

LIVING MARXISM

**Bernadette
McAliskey
on the
Irish 'peace
process' p12**



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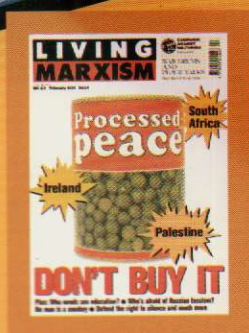
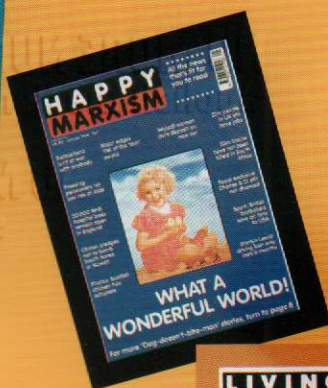
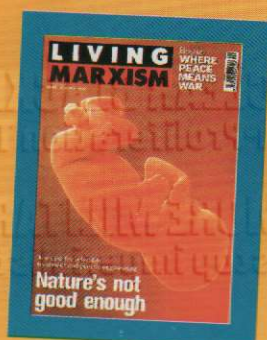
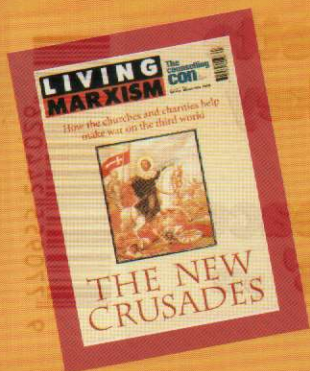
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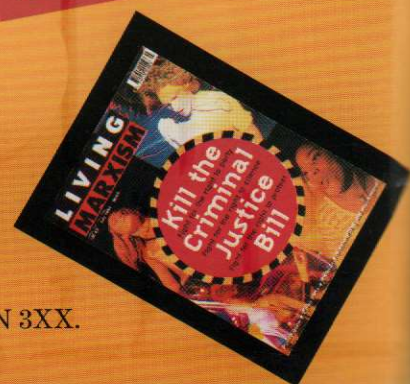
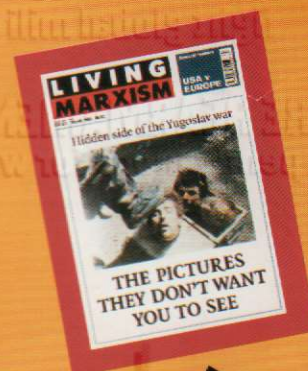
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The Tories failed to push their Criminal Justice Bill through parliament in July, but they will be back in the autumn to finish the job. The bill will remove the right to silence, make raves illegal, criminalise festivals and protests, and give the police draconian new stop-and-search powers. We need to make the most of the summer delay to mobilise people against it.

July's 'Kill the Criminal Justice Bill' issue looks like being the biggest-selling edition of *Living Marxism* this year. The Campaign Against Militarism is continuing to work with others to get the anti-bill message across. If you want to do something about it, get in touch with Geraldine Hetherington on (071) 278 9908.

Campaign materials still available:

- **Badges: 3 types** **50p each**
 - Fight for the right to protest*
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 - Kill the Criminal Justice Bill*
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Mick Hume

No more Hiroshimas

Amid the anniversary fever now gripping the media, there is one date from the Second World War that the authorities seem rather less keen to celebrate. In August 1995, it will be 50 years since the Americans, with British support, dropped the atom bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. August 1994 marks the start of an international year of anti-war action leading up to that anniversary. *Living Marxism* will be supporting protests and other events throughout the year—not to commemorate the past, but to sound the alarm about the threat of militarism and war in the present.

The bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 killed an estimated 130-150 000 people; the bombing of Nagasaki, three days later, left 60-80 000 more dead, the only occasions on which nuclear weapons have been used in war. These unique, awesome events are often depicted as something separate from the rest of human history. The Bomb is portrayed as a mysterious and terrible consequence of the clash between modernist science and nature, a technological monster that somehow acquired a momentum of its own, quite independent of capitalism and the struggle for political power.

But there is nothing mysterious about Hiroshima. In many ways it was the moment of truth of modern times. The moment when the facade of freedom and democracy in a class society was stripped away, and the reality of capitalist rule laid as bare as the fleshless bones of the victims in those ravaged Japanese cities. What happened there offers a damning insight into Western civilisation, then and now.

Hiroshima shows what American presidents, British prime ministers and the rest are prepared to do to in order to defend their power. They will commit mass murder—and present it as a humanitarian act.

Announcing that the first Bomb had been dropped, US president Harry S Truman

asked the world to note that he had chosen Hiroshima, 'a military base', because 'we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians'. Washington insisted that the Bomb had only been used in order to bring the Second World War to an abrupt end, saving the half a million American lives and million Japanese which it claimed would have been lost if its ground forces had had to invade Japan. This humanitarian line has remained the official explanation for Hiroshima and Nagasaki ever since.

It is a lie. They did not drop the Bomb to prevent the need for a bloody invasion. Having cracked the enemy codes, the US authorities already knew that Japan was on the verge of collapse, and would soon have surrendered without a shot being fired on Japanese soil, never mind two bombs that killed 200 000 people. Saving lives was the last thing on their minds. A recent American study notes how, at a meeting of Truman's nuclear advisory committee on 31 May 1945, called to discuss the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, US secretary of war Henry L Stimson 'agreed that the most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers' houses'. In other words, they wanted to kill as many people as possible, to make the most dramatic impact upon world opinion. The city of Hiroshima fitted the bomb-sights perfectly.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a cold-blooded, premeditated display of destructive power. It was staged as a global demonstration of America's imperial might. When that blinding white fireball engulfed Hiroshima, it gave the peoples of the colonial world a warning of what could happen if they got out of line; it put Stalin's Soviet Union on its guard for the Cold War to come; and it put Britain and France in their places as second class powers, deputy sheriffs to Washington's world policeman.

There is a widespread assumption today that Hiroshima could never happen again. But why not? To this day, no American or British leader has ever recognised the criminal character of the massacre. When they say that it was justified at the time, they are really saying that *they would do it again* if the need arose. Nobody has to wait for a nuclear Third World War to see the proof of that. See what the US-led Western alliance has done since Hiroshima with non-nuclear weapons, as it has sought to stamp its authority on the third world.

Between 1965 and 1972 in Vietnam, for instance, the USA unleashed the greatest flood of firepower in history, dropping seven million tonnes of explosives—the equivalent of almost one 500lb bomb for every man, woman and child in the country. The Americans' use of carpet-bombing, napalm and chemical warfare defoliated and depopulated great swathes of South-East Asia.

In the Gulf War of 1991, the USA, Britain and their allies killed perhaps 200 000 Iraqis. The public image is of a hi-tech 'robo-war' fought against military targets. The reality was a bloody war of attrition, in which the allies used every weapon at their disposal to blast a developing country back into the Stone Age: carpet-bombing, Cruise missiles, napalm, 'fuel-air explosive' devices (which suck the air out of the lungs), 'daisy cutters' (15 000lb bombs filled with gelled slurry explosive). For good measure they left behind tons of radioactive depleted uranium shells.

Nor is the Bomb itself a thing of the past. The Cold War might be over, but the USA is modernising its still huge nuclear arsenal with a new generation of missiles aimed against third world countries. President Bill Clinton's recent threat to 'annihilate' North Korea with nuclear weapons showed that the threat to stage another Hiroshima remains an important instrument of Western

diplomacy. The British government is pressing ahead with plans to bring its new multi-billion pound Trident submarines into operation by the end of 1995, complete with nearly 100 nuclear warheads each.

Just as they did at the time of Hiroshima, the Western powers have a good excuse for every act of barbarism. In the language of the nineties, their wars and foreign interventions tend to be presented as crusades for democracy or human rights, or missions to save the starving. But these people care no more for human life today than their predecessors did when they wiped out two Japanese cities with the flick of a switch. Whatever the pretext they offer, their real motive for intervening abroad is always to project and protect their own power in the world. Their 'peacekeeping missions' and 'relief operations' today do about as much good for the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America as Truman's humanitarianism did for the citizens of Hiroshima.

Hiroshima shows what the Western powers are capable of inflicting on the world. And it also reveals how they get away with it—by successfully waging a race war using ideological weapons.

The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was made publicly acceptable by the fact that the victims were of an 'oriental race'. It was unthinkable that the Americans or British would have dropped the Bomb on their white European enemies in Germany. But the Japs were different. Throughout the war, they were treated as a lower form of human life. American newspapers, tabloids and broadsheets alike, routinely referred to the Japanese as 'mad dogs' and 'yellow vermin'. Cartoons usually depicted them as monkeys, but also as insects, reptiles and even bats. In every Hollywood war film, the Japanese were portrayed as sadists and war criminals.

● **No more nuclear blackmail**
abolish the Non-Proliferation Treaty

● **No more military threats**
stop imperialist intervention

● **No more arms bazaars**
fight global militarisation

● **No more rearmament**
not a penny more for war

The US and British forces in the Pacific war put these racial ideas into action. One American veteran described the Japanese —'small, a strange colour'—as 'the perfect enemy': 'Marines did not consider they were killing men. They were wiping out dirty animals.' Since that view dominated Western opinion, Hiroshima was widely celebrated as the wiping out of dirty animals on the grand scale. The success of the US and British authorities in instilling their people with the racial attitudes of Empire ensured that they could kill 200 000 Japanese civilians within four days without worrying about serious protests at home. After all, who cares what happens to mad dogs and vermin?

Today, American and European elites are waging a silent race war. They no

longer spell out the racial politics which inform their attitude towards Asia or Africa, they never use words like 'yellow vermin', but the underlying message is much the same. Every foreign policy discussion in Washington or Whitehall in the 1990s, whether it is about population control or war crimes tribunals, is based upon the same assumption: that there is a fundamental divide between the civilised nations of the West and the dangerous races of the rest of the world.

That was the assumption which allowed president Truman to declare the bombing of Hiroshima to be 'the greatest thing in history'. It is the same assumption which has allowed the Western allies to bury Iraqi troops alive in the desert with bulldozers, ►

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◀ blow Somali homes and hospitals away with helicopter gunships, and still preserve their image as international peacekeepers. If they can get away with that, who is to say that they could not stage another Hiroshima with impunity—so long as the victims were 'a strange colour'?

The double standard of racism today dominates an issue that relates directly to the legacy of Hiroshima—the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is due to be renewed in 1995.

Renewing and strengthening the Non-Proliferation Treaty is seen by many peace activists in the West as an important safeguard against the threat of nuclear war. In reality, this treaty is a blackmailer's charter, which the nuclear powers of the West can use to threaten any third world regime with war unless it submits to their will.

The preamble to the Non-Proliferation Treaty talks about it as a step on the road to total nuclear disarmament. Yet in practice, the treaty has nothing at all to do with getting rid of nuclear weapons. It is a declaration of who should and should not be allowed to have their fingers on the nuclear trigger. The basic rule is that 'we' should, and 'they' should not.

The treaty enforces a legal monopoly on the ownership of nuclear weapons, under which the signatories agree that only the great powers of the United Nations Security Council can legitimately have the Bomb. Since it was signed in 1968, the USA, and to a lesser extent Britain and France, have constantly 'proliferated', updated and improved their own nuclear arsenals without infringing the treaty. They have also quietly helped selected allies, like Israel and the apartheid state of South Africa, to develop nuclear weapons programmes.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty has really come to the fore as an instrument of Western foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. In the past couple of years, the USA has talked up the alleged threat of nuclear proliferation in the third world as the new justification for its own global militarism. In 1992, a special summit meeting of the United Nations Security Council issued a warning that any state suspected of violating the treaty would now be punished severely. Washington has since got all five permanent members of the council—including the Russian and Chinese regimes—to

agree to extend the Non-Proliferation Treaty, so guaranteeing their exclusive status as 'legal' nuclear powers. It seems that the murderers of Tiananmen Square are the only people of 'a strange colour' whom the West is willing to trust with nukes.

The scare about nuclear proliferation entirely distorts the truth about the threat to peace. Attention is always focused upon the alleged (and largely imaginary) development of nuclear weapons in a third world state; the Islamic Bomb in Iran and Iraq, or the Madman's Bomb in North Korea. These invisible missiles become the subject of major international incidents. Meanwhile, the real power to destroy the world many times over, which rests in the military arsenals of the great powers, is ignored.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty pulls off a considerable conjuring trick; it both ratifies the right of UN Security Council members to maintain and modernise their nuclear arsenals, and casts them in the role of global campaigners against the Bomb. The USA, the greatest war machine on Earth and the only state ever to use nuclear weapons, is transformed under the terms of the treaty into the leading force for world peace. On the other hand, a ruined country such as Iraq can be bombed again by the Western powers, and a backward country like North Korea threatened with annihilation, in order to make their governments agree to stop developing nuclear weapons which they do not have in the first place. Meanwhile UN inspectors are granted the right to trample over any third world or East European nation's sovereignty, in the endless search for the illusory nukes.

The irony is that the Non-Proliferation Treaty imposes the same division on the world which was made so clear by the bombing of Hiroshima; the divide between the West and the rest, between the civilised nations and the barbarian races, between those mature enough to handle the Bomb and those so backward that they are only fit to be bombed.

Once that racially loaded way of looking at the world is accepted, just about anything goes. Overnight, the media can convert North Korea from a funny little place that nobody knows about into the most dangerous military power of our times, without anybody batting an eyelid. And the Non-Proliferation Treaty can be used as a nuclear blackmail note against the entire third world.

The demand 'No more Hiroshimas' should become a battle cry for the next 12 months. Some might support the year of action as a commemoration of past horrors, coupled with a vague hope that such things will not be repeated in the future. But it should be much more than that. For us, the 'No more Hiroshimas' campaign is not primarily about the past or the future, but the present. It is based on a cool assessment of the real dangers of militarism and war which we face in the 1990s.

Everywhere we look today, we see Western governments trying to resolve their domestic difficulties by intervening more forcefully in the international arena. Beset by corruption scandals, political crises and economic slump at home, prime ministers and presidents in every major nation are seeking salvation on the world stage. They instinctively understand that it is far easier for them to regain a degree of authority by lecturing Asia on nuclear proliferation or pledging to save lives in Africa, than by facing up to the intractable domestic problems of Western capitalist societies.

That is why Bill Clinton, despite his wish to avoid messy international entanglements, can be seen trying to throw his estimable weight around everywhere from North Korea to Haiti. It is why John Major, who is not keen to be seen out on the streets of Britain, loves strutting about at international summits. It is why Francois Mitterrand's France has gone into Rwanda with guns blazing. And it is why the (for now) non-nuclear powers of Germany and Japan are reinterpreting their postwar constitutions, to allow them once more to play a more muscular military role in international affairs.

Global politics are becoming more and more a matter of gunboat diplomacy. The arms bazaars are militarising the world. The Western powers increasingly display a colonial-style arrogance towards the third world. And the nuclear and conventional technologies of mass destruction advance apace. Is it scaremongering to suggest that all of the ingredients for another Hiroshima are falling into place? Let's not wait another year to find out.

● Join the Campaign Against Militarism protest at Aldermaston on 6 August (see page 15 for details), and help launch the year of action.

Dead sheep savaged

James Heartfield's article ('In defence of Damien Hirst', July) marks a new low in your coverage of art. An estimate of his grounding in art history may be formed from the following excerpt: 'they [us, the uninitiated plebs] are not surprised at the price of a piece of canvas decorated by Leonardo da Vinci—even though canvas and colours combined can only have cost a few bob.'

In fact the whole art world would be more than 'surprised' to come across such a piece of canvas, because Leonardo painted exclusively on wood panel and in fresco. Your art expert does well to confine himself to the vague term 'colours' to describe the medium with which Leonardo 'decorated' his, er, painting surface.

Heartfield treats us in the very next sentence to the following gem: 'Art has to be expensive otherwise nobody would ever engage in this unrewarding and precarious career.' There are two aspects to this remarkable assertion. The first is that artistic practice is motivated by rational calculation of one's likely gains in the market-place. The second is that the market spontaneously harmonises with this motivation, according a kind of entrepreneurial bonus to the more fortunate contenders.

Let us compare this with a brief comment by Karl Marx on the creative process: 'Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason as that which makes the silkworm produce silk. It was an activity wholly natural to him. Later he sold the product for £5.' Here also there are two aspects to the proposition. The first is that the creation of genuine art is essentially an organic process; it is an expression of inner necessity. The second is that the relationship between production and exchange of art is a purely external one ('Later he sold the product...').

Art is indeed a commodity under capitalism. But unlike normal commodity production, where the process is geared in advance to the anticipated requirements of exchange, art must follow its own immanent laws in producing itself. The genuine artist must hope that his product will coincide with a demand which he has not himself taken into account in producing the work of art. That such a coincidence more often than not fails to occur is attested to by the countless major artists who have suffered impoverishment and marginalisation.

Your critic, however, takes a more cheerful view of the matter. Emboldened by the example of Mr Hirst and his dead sheep, he assures us

that 'the bad artists are the ones that make the good artists expensive. The extra the collector pays for is their unsuccessful labours'. It is hard to imagine even the most brazen apologist of the market venturing such an assertion. Here capitalism is endowed not just with beneficence (keeping its prices up to encourage young talent), but with discernment as well.

The truth is that the market economy tends to be destructive of artistic talent. This destructive tendency becomes much more pronounced in conditions of slump, and is reflected in a breakdown of critical standards. Heartfield's articles provide unwitting testimony to this latter fact.

Louis Ryan *Paris*

I read with great interest James Heartfield's defence of Damien Hirst. I, too, would support Hirst on the grounds that offering a dead sheep suspended in a tank of formaldehyde as art is outrageous and therefore has the capacity to shock us into the consideration that art as a form of human creativity can have no limitations. This idea is truly exhilarating.

Most people are not impervious to beauty. At the same time they are at least being honest when they say 'I don't know about art, but I know what I like'. After all, a pile of (Andre's) bricks and a dead sheep are hardly aesthetically pleasing. It is not surprising, then, that people should feel indifferent to Hirst's work which appears as a privileged and decadent art form from which they are excluded.

The intellectualisation of art seems to be the preserve of a middle class elite. Nevertheless, Hirst's sheep is a provocative challenge to the real philistines in the establishment who would condemn us to live like the matchstick men and women in LS Lowry's dreary depictions of working class life.

Bob Pounder *Ashton-under-Lyne*

Compassionate state

I agree that we should be encouraging people to be strong and not collapse in a dependent heap every time they scratch a fingernail. The key point to make in response to your magazine's assault on left PC is that not all can be strong (at least not all the time). Many people have real problems and different capacities for coping with problems. Therapy, government intervention, etc, can be of great assistance to people in times of weakness/vulnerability.

Why is state social intervention necessarily inappropriate? It depends on the nature (and extent) of the intervention. I want community concern, caring and compassion, as well as individual, resilience, creativity and thought.

Brent Howard *New South Wales, Australia*

Prozac and cons

David Wainwright (letters, July) makes a valiant attempt at putting some holes in Stuart Derbyshire's article ('Under the influence', June). But Derbyshire was clearly not implying that 'social problems lead to mental distress which leads to...revolutionary activity', and therefore that communists should be anti-anti-depressants (!). Nor was Derbyshire's article an attempt to examine the complex relationship between man's biological make-up and his environment. It was rather an attempt to challenge the tendency to imply that the problems we face are essentially the result of biologically determined personality defects.

I'm glad to hear that Wainwright is committed to social change. He must know, then, that one of the biggest prejudices confronting us is the argument that 'human nature' will lead to destruction. Derbyshire demonstrates that academics are helping to legitimise inequality by suggesting that biology determines our abilities and behaviour, and are feeding the belief that problems are not 'social' but 'individual'.

Derbyshire's criticism is not of Prozac, but of scientists whose conclusions about the use of such drugs make them participants in today's ideological attack on the idea of social change.

Daniel Smith *Brixton*

I was concerned to read Stuart Derbyshire's article about fluoxetine (Prozac). Derbyshire states that 'virtually all the side-effects...have been eliminated, while the main effect, the alleviation of depression, remains'. A glance at a copy of the British National Formulary will show a long list of distressing side-effects associated with Prozac, including aggression.

Maybe prior knowledge of these side-effects would discourage people from taking this powerful drug in an attempt to 'improve' their personality. While psychiatrists have the right to prescribe Prozac for patients with clinical depression, I would hate to think that the general public are encouraged to use it as a cure-all.

Kirsten Hey *Occupational therapist
Huddersfield*

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

Andrew Calcutt thinks the big debate about legalising cannabis is a smokescreen

For millions of people, drug-taking has symbolised the desire to break free of the controls imposed by a stagnant society. Anthony Burgess identified it as 'instant sin'. But how sinful is it? Smoking dope can still get you fined or even locked up, but now that it is almost as commonplace as sipping a gin and tonic, it can hardly be said to guarantee outlaw status.

For the flower power generation of the 1960s, drugs represented an attempt to dodge social control by asserting the right of the individual to control his own mind. 'Thou shalt not prevent thy fellow man from altering his own consciousness', declared former Harvard psychologist and LSD-guru Timothy Leary. When Leary was sentenced by a Texas judge to 30 years' jail and a \$30 000 fine for possession of less than half an ounce of cannabis, he replied that 'prisons exist only in man's mind'. Perhaps not entirely believing his own rhetoric, he later bolted to Switzerland.

The counter-culture of the 1960s implied conflict with authority. Paul Krassner once described the Yippie movement as hippies who have had their heads bashed in by the police. Today, taking drugs no longer connotes the rebel without a cause. Nor is it an internal odyssey with no known destination, for many it is simply part of a good night out.

In a survey published in the London magazine *Time Out* earlier this year, 86 per cent of respondents said they had smoked dope. There are thought to be around 1.5m regular cannabis users in Britain. Drug use has become banal, even normal. The secretary who rushes home from work to watch *EastEnders* is just as likely to enjoy a spliff as the philosophy student from Madchester. So why all the recent fuss about 'soft' drugs? Perverse as it may seem, today's 'normalisation' of drug use is giving the authorities almost as much of a headache as the 'tune in, turn on, drop out' culture of yesteryear.

In the eyes of those who draft, pass and enforce legislation it is dangerous when laws are ignored and publicly flouted by a substantial section of society. It undermines not only the authority of that particular piece of legislation, but the law in general. When law-breaking is marginal,

the law-breakers can be ostracised and characterised as anti-social delinquents. It is considerably harder to do this when legislation is held in contempt and disobeyed by so many.

In many ways it would make sense for the government to reform the law to comply with current practice. This was the impetus behind the liberalising legislation of the sixties—the Abortion Act (1967), the Sexual Offences Act (1967), and the Divorce Reform Act (1969). All of these reform measures followed on the heels of social practice. It became clear to the government of the day that it stood no hope of containing behaviour in line with the law, and so unless the law were to be made to look ridiculous, it would have to change. But in those days the British political elite was still confident and secure enough to consider loosening some of the out-of-date controls over society. In Germany, where the upper classes can still afford to be a little sanguine, the authorities recently relaxed controls over cannabis.

Meanwhile, here and now things are different. The three main political parties in Britain have formed a straitlaced pact against any form of decriminalisation of soft drugs. The atmosphere in Westminster is reminiscent of the USA, where the drug panic has escalated along with draconian penalties (21 per cent of all federal prisoners are 'low-level' drug offenders), and in December 1993 president Bill Clinton (who smoked dope but didn't inhale) felt obliged to dismiss out of hand the surgeon-general's statement that in other countries the crime rate declined after legalisation.

Similarly, in Britain's corridors of power the nearest thing to a political strategy today consists of an attempt to reinforce control over society by means of repressive legislation such as the Criminal Justice Bill, combined with moral exhortation and the scapegoating of 'monsters' who have failed the morality test ('home alone' mums, drug abusers, the 'underclass'). Once the game has started, the player-politician has no option but to increase the pressure. There is no scope here for understanding drug-users a little more and condemning them a little less.

The current government has struck a position on drugs which leaves it little room for tactical adaptation.

A critical look at the conventional
wisdom on social, moral and sexual issues

TABOOS

Dealing with dope

In spring 1994, John Major and his cabinet declared 'war on drugs'. Home secretary Michael Howard inserted a clause into the Criminal Justice Bill raising the maximum fine for possession of cannabis from £500 to £2500. In April 1994, amid talk of a leadership contest in the Tory Party, Major sought to improve his image by launching a new initiative against 'drug-related crime'. He put leader of the house Tony Newton in charge of a £500m budget, and commissioned him to devise a plan for shifting youth culture away from drugs towards active citizenship. Newton is due to publish his proposals in the autumn.

Major even took his homegrown drugs panic to the European Community summit in June. The British prime minister called for a Europe-wide action plan to tackle drug-trafficking and protect young people. Foreign secretary Douglas Hurd spoke of 'a spectre haunting Europe. It is the spectre of illegal drugs'.

The 1994 drugs panic was conceived as an extension of the ►

PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

government-sponsored fear of crime, with ordinary citizens portrayed as the victims of drug-related burglary and street-robbery perpetrated by dope-crazed 12-year olds. The 'war on drugs' was meant to cohere responsible citizens against the criminal mentality of drug-users. Instead of cohering society, it has emphasised the incoherence of Britain's rulers.

The more they bleat on about toughening up on drug use, and upholding the prohibition of 'soft' drugs, the more they draw attention to their inability to solve the problem. Not for the first time, the government has discovered that it is one thing to launch a moral panic in the media, and quite another to turn it into a practical plan of action.

In June, the home secretary gave a speech to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) conference which illustrated the government's problems in this area. His words laid out the moral framework within which policy is meant to be developed. 'We stand by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971', said Howard. 'This government has no intention of legalising any currently banned drug. To do so would be bound to increase the human and social damage, especially that inflicted on the young. Drugs are harmful. They destroy people; they destroy families; they destroy the very fabric on which society rests.'

Furthermore, he insisted, there would be no turning of a blind eye by the police. 'To maintain criminal laws on the statute book while deliberately deciding not to enforce them is to bring the whole of the criminal law into disrepute. I do not believe we can countenance a pick-and-choose attitude to law enforcement.'

A good hard moral message, but one that is completely incapable of engaging with many people like the *Time Out* readership who have had the odd smoke and who have not been turned into corrupt degenerates in the process. Howard's declaration of war on drugs even drew critical fire from the Tories' core constituencies. In a *Times* article headlined 'Choosing self-destruction', former Tory MP Matthew Parris spoke up for the rights of the middle class 'pot-smoker' who wants the nanny state out of his life: 'How many failed initiatives does it take before the Conservatives remind themselves of the basic to which they should really go back: that the health of a nation is best secured when individuals learn to make decisions, even wrong, hurtful decisions, for themselves.' (19 February 1994) The *double entendre* in the headline is deliberate. Referring to the panic-mongers' notion of drug-use



as 'death on the instalment plan', it also suggests that, in trying to launch another moral crusade, the Tories have again set out on the road to disaster.

The declaration of war on drugs also risks alienating those law-enforcers who see themselves as not so much unwilling, as unable to enforce the crackdown on dope-smoking. Commander John Grieve, head of

Hundreds of thousands of pot-smokers are flouting authority

criminal intelligence at New Scotland Yard, even went so far as to declare that a war on drugs would be futile. The chairman of ACPO's drugs conference, West Yorkshire police chief Keith Hellawell has said that, while no chief constable advocated legalisation of all drugs, many now accepted that first-time users of soft drugs should be cautioned rather than prosecuted. Hellawell also criticised the simplistic tone of the government's anti-drugs campaign, advocating a more sophisticated approach which, besides warning them off drugs, would also recognise the 'buzz' which young people get from taking them.

Frank Coffield, co-author of *Drugs and Young People*, a new report published by the Institute of Policy Studies, concluded that 'some police officers now advocate change because they cannot cope with the exponential growth in the number of cannabis offenders' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 17 June 1994). At a time when hundreds of thousands of pot-smokers are flouting authority in this way, the likes of Hellawell are advising the government not to make the law into an outright ass by rendering it even more unworkable.

In the eyes of some commentators, Hellawell represents a new generation of enlightened police officers making a principled stand against the unwarranted extension of their powers. In reality, the differences between the Home Office and some chief constables are largely confined to matters of presentation for different audiences. Howard's hardline speeches are designed to bolster a Mary Whitehouse-mentality and galvanise an audience of *Daily Express* readers. Hellawell, meanwhile, is addressing the broader question of how to rehabilitate the law and re-establish its authority in the eyes of a younger

generation which has turned its back on the establishment's values.

On matters of on-the-ground policy, however, they are largely in agreement. The overriding concern of both sides is to find a way for the law to regulate people's behaviour in the 1990s.

Those sections of the legal establishment who seem to advocate piecemeal decriminalisation of cannabis are not calling for the extension of personal freedom, or harking back to the 'permissive society', or trying to undermine the politicians' quest to get a grip. Nowadays, even those in authority who call for outright legalisation do so on the basis that it will separate cannabis from 'criminal culture' and bring dope-smoking under official control.

Hellawell's concern is that teenagers exposed to Tory-sponsored notions of 'reefer madness' will burst out laughing in the face of authority. Like Howard the politician, Hellawell the police chief is keen to re-establish control over society, except that he is like the trendy curate who insists that jazzing up the liturgy is the only way to get young people back to church.

The underlying consensus between Howard and Hellawell is recognisable in the small print of the home secretary's speech to the ACPO conference; after declaring that there could be no question of turning a blind eye, he quietly conceded that it was up to the police force concerned to decide whether to caution first-time offenders rather than prosecuting them.

Any attempt to impose even tighter controls on what people can and cannot do only creates more problems. Howard's war on dope-smoking should be opposed. It is also important to recognise that there is nothing liberal or liberating about the high-level calls for the decriminalisation of cannabis. But then there is really nothing liberating about drugs either.

Well over a century ago, the French poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire astutely observed that 'Despite the adventurous force of his sensations [the drug-taker] remains merely the same man increased, the same number raised to a very high power...hashish will be a mirror of his impressions and private thoughts—a magnifying mirror, it is true, but only a mirror' (*The Seraphic Theatre*, 1858).

The drugs subculture has always been an extension and reflection of the mainstream society which spawned it—just as the authorities' panicky and confused attitude to drugs today reflects their general state of mind.

(Additional information from Ian Williams)



Does it matter if fetuses feel pain?

Do we really care whether or not fetuses feel pain in the womb? I am not asking the question for the sake of being provocative. It is an issue genuinely worth consideration in the light of the recent brouhaha about a *Lancet* article which suggests that, in pregnancies later than 20 weeks, the fetus might be able to feel pain.

The study, conducted at Queen Charlotte's Hospital in Chelsea—a world leader in fetal medicine—showed that fetuses subjected to an invasive medical procedure released levels of hormones which, in you or I, are associated with a pain response. The authors were careful to point out that they were not saying that the fetuses definitely felt pain. The results showed a reflex response, and reflexes do not equal pain. Plants respond to physical stimuli, they grow towards the light, but we don't assume (unless we are absolutely barking) that they are conscious of what is going on or that they 'feel' the sun in the way that we do.

The discovery that fetuses respond to physical stimuli is not new. Spinal cord reflexes have previously been detected at 20 weeks

gestation. But the latest report hit the news because the anti-abortionists seized upon it to conjure up images of fetuses writhing in agony during abortions. Jack Scarisbrick, chairman of the anti-abortion group Life, reminded us that his organisation 'has been saying for some time that children are hurt and frightened by the attack made on them by abortion'. In an interview with BBC

Radio Leeds he went on to claim that this was proven by the fact that aborted 'babies' have their hands over their faces in horror. Quite how he thinks they strike up such a position in the womb and maintain it throughout the abortion procedure is not apparent.

David Alton MP, never one to miss a chance to whip up a hysterical reaction to abortion, told the papers that there is 'long-standing evidence that unborn babies as early as seven to eight weeks can feel pain'. The fact that the only people to accept this long-standing evidence are those who believe that life is significant and has human quality from the time sperm meets egg, is not an issue to Alton.

For the purposes of factual accuracy it is worth pointing out that the claim that the *Lancet* study tells us anything about fetal pain responses does not stand up to informed scrutiny. Pain implies an interpretation of responses on the part of the brain, and that implies consciousness, which a fetus does not have. Someone in a deep coma, or even brain dead will have certain reflex responses but it does not mean these are consciously understood by the brain. The clinical jury is still out on whether newborn babies experience pain, in the sense that we understand it.

But even supposing fetuses did feel pain, would it matter?

Alton insists that 'this argument alone should make people reconsider their position in the abortion debate'. But why should it?

Women do not have their pregnancies terminated because they believe fetuses cannot feel pain. Women have abortions because, for whatever reason, they feel (and two doctors agree) that it is inappropriate for them to have a child. The situation which motivates a woman to end the pregnancy will not be changed by whatever discovery is made about fetal reflexes—not even in late pregnancy. Especially not in very late pregnancy, given that the overwhelming majority of late abortions are carried out because there is evidence of severe fetal handicap or because there is a serious threat to the woman's health.

Ill-informed commentators have tried to appease the anti-abortion lobby by suggesting that abortion practice might need to change so that the fetus is anaesthetised when late abortions take place. This is a nonsensical argument which just reveals ignorance about the way abortions are carried out. The image of the 23-week fetus screaming in agony as it is torn limb from limb is a fantasy conjured up by the anti-abortion lobby. Women having late abortions go through

labour—and very gruelling it is for them too. In earlier pregnancy women are normally under a general anaesthetic which passes through the placenta to the fetus anyway.

It is even difficult to imagine what the consequences of fetuses feeling pain would be for fetal medicine when it is intended that the pregnancy should continue. Why should we assume that

the subsequent child should be in the slightest bit affected by what happens to it before it is born? Think it through—our own birth must be the most excruciating of experiences given the mangling we receive on the journey down the birth canal. Yet none of us remembers one jot about it. It simply does not matter. Babies have been born this way for as long as babies have been born. The authors of the *Lancet* report tentatively suggest that doctors should err on the side of caution and anaesthetise fetuses before invasive procedures. Follow this to its logical conclusion and you would end up sedating babies at the start of labour.

It is clear why the anti-abortion lobby wants to make so much of this report. They are aware that they are marginalised in terms of opposition to abortion in general. Opinion polls show that the vast majority of the population believe that the abortion law and practice should either be allowed to remain as it is, or be liberalised. In the face of this, the anti-abortionists seek to elevate any issue on which they can play up the 'yuk factor', whether it is accusations about scientific experiments on fetuses, or studies that can be imaginatively interpreted to suggest that fetuses feel pain.

The discussion about fetal pain is a non-issue for doctors carrying out abortions. Abortion practice could do with much refining and improving—but in areas that appertain to the needs of the woman rather than the hypothetical experience of the fetus.

You would end up sedating babies at the start of labour

'We have been wea



Bernadette McAliskey carrying the coffin of the former INLA leader Dominic McGlinchey who was gunned down in Drogheda in February

PHOTO: PACEMAKER

akened'

Bernadette McAliskey

In August, it is 25 years since British troops appeared on the streets of Northern Ireland. This anniversary comes amid much speculation about a possible IRA ceasefire and the prospects for peace.

Mark Ryan, author of *War and Peace in Ireland*, went to Dungannon to discuss the 'peace process' with Bernadette McAliskey, for 25 years a leading opponent of British rule in Ireland

Simply making the journey from Dublin to the North of Ireland reveals many of the problems confronting those committed to Irish freedom. The two parts of Ireland are becoming more and more like two different countries. Northern nationalists may still regard Dublin as their capital city, but for Southerners, the North is another country, physically threatening and politically remote. For most Southerners, the idea of going North, if only out of curiosity, holds little appeal. Even business between the two states has reached the point where it hardly registers on the economic indicators. The most lucrative trade is probably the smuggling that goes on in everything from petrol to livestock. The trains between Dublin and Belfast, Ireland's two major cities, stop before six o'clock in the evening.

There is no escaping the reality that the two parts of Ireland are growing apart. In fact the North is probably more remote from the South than is Britain, Europe or America. Southern opinion is as agitated by the talk of peace in the North as it is by events in the Middle East. The irony is that the 'independent' South feels more like England than does the occupied North. I was brought up in Dublin in the sixties and seventies when, despite the major changes taking place, Ireland (that is the South) still seemed different from Britain, a state with its own peculiar social practices.

The sense of difference between the South of Ireland and Britain is disappearing. Dublin feels more and more like a British provincial city. British shops line the streets, and British newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet, are threatening to wipe out the domestic industry. What can best be described as a cultural fusion between Britain and Ireland was made palpable for me by the World Cup frenzy which gripped the South for most of this year.

Despite the fact that there were probably more tricolour flags on display throughout the South during the World Cup than in the entire 73 years of the state's existence, it seemed to me that the celebrations had nothing in common with traditional nationalist fervour. Rather, they signalled Ireland's reabsorption into

a Greater Britain. Here was an English sport played by English men in Irish jerseys, coached by an Englishman, and accompanied by crowds at home and abroad singing English football songs. All the pompous declarations of academics about an Irish diaspora, and the 'broader definition of Irishness' implied by the football team, sounded like a sad attempt to disguise the truth—that the South is becoming as British as the Home Counties. There is as much political symbolism in waving the tricolour now in the South as there would be in waving the Welsh flag in Cardiff or even the Arsenal colours on the streets of north London.

But once you cross the Border things start to change. It struck me as the oddest irony that here in the British-occupied North, a part of the United Kingdom, I felt that I was in Ireland again. It seems more like Ireland because the past is so present everywhere. In Unionist areas especially, the victories of a glorious bygone age are celebrated everywhere—King Billy's triumph at the Boyne in 1690, the pogroms of the Ulster Special Constabulary in 1922—past victories and future betrayals. In nationalist areas it is the reverse—past defeats and future victories.

Past made present

In the North there is no escaping the historical continuity and the conflict which defines Irish history and politics. Any attempt to disguise it like they do in the South could never succeed. Here, waving the tricolour, even if it is just for the football team, could be suicidal. Even watching the Irish team play is suspect, as the people of Loughinisland discovered in June. In the South, the past is an embarrassment best forgotten about—few people seem to want to remember further back than the last Irish goal in the World Cup. On the other hand, the North seems locked in the past. This is not because the people there are in some special communion with history, as many academics would have it. The past is present all the time in the North because the Anglo-Irish conflict confronts people there every day of their lives. ►



I had travelled north to see Bernadette McAliskey (or Bernadette Devlin to use her better-known maiden name); someone who has been fighting the British presence all her adult life. Elected as MP for Mid-Ulster in 1969 at the age of 19, she has been at the centre of political struggle ever

'The republican movement were deluding themselves about their own importance'

since. McAliskey is as committed to fundamental change today as she was in 1969 when she led nationalists in the Bogside area of Derry against attack from Loyalist and RUC mobs. Despite her passionate commitment to Irish freedom, she has remained on the fringe of the republican movement itself, but has recently watched with growing alarm the confusion and demoralisation which the so-called 'peace process' has caused among republicans.

As far as McAliskey is concerned, the Downing Street declaration and the talk of peace is simply a ploy to confuse the liberation movement. She thinks it is irrelevant at this stage whether Sinn Fein accepts or rejects the declaration. 'The British don't care whether Sinn Fein deal into this poker game, or deal out of it. Sinn Fein have dealt themselves out of it by not responding to the declaration and saying "take this ridiculous piece of paper off the table, and demonstrate that you are serious about peace".'

Fighting over nothing

She has harsh words for Gerry Adams and the other Sinn Fein leaders. 'They are playing a very dangerous game—they're talking in riddles. They can take a statement to the grassroots and say it means "A", and take exactly the same statement to the press and say it means the opposite to "A". I know only one word for that, and that's "dishonesty".'

McAliskey doesn't believe that the leadership of the republican movement would consciously betray the nationalists. 'But they are lost. They are floundering so far out of their depth, and my problem is, how do we stop them taking the whole ship down with them. My main problem is the effect of what's happening, what is the effect on people who are trying to do things.'

The McAliskey trademark has always been candour, facing the reality that others would rather brush under the carpet. When the home secretary of the time, Reginald Maudling, tried to whitewash the British Army's killing

of 13 unarmed civilians in Derry on Bloody Sunday in 1972, she crossed the floor of the House of Commons and punched him in the face. It is with the same spirit that she faces up to the difficulties facing the liberation struggle in the 1990s.

'Sinn Fein cannot accept the Downing Street declaration. They don't have the support on the ground to do it. The only way they can do it is by demoralising their own people into accepting anything.' Was that possible, had people become so demoralised that they could accept the declaration? 'Yes. I tell you, it is pathetic. It would break your heart. People are fighting over nothing. In order to avoid a political discussion, people are bickering over who didn't do what, who didn't get the insurance for the prisoners minibus. People are getting sniped at over the silliest things, about not filling in forms, or that Sinn Fein lost votes in the European election because someone started a fight in a pub or because Barney McFadden ran up the papal flag in Derry. You just want to say let me out of all this please. It's just heart-rending.'

'What we've ended up with is a pan-nationalist front; and worse than that. It's a pan-nationalist front which is a figment of Sinn Fein's imagination. All we have is an agreement between [Irish prime minister] Albert Reynolds, [SDLP leader] John Hume and Sinn Fein. And even within that we don't have unity. John Hume says his discussions with Gerry Adams and the Downing Street declaration are identical. Gerry Adams says they are not. Now my experience in struggle says, right, if I have to make a jump here as to who's not telling the truth, I have to say it's John Hume.' A pause and an uneasy laugh: 'or at least I used to be in that position. Now I'm not so sure.'

'In the process of creating a momentum around talk of peace, Sinn Fein have demoralised their own people.'

'The republican movement has always got caught out in wheeler-dealing behind closed doors, making big boys of themselves. When the British started talking to the IRA, instead of the IRA sitting down and saying "this is a trap", they told themselves "didn't I tell you we were winning, didn't I tell you that they'd come". Instead of retreating and asking, "why are they talking to us?", they were deluding themselves about their own importance.'

'The Brits have studied the dynamics of the situation, Sinn Fein have not. We have been weakened by events, they have been strengthened. And people keep saying to me, "Bernadette, why are you in such a bad temper?"'

McAliskey is ready to question many of the assumptions of the past, both with regard to British intentions and any future strategy for a liberation movement. 'We have to ask some fundamental questions. What is the British agenda? I think the Brits are out to strengthen the Union. They are going to replace what they now call the Protestant "underclass", the people of the Shankill, with the Catholic OBEs, the ones who have made a small bit of progress within the existing system, while keeping on-side the respectable Unionism of James Molyneux. They are strengthening the Union by modernising it.'

A nation once again?

McAliskey is not enamoured at the prospect of building an Irish nation-state today. The issue now, she says, is not a united Ireland, it is democracy. 'The issue is the removal of British interference in the political development of this island. That's not because we don't like Brits, but because the British presence interferes with the democratic process. Then we can begin to understand what we want. Our experience is that Britain has consistently refused or been incapable of providing basic democracy, and that's why they have to go.'

Reflecting on the schism which was so evident in the journey from North to South, this strategy at least addresses some sort of reality. The old dream of creating a united Ireland, 'a nation once again', holds few in thrall these days, either North or South. Ireland, the South especially, has changed almost beyond recognition from what it was in 1968, when Bernadette McAliskey began her political career.

It would be easy for McAliskey to adopt the position of guardian of the nationalist faith. That she is canvassing instead a fundamental rethink of radical politics in Ireland shows she is still looking forwards. At the same time, however, she defends Articles 2 and 3 of the Southern constitution, the token claim over the North, which seems like a desire to hang on to some shred of the past. Her argument that these articles were endorsed democratically by the people of the South (in 1937) is an evasion of today's reality. To me it would seem far more productive to deal with the fact that people in the South do not care about the North, rather than defend a 60-year old claim which is today no more than a cover for Dublin's collaboration with London. But that is another day's work. For now, at least there are voices like hers willing to speak out against the dangerous drift of events in Ireland. ●

Mark Ryan's new book, *War and Peace in Ireland*, is reviewed on page 43.

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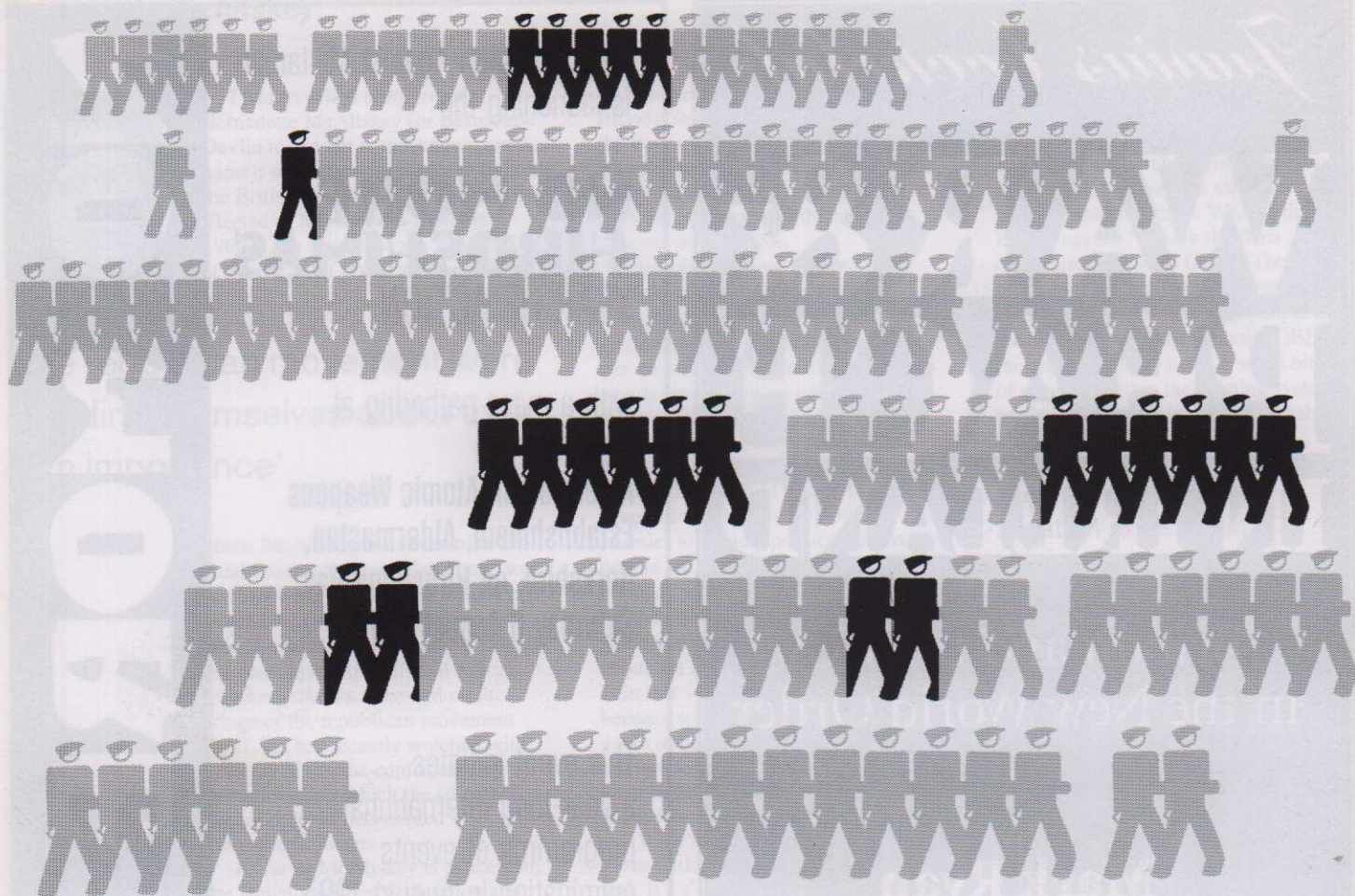
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NO MORE HIROSHIMAS



Unemployment fell in May...providing further evidence of a steady economic recovery' (*Financial Times*, 16 June 1994). This year, as the official unemployment figures have fallen by 20-25 000 a month, the message on jobs has become increasingly upbeat. On the face of it, the government's case seems sound enough; after all, if there are fewer unemployed, there must be more jobs, which must mean a real economic recovery, right? Not necessarily.

When they announced the new, lower unemployment figures in June, they also let slip another statistic which gave the game away. It turns out that, while unemployment figures have been falling, so too have the numbers of people *in work*—by about 100 000 in the first three months of this year. So we have less unemployment, but at the same time, fewer jobs. How? Because the official unemployment count does not measure the number of people without jobs.

There are about 35m people of working age in Britain. About 25m of them are officially classified as having jobs, and less than three million are now officially unemployed. The rest—more than seven million—are known as the 'economically inactive'. So it is possible for both the numbers unemployed and the numbers employed

to fall at the same time, if the number of people deemed 'economically inactive' increases. This is what has been happening; last year the numbers defined as economically inactive grew by more than 120 000. This figure never made the headlines, but it's a more accurate gauge of the economy's strength than the official unemployment count. When pressed, everyone in the know agrees that the seven million-strong pool of economically inactive includes a large number of people who would like to work if jobs were available. Even the government's Employment Department admits that there are more than two million 'inactive' people who want to be working now.

The lesson from this is that the government's measure of unemployment is useless as a guide to society's capacity to provide decent jobs. The unemployment figures only tell a small part of the story. It seems bad enough that in Britain the unemployment statistics breached one million in 1975, two million in 1981 and three million in 1984; and that since then they've only once, briefly, fallen below the two million mark. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg and discounts the enormous efforts that have gone into hiding the true numbers of jobless.

It is important to come up with a more accurate measure of unemployment. The most basic gauge

More lies, fewer jobs

The official statistics conceal more than the scale of unemployment. They also turn what is happening in the real economy upside down. The government boasts that unemployment has fallen by over 300 000 since the official figures peaked in December 1992, during the recession. But where have these previously unemployed people gone? The job creation figures simply don't add up.

Look at what happened last year in more detail. During 1993 the official unemployed figure fell by 195 000. Yet the labour force figures show that just 16 000 of these can be accounted for by more people having jobs. So what about the other 179 000? And what of the extra 50 000 or so people who joined the population of working age during the year? It means that more than the total number of the 'unemployment' fell

The government might be able to boast that official unemployment in Britain has fallen below the three million mark. But how many millions more are denied the chance of a proper job? Phil Murphy investigates

Real unemployment: 10%, 25% or 60%?

of a society's worth remains its ability to provide its members with an adequate standard of living. In a market economy this primarily means giving people the opportunity to work, to earn an income sufficient to buy whatever goods and services are necessary to ensure a decent life. The real level of unemployment, or non-employment, is therefore an important indicator of how well or badly the system works.

To obtain a more realistic measure we need to take apart the official obscurantism. The authorities' endeavours to keep the figures down have taken two main forms: fiddling the statistics, and counting a plethora of phoney work-schemes and other special measures as real jobs.

The British government has made an art form out of manipulating the statistics. The key is to define the unemployed narrowly as those people who claim unemployment-related benefits. By imposing more and more restrictions on who is entitled to claim such benefits, the government automatically reduces the official unemployment figure. There have been about 30 such revisions, including some technical alterations to the collection of the figures, over the past 15 years—nearly always with the effect of reducing the headline unemployment figure.

Various studies have estimated the cumulative impact of these changes. The most widely quoted comes from the Unemployment Unit; today it aggregates the necessary adjustment as over one million, which brings real unemployment to a figure closer to four million than the claim of under three million.

Skiving off signing

One of the major innovations of recent years has been to encourage people to sign off the unemployed register, declare themselves sick and receive invalidity benefit instead. There are now around 1.5m people on invalidity benefit, a figure which has almost doubled since the late 1970s. One authoritative report noted that 'It is hard to believe...that the health

status of the insured population has declined so markedly in this period', and instead linked the increase to rising unemployment (R Disney and S Webb, 'Why are there so many long-term sick in Britain?', *Economic Journal*, Vol101, 1991). Having pushed people to take this route off the jobless register, the Department of Employment then attacks those receiving invalidity benefit as skivers and scroungers.

'Non-standard' jobs

But it has not just been magic with figures that has pegged official unemployment at around 10 per cent of those regarded as economically active. There have also been lots of phoney jobs and other measures designed to keep unemployed people off the register, from expanding rubbishy training schemes (a third of a million places), to stuffing thousands more young people into underfunded colleges.

On top of this has come the shift in the pattern of work, away from regular full-time waged employment. Today there are around six million people in part-time jobs, some 1.5m in temporary work, and about three million are self-employed.

If all of these 'non-standard' jobs and special schemes are taken into account, there are about 15m people in Britain who are in regular

moved off the jobless register, not into jobs, but to join the growing band of the 'economically inactive'.

So what about the 16 000 more who are at work? Surely that at least is something to be positive about? Only if you favour a shift from full-time, waged work to part-time work and self-employment. The hard fact is that by the end of 1993, a year of 'falling unemployment' there were 121 000 fewer full-time regular jobs, 66 000 more self-employed and 118 000 more part-time workers.

Both Labour and the Conservatives have recently tried to promote themselves as the party of full employment. If current trends in the labour market and in official statistics continue, a future government may even be able to pull off the miracle of ending mass unemployment—without creating any decent new jobs at all.



full-time, permanent (until redundancy, that is), paid employment; this leaves *more than 20m people of working age without a proper job*, an 'unemployment' rate of about 60 per cent.

Those in authority would say that this figure is an outrageous exaggeration, since more and more people now *want* irregular jobs, part-time work and so on. Given the worse pay and conditions attached to

work). All told there are over seven million economically inactive people of working age. Around 2.2m of the 'inactives' either say they are seeking work or would like work. These include 'discouraged workers'—people who say there is no point looking because there aren't any jobs around, the long-term sick and disabled, students, and those who are bound to the home—mainly women. The government claims that about 600 000 people in these categories are included already in the official unemployed figures. This leaves 1.6m.

- 130 000 young people (under-20s) who are classified by the government's Labour Force Survey as unemployed but who do not claim; this is usually because of the government's rule that bars under-18s from claiming benefit.

- 200 000 women (20 and over) who are classified as unemployed under the ILO definition, but who cannot claim under British benefit rules. Most of this is because they haven't paid sufficient NI contributions or because they live with a partner whom the government expects to keep them.

- 600 000 other people who are unemployed according to the ILO definition but who do not appear in the claimant figures. These include unemployed men with working wives, people who do not think it is worthwhile to claim the meagre level of benefit, and people ruled out from claiming due to the more restrictive rules. It is estimated that the proportion of unemployed men receiving benefit fell from 90 per cent to 71 per cent during the 1980s, as a result of the plethora of changes which made it more difficult for the unemployed to qualify for benefit and unemployment insurance in particular.

- 310 000 people on low-paid government training schemes; it is reasonable to assume all these want a real job.

On top of all of these out-of-work people there are those in what we can call inferior or inadequate jobs, who want to switch to a proper job:

- 240 000 temporary full-time waged workers who say they want proper, permanent jobs. Altogether there were 1 430 000 people in temporary employment towards the end of 1993. About half of these are people on fixed contracts; the rest do even less satisfactory seasonal work, temping and casual work. About half of all temporary workers are full-time; of these, 600 000 are waged workers (the other 105 000 are self-employed). When surveyed, around 240 000 of

those waged workers said that they were only doing temporary work because they could not find the permanent job they want.

- 820 000 part-timers—the biggest growing segment of the waged workforce over the past 20 years. Nearly six million now work part-time (even excluding the part-time self-employed). Although the government is always emphasising that this meets people's needs, its own surveys show that 14 per cent of part-timers explicitly want full-time work but can't get it (this breaks down as a third of the men and one in 10 of the women part-timers).

A comparison between the national census in 1991 and the quarterly Labour Force Survey seems to confirm how many part-timers want full-time work. The census is based on us filling in the form ourselves, while the LFS survey is completed by trained interviewers. The strange thing is that there are 800 000 fewer people in part-time employment according to the census than the survey. The explanation is straightforward: while the statisticians write up any part-time work, however paltry, as 'having a job', many part-timers have a more realistic assessment and designate themselves either as unemployed or as economically inactive.

- 280 000 self-employed—another catch-all category which probably disguises many more who would prefer to be on a payroll than struggling alone to make ends meet. As another supposed sign of the enterprise economy the numbers of self-employed rose from less than two million in the 1970s to over three million a decade later. There is no doubt, however, that rising unemployment—and the greater fear of it—was a major factor in making an extra million call themselves self-employed over the 1980s. How many of these would prefer regular employment? It appears nobody has ever asked the self-employed, but nine per cent have reported themselves as quite or very dissatisfied with self-employment. We can use this as a conservative estimate.

Add all these estimates together and you reach a total of around 7.1m men and women who do not have a proper job and want one. That is nearly one quarter of the 30m people in Britain today who are either working or say they want to work. For now, the government may be able to claim that 10 per cent unemployment figures are a thing of the past; but behind the official statistics, it appears that a 25 per cent non-employment rate is typical of the present.

How many of the self-employed would prefer regular employment? Nobody has ever asked them

these 'non-standard' jobs, this seems unlikely. Instead, people's attitudes to work are conditioned by their circumstances; for example, many women 'want' part-time work because the lack of decent, affordable childcare facilities makes it impossible for them to work full-time.

But just for the purposes of illustration, let's adopt the government's approach of examining what people say they want today, and try to estimate how many people of working age *want a proper job*. (To be even more generous to the government I'll make use of its own published figures, including the 1991 decennial Census and the Department of Employment's quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS). Given the estimates involved, the figures used here are usually rounded to the nearest 10 000.)

Adding the various groups together, how many people want a regular full-time job in Britain today but cannot get one?

- 2 690 000 official unemployed (January 1994 figures, adjusted to take account of seasonal variations). It seems rational to assume that people claiming unemployment benefit would take a decent, decently paid job if they could get one.

- 1 600 000 'economically inactive' people, who would like to work, and who do not claim unemployment-related benefit. This category is for those people who are neither working, nor on a government scheme nor unemployed on the International Labour Office (ILO) measure (looking and available for

Tilting at Italian windmills

Rob Knight wants to know why anti-racists in Britain are making such a big deal about the National Alliance in Italy

Britain's Nazi-hunters have recently turned their attention to Italy where the far-right National Alliance (formerly the MSI) has five ministers in the government of media magnate Silvio Berlusconi. The campaign began when president Bill Clinton met the new Italian government, including representatives of the National Alliance. In a letter to the *Guardian*, anti-racists including Labour MP Peter Hain, Oxford academic Terry Eagleton and Paul Holborow of the Anti-Nazi League protested that it was 'obscene that president Clinton should be sitting down to eat with the leaders of Italy's MSI' because it gives 'Nazi parties across Europe the political credibility they so desperately seek' (7 June 1994). The letter urged Oxford University to reconsider its decision to give Clinton an honorary degree, 'and in so doing send out a message across Europe that Nazis have no place in any democratic society'. In Britain the participation of the National Alliance in the Italian government has led to talk of boycotting Italian goods.

It is a cause for concern that racist politicians should be in any government, but is there any reason to single out the National Alliance from all the other racist parties in office in Europe? Why concentrate on the racism of the NA when all European governments are actively pursuing anti-immigrant policies?

For example, in the same week in June that posters were going up around London calling on the Tory Party to break its links with Italian fascists, European justice ministers were setting up a computerised fingerprint-recognition system to help keep out 'refugees, illegal immigrants and other unwanted aliens'. Anti-Nazi groups have not announced any protest against this move, which tightens the immigration screw and guarantees more harassment and surveillance of non-white Europeans. The NA's attachment to the outdated symbols of Italian fascism is apparently of greater concern than the racist policies pursued by European governments in the here and now.

Focusing on the threat from the National Alliance and other far-right groups might look uncompromisingly radical, but in fact it ends up diverting attention from the racist policies of mainstream European politicians. The legitimacy which anti-Nazis want to deny the NA is already granted by the well-entrenched respectability of racist policies in European society.

The Italian writer Umberto Eco is a good example. Last year he launched an 'Appeal for vigilance', warning of the dangers of Italian fascism, but not so long before he was warning of the dangers to Italy from an influx of foreigners: 'we are facing a migratory phenomenon. And like all great migrations its final result will be an inexorable change of habits, an unstoppable



Anti-Nazi protesters outside the Italian embassy

interbreeding that changes the colour of skin, hair and eyes.' (Quoted in P Kazim, 'Racism is no paradise', *Race and Class*, Vol32 No3)

The NA's policies on stopping immigration are in tune with virtually every mainstream European political party. On paper at least, the NA's programme is slightly more moderate than that of chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union in Germany. The NA is opposed to further immigration but offers citizen rights to immigrants already settled in Italy, while Kohl's party denies such citizenship. At the same time, chancellor Kohl's attendance at anti-fascist marches and support for laws censoring Holocaust revisionism mean that he enjoys a reputation as an opponent of racism. Focusing on the NA allows the respectable racists of European parties like the CDU or the Tories off the hook.

The implications of the current campaign for the Tories to 'break the links' with Italian fascism are even more self-defeating. The campaign implies that the Tories need lessons from Italian racists, despite the fact that Britain has always been ahead of the rest of Europe in its anti-immigrant policies. It implies that racism is some kind of a contagion coming from abroad that you would not otherwise expect to find in tolerant Britain.

In this view of the threat of racism, British society is basically all right, as long as it can resist these dangerous foreign ideas and influences. Where have we heard this before? It is of course the prevailing view peddled by the British establishment: we are a decent, moderate

people, threatened by extremist and unstable foreigners.

If the campaign to 'break the links' with Italian fascists strikes a chord, it is because it says 'we don't want these foreigners with their extreme views in our country'. In their eagerness to get their message to the widest audience, anti-fascists end up paralleling the little-Englander outlook of the Euro-sceptics in the Conservative Party, who also argue against foreign influences. Anti-fascists want to break the links with the NA, the Tory right wants to break the links with the Euro-federalists. Both are playing their part in endorsing the view that foreigners are a source of danger to British civilisation.

All of the above would be true even if fascism was on the march in Italy. But it is not. Before it changed its name to the National Alliance, the MSI was for years a fringe organisation of old Mussolini supporters and other right-wing inadequates. In the seventies MSI leader Giorgio Almirante had to drive around Tuscany in a bullet-proof car.

What propelled the NA into government was not a sudden yearning by Italians for a return to fascism, but the collapse of the traditional party of the right, the Christian Democrats, in a welter of mafia corruption charges. In the April elections Italian voters backed parties not associated with government. The main beneficiaries were the Northern Leagues in the north of Italy and Berlusconi's own Forza Italia in the centre. In southern Italy, the National Alliance inherited the old Christian Democratic machine and was able to win 13.5 per cent of the national vote as a result.

It is as true to say that fascism is on the rise in Italy as it would have been to say that communism was on the rise when the old Italian Communist Party did well in the elections in 1993, or that football is taking over because of the success of Berlusconi's Forza Italia movement. None of these movements has any real substance or dynamic behind it. They are a symptom of the crisis of the old order, but they do not represent a new order.

In chasing after Italian fascists and evading the real issues of racism, anti-Nazi groups are tilting at windmills once more. The most grotesque example of this was shown in the protest against Clinton's meeting with the NA. Here we had the leader of world imperialism, commander-in-chief of the force that has butchered thousands of Somalis, and threatens North Korea with annihilation, and the only thing the left can think to complain about is that he shook hands with some right-wing Italian. The gap between the left's fantasy world of pretend Nazi threats and the real-life problems we all face has rarely been so sharply exposed. ●

Public sector workers express a growing fear of violence on the job. But what are we really frightened of, asks Claire Foster, a teacher in Further Education

Danger: f



If you ask most public sector workers what frightens them most in their working lives, many will tell you of the last time some disgruntled 'service-user' threatened them. I'm a teacher in Further Education (FE) and the constant staff-room discussion is how best to deal with the unruly mob that passes for our students. Tales of yob-like pupils and irate parents abound: 'one mother turned up with a baseball bat after I gave her daughter D-minus.'

Teachers' unions have made headlines by declaring that classroom assaults are on the increase. The Department for Education has sent schools an inch-thick set of circulars to provide guidance in dealing with 'pupils with problems'. Reports that staff at a Middlesborough primary school had a whip-round and chipped in £1 each to pay for a security guard, surprise nobody. Panic buttons, security passes and video cameras are becoming a feature of school life. I was offered a rape alarm by my union branch secretary when I mentioned that I taught one night a week: 'we might have lost the pay dispute, but at least we've won the right to work safely.'

Reinforced glass

Teachers are not alone. Doctors report that they are so frightened by their patients that they have to take dogs, bodyguards and even fake guns with them on call-outs. Department of Social Security (DSS) workers have campaigned for protective glass windows. Social workers want to do home visits in pairs. But are these fears real or imagined?

While many have the impression that things are getting worse, hard factual evidence is difficult to come by. Certainly perceptions have changed and public sector workers are more frightened than in the past. However, the statistics quoted in the press suggest that some of the fears are out of proportion to the dangers. The British Medical Association (BMA) reports

that 8.5 per cent of doctors have been assaulted and 50 per cent threatened by patients over the past two years. Meanwhile a recent Royal College of Nursing survey of community nurses records that while more than one in 20 have been threatened with violence, one in five had experienced vandalism (much of it to cars) and one in four had been verbally abused, it was the fear of assault that was the most serious concern.

Even without statistics, knowing that service provision is so awful these days, you can see why some of our 'clients' might take it out on those workers who 'man' the front line. The BMA admits that violence against GPs occurs in part because patients have high expectations (presumably they want treatment!) and become frustrated when they cannot be met. As a consumer I can identify with the irate man in the DSS who screams abuse at the clerk when he's told his giro is lost. I too have felt like hitting the housing benefit worker who told me she was too busy to deal with my claim three months after I submitted it. And those parents who physically remove the local social worker who has come to snoop around their home, must have all our sympathies.

There is more pressure on those of us who work in the public service sector—staff cuts, less resources, more clients mean we are overworked and underpaid. Inevitably there is more tension. FE colleges, for example, are now allocated money based on recruitment and retention. This means departments accept anyone on courses just to gain funding. Some students would be better off (educationally) in non-examination classes but the college would not get any funding. Even if students are excluded for their behaviour, teachers are told to take them back—or the college will lose money. And then with classes overcrowded and teaching materials inadequate, inevitably some of these students get frustrated and lash out.

'Too risky'

So how should we, as workers, respond when clients try to take their frustration out on us? I am certainly not advocating that we grin and bear it. I resent the current PC teaching ethos which means I can't shout at my students for fear of the Children Act. Why should I allow some 17-year old to humiliate me? Bruce Reynolds, a teacher in Kent, was attacked by a female pupil who then told the head

ear at work



that he had assaulted her. He, not the pupil, was disciplined. 'I'm not too worried about kicks on the shins', he told the *Independent*, 'but I feel very bitter about the injustice of it. After that, I didn't stand in the way or intervene in fights. It is too risky to even touch pupils'. (8 April 1994)

Management should not be allowed to victimise workers for defending themselves. How we deal with the differing situations that face us in the workplace should be at our discretion. Only the workforce—and not the government or management—should decide how we respond to problems. Common sense should prevail.

However, the solutions now being advocated by trade unions will not help us. Unison members in housing offices have been discussing 'good-behaviour pledges' from 'aggressive' tenants. But more codes of conduct about how to behave will solve nothing, simply creating another set of rules not to break. In fact, many of the proposals are likely to aggravate the situation. Some branches of the CPSA (civil servants' union) have passed motions calling on management to install security measures like video cameras in the dole offices. These would not

protect DSS workers. But they would be used to monitor all claimants—and maybe staff, too. In a climate where employers are keen to oversee the workforce through appraisal and mentor schemes (increasingly linked to payment by results), why give management more powers to check up on employees every minute of the working day—even if they say they only want to be our guardian angels?

Pathetic

Meanwhile, the teachers' unions call for security gates at FE colleges and for more expulsions, which can only help the government to criminalise young people and to blame badly disciplined students for the failures of the underfunded education system. If we go along with these sorts of measures, it will confirm the 'them and us' mentality, and further alienate the students we teach and the clients who use the services we administer. If we act as policemen, we should not be surprised when some people treat us with the contempt they may already feel for the boys in blue.

Another problem with the present discussions is that service sector workers are presented as

helpless. Workplace counselling is the one growth area of the public sector. The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (Natfhe) has recently tried (unsuccessfully) to use a stress survey to persuade the employers not to impose a massive productivity increase. Telling the employers that we are all on the brink of nervous breakdowns simply makes us look pathetic. If our working conditions are intolerable, we should organise to do something about them, not whine or plead for pity.

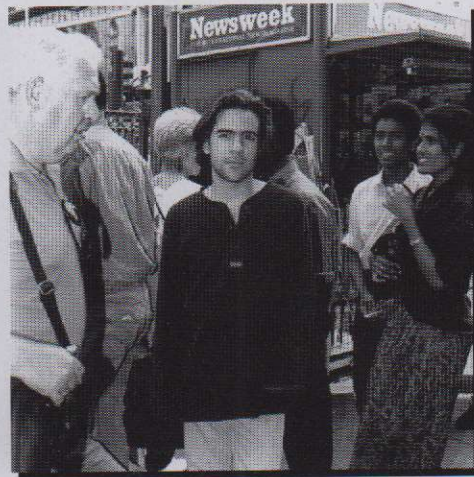
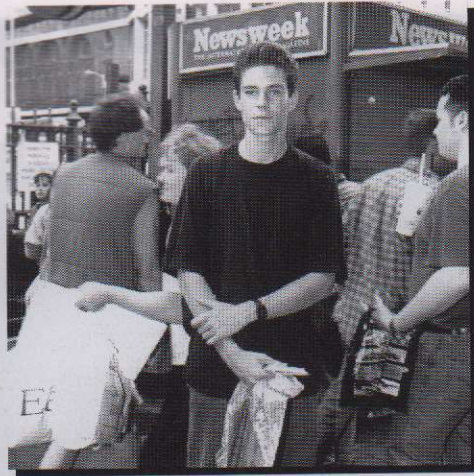
Mad axeman

And we should question whether it is really true that the worst thing about work in 1994 is the fear of being attacked by our clients. The fact that employees are more susceptible to panics about violence is a symptom of our general insecurity at work. In reality the overwhelming fear that stalks the classrooms in FE colleges is the threat of redundancy. But because we feel so paralysed about confronting the source of that problem—the government and our employers—we start to transfer our fears onto other targets.

For instance, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)—a union not known for its militancy—is threatening strike action over assaults on teachers, and yet there is no talk of strike over government tests, cuts in resources and increased workload. Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the union says that 'If the government gave an alarm to all 400 000 teachers it would cost about £20m. Money would be better spent on that than on producing glossy publications' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1 April 1994). Yet he says this as the government announces a derisory 2.5 per cent wage increase. If there's money around Nigel, we want it in our wage packets! Of course we need more staff to cope but that's something to fight for, and the people we will have to fight are John Patten & Co, not Johnny Bloggs in our biology class or John Bloke in the dole queue.

This is an important point; after all, who is it that we are frightened of? That angry patient, demanding that the doctor gets his mother into hospital before it's too late, works in housing benefit. That furious claimant shouting at the lad in housing benefits is a part-time teacher desperate to pay his rent. And that irate parent demanding a decent education for her daughter is the local nurse. Who are we being asked to be frightened of? Each other?

Watch out! There's a mad axeman behind you! Oh sorry, it's just Kenneth Clarke preparing to make another cut in your budget.



As thousands of school and college-leavers join the job market, David Nolan finds expectations of a job for life have been replaced by hopes of a few weeks' work

Since the colleges and schools closed down in the summer, school-leavers and graduates have begun the serious task of job-hunting. Thousands have sent off applications, rung agencies, asked friends and trudged the streets to look for work.

I managed to survive the conveyor belt that was my history degree and come out with a decentish mark. That was, however, the easy bit. Despite all the problems that I had getting books, finding computer time and contacting my lecturers, it was easy meat compared with what I have come up against on the job merry-go-round.

I don't object to employers looking for the best applicants. But the hoops they make you jump through and the qualifications they demand are beyond a joke. You could almost make a career out of filling job application forms. Which is more than most people think is possible today.

The vast majority of the 70-odd people in my class at university haven't had a sniff of a job yet. Many don't even know what they want to do. Some refuse even to discuss it. Given the parlous state of the current job market that is hardly surprising. The most interesting thing I found talking to them was that almost nobody mentioned the word career. Even the best qualified ones were going to look for other jobs as soon as they had got their first one. Few, if any, considered a job for life to be a realistic option.

Look at the success rate of those who left college last year and these fears appear well-founded. By December 1993, 10 000 of the 150 000-plus people who left college the previous June were still on the dole.

Among other college-leavers I spoke to, there is a widespread recognition that life will be more difficult than it used to be. The type of job is the biggest worry. Many end up doing jobs that don't need a degree. Mike, a history graduate from Manchester, is one of many who now want to do a postgraduate degree so that he has a better chance of a decent job. 'I know that one degree is not enough nowadays. The problem is that so many people go to university now and not everyone will get jobs. I feel that the longer I spend in college the better it will be.'

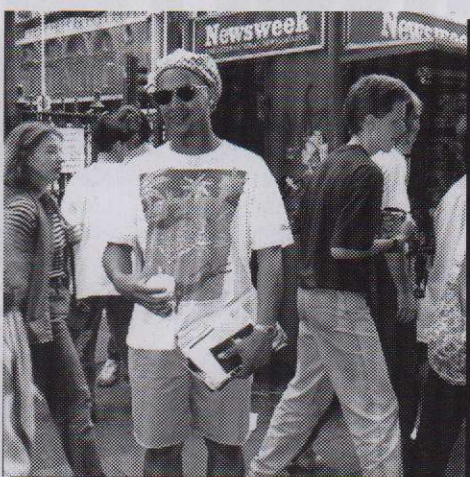
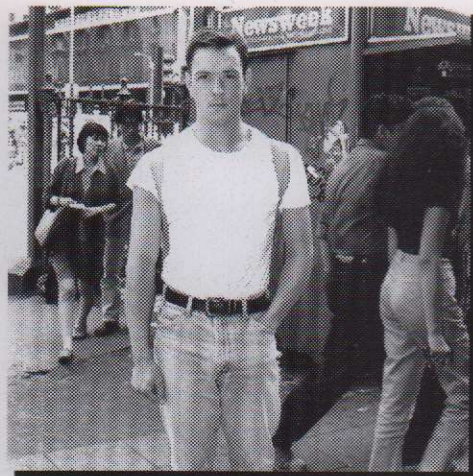
Among school-leavers, with or without A-levels, there is an even bigger sense that it is going to be a long struggle. Evelyn, an 18-year old just out of school, is typical of many in her age group. 'I cannot be sure that the job I get will last. So many of my friends are in dead-end jobs. There don't seem to be the prospects around now that were there when my brother left school six years ago. With so few jobs around a lot of people have to bend the rules to survive.'

Many school-leavers are no longer sure that they will be able to find any kind of work. John, who left school a year ago, has had three part-

time jobs in nine months. None of them lasted more than seven weeks—despite promises to the contrary. 'Each time I walk into a new job I am told that there is a full-time job at the end of the probationary period. Each time I am told that circumstances have changed and that the position will not be filled. I feel that I am being used as a stop-gap when there is a little extra work to be done.'

When you leave school you are supposed to be guaranteed either a job or a place on a government training scheme. By last December, 88 000 of the 380 000 teenagers eligible for training hadn't got a place—and only 12 000 of those were eligible for income support. (The vast majority are not eligible for income support until they reach 18.) Since 1988, according to the Labour Party, when the government first refused income support to 16 and 17-year old school-leavers, upwards of 600 000 young people have been left with no job, no training scheme and no benefits—and they aren't counted in the jobless totals.

Not surprisingly in the circumstances, the aspirations of school and college-leavers today are in stark contrast to those of the previous generation. The idea that you would work your way up in a firm over the years no longer holds true like it did, say, when my parents went to work or even when my older cousins did. For



Careering off

most young people, a job for life, a decent standard of living, good working conditions and regular promotion are like the proverbial free lunch—they just don't exist.

For those of us who go to college the possibilities certainly look better. That's why many go there. But the reason that the government has been providing extra places in underfunded, understaffed colleges is obviously not to give us a decent education. Instead, training schemes and the access-for-all education policies are largely ways of massaging the unemployment figures. In 1991-92 there were a quarter more people in further education than in 1980-81. The figure was twice that for 1970-71. This huge influx of students has merely resulted in overcrowding and under-resourcing, not in an educated workforce.

In any case, a recent study of graduates in the USA suggests that those of us with a degree may not be as well off as we thought. The current trend in Britain of sending as many people as possible to college started in the USA in the sixties. The Institute of Manpower Studies was asked to research the American experience to help predict what might happen here. Its report shows that there has been a 16 per cent decline in the starting salaries of US degree-holders since 1969. The institute found that 20 per cent of US graduates are now in jobs that don't even require higher education, and predicts that about 30 per

cent are expected to be 'underutilised' by 2005. Its fear is that these trends will be repeated in Britain. In fact things are likely to be considerably worse over here, given the far weaker state of the British economy today compared to the USA of 25 years ago.

Whatever the truth about graduates being underutilised in the future, there is already a real difference between the experience and attitudes of those who first started work in the late sixties and the early seventies, and those who are starting work for the first time today.

Liz, a New Zealander, who has just finished a degree as a mature student, had wildly different aspirations about her first job. 'I trained as a nurse so that I would always be able to work. I knew that at least half of the women would leave to have children but they could always come back. There would always be work and a decent salary provided I got promoted. I knew it was a career—a job for as long as I wanted it. When I go out there again it will be completely different.'

Marie, who works for a major bank, didn't have any illusions about becoming rich when she started work, but did expect to be comfortably off. 'When I left school there were two jobs that you could count on—the bank and the civil service. You were sure that there would be steady work and that the money would keep you going.

Those sorts of jobs are not around now. My children are not going to have it as easy as I did. Banks are laying people off and they are even talking of sacking senior civil servants now.'

Some of the other 40-year olds I spoke to had left school secure in the knowledge that they could learn a trade which would guarantee work. Seamus, who came over from Ireland in 1968 when he was 17, joined an engineering works in Liverpool and became an electrician. 'It was a shock when the works closed down. There had been no history of redundancies. But I knew that I would be alright. I had learned a trade so that I would always have work. And I was right. It's been tough in the last few years but I have kept my head above water.'

The search for stability and security that characterised the outlook of people who started work 30 years ago seems largely absent from the first-time workers of today. Their expectations have changed along with the times.

While those in work worry about hanging on to jobs which they thought were for life, those starting work worry about getting one in the first place. Not only that, there is no conception that the job they end up with will last long. The possibility of a job for life or a career is not even considered today. As Evelyn put it: 'When I go looking for a job I can't be sure that I'll have it at the end of the month—let alone in five years' time.'

People who read *Living Marxism* often say that they like its critical approach to what exists today, but want to know 'what's your alternative?'. Frank Richards offers an answer to a famous question

There is an alternative

Anyone critical of the way things are today will sooner or later be confronted by someone shouting in an irritated voice 'But what is your alternative?'. Criticise the underfunded system of healthcare, education or any other public service, and you will get the same response. The 'what-is-your-alternative?' question is wheeled on to dispose of any arguments for radical change to improve the quality of life.

Obviously, Marxists are continually confronted with the 'what-is-your-alternative?' problem. Anyone who has been exposed to this demand will know that it is really a rhetorical question, a summary dismissal presented in the form of an enquiry. For whenever an answer is provided, it meets with the retort that it is not 'practical' or that it is 'unrealistic'.

'What is your alternative?' is actually more of a statement than a question. Indeed it is a very powerful statement, because it is based on the concentrated strength and resources of those who control capitalist society. The question is underpinned by a set of ideas which constitute the ruling realism of the day.

Notions of what society considers realistic are constantly shifting. But they shift only within the

parameters of what is acceptable to the interests of the establishment. So, for example, in contemporary Britain it is acceptable to criticise a specific example of police corruption. It is considered realistic to demand a judicial review of a particular case. But to denounce the *entire* police and legal system as inherently unjust is not acceptable to the authorities—and so any statement in that vein must be unrealistic nonsense.

Today's rules about what is considered realistic or acceptable to establishment interests constitute the boundaries within which alternatives can be discussed. So when someone demands to know 'what is your alternative?', the question posed is really this: what are you proposing within the confines defined by ruling class realism? And obviously from this perspective, as Margaret Thatcher once observed, 'there is no alternative'.

One of the reasons why the Tories tend to win and other parties tend to lose is because the party of capitalism has the privilege of elaborating the rules of the game. As long as the other parties play the game according to those rules, they cannot win. In British politics, most parties have long been prepared to play the game. This is reflected in the limited scope of political debate. For example,

most recent elections have been fought around the issue of taxation. The difference between the major parties was often reduced to a few pennies. In the very act of focusing on taxation, they all conceded the realism of the Treasury, which implies that at best economic policy could be no more than a minor modification of the existing state of affairs. Obviously, if the dictates of the Treasury are accepted, any policy which was based on a fundamental transformation of the way society produced and consumed its wealth, would be seen as an unrealistic fantasy.

The narrow confines within which political debate takes place make it impossible to argue for any plausible radical alternatives. If the Treasury orthodoxy is accepted, policies designed to provide decent jobs for all or a civilised health service simply do not make sense. It is just not possible to please the City financiers and provide a decent standard of living for the majority of society at the same time. That is why there is no public economic debate on matters of substance. The main point of contention is whether or not to spend a few more pounds on this or that service, or whether to tax a particular group a little bit more.

Although there is no real debate



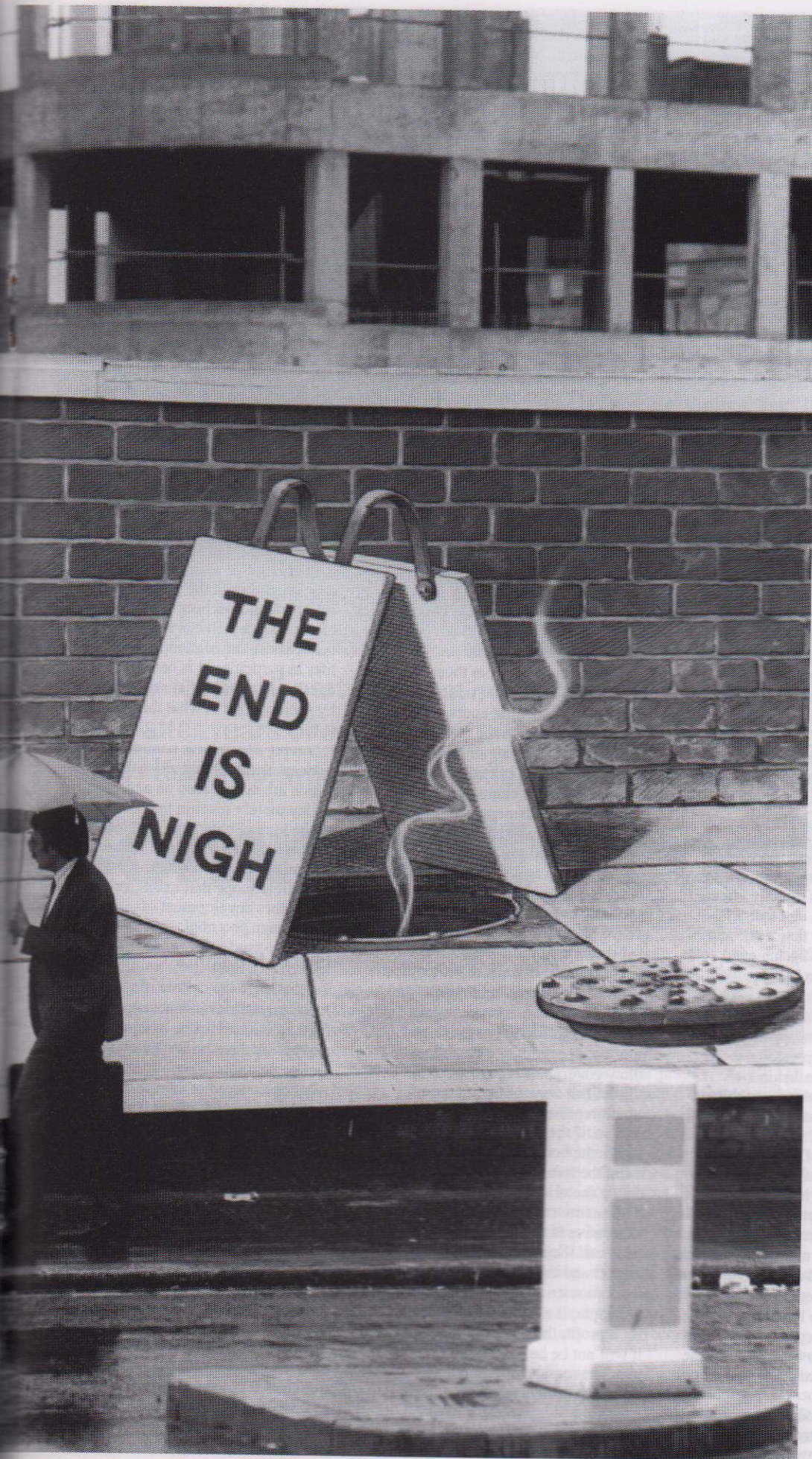


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

about major issues, people still have strong views and opinions. It is just that they tend to develop strong attitudes about matters which in the past would not have been all that controversial. Politicians now make their names by organising campaigns to provide seat belts in minibuses. The media promotes such campaigns and lends them considerable publicity. These days an accident of some sort anywhere from a motorway to a fun fair is guaranteed to provoke a demand, fronted by assorted local MPs, for some kind of safety measure.

It is as if politicians and the public alike, feeling unable to fight for a decent quality of life or for secure employment, use their energy to campaign for objectives which are held to be realistic and acceptable. Consequently there is a veritable explosion of campaigns to erect traffic lights, or for building or not building roads. The orientation is held to be realistic on the grounds that these are the sorts of issues which affect people's lives.

Paddy Ashdown and the Liberal Democrats are the most consistent advocates of this politics of parochialism. In their view, what local people are interested in are their drain pipes, roads, litter collection and local shops. Liberal Democratic ►



councillors pride themselves on their knowledge of the local community and continually uphold this expertise as a demonstration of their political commitment.

But the orientation towards parochial interests can also be seen in a different, and a far less favourable, light. In one sense it can be seen as

Their game is not the only one in town

a retreat from wider social concerns. It also represents a devaluation of political life. Issues that used to be considered technical matters, in the domain of local administration, are now considered the stuff of political battles. At the same time, the debate among contending views of how society should be organised, and for whose benefit, has disappeared, leaving behind a political culture that is empty and uninspiring.

The psychology of low expectations is clearly codified in the realism of parochial politics. Many would argue that the locality is really where it is all happening today. The word 'community' has become a chant which everyone wants to repeat. Advocates of community politics argue that everyone is directly affected by community issues, and that it is only at the local level that 'real' and 'practical' results can be achieved. Anything else is pie in the sky.

Zebra crossing victories

Although local politics appears to evoke such strong passions, there is little real conviction behind it. Community politics always culminate in some Ashdown platitude about how much 'people matter'. The essentially rhetorical character of localism is shown by the fact that all shades of opinion can claim it as their own. The real role of this parochial emphasis is to create the pretence that there is at some modest level a measure of choice. There may be no real alternatives when it comes to government spending, and we are all doomed to live under the whip hand of Treasury orthodoxy; but in our communities a campaign for the zebra crossing we want may just win out in the long run.

In this sense, parochial community politics can be seen as the local reflection of the narrow national debate

on taxation. In both cases, the options available are restricted to what is deemed realistic by ruling class interests. Although it is claimed that community issues directly affect everyone, it is clear that at this level nothing of substance can be achieved.

The forces which shape and govern our lives are not those operating at the level of local communities. The opportunities for employment are not determined locally. The quality of our lives, our standard of living, our existence in every respect is not the product of local developments. Ultimately it does not matter what happens within any single so-called community. Whether or not roads are built or services are provided will be determined by the market forces that operate on a national and, indeed, on a global scale. That is why the focus on parochial politics represents an evasion of the realities of contemporary society.

Need not profit

Why has so much energy been devoted to campaigning in the community of late? Because such campaigns are unlikely to come up against the limits of ruling class realism. Nobody will demand 'what is your alternative?' from those campaigning for cleaner parks or for longer library opening hours. Similarly nobody will question the realism of those who are campaigning for seat belts in minibuses. In reality the more ineffective a campaign, the less it affects the fundamentals of everyday life, the more it will be sanctioned by the public opinion-makers.

One way to answer the 'what-is-your-alternative?' question is to pose one of our own: 'whose game are we playing?' Within the confines of contemporary political culture, *there is no alternative*. If we accept the rules laid down by the ruling interests and the limits of the market economy, the only option is to lower interest rates by a per cent or two, or maybe allow government spending to increase a little. But none of these measures would represent an alternative. And so, if the debate takes place within the bounds of the existing rules, the term alternative has only a rhetorical significance.

The first step towards creating a real alternative is to refuse to accept their rules and their game. The laws of the market and the profit-motive inexorably work to restrict the options available to people. If a house must be sold for a profit, then in today's conditions it will not be built. The option of using unemployed builders or unused machinery will not be exercised. It is as simple as that.

To elaborate an alternative, the key is to begin not with profit, but with

human need. This requires a different game with different rules. The idea that policies should be based on the demands of social need rather than private gain is antithetical to capitalist society. It is only when people begin to look beyond the constraints of the market system that the possibility for real change suggests itself.

So, the first response to that famous question is to explain that their game is not the only one in town.

It would be easy to fall into the trap of offering an off-the-shelf alternative, a blueprint for a better world. Unfortunately, alternatives that are genuine and practical are only developed as a product of common experience and struggle. It is clear that at this stage any such alternative is absent. For a variety of reasons, society today has been captured by the spirit of low expectations.

The best way to confront the spirit of low expectations, the belief that nothing much can be done, is not artificially to counterpose high expectations. Instead, what is required in the first place is a systematic campaign against the present political culture. What we need most is the spirit of criticism which can help to expose the dead-end of contemporary political life. In particular, it is necessary to question the limits that are accepted by society. That is what this magazine is for.

Living Marxism is committed to demonstrating that all of the limits which are now placed on action and policy merely restrain the development of the human potential. And most important of all, *Living Marxism* is committed to demonstrating the incredible scope that exists for the further development of that human potential.

Break the limits

To challenge the culture of low expectations it is necessary to fight against all forms of legal, social and political restraints. Every law and convention today—from regulating what parents can or cannot do with their children to limiting the right to strike—seeks to curb human action. A consistent exposure of the role of these rules and controls can at once challenge the culture of limits, and indicate the potential that exists beyond British capitalism's 'Off Limits' sign.

The alternative begins with those, a minority, who today are prepared to fight and argue for rejecting the limits imposed on society. It requires a preparedness to rise above the politics of low expectations; but above all, it requires the conviction that the further development of the human potential is a goal well worth fighting for, regardless of who says it is unrealistic.



The new-found all-party interest in the politics of Community might seem a relief after years of celebrating the individualism of the free market. But, asks James Heartfield, what are they offering members of the community like us?

Community conformity

There is a new buzz-word in British politics: Community. All politicians use it, no matter what party they are in. According to Labour's kingmaker Gordon Brown, speaking at the Fabian Society's What-ever Next? conference in June, the importance of 'Community' is 'our mutual dependency'. Labour's transport spokesman Frank Dobson agrees: 'What we all need is a change in our culture which recognises that we all have responsibilities to one another.'

Labour's new leader-in-waiting, Tony Blair, told the Fabian conference that Community is the basis of a revitalised socialism: 'The ethical view of socialism is based on these values—individuals are social and interdependent beings. Individuals owe a duty to society. This version of socialism does not set apart the interests of the individual and society, it is social-ism.'

But speaking at the *Sunday Telegraph's* Crime, Law and Order conference a few days later, Tory home secretary Michael Howard insisted the Community idea belonged to his party: 'We've been promoting this for years. If Tony Blair is willing to sign up for that, good.

Individuals have rights and they also have responsibilities.' For good measure, Paddy Ashdown's Liberal Democrats claim to have always been the party of the Community, but never more so than right now.

It has been a long time since there has been any new thinking in mainstream politics. Any claim to have found the long-hunted Big Idea should be taken with a pinch of salt. David Marquand of the opposition think-tank Demos protests that 'it is no longer true to say that the left has run out of ideas'. But when pressed on the Community idea he admitted that 'it is vague but we are grappling with it, and it will eventually come right: somewhere between "the market" and "social solidarity"'. In fact, on examination the most obvious thing about the Community idea is just how woolly it is. How else could a slogan be adopted by every establishment party, without any real agreement about what it means?

One thing that the new-found affection for the Community does mean is that the days of singing the praises of the unalloyed free market are over. All the talk about community has one common proposition, that, as Gordon Brown has it, the

'selfish individualism of the eighties is superseded by the politics of Community'. With capitalism returning to slump after the brief and speculative boom of the eighties, the free market individualism promoted by Margaret Thatcher is widely seen as a failure.

In 1987 Margaret Thatcher said 'I don't believe in society', adding 'there is no such thing, only individual people, and there are families' (*Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987). She was saying that only scroungers talk about 'society' while achievers know that they are on their own. Today Thatcher's comments seem to be the epitome of a selfish elevation of greed over the community.

Of course it is easy to imagine the Labour Party criticising selfish individualism; but surely such criticism could never influence the Tory Party, could it? In fact, right-wing thinkers, too, are being forced to express doubts about the free market. In his recent paper, *The Undoing of Conservatism*, Oxford don and former Thatcherite John Gray writes that 'human beings, more than they need the freedom of consumer choice, need a cultural and economic ►

◀ environment that offers them an acceptable level of security and in which they feel at home.' For good measure Gray is supporting Tony Blair as the next prime minister.

Nobody would expect the parliamentary Tory Party to go so far, but on top of the gratuitous use of the 'C' word Tories like MP and former Thatcherite David Willetts are not averse to bemoaning the curse of selfishness. 'We are becoming worse people', he says, 'more self-centred, more aggressive, more hostile to excellence and achievement, less civil, less willing to give time to any cause greater than ourselves'.

All of this condemnation of selfishness sounds like a change of heart. However, the stress on community is really motivated by the authorities' instinctive fear of the consequences of economic slump and social division, rather than any desire to organise the economy for the benefit of ordinary people. The trouble with this kind of criticism of the free market is that it only operates on the moral level. Instead of seeing the problem as the failure of the market system as a whole, the problem is reposed as one of individual behaviour: selfishness.

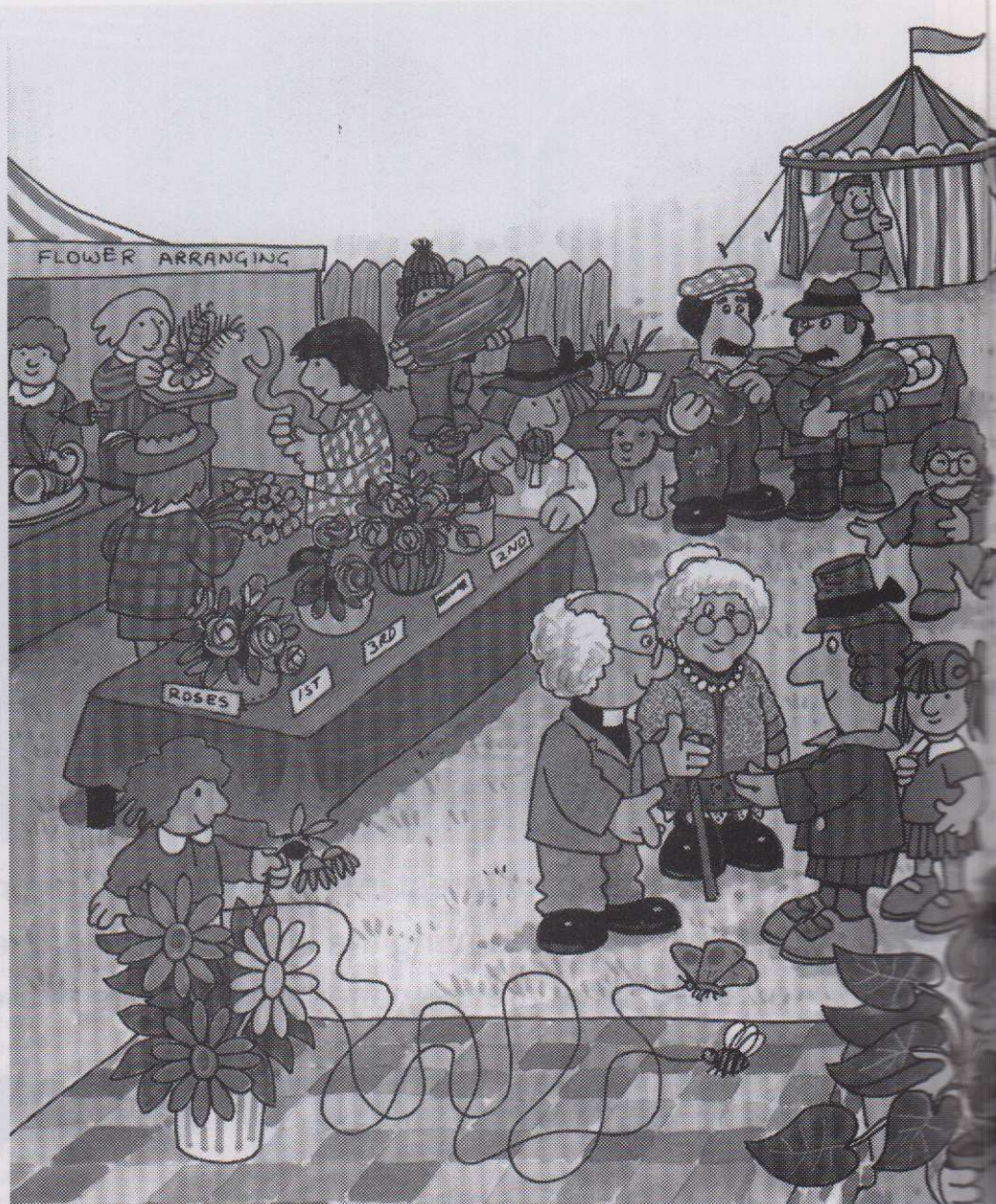
But it is worth asking just who is it that has been so selfish in recent times? Certainly not workers like British Rail's signalmen. They were persuaded first to sacrifice jobs for increased productivity and second to hold back on any pay increase until Railtrack took over after privatisation. Now Railtrack says that their outstanding productivity deal was a matter for BR and the signalmen are left fighting for £150 per week.

Indeed trade unionists are the last people you could call selfish. The unions have spent the greater part of the past decade negotiating away hours, conditions of service and jobs, getting all too little in return.

Perhaps, as some Labour activists see it, it is the C2 voters of southern England who have been selfish, voting for the Tory Party out of narrow self-interest when they should have elected a more caring Labour government. But the truth is that not many southern voters in occupational group C2 would have been affected by the £21 000 tax threshold proposed by Labour at the last election (see G Radice, *Southern Discomfort*).

Instead of being motivated by a greedy desire for more and more riches, those skilled working class Tory voters were trying to hang on to the essentials—a mortgage, income, and perhaps a car—that they thought would be even less secure under a Labour government.

The truth is that working people have not been nearly selfish enough. They paid the price for the failures of British capitalism in unemployment and speed-ups and harassment at work. On top of that, they shouldered the burden of their relatives and friends who were thrown out of work. And all the time that they have been making sacrifices to keep industry afloat, the wealthy and powerful members of the Community have reaped the benefits.



Some company directors award themselves wages of £1m or more a year. Former cabinet ministers like Lord Young and Cecil Parkinson get themselves lucrative jobs on the boards of the companies they had privatised while in government. Some 70 000 people have been appointed to comfortable positions on quangos to run local government in place of elected representatives; many of the most privileged quangoites are defeated Tory candidates.

You could say that these were the people who have been selfish, but it would be more accurate to say that they worked the system to defend their collective interests. These Hooray Henries would not last a minute under the law of the jungle, but when it comes to jobs for the boys, they know how to look after their own little community of the boardroom.

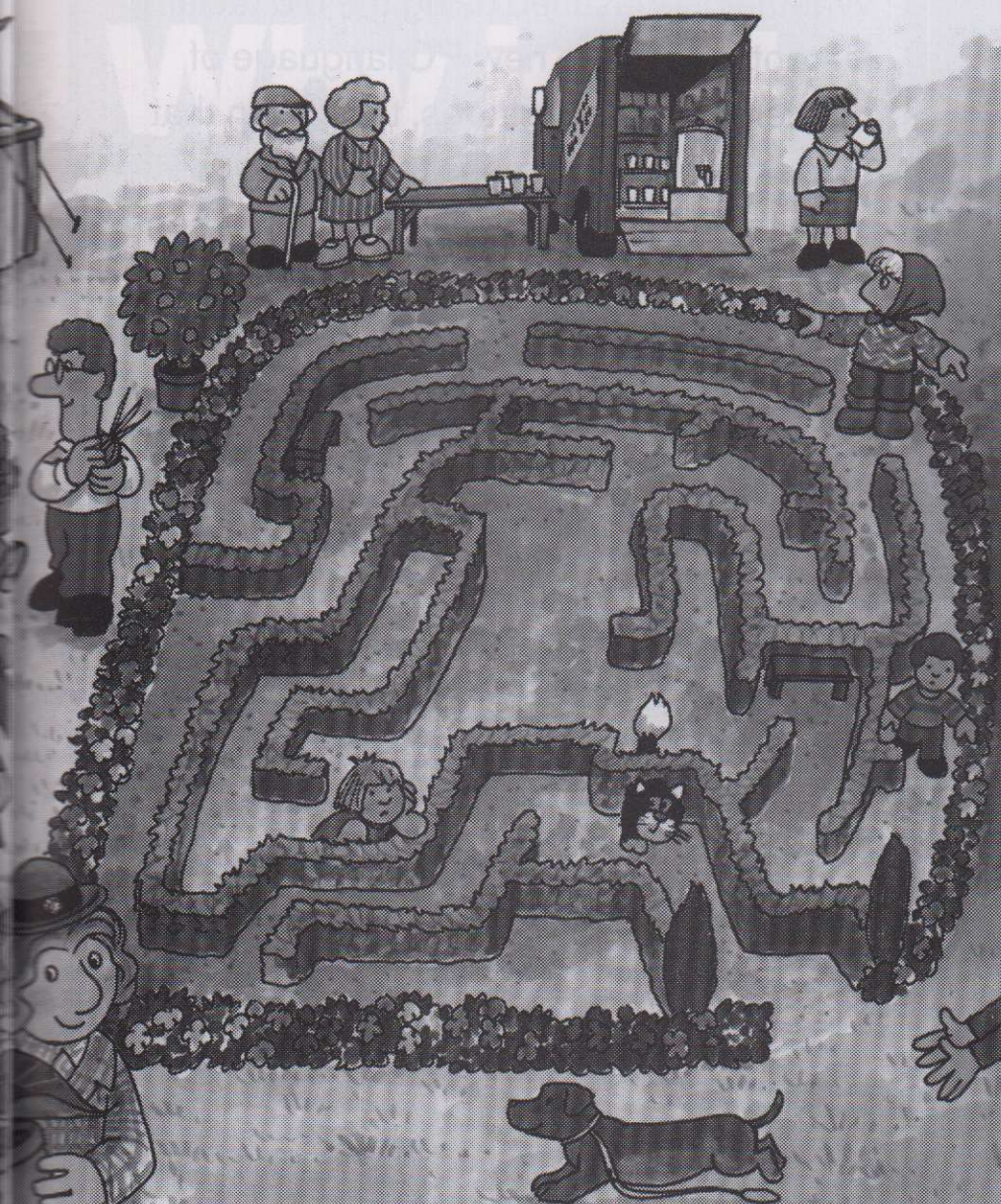
The moralistic criticism of the market ends up blaming the very people that are on the receiving end of the slump, because everyone is held to be equally to blame. When we are all to blame for being selfish, the question *Que bono?*—who really benefits?—never gets asked. Instead

everybody is expected to tighten their belts and share the burden of the slump, everybody except those company directors who can afford to sit out a little adverse publicity about the size of their bonuses from time to time.

Behind the concern with Community stands a fear of dissent and division. The more that politicians talk up the notion of Community, the clearer it becomes that they have nothing real with which to hold people together and are trying to cover up the social divisions that threaten their position.

It is not difficult to see why Tory politicians are preoccupied with division and the need to pull everything together: their usually rock-solid support in the British middle classes has collapsed under the impact of the slump. According to June's Mori poll only 12 per cent of professional, managerial, administrative and clerical employees (group ABC1) trust Tory politicians. A succession of poor election results only confirms that there is no such thing as a safe Conservative seat any more.

But for Labour, too, there is a problem of division in the ranks that means it cannot be sure



of succeeding where the Tories fail. The Labour Party is an overwhelmingly middle class party, according to Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley's 1992 survey of Labour Party membership, while its voters are predominantly working class (*Labour's Grass Roots*). As Neil Kinnock, John Smith and now Blair have remoulded Labour's public image in pursuit of middle class votes, the potential for tensions between the party and its base has arisen.

In various elections Labour has seen signs of that divide opening up in its heartlands. In the Rotherham by-election in May, Labour candidate Denis MacShane saw the party's turnout and majority plummet. MacShane sent a bitter memo to party HQ, noting how out of touch Labour has become with working class people, especially young ones: 'during the whole campaign we never had more than four or five people working for us under the age of 45.' (*Tribune*, 17 June) In Scotland and London's East End, Labour has found its core support tempted away by the Scottish National Party and even the crank British National Party as traditional Labour voters

protest at the middle class drift of the party.

But the need to talk up common interests and downplay divisions is not just about getting elected. It is about keeping a grip on a society that is increasingly fragmented and out of control. The rhetoric of Community is about fostering conformity and criminalising dissent, drawing a divide between responsible 'us' and irresponsible 'them'. As such it is the favoured language of the forces of law and order.

Sir Paul Condon of the Metropolitan Police has been criticised by some rank-and-file officers for going soft, but at a recent conference he outlined the need for the police to win public support: 'The police service must through its style, priorities and performance encourage confidence and support in the wider Community.'

But when the authorities start talking about protecting the Community we are entitled to ask, exactly what Community are they talking about? The answer turns out to be a lot more exclusive than inclusive. Politicians and police officers alike effortlessly imagine a Community that is made up of people like them, who share their prejudices of what is and what is not legitimate.

According to Paddy Ashdown it is 'schools, welfare organisations, business, voluntary bodies—the whole community': a 'whole community' made up of middle class do-gooders like Paddy Ashdown in fact.

According to Paul Condon, the Community is made up of 'individuals, the business community, local government and central government' whose principal duty is a 'comprehensive strategy to fight crime'. In other words, a kind of national Neighbourhood Watch scheme. At the same conference the chief constable of the Strathclyde Police outlined what kinds of activities were legitimate in 'the Community'—'a safe place in which to live, work, play, invest and locate enterprise'.

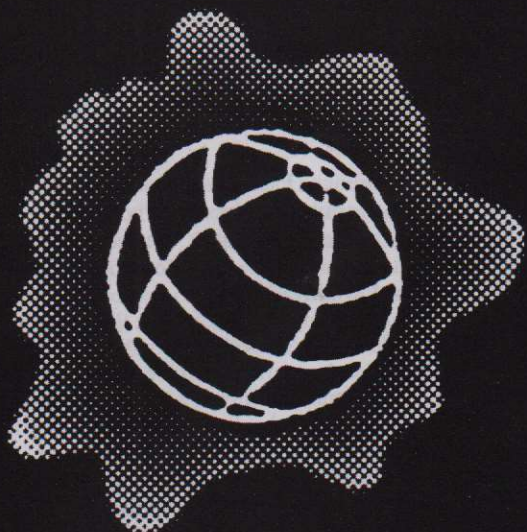
If, on the other hand, you do not fit into the acceptable categories of communal behaviour—being enterprising or investing—you will incur the wrath of the authorities. The proposed Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill gives an insight into just how narrow is the envisaged community of respectable citizens.

Deploying the pious language of defending the Community, the bill seeks to ban a range of activities that would rule anybody under 30 an outsider: hunt-saboteurs, hikers, bikers, ravers, people going to raves, squatters, protesters, travellers, dope-smokers and ticket touts among many others are all subject to special provisions. That should leave a community made up of Victor Meldrew, Richard Branson and Mavis Riley.

Presumably railway workers can be members of the community along with their passengers; until, that is, they go on strike for 24 hours in pursuit of a paltry pay rise, at which point they become mindless vandals who are, in the words of Community spokesman John Major, 'putting thousands of commuters at risk'.

When Martin Mitchell and other anti-Criminal Justice Bill campaigners took part in a recent Channel 4 studio discussion about the bill, the television company was phoned the next day by Inspector Stephen O'Farrell of the Thames Valley Criminal Intelligence Unit asking for details of all the participants in the programme. When it was pointed out that they had not committed a crime by appearing on television, O'Farrell replied that they were 'only trying to fit some names to some faces'. Faces, presumably, that do not conform to Inspector O'Farrell's idea of the respectable Community.

The rhetoric of Community proposed by leading politicians and police officers is far from a new idea that will get British politics out of the doldrums. Rather it is the reflexive conservatism of an establishment that senses its own loss of authority. The proposition 'Let's all pull together' does not add up to a new policy. What it does show is that free market individualism has lost its appeal and, for all the talk of Community, the only thing that the powers that be have on offer to pull society together is a big dose of law and order.



A challenge to prejudice and mysticism
on matters scientific, technological and
environmental

FUTURES

Whether it is justified using the old racial stereotypes or the new PC language of concern for other cultures, the notion that modern communications technology is unsuitable for Africa is dangerous nonsense, says Emmanuel Oliver

Where I work, everyone is trying to get connected to the global computer networks of the Internet and Information Superhighways. I am constantly inundated with questions about how so and so can get 'on-line'; about the comparative merits of Compuserve and a Demon Internet account; and about how much the potential user is likely to spend on monthly phone bills as they join the information elite in cyberspace.

If, however, you happen to live in Africa, or many other parts of the third world, you are unlikely to have heard of the Internet, never mind be on it. In fact, the average African is more likely to be waiting for the installation of his or her first telephone than waiting the few minutes it takes for an Internet connection. The average wait for a telephone installation in sub-Saharan Africa currently stands at nine years.

The information technology revolution taking place in Europe, North America and parts of Asia is fast becoming another indicator of the inability of Africa to participate in the world economy. The low incidence of telephone lines, a basic requirement for computer networking, and the number of computers in Africa show just how marginal the continent is to recent technological advances.

Africa is already at the bottom of the international economic pile. Africa has the lowest levels of general investment of any region of the world. It has the lowest levels of return on investment. More wealth is leaving the continent than entering it, as debt repayments to Western financiers outstrip aid contributions in the other direction. Communications technology indicators also make for grim reading. Africa not only has the lowest number of telephone lines in the world, it also has the world's highest costs for international calls and the lowest completion rates. It has the lowest levels of actual and planned investment in communications technology. It also has the fewest host computers for the Internet.

The economic marginalisation of Africa is mirrored in the paucity of communications technology in the continent.

This technological backwardness, on top of the increasing economic marginalisation of Africa and much of the third world, gives obvious cause for concern. Even more worrying is the casual assumption that this is the way things will be into the indefinite future. This view was recently summarised by Arlen Yokley of the US telecommunications corporation, Bell South. 'We have identified countries around the world that we would be confident dealing in cellular with', announced Yokley: 'They do not include undeveloped countries in Asia or Africa.'

How is such a view justified?

There is a widespread assumption that Africans and some Asians have little use for the telephone or the computer. Africa is seen as a continent which neither needs new technology nor would know what to do with it if it had any.

Recently AT&T, the telecommunications giant, allowed its glossy image to become tarnished. An AT&T magazine featured a cover of a gorilla using a telephone, which was supposed to represent an African phoning home. An embarrassed apology was given and the customary sackings followed.

Gorilla images may be out of fashion in these politically correct times, but similar sentiments about modern communication technology being inappropriate for Africa still dominate the Western world view. It's just that today, the argument is more usually couched in the liberal language of concern for the sanctity of other, older, more organic cultures. But whatever the language, the message is the same: 'they' are inherently different, unable or unwilling to follow Western ways.

A recent conference (The Appropriateness of Information ►

Why isn't Africa 'on-line'?



COMPUTER GENERATED ILLUSTRATION: NICK DARTON

Systems Strategy Methodologies for Developing Countries, London School of Economics, March 1994) discussed the exportability of information systems methodologies to the third world. It was composed mainly of third world computer specialists, and Westerners active in non-governmental organisations. There the talk was not of gorillas and telephones. Speakers were more concerned that the West should not go about 'colonising other parts of the world with our highly specialised bureaucratic and control technologies'. There was also a concern to explain the limits of 'Western' technology in different cultural settings.

Whether it's the blunt chauvinism of corporate businessmen or the liberal concerns of politically correct aid workers, the notion that Western technology is inappropriate for third world societies is dangerously mistaken. It is based on a mystified view of culture and a deterministic understanding of technology. The result is to propagate and justify an apartheid process of separate technological development.

There is nothing nationally, continentally or racially unique about any specific culture. Culture is the property of the whole of humanity, and it is spread by the cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices. Of course, a particular practice or idea will often develop in a specific place and time, but it very rarely remains so localised. Even such a specific cultural phenomenon as the music of the black American ghetto has been appropriated and developed by white musicians who have never lived anywhere near Harlem or South Central Los Angeles.

The same process holds true for science and technology. If there really is a separate and distinctly Western tradition in scientific matters, how is it that, historically, 'Western' science survived and developed in the Arab world for centuries before being taken up by the Italians and then the English? And how could it be that gunpowder, the technical facilitator for many of the most dramatic developments in Western culture, was developed by the Chinese?

Cultural cross-fertilisation is a constant feature of human history. So why is it uncomfortable for Westerners to face the prospect of intercontinental exchange with Africa today? After all, they will readily acknowledge that American culture 200 years ago was profoundly influenced by ideas developed in Europe, and that in turn American culture has influenced Europe in countless ways during this century. It appears that cultural exchange within the white Western world is thought to be OK, but cross-fertilisation with blacks and the third world is not—



because it represents a challenge to Western notions of innate superiority.

Nor is there anything special about any culture or group of people today that makes them especially predisposed to the use of modern technology, of any kind. British people, like Africans and

The result is to justify an apartheid process of separate technological development

Asians, learn how to make use of technology. Nobody is born knowing how to develop a computer-based information system or how to use consumer electronics.

Societies develop such capabilities. South Korea is a good example. It is a country which has made the transition from an almost exclusively rural society to a fairly developed industrial economy within a generation. Consumer electronics, office technology and industrial technology have been developed to the point where Korea can rival some of the more established capitalist nations in these markets—and outstrip others like Britain. Yet there was nothing within the rural Korean of half a century ago which might suggest such progress—apart, that is, from human ingenuity, which is a universal attribute that binds us all together.

A recent advert for the Korean car corporation Hyundai illustrates this point. Hyundai produces quality cars using exactly the same technology as is used to produce German BMWs and Mercedes. Having pointed this out, the advert suggests that the only thing which stops us buying Korean cars is prejudice about Asians. Efficiency and precision are no more German national characteristics than they are Korean national characteristics.

There is nothing inherent within modern communication technologies which prevents their use by any modern society. A computer is not a box full of oppressive Western values which subverts the supposedly more human values of third world peoples. Communications technology is nothing more than a tool, albeit a very sophisticated one, that can be picked up and used by any human hand if the investment is forthcoming. Computers

and telecommunications could be used to bring enormous benefits to third world societies in everything from agriculture to healthcare. In the short term, however, the global communications highway looks set to stop at Africa's borders, another symbol of the subordinate position of Africa to the West.

The notion that culture is a barrier to the absorption of technology in Africa is disproved by the existence of small pockets of wealthy black African businessmen who form a small cellular phone market and enjoy the latest electronic gadgetry. The limited diffusion of technology is more a product of poverty than of any innate characteristics of Africans. While a few, like the wealthy capitalists of the new South Africa will get themselves connected, the other half a billion Africans will be living 'off-line' in a technological ghetto.

Today the argument that there is an immovable cultural divide between the industrialised nations and the third world is used to justify the expanding technological and economic gap between the two, particularly with regard to new information technologies. It is also used to justify the undermining of local capabilities and the imposition of closer control by Western capitalists. Computer and communication networks are technologies from the West, so the argument goes, and so the West will have to control them. The ownership of a technology base is deemed illegitimate for third world countries, which are not considered culturally suited to the management of complex systems. As a consequence, multinational corporations are demanding the removal of trade barriers so that they can more or less take over the small information markets which do exist in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The argument that cultural difference and identity are important might start off as a PC attempt to flatter third world societies. But it ends up complementing the argument that these societies would be better off with the sort of 'African', 'human' technology which allows manual production of pulped paper egg trays, than with a database containing information about climatology or biotechnology expertise.

Applied in a universal fashion, computers and telecommunications could be used to modernise third world societies, to improve global connections and to help create a universal culture that could overcome the fragmented state of life on earth today. Instead, the partial and distorted application of the latest generation of high technology has come to be another illustration of the inability of capitalist society to develop a universal suffrage.



A new man's game

Talk about a game for fairies', snorted Ron Atkinson, after yet another booking for an innocuous challenge. The 1994 World Cup threw British commentators into confusion. FIFA's new guidelines have resulted in a serious crackdown on those archetypal foreign vices, professional fouls, play-acting and ungentlemanly conduct. However this has also outlawed certain British habits, such as tackles from behind and high challenges, and encouraged 'fussy' (ie, un-British) refereeing.

As I write, halfway through the tournament (that's 'tourneyment' to you, Ron), ITV's Alan Parry, apparently ignorant of the concept of cause and effect, is still bewildered by the fact that it has been the cleanest, fairest tournament in living memory, and yet there have been record numbers of cautions and red cards. He longs for proper referees like England's Philip Donn to be given a go, and make it a man's game once more.

Sadly, Parry and the rest are behind the times. The days when the British game embodied grit and manliness are long gone. Foreign sides are fitter and tougher, and our players no longer tolerate the sergeant-major approach to training. In the recent documentary about Swindon Town, the bewildered manager and coach were at a loss to know how to handle the young players, who won't stand for a clip round the head and a flea in the ear. Any kind of dressing down reduces these boys to emotional wrecks.

The most famous example of this temperamental new breed is, of course, Paul Gascoigne, who, unlike Swindon's juniors, does at least have the merit of being a top-class player. Until now, Gazza's off-the-pitch antics (when was the last time he was *on* a pitch?) have helped sell a lot of papers, and done nothing to diminish his popularity. However, nightclub brawls are one thing—beating up girlfriends is another. And that can't be good for the game.

One might have expected his latest confession—that he knocked his fiancée about—to have finally sent him crashing from his precarious pedestal. But no, he held his hands up like a good lad, and they slapped on a sticker saying 'Fragile—handle with care'. Just how far this softening has gone was clear from the *Sun*, which called, not for prison or birching, but counselling. Gazza must conquer his macho tendencies, talk about his feelings more openly (to the *Sun*, perhaps?), and 'confront his attitudes to women'. Talk about a paper for fairies, as Ron would say (but not in his *Sun* column).

Maybe Gazza would respond to meeting some victims of domestic violence and learning to appreciate the other point of view. Battered men have been phoning a new national helpline in their hundreds, and prominent among them have been policemen, soldiers, and even a member of the SAS. Clearly, their professional training places them at a particular disadvantage, as 'they will not fight

back even under extreme provocation'. So says Dr Malcolm George, who is studying such cases. We've had riot police as trauma victims, so why not 'SAS—a game for fairies'? All we need is someone to tell them. Claire Raynor, with a bit of luck.

All right-thinking persons are now in agreement that video nasties cause children to turn into potential murderers, but how many of you realised that they are also responsible for fascism? Like most video theories, this is based on the views of school teachers, who 'think', 'feel' or otherwise deduce sinister changes in the psyche of their pupils, who to the untrained eye appear quite normal.

Teacher-turned-author Frank Lean's former pupils in Moss Side are now the inspiration for his inner-city thrillers. As he told the *Independent*: 'They're natural resisters, grit in the machinery in school and in society as a whole. But the ingenuity and resource [sic] they show in circumventing rules is a very attractive quality. If we had a dictatorship in this country, they would be the first to rise up.'

Other teachers rather seem to think that inner-city school children are the stuff that dictatorships are made of, drawing links between schoolyard fads and fascism. 'In any city centre children cruise around in £90 trainers, sporting haircuts dearer than a hard-back, individually Walkmanned, guzzling

chips and polystyrene drinks [?!], happy in multiconsumption', begins another *Independent* piece:

'Such children are denatured and de-socialised, robbed of discrimination, of history and their own childhood. I fear that, if they vote, it will be for the party that crackles and pops with the zappiest ads ["Hang IRA scum" stickers, perhaps?], and appeals to intellect and conscience least; or a party offering reflex action against depersonalised foes: a brutish Nintendo Nationalism.'

And where are these polystyrene-drinking children to be found? Well, the author of the piece can't help you. He teaches in Oxfordshire, 'where the pupils are, thankfully, motivated and hard-working', so presumably he spotted these proto-fascists in other newspaper articles, where such people appear to have a life of their own.

In these fascist fantasies, there is always a good guy: the virtuous school teacher who through his preaching tries to inculcate some basic decency against all the odds. And for all of us big children there are the ridiculous 'Don't vote BNP!' posters, with their wrist-slapping warnings about what a Nazi government would mean (No TUC! No NHS! No nationalised Post Office!, etc). I see that there is now even a 'Lecturers Against the Nazis' campaign. Since lecturing is so clearly its forte, perhaps the Anti-Nazi League as a whole should adopt this title. Then they could really teach us all a lesson.

Battered men have been phoning a new national helpline

The demand for tougher laws against racial violence can only end up giving more power to the biggest gang of racists in the country, says Mark Butler

Whitewashing racism

At the end of June the Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee produced a report on racial violence and harassment. Evidence had been presented by anti-racist groups, police officers and members of parliament. There were two main conclusions, supported by most of those submitting evidence: that racial violence and harassment were now far worse than they had ever been, and that the solution to this problem was to strengthen the new Criminal Justice Bill.

It is worth asking how a spectrum of people that includes the Anti-Racist Alliance, the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers could all come to agree on making racial violence the priority. After all, the police have not usually seen eye-to-eye with anti-racists.

Racist society

Of course, any indication that something is going to be done about racism will be welcomed by many. Recent surveys confirm that, for black people in Britain, racism is an everyday experience:

- Ethnic minorities are twice as likely as white people to be unemployed. Two reports at the beginning of June suggested that the rate of unemployment for black women was 16 per cent compared to six per cent for white women.

- Black people are more likely to receive custodial sentences when they appear before the courts.

- Black people are three times more likely to be homeless, and when they are housed they are more likely to receive the worst places. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) last year found unlawful segregation in housing by Oldham Borough Council: 71 per cent of tenants on one rundown estate were Asian, while on a nearby modern estate only one resident was Asian (see CRE, *Annual Report*, 1993).

Racism is institutionalised through discrimination in Britain's job market, courts, housing offices and police stations. Whether immigrants or not, black people are widely seen as outsiders and even scroungers, a view fostered by politicians. Racist attacks, harassment and murders are a direct consequence of the second-class status



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

imposed upon black people in British society. Racial violence is the harrowing consequence of the climate of everyday racism.

Unfortunately these days little attention is paid to struggling for real equality in society. Instead anti-racists tend to focus on the most extreme aspect of racism—racial attacks. In an attempt to win easy sympathy for their cause, most anti-racist groups now play up heart-rending images of racial violence, at the expense of wider issues of racial discrimination.

But reducing the campaign against racism to the question of violence has damaging consequences. Racism is no longer understandable as a general trend in society. Instead, removed from the context of a racist society, racist attacks seem to be only a question of individual psychology. Racial violence can become a blanket term for any violence between people of different races—so that blacks are seen to be as capable as whites of racist attacks. Racist violence loses its specific meaning, as violence caused by racial oppression, and becomes just another crime.

'White victims'

According to the Home Affairs Committee report: 'it is clear that racial incidents affect whites, blacks and Asians.' That might be true of violence—anyone can get hit—but it is not true of racism: in this society black people are the victims of racism not whites. But according to the Home Affairs Committee:

'We do not accept the view that there is any difference between a racial attack on a white man and one on a black man. Both attacks are criminal; both serve to divide society.'

Highlighting the handful of cases where white people lose out makes racism into just one more misfortune that could happen to anyone, letting the authorities off the hook for the systematic racism that they enforce.

The Commission for Racial Equality last year took up the cases of five white people (out of 99 who had applied for help, 34 of them Irish). The most ridiculous case must be that of Ms DSA Jackson who did not apply for a job with Bolton Metropolitan Council because she had no Urdu, one of the job's requirements. Since the council could not give a convincing argument as to why the language was necessary, a tribunal awarded Ms Jackson £1000.

These few arbitrary cases obscure the fact that black people have no power in society to discriminate against whites, but are themselves the victims of systematic discrimination. While every black person competes on an unequal footing in the jobs market, the CRE fights for the one white woman who is discriminated against as a result of not applying for a job.

'Black racists'

In the recording of racial incidents the authorities are even keener to maintain the fiction that anyone can be a victim. According to the Metropolitan Police, in London in 1992, fully 22 per cent of the victims of racial incidents were white, while 49 per cent were Asian, 23 per cent Afro-Caribbean and 7 per cent Jewish. Greater Manchester Police reported that 54 per cent of victims of racial harassment were Asian and 27 per cent were white—making white people the second most victimised 'ethnic minority' in the area, ahead of West Indians. Presumably figures for racial attacks against West Indians in the Greater Manchester Police area do not include Leon Patterson, who was killed in their custody in November of that year.

It is only a matter of time before everything is completely turned on its head and black people become the cause of racism. The Home Affairs Committee report cites Oldham police as saying that racist attacks are mainly carried out by 'Asian gangs' (pix). In the same week that the committee released their conclusions *Time Out* magazine reported that Stepney police were 'treating as racist an attack by three Asians on a white man'. In this version of racial violence the odd incident where Asians lash out is equated with the state of siege maintained against blacks by both the police and white racists.

The official definition of racism is now accepted by many who consider themselves anti-racists, but make the mistake of citing police and Home Office race attack figures to support their arguments. Anti-racists urged people in east London to vote Labour in the local elections in May to keep the British National Party out, on the basis of a '300 per cent rise in racist violence' since BNP councillor Derek Beackon was elected. This is the Limehouse police station's figure; the police also said that the biggest section of this 300 per cent increase had been a growth in attacks on white people.

Anti-racists have handed the authorities an invaluable weapon by accepting the police definition of racism. The leader of the Anti-Racist Alliance, Marc Wadsworth wrote recently: 'It is disgusting that a government that claims to be strong on law and order continually refuses to strengthen the criminal code in regard to racist offences.' (*Guardian*, 2 July 1994) Having accepted the definition of racism as a crime just like any other, anti-racists like Wadsworth inevitably end up agreeing that the solution must be more policing. The authorities have no problems if the only pressure they are under is to strengthen law and order.

Now the police figures on the increase in racial violence are being cited to support the strengthening of the government's Criminal Justice Bill—by the Labour Party. Tony Blair says that although he could not support all of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, he could not oppose it either because of the clauses that dealt with racial and sexual harassment.

On the case

Young blacks and Asians will be the first victims of police harassment dished out under the politically correct cover provided by anti-racists. For example, after Quddus Ali was attacked last year anti-racists called for more police on the streets of east London to protect the Bengali community. The increased police presence on the streets resulted in an even greater number of Asian youths being stopped and given producers—demands for their car documents to be taken to a local police station. Although there was already a massive difference between the number of producers that Asians received compared to white car drivers, a survey found that the number increased by 50 per cent after Quddus was attacked (*ELWAR, Police/Asian Relations in the Brick Lane Area of East London*, October 1993).

Anti-racists have provided the candy-coating for proposals to increase police powers. Under these powers, the police in places like east London can regularly harass white youths—now tarred with the 'racist' brush. And, at the same time, they can continue to push around young Asians, this time on the pretext of clamping down on the 'racism' of Asian gangs, too.

Mark Butler is the organiser of Workers Against Racism

Police officers at Limehouse station: part of the problem of racism, not the solution



IN DEFENCE OF

Diego Maradona

'We' could not win the World Cup, since no British team had even qualified for the finals in the USA. So the British media decided to restage the glorious Falklands War instead, with the Argentinian captain Diego Maradona cast in the role of the *Belgrano*, complete with 'Gotcha' headlines.

Maradona was kicked out of the World Cup after failing a drugs test. He was found to have traces of the banned substance, ephedrine, in his bloodstream. He might have taken it to combat a summer virus. He might have taken it to help him shed weight fast before the World Cup finals began. But one thing is for certain, he did not take it to make him play the kind of football with which he has bewitched the world for a decade. They have not invented a drug that can make you play like Maradona. If they had, even England and Scotland could have qualified for the finals with the aid of a corner-shop chemist.

But the British media were not interested in any of that. To them Maradona's expulsion from the tournament proved he was 'Dirty-cheat Diego' (the idea is that you say it fast and it sounds like Dirty cheatin' Dago), and they dragged out every has-been British footballer to kick him when he was down.

Gary Lineker said it was a case of 'good riddance', and Terry Butcher announced that Maradona should never have been allowed to play in the World Cup in the first place, because his previous drug conviction (for taking cocaine, a drug which definitely does not enhance your ball-juggling skills) meant he was setting a terrible example to young fans. Unlike Mr Butcher, who set them such a fine example by head-butting Tunisians on the pitch while playing for England, and revelling in the jolly 'Up-to-our-knees-in-Fenian-blood' culture of Rangers fans when he played in Glasgow.

Of course, the bile displayed by the likes of Lineker and Butcher came purely from their

Eddie Veale kicks off an occasional column that will put the case for some contemporary folk-devils

sense of affronted sportsmanship, and had nothing to do with the fact that these players were part of the England team beaten by Maradona in the quarter final of the 1986 World Cup. He humiliated England in that game, not with the Hand of God, but with the second goal, the dazzling run past half of the team that made the Fenwicks and Butchers of the English defence look like the artless shitkickers they were. Lineker won the Golden Boot in that World Cup by scoring six goals, but nobody outside his native Leicester remembers any of them. The ones Maradona scored against England and Belgium on the way to winning the tournament will live in the memory forever. The Argie-bashing bulldogs of the British press have been waiting for revenge ever since, and they sunk their teeth into Maradona with relish after his 'drug bust'.

Nothing brings out the self-righteous hypocrites like the issue of drugs in sport. The fact is that Maradona has been playing on drugs for most of his career. He has had to pump himself full of the pain-killer cortisone, to enable him to play on with the countless injuries inflicted by the Butchers he found wherever he played—in Argentina, in Spain, in Italy and in World Cup tournaments. There was never any outcry about that because cortisone is legal. Indeed the rich men who held his contracts insisted he take the drugs, because their bank balances needed him on the pitch, regardless of the damage which cortisone can do to the body in later life.

Similar double standards are evident in every discussion of drugs and sport. The authorities and the media load athletes down with demands to win for their country, then treat them like child murderers if they are caught taking the demand to win at all costs seriously and seeking some chemical assistance. And when somebody is found to be carrying traces of some arbitrarily forbidden

substance, another double standard comes into play; how heinous a crime it is considered to be all depends on whose blood sample we are talking about.

As athletic coach Charlie Francis put it, 'It's a pity for Maradona he wasn't British and running in the Olympics'. Francis coached Ben Johnson, who was stripped of his 100m Olympic gold medal in 1988 after failing a drugs test. Britain's Linford Christie also failed a test after finishing third in the same race, but the officials accepted his explanation that he had only taken ginseng tea. As Francis says, 'Linford Christie had traces of the same kind of drug as Maradona in his sample but they didn't send him home. They gave him a silver medal instead of a bronze'.

Predictably, British commentators showed no such sense of perspective. The often sensible Alan Hansen of the BBC even suggested that we should all have known Maradona was high on something more than adrenalin from his wild-eyed response to scoring a goal against Greece in Argentina's opening match of the World Cup. The mind boggles at what British players like Gascoigne, Wright, Beagrie or the entire Wimbledon team must have been taking all these years, judging by what they get up to when they score.

The only homegrown pundit to display any sense on the Maradona question was, amazingly, Jimmy Greaves, the man who once, during the post-Falklands World Cup of 1982, announced that he would not want to see the Argies win a game of tiddlywinks. This time, Greavsie told the *Sun* that he didn't care what Maradona had taken to lose some weight and get fit, his expulsion was a tragedy because the Argentinian was the greatest player of all time. The real criminals were the Fifa officials who had allowed him to be robbed of his fitness and health by thugs in football boots.

Perhaps Greaves' own fall from football grace made him more sympathetic to



Maradona's plight; he lost his place through injury in the World Cup-winning England side of 1966, and subsequently became an alcoholic. But his judgement was coolly sober when he said that he would put the Argentinian ahead even of Pele on the grounds that, unlike the great Brazilian, who played in great teams, Maradona had won the World Cup single-handedly; indeed, said Greaves, if the little man had played for Germany or even England in 1986, then they too would have won the World Cup.

In the end that is the only standard by which to judge a truly great player; not what did they take for their weight, but what did they win for their teams? Maradona not only won the World Cup single-handed (given the infamous weakness of his right foot, he arguably won it on one leg), he also conquered the highest quality league in the world, Italy's Serie A. When he joined Napoli, the club had won nothing in its century-long history. In four years of Maradona, they were twice champions and twice runners-up, and won the Uefa cup for good measure.

The people in British football today cannot relate to a talent like Maradona's. They prefer,

in the words of the dreadful Don Howe, 'well-organised teams like them Belgians'. The record of well-organised British teams speaks for itself. England, despite reaching the World Cup semi-final in 1990, have failed to qualify for three of the last six tournaments. Scotland have made a speciality of qualifying and then being beaten by Costa Rica. Wales have not qualified for almost 40 years. And as for 'our' adopted team, Ireland, which the British media now treats like a national treasure, in the last two World Cups they have played nine games, won one (without the assistance of a penalty shootout) lost three and drawn five, scoring a total of four goals. Argentina, by comparison, won the World Cup in 1978 and 1986, reached the final in 1990, and looked well on the way to repeating that achievement this time around before they were robbed of their captain and inspiration. But never mind, if we can't beat them at football, the Brits can still wipe the floor with them when it comes to the kind of petty, narrow-minded nationalist outburst which can declare that South Korean players all look the same (Alan Parry, ITV), and that Maradona is a disgrace to a game which is played by people like Butcher.

World Cup records

England

1974	failed to qualify
1978	failed to qualify
1982	knocked out second round
1986	quarter finalists (beaten by Argentina)
1990	semi-finalists
1994	failed to qualify

Argentina

1974	semi-final round
1978	winners
1982	knocked out second round
1986	winners
1990	finalists
1994	knocked out second round

British commentators are so blinded by their own prejudices that they really believe everybody else in the world must think like they do. So the gormless Matt Lorenzo could tell ITV viewers that the ousted Maradona would be the subject of popular hatred when he returned to Argentina. In your dreams, mush. Maradona continues to be feted as a hero not just in Argentina, but among the poor everywhere, most of whom interpreted his expulsion from the World Cup as another display of Western contempt towards the third world. Even in Bangladesh, which is not too near to Buenos Aires, there were several days of riots demanding his reinstatement.

Partly because of his own background, and partly, no doubt, as a PR exercise, Maradona has always cultivated his relationship with the poor and the oppressed. In Naples he made himself the champion of the backward south of Italy against the rich north (centred in football terms on AC Milan). When Argentina played the Italians in Naples in the semi-final of the 1990 World Cup, Maradona even appealed to Neapolitans to support his team because 'What has Italy ever done for you?'

Maradona has incurred the wrath of no less a bigot than the Pope, because every time His Holiness makes a speech about helping the poor, Maradona demands that the Vatican should give them its own vast wealth. And he has often fallen foul of the Argentinian oligarchy. When he arrived in the USA for the World Cup, Maradona said that, first, he was glad to be in a country where they played football with their hands as well as their feet, and second that he had a message for Argentina's president Carlos Menem: 'Instead of swanning around here and boasting to everybody that we are going to win the World Cup, he should think of the poor people at home, on the streets and without jobs.' Or, as Maradona might say if he were a British player, 'It's a world of two halves, Brian'.

TV's kissing lesbians leave Jennie Bristow cold

Lesbian



God, I can't stand another lesbian sex scene', exclaimed my mother as we were watching the omnibus edition of *EastEnders*. I could see her point. The day before we had seen Beth and Chris snogging outside the nightclub in *Brookside*. Now we were being subjected to Della and Binnie having surreptitious sex in the Queen Vic. All we need now is for Phoebe and Gaby to get it together in *Neighbours*.

Lesbian chic has become the fashion statement of the nineties. From the Madonna/Sandra Bernhard affair to the *Vanity Fair* cover of Cindy Crawford shaving kd Lang, from best-selling novels like *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* to Anna Friel's fame as *Brookside*'s nubile lesbian, dykes and their life stories are everywhere in the media. But while I'm all in favour of having more gay sex on television, I can't agree with the idea that this new approach to lesbianism shows that gays are finally becoming accepted. Not only do the media lesbians have little to do with real dykes, but there is nothing positive about any of these images.

All the trendy media lesbians have three things in common: they don't look like dykes, they don't act like dykes and they all have problems with being dykes. The *Sunday Times* pretty much summed it up when it referred to the era of the 'lipstick lesbian', with the traditional

Beth and Margaret's school-girl crush was as chaste as a story in the *Bunty*—but it was still censored

image of the butch, sex-hungry dyke with pierced nipples giving way to a more sensitive, feminine image of the modern lesbian.

Beth in *Brookside* is the model lipstick lesbian: a young, pretty girl abused by her father and mistreated by her boyfriend who finds a new female best friend to share her most intimate secrets. It's enough to make the nicest of girls-next-door turn to women. She can't help being lesbian, the scriptwriters seem to be saying, and only old bigots like David 'Bing' Crosby or hysterical parents like Mandy Jordache could disapprove.

Lesbians are trendy—but only up to a point. A lesbian snog—whether in *Brookside*, *EastEnders*, *Roseanne* or *LA Law*—is good for the ratings. But, while the soaps might try to pull in the punters with a bit of titillation and controversy, they are only allowed to go as far as suggestive dressing gown scenes and fully-clothed cuddles. Even Beth and Margaret's first kiss on *Brookside* was censored for the omnibus edition, apparently because more young people watch it. Imagine the censor's reactions if Beth had shaved her head, or actually had sex, or if it had been two men having an affair.

The lipstick lesbian is a fantasy figure. In *Brookside* and *EastEnders*, the relationships of Beth and Della are presented like other teenage love affairs of which

others disapprove. The emotional consequences of young love are sketched in detail. The social problems of lesbian relationships are never discussed.

But in reality lesbians are different. It does not really matter what you look like, or how normal you appear on the surface, lesbians today are no more acceptable than they have ever been. When Jean Crosby in *Brookside* admitted that her best friend had been expelled from nursing college nearly 30 years ago for being gay, the implication was that things are different today. But when it comes to real, everyday issues like applying for a job, fighting a child custody case or even walking down the street with your girlfriend, lesbians are still treated differently from straight women.

Casual anti-gay prejudice is as widespread as ever in the media. Just listen to the nudge-nudge, wink-wink comments about Brazilian footballers holding hands before World Cup matches, or the innuendo about Jason Donovan or Michael Jackson. The fact that Richard Gere and Cindy Crawford had to spend £20 000 taking out ads in national newspapers to 'prove' their heterosexuality shows just how problematic it is to be seen as gay in real life, however many 'positive' images of lesbian lovers there are on TV.

Lipstick lesbians are not just fantasies, they are reactionary fantasies. What is common to all these relationships is that they are so studiously

cheek

conventional. These are lesbians who conform to traditional family values. In contrast to the bed-hopping, unfaithful men in the soaps, the lesbian characters are generally monogamous, deeply in love with their partners and would never dream of screwing around. The old image of lesbians, which turned accepted ideas of femininity and respectability upside down, has been replaced by a culture of normality. In this sense the portrayal of the lipstick lesbians is entirely in keeping with the puritan culture that now pervades popular entertainment. It goes hand in hand with the censorship of video nasties, the toning down of sex and violence in soaps, and the promotion of wholesome values.

What the soaps give us is the PC version of 'Back to basics' with a bit of titillation thrown in. As *Mizz* magazine's *Guide to Love, Life and Sex* puts it, 'Lesbians are like everyone else' and 'the most important thing is to have loving and fulfilling relationships with someone—whether that someone is a boy or a girl'.

The portrayal of the gay relationship in the hit film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* shows this well. For a change two gay men rather than lesbians are involved. But they are not simply gay, they are rather more conventional than all of their straight friends. As one of their friends remarks after the funeral, they were married all along without anyone realising it. ●

Meanwhile, in Manchester...

The Mineshaft is a men-only bar in Rockies, a popular night club in Manchester's 'gay village'. In recent months it seems to have become as popular with the police as with clubbers. In the early hours of Sunday morning, on 24 April, two uniformed policemen walked into the club. Twenty or so other officers, who had been mingling with the clubbers on the dancefloor, suddenly announced their presence by turning on the lights, donning police armbands and arresting many of those present.

Using rigid clamps they handcuffed men to each other and manhandled them through the fire escape into police vans. Some were arrested for kissing, some for abusing the police as they took others away. Many were not even given the chance to fasten their clothing. The men were paraded in their underwear through the public areas of Bootle St Station. Nine were persuaded to accept cautions for gross indecency, two were charged.

The police attack on Rockies is part of a persistent campaign to censor and drive homosexuality underground in Manchester. Typical is the story of the man who was stopped in the street as he walked from one gay pub to another. The police told him that they were looking for a man in blue denims and a leather jacket! They searched his jacket and, finding a UB40 belonging to his friend, arrested him for theft of government property.

Gay club owners face constant harassment. The owners of Equinox and Mineshaft have been accused, under a 1751 law, of 'running disorderly houses'. The Gaslight—Oldham's only gay club—has had its licence challenged.

But the most outrageous piece of police action concerns a clampdown on gays visiting a local beauty spot, Worsley Woods, in Eccles. Greater Manchester Police traced people who had visited the woods through their car number plates. Each one was sent a letter, signed by Superintendent Arthur Reid, which warned that 'the picturesque area of Worsley Woods and Bridgewater Canal is being frequented by men engaging in overt and unlawful anti-social/homosexual behaviour'. The letter asks for help in an 'intelligence-gathering operation' to 'combat this problem'. Manchester's beauty spots, apparently, are only for use by heterosexuals—preferably ones prepared to act as police informers.

Mick Spencer



NAKED, 1988

Pee Wee Koons

Jeff Koons has become a parody of himself,
says James Heartfield

What if there was no depth, if beyond the surface there was just more surface? Someone once said of Doris Day that if you took her bra off, what you would find is another bra. In Jeff Koons' world superficiality is grand. His retrospective exhibition at London's Anthony D'Offay Gallery is a hymn to everything kitsch.

Koons' stainless steel JB Turner Train looks as if it is chromium plated, and it is filled with Jim Beam bourbon. Its shiny surface and choo-choo chunkiness is characteristic of the child-like, cutesy imagery of Koons' work.

Years ago Pee Wee Herman was a very adult alternative comedy act whose laughs depended upon the tension between his child-like persona and his obscene behaviour. Koons is a bit like Pee Wee. One of the earlier prints is a self-portrait as a teacher, with a sickly grin and rows of beautiful 10-year olds, that looks very like Pee Wee. Only the lessons on the blackboard 'Banality as saviour' and 'Exploit the masses' tell us that this is not an advertisement for the Moral Majority, but a sardonic attack on it.

Over time Pee Wee Herman honed his act into an ever more precise parody

of a children's entertainer, until one day he turned into the thing he was parodying. He got a children's show on TV and made some excruciatingly bad films—well-observed, but ultimately unwatchable.

Koons, too, is often on the verge of dissolving his work into the object of his parodies. Some of the porcelain animals are so close to the My Little Pony aesthetic that only the scale tells you that it is a joke. And that is when his work is at its best, giddily tottering on the edge of the kitsch world it refers to, as with his porcelain John the Baptist.

One thing that always kept Koons firmly within the realm of the sardonic was his marriage to Ilona Staller (better known as La Ciccolina), the Italian porn actress turned Radical Party deputy who protested against censorship by taking her seat in parliament topless—a sort of 'Get your tits out for the deputies' protest. Unlike Doris Day, La Ciccolina wore her nudity as if it were a uniform.

Koons produced scores of portraits of his wife and muse in the eighties, usually in some studio pastiche of a rural scene, dressed like Little Bo Peep or Miss Muffet, except of course that her pose was pornographically explicit. But eventually Koons and La Ciccolina split. She accused him of wanting her to stay at home, like Phil Spector's treatment of his wife Ronnie. In this exhibition all reference to La Ciccolina has been pointedly excised.

Without La Ciccolina to keep him off the straight and narrow, Koons wanders inexorably towards the oblivion of a parody so precise that it is not even parody any more. Koons' perennial capacity to descend into kitsch can be seen in one chillingly glazed porcelain of a boy and girl—life-size, but with twee smiles like those polio-crippled models of girls with the slot in the head that you used to drop your penny in outside the newsagent.

The two are naked and he is handing her a bunch of flowers. But their sexual organs are too well defined, like those anatomically correct dolls that social workers frighten kids with, and the orchid the boy is handing the girl is too flushed red not to indicate sexual desire. The tension is like a Robert Crumb comic. The rendition is childish but the meaning is obscene—doubly so because of the way it sexualises the child.

In fact it is Pee Wee Herman's old joke. Poor Pee Wee. A year or so ago he was taking some time out from the ever-more demanding role he had invented for himself, in a pornographic cinema showing some busty models in school-girl uniforms. While enjoying a quiet wank Pee Wee was arrested and charged with indecency. All over America sponsors demanded that the Pee Wee Herman show be dropped. They did not even know that he was joking.



The end of history (rpt)

The world has stopped changing. Nothing demonstrates the truth of this more clearly than the fact that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Investiture of the Prince of Wales was marked by a week of hot media discussion culminating in a primetime splash on the commercial channel, while that of the lunar landings was celebrated with an erudite little piece on BBC2.

The nature and duties of the heir to the throne were discussed with jugular urgency. The Apollo missions were of entirely historical interest. It was different at the time. Time and again, throughout the BBC2 documentaries, presidents, intellectuals and astronauts confidently asserted that the Moon landings were not merely historic, but were in some sense History itself. They redefined the purpose and direction of humanity. We were living in the Space Age as incontestably as our ancestors had lived in the Bronze or the Iron Ages. Now the landing on the Moon seems an aberration. Like the building of the pyramids it is obviously impressive but slightly daft. A fad. They might just as well have called it the Stylophone Age. Armstrong's 'giant leap for Mankind' was seen as the moment that divided the past forever from the present. In fact, I discovered that my six-year old was not aware that it had ever happened, though he can do a passable Cary Grant and name all the martyrs of Easter 1916.

Of course, things have changed. Who could have predicted Pot Noodles, for instance? Some very dodgy predictions came true and some reasonable requests didn't. I grew up in a culture built on two different millenarian creeds—Catholicism and Marxism. Catholics awaited the Kingdom but in the meantime they prayed for the conversions of Russia and England. This was plainly nuts. Marxism predicted the beginning of history. This was plainly science. As a Marxist, I'm still waiting; if Lady Di does make the move to Rome though, Our Lady will indeed get her dowry. It just goes to show. Pope Paul VI kept popping up in the Apollo story, blessing things. Everyone laughed when he said The Beatles were crap but he was right about that too.

Of course some things have changed beyond recognition. I am writing this in bed on an Apple Powerbook which fits nicely on my knee but which is probably every bit as powerful as the hangar-sized computers at Mission Control. The thing that is really surprising, however, is not the innovations, but the survivals. Some are welcome and understandable—*Roadrunner* and Rolf Harris. Others are an indictment of all of us—hunger and homelessness. Some are just bizarre—Eric Clapton, for instance, or the works of EM Forster. A sixties computer expert might have predicted my Powerbook or the smart card, but even his own mother would not have bet on Bob Monkhouse still being around.

Bob's appearance on BBC2's *Room 101* provides us with a handy map of *fin-de-siecle* attitudes to the past and the future. The title comes of course from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 101 being the room in which Winston Smith experiences the rodent face pack. The phrase encapsulates our fear of the future. The format of the programme allows

celebrities to list their pet hates. Bob's included Elvis, Cilla and the French. There was a time when iconoclasm was reserved for those with something new to say. But here we were watching one sacred cow slaughtering a few others, a point that Bob underlined by adding his own *Golden Shot* to the list. At the end of the century, aggressive new television is made by chopping up old television.

Bob Monkhouse has relaunched himself recently. Quality columnists have done a Benny Hill on him (and by the way, who would have predicted that in the Age of Information newspapers would be written almost entirely by people who know absolutely nothing—columnists). Bob is now a neglected genius. The thing that made the difference here was not the sparkling performance he put in on *Have I Got News For You?*, but the hints of unspoken heartbreak he managed to drop on *In The Psychiatrist's Chair*. Here Bob laid claim to the pole position of modern rhetoric—that of the victim. Dimpleby's documentary on the Prince of Wales performed the same manoeuvre. OK, it said, he's one of the richest men in the world, he's not too bright and he doesn't do

much but he's suffering. This was enough for 80 per cent of English people.

A look at Fraser's *Golden Bough* will tell you that suffering has always been a component of heroism, but didn't there used to be dragon-slaying too? Our obsession with the victim-thing showed up most clearly in the Apollo documentaries. Here was a group of people who had been to the Moon. I'll say that again.

They had walked on the Moon. Did we

want to know how that felt? Or how it was achieved? Or what good it did? No, we wanted to know how they coped with the anti-climax, with the stress on their marriages, with the perils of celebrity. Astronauts were victims too! The Oprahisation of the Western world is now complete.

I remember a competition that *Blue Peter* ran during Investiture year. We were all supposed to predict what kind of world we would be living in when Charles became king. One of the winning ideas was Sea City—a floating settlement that would put an end to homelessness without encroaching on the green belt. Twenty-five years on, it is not the technology that seems laughable, but the Utopian sense of purpose, the confidence in humanity. One of the most surprising and depressing moments in the Apollo story was footage of a 'protest mule train'—thousands of black activists showed up at the gates of Nasa to protest about world hunger. It seemed unimaginable that such a group should concern itself with, and feel equal to addressing a global problem. Like Welsh miners striking for 'Arms for Spain'. There was a time when ordinary people believed they had a stake in History. Now they are being told that there is no such thing as History.

Every era tends to select an epoch from the past and use it as an idealistic and imaginative landmark. In the Renaissance it was Periclean Athens. For the Victorians it was the high Middle Ages. For us, it seems to be the Cretaceous and Jurassic periods. We see ourselves in terms of the dinosaurs—big, pointless, over-consumers; sad, colossal victims who really belong in the nursery.

The Oprahisation of the Western world is now complete

Wystan Massey on the surreal world
of Iain M Banks

A Feersum Imadjinayshun

I met Iain M Banks in the lobby of the Berner's Park Plaza Hotel. I had come armed with his latest best-seller, *Feersum Endjinn*, already signed by the author a few days before in a book shop in Islington. I'm a fan.

In *Feersum Endjinn* Banks has created the most extravagant science fiction novel this decade, using some familiar Banks devices such as overlapping multi-narratives—'it keeps people interested', he says—and new ones such as phonetically written narrative—'Bascule, he sed, u r so fik sometimes'. It is a fast-paced, stylishly written, funny, surreal and sometimes shocking story—a general description that in my opinion can be given to most of his writing.

Iain Banks has published 12 novels and a collection of short stories in 12 years. And don't be confused, Iain M Banks (SF writer) and Iain Banks (mainstream novelist) are one and the same. The 'M' stands for Menzies (or Mingis in his native Scotland), and he insists it is not meant as an ironic snipe at Philip K Dick, Ursula K LeGuin or Arthur C Clarke.

I have been hooked, along with countless others, ever since reading his first novel, *The Wasp Factory*. A novel which revolved around the life of a sexually ambiguous child called Frank who murders other children, has a mysterious brother who sets fire to dogs and who tortures animals, it was bound to provoke an exaggerated reply from the moralists of the eighties and so sell a lot.

'*The Wasp Factory* was accused very much of being the literary equivalent of a video nasty', says Banks, 'and yet people would come up at SF conventions and say, I read *The Wasp Factory*, quite liked it but I kept waiting for the really nasty bits...so I think the controversy was a bit exaggerated'.

A writer noted for his substance as well as stylistic skill, Banks admits that he consciously sets out to break taboos. In these conservative times he has no shortage of material and it is no surprise that there is speculation as to whether it is autobiographical. In *Walking on Glass*,

for example, he deals with incest in typically in-ye-face fashion, because, Banks says, 'it is a taboo', but adds that 'being an only child I never had much opportunity for it myself and I didn't fancy my mother or my father'.

In another recent book, *Complicity*, to be released in paperback in September, Banks has as the central story a serial murderer with a penchant for torturing establishment figures. A personal fantasy?

'In a not particularly enlightening sense, yes', says Banks. 'I'm against the death penalty, but at the same time it was very cathartic for me to write about somebody doing all these horrible things to these, you know, bastards. If I didn't get it out of my system by writing about it I'd start probably torturing hamsters and rabbits, work my way up through killing cousins and end up trying to do horrible things to judges and cabinet ministers. But I'd probably be so incompetent I'd get caught.' Shame.

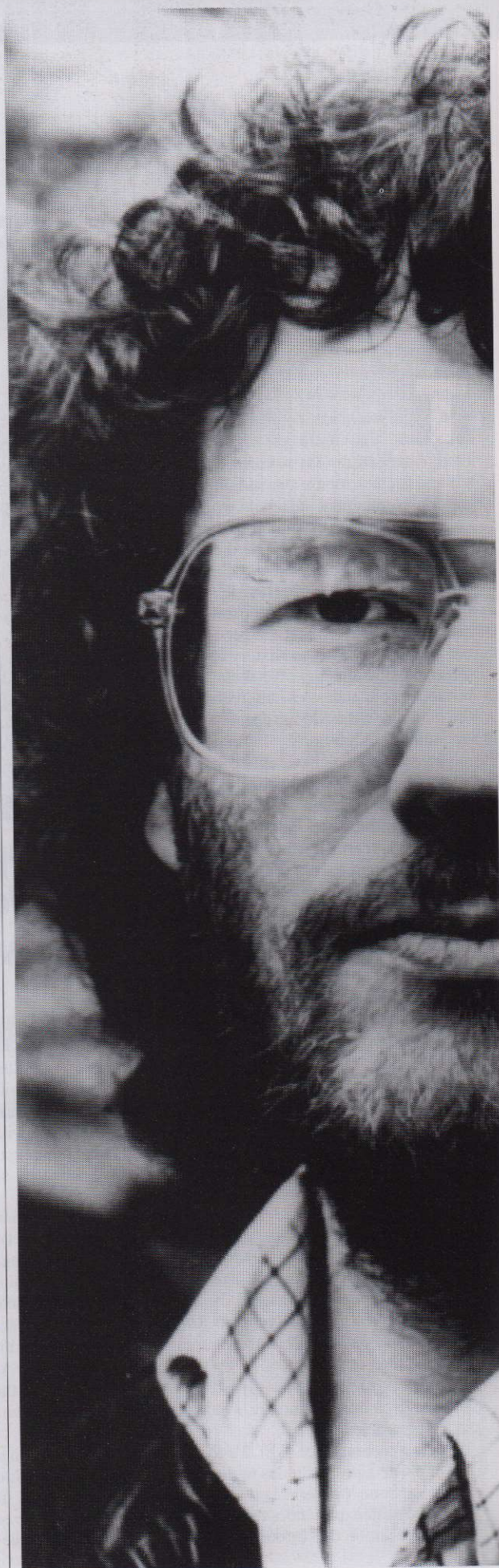
A sense of darkness prevails in most of his work and particularly in his use of symbolism. Crows—'mean little bastards'—feature frequently, for instance. His explanation is simple: 'When the world stops being dark, I'll stop writing dark stuff.'

And yet in *Feersum Endjinn*, the landscape of which is dominated by a space elevator, Banks is unfashionably optimistic about technology. 'I think it is very silly and short-sighted to be human and not to be optimistic about it', says Banks. 'We can't really turn our back on technology, technology is as much an expression of our personality as a species as our art is. You can't turn your back on it. Radical greens and people who think like that—I just think they're mad.'

Banks is a rarity, a writer who has achieved serious critical acclaim and who believes in something and is still hopeful about the possibilities opened up by human endeavour.

Feersum Endjinn, published by Orbit, 1994, £15.99 hbk

Complicity, published by Little Brown & Company, 1993, £15.99 hbk



THE MARXIST REVIEW OF BOOKS

Mick Kennedy examines the latest thinking on the Irish War

Paths to peace?

Northern Ireland: Sharing Authority, Brendan O'Leary, Tom Lyne, Jim Marshall, Bob Rowthorn, Institute for Public Policy Research, £9.95pbk

Heresy: The Battle of Ideas in Modern Ireland, Desmond Fennell, Blackstaff Press, £9.95pbk

The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin, 1985 to Today, Brendan O'Brien, O'Brien Press, £18.95hbk

War and Peace in Ireland: Britain and the IRA in the New World Order, Mark Ryan, Pluto Press, £8.95pbk, £27.50hbk

The apparently unending cycle of violence in Northern Ireland has provoked two distinct responses among the chattering classes on both sides of the Irish Sea. For those of a gloomy and world-weary disposition, each new atrocity provokes another despairing shrug. Such events merely confirm their conviction that the conflict is too complicated to comprehend and the protagonists too gripped by atavistic prejudices as to be beyond reconciliation.

Those of a more earnest spirit retain some faith in the possibility of human intervention, particularly when guided by the potentially beneficent British state. They put their hopes in the latest 'solution' to be advanced by some forum, commission or think-tank that offers to 'bring the two sides together' and advance the cause of peace. The very impracticability of the solutions advanced by the latter camp serves to reinforce the fatalism of the former, ensuring that, over the past 25 years, it has attracted a growing following.

'Sharing authority'—the solution advanced by the Labour-aligned Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)—is the latest in a long series of schemes for resolving the Northern Ireland conflict. The IPPR book prescribes in detail a constitutional framework through which the British and Irish governments and the people of Northern Ireland could share authority, responsibility and power in the troubled region. Because of the insight this book offers into the outlook of British liberal opinion, its proposals are worthy of more detailed consideration than they have generally received.

The 'apex of shared authority' would be the 'Shared Authority Council of Northern Ireland', consisting of five members, one each appointed by the London and Dublin governments and three elected within Northern Ireland.

At the pinnacle of the apex, the British monarch and the Irish president would jointly preside as titular heads of state. A proposed 'Assembly of the Peoples of Northern Ireland', elected by proportional representation, would have only advisory powers in relation to the Shared Authority Council which is described as 'an executive with legislative capacities'. The authors describe their model as a 'democratised and autonomous condominium', and say that the 'democratic structures of the proposed condominium include a collective executive, a separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers, and a system of checks and balances' (p23). This is all very well, but one elementary democratic principle which this scheme violates is that of majority rule.

The very existence of the six-county state of Northern Ireland is predicated on the subordination of Ireland's nationalist majority to the Unionist minority through the partition of the country. Furthermore, two out of five members of the proposed executive council are to be appointed by external state authorities, drastically curtailing the representation of local people. The only democratic feature is the proposed assembly, which at least purports to represent everybody within the undemocratic framework established by partition, but which has no powers at all.

The authors claim that the 'autonomous nature of the condominium is reflected in its capacity for self-government and its capacity to obtain more autonomy with the broad consent of its peoples' (p23). In reality, the condition for the success of any such constitution, as the authors go on to acknowledge, would be its capacity to 'protect the civil, individual and cultural rights of all the citizens of Northern Ireland' (p38). To achieve this they propose a Bill of Rights and other measures for 'the ►

protection of fundamental freedoms'. But how could such anti-discriminatory measures be enforced in a society in which sectarian discrimination in all spheres of social life is endemic? Clearly this could only be achieved through an even more authoritarian state than the one which currently rules there.

Such a state would be autonomous only of the people of Northern Ireland as all its coercive powers would depend on the external authority of the British state. A state which is based on the denial of the democratic rights of nationalists, yet attempts to use its executive powers to curb Unionist discrimination, is unlikely to win the broad consent of many of its 'peoples'.

A condominium of Northern Ireland would mean 'the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland' acting as 'the external co-sovereigns of the region'. However alluring the spectre of the joint monarchy of Queens Elizabeth Windsor and Mary Robinson might be to drag artists everywhere, the implied symmetry between the state of the British Empire and that of its Dublin stooges is an absurdity. However degenerate its ruling elite, the British state continues to administer the affairs of a major imperialist power—within territories which already include 'Northern Ireland'.

The Dublin government was sponsored by the British authorities at the time of the partition of Ireland between North and South as an expedient for containing a troublesome colonial revolt. Why the British establishment and its monarch should suddenly wish to share authority within territories over which they have presided for centuries with this tawdry regime is never explained. Why the people of Northern Ireland should want to put up with Mary Robinson, Albert Reynolds and Sinead O'Connor as well as the Queen, Patrick Mayhew and Frank Carson is another mystery.

Though the first chapter of *Sharing Authority* is entitled 'The need for fresh thought', the authors discreetly concede that 'sharing authority' is not exactly a new idea

The key features of the 'shared authority' plan, common to numerous such schemes over the years, are its anti-democratic, elitist and pro-imperialist character. Though it proclaims a progressive purpose, it implicitly denies the democratic aspirations of the majority of the Irish people to national independence and unity. This particular scheme even curtails the democratic rights of the Northern minority. It assumes that enlightened intellectuals backed by the authority of the state should 'empower' ordinary people, rather than the democratic principle that people should participate in administering their own affairs. It accepts the right of the British state—monarchy and all—to interfere in the affairs of the Irish people.

Though the first chapter of the IPPR book is entitled 'The need for fresh thought', the authors discreetly concede that 'sharing authority' is not exactly a new idea. Indeed they later provide a list of 'independent academics and thinkers' who have at one time or another advocated some such scheme (p51). This list includes a passing reference to Desmond Fennell, whose own recent collection

of essays, *Heresy: The Battle of Ideas in Modern Ireland*, includes an account of his proposals for resolving the Northern problem over the past 25 years. Fennell, who first recommended a 'condominium' in 1971 and 'joint sovereignty' in 1972, is understandably miffed at the way his proposals have been taken over by others who have failed to give their author the recognition he feels he deserves.

Fennell can certainly claim an impressive record in peddling plans for constitutional solutions to the Northern conflict. In 1971 he advised Sinn Féin on its Eire Nua programme which proposed a federal Ireland acknowledging Ulster's Unionist identity. The following year he helped to frame the SDLP's plans for 'joint sovereignty'. In 1975 he endorsed Loyalist paramilitary plans for an 'independent Ulster'. Two decades later, Fennell still seems to believe that the solution to the war lies in finding the right constitutional framework. His current formula is 'territorial power-sharing and two-tier devolution', yet another variation on the old theme.

For Fennell the main defect of intellectual life in Ireland over recent decades is its failure to give due acknowledgement to the contribution of one Desmond Fennell

Mercifully silent on the role of the monarchy, Fennell favours three administrative councils—one in the Western regions (Catholic/nationalist), one in the East (Protestant/Unionist), and one in Belfast (split). While Fennell recommends that each council should have its own police force, it is clear that to do anything much more than existing local councils, which merely collect rubbish and bury the plentiful dead, full Army support would be required. It is richly ironic that the condition for the success of all such schemes—the continuing military occupation of Ireland by Britain—is really at the root of the problem.

For Fennell the main defect of intellectual life in Ireland over recent decades is its failure to give due acknowledgement to the contribution of one Desmond Fennell. In fact, for all his childlike ego centrism, Fennell has a point. In 'Getting to know Dublin 4' he excoriates the new Irish cultural elite, which postures as liberal and progressive, but is in reality reactionary and provincial, only a 'superficially modernising movement'. It disguises its acquiescence to the Anglo-Irish status quo through its repudiation of the nationalist tradition and exhibits an embittered intolerance towards those, such as Desmond Fennell, who question its project.

In response to the dogmatic fundamentalists of Dublin 4, whom he lampoons as a 'confraternity of the well-catechised', Fennell fights a rearguard action for traditional nationalism and what he calls 'liberal democratic Catholicism'. Though this is clearly a futile project, he accurately identifies the crisis of Irish national identity which is both expressed and exacerbated by the new elite. This 'severe crisis of identity' has followed 'since we abandoned the satisfactory national self-definition of the first half of the twentieth century and put Muzak in its place'. Dublin 4 is 'the balloon filled with Ireland's collective emptiness'. For this polemic—and for his per-

ceptive essay on the poet Seamus Heaney, 'Whatever you say, say nothing'—Fennell's idiosyncratic collection is good value.

The great merit of *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin 1985 to Today*, Brendan O'Brien's study of the current state of Irish republicanism, is that he focuses on the movement that has emerged over the past 25 years as the leading force in resistance to British rule. As a television journalist with the Dublin-based RTE, O'Brien has good contacts in the North and he is true to his aim of providing an 'honest, objective and fair account' of the process that is leading Sinn Féin leaders inexorably to the conference table. He notes that 'by the late eighties, it was clear to both sides that, while the IRA could not be beaten, they could be contained' (p158). In the early nineties, in response to military setbacks and electoral stagnation, he discerns a tendency to scale down objectives. Instead of insisting on British withdrawal, republican leaders appeared to be willing to settle for a place for Sinn Féin at talks: 'They indicated a willingness to take "risks" and be "flexible"'. These were signals of compromise.' (p199)

At the 1992 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis (national conference) in Dublin the signals pointing towards a shift of policy were unmistakable. By contrast with earlier gatherings, this conference played down the armed struggle, emphasising the need to appease the Unionists, and curry favour with the Dublin government and the SDLP, and appealed to international agencies such as the UN and the EC to endorse republican aspirations.

'In essence', O'Brien concludes, 'the republican movement was paving the way for an accommodation of sorts with constitutional nationalism' (p229). The lame riposte from *An Phoblacht/Republican News* in its review of O'Brien—'this is way off the mark' (an assertion never substantiated)—tends to confirm the accuracy of his judgement (27 January 1994).

Ryan's book is the most important work on the Irish question and its wider significance to have appeared for years

O'Brien provides a detailed account of recent events, enlivened by interviews with key players, including republicans, Loyalists, senior RUC officers, politicians and many more. As a journalistic account, evidently published in haste to keep abreast of the accelerating 'peace process' that culminated in the December 1993 Downing Street declaration, it lacks much analysis of the shift in republican policy, as well as neglecting the wider forces influencing this shift, from Britain and further afield.

For an account of the Irish peace process that puts it in an international context, as well as considering its Anglo-Irish and internal Irish (North and South) dimensions, it is necessary to turn to Mark Ryan's new book, *War and Peace in Ireland*. This too has been rushed out in response to the Downing Street declaration, a notable authorial and publishing achievement. Ryan's book is the most important work on the Irish question and its wider significance to have appeared for years and it deserves a wide readership on both sides of the Irish Sea. Though it may have been produced rapidly, it reveals a deep famil-

ilarity with the subject and is evidently the product not only of prolonged study, but of political engagement.

The link between the Irish conflict and the New World Order contained in the subtitle may surprise many who are accustomed to viewing Anglo-Irish relations in isolation from wider trends. Ryan recalls the historic significance of the Irish question in the politics of Britain, and discusses the changing role of nationalist movements since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the new confidence of Western powers in interfering in their former (or in Ireland's case, continuing) colonies. This provides the framework for a critique of the Irish republican movement, which begins from a respect for its heroic resilience in defying the forces of the British empire, but recognises the exhaustion of its political project.

Recent events in the North provide powerful vindication of Ryan's thesis that the peace process is simply the continuation of war in another form

While acknowledging the dynamic towards some sort of 'settlement' in Ireland, along the lines of South Africa or Palestine, Ryan challenges the prevailing consensus that any such process will bring peace. He surveys developments in Ireland, North and South, and in Britain, to indicate the potentially destabilising character of the process which was triggered by Sinn Féin's increasingly conciliatory approaches towards Britain, advanced through various diplomatic and political initiatives, and given a substantial public boost through the Downing Street declaration. Recent events in the North—the upsurge in Loyalist sectarian assassinations and signs of nationalist retaliation—provide powerful vindication of Ryan's thesis that the peace process is simply the continuation of war in another form.

One of the strongest chapters in Ryan's book is his appraisal of the 'pluralist' political culture of the Dublin elite. Whereas Fennell is inclined to retreat into nostalgia for the Ireland of Yeats, Connolly and George Russell, Ryan keeps his feet in today's Ireland. While contemporary commentators regard the peace process as enhancing the new, supposedly post-colonial Irish national identity, Ryan points to the disintegrative forces at work below the surface of the Irish Free State. Albert Reynolds will need more than Jack Charlton to provide the cohesion that this inherently unstable society desperately needs.

In his last chapter, Ryan looks at the dangers to the British state of John Major's desperate attempt to pull off a solution to the long-running Irish War. Attempting to win a temporary boost in the opinion polls for the Conservative Party at the expense of putting in question the integrity of the United Kingdom makes the short-termism of the Thatcher-Lawson boom seem visionary.

Most books on the Irish War put forward solutions without understanding the nature of the problem. This one begins to ask some of the questions that need to be addressed by anybody concerned with the cause of democracy and freedom in Ireland given the new balance of forces resulting from a particularly unfavourable convergence of domestic and international forces. This is an important contribution to addressing these challenges.

Only Words, Catharine A MacKinnon,
Harper Collins, £9.95 hbk

Catharine MacKinnon shows that feminism is at the forefront of reaction today. A respected and influential American legal scholar, MacKinnon is a leading anti-pornography campaigner. A legal brief drafted by MacKinnon was the basis for the Canadian supreme court's anti-pornography law, which has been used to censor gay and lesbian magazines as well as other publications. She is also one of the leaders of an international campaign which falsely accuses the Serbs of running 'rape camps' in Bosnia, to which end MacKinnon is pursuing a civil case against Serbian leaders. Where once the 'women's perspective' that feminists aspired to was supposed to be innately nurturing and peaceable, today's feminists are not embarrassed to be at the cutting edge of puritanical censorship and militaristic sabre-rattling.

Only Words presents MacKinnon's case against pornography. Much of it is based on what's been heard before—men are unthinking creatures who are compelled to attack women if they see pictures of them naked—only that MacKinnon's version is even cruder. The message of pornography, says MacKinnon, is addressed 'directly to the penis, delivered through an erection, and taken out on women in the real world'. This is 'nearly a universal conditioned male reaction'. 'Nearly', I suppose, because one male, her partner, the controversial psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson, is beyond all that, and thus immune to it (or maybe she just prevents him from seeing the stuff).

MacKinnon's only innovation to the anti-porn argument is to say that pornography itself is a type of rape. To her, pornography is a form of speech which simultaneously acts—there can be no distinction between the two. 'To say it is to do it, and to do it is to say it.'

This equation is ridiculous. Photographs themselves are simply forms of representation. Her account obliterated the distinction that exists between words and acts. In America Carlin Romano made this basic point in a provocative way in his review of *Only Words* in the *Nation*. His review begins 'Suppose I decide to rape Catherine MacKinnon before reviewing her book.' He then sets out a hypothetical situation in which he is arrested for his thought experiment. MacKinnon said the review was 'a public rape'. Romano replied: 'She's gone from saying pornography is rape to saying book reviewing is rape. Catharine MacKinnon's mind is one long slippery slope.'

Whatever your view of pornography, MacKinnon's anti-pornography campaign has one central message: the state must act to restrain the 'abuse' of liberty. Indeed, it would be wrong to see MacKinnon's arguments as exclusively about the pornography issue. On a range of topics, she believes the state should repress in order to remedy inequality in society. In *Only Words* she calls on the state to ban traditional school textbooks and racist far-right groups. In her view, it is one thing for the state to prevent the powerless from speaking, as was the case of the repression of communists during fifties' McCarthyism. But it is altogether different, she argues, if the state intervenes on behalf of the powerless to ensure that

they are not silenced by powerful interests and to bring about equality.

Despite its progressive-sounding aim, MacKinnon's brand of censorship is just as reactionary as any other. She presupposes a dichotomy between a nasty society and a benign state which does not exist. The body which MacKinnon wishes to endow with more powers of repression is the same one which is the main force for inequality in society. The state ensures the workings of a market system which, without necessarily requiring the assistance of specific discriminatory laws, puts women, among others, in inferior positions.

If the state is given the power to decide what is and is not politically acceptable, it will use that power to suit its purposes. MacKinnon calls this fact of life the 'slippery slope' argument. In *Only Words*, MacKinnon notes with some satisfaction that the Canadian supreme court did not even consider the slippery slope in 1992 when it accepted the legal brief submitted by herself and the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund. Of course, the slippery slope was pretty steep and slick, and the law ended up being used not only against gay and lesbian magazines, but even against the books of her fellow anti-pornography crusader, Andrea Dworkin (see 'Canada's PC censors', *Living Marxism*, March 1994).

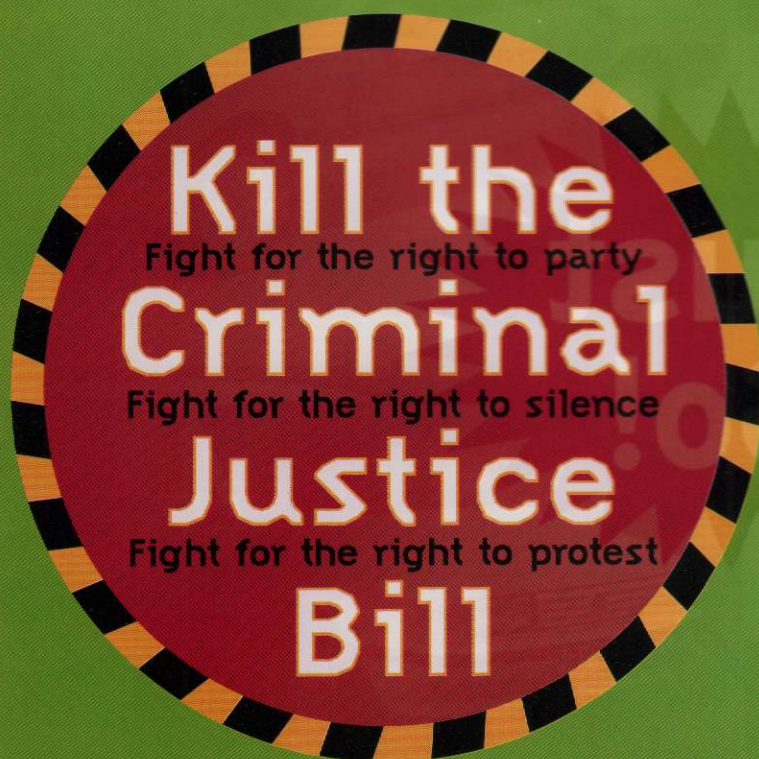
The Canadian case is not the only example of feminists providing the state with an excuse for taking on greater powers. To prevent American anti-abortion protests, some of which have been violent, the National Organisation for Women filed a suit against the Pro-Life Action League. This resulted in the US supreme court ruling in January that abortion protesters can be sued under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations Act (RICO), which was introduced in 1970 to stop organised crime. The ruling sets a precedent for restricting protest by any group, and for holding the leaders of organisations responsible for members' activities.

You would have thought that feminists in this country would have welcomed MacKinnon as a sister with the same agenda, but she got a cool reception when she was here in June to promote her book. The consensus from the roundtable discussions and weekend newspaper profiles was that MacKinnon was too extreme. It is true that MacKinnon can appear to be a bit mad. She often refused to answer straightforward questions, dismissing them as aggressive male behaviour. On the David Frost show she said point-blank that Canadian censorship of gay material was untrue.

But what the British feminists really minded was that she is American—a shrill American with forthright opinions. Not long ago, when there were American anti-abortion protesters in this country, British feminists did not say why the foreigners' arguments were wrong, they told the government to send them home. In a similar way, they objected to MacKinnon's forthrightness—perhaps her only redeeming feature. But few disagreed that pornography is behind rape or put up a principled opposition to the use of state repression. To our feminists, egging on the bobbies has to be done sensibly—in calm tones, politely and with a certain amount of reluctance. In other words, in a proper British way. Never mind that the results are the same, and equally disastrous.

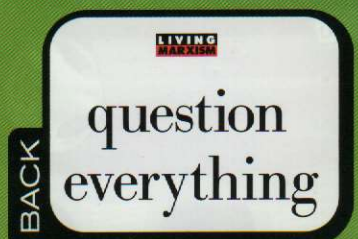
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