prevent the African porters from running away by getting '500 sets of slave chains and bind these runaways into gangs of fifties, each controlled by a non-commissioned officer with a whip' (quoted in A Lloyd, *The Drums of Kumasi: The Story of the Ashanti Wars*, p105). Wolseley burned down several villages and forced women and children to porter for him.

Stanley also helped King Leopold of Belgium found the Congo Free State. Leopold was denounced by the British diplomat Roger Casement (who was to be ►

executed for treason for aiding Irish rebels) for the systematic cruelty practised on his rubber plantations. Those black Africans who failed to gather the required amount would have their hands hacked off. Leopold is a particularly interesting character in the light of our own 'humanitarian' times. During most of the scramble for Africa he posed as the humanitarian conscience of Europe, and successfully won the hearts and minds of both the anti-slavery lobby and the missionaries. According to Pakenham, '[Leopold] was used to being under-rated; in fact, he encouraged it by laying stress on his weakness as a poor philanthropist at the mercy of the great powers' (p402).

But above all it was the British who exemplified the policy of dominating Africa for its own good.

In Somalia Western troops have been seen once again to occupy an African country

The famous meeting of Livingstone and Stanley in 1871—whether or not Stanley said 'Dr Livingstone, I presume'—symbolised the meeting of the philanthropic missionary and the rapacious adventurer.

The British followed up their 'philanthropic' interest in Africa with the anti-slavery convention with Egypt in 1877. Under its terms Egypt agreed to British pressure to rid the Sudan, then an Egyptian province, of slave trading, and to accept General Gordon, fresh from his victory over the Chinese rebels, as governor general of the Sudan. As important as the rhetoric of anti-slavery was to the original justification of the mission in the Sudan, Gordon felt no qualms about unilaterally suspending the convention in 1884, while looking for local support for his campaign against the Mahdist rebellion.

The Scramble for Africa is better than many histories of the continent in looking at the relationship between the European powers and the African continent. However, while it is a well-told and well-researched narrative, Pakenham's account concentrates the blame for the race on notable European personalities.

In his introduction, Pakenham criticises Lenin's theory of imperialism for being 'Eurocentric' in seeing the drive towards colonisation as a consequence of the crisis of capitalism in the West. But it is Lenin's theory of imperialism that better accommodates the facts than Pakenham's account of the scramble for Africa. By concentrating on personalities and policies, Pakenham reduces imperialism to a particular kind of relationship between the European powers and Africa—that of colonial military occupation.

By contrast Lenin's theory of imperialism concentrates not on the whims of statesmen, but on a defining feature of the modern capitalist system: the way in which economic stagnation in the West has led to a drive to expand internationally. This dynamic has shaped the West's relationship to the rest of the world, including Africa, in the twentieth century. Quite apart from the problem of military conquest, any nation has to contend

with a world economy shaped by Western interests. The scope of Lenin's theory, then, is far wider than that of colonialism alone, providing a way of understanding how the West has continued to exercise domination over Africa after decolonisation.

In recent times the discussion of Africa's problems has shifted from the colonial era to the poor record of independence. The project of building independent African nations has been widely judged to have been an unmitigated failure. The record of war, famine, corruption and dictatorship has helped apologists for the Western powers to justify imperial domination retrospectively. The nostalgic arguments about a golden age of European rule have appeared even more convincing since many African intellectuals, too, have joined in the criticism of independent African nations.

Lenin's theory of imperialism provides a way to make sense of these developments without falling into the trap of apologising for the colonial past by blaming African independence for today's crisis. Because Lenin did not reduce imperial domination to its particular form of colonialism, his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* creates a framework for understanding how domination by the West has continued after independence—and how the decades of indirect domination have been just as disastrous for the peoples of Africa as the era of direct occupation.

With the United Nations operation in Somalia Western troops have been seen once again to occupy an African country. Of course, Western troops have intervened in Africa throughout the postwar period, but only recently have the Western powers felt confident enough publicly to assume authority for governing parts of Africa. The sheer audacity of operation Restore Hope is a telling symbol of the renewed problem of Africa's subordination to the West.

Basil Davidson's *The Black Man's Burden* seems useful in pointing to the West as the source of Africa's difficulties even after formal independence was gained during the fifties and sixties.

Davidson sees the present moment as one which enables Africa to take stock of itself having broken the last links of the colonial chain. His is an Africanist's evaluation of the African crisis; he has worked with African nationalists and is passionate about Africa's cause. *The Black Man's Burden* is the result of over 40 years' engagement with Africa and, as his twenty-fourth book on Africa, it 'offer[s] the conclusions of a lifetime' (p9).

Davidson stridently presents the case that Africa's crisis is the unavoidable legacy of the institution of the nation state which was bequeathed by Europe in the process of decolonisation. The nation state destroyed African civil society. Europe imposed it because it could not conceive of African society as anything but atavistic and dissolute; African nationalists embraced it because they saw in traditional African society only barriers to modernity and progress. Traditional society was to be reordered through imitation of Western institutions. The result was profound social and cultural alienation. For Davidson, independent Africa did not stand a chance.

European missionaries in particular are singled out for practising mental enslavement: 'Above the entrance to every school there was the invisible directive to those who passed within the magic gate into "the white man's

world": Abandon Africa, all ye who enter here, sums them up.' (p42)

This reproach also had African enthusiasts. Earliest among them were the 'recaptives'—freed slaves who established new societies dotted along the west African coast. Their hunger for education, and their aspiration towards European parliaments and judiciaries led them to view the 'natives' of the hinterland with disdain. In their footsteps came the modernisers of the postwar national liberation era. They embraced the nation state in order to master it, but, argues Davidson, it mastered them instead.

Davidson's analysis seems attractive at first sight. Certainly decolonisation was a process largely managed by the West and one whereby it retained a considerable degree of control over the newly emerging African nations. Behind the talk of assuming the responsibility for Africa's coming of age, Britain and other Western powers were fighting a rearguard action to dominate the fate of Africa indirectly.

Central to a continuing influence over African affairs was the process of training an African elite to govern the newly liberated nations of Africa in accordance with Western interests. British tutelage extended from the military to the courts, cementing lasting links to its former colonies.

Also the boundaries of the newly emerging nations often reflected Western concerns instead of African ones. The borders secured legitimate spheres of interest for Western nations, quite often at odds with the cultural, religious and linguistic ties of the people contained within them. Many African nations were left with divided peoples and profound regional tensions.

However, in describing the nation state as a 'curse' on Africa, Davidson denies the role that nationalism had in popularising the notion of liberation among African opponents of Western imperialism. Left to themselves, he claims, African societies such as the Ashanti were well on their way to a civilised society.

'The history of precolonial tribalism was in every objective sense a history of nationalism....However "exotic" Asante might appear in its African guise, it was manifestly a national state on its way toward becoming a nation state with every attribute ascribed to a West European nation state, even if some of these attributes still had to reach maturity.' (pp75-6)

In fact, African tribal states like the Ashanti were far from being a wholly indigenous development. The tribal sense of nationhood was conditioned by the relationship with Europe during the days of the slave trade—as Davidson himself has shown in a previous work. The European slavers offered Africans the alternative of either capturing slaves or becoming enslaved themselves. Dahomey on the West African coast grew into a powerful state precisely to avoid the slavers' chains:

'Dahomey's power to resist...depended on delivering slaves to the coast: the drastic but inescapable alternatives were to enslave others—in order to buy firearms—or risk enslavement oneself. This indeed was the inner dynamic of the slaving connection with Europe; and it pushed Dahomey, as it pushed other states, into whole-sale participation in slaving.' (B Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, 1980, pp241-2)

Where once Davidson highlighted the way that even those African traditions that were apparently indigenous were conditioned by Africa's relationship to the great powers, today he ends up lionising those same traditions as a source of resistance to the West.

Quite apart from romanticising Africa's past, the real flaw in Davidson's argument is that he does not put the failure of the African nation state in the context of a continuing Western domination. Instead he reduces the problem of Western influence to its historical legacy—the nation state.

In this way Davidson underestimates the democratic aspiration contained in African national liberation. However blighted the reality of the new nations of Africa, the desire to be free of colonial domination, and the desire for modernisation was a progressive impulse.

The limitations of Africa's experience of independence are unavoidable. But the prejudice that the failure of the African nation states proves the inability of Africans to handle democracy is an essential part of the rehabilitation of imperialism. If it can be shown that Africans have fared worse through independence, the case for taking up the White Man's burden once again is made.

However, it is not the unsuitability of the democratic nation state to African sensibilities that is the problem. Rather it was Western domination that continually frustrated the course of formally independent African societies. The curse was not so much Europe's bequest of the nation state to Africa, but its inability to let the Africans exercise self-determination.

Doubtless Basil Davidson would not recognise his work as a part of the agenda of reinforcing Western domination over Africa. His whole approach is critical of the legacy of Western rule over Africa. But his attack on the record of the nation state echoes the disappointment of African intellectuals with post-colonial Africa. The argument that African traditions provide an alternative to the model of Western democracy seems to challenge Western domination. But in practice it only reinforces the idea that the African temperament is not suited to democracy and self-determination.

In the context of the thorough-going assault upon Somali independence, and the widespread propaganda against other African governments, any criticism of African society that does not start from the destructive impact of the West in the here and now can only reinforce the case for Western control. If Africans cannot handle political responsibility without descending into corruption and repression, goes the argument, then it would be better that the West took over.

In particular Davidson's idea that African tradition provides a respite from the West is fruitless. Emphasising Africa's difference from Europe only reinforces the notion that Africans should not be treated in the same way as Europeans.

The retreat to tradition is essentially a defensive one. Indeed it was characteristic of the corrupt elites of post-colonial Africa that they would excuse their undemocratic rule by saying that representative democracy was a Western idea imposed upon Africa. Today, as the Western powers are trying to recreate the glories of the colonial past, it is no good answering with the glories of Africa's pre-colonial traditions. Liberation, if it means anything, means looking forward.

The Future of the Market: An Essay on the Regulation of Money and Nature after the Collapse of 'Actually Existing Socialism',
Elmar Altvater, Verso, £34.95 hbk, £11.95 pbk

This book—based on a series of lectures Elmar Altvater gave at the Free University of Berlin in 1990—was a personal disappointment. I had expected something different and more substantial from one of my early influences in political economy.

Altvater was one of a rare breed of radical economists writing in the 1970s whose approach to the emerging world capitalist crisis sought to apply the method of Marx. This was of permanent value in providing a guide which is still relevant for aspiring Marxists today. His article on West German imperialism, written jointly with colleagues and published in English by the *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* in 1974, remains a classic in establishing some of the fundamentals of Marxist political economy. It stood out at a time when economic crisis had replaced boom and most on the left were disorientated and clueless about what was really going on in the national and world economies.

In the tradition of Lenin and Henryk Grossmann, Altvater at that time argued that an understanding of the world movement of capital must start from the problems of capital accumulation within the Western imperialist economies. Using this perspective he was able to explain some key points about the modern world which most others had failed to grasp.

However, in Altvater's new book, *The Future of the Market*, the earlier emphasis on understanding developments within the sphere of production in the advanced capitalist countries is missing. As a result, this study of the state of the capitalist world suffers from the divorce of modern developments from Marx's theory of capital accumulation. Even more disappointingly, Altvater deserts the sphere of production altogether as the legitimate field of analysis in favour of the environment. In effect Altvater's latest work abandons Marxism as the science of the inherent restrictions that capitalist social relations place in the way of the development of the productive forces. Instead he adopts the perspective of green economics, and elevates the problem of the impact of production upon nature.

The book is in two parts. The first is an attempt 'to explain the demise of "actually existing socialist societies"', the second an investigation of 'both the grounds and the limits of the superiority of "market rationality"' (p3). The first part introduces his anti-production theme. It suffers from blurring the distinction between capitalist and Stalinist societies and by arguing that one of the main errors of the Soviet system was in trying to compete with the West on the 'ground of the development of the productive forces' (p13). So for Altvater, the Russian revolution was only a 'half revolution'; it got rid of the market but failed to break with capitalism's preoccupation with productive growth. This, we are told, was its undoing.

The denigration of production and progress which underlies this first part of the book becomes more explicit when we move onto the critique of what drives the

'victorious West'. Given that one of the objectives of the book is to puncture some post-Cold War myths about the virtues of the market, this is a double shame.

The weakness of Altvater's analysis today is most evident when his discussion of the limitations of the market focuses on the question of ecology. Apparently capitalism has changed so much recently that 'just as the social question dominated industrial society until the middle of this century, so does the ecological question now occupy central place' (p230). This assertion justifies a discussion of the alleged ecological limits of modern production, instead of laying bare the social barriers inherent in a capitalist system based on production for the market. The specific constraints which falling profitability imposes upon production under capitalism are replaced by an ahistorical discussion of the harmful effects which the pursuit of production and consumption has for the environment.

Altvater abandons a critique of the crisis of capitalism in favour of evoking the idea of a 'global crisis of civilisation'. Industrialisation has, through the damage caused to the environment, supposedly precipitated a 'crisis of the natural foundations of human life' (p49). The problem of Altvater's analysis is not that it describes the degradation of nature, but that it removes this phenomenon from the specific context of capitalist society, and elevates the ecological crisis as the main crisis facing humanity.

Altvater has adopted the standpoint of pessimism so fashionable among capitalist ideologues as they face a seemingly interminable slump. Unable to face up to the fact that the system itself is the problem, its apologists take refuge in claims that the resources of nature cannot sustain economic growth. Paul Kennedy's neo-Malthusian tract, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (Marxist Review of Books, August) on the problems of population growth and global warming, provides the mainstream version of Altvater's more radical exposition.

After mimicking this mood of gloom Altvater is almost but not quite as fatalistic as his mainstream contemporaries about what can be done. His favoured solution in the face of the 'overburdening of the world's ecosystem and the sharpening of social problems' is some international mechanism for firmly embedding 'the economic rationality of market procedures...in a complex system of social, non-market regulation of money and nature' (p260). If this sounds vague, he admits it: his concluding observations, he writes, 'end the book without concluding it' (p6).

The trajectory of Altvater's thinking over the past 20 years is an extreme version of the collapse of the left. Altvater has joined the green and anti-progress bandwagon which claims that the defects of modern society are at root problems of nature. The basis for his personal decline is that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Altvater has lost faith in the working class as the agency for social change: 'The alternative to bourgeois/capitalist society that the October Revolution presented to the world was no alternative at all' (p243). Altvater has closed his eyes to the possibilities for revolutionary transformation which remain inherent in today's slump-ridden class-divided society.

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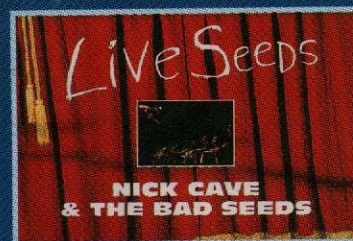
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