

LIVING MARXISM

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The other
Bosnian war p24

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FEAR OF FAT

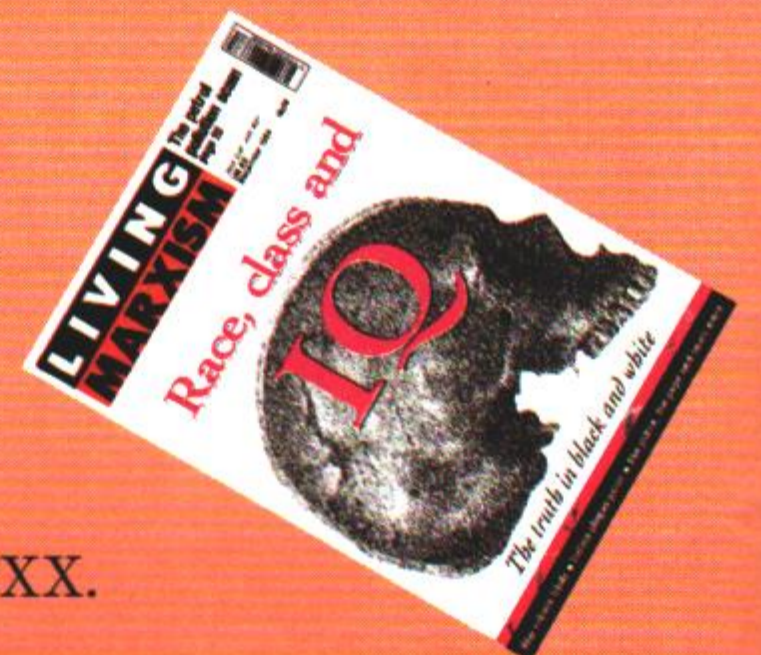
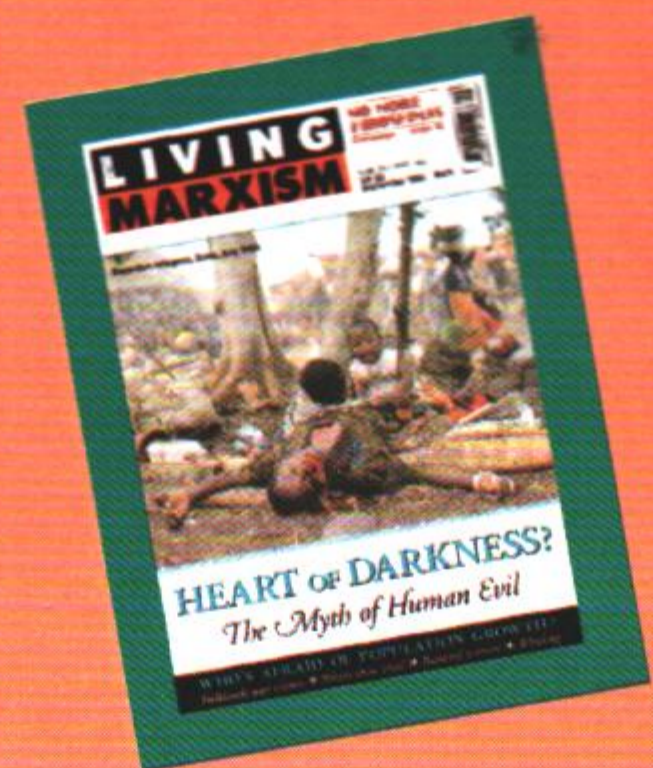
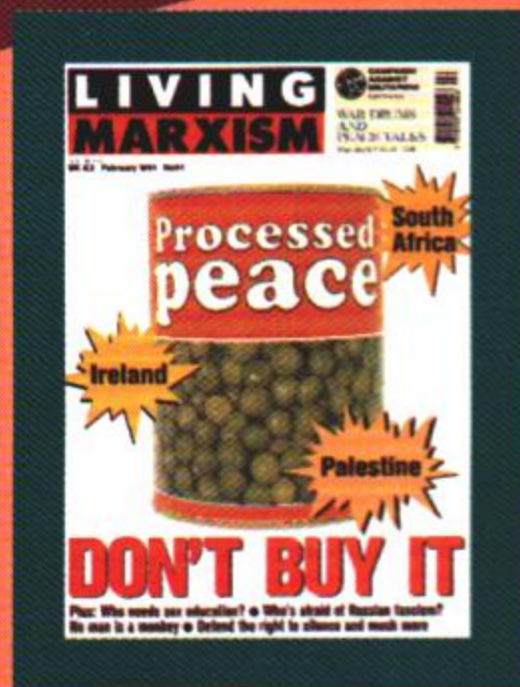
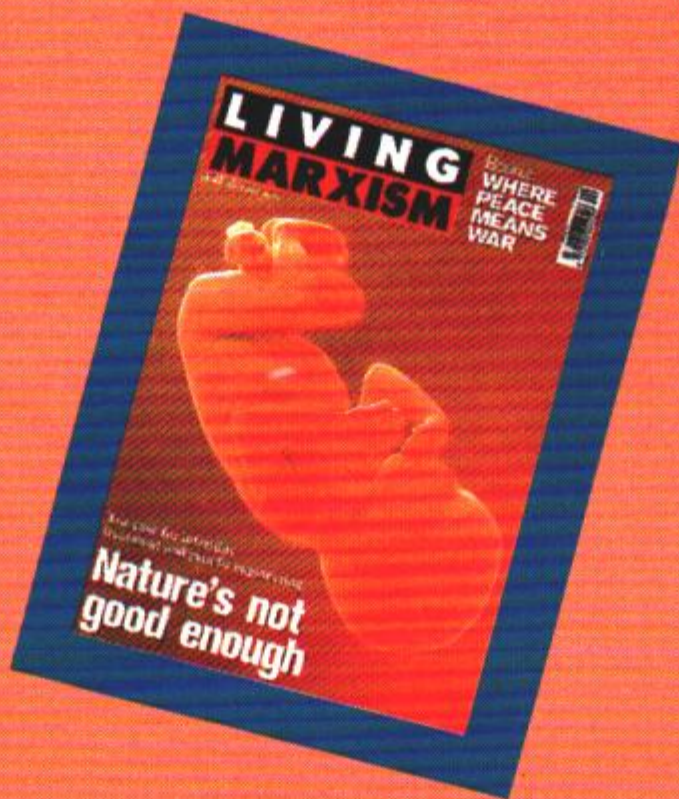
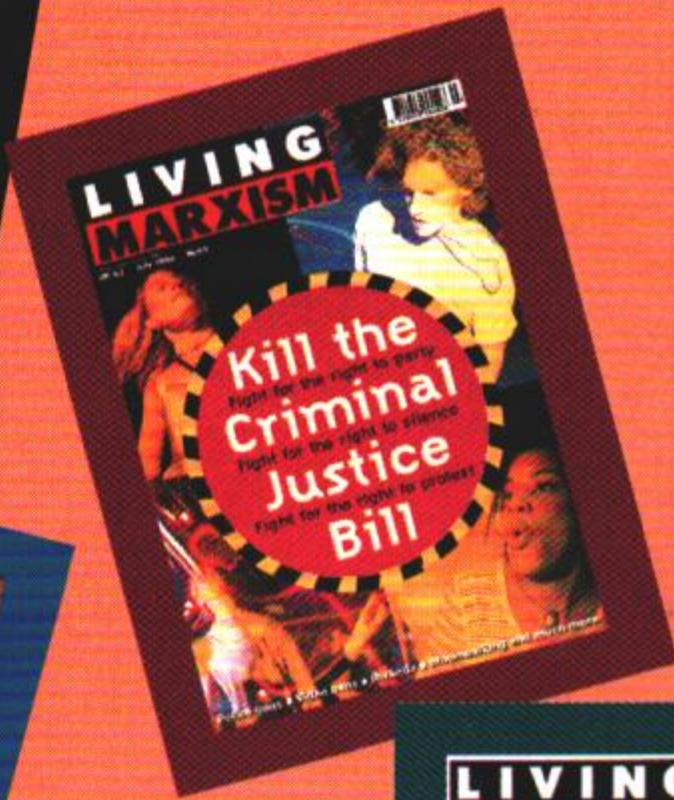
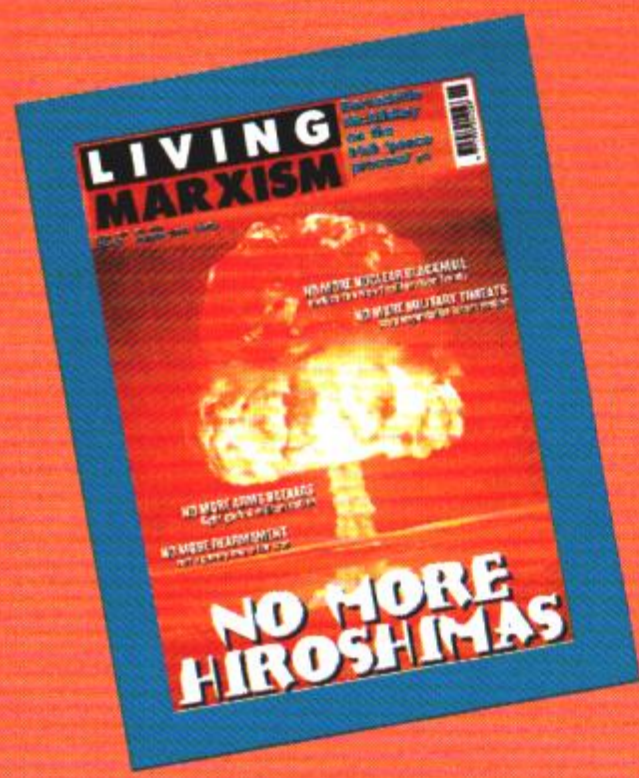


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COVER PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER WITH THANKS TO LEILA AND AK

Don't panic

After the success of our November conference, The Making of Moral Panics...

'a pleasure and a revelation...the tabloid hacks should have been there'

British Medical Journal...

and the accompanying issue of *Living Marxism*...

'une brillante et exhaustive étude'

Liberation, (French national daily)...

this month's magazine continues our campaign to expose the moral panics of the day.

Satanic ridicule

p10

Sara Hinchliffe takes apart the idea that Satanist cults are stalking children, and asks why a horror fantasy like Satanic ritual abuse can be believed today.



Healthy eating in a diseased society

p20

After reading the government's latest report on healthy eating, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick offers an alternative prescription: stop worrying about dying and start living.



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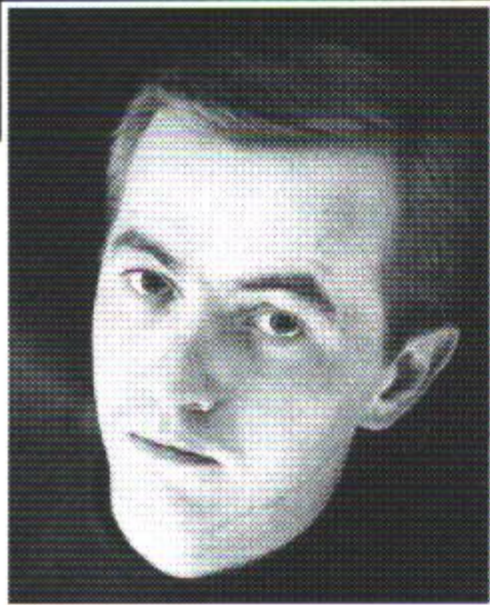
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Mick Hume

The use of abuse

Why are abuse and harassment such buzzwords today? Is there really a boom in the prevalence of problems like child abuse, or is something else going on?

It is useful to make a distinction between two things: abuse, and the *consciousness of abuse*. There is no evidence at all that abuse itself is increasing. Our consciousness of abuse, however, is increasing at a geometric rate.

This is not surprising, given that definitions of what is considered abuse and harassment are continually being broadened to include more types of behaviour.

In December, for example, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children published the results of a survey into adults' recollections of child abuse. The questions made it clear that the NSPCC is no longer simply interested in the maiming of children. It now considers parents punishing children by withholding part of a meal, or fathers failing to show emotion to their offspring, as forms of child abuse.

What would have been seen as uncontroversial practices for parents as recently as 15 or 20 years ago can now become the subject of an entire chapter in the latest study of child abuse. It is not that thousands of children have suddenly started dying from being starved by their parents. What has changed is the climate in which the treatment of children is discussed. As the consciousness of abuse has soared, so anything to do with disciplining children or telling them what to do—which was long considered parents' primary responsibility—has become the subject of controversy.

The increased consciousness of abuse is widely seen as a good thing, said to have given recognition and protection to more and more victims. The reality is very different.

A hysterical climate has been generated, in which those named as victims of one of the countless new categories of abuse are publicly stigmatised. The abuse-conscious

professionals and the media now hang a sign around every victim's neck, branding them 'Scarred for life'. In many respects, this hand-wringing circus is worse than any abuse the child might actually have suffered. Scars heal. But when society continually reminds people that they are still suffering from something that happened in childhood, whether they know it or not, the effects are far more insidious and long-lasting.

Far from being a step forward, the contemporary preoccupation with abuse can be seen as one of the most dangerous, anti-human trends of our times.

An army of caring professionals, backed by the media, is now scouring the country for hidden signs of the multi-headed monster named Abuse. They are searching for child abuse, Satanic ritual abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, domestic violence, and harassment of the sexual, physical, psychological, verbal and non-verbal varieties. The only categories which do not appear to be the subject of investigation are the harassment of the public by prying counsellors and psychotherapists, and the abuse of the authorities' powers to interfere in people's private lives. We are living in the age of the social services inquisition.

Every relationship between adults and children is now under the spotlight of suspicion as a potential problem of abuse. Schools are shrouded in an atmosphere of mutual mistrust between teachers and parents, each looking for signs that the others are abusers.

The preoccupation with abuse is leading to some bizarre reinterpretations of what goes on between adults and the children in their care. Take the high-profile demands to outlaw smacking by parents and child-minders as a threat to children's physical and mental health. This idea seems to be underpinned by an assumption among the caring professions that most people do not know the difference between clipping a child's ear and beating

it senseless. If that were true, the schools would have long been empty and the hospitals and graveyards full of battered children.

But parents don't even have to hit their children to be found guilty of serious abuse today. An additional problem has been identified as 'emotional abuse', which includes something like withholding food for the purposes of punishment. Those of us who are not qualified in these matters had naively assumed that this was a normal part of growing up and learning the rules. But in the gospel according to today's abuse experts, it seems that all of the generations of children denied ice cream or sent to bed without supper for misbehaving must have been scarred for life by the experience.

In the USA, the obsession with child abuse is even more advanced than in Britain. The American search for new forms of hidden abuse is currently focused on the bogus notion of a repressed memory syndrome. According to self-appointed experts in this field, literally millions of American women were, unbeknown to them, raped and sexually abused by their fathers as children. The reason that these women know nothing about the abuse they endured is apparently that they unconsciously repressed the memory—until, with the enthusiastic coaching of counsellors and therapists, they are suddenly and miraculously able to recall everything in cinematic detail, 20 or 30 years later. These days, hidden inside every unhappy adult, there appears to be an invisible victim of child abuse trying to get out and denounce their parents on *Oprah*.

Meanwhile, back in the laboratories of social pseudo-science, relations between adults are also coming under the microscope as the caring professionals expand the definitions of problems such as domestic violence and harassment.

Domestic violence used to be understood as a problem involving relatively few

men who got rid of their frustrations by beating up the women with whom they shared unequal relationships. No longer. Listen to a television discussion of domestic violence today, or read the reports from the new police units set up to deal with the issue, and it becomes clear that a lot of what is now called domestic violence has nothing to do with violence. The expanded definition of domestic violence includes the kind of everyday arguments and tensions over sex or money, children or drink, that are common in countless relationships. The idea of what constitutes domestic violence has been downgraded to the point where, according to those interviewed in a recent Mori survey, men are 50 per cent more likely than women to suffer it.

This redefinition trivialises the rare but real problem of domestic violence, by putting a woman who suffers a bruised ego on a par with one who has her ribs broken. Worse still, the ever-expanding definition of domestic violence creates a situation in which, eventually, all of us in relationships can be labelled as either victims or perpetrators. (And those who are not in relationships must all be 'potentially' one or the other). In the worldview of the domestic violence detectors, it is assumed that your partner must be either your punch-bag or your persecutor, and that one of you must need to be protected from the other by more enlightened outside agencies. The preoccupation with domestic violence recasts the most basic human relationships as no better than a dogfight.

Perhaps the most common personal crime of which any of us could be accused today is harassment, usually in a workplace or college. Every college and students' union now has an increasingly extensive anti-harassment code, and few offices, shops or factories are without a comprehensive set of rules on the subject. If you awoke from a 20-year coma today and read these codes of conduct, you could

be forgiven for assuming that humanity had been replaced by a race of rapacious, flesh-eating zombies, in need of tight restraint to prevent them from doing each other serious damage at every turn. The codes cast the suspicion of harassment on the most mundane aspects of workplace or college relations.

Anybody can now officially be a victim of harassment, if they believe they have been treated differently because of their race or religion, their haircut or accent. You can harass somebody by the way you look at them, the way you talk to them, the fact that you stand too close to them, and so on. In fact you don't need to do anything at all. So long as they *feel* that you are harassing them, you are considered guilty as charged.

Everyday relations between students and workmates, with all of their obvious but manageable imperfections, are here twisted into a frightening minefield of risks and threats posed by other people. The logical conclusion is that the only place you are really safe from harassment today is at home in bed—so long as you are on your own, of course.

These codes of conduct sum up the message behind today's obsession with abuse and harassment. The message is that we should always assume the worst about everybody, should always impute the lowest motives to anything anybody might do. It is the wisdom of our times that all human behaviour must now be considered as a potential form of harassment or abuse.

It follows that we can trust nobody—not our parents, not our partners, not our friends and colleagues. Nobody, that is, except the caring professionals, who somehow always seem to be immune to the infection of abuse which they insist has spread through the rest of human society.

The assumption is that, in one way or

another, we are all either victims or abusers—and many of us probably belong in both categories. In any case, we are deemed powerless to do anything about our situation, and must look to policemen of some sort to protect us from each other. All in all, that is a recipe for a rotten life.

In every situation, the fulfilment of life's potential depends upon interacting with other people. Only hermits and sad bastards could think otherwise. Yet in the atmosphere of today, we are being pushed to do the opposite; to look over our shoulders, keep ourselves to ourselves, hope the next bloke gets made redundant before we do, and worry about why the neighbour is being friendly to those children. Living with such a mood of mistrust, fear and suspicion can only make matters worse.

Human relations are already distorted enough by the divisions created in capitalist society: between those who have money and those who do not, between people in different jobs, between men and women, young and old, black and white. Now we are expected to relate to each other through the barriers created by the abuse and harassment panics as well.

The result of giving into these panics is that we become increasingly atomised as individuals, and it gets harder to cooperate in confronting the economic and social problems which really do mess up our lives. Wouldn't those teachers and parents now warily circling each other on the abuse issue be better off getting together to demand of the government how they are supposed to educate the children in a school with too few teachers, no books and a hole in the roof?

Contrary to the impression given by the exaggerated consciousness of abuse and the new harassment codes, other people are not the cause of our problems. They could even be the solution to the problems created by capitalism. If anybody tells you different, give them some abuse.

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, write to Helen Simons, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, phone (0171) 278 9908 fax (0171) 278 9844 e-mail lm@camintl.org

Addressing sexual harassment

Whilst agreeing with the overall context of Juliet Connor's article ('Harassment—says who?', November), I feel that in decrying employers for their use of sexual harassment in disciplinary codes you also blame women for the inability to differentiate between office banter and down-right verbal abuse. Ten years ago, when I was party to changing the law on sexual harassment (*Porcelli v Strathclyde Regional Council*, 1984-86), this was not the case.

The two men I worked with were employing a sexual and particularly awful vendetta against me in order to remove me from my position as a senior laboratory assistant. Their sexual overtones and verbal abuse were not meant for the purpose of eventual sexual union but to remove me from the post by causing extreme mental distress. Now, while this was going on, the employers, the union and even the five lawyers that I contacted (all men, I may add) did not want to know about the situation. They were all repeatedly asked to provide help over the period of a year and none could assist me.

What were people in my position supposed to do? I had to go to court. My own employer briefed a team of lawyers to prevent the case coming to fruition and my removal from the workplace seemed likely (ie, the sack).

Will we ever stop those people in power using the law for their own ends? Will there always be someone who will manipulate the law? There are, I admit, women or men who play the game for financial benefit or even self-promotion. They have done us no favours by this. That does not mean that all the effort that I and other women went through was to no avail. It became possible for women to confront men who employed such strategies, where there was no legal precedent before. The fact that 10 years on it is an entirely different ball game was not my intention.

Mrs J Porcelli *Cromer, Norfolk*

The Bronx and the 'underclass'

Michael Fitzpatrick ('Yob culture clash', November) is totally justified in his anger at *Sunday Times* journalist Keith Austin's exaggerated portrayal of his Sandringham Road neighbourhood. Unfortunately, he then commits the same offence as Austin by complaining that Sandringham Road is unfairly compared with the South Bronx.

While I don't live in the Bronx, I know that many areas of New York City, like the South Bronx, Washington Heights, or East New York City, have a reputation for being home to the 'underclass'. While these areas probably have more drug dealers and a higher incidence of violence than corresponding sections of London, they are mostly home to 'ordinary people, many

of them struggling to get by in difficult circumstances'. Just as Fitzpatrick gives no credence to the media rants about Moss Side, Meadow Well or Blackbird Leys, he should know better than to add to the hype about American cities and our 'underclass'.

Jon Daniels *Brooklyn, New York*

The privilege of taking risks

May I congratulate you for a very well organised, interesting and entertaining conference (The Making of Moral Panics, London, November 1994). I would like to make a couple of observations which I was unable to make from the floor. Firstly, I suggest that if we are to understand the popular appeal and currency of moral panics, we must acknowledge and investigate people's very real fears and actual experiences of, for example, crime and child abuse. Of course such incidences are often grossly exaggerated through the mass media, but that is not to say they have no basis at all.

While I agree that moral panics justify increasing penetration of state power throughout society, in the form of the regulation of behaviour and mechanisms of surveillance (and encouraging conformity through self-surveillance), I feel that popular impulses towards safety and security were ridiculed from positions of relative safety and privilege.

This approach smacked of dubious and inherently elitist notions of false consciousness—an idea that the general population have fallen for ideological mechanisms which the privileged few can see through. It also failed to take into account the material reality of people confronting at first hand problems of social decay, deprivation and the crimes and abuses which thrive in such conditions. Risk is a relative luxury not available equally to all in our inequitable society.

Underwriting much of the proceedings was a pervasive contemporary moral panic which went wholly unchallenged—that is, the fear of being labelled politically correct (the personification of political correctness being the much maligned social worker—an apparent exception to repeated exhortations to think better of our fellow humans). I find it worrying that a concept invented by the right-wing media in the US and used with zeal by the conservative press in this country to rubbish any leftist initiative should be taken up, even tacitly, with such unquestioning enthusiasm by sectors of the British left.

Thomas Austin *University of East Anglia*

For whom the Bell Curve tolls

The reason why Charles Murray's latest apologetic for the failure of capitalism has been so ill-received is that it points up the inadequacies of the socio-economic system which Murray would

prefer to celebrate (James Heartfield, 'An unintelligent argument', December).

The beauty of Murray's previous work was that while concentrating on the individual moral failure of certain sections of society, particularly single mothers, he still allows for the possibility of rehabilitation. In *The Bell Curve* Murray continues his emphasis on individual responsibility but takes the debate into the realm of immutable biology. By asserting the genetic/racial basis for inequality he oversteps accepted boundaries.

First, Murray explicitly addresses the sensitive issue of racial inequality which many of his liberal critics would prefer to sweep under the carpet. His second obstacle is the extreme relativisation of contemporary social thought. Murray's attempt to reassert absolute values and reinstate IQ as a universal measurement of man is therefore met with a wall of censure.

Finally, underlying much of the denunciation of Murray is the recognition by establishment thinkers that the consequence of a genetically inferior underclass is a direct admission of the failure of American ideals. In a society that defines itself through the ideologies of progress and equality it is wiser not to highlight the disparity between ideals and social reality, never mind suggesting that the impasse is permanent.

Cheryl Benton Ewell *Surrey*

With reference to James Heartfield's (good) review of *The Bell Curve* by Murray and Herrnstein—the sequel will presumably be called *The Bimodal Distribution* and will be produced by crossing out the word 'black' and substituting the word 'woman'.

Keith Burnett *Birmingham*

Haiti under the heel

Your article on Haiti ('Operation Redefine Democracy', November) summed up quite well the nature of US foreign policy. It is important to note that this kind of intervention is not an isolated event, and it has not been changed by the ending of the Cold War. History has shown that America will go to vast lengths to make sure its interests are the priority in 'its own backyard'.

The main reason why Aristide was overthrown had to do with his adopting a more independent line. He was trying to take his country away from the American sphere of influence. The Haitian army made sure he would not get a second chance by killing his supporters and basically destroying his grassroots movement. The Americans fear this kind of popular—and dare I say, successful—democracy.

The future of Haiti is once again bleak. International (US) loans have already been earmarked with the usual structurally adjusted conditions. So American business will reap the profits of this invasion.

David Salter *Rhiwbina, Cardiff*

Private cars, public nuisance

The British road lobby will welcome John Gillott's timely support ('The petrol pollution scam', December): more cars for the workers, and damn the consequences! Gillott's idea of 'meeting our needs' is based on a fallacy. Car 'need' is created and stimulated by road-building. And the only way public transport can function in cities is to curb private car use. 'Excellent and cheap public transport' means restrictions on private cars, which means, ultimately, less of them.

Is Gillott in favour of the present exploitation of workers having as their only hope of getting to work (or getting a job) a rapidly depreciating half-ton of junk obtained on exorbitant hp charges? Instead of demanding more cars, should we not be asking ourselves how to obtain something better than the car as a private possession? Mass ownership of cars will bedevil any society. Your illustrating photo of a dreary tailback on an urban motorway (with no doubt a lone driver in every car) seems to say it all.

Brian Miller *Bristol*

Poor health and bad housing

In the article debunking the widely held view that the increase in asthma-sufferers is caused by pollution, in particular from petrol engine fumes (Michael Fitzpatrick, 'Suffocating cities', December), the probable cause of increased asthma is just touched on as a matter requiring further investigation and treatment.

One of the biggest effects of increased relative poverty during the eighties has been the decline in working class housing conditions. The vast majority of people on low incomes are living in inadequate, overcrowded, unrepared or unfit housing. Any housing law adviser will say that virtually all their clients in poor housing report at least one family member suffering from asthma, eczema, bronchitis, colds and coughs. It is a commonplace amongst environmental health professionals, and it is widely accepted in legal cases about housing conditions, that these illnesses, if not caused by damp and overcrowded accommodation, are certainly exacerbated by it.

Tenants complaining of damp and condensation and the effects on their health are met with scorn by council officials, who peddle the completely unscientific nostrum that it is the tenant's 'lifestyle' which is at fault. If they would

stop cooking, washing and drying clothes, and even breathing, and would keep windows open and wipe the mould off the walls with disinfectant, the problems would cease.

Blaming the car for increased asthma is not just a means of gaining 'green' support for an attack on our freedom and ability to travel. It is an effective distraction from the real vandals of working class health, and from the particular government policies which are responsible.

Sheona York *Wandsworth, London*

There is a well-known inherited factor in asthma. Many of us used to die before we could breed. Has anybody bothered to look at more of us surviving as the simple reason for much of the increase in asthma in children?

What does 'general atmospheric pollution has fallen' mean? There has been an enormous decline since the 1950s in the pollutants released by burning coal. Other pollutants have risen. Drive into London when there is a pressure inversion and just look at the haze. I just don't believe Fitzpatrick is correct. Speak to any asthmatic living in London who has gone somewhere genuinely clean and ask them how much better they felt after a day or so.

If the house dust mite is behind the increase, I obviously missed the demise of the vacuum cleaner.

'It seems that thousands of children coughing, wheezing and short of breath symbolise their parents' sense of suffocation in modern city life?' What sort of bizarre crap is this?

Peter A Roberts *Islington, London*

Insufferably flippant

Toby Banks contrives to be flippant about a number of high points of prolonged human suffering ('Spastic: what's in a word?', December). He squirms over what he sees as the political significance of Poppy Day. The significance of Poppy Day for me is of suffering. Suffering endured by millions, by day, by night, in fierce heat and bitter cold, rain, mud, lice and always the threat of death, sudden or prolonged; while at home hung the threat of the most dreaded telegram.

A few years ago when tuberculosis was endemic, it's unlikely (as I recollect it) that people with TB and their carers would have been described as 'the other self-righteous lot', which is how Banks describes 'the pious...Aids establishment'. This sort of flippancy will not

alleviate the agony of those with Aids or the suffering of those who love them.

FN Cuthbert *Coventry*

Wot, no Oasis?

I just don't get it. We've had all these articles about pop music over the last few months, and not one mention of Oasis. They are obviously the best new thing in British music this decade and yet your reviewers continue to shoot down straw dolls such as the so-called NWONW, seventies revivalists like Suede and Primal Scream, and nostalgia peddlers Blur. Here we have a group with all the right credentials—a bit of style, a bit of noise, a bit of arrogance, an ability to trash hotel rooms, a lot of attitude, and a few nice tunes to boot—and they go completely unnoticed by your Living section. Living where exactly?

D Sheppard *Hemel Hempstead*

I have welcomed your recent coverage of pop music, and so I felt I had to respond to 'Don Van Vliet' (letters, November).

'Van Vliet'—ho, ho, ho! so Captain Beefheart lives in Leeds and listens to Classic FM—thinks he can lend credibility to his nostalgia by referring to Trotsky and Lenin. But I doubt they would endorse his blanket dismissal of contemporary music.

I would advise 'Van Vliet' and like-minded readers to throw away their history of music and investigate the future sounds of Laika, Pram, Portishead, Stereolab and My Bloody Valentine. But if you must listen to old music, ignore Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band and investigate Pet Sounds, bearing in mind that back then Brian Wilson was looking into the future as we should now.

Peter Roberts *Birmingham*

Glitch

A glitch got into my review ('White power', December). It appeared to say that Theodore Allen was 'writing about India'. Allen's book details repression in Ireland and in the West Indies, and the development of American racism—but not Indian fragmentation. Allen stated that 'racial oppression [was] introduced as a deliberate ruling class policy' in the introduction to his book *The Invention of the White Race*.

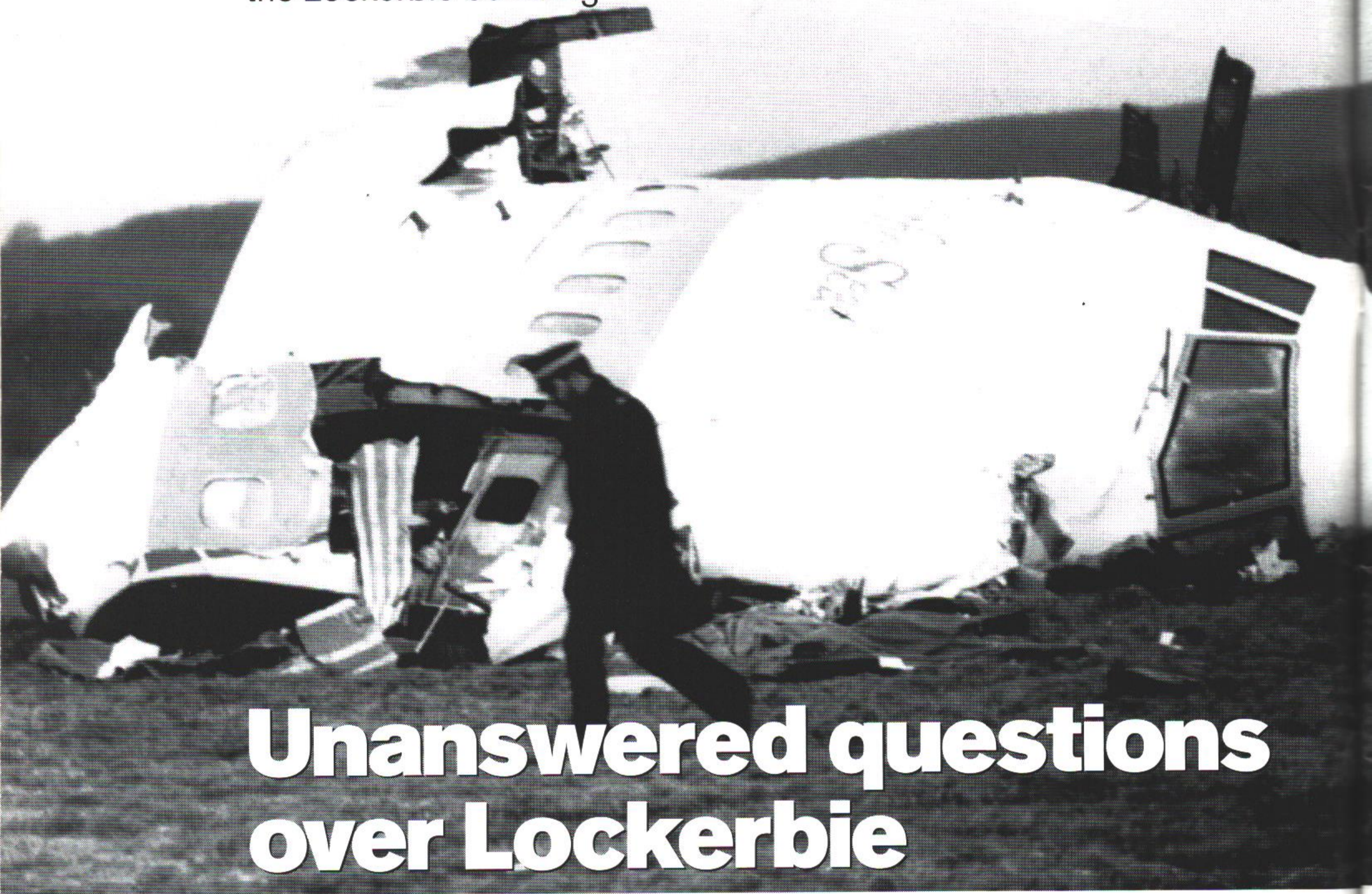
Suke Wolton *Oxford*

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor,

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Phil Johnson reports on the latest chapter in the cover-up surrounding the Lockerbie bombing



Unanswered questions over Lockerbie

A new film, *The Maltese Double Cross*, directed by Allan Francovich and funded by business tycoon Tiny Rowland, has rekindled the controversy about the Lockerbie disaster. The documentary is an attempt to expose the lies surrounding the aircraft-bombing which killed 270 people over the Scottish town of Lockerbie on 21 December 1988, and which remains shrouded in secrecy.

The UN has accused two Libyans of planting the bomb, and imposed sanctions to force Libya to hand them over for trial in the USA. The new film has been dismissed as a Libyan-funded attempt to duck responsibility for the murders. But, as one bereaved mother explained after seeing the film, the questions it raises would be valid even if the funding came from the ghost of Adolf Hitler.

Due to be premiered by the London Film Festival at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in November, *The Maltese Double Cross* was pulled from the programme 18 days before its scheduled showing. Why?

According to a *Guardian* report of 12 November 1994, the festival organisers explained that 'certain statements similar to those made in the film are the subject of legal action'. That much is true. Allegations made about former US drug enforcement agent Michael Hurley, are the basis of a libel suit against the publishers of a book about Lockerbie, *Trail of the Octopus*, written by Donald Goddard and Lester Coleman. But the case has not been brought to court and Bloomsbury, the book's publishers, appear to be taking no notice of the libel threat. So why did the NFT feel obliged to take it so seriously? No comment. No NFT.

When Tam Dalyell MP announced that he would show the film in the House of Commons on Wednesday 16 November, an American firm of solicitors representing Michael Hurley wrote to him suggesting libel might be involved. Someone from the same firm also telephoned the Speakers office to ask if their representative could attend the screening. When Dalyell returned

the call, nobody knew who had written the letter and nobody came to the screening. Who sent the letter? No answer.

Dalyell went ahead with the showing, as did the *Scotsman*, despite receiving a threat of libel action via a fax to their lawyers. At the time of publishing, no libel case has been brought.

Cold feet

The Angle Gallery in Birmingham then announced a showing of the film on Friday 18 November. No libel threats this time, but a curious message was relayed by Birmingham local radio, stating that the film had been withdrawn from public showing because it would be prejudicial to the trial of the Libyans. What trial? No answer. There is no contempt of court and there is no trial. Who passed false information to the radio station? No answer.

A subsequent burglary at the Angle Gallery and a forced entry to the home of gallery coordinator

Ceri Dingle raised suspicions of intimidation by anonymous intruders. Dingle said, 'I'm not a believer in conspiracy theories but this is too heavy to be ignored. These pressures do seem to be frightening people off. It's intolerable. Birmingham and Warwick University Students' Unions have now banned the film for supposed legal reasons.'

Several attempts by the Campaign Against Militarism (CAM) to hire a venue in London for a showing were turned down—most surprisingly by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) which is not noted for its caution.

'I remember a time when the ICA didn't baulk at presenting a performance piece in which an artist shoved live clams up her bum', says Kate Margam of CAM. 'But when I asked them if they would show *The Maltese Double Cross* they said their lawyers had advised them not to.' Would they allow CAM to hire a room and show the film privately? No.

Why has Allan Francovich's film aroused such a welter of legal fears when there is, in fact, no legal case against it?

According to Tam Dalyell, 'the American and British governments do not want the film shown. The American families do not want the film shown because they want their compensation money. More importantly, their lawyers want their money.'

Accessories to murder

The central thesis of the film, also propounded in *Trail of the Octopus*, is that a Syrian-backed Iranian group planted the bomb on a CIA protected drug route. The film alleges that government personnel were warned and pulled off Pan Am Flight 103 at the last minute. It argues—as *Living Marxism* has done from the start—that the US and UK governments have tried to frame Libya for Lockerbie rather than mess up their relations with the more plausible culprits, Syria and Iran.

Taken together, the film's allegations contradict the claim that Pan Am was guilty of negligence. But Pan Am has been found guilty, and hefty compensation awards are on the point of being made. There are clearly interested parties who would not want any further debate about what really happened. Not least among them are the British and American governments.

Dr Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora was killed on Flight 103 and who is now spokesman for the British families group, has given the film his support because it tackles some of the questions that have still not been answered.

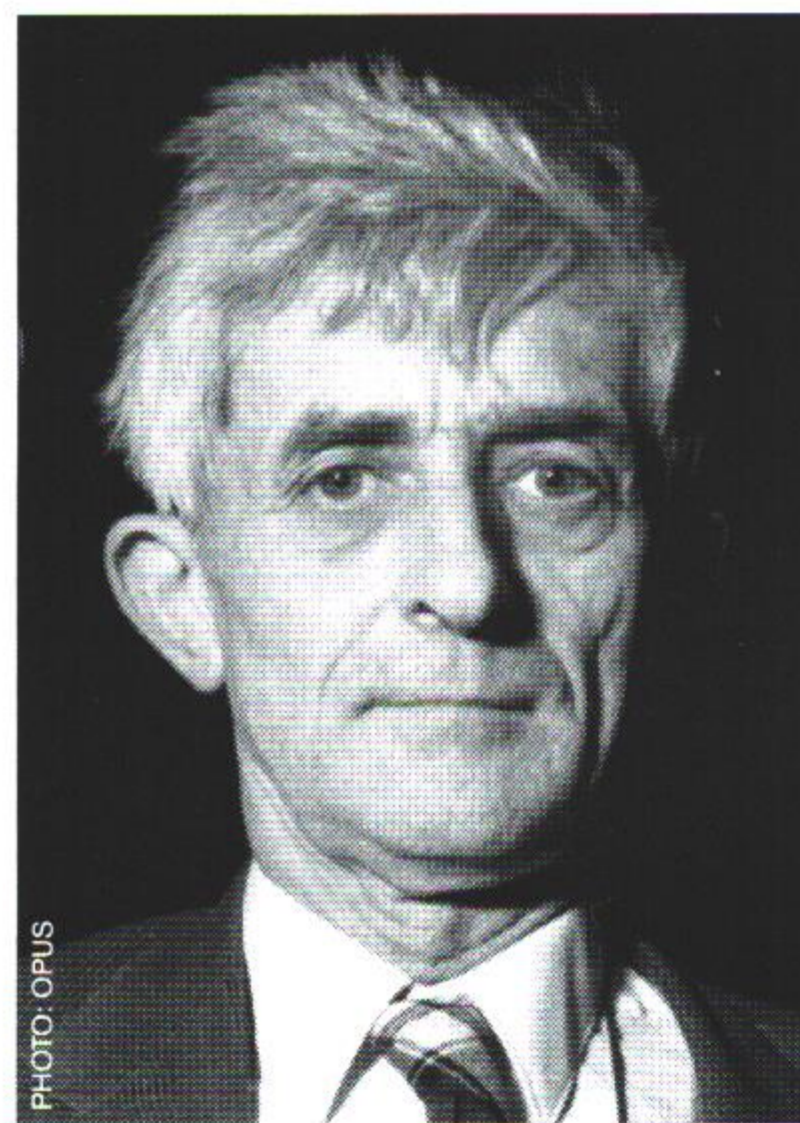
For a start, why do the British and American governments insist on accusing Libya of planting the bomb when there is no evidence to support this?

Jim Swire now believes that Libya has been framed with false evidence and that Margaret Thatcher and president Bush knew about it. He charges the British, American and German security services with being accessories to the murder of 270 people.

Allan Francovich, the film's director believes there has been a cover up because of implications that the plane was brought down as part of an American and British security operation. 'They have to come up with a scenario that can get them off the hook.'

Did the American, British and German security forces receive explicit warnings about Pan Am Flight 103 on 21 December 1988?

Dr Jim Swire believes they did, and that evidence used to blame Libya has been fabricated. The framing of Libya



hinges on accusations that the bomb came from Malta. But Swire explains:

'Air Malta sued Granada TV for showing a programme about how the bomb got on the plane. They won because there wasn't a shred of evidence to prove that the bomb came from Malta. There is a document on the film which says the FBI team that was sent to look into this also failed to find any evidence.'

At the original Fatal Accident Inquiry, Swire's frustration at being represented by lawyers, hired by the Department of Transport, who would not call the witnesses he wanted led him to take over his own case. Nobody told him that the government had prepared a number of Public Interest Immunity certificates to prevent certain documents being made public. 'There was a clampdown on any information relating to intelligence and also a clampdown on any information prior to the feeder flight taking off from Frankfurt, so there was no

inquiry into how the bomb got on the plane, or where it came from. It was a whitewash.'

Who is behind the cover-up? 'The number one suspect must be intelligence', says Jim Swire. 'When the families group was first formed, one of the people who worked hardest at getting the group off the ground turned out later to be trying to stop the film. She must be either an agent for intelligence or working for the other group who want to stop this—the relatives working for compensation. Their case depends on the idea that the device came from Malta. They are very worried by the material in the film.'

There are people supporting the film who feel that enough is enough and it is time to let Libya off the hook. 'I don't believe the Libyan state had anything to do with it', says Tam Dalyell. There have been calls for the UN to bring the affair to a conclusion by allowing the Libyans to be put on trial in Scotland, a 'neutral' country. This is seen as a solution not only by those who would like to see the Libyans' coffin finally nailed, but by those who want to see an end to the sanctions. 'I would be quite happy if they were brought to trial', says Dalyell, 'because I think the evidence against them would be laughed out of court'. This theory seems criminally naive.

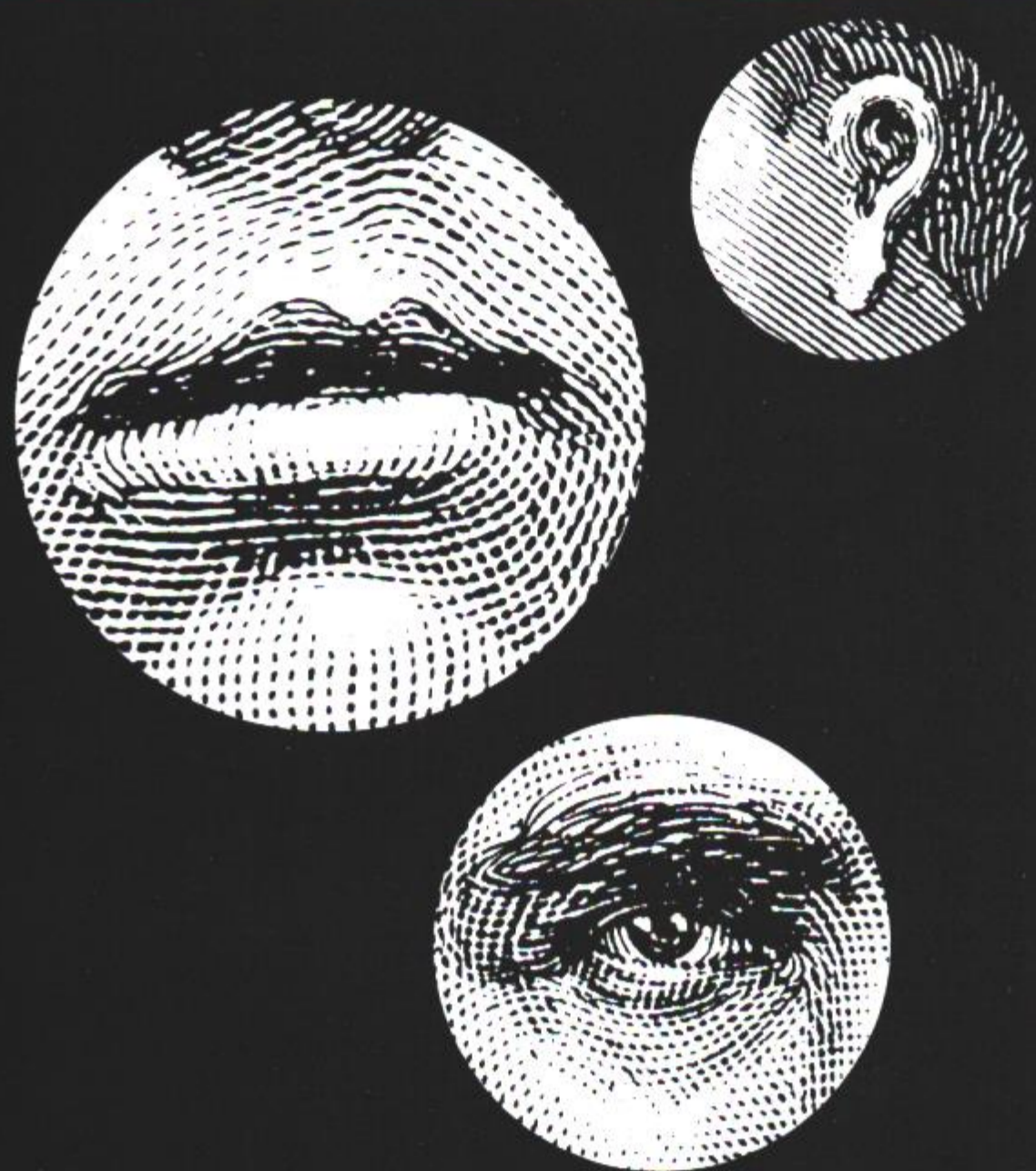
Unacceptable

Governments which have blatantly framed two Arabs for mass murder, maintained sanctions against a whole country on the basis of the fit-up, and possibly knowingly sent their own citizens to their deaths, are governments equally capable of fixing a trial. In this country we are familiar with the ease with which government interests manipulate the justice system. We are also familiar with the way that the Western powers bend the UN to their will, and have branded Libya a pariah. There is no such thing as a 'neutral' country. Libya has already been found guilty. As the leading British barrister Michael Mansfield told me, the Libyans 'would not receive a fair trial anywhere in the world'.

Jim Swire wants the film shown and his questions answered. 'There is an interesting piece of poetic symmetry', he says: 'Tiny Rowland is the man who was described by Edward Heath as the "unacceptable face of capitalism". It may be that Tiny Rowland's film exposes the unacceptable face of Western democracy.'

There are so many interests at stake in the Lockerbie saga it is unlikely the full truth will ever be known. But the more it is questioned, the dirtier the whole affair appears.

The wreckage of Pan Am Flight 103 (above), and Dr Jim Swire (right), whose daughter Flora was killed in the crash



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

TABOOS



Are Satanic cults stalking our children? Sara Hinchliffe reports

The harrowing stories of those who claim to have suffered Satanic ritual abuse have been widely reported in the press, in TV programmes and a library of books over the past five years. Gone are the days when believers in Satanism consisted only of groups of evangelical American Christians who produced nutty tracts like *Satan-Proof Your Home*. Now a prominent consultant child psychotherapist, Valerie Sinason, can introduce a guide to surviving Satanic abuse by presenting tales of horror as indisputable fact:

'Men and women...worship Satan as their god in private houses or in churchyards and forests. In so doing they literally turn upside down any moral concept that comes with Christianity. They practise every sexual perversion that exists with animals, children and both sexes. They drink blood and urine and eat faeces and insects. They are involved in pornographic films and drug-dealing

as a means of raising money. They are highly organised, successful in their secrecy and have a belief that through this pain and abuse they are getting closer to their god.' (*Treating Survivors of Satanist Abuse*, 1994, p3)

Today professional social work journals carry lists of 'Satanic indicators' to enable them to spot a Satanically abused child. *Community Care* magazine recently highlighted its coverage of 'the debate that really matters' with the headline 'Tales of evil'. There are guidebooks instructing professionals on how to discover whether children have been victims of Satanic abuse (according to some therapists you can do this by looking at their drawings), and how to treat them accordingly.

When Valerie Sinason was putting together her guide to treating 'survivors of Satanist abuse' she was able to find no fewer than 39 eminent child abuse/Satanic abuse professionals prepared to offer their wisdom.



Satanic ridicule

Some of these experts are behind new organisations, such as RAINS (Ritual Abuse Information Network and Support), SAFE (for victims) and VOICE (for victims with 'learning disabilities').

Those who believe Satanic abuse to be widespread point to the evidence of severely damaged adults and children. They point to clusters of allegations, such as the Orkneys and Rochdale cases in 1991, where dozens of children were removed from their homes in dawn raids. Therapists working with victims argue that the victims must be believed, whether forensic evidence supports their allegations or not. The implication of many experts is that not to take the children at their word is to perpetuate the abuse. The horror of what children recount is considered too great for it to be ignored, and any demand for evidence is presented as unreasonable. Sinason argues that 'if a child is referred for bed-wetting we do not send a forensic expert in to check the sheets' (p5).

Perhaps not; but then bed-wetting is not the kind of horrific fantasy normally associated with Stephen King.

It is not surprising that experts predisposed to believe in Satanic ritual abuse should dismiss demands for evidence. They do not have any evidence to offer. Every attempt to look at evidence rather than hearsay has found nothing. No pornographic videos, drugs, human or animal remains connected to Satanic ritual abuse have been found. A 1992 Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme used film allegedly taken at a Satanic abuse session; it later transpired that it was a clip from a Derek Jarman film.

Yet such has been the concern about Satanic abuse in recent years that leading social anthropologist, Professor Jean La Fontaine, was commissioned by the British government to write a major report on the issue. La Fontaine has a formidable academic reputation and has done extensive work on witchcraft in Africa. Her study, *The Extent and Nature of Organised and*

Ritual Abuse, concluded that if Satanic or Satanist abuse was defined as 'rites that allegedly include the torture and sexual abuse of children and adults, forced abortion and human sacrifice, cannibalism and bestiality....*There is no evidence that these have taken place in any of the 84 cases studied*' (p30).

La Fontaine's inability to come up with any evidence of Satanic abuse was not due to a preconceived conviction that none existed. As she explained in a recent interview, when she undertook the commission she *had* expected to find something, but as the research went on she says she became 'absolutely amazed by the lack of evidence supporting the Satanic abuse scare'.

La Fontaine's work has been attacked by psychologists, therapists and feminists. Bea Campbell accused her of being in league with paedophiles (*Independent*, 4 May 1994). Labour MP Llin Golding, chair of the parliamentary children's group, argued that 'just because one person found no evidence, ►



◀ that doesn't mean Satanic abuse does not exist' (*Independent*, 3 June 1994). Their blind belief in the existence of Satanic abuse rests largely on a refusal to accept that the children alleged to be victims could be lying.

But, in fact, many of the stories of abuse are not based upon what children say, at least not spontaneously. There is mounting evidence that social workers, therapists and carers have, unwittingly or not, coaxed the 'right' stories out of children. The majority of allegations of Satanic abuse come from young children, many of whom suffer from delayed development, speech impediments or mental handicaps. What these children say has to be interpreted by adults.

In many cases interviews have been conducted in a leading way; children were pressurised into taking part and were repeatedly asked the same question. One affidavit quoted in La Fontaine's report stated that a child had 'talked of ghosts'. The full interview transcript revealed an hour-long session in which the interviewer asks 33 questions about ghosts, to which the child replies with short, reluctant answers. Some interviewers told children lies in order to pressurise them to talk about Satanists.

Recent research into child behaviour by experts such as Professor Stephen Ceci indicates that children can very easily be convinced by adults that things have happened when in fact they had not occurred. In the 'Sam Spade' experiment, for instance, a group of children is told that Sam is very clumsy. Sam comes into the room and does nothing. After he has left the room, 78 per cent of three to four-year olds said that he had exhibited some clumsy behaviour.

Professor Elizabeth Newson was called as an independent witness to analyse interviews with children in the Rochdale case of alleged Satanic ritual abuse. She concluded that 'the children were isolated for many months from their parents, despite their protests. I shall not forget the child who exclaimed: "Why doesn't someone listen to me...I want to go home, I am safe at home." When there is professional determination to discover Satanic abuse, children will be listened to only selectively.' (*Independent*, 9 May 1994) One 'survivor' of Satanic abuse told Dr Kirk Weir of Ipswich Institute of Family Psychiatry that she had made up her story 'because she felt that's what they wanted to hear'.

The evidence of children and victims has been framed in a way considered appropriate by social workers and other 'specialists' actively looking for Satanic abuse. La Fontaine notes that many of these experts' involvement in ritual

abuse rests on their claims to know about Satanic abuse rather than any formal qualifications.

But even if children had directly accused named adults of ritual abuse, it would be dangerous to take this testimony at face value. As La Fontaine notes:

'It is very dangerous to talk about people who have been abused as the only experts. They're not experts. They have experience. It is very worrying to place more importance on experience than actual research and study.' (*Independent*, 1 May 1994)

We do not believe people who claim to have been kidnapped and raped by aliens

The people who claim to be victims of Satanic abuse are usually either mentally disturbed, or children, or both. Believers in Satanic abuse argue that these groups are selected by Satanists because they are vulnerable. They point to the story of Ingrid, an institutionalised Swedish woman, who told stories of being carried out into the woods tied to a chair and Satanically abused, once she had been convinced by her therapists that she would be believed (*Treating Survivors of Satanic Abuse*, pp13-21).

Yet it is well known that children and adults with mental handicaps are much more likely to have problems understanding their experiences. Society usually agrees that these are not people whose word can be taken as fact. Jean La Fontaine is clear that 'there is a difference between taking patients seriously and believing anything they say', a trap she believes many specialists have fallen into.

We tend not to believe children's stories because they cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality in the way that adults can. What may appear to be an act of real cruelty to a child may be entirely rational from the point of view of adults. From the point of view of children, being sent to bed without seeing a favourite TV programme may be the act of an adult who hates them. From an adult viewpoint it is simply a case of ensuring a child gets enough sleep for school. If we are honest, many of us will remember spending hours as children romping through fantasy worlds where we were chased by monsters and involved in great adventures and had secret friends. Childhood is a time when our imaginations can run free without consequence—and we let them. In fact

we are encouraged to do so by adults: how many children will have 'seen' Father Christmas on Christmas Eve?

It is ludicrous to assert that every child or even adult who claims to have been a victim of a bizarre event should automatically be believed. As Catherine Bennett pointed out in a perceptive article on Satanic abuse allegations (*Guardian*, 10 September 1994), we do not tend to believe disturbed people who claim to have been kidnapped and raped by aliens. Few would argue that the lack of evidence of such incidents was due to the space-invaders' skill at concealment. But that is the argument used by those who believe in Satanic abuse; it must be the work of the devil otherwise we would be able to find evidence. In other words, the fact that there is no evidence only serves to prove that Satanic abuse exists.

Many people do not believe the stories of Satanic ritual abuse, and some social workers and therapists have spoken out against the way that children have been coached by unprofessional individuals. But there is definitely a mood in society which makes this modern myth something that a large number of people are prepared to accept could and does happen. When the *Dispatches* programme on Satanic abuse was broadcast, callers flooded the helpline switchboard. Four and a half thousand people tried to call in the first hour.

It is never possible to give a one-dimensional explanation as to why certain irrational panics might take off at particular times. However, there are elements in the idea of Satanic child abuse that have made it a panic waiting to happen in recent times. For a start, the issue manages to combine the preoccupations of both the Christian right and the liberal caring professions.

For Christian fundamentalists, tales of Satanic abuse provide proof of what happens when we forego their values in favour of an increasingly secular society. A crusade against Satanic abuse provides a dramatic and emotive focus for their warnings about family breakdown leaving neglected children prey to evil forces, and allows them to excite themselves about the growing number of sexual perverts seeking to corrupt the nation's youth.

On the other hand, you have the caring liberal professions, concerned that today's parents are unable to meet the tests of caring for their children without help and supervision from the authorities. Many of the issues covered in the pages of social work journals these days relate to worries that parents are unable to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate behaviour, incapable of drawing the line between



a disciplinary smack and child-battery, or between a loving cuddle and sexual arousal. Accusations of Satanic abuse fit in with these patronising attitudes towards the public. After all, if parents are so out of control of themselves and their children, then who is to say what they would not do?

The Satanic abuse scare has undoubtedly been hyped up by the 'caring professions', who are responsible for feeding a salacious media with questionable cases. And it is possible to understand why many social workers are professionally disposed to take Satanic abuse stories at face value.

Seriously damaged children

can behave like animals; the Sinason collection contains many examples of children whose behaviour would make it difficult for anyone to take care of them. 'Russell', for instance, 'systematically smashed walls, doors and...furniture into pieces....He would urinate in any receptacle—waste bins, vases, etc. His excreta was left in piles or smeared on walls' (pp94-95). Why does he do it? Nobody knows, least of all the professionals. But allege a history of Satanic abuse and you have a ready-made 'expert' explanation for anything. It worked in this case; Russell's foster parents apparently found it easier to deal with him sympathetically because they believed that supernatural horrors had happened to him.

These days social services departments are taking on more and more work—particularly, as reported in previous issues of *Living Marxism*, through playing a more extensive role in the policing of people's private and family lives. Social workers have also become more unpopular as they have taken on a more interventionist

role. For some, it makes sense to use the panic about Satanic ritual abuse to demand more resources, support and protection.

But the fact that social workers or Christian cranks are predisposed to treat Satanic abuse seriously cannot explain why anyone else believes them. The professionals can only create a bandwagon if other people are prepared to jump on to it. In many ways, the panic about Satanic abuse has become a vehicle for widespread fears about the state of society and human relations today.

It is interesting to compare the focus of the panic in the USA to that in the UK. In the USA, where the scare began, the tales of Satanic abuse centre on nursery schools, such as the Californian McMartin preschool case in the late eighties where childcare workers were accused of ritually abusing the children in their care. This is primarily a panic centred on fears of family breakdown being caused by women going out to work and leaving their children in the care of strangers.

In Britain, however, the stories are of Satanic abuse taking place within the family; parents are alleged to have ritually abused their children, often involving others from outside the family. Here the scare concentrates on the internal disintegration of the family, and the need for professional intervention to shore up the family institution.

In both American and British society, there is now a profound sense that things are out of control. The fear and insecurity which results often concentrates first on worries about family breakdown and the vulnerability of children. The Satanic abuse panic

crystallises the fear that people feel about a loss of stability in society, by endorsing the idea that evil—something irrational and incomprehensible—is at the door of the nursery, or even the family home.

This sense of an out-of-control society is compounded by the way that people relate to each other in nineties Britain. Today we are encouraged always to suspect the worst of those around us. The man who asks you out for a drink is not just being friendly—he is a potential rapist. The stranger in your road might not be lost—he is a potential burglar. Your childminder is a potential child-batterer. Your child's teacher a potential paedophile. Even the vicar is probably after the choirboys! People see potential threats from those they might once have seen as neighbours. In this climate, anyone could be a Satanic abuser: all that is needed is a black cloak.

We are even encouraged to mistrust our families, since Satanic abusers are often alleged to be those closest to the victims. Some experts claim that we may even have been ritually abused without realising it. As one therapist says, 'If you have doubts, it doesn't mean you weren't abused' (*Independent on Sunday*, 15 May 1994). The idea that your husband or mother or grandfather could be a Satanic abuser will be enough to keep everyone looking over their shoulder, in fear of what might happen even in their own homes.

When a society is gripped by irrational fears, it is a safe bet that the proposed solution will involve the imposition of tighter controls and more regulation. People want their children to be protected from weirdos, and the authorities are happy to use any pretext to bring in measures which increase their ability to control society.

More social workers must be needed to protect children from their parents and families, and presumably to check them for 'Satanic indicators'. The police must be empowered to take children from their parents should abuse be suspected, and must take the word of a child—usually translated by an expert—against the parents. The testimony of witnesses previously considered incompetent and unsafe—such as children and the mentally handicapped—should be believed at the first mention of ritual abuse. For many, these authoritarian measures can begin to sound commonsensical in the wake of the Satanic abuse panic.

The fact that people are ready to believe in something as fantastic as Satanic abuse is a good indicator that we need a more rational, critical element in the discussion of problems today. It is a powerful indictment of society that so many grown-ups still seem to be afraid of the bogeyman. ●

It seems like the humiliations of the old Ireland will never end. Two years ago, it was discovered that the Bishop of Galway, Eamonn Casey, had fathered a child 18 years previously. Ireland was shocked that a senior cleric could do such a thing. The Catholic hierarchy must now be looking back wistfully to the days of the Casey scandal.

Today each new scandal seems more shocking than the last. In November the Fianna Fail/Labour Party coalition government collapsed following revelations which implicated the hierarchy of the Catholic church, the judiciary and taoiseach (prime minister) Albert Reynolds in a cover-up around the case of the paedophile priest, Fr Brendan Smyth.

For nearly 30 years, Smyth had engaged in persistent sexual abuse of children, despite complaints from parents to his superiors. Not only had the hierarchy done nothing to discipline Smyth, but as late as 1985 they had recommended him as chaplain to a children's hospital in Co Kerry. The scandal spread when it was discovered that a Royal Ulster Constabulary warrant for his extradition to the North had sat for seven months on the desk of attorney-general Harry Whelehan—the man whom Reynolds appointed president of the High Court. The implication was that Smyth had been protected, not just by the hierarchy, but up to the highest levels of the state. The Smyth case led to the resignation of both Whelehan and Reynolds.

The Smyth case blew the day after the gay sauna scandal. In a sequence which could have come from the Marquis de Sade, it was revealed that a 68-year old priest had died of a heart attack while at a gay sauna in Dublin. Two other priests were on hand to administer last rites. One of the dead priest's assistants died of a heart attack on hearing the news. It was subsequently revealed that up to 20 other priests were regulars at the sauna.

Debauchery and perversion

There are now so many cases of child sexual abuse pending against the clergy that many orders face financial ruin. Priests, brothers, nuns, all are implicated in sordid goings-on and attempts at cover-up. In one case alone, the Madonna House scandal, nuns stand accused of nearly 100 cases of abuse. It must be difficult to look at a priest or a nun in the same way any more. Once the object of popular deference, each is now suspected of the worst debauchery and perversion. The Irish Catholic church will never recover from this.

The recent scandals have rocked the two strongest pillars of the old order in Ireland—the Catholic church and

With both church and state rocked by sex and corruption scandals, nothing is sacred in the new Ireland, says Mark Ryan

A national

Fianna Fail, which has dominated the Southern state since the 1930s. The old institutions of Irish society cannot survive the harsh new climate of the nineties.

There are many features of the scandals which are peculiar to Ireland. The high profile of the church in every area of life from education to social welfare has left it dangerously exposed to the destructive forces at work in Irish society. However, despite these differences, Ireland is going through the same sort of upheaval that has afflicted every other Western society in recent years. Since the end of the Cold War removed the stable framework of the past half-century, political parties and public institutions everywhere have appeared empty and bereft of their old coherence, particularly under the pressures of economic recession.

Catholic nationalism

Elsewhere in the Western world, the humiliations suffered by governments and official bodies have been read as a symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting society. In Ireland, however, the undermining of the church and the party that have dominated Southern society for the past 60 years is widely regarded as the sign of a new dawn for the Irish people. There is a growing consensus among commentators that Ireland has finally become a mature and democratic society after its long night in the darkness of Catholic nationalism.

The reason for the optimism is that the end of the Cold War coincides in Ireland with the demise of nationalism, in its old constitutional form in the South, and in its physical-force manifestation of the IRA in the North. For 25 years, the war in the North has kept the national question at the centre of political life in Ireland, long after the nationalist aspirations of

the Southern establishment had expired. The 'peace process' and the unconditional surrender of the IRA has finally laid to rest the ghost of Irish nationalism.

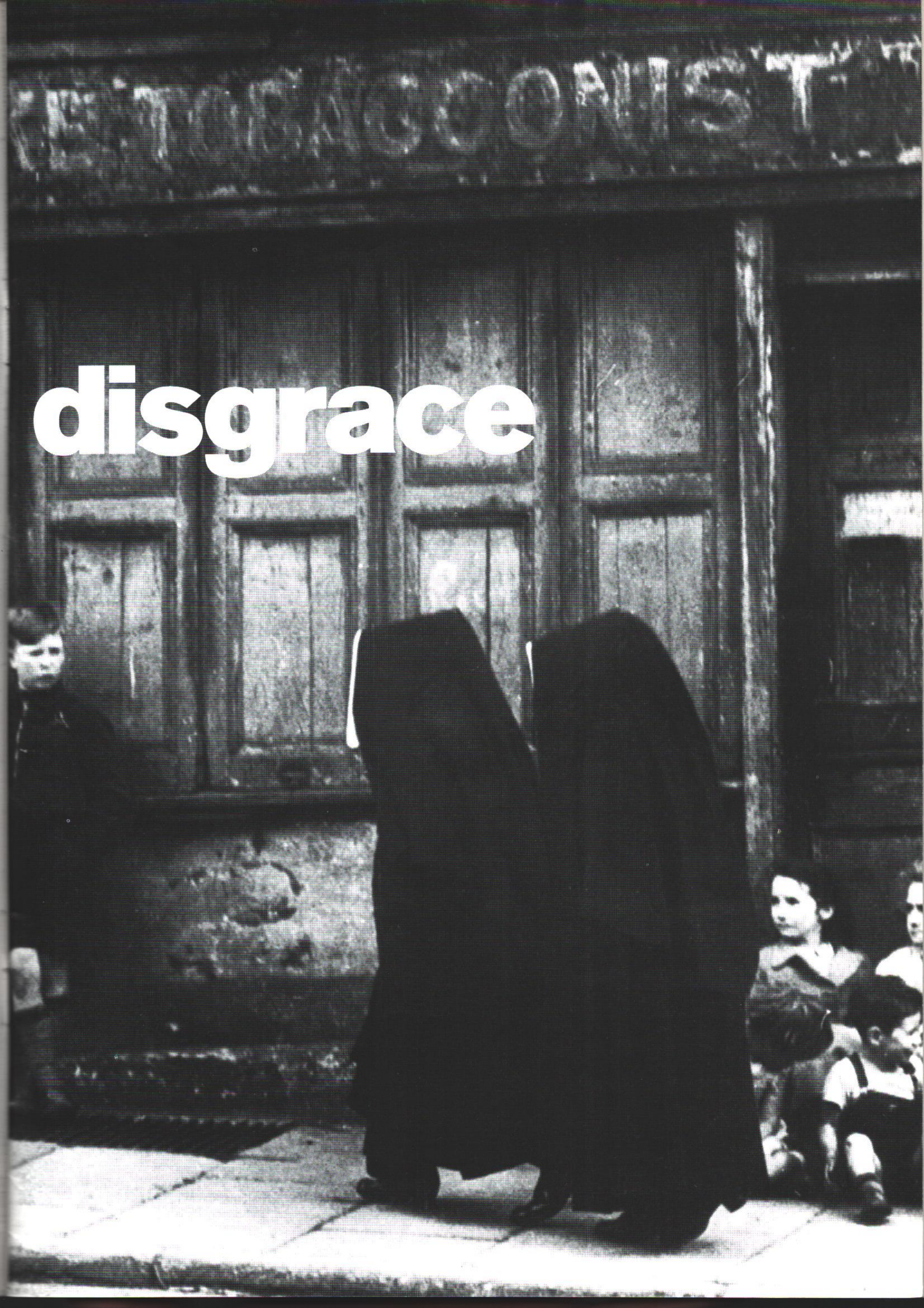
Chattering classes

The political class in the South now feels more at ease in pursuing a pluralistic policy which 'privileges' diverse identities over a singular national ideal. The general opinion among politicians and commentators is that such a policy will allow Ireland to shake off the tainted legacy of the past, promote reconciliation and elevate the country as an equal among the nations of the Western world. If Fianna Fail and the Catholic church have to pay the price for such modernisation, goes the reasoning, then so be it. Such optimism among the chattering classes of Dublin 4 is gravely misplaced. The experience of the past year suggests that there is nothing with which they can replace the stability conferred by the old order.

What the modernisers fail to appreciate is that the old Catholic nationalism which they blame for holding Irish society in a state of backwardness also held it together. All they see is that nationalism left Ireland stuck in the past, preoccupied with age-old quarrels. What they fail to observe is that it also offered the vision of a future (however distant) in which the troubles of the present could be ended. Likewise with the church: it may have been an agency of moral repression, but it also offered salvation in the next life as well as an identification (largely fictitious) with the old struggle for national independence.

Both Catholicism and nationalism provided a clearly defined set of beliefs which guided the life of Irish ►

disgrace





society and kept it stable under the rule of a privileged clique for 70 years. Without the moral and political framework of church and nation, everything becomes chaotic and arbitrary. Things fall apart. So a politician like Albert Reynolds can be thrown up as a hero one day, hailed as a peacemaker with a guaranteed place in the history books, only to be cast down as a villain and

The new moral order is no substitute for the fire and brimstone of Catholicism

a friend of child-abusing priests the next. The new Ireland has not been kind to its chief architect.

The new pluralist society is pulling down all of the old institutions. Take the Catholic church. For years it has been toning down its pronouncements on sensitive moral issues such as divorce and abortion. During the scandal surrounding the infamous 'X' case in 1992, when a 14-year old rape victim was prevented from travelling to England for an abortion, the church kept a discreet silence. When pressed on the issue on Irish radio, one bishop could not bring himself to declare abortion in such a case to be morally wrong. The church's strategy was to retreat from the public domain, while playing a more behind-the-scenes role and keeping its special position in education and social welfare. But events proved that it was impossible to disentangle the church from the crisis in Ireland's public life.

Church and state

In recent years Ireland has been gripped by many of the same moral panics, from Aids to child abuse, that have afflicted Britain and the USA.

In Britain such panics have promoted a general mood of suspicion and mistrust. Parents and care workers have been accused, often wrongly, of abusing children in their care. In Ireland, however, because of the pivotal role played by the church in education and social welfare, it is the clergy that takes the full force of such panics. To be caught out on such an issue is particularly destructive for the church because of the strong stand it has taken on sexual morality.

Because of the close links between church and state, the scandals had a knock-on effect which finally brought down the Reynolds government. Despite all the attempts at liberalisation, church

and state were still locked in what became a deadly embrace.

It is striking the way that every party and organisation associated with traditional Irish nationalism is being dragged down by scandal and corruption. Even Sinn Fein is tarnished. At the height of the Brendan Smyth scandal and before Reynolds resigned, Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams warned of the danger of political instability in the South disrupting the 'peace process', and voiced his hope that Reynolds would stay in power. The party which only yesterday posed the greatest threat to the existing order throughout Ireland seems to have become in the course of the 'peace process' a voice of conservatism. When it had become clear to all that Reynolds was doomed, Sinn Fein proved to be the last defender of a corrupt government.

Equally valid

But if the old institutions are buckling under the strain of the new, what, if anything, will take their place? Ireland, for so long the epitome of Catholic fundamentalism, staunch in the certainty of its beliefs, has been transformed quite suddenly into its very opposite: a country without any clear idea of where it is going or in what it believes.

In public discussion in Ireland today, it appears that every belief and every identity is considered equally valid and worthy of respect: unionist or nationalist, gay or straight, conventional family or single-parent family, one is just as good as the other. But for all the hopes invested in it, the new outlook is by its nature vacuous and unable to command the allegiance of the Irish people. The contempt in which the public now holds former premier Reynolds, a man who considered it a virtue to have no beliefs and who described his only political principle as 'pragmatism', reflects the problems of winning legitimacy for a system without a defining vision.

Disenchantment

The new moral order which recognises the validity of diverse identities is no substitute for the fire and brimstone of Catholicism or the political ambitions of nationalism. Rather than generate enthusiasm from the people, it has engendered apathy and disenchantment. An opinion poll conducted after Reynolds' resignation showed that 73 per cent of the electorate was against the holding of a general election. It would seem likely that the majority just were not bothered about voting for parties with no noticeable differences. At the same time all the parties were united in their fear of going to the electorate, and were determined

to stitch together another coalition. The elite showed its fear of popular democracy and mistrust of the electorate, while the electorate showed little interest in the political ambitions of the elite.

Morbid mood

The end of nationalism has left a vapid political culture without any discernible aim or purpose. Rather than providing a modern, forward-looking vision to match the needs of its well-travelled and educated people, Ireland can offer nothing more than a celebration of diverse forms of Irishness. Such an offering will leave most people cold, since there is nothing much worth celebrating in a country which, despite a paper recovery, remains stuck in economic slump. The lack of any forward-looking dynamic has left Irish society looking to the past and preoccupied with the most sordid issues, of which child sexual abuse is the most notable. The prevalence of this morbid mood says more about the state of Ireland than the rise or fall of any government.

The new moral climate in Ireland and the obsession with child sexual abuse fits a pattern. There seems to be an insatiable appetite in Ireland these days for the most indecent and maudlin ceremonies. Preparations are well under way for the commemoration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the great famine, which killed more than a million people in the 1840s.

Grave robbers

The most morbid and venerable woman in Ireland, its president, Mary Robinson, has already travelled to Nova Scotia to visit the landing place and graves of the victims of the 'coffin-ships'. In the west of Ireland, mass graves containing the remains of famine victims are being excavated. Long-forgotten graves containing the remains of children who died before being baptised are being rediscovered and consecrated. In Dublin, a mass grave containing the remains of hundreds of 'magdalens', prostitutes who were dragooned as cheap labour into the service of the church, was unearthed; and, after a major procession through the streets of the city, they were re-interred in Glasnevin cemetery.

The icons of the old nationalism were martyrs, men who had suffered, but who had also fought for a better future. The icons of the new pluralism are victims, the more helpless the better. It would seem that rather than shaking off the legacy of the past, Ireland is more obsessed with it than ever, and in a most sordid and degrading manner. Welcome to the new Ireland.

No peace for the wicked

Tommy McKearney, former IRA prisoner of war, told Fiona Foster about the attempts to silence opponents of the peace process in Ireland

First and foremost I don't believe that it is a peace process at all.' That was how Tommy McKearney, a former IRA prisoner of war, began his speech to the Campaign Against Militarism conference at Wembley in March 1994. He concluded by calling on his audience to expose Britain as a warmonger not a peacemaker in Ireland. Eight months on, McKearney was arrested under the Offences Against the State Act after a dawn raid on his home in Monaghan in the Irish republic. The Irish media has portrayed him as a dangerous subversive intent on wrecking any attempt to get peace. His arrest and the surrounding events offer a telling insight into what the peace process in Ireland really means.

McKearney's opposition to the peace process has won him few friends in Ireland, not least in the republican movement which is now a key player in the negotiations. But, alongside other individuals like Bernadette McAliskey, he has continued to protest against what he believes is a cynical ploy to dupe the republican movement into participating in a process which will end the conflict in Ireland on the British government's terms.

On Saturday 22 October McKearney and his wife were woken at 7am by armed police with a warrant to search their home. Three hours later Irish television and radio announced that over 50 homes in the Irish republic had been raided in an attempt to thwart a new terrorist group called the Irish National Republican Army (INRA), intent on breaking the ceasefire and wrecking the peace process. Tommy McKearney was named in the reports and his home was shown.

McKearney says that the hysterical headlines were in sharp contrast to the relaxed nature of the raid and arrest: 'Don't get me wrong. I don't take kindly to armed police searching my home at some unearthly hour, but Patricia and I were treated relatively well and were allowed to have some breakfast while they searched the place. These guys obviously weren't expecting us to pull a gun on them. In fact for one minute I thought they'd introduced internment because they didn't seem to be too bothered about getting evidence to prove any charges.'

Despite the media reports of a new 'terror group', loyally repeated from a police press release, the police made no attempt to look for arms. There was no metal detector and they did not rip up floor boards or dig up the garden. Instead they spent two hours looking through books, speeches, letters and political magazines, many of which were confiscated.

McKearney was taken to a barracks where he was interrogated three times. Not once did the police and special branch mention the

INRA or any other armed organisation. Instead he was repeatedly asked about his political views, why he didn't support the peace process, why he didn't agree with the Sinn Fein strategy. 'I felt like I was part of a political charade. I didn't co-operate with the interrogations, but I did say at one stage that I could have answered all these questions in the house over a cup of tea or they could have read the answers in my interview with the *Guardian* or my speech to the Wembley anti-militarist conference.'

McKearney was released at eight that evening and went straight home. The biggest shock of



the day came with the main Irish news at 9pm. 'The tone of the coverage took my breath away. The security correspondent was wearing a flak jacket and sirens were screaming in the background as police cars screeched out of the barracks on their way to make the arrests. He was saying that a new terror group had been smashed and my name was mentioned. For the first time that day I felt frightened and vulnerable.' Tommy McKearney has had two brothers and an uncle shot dead by loyalist death squads. He now fears that if the loyalist ceasefire breaks he will be high on their target list.

The coverage in the Sunday papers did little to comfort him. One journalist writing in the *Sunday Tribune* soberly described the INRA as a bogus organisation invented to discredit opponents of the peace process, but the rest of the media repeated the police claims that a new group had been foiled. The Irish edition of the *Sunday People* ran the story on the front page under the heading 'Terror chiefs held in dawn swoop', describing McKearney as an 'ex-Maze killer'.

McKearney believes that the operation was set up to further isolate and discredit those indi-

viduals who have spoken out against the peace process, and to serve as a warning to anyone in the republican movement who might be sceptical of the Sinn Fein leadership's strategy. 'The authorities used the media to lump together anyone who has challenged the peace process and present us as psychopaths with no arguments beyond a call to bomb-on.'

One of the most disturbing aspects of this incident was the ability of the Dublin authorities to carry out raids and arbitrary arrests while eliciting hardly a word of protest. Nobody has ever heard of the INRA and the police have

provided no evidence that it exists, yet the failure of any civil rights group or indeed the leadership of the republican movement to condemn the arrests has given credibility to the story.

The rounding up of opponents of the peace process in Southern Ireland points to the dangers inherent in current developments. The leaders of the republican movement cannot protest against such draconian attacks because it would threaten their cosy relationship with their new allies among the Dublin authorities.

Tommy McKearney takes no comfort in seeing his own worst fears realised. He sees his task of exposing the peace process as more urgent than ever. 'My point is that the British and their allies in the Irish republic are not capable of delivering peace with justice in Ireland.'

Sinn Fein has celebrated the opening of Border roads and the lifting of the exclusion order on Gerry Adams as the rewards of the peace process. Meanwhile, the Dublin government's move against political activists should be a reminder that the peace process delivers only to those who have announced their unconditional surrender.

Something to hide?

Identity cards will not do nicely,
argues Bernard Ryan

Home secretary Michael Howard's proposal for a voluntary identity card, announced at the Conservative Party conference in October, has generated little controversy. This is surprising, since it seems to admit that Britain is fast becoming a constant surveillance society. There has been a marked reluctance to question either the need for an identity card system or its wider implications.

Howard's identity card proposal is in fact a remarkable break with the past. Since the wartime identity card was abolished in 1952 there has been a consensus against its reintroduction. At that time, even the Lord Chief Justice felt that the system gave intolerable powers to the police. As he put it in the famous case of *Willcock v Muckle* (1951):

'it is obvious that the police now, as a matter of routine, demand the production of national registration identity cards whenever they stop or interrogate a motorist for whatever cause....[T]o demand a national registration identity card from all and sundry...is wholly unreasonable.'

Today, by contrast, even liberal commentators are prepared to defend an identity card. Joanna Coles argued in the *Guardian* last year that 'only those with something to hide can fear it' (25 February 1994). More recently, the *Independent* offered its support for the government's proposal, suggesting that 'the potential benefits are numerous, and not only to officialdom and the police' (14 October 1994). This was an echo of Michael Howard's trivialising justification of identity cards, that they would enable citizens to discard a wallet full of plastic.

One reason for the lack of criticism may be that, in themselves, identity cards seem to be of little direct benefit to the authorities. For example, they are unlikely to help the police prevent petty crime, since presumably this is rarely committed in the presence of police officers to begin with. As Dr Michael Levi, a criminologist at the University of Wales, put it on the day after Michael Howard's speech to the Conservative conference, 'I cannot imagine how the chances of detection

or conviction will be improved significantly by this measure in any form' (*Guardian*, 15 October 1994).

Nor would identity cards aid the Department of Social Security in its never-ending campaign against benefit fraud. As social security minister, William Hague, admitted in the House of Commons, benefit fraud usually involves misrepresentation of facts rather than of identity (*Hansard*, 28 October 1993).

Identity cards would not even contribute greatly to the surveillance of the population. The banking and telephone systems already generate a vast amount of data about individuals' movements and associates, which is readily available to the police. The increased videoing of vehicles on public streets and motorways can only add to this information. Meanwhile, in the background, the Police National Computer hums with information on over five million individuals and 24m vehicles, and the Government Data Network links the major government departments.

Put liberty first

That an identity card has been proposed, and largely accepted, notwithstanding these limitations, simply confirms the reactionary trend of British politics. In the last 18 months alone, we have seen everything from armed road blocks in the City of London to the mobilisation of Street Watch patrols by the Home Secretary. The issuing of identity cards, whether on a compulsory or voluntary basis, is merely another step in the acquisition of greater control by public authorities.

What we see today is essentially the reversal of the official relationship between the individual and the state. In the traditional liberal view—for which the authorities at least indicated their respect—the individual's interests were paramount and any restrictions had to be carefully justified. Now, it is the other way around. The interests of the state take priority, and it is for individuals to apologise and explain themselves to it. It is no longer the authorities, but rather the population, which is being called to account for its movements.

Many of the current restrictions on liberty rest upon a simple, flawed,



proposition. It is the Joanna Coles argument for identity cards, generalised: if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. Only the suspicious and the guilty can object to increasing the power of the authorities.

This argument was recently used, for example, to explain the abolition of the right to silence by the Criminal Justice Act. We were told that only criminals could benefit from its retention. In Michael Howard's words, 'I do not believe that the innocent have anything to fear from the changes' (*Hansard*, 11 January 1994). The innocent would presumably be only too glad of the offer to explain themselves to the police.

The 'nothing to hide' slogan has also been used to justify the sprouting of security cameras on High Streets up and down the country. If you are not breaking and entering, why should you object to having your public movements recorded on video? Such has been the power of this view that even the civil liberties organisation Liberty does not oppose surveillance cameras as such, but calls instead for their installation to be regulated by law.

In fact, the 'nothing to hide' principle is profoundly dangerous. In the first place, it implies that literally everything about us should be open to inspection by the police and other authorities. If it were rigorously pursued, it would give the authorities *carte blanche* to pick through our homes, our cars, our acquaintances, our whereabouts, our sexual partners, and so on. If you have nothing to hide, how can you deny them access? The logical result is an obligation to report to the police each morning, and to obtain their permission for our proposed movements for the rest of the day.

Indeed, if we accept the 'nothing to hide' principle, then the consequences of the current identity card proposal may be far more severe. The existence of a voluntary identity card would lead to demands that its possession be compulsory. Police would then be given powers to demand proof of identity as and when they saw fit. The use of these powers by the police to harass and to control those whose faces do not fit would presumably follow.

A 'nothing to hide' culture is also a restrained and censored one.

A sense of being watched, or the possibility of being called to account for all of your actions, tends to reduce an individual's perceived freedom of action. Streets become sanitised, drained of all life beyond shopping. The abolition of the right to silence will make individuals more reluctant to engage in behaviour they might not wish to discuss under police questioning later on.

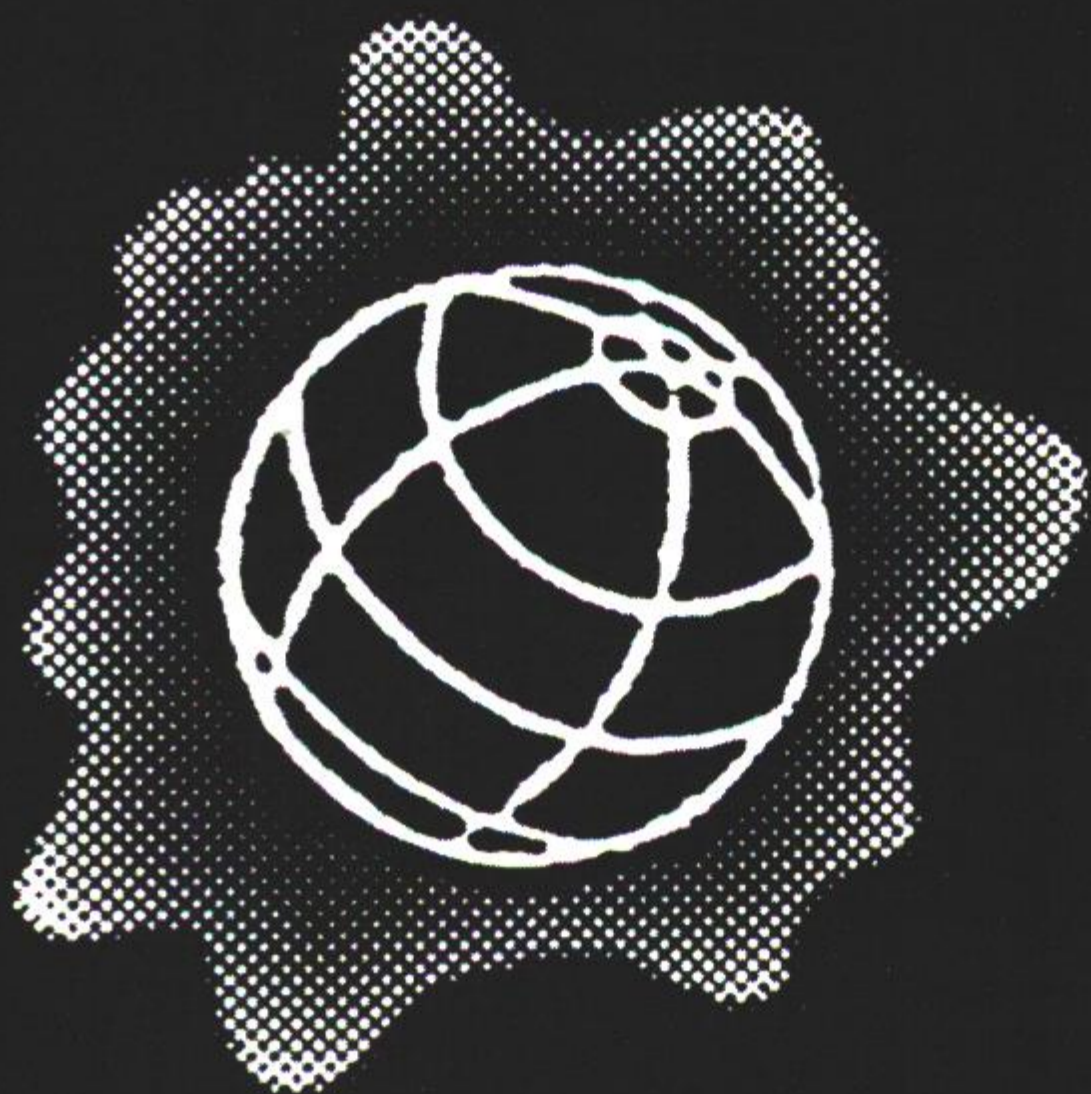
Not to be trusted

The problem with 'nothing to hide' is that it implies that we can trust those in authority. It presumes that they are willing and able to act in the interests of the population at large, to decide what should and should not happen.

Experience however tells us that the authorities cannot be trusted to run our lives. The powers they obtain, whether by law or for the want of objection, have always been used and abused for the purposes of control, and always will be. This is the lesson of the many miscarriage-of-justice cases in recent years in which the police have been shown to have lied and manufactured evidence to secure convictions. It is the repeated lesson of demonstrations confronted and attacked by riot police. It is the lesson of the Criminal Justice Act, which legalises the harassment of those with unconventional opinions and lifestyles—for no reason other than that they *are* unconventional.

At bottom, even to ask whether individuals have anything to hide is to agree that the relationship between the individual and the state should be reversed. It is to argue that individuals should always be answerable to the authorities. It is to accept that the authorities are above question, and that any restrictions and demands they place upon us are legitimate ones.

The identity card proposal confirms the reactionary turn which British politics has taken in the 1990s. Faced with their incapacity to develop society, politicians on all sides take refuge in the promotion of division, suspicion and fear. The rights and freedoms of everyone are called into question in a desperate attempt to strengthen the authority of a few. We should not be afraid of their arguments. When it comes to liberty, it is they, not we, who have something to hide. ●



Healthy eating in a diseased society

After reading the government's latest report on healthy eating, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick offers an alternative prescription: stop worrying about dying and start living

It's official! According to a recent government report, if you eat less fat, salt and sugar, and more fibre and starchy carbohydrates, you might succeed in living a bit longer. But why should anybody want to prolong the agony of old age in a society that treats old people so badly?

Working as a general practitioner, I am struck by the contrast between two types of patient. I see many young people, usually in professional occupations, who worry about their health, watch their diet and take regular exercise. They also seek regular check-ups and screening tests for various diseases.

I also see many old people, often former manual workers, who have never been much concerned about their health and have rarely modified their lifestyles or consulted their doctors with a view to preserving it. If you congratulate them on their longevity, they often say that they only wish they had not lived so long. Sometimes they even request my help in assisting their escape from the misery of loneliness, infirmity and poverty.

The current preoccupation with the link between diet and health reveals the grip of irrationality on modern medicine and the pervasive anxiety of contemporary society.

According to *Nutritional Aspects of Cardiovascular Disease*, the report of the government's Cardiovascular Review Group Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (Coma), changes in the national diet could produce a substantial reduction in levels of illness and death resulting from such diseases. At present coronary

heart disease (CHD) accounts for 27 per cent of all deaths in the UK and stroke for a further 12 per cent.

The key link identified in the report is that between dietary fat, the level of cholesterol circulating in the blood and the incidence of angina, heart attack and stroke. Citing the results of a meta-analysis of numerous surveys and clinical trials published in the *British Medical Journal* on 5 February 1994, the Coma report asserts that 'these data are strong, consistent and show the characteristics of a causal relationship between plasma cholesterol and CHD mortality' (p31).

'The cholesterol papers', as they are dubbed in an accompanying editorial, indeed make an impressive case for the link between cholesterol and CHD (*BMJ*, 5 February 1994, pp363-72). The authors conclude that a 10 per cent reduction in serum cholesterol in Britain would result in a 27 per cent fall in mortality from CHD. This reduction could be produced by a 10 per cent fall in the proportion of energy derived in the national diet from saturated fatty acids (the sort of fats found in meat and dairy products). They demand 'appropriate action', including 'wider health education, labelling of foods, and policies on food subsidies that are linked to health priorities' (p371). The Coma report has taken up these demands and produced detailed recommendations on proposed changes to the national diet.

All of this sounds eminently reasonable. Indeed the notion that fatty foods lead to clogged coronaries is already firmly established, as in the popular description of the traditional

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

FUTURES



British fried breakfast as a 'heart attack on a plate'. Yet while health educators wonder if this awareness leads to any change in eating habits, it is worth asking whether the link between diet and heart disease is so straightforward and the potential benefits of change so great as to make major dietary adjustments advisable. Many important criticisms of the policy conclusions drawn from the 'cholesterol papers' appeared in subsequent issues of the *BMJ*.

The association between

cholesterol and coronary heart disease may be strong, but it is clearly not the only factor involved (*BMJ*, 16 April 1994, p1038). The incidence of CHD has been declining over many years in different Western populations, despite steady or even increasing levels of cholesterol. A major British study has shown that, though cholesterol levels tend to be lower in lower social classes, the incidence of CHD is around four times higher. Genetic, cultural and environmental factors, as well as chance, also appear to affect any particular individual's likelihood of acquiring CHD. This means that the scope for personal initiative in improving one's survival prospects is relatively small.

Other critics drew attention to the distinction between the apparently impressive improvement in the relative risk of CHD resulting from dietary change and the marginal improvement in *absolute* risk:

'Most doctors answer in the affirmative when asked whether they ►



would take a daily pill to reduce their chances of dying from a heart attack by 50 per cent. When asked if they would do so for 10 to 20 years if the risk was reduced from 2/1000 to 1/1000, a reduction of 50 per cent, there is much less enthusiasm.' (*BMJ*, 16 April 1994, p1040)



have been identified, the causes of these conditions remain obscure and treatment remains largely unsatisfactory. Furthermore, because these are diseases of ageing—83 per cent of people who die of CHD are over 65—the scope for any intervention is likely to be limited. Old people will still die. Where clinical medicine falters,

The chances of a 40-year old man with a relatively high serum cholesterol dying from a heart attack are very small indeed. Reducing his serum cholesterol level by 10 per cent would make his chances of such a death very very small indeed. The authors comment that such improvements 'may represent substantial epidemiological benefit', but are of 'trivial clinical importance'.

A man advised of his chances in these terms might well decide to live dangerously (but happily) on bacon and eggs, rather than marginally more safely on muesli and skimmed milk, with the added risk of dying miserable and flatulent.

In all the computerised number-crunching involved in the cholesterol-CHD debate, one statistic stands out. Two contributors to the discussion from the Netherlands note that the postulated 27 per cent decline in CHD mortality resulting from the proposed dietary changes 'seems high', but, they continue, 'expressed in terms of individual life expectancy gained, this represents only 2.5 to 5.0 months' (*BMJ*, 16 April, p1038).

In other words, if you forgo the pleasures of meat and cheese for the rest of your life, and eat plenty of pulses and potatoes, you might prolong your melancholy existence by a mere few months. Once again, offered the choice in these terms, many would opt to eat now and forfeit the 2.5 to 5.0 months.

Another set of problems arises from the presumption that the recommended reduction in serum cholesterol is easily achieved by dietary changes. According to one group of experts who have studied this matter, simple fat-reducing diets are ineffective, while effective diets are unpalatable and cannot be sustained (*BMJ*, 16 April 1994, p1038-39). They conclude that the authors of the cholesterol papers 'should apply the same rigour to assessing the effectiveness of intervention as they have to their analyses of the epidemiological and clinical trial data'.

The dietary approach to heart disease reflects the peculiar predicament of modern medicine. Ever since the causes of the infectious diseases that were the major killers of the past were identified and effective treatments were developed, attention has shifted to the 'modern epidemics' of heart disease and cancer. The problem here is that, though diverse 'associations' and 'risk factors'

Doctors who cannot help individuals turn to treating populations

epidemiology steps in. Doctors who cannot help individuals turn to treating populations. The Coma report raises this strategy to a new level of absurdity:

'The main recommendations are given as targets for populations. These are proposed averages for population groups rather than for individual eating. They should not be interpreted as recommended maximum (or minimum) intakes for individuals. The distinction is crucial. To meet a given population dietary target approximately half the population will be expected to consume less than that target, and half more.' (p5)

But unless every Jack Spratt who follows the Coma guidelines randomly acquires a mate who complements his dietary idiosyncrasies and so maintains the national average, the targets will not be met.

One alternative would be for the population to be assigned in roughly equal numbers to one side or other of the dietary average, perhaps after consultation and appropriate counselling. In the Coma report the health foods shops of the seventies meet the Stalinist five-year plans of the thirties.

According to the late Petr Skrabanek, a trenchant critic of the excesses of modern epidemiology, the prevailing obsession about health is 'not orchestrated by some worldwide conspiracy, but is rather the result of a positive feedback between the masses stricken by fear of death and the health promotionists seeking enrichment and power' (*The Death of Humane Medicine and the Rise of Coercive Healthism*, 1994, p38). In fact, a fear of death and a pervasive anxiety about health are strongest among the middle classes, who have experienced a growing sense of insecurity in recent years as a result of the economic slump and the collapse of the old political systems.

In an age of diminishing expectations, there is a widespread loss of faith in the future. As a result, the meaning of life for everybody shrinks to the number of years of its duration. For every individual, his or her lifespan is all they have. Staying alive becomes an end in itself. Hence they become preoccupied with clinging on to it, with holding off death, with playing safe, with avoiding risks. As Skrabanek puts it, 'a dying century and a dying culture makes war against death its main preoccupation' (p39). Paradoxically, when there appears to be nothing to live for, people are reduced to trying to prolong life itself. Yet, as Skrabanek also observes, to live in fear of death is to fear living.

Such a climate of fear is receptive to any agency that offers greater security, or any source of rules to enhance the individual's prospects of survival in a world experienced as hostile and threatening. Anxiety invites moralism and self-regulation; it thrives on the sort of guidelines to behaviour now offered in the Coma report and in numerous other such codes of conduct covering everything from language to sex.

Numerous commentators have noted that the evils targeted by modern health promotion are strikingly similar to the sins defined by traditional religion—from promiscuity to drunkenness and gluttony. In fact, today's health moralism is even worse: at least religion accepts the reality of suffering and offers consolation in an afterlife. 'Healthism' offers only fear and guilt.

A climate of fear is also receptive to measures of external regulation, and the government is not slow to respond with the facile rhetoric of health promotion. Like Virginia Bottomley's 1992 white paper, 'The health of the nation', the Coma report expresses the government's concern with issues of public health, in an attempt to bolster its flagging popularity. Such reports cost little and, through their emphasis on individual responsibility in matters of health, imply the expenditure of less rather than more money on the National Health Service. By promoting measures of public self-regulation, these measures also intensify the pressures of individuation and help to enhance the power of the state over an increasingly atomised society.

'Hope I die before I get old': this was the spirit of the 1960s as proclaimed by The Who. In the 1990s we live in a society in which young people want to get old and old people wish they were dead. Once we stop worrying about dying, we can start living (and eating) and concentrate on improving the quality rather than extending the duration of our existence.



Gender bending

How do you bring up a boy today? Once it was all dead simple. Boys were brought up to be masterful, and girls were raised to be nurturing. Then along came feminism insisting that girls should be reared so as to give them a sense of equality with their brothers—equal rights to train-sets, scraped knees and later a decent education and a job to follow. Through the 1970s and most of the 1980s the problem of raising girls was the point at issue—‘how does one counter all the negative, traditional images of feminine softness?’. Now boys are in the spotlight. After years of trying to get girls to assert their right to play in the sand-pit and stand up for themselves, everything has gone into reverse. The received *Guardian*-reader wisdom in the 1990s is that boys should aspire to ‘feminine’ values.

It has been coming for sometime. Lynn Segal led the way in 1990 by popularising a debate among academic feminists with her seminal work, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. And since then the Angelas (Phillips and Neustatter) among many other high-profile feminists have kept the issue burning. Cynics have put it down to so many of the more articulate feminist writers reaching a certain age and life-stage at the same time. In their heady activist days, when pregnancy would have been a problem, they were concerned with access to abortion and contraception, when they started thinking about families in the eighties infertility and childcare issues topped priorities, and now they are all mothers (or friends of mothers) it is the problems of child-rearing that preoccupy their thoughts. But there is more to it than this.

The current insecurities about child-rearing in general and the problems of coping with boys are really a code for other fears shared by the liberal middle classes. Today’s rather wet, uncertain middle class values sit awkwardly with rude, uncouth and not very restrained behaviour, and many of these parents see boyish exuberance as far more akin to the loutish behaviour of yobbo football hooligans, joy-riders and working class vandals than to their own restraint. What worries them is not the gender difference in behaviour, but anything loud, rough and aggressive.

The often-sensible journalist Dave Hill illustrated this in his recent from-the-heart piece in the *Guardian*. He writes of his ‘despair’ that boy peers of his 10-year old daughter, ‘seem able to relate to each other only by wrestling each other to the ground’. He ‘grimly’ remembers his own boyhood, in particular, ‘the routine cruelties and punitive rituals which [he] endured and also enjoyed at the expense of others: the compiling of pecking orders, selection of victims, apportioning of derision to those who failed to come up to the macho mark’.

Hill remembers ‘boys whose preferred means of communication was to thump you on the leg’. What Hill remembers as gender-specific behaviour would be more accurately described as childish brutality. I could conjure up similarly brutish memories of girlie behaviour.

There is a tendency for girls and boys to act differently. None of us is immune to gender stereotypes, but while in the seventies girls were encouraged to aspire to what were perceived as ‘male’ values, now ‘female’ values—like sensitivity, consideration and thoughtfulness—set the quality standard. In short, whereas before it was taken to be appropriate for girls to assert themselves and compete with boys, the nineties parenting code encourages boys to imitate the passivity of girls.

It is the rudeness, aggression and rough-and-tumble of boy behaviour that is at the heart of middle class concerns, not worries about inequality or gender difference itself. This is why the concern about bringing up boys runs parallel to worries about laddish behaviour in girls.

‘Yob girls’ and ‘girl gangs’ have become a focus of media interest. The recent mugging of actress Elizabeth Hurley turned the spotlight on violent girl gangs, but the issue was already under scrutiny by sociologists. It has been a media panic in the USA for the past couple of years.

The real message that comes through these discussions is that aggression, assertiveness and being loud is a problem—‘niceness’, compliance and non-threatening behaviour are the order of the day. The problem for young people—male or female—is that niceness doesn’t

actually get you very far and sometimes threatening behaviour is entirely appropriate. It is particularly appropriate for those of us who find ourselves in a battle to defend our living standards and our rights.

Society is riddled with conflict and battles that have to be fought: battles to sustain pay and conditions at work, battles against social inequalities, battles against the interference of state agencies in our lives. Our children need to be taught how to fight, how to stand up for themselves.

The reason why such assertiveness is identified with macho, yobbish, uncivilised (that is working class) behaviour is because most working class people know that there is no virtue in turning the other cheek—you just get hit again. If you don’t learn to defend yourself and your mates, you are likely to get pulverised. I would rather fight in a campaign alongside someone riddled with ‘masculine values’—whether they are male or female—than someone whose behaviour had been neutered. Tomorrow’s young men don’t need less balls—they need more, and so do tomorrow’s women. ●

The nineties parenting code encourages boys to imitate the passivity of girls

There is now a civil war within Nato over Bosnia. Joan Phillips explains why

The other Bosnian war

Two things have become clear in recent months about the war in Bosnia:

- Global power politics are having a destructive impact on the ground;
- Every foreign power is pursuing its own agenda at the expense of the Western alliance.

One thing is not so clear however. Why are the Western powers, and the Americans especially, going their separate ways over Bosnia given the damage that this is doing to the Nato alliance?

The war in Bosnia was effectively over in 1992. So why is it still raging more than two years on? The answer is that there is an out-of-control aggressor in Bosnia—and it is not the Serbs, but the Americans.

Any doubts about what has kept the war going should have been dispelled by recent events. After six months of virtual peace, during which there was little enthusiasm for more fighting among the warring factions, the war in Bosnia flared up again in August 1994 and escalated through the autumn and winter months. The conflict was reignited by American intervention. By lending diplomatic and logistic support to the Bosnian government, the Americans are responsible for restarting the war in Bosnia.

In August, the Bosnian Fifth Corps launched an offensive in north-west Bosnia against fellow Bosnian Muslims loyal to Fikret Abdic, a Bihac politician and businessman who had made his peace with the Serbs and Croats. After concerted shelling, the towns of Velika Kladusa and Cazin, both in the Bihac pocket, fell to the Fifth Corps. Some 30 000 Abdic loyalists fled to Serb-held territory across the border in Croatia.

Several months later, in October, the Fifth Corps launched an offensive out of the UN-designated 'safe area' of Bihac, cutting a swathe through Serbian territory around the enclave. The safe zone of Bihac was used as a staging area for attacks against Serb-populated areas on the Grabez plateau, leading



Serbian soldiers at Drmis, Krajina

to the expulsion of about 10 000 Serbs, who escaped to neighbouring Serb-held Croatia, following the tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslims who had fled the earlier Bosnian Fifth Corps offensive.

The Bihac offensives were not exceptional. Elsewhere, Bosnian government troops joined forces with the Croats to take the town of Kupres from the Serbs. They also engaged the Serbs around Trnovo, Tuzla, Mostar and Sarajevo. The ceasefire in Sarajevo was broken by government soldiers who repeatedly entered the demilitarised zone and launched

attacks against the Serbs.

The Bosnian army could not have launched such offensives unaided. External intelligence and military support has been essential to their success. According to diplomatic and military sources, the Americans have been providing intelligence, tactical support, training and arms to the Bosnian government forces.

UN military officials in Sarajevo say the Americans have been passing intelligence to Bosnian Muslim military commanders. For example, it has been suggested that they provided aerial photographs of Bosnian Serb troop positions around Bihac before the Bosnian Muslims launched their offensive out of the enclave at the end of October. Intelligence information from the USA's spy satellites is 'downgraded' to American personnel on the ground and passed on to Bosnian Muslim forces.

Turning a blind eye

British and French military sources have intimated that US military and intelligence personnel helped plan the attacks against the Serbs at Bihac, Trnovo and Kupres. One Western diplomat who refused to be named told *Le Monde* that the USA had set up an operational headquarters, perhaps on board a ship in the Adriatic, to maintain a constant link with the Bosnian Muslim army command (17 November 1994).

Senior diplomatic and military sources have said that retired American soldiers are training the Bosnian Muslims. According to the *European*, UN officers near Vitez told the paper that American personnel had been seen at some of the Bosnian army bases in the area for months (18-24 November 1994).

While the Americans have demanded an end to the arms embargo against the Bosnian government, UN personnel allege that the CIA has already been landing arms shipments to Bosnia. Whatever the truth of this, it is likely that the Americans have been turning a blind eye to the delivery of arms to Bosnian forces. Under the same amendment to the annual defence bill that required the US government to stop policing the arms embargo against Bosnia, the Pentagon has been obliged to prepare plans for arming and training the Bosnian Muslims.

The CIA has denied that its members are working from the Sarajevo headquarters of the Bosnian army, but it has not denied that its operatives are on the ground in Bosnia. US officials have been similarly selective in their denials. In a defence department regular briefing, Dennis Boxx stated that 'no department of defence personnel are conducting training or any other military activity in support of any Bosnian

government forces' (18 November 1994). However, Mr Boxx would not rule out that other parts of the US government might be engaged in military activities, saying that he could speak only for the Pentagon. Nor could he comment on whether the USA was providing intelligence information to the Bosnian forces.

Anybody who has spent any time on the ground in Bosnia knows that there are a lot of Americans (a lot more than the 20-30 cited by Mr Boxx) running around. They can be seen in and out of uniform in many places. Why are they there? The Americans are not officially involved in UN operations, so what are they doing? Providing 'support' ('logistics, air operations, administrative and convoy support') is the official answer from Mr Boxx. Support to whom is the question many are asking. It would be an all-time American foreign policy first if there were not any CIA operatives in Bosnia. However, even if there were not a single CIA operative on the ground, the USA is doing more than enough overtly, never mind covertly, to influence what is happening on the battlefield.

In September 1994, a high-ranking US military delegation visited central Bosnia for discussions with Bosnian government commanders. According to several sources, General Charles 'Chuck' Boyd led the US team, which included Brigadier General Mike Hayden, head of intelligence in the US European Command, Brigadier General Mike Miza, director of operations at the European Command and Brigadier Andrew Ridgeway, local sector commander of UN forces. In addition, president Bill Clinton's special envoy, ambassador Charles Thomas, the assistant secretary of state for Europe, Richard Holbrooke, and his deputy, Robert Frasure, attended the meeting with Bosnian army commanders in Gornji Vakuf.

US-brokered agreement

The talks were aimed at cementing the Muslim/Croat military alliance which was supposed to come into being with the signing of the Washington agreement creating a Muslim/Croat federation in March 1994. American hopes for an integrated military alliance with a joint command structure have been slow to materialise. So US military personnel have stepped in to act as the liaison between the Croatian and Muslim armies.

The despatching of more than a dozen US officers to Sarajevo some weeks after the Gornji Vakuf meeting indicated that the Americans meant business. The job of the American military delegation led by retired US general John Galvin, the former supreme commander of Nato forces ►





in Europe, was to help unite Bosnian Muslim and Croat forces under the terms of the US-brokered Washington agreement.

At the same time, the Americans were cementing military relations with the Croats. While everybody was fixated with the US decision to stop policing the arms embargo against the Bosnian government, few noticed that the USA had broken the arms

British and French were denouncing the Americans, the next day they were following the USA in Nato bombing raids against the Serbs. One day the Americans were castigating the Europeans for appeasing the Serbs, the next day they were saying that concessions should be made. One day the Americans were saying that Nato should not heed the UN, the next day they were praising UN forces. One day the Americans were calling for more bombings, the next day they were urging a negotiated settlement. One day the Americans called the conflict in Bosnia a war of Serbian aggression, the next day they described it as a civil war.

What are we to make of these contradictions? The first thing that is clear is that the five major powers involved in Bosnia—the Americans, French, British, Germans and Russians—all have their own agendas. The events of recent months reveal that the Americans are pursuing a policy at odds with that of the British, for example. While the Americans are continually escalating the war by siding with the Bosnian government, the British are adopting a neutral stance and pushing for negotiations.

The second thing we can conclude is that nobody wants the alliance to collapse. Hence, the Europeans join in symbolic Nato air-strikes against the Serbs, while the Americans stop short of going a bridge too far.

UN v Nato

The third point, however, is that a subjective desire to hold the alliance together does not seem to be sufficient to arrest an apparently unstoppable dynamic towards unilateralism. While the differences among the allies have been apparent for some time, their interests are now diverging to the point where they are becoming irreconcilable. The Americans and Europeans are like a husband and wife who have both got a lot out of their marriage in the past but are now having a hard time trying to reconcile their differences. The rows are becoming more frequent, and every time they happen it is harder to patch things up. The partners are heading for an irretrievable breakdown. The conflict of interests is now assuming an institutional form, with the Americans attacking the Europeans through Nato and the Europeans attacking the Americans through the UN.

The one thing that is not obvious is why everybody is doing their own thing in Bosnia given the destructive consequences for the alliance.

There is a large element of irrationality in what the Americans are doing. Going it alone puts Washington in a no-win situation. By insisting that lifting the arms embargo against

the Muslims and bombing the Serbs is the answer, the Americans are in danger of being badly exposed, by drawing attention to a problem they cannot solve. The pursuit of such a policy is likely to undermine rather than enhance the USA's status as global policeman.

Vying for position

Going it alone is also doing serious damage to the Western alliance. The more the Americans alienate their allies over Bosnia, the less they can expect of the alliance next time they want a favour done. Ultimately, this policy risks exposing the idea of the 'international community' for the sham that it is. In the past, the USA has usually been able to get multilateral cover for its foreign policy adventures. After Bosnia, it is likely to be much harder. The next time the Americans ask the British or the French to support an invasion here or a bombing there, the old allies are likely to think twice about it. The more this happens, the more the actions of the 'international community' will be revealed for what they really are—the self-interested exercise of power by competing states.

America's out-of-control foreign policy over Bosnia can be understood only in the context of the intensification of global competition among the major powers in recent years.

As the old international hierarchy has unravelled since the end of the Cold War, the major world powers have been vying for position and influence. The old rules of international relations have gone, and in the absence of new ones everybody is feeling their way in the emerging New World Order. Bosnia has provided a focus for the competing powers in their struggle for influence. Through their interventions in Bosnia, the various Western powers have sought to establish their global authority, usually at the expense of their rivals.

Reject accept reject

Take America. Sometimes it is hard to see the wood for the trees when examining US diplomacy in the former Yugoslavia. There have been so many twists and turns in policy that it is hard to grasp the underlying dynamic.

Washington started out in 1991 by supporting the unity of Yugoslavia and opposing the secessionist republics. By early 1992, the USA was supporting the secessionist republic of Bosnia. In early 1993, the Americans began by supporting the Vance-Owen plan for the cantonisation of Bosnia, and then changed their minds and brought about the collapse of the plan. Later in 1993, Washington accepted the Owen-Stoltenberg plan for the three-way partition of Bosnia, a virtual duplicate of the three-way partition plan it had urged Sarajevo

One day the Americans were calling for more bombings, the next day a negotiated settlement

embargo against Croatia. In late November, Gojko Susak, Croatia's defence minister, signed a military cooperation agreement with the USA in Washington.

The agreement followed extensive contacts between the Croatian and American military after the signing of the federation agreement in March. One of America's most prestigious military consultancies, MPRI, is modernising the Croatian army, apparently with the approval of the government in Washington. Croatian army officers will be schooled at the George Marshall European Centre for Security Studies, run by the US European Command.

The closer ties established with the Croats are paying dividends. America doubtless had a hand in the Croat withdrawal of support from rebel Muslim leader Fikret Abdic. Croatia allowed Nato to use its air space for a month at the time of the Bihac crisis, and has agreed to site CIA spy satellites, making surveillance of air bases, supply caches, gun movements, tank clusters and troop movements in Bosnia more effective. By working through Zagreb, the Americans can more easily bypass the British and French in Sarajevo.

As well as having a destructive influence on what is happening on the ground in Bosnia, America's pursuit of a unilateral policy is having a devastating impact on the Western alliance. When America decided unilaterally to opt out of policing the arms embargo against the Bosnian government all hell broke loose. From 13 November, Washington stopped US naval support for the blockade against arms shipments to Bosnia, while continuing to intercept supplies to Serbia and Montenegro. Practically, the US move was of little moment, but politically it was a bombshell.

There followed a confusing sequence of events. One day the

to reject in 1992, then rejected it, then accepted it, then rejected it. Also in 1993, the Americans adopted their 'lift-and-strike' policy, then abandoned this and began to characterise Bosnia as a civil rather than an international conflict, then returned to 'lift-and-strike'. Similarly, in 1994, Washington blew hot and cold about the 'lift-and-strike' option, changing its mind from one month, and even one week, to the next.

What can we make of this? Anybody who thinks that morality enters into American calculations when it comes to Bosnia should think again. As the above makes clear, there is no principle at stake here; avowed principles (and the Bosnian Muslims) are always sacrificed to *realpolitik*.

The only thing that has been consistent in the US approach to Yugoslavia is a determination to bolster American authority at the

expense of its rivals. So, the USA's initial pro-Yugoslav policy in 1991 was an attempt to slow down the dissolution of the Cold War order upon which America's ascendancy depended. Its about-turn in 1992 when it led the campaign for an independent Bosnia was a manoeuvre to usurp the leadership role in Yugoslavia from Germany. Washington's pursuit of a 'lift-and-strike' policy through 1993 and 1994 has been aimed at presenting the Europeans as appeasers and weaklings and the Americans as decisive leaders.

Above all, American policy in Yugoslavia has been reactive—reactive not to what is happening on the ground, but to what the other world powers are doing at any particular time. These powers too have stage-managed their interventions, from Francois Mitterrand's dramatic visit to lift the siege of Sarajevo in 1992 to

John Major's commitment of more British ground troops in 1994, in order to establish their great statesmen credentials, Russia has also intervened in Bosnia in a bid to reaffirm its status as a great power.

Hence when France pushed for a settlement in early 1994 that depended on the Europeans extracting concessions from the Serbs and the Americans talking the Bosnian Muslims into making compromises, Washington reacted within a month by issuing ultimatums and calling for air-strikes against the Serbs in Sarajevo. In other words, everything the Americans have done has been done in response to the pressures of global competition.

To this has been added a further destabilising element in US foreign policy. The domestic political crisis is lending new weight to divisions in the foreign policy establishment. Today, the personal antagonisms (masquerading as differences of principle) between Democrats and Republicans are played out not only in Congress, but in the global diplomatic arena. This is making US policy dangerously unpredictable.

All Bosnia a stage

Meanwhile, Germany has used the conflict in the former Yugoslavia to put itself at the centre of great power diplomacy. Bonn began by leading the campaign to recognise the secessionist republics, Croatia and Slovenia, in the face of opposition from the other Europeans and the Americans. Having established its position bestride Europe, Germany has since acted in tandem with the Americans. Yugoslavia has provided the focus not only for Germany's rise to power, but also for Bonn's strengthening strategic alliance with America.

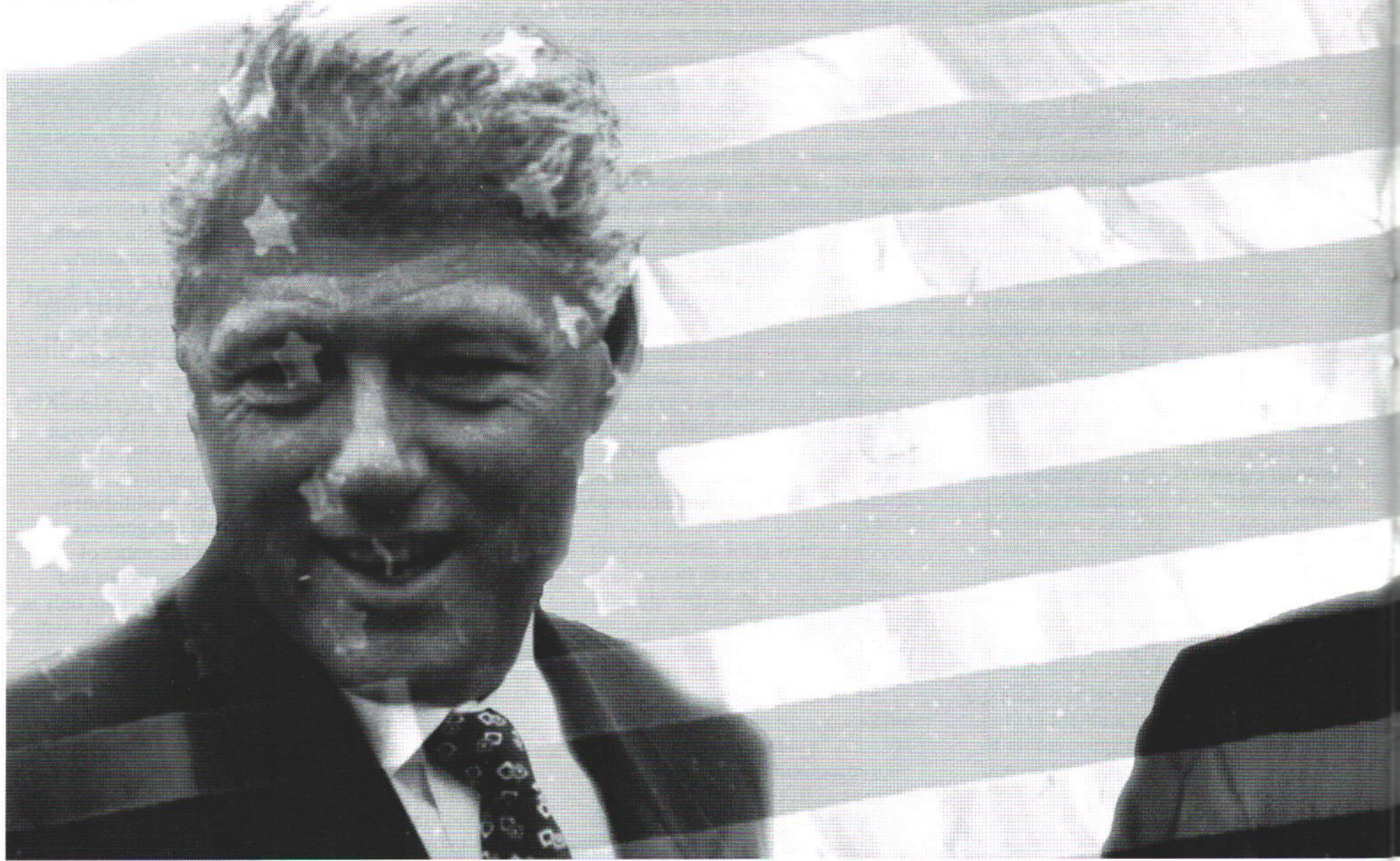
Bosnia has become the theatre of war in which the rivalries among the world powers are being played out. All of Bosnia is a stage and all its armies merely players. It is not really their war any longer. The people pulling the strings are in Washington, Bonn, London, Paris and Moscow, and the people on the other end are paying a high price. The Muslims are the patsies and the Serbs are the fall-guys in a cynical morality play being staged by America to bolster its own authority on the world stage.

Bosnia is casting a shadow over the world. At the start of 1994, Bosnia became the arena for the first ever air-strikes by Nato. At the end of 1994, Nato invited the Luftwaffe to join bombing raids in Bosnia. In the fiftieth anniversary year of the end of the Second World War, the other Bosnian war is accelerating the militarisation of global power politics. ●

Nato's graveyard too? The people of Bosnia are paying the price of the West's great power politics



**Clinton to face Dole in '96?
(That's Bill on the left and
Bob on the right)**



The defeat for Bill Clinton's Democratic administration in America's November mid-term elections was resounding. For the first time since 1954, the Democrats lost control of both the Senate *and* the House of Representatives—something they had controlled all through the Reagan-Bush years. Traditional Democrat governorships like New York state and Texas also fell to the Republicans.

The leader of the Republican campaign, former academic Newt Gingrich, promised to bury the remnants of the 'Great Society, counter-culture, McGovernick' legacy with his 10-point 'Contract with America' platform. Reaganism, says Gingrich, is back. The idea that the clock has been turned back to the era of Ronald Reagan's presidency depressed liberals as much as it delighted conservatives in America and Britain.

According to the *Sunday Telegraph* 'the elections confirm what conservatives have been saying all along, that Clintonism is the last gasp of a defunct ideology and that this administration is a freak interlude in a relentless historical shift to the hard right' (13 November 1994). But the celebrations at Conservative Central Office in Smith Square are premature.

Despite Newt Gingrich's claims, the 'Contract with America' and the Republican Party's election triumph do not mean a return to the strident free market conservatism associated with Reagan. In fact, on almost every issue the Republicans have been running scared from the high moral posture struck by the former film star and president.

Take the issue that has been at the heart of the programme of right-wing Republicanism in recent years: opposition to abortion. In the heady days of the moral majority, 'born again' president Reagan was personally identified with the 'pro-life' crusade. Yet today, the Gingrich camp has studiously avoided saying anything about abortion. Even Ralph Reed Jnr of the Christian Coalition has warned that the right has to tread carefully on the abortion issue—recognising that voters were more interested in tax cuts than being told how to live their private lives.

Those Republicans who did closely identify with the moral majority—like conservative champion Oliver North, veteran of the Iran-Contra scandal—have not gained with the party. North lost his Virginia campaign after the intervention of Nancy Reagan, criticising North for lying to her husband when he was president.

Nor for that matter have today's Republicans taken up the standard of foreign policy in the way that Reagan and his successor George Bush did. For Reagan, America's willingness to walk tall in the world was the foundation of his government's authority. By contrast the incoming Republican team are equivocal about America's global role.

Conservatives understand that patriotism is still an effective stick with which to beat a president who avoided the draft. Appointing the belligerent right-winger Jesse Helms to sit on the senate defence committee must have seemed like a good idea—especially after he caused

a storm by saying that Clinton was not fit to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Later he suggested that the president would need an armed guard to visit American army bases, so unpopular were his defence policies.

But the storm blew up in Helms' face after former president Bush went on record to say that Helms represented everything that was wrong about current Republican thinking on defence, especially an unwillingness to honour America's commitments abroad.

Republicans moved even further from the Reagan legacy when senate leader Bob Dole said that British and French obstructions to American policy over Bosnia could lead to the 'complete breakdown' of Nato. Where Reagan used the Western alliance as a guarantee of American leadership, today's Republicans are threatening to withdraw from it. In the 1992 presidential elections it was the Democrats who ran against the foreign policy president—George Bush. Today it is the Republicans who are increasingly using Clinton's campaign slogan 'Come home America'.

The isolationist rhetoric in Republican foreign policy statements is an indicator of one real reason for their recent electoral success—the party's ability to cash in on voters' hostility to government. Military adventures in Haiti and Somalia seem to many Americans only the worst example of the way that their government ignores their interests.

The most effective anti-government measure



After the Republican Party victory in America's mid-term elections, James Heartfield explains why there will be no return to Reaganism

More Ross Perot than Ronald Reagan

in Gingrich's contract is one policy that is in keeping with the Reagan legacy: welfare cuts. Cuts in welfare spending appeal to the increasingly suburbanised American working classes as well as the more affluent middle classes.

For many years now, more people have lived in the suburbs than the cities. Those who can afford to have moved out as industry has decamped. As inner cities are left to the poor, financial crises have crippled American city halls. In the suburbs, Americans resent paying taxes to keep city-dwellers on welfare.

Anti-tax campaigns have always been a mainstay of Republican platforms. They appeal to an unstated assumption of American politics: that 'welfare dependent' and 'city' are code words for non-whites. The suburbs, by contrast to the inner cities, are almost exclusively segregated through informal colour bars upheld by pre-emptive policing.

Anti-tax campaigns play on the prejudice that the black inner city is the author of its own failure, rather than the victim of economic decline. The identification of taxes with big government lends anti-welfare campaigns a populist flavour. By playing off the white suburbanites against the inner cities, the Republican Party secured itself enough working class votes to win.

Anti-city sentiment cost the Democrats key governorships in New York state, where the electorate is largely made up of the New York overspill, and in the south. In the mid-term elections, Californians also voted for Proposition

187 that bars 'illegal' Mexican immigrants from access to basic welfare measures—like schools. The mood behind the Republican victory reflects a society fraught with increasingly bitter divisions. In the absence of the Cold War rhetoric that pulled America behind Ronald Reagan, these trends can only accelerate the disintegration of American society.

Newt Gingrich's 'Contract with America' is framed in pointedly anti-government terms. Commitments to audit Capitol Hill and investigate fraud back to 1906 play upon American resentment at big government. The Republican victories in the mid-term elections owe more to the anti-incumbency politics of Ross Perot than the Cold War politics of Ronald Reagan.

All the indications are that, now they are back in Washington, the Republicans will distance themselves from the anti-government rhetoric of Gingrich's 'Contract with America' in favour of a more conciliatory approach to the Democratic presidency. Already Gingrich has been overshadowed by more pragmatic Republican leaders like Bob Dole.

The potential for cooperation with the Democrats is more extensive than the conservative rhetoric of the election campaign suggests. There is an underlying convergence between the major US parties that fits into a pattern identifiable across Western politics.

Even before the elections, Clinton's Democrats were committed to 'welfare reform'. The style of the Democrats' welfare policy is different

—posed in terms of helping people back to work rather than cutting benefits. But the content is similar: both parties are committed to reducing welfare spending by a managed reduction of entitlements.

Republican and Democrat leaders have indicated areas of possible cooperation, especially in reducing the role of the legislature—that is, the houses of congress—in favour of the executive—the White House. Limits on the number of terms that congressmen can serve and an increased presidential power of veto are supported by both the president and the Republican leaders.

It seems strange that Republicans would willingly reduce their power relative to that of a lame-duck Democratic president. But it is part of the emerging consensus that authoritarian measures are necessary to reduce the pressure on the budget and resolve the crisis of the political system. In this view, the hard decisions and cuts that government needs to take to manage America's economic decline are best made if the electorate has less impact on policy.

The irony is that an election success achieved by playing upon American fears of big government and resentment at the incumbent administration will lead to a greater consolidation of executive power over the electorate. Behind the apparent hostilities between the Republicans and Democrats, the political class is closing ranks to defend American capitalism against the demands of the American people. ●

Claire Foster thinks that the report of the Labour Party-backed Commission on Social Justice should have been commissioned by the Conservative government

Anti-social and unjust

The Report of the Commission on Social Justice, published at the end of October, has been heralded as the Beveridge report for the nineties. Instigated by the late Labour leader John Smith and launched on the fiftieth anniversary of Beveridge's Social Insurance and Allied Services, it proclaims frankly that in a changing world, the old welfare state is out of date (p16).

The world has changed. The commission's 'State of the Nation' report demonstrates that traditional welfare provision provides no defence against poverty as inequalities between the richest and the poorest are at their worst since records began in 1886. However, the changes proposed by the social justice commission are not designed to protect people against poverty, but to protect the Treasury against the claims of the poor. The social justice commission's starting point is that the capacity of British capitalism to cope with the problems it creates no longer exists. Its answer is to dump those problems back on the likes of us.

This collection of academics and members of the leftish think-tank elite around the Institute of Public Policy Research has torn up the old welfare state, and replaced it with a new strategy: individuals should accept responsibility for the failures of the market system to provide, and lower their expectations accordingly.

The SDP's David Marquand and a profusion of academics and commissioners associated with the

Labour Party (including the chairman Sir Gordon Borrie QC, deputy chair Patricia Hewitt, and Tony Blair's new head of policy, David Miliband) have taken it upon themselves to offer us some new opportunities 'to earn, learn, save and own' (p24).

But once the social justice commission's language is translated into the harsh realities of the British economy, these 'opportunities' become more like threats. You had better be earning, because you cannot take social security for granted; you had better be qualified or you won't get work; you will need to save, because there is no promise of a decent pension or sick pay; and don't complain about the drains because now the responsibility for this sink-estate is yours, to repair at your own expense.

At its heart the social justice commission accepts—indeed promotes—the Tory argument about welfare: people must be prepared to take more individual responsibility and not expect the state to bail them out. In the hands of the commission, however, this tired old argument is repackaged in the modern woolly language of community and citizenship. The commission's proposals enthusiastically endorse the Thatcherite self-help of the eighties, but dressed up in a new liberal-sounding package for the nineties.

In the eighties the Tories promoted self-help as an alternative to welfare. According to Margaret Thatcher and her ministers, Victorian values of thrift and the family would

provide better security than the social security department. Back then, most commentators understood that the Tories' talked up self-help in order to justify cutting welfare provision. A healthy streak of cynicism qualified the response to every Conservative statement about self-reliance, as people expected a cut in welfare to follow. Now, however, when the social justice commission makes much the same arguments about the inability of the state to supplement individual self-help, it is welcomed as a radical breakthrough by commentators whose critical insight seems to have gone out of the window.

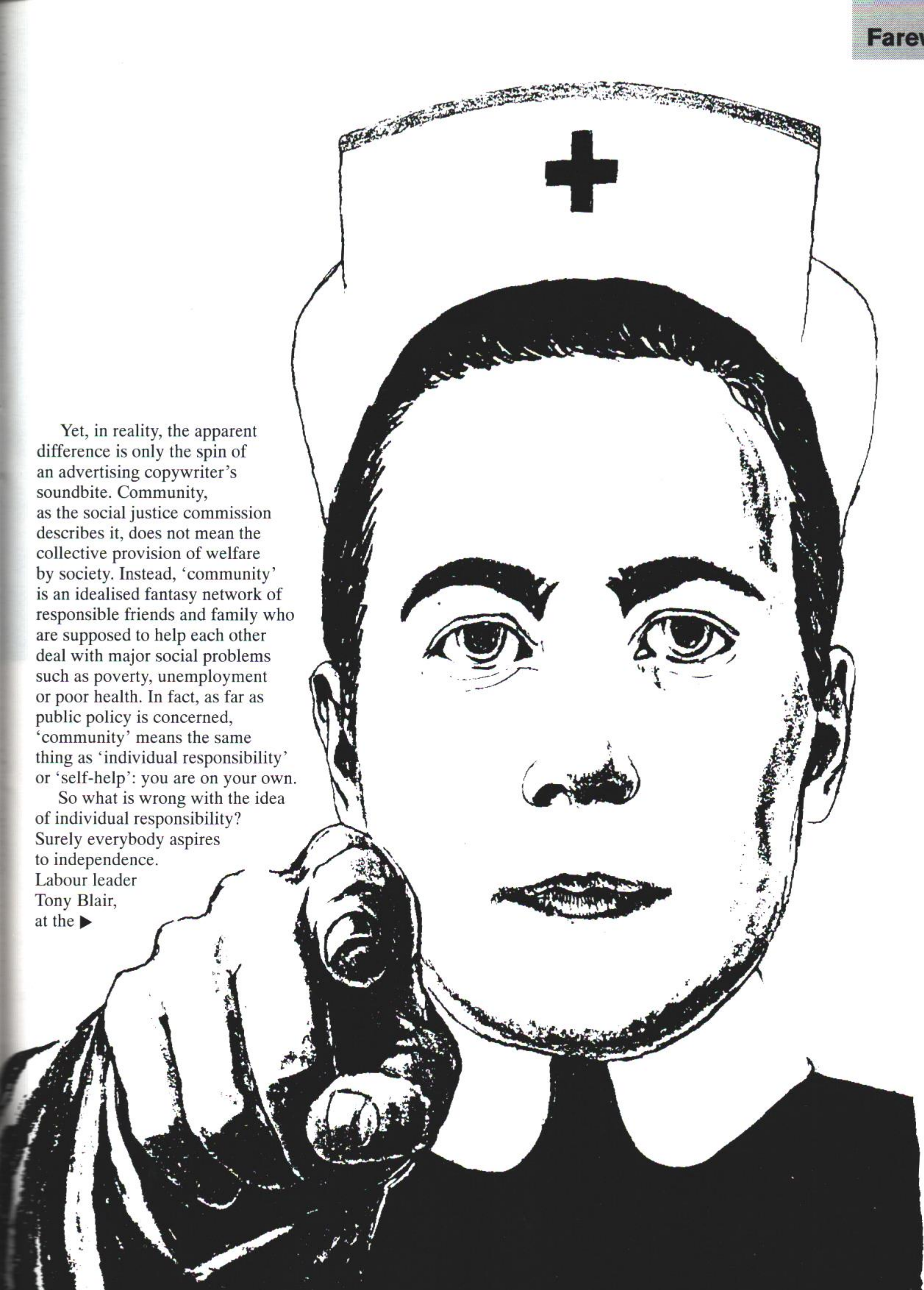
The key word which the commission uses that is different from the old Thatcherite argument is 'community'.

'Government can never take the place of community....A government that wishes to unleash the energy of people in their own communities must also be able to devolve some of its power.' (p370)

The commission's idea of community—where people are 'mutually interdependent'—sounds like an alternative to the barrenness of Tory individualism. In chapter seven, under the heading 'Responsibility: making a good society', the report states that: 'A good society depends not just on the economic success of "I", the individual, but the social commitment of "We", the community.' (p306)

Yet, in reality, the apparent difference is only the spin of an advertising copywriter's soundbite. Community, as the social justice commission describes it, does not mean the collective provision of welfare by society. Instead, 'community' is an idealised fantasy network of responsible friends and family who are supposed to help each other deal with major social problems such as poverty, unemployment or poor health. In fact, as far as public policy is concerned, 'community' means the same thing as 'individual responsibility' or 'self-help': you are on your own.

So what is wrong with the idea of individual responsibility? Surely everybody aspires to independence. Labour leader Tony Blair, at the ▶



“YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS
YOU”



launch of the report, stated that for a 'second generation welfare is about giving people a hand-up and not just a handout'. What's attractive about Blair's argument (taken word for word from Bill Clinton's inauguration speech) is that it appeals to people's desire to take responsibility for their

Being 'responsible' means taking the blame for a recession that is none of your making

own lives, while avoiding the *laissez-faire* rhetoric of the free marketeers. For the social justice commission, however, being a responsible citizen ultimately means taking the blame for an economic recession that is none of your making.

In the world envisaged by the social justice commission, the unemployed will have to demonstrate that they are chasing jobs to get their benefits. If you do not take responsibility for making yourself employable, you will not get benefit; the idea that social security is yours as of right is now 'old hat'. For parents on benefits, this means that they will be obliged to look for work once their children reach five-years old: 'it would be both appropriate and desirable for parents of older children to register as available for at least part-time employment if they or their partners wished to claim means-tested benefits' (p240).

These proposals were published at the same time as Tory ministers Peter Lilley and Michael Portillo announced their plans to replace unemployment benefit with a 'job-seekers allowance', putting the onus on the unemployed to prove that they deserve benefits. The government has also been trying to persuade single mothers to accept low-paid part-time work. So what is the difference between the proposals from the commission and the government? In substance they are all designed to harass the unemployed, by setting more stringent conditions for the receipt of social security. The only real difference is that the plans from the social justice commission go further than Tory policies in undermining welfare provision.

Over and above the practical attack on claimants, these policies reverse the real relationship between the unemployed and the market. If a new suit and a positive attitude is the only thing you need to find work then unemployment must be the responsibility of the unemployed.

In reality, mass unemployment does not result from a failure of collective will-power on the part of the jobless, but from a lack of jobs. However caring and constructive the language, the approach of the social justice commission ends up as an old-fashioned excuse for the failures of the market and a bid to blame the unemployed.

'On yer bike'

The report states that 'we must transform the welfare state from a safety net in times of trouble to a springboard for economic opportunity' (p20). It may sound exciting to talk of allowing people to escape the degradation of poverty by leaping into wealth, but remembering that Britain is broke, this is nothing more than Norman Tebbit's 'on yer bike' philosophy of self-help.

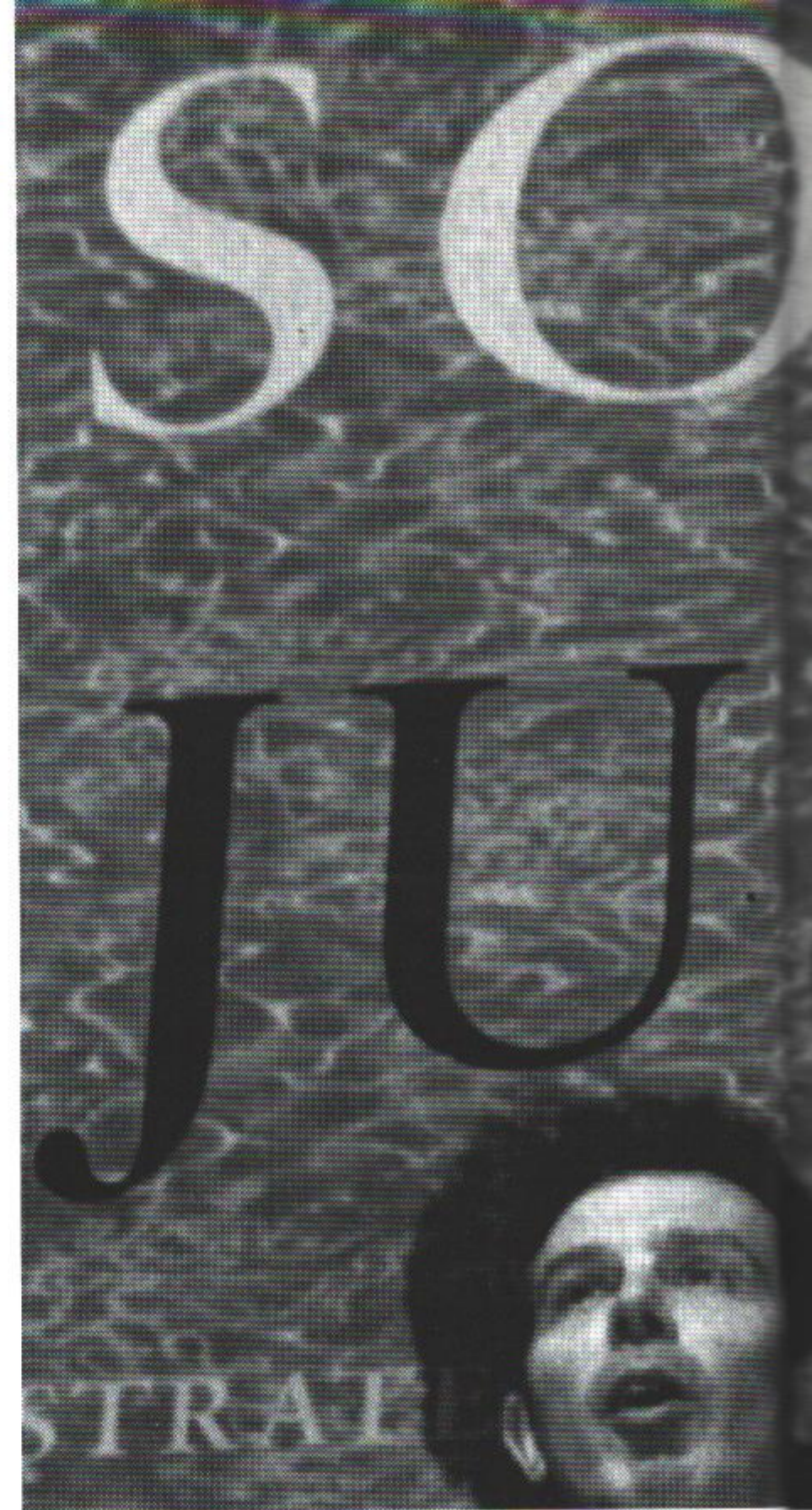
Pre-welfare state, self-help was much in vogue—people had no choice but to survive as best they could. But teaching us to 'go it alone' through 'self-improvement and self-support' (p224) in the nineties is no different to the 'stand on your own two feet' of Victorian social policy. The *Big Issue*-seller approach to welfare is celebrated by the report (p347)—the message is that the deserving homeless don't just wallow in their condition, they become self-reliant. This is the kind of personal responsibility we are all encouraged to take for our own welfare by the commission.

Commission chairman David Marquand boldly proclaims that 'social citizenship is empty unless the citizens own the institutions that embody it'. (*Guardian*, 24 October 1994). Is Marquand advocating that the media, the factories, parliament, the banks should be controlled by ordinary people? That really would be an exciting prospect. Work could be dedicated to creating the things we need instead of making profits for a handful of capitalists.

Responsibility without power

Unfortunately the one thing that the social justice commission does not mean is that the majority of people should have control over the way wealth is produced in society. The report is prefaced by a watertight commitment to the private ownership of industry. The authors claim that this is a guarantee of wealth creation and a precondition of any welfare provision, despite all the evidence that British capitalism has ruined industry and wrecked society.

What David Marquand really means is that the rest of us should be allowed to 'control' the bits of society that have been wrecked by the ravages of recession. It is not the devolution of real power that he is suggesting,



but rather that we take responsibility for our own communities (without ever getting the title deeds, that is). All we get responsibility for are those inner-city slums left behind after industry has bled communities dry and moved on.

Distributing misery

The social justice commission says it wants to empower people by involving them in making decisions about welfare priorities. But, since the absolute amount available for such services is assumed in advance to be whatever capitalism can afford, the only decision you will be making is which services should be cut. 'The views of service users must be sought' (p359): 'If two people need a hip replacement or want to send their child to the same school—and there is only enough money at that time for one operation or space for one pupil—who decides who gets what?' (p360)

In other words, not only should we share out the cuts—but we should have a fight about it as well. It is ironic that a proposal to distribute misery, the very thing for which the commission criticised the 'levellers' of traditional welfarism, should be its own last word in 'empowerment'.

The report argues that by giving us the 'rights to information to enable decisions to be made', we too can be empowered to decide who should become the victim of the next cut. This is the opposite of real power, it is getting us to take responsibility for somebody else's clapped-out economic system. It is also cheap: 'Providing patients with better information about the possible risks of treatment and the alternatives to drugs and surgery is

SOCIAL JUSTICE

FOR NATIONAL RENEWAL

**Labour leader
Tony Blair unveils
the conservatives'
welfare policy**

also a way of reducing demand for expensive interventions.' Better information in this context means scaring patients off with horror stories about what can go wrong.

It seems that, whether it is the right to information or the right to make those 'hard choices about who gets what treatment' (p293), we are all to be given more rights. But then 'given' is the wrong word. The commission wants to force these 'rights' down our throats, like it or not.

For example, in the report's discussion of the inner cities the emphasis has shifted from the old Labour policy of financial regeneration to what is called 'social regeneration' (p325). The responsibility to clean and repair rundown estates—the 'Brazils of Britain' (Bea Campbell's term, quoted on p324)—is to be taken from bureaucratic local authorities and given as a 'right' to local residents themselves: a sort of DIY new community scheme. Our aspiration to control our own environment is reduced to a coat of paint and a new community centre—to be built by us, of course.

Taking its lead from Clinton's Community Empowerment agenda, the report gives examples where after a 'skills audit', unemployed local people build their own playgrounds, launch after-school clubs, introduce a local mini-bus service (p330). Note that nobody is paid. Sorry, but surely this is working for no money, and surely working for nothing is slavery? But in social justice commission Newspeak, it is ownership and rights.

The key area of health gives a flavour of the report's message that welfare must increasingly become

the responsibility of its responsible recipients. The idea that the state should spend more money on healthcare is dismissed: 'Spending a larger proportion of national income on the treatment of illness does not necessarily improve a nation's health.' (p291) Doesn't it? Spending more money on NHS bureaucrats might not help anyone, but it is a reasonable assumption that there is a direct relationship between healthcare and health.

Bottomley-style bumf

In the eyes of the commission, however, there must be a shift in responsibility as the emphasis moves away from the treatment of illness towards health promotion and education. If money is to be spent, it should be targeted at telling us how to stay well: 'Policies for financing should not reinforce the view that health means treating illness.' (p292) Which presumably means yet more useless Bottomley-style bumf about your diet, and fewer hospital beds.

Underlying this slick advertising copy about health promotion over illness-treatment is the message that it is you who are to blame for not looking after yourself. The way individuals live their lives is highlighted over and above the need for a national health system. Smoking, diet, and drinking are emphasised in the report (p286). Suggested solutions are a ban on tobacco advertising and more rigorous food labelling. Of course, sanctimonious lectures are a lot cheaper than beds and heart-bypass operations.

Like the Conservatives before them, the social justice commission understands that when welfare is cut,

Farewell to welfare

the only bulwark against social decay is the family: 'the success of families is the foundation of the strength of the world outside.' (p310)

Placing families at the heart of its 'social' policy, the commission is keen to make sure that parents assume the main responsibility for childcare, and that families assume the burden of caring for the aged. Anyone seriously concerned to improve the lot of children would focus on the need for more investment in childcare and schools. But the social justice commission is not in the business of providing such 'simple' solutions. Its priority is to apportion blame, by criticising irresponsible parents and demanding that families take more responsibility for their own children and elderly relatives. Once again, the commission's ideas on community seem to merge seamlessly into the government's cost-cutting 'community care' policies.

While some state childcare may be provided, the emphasis is that 'babies and very young children need continuous, individual care, consistently given by adults whom they know' (p124). As for the elderly, the report says there is no question of the state being able to meet their chronic needs: 'Given the many demands on resources...it is not feasible to extend the founding principle of the NHS—that treatment should be free at the point of use.' Care in old age is described as 'a sufficiently predictable risk to suggest that responsibility should start with the individuals'. The young are advised to begin now to make provision for care in their old age. So, because we know we are likely to need looking after when we're old, we should be responsible and save for it. Forget the contribution you made to society throughout your working life—once you are over the hill, you are on your own.

Privatised community

The report of the social justice commission is effectively Labour Party policy on welfare. It represents the party of welfare's subordination to the principles of Tory austerity and self-help. As such the rhetoric of the report is wholly at odds with its real content. The meaning of social justice to this commission is the subordination of the unemployed, the poor and the sick to the needs and limitations of the market economy. The meaning of community is here the most privatised experience of hardship, where all social provision is cut, shifting the burden onto individuals and their families. The meaning of individual responsibility is that individuals take the blame for the failure of capitalist society to generate prosperity.

The Child Support Agency might look like an incompetent flop. But, argues Fiona Foster, it has achieved its real aim: pointing the finger for society's problems at 'irresponsible' parents

The hidden success of the CSA



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

The Child Support Agency (CSA) appears to have little support of its own. In November the Social Security Select Committee, chaired by Labour MP Frank Field, published a damning report which slated the agency for its incompetence, and called for changes to ease the financial burden on absent parents. Even the CSA's own 1994 annual report admitted to missed targets and poor service, and chief executive Ros Hepplewhite, described by one tabloid as 'Britain's most hated woman', had to resign in September.

The Child Support Agency was set up in April 1993 to get absent fathers to pay more maintenance for children they had left behind. It was widely welcomed as a reform of a court system under which only 30 per cent of mothers got any maintenance, leaving the state to foot the bill for the rest. Yet despite passing through parliament without a single dissenting vote, the CSA is now widely seen as the most disastrous government policy since the poll tax.

No better off

CSA staff have received death threats, razor blades and excrement in the post. The papers are full of anti-CSA stories, including allegations of suicides by absent parents who have been sent massive maintenance demands. Even the Tory *Daily Mail* has expressed despair at the agency's incompetence: 'There could hardly be a more exasperating example of how this government sets the social agenda only to lose the political initiative.' (4 July 1994)

Every aspect of the CSA's practice has come under fire. The formula for working out how much maintenance is paid is criticised for excluding clean break settlements and reducing second families to poverty. Lone parents complain that they are not a penny better off because any maintenance they receive is simply taken out of their income support, pound for pound. Middle class men who were already paying maintenance complain loudly that the agency should be off chasing

the 'irresponsible and feckless ones'. And everyone complains about the administrative chaos which leaves lone parents without money for weeks on end and absent parents with crippling arrears through no fault of their own.

Yet disguised in the barrage of criticism of the CSA's day-to-day operations is the fact that almost everybody now accepts the principles behind the agency. In this sense, and in spite of its own incompetence, the agency has already achieved its key aims.

Principle unchallenged

The CSA was set up to reduce the soaring benefits bill for lone parents; it has gone some way to doing that. While critics point to the CSA's failure to meet the Treasury's ambitious savings targets, the agency did get £418m back into Treasury coffers in the first year, and boasted that it tracked down 28 000 men who had abandoned their parental responsibilities.

Most importantly, the CSA's brief was to establish the principle of parental responsibility for life, to win acceptance for the notion that individual parents, and not the state, must pay for child support. On this count it has been hugely successful. Nobody it seems can voice an opinion on the CSA without first emphasising their commitment to the principle of parental responsibility, of making fathers pay for their children.

Many of those who support the principles behind the CSA see the agency as an attempt to redistribute wealth between absent fathers and lone mothers—the majority of whom live in poverty on state benefits. Yet a closer look at the workings of the agency reveals that the CSA actually makes lone parents and children worse off while financially crippling working class fathers who have second families. This is because the agency was never about helping lone parents and children, it is about helping to dismantle the welfare state, transferring the financial responsibility for children away from society and back onto the individual.

That the CSA is about slashing state benefit rather than improving things for lone parents and their children is demonstrated by the fact that it is only lone parents on income support who have to cooperate with the agency. Working lone parents will not be contacted by the CSA and can only use the agency to track down errant fathers by becoming a fee-paying client.

In addition the large number of absent fathers who have given their children's mothers cash to top up their paltry benefits must now pay that money directly to the Treasury rather than to their children. One mother who told CSA staff that her ex-husband would not be able to pay for their children's shoes and school trips if the CSA got him was accused of fraud and lambasted for expecting the taxpayer to provide luxuries for her children. Far from being set up to help families, the CSA's sole aim is to reduce the role of the state in providing financial support for hard-up families.

While critics of the agency accuse the government of creating a Treasury Support Agency rather than one which will help children, there is widespread support today for the principle that individuals and not the state should assume the financial responsibility for children. The strength of this consensus around parenthood for life ensures that the CSA can continue its drive to cut welfare spending and point the finger at 'irresponsible' parents, even in the midst of a barrage of criticism.

Parent for life

While the Tory right has long been associated with policies aimed at bolstering the traditional family, it is British feminists and the Labour Party who can be credited with legitimising the call for parental responsibility which has paved the way for the CSA.

Sue Slipman, a former member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and leading feminist, has used her position as head of the National Council for One-Parent Families to demand that the blame for ►



family breakdown be laid at the feet of 'irresponsible men'. She says that she is seeking 'a new consensus on parenting that insists that regardless of the marital or domestic relationship of the parents, parental responsibilities last at minimum for the whole period of children's dependency'.

Slipman's hope is that the CSA will mark a new era in which men will grasp the fact that a broken condom on a one-night stand carries a life-long responsibility.

Frank Field accused women who refused to cooperate with the CSA of colluding with their former partners to 'defraud the agency'

In party political debates around the CSA it often seems impossible to distinguish between the Tory right and the Labour left. Last July, for instance, Labour left-winger Diane Abbot attacked absentee fathers in language which would not have seemed out of place during the 'Back to basics' debate at the Tory Party conference. Calling for a 'sea-change in attitudes about parental responsibility', Abbott complained that 'too many well-meaning absent parents, provided they saw their children regularly and paid pocket money, were content for income support to bear the brunt of the real costs of bringing up their children'.

The sea-change Abbott calls for is well under way. It was pertinent that Tony Blair used his first television interview as Labour leader to promote the traditional two-parent family and condemn women who bring up a child without a father around. Sarah Baxter, political editor of the Labour paper *New Statesman*, is open in her loathing for people who expect the state to take responsibility for their welfare. Referring to the spate of suicides linked to the CSA she writes that 'astonishingly these men are treated as martyrs, deserving of sympathy for asking us to pick up the tab, not only for their former wives and children, but for them as well'.

'Taxpayers better served'

While Tory ministers crudely argue for the CSA on the basis of the need to slash the benefits bill, Labour spokesman Frank Field's main message to government is that short-term Treasury savings should be secondary to the aim of changing attitudes: 'taxpayers will be better served in the long run by a change in attitudes to parental

responsibility.' In similar vein, many of the CSA's critics in parliament and the press express concern that the lack of popular support for the agency may threaten its potential to alter social behaviour in the future. Most merely want minor reforms which would calm opposition to the agency and so ensure its survival. So the lone-parents lobby wants single mothers to be allowed to keep a little of their maintenance without losing benefits, while the most radical proposal from the parliamentary select committee was that there should be a reduction in the maintenance paid by men separated from their families before the setting up of the agency, as opposed to those irresponsible men who left children behind 'knowing that the CSA is in existence and is here to stay'.

Genetic fingerprints

While politicians and commentators fight over how to make the CSA work, the most punitive and draconian aspects of the agency rarely even feature in the debate. The CSA represents a dramatic increase in the power of the state to interfere in people's private lives. It is a further attack on working class living standards, and one which makes women even more dependent on men and tied to the family.

When an absent parent is tracked down by the agency he has to provide full details of his income, his new partner's income, and other information about his private life. Agency inspectors can enter his workplace to demand information from colleagues who could be fined if they refuse to cooperate. The agency has new powers to obtain information from the Inland Revenue and local authorities. It recently announced plans to genetically fingerprint men to prove paternity. The CSA can deduct money from the man's wages without his permission—and if all that fails, it can apply to a magistrate to imprison him.

Benefits cut

The CSA has been cutting benefits to lone and absent parents for the past year. Women on income support have to cooperate with the agency unless they can prove that their ex-partner was violent or particularly disruptive. Anyone who does not want to cooperate for other reasons, such as not wishing to be financially dependent on a man they hate, will have their benefit cut by 20 per cent for six months and by 10 per cent for a further year.

Of the 65 000 mothers who refused to name the fathers of their children in the agency's first year, 32 000 had their stories accepted after investigation, 14 200 were 'persuaded' to give details and the rest had their benefits cut. In November 1994,

Frank Field accused women who refused to cooperate with the CSA of colluding with their former partners to 'defraud the agency'. The fact that the CSA's function is to defraud lone parents of their benefits is not seen as a problem.

Another feature of the CSA's work rarely discussed is that absent fathers who are low-earners are forced to pay proportionally more for their children, while a ceiling on maintenance protects men on higher incomes. So a single man on an average weekly income with two children under 11 will pay 32 per cent of his net income (after certain deductions), while a man on twice the average weekly income will pay 26 per cent. When politicians voice their hope that the CSA will act to stop men from having second families without a thought to the consequences, they are clearly referring to men on low incomes rather than their own friends and colleagues. Meanwhile the lowest income absent fathers of all, those on income support, automatically have their benefits cut by £2.30 a week, the minimum maintenance payable under the agency's rules.

Childcare for all

With all the talk of the agency striking a blow for lone parents, few commentators question the real effect of CSA policies on women's lives. While increased economic independence provides more women with the chance of escaping failed relationships, the CSA forces them into continued dependence on those men. The option of bringing up children without a man will now only exist for women who can guarantee a well-paid job for the duration. Lesbian couples may have a legal right to bring up children, but the CSA is already in hot pursuit of a number of men who provided their services to lesbian friends.

In the days when feminists demanded childcare for all as a prerequisite to women's independence, this was seen as a social responsibility which the state should be made to meet. Today, prominent feminists have given legitimacy to a new state body set up to ensure that the responsibility for the care of children is seen as a private matter to be shared between the child's natural parents. If irresponsible individuals attempt to eschew this responsibility, the agency is there to enforce responsible parenting with court orders, genetic fingerprinting, wage deductions and benefit cuts.

There was a time when state spending on children was seen as a way for society to invest in its own future. The CSA is a grim reminder of who is expected to pay the price when this society has no future to offer.



1994 and all that

The Bible officially overtook Marx in 1994, according to the *New Statesmen's* poll of Labour MPs' reading matter. Of course, the British labour movement is no stranger to religion: Leon Trotsky delivered a devastating (and hilarious) critique of Anglican 'radicals' over 70 years ago. Today's labour movement has no radical pretensions at all, it is simply 'come one, come all': following the example of Christians in Quantity Surveying, the MSF has become the first TUC-affiliated union to start a section for priests.

Like the church, the left looks to Labour when in search of a flock. In 1994 Paul Foot plumbed new depths with his campaign to 'save' that great working class institution, the Post Office. Calling on the TUC (official leaders of the working classes, in case younger readers don't know) to make a stand, he demanded a mass campaign of meetings, marches, rallies and plebiscites 'such as the one imaginatively conducted on water ownership by Strathclyde District Council'. Perhaps this year Paul could concentrate his energies on saving the Working Class Movement Library, run by Edmund and Ruth Frow (87 and 71 respectively). The Frows are particularly proud of their 88 volumes of handwritten minutes of the Boiler Makers' Society from the 1870s. The library faces closure, and Mr Frow asks: 'What are we going to hand on to our sons and daughters?'

Well, I'm as opposed to library closures as the next man, but it seems to me that the left has spent too much of the past 50 years paying homage to the dubious achievements of the British unions. The last thing our sons and daughters need is another shrine to the past.

History today

Republicanism reared its head again in 1994, but the fiercest battles are still being fought in the past. Sealed Knot, the original club for people who like to dress up as Roundheads and Cavaliers, has been troubled by members of the English Civil War Society, which was formed by disgruntled nutters who considered Sealed Knot to be insufficiently authentic. Society members Christine Perkins and her mother claim they were assaulted and thrown out of a Sealed Knot meeting which they pitched up at. Although the halberdiers who chased them off were themselves wearing English Heritage insignia, Sealed Knot nevertheless justified its actions by accusing the women of wearing 'very poor substitutes for the correct costume' (including sunglasses and cigarettes). Mrs Perkins disagreed. 'What worries me', she said, 'is that other members of the public could have attended with young children also dressed up in seventeenth-century style'. You have to admit, that is worrying.

British is still best

A Queen's award to industry to Prince Edward and Fergie—they did the business at the MIP-TV festival in Cannes. Edward represented his production company, Ardent, which was flogging a single edition of *Top Gear*. Fergie was promoting her cartoon series *Budgie the Helicopter*. I understand both products have subsequently proved to be typically successful British exports. However, the top marks go to Prince Michael of Kent, who used his appearance on America's leading chat show to forcefully plug House of Windsor merchandise. Brandishing crockery, goblets and ties bearing the royal logo, and shouting the company's phone number, he really showed the Yanks a

thing or two about class. Typically the Americans failed to appreciate it. 'It made me sound as if I was on a home shopping network', grumbled host Larry King ungraciously. 'It was really tacky', added a CNN official. And what, pray, would they know about taste?

Meanwhile British advertising remains the envy of the world. Cheap homes are now sold to the sound of a radio ad which features the catchy jingle 'the repossession list' sung over and over by sweet female voices. With that sort of spirit, who can doubt that the housing market will pick up in '95?

The last word on Britain goes to Alan Clark. Asked whether he agreed with the Archbishop of Canterbury that we are 'a pretty ordinary little nation', he put us straight: 'The football supporters—remember when three or four of them beat the hell out of the Dutch police—testify to the innate vitality still in the country.'

Book of the year

If the *Sun* can award Damon Hill its own 'world championship', then I can award my own Booker. It goes to *How to Gain an Extra Hour Every Day*. Author Ray Josephs recommends getting up at 4am. If you already get up then, you can save time by sewing labels on your sheets so you can immediately tell if they are single or double. Or you can throw out visitors in mid-sentence, if you don't wish to talk. You should also give up 'time-wasting' drinks like tea and coffee, and never sit by windows or doors, in case you are tempted to waste time by looking through them.

Innovation of the year

Sky TV's use of slow motion—for darts.

Roy Castle

I never speak ill of the dead, so I'll quote Bernard Manning: 'Roy Castle? No-one'd heard of him till he got cancer. They said to him, "You've got six months to live". He said, "I'll do it in four".'

TV cut of the year

Toss-up between *Robocop*, which featured the distinctly un-twenty first century epithet 'blackguard', and *The Dam Busters*, in which Commander Guy Gibson's dog Nigger was politically corrected to the more acceptable, but confusingly horsey Trigger.

End-of-the-beer show

And finally, as they say on the news, a story with a happy ending. At a recent do at Terry Neill's Sports Bar, in the presence of leading football writers, *Living Marxism* editor Mick Hume won a year's supply of beer. Delivery was taken in early December, and I can report that it was duly consumed well before the end of the year, in accordance with the terms of the prize. On Mr Hume's behalf, I would like to wish all our readers a happy New Year. ●



PHOTO: RUBBER AND LEATHER JACKET, CRAIG MORRISON, 1993

All

Andrew Calcutt finds

style

little to celebrate

but

in a major exhibition

no

of street culture

street

How have street styles from teddy boys to rappers become part of mainstream culture? *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* is the title of a major exhibition at London's Victoria & Albert museum accompanied by a lavishly illustrated book. The author/curator is 'cultural anthropologist' Ted Polhemus, who believes that style and fashion have been changed irretrievably by a 'bubble-up process' which 'has made us a fully fledged creative democracy in which talent isn't thought to be limited by class, race, or education'.

The 'bubble-up process' has nothing to do with exhibition sponsors Perrier. Polhemus is referring to the social climbing of street-style into the salons of high culture, exemplified in the universal acceptance of the Perfecto leather jacket made by Schott Brothers of New York. After a half-century of 'bubble-up', says Polhemus, we now live in a 'non-hierarchical supermarket of style' where individual consumers are free to pick'n'mix their own identity.

Cynics may be inclined to retort that the Polhemus thesis is old hat: just as the *Streetstyle* exhibition opened in London, the Paris fashion shows were noted for their return to unashamed elitism ('flawless elegance and ladylike looks are the hallmarks...hairdos and manicures are a must as *laissez-faire* styling gives way at last to good grooming', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 20 November 1994).

The way Polhemus weaves it, street-style is a form of free expression on the part of ethnic groups and subcultures. But it would be more accurate to describe style as an expression of unfreedom on the part of those excluded from the corridors of power. From zoot suits to raggamuffin and jungle, street-style has always been a pastiche of various social roles imposed on others by those in authority.

Young blacks in LA or east London may use their style as a way of asserting their difference, but that difference has already been imposed upon them by a society that treats them as second class citizens. To suggest that ghettoised blacks wearing sneakers or listening to Ice-T is a sign of democracy is as absurd as black sociologist Paul Gilroy's suggestion in his book, *There Ain't No Black in The Union Jack*, that unemployment among young blacks is a sign of a conscious rebellion against the work ethic.

Polhemus is so fixated on the upward mobility of style that he fails to notice what is happening to the street: it is being closed down. From Los Angeles to Milton Keynes, the public space associated with the street is being superseded by privately owned piazzas and shopping malls, complete with private security guards who move you on if you don't fit the required marketing niche.

Nowadays public space is where nobody wants to be: 'on the street' implies homelessness, criminality or victimhood. But the more we find ourselves restricted to private zones (now known as 'communities'), the more the lost freedom of the street appears exciting and attractive. 'The street' is now a pleasure to be enjoyed vicariously, as an idea of how it used to be.

The *Streetstyle* exhibition is a high point in the vicarious celebration of days gone by. Now that unregulated social space has all but disappeared, and the nostalgia-punks on the King's Road are about as subversive as beefeaters in the Tower of London, you pay to enter the exclusive space of the Victoria & Albert museum. In this place of safety, where every entrant is monitored by security guards, the dangerous icons of the past 50 years are there to be examined, with only a hint of offensive items such as the swastikas worn by the first punks. The overall effect is interesting, mildly pleasurable but somehow lacking—like having sex in an all-body condom.

What Polhemus describes as the 'democracy' of style is contemporaneous with the shutdown of public space and the extension of social control. The anti-traveller Criminal Justice and Public Order Act was enacted in the same year that Dolce e Gabbana 'created a traveller outfit to suit the smartest cocktail party with a glittering, multi-coloured patch-work suit'.

In one sense, however, there is a grain of truth in the 'bubble-up' idea. Fifty years ago, in the period before the Second World War, the man in the Harlem street might have worn a Homburg hat in imitation of the American president, demonstrating his awareness and appreciation of established customs and modes of dress. Today, Bill Clinton is photographed playing sax and wearing a baseball cap while jogging, in an attempt to show that he is 'culturally aware' of black styles in the Bronx or South Central LA.

But, if the American president chooses to cross-dress somewhere between Roseanne's jogging pants and Public Enemy's baseball cap, this has less to do with cultural democracy than national decline. Far from the traditional presidential garb being a suit of aspiration, as it once was, it now represents the tiredness of traditional American values. Instead, the most powerful man in the nation is forced to plunder the styles of those at the very bottom of society to make himself culturally presentable. Democracy? No, just desperation. ●

The exhibition *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* is at the Victoria & Albert Museum, South Kensington, London until 19 February; the book is published by Thames & Hudson, £14.95 pbk.



PHOTO: EX-ARMY PARA BOOT FROM A NEW AGE TRAVELLERS OUTFIT

Unnatural born censors



The censoring of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* has little to do with the film, critic Tom Dewe Mathews tells Alec Campbell

The response of the British Board of Film Certification (BBFC) to Oliver Stone's controversial film *Natural Born Killers* has been very British. It has not actually banned the film. It has simply not got around to granting it a certificate. Which, when it comes down to it, amounts to the same thing—it means that, unless you were one of the lucky few hundred who caught its one showing at the recent London Film Festival, you cannot see a film that has been showing for months in America and throughout much of Europe.

Natural Born Killers tells the story of a white trash couple, Mickey and Mallory who go on a rampage of violence through America. In their hysterical condemnation of the film, British commentators have taken their lead from American critics like Michael Medved (infamous for his book *Hollywood versus America*) who said he was shocked by the film's 'strongest message, that killing is sexy'.

On both sides of the Atlantic, *Natural Born Killers* has been charged with being an accessory to murder. The film has been linked to 10 murders in America and four shootings in Paris. In the

American state of Texas, a 14-year old boy decapitated a 13-year old girl. Reporting of the murder reached a state of frenzy when the boy said he had done it to be 'famous, like the natural born killers'.

Tom Dewe Mathews, author of *Censored: The Story of Film Censorship in Britain*, is one of the few film commentators who has taken a rational attitude to the film. Mathews' book details the long and dismal history of film censorship in this country. 'Film censorship is the result of political paranoia', he says. 'Film provides politicians with a scapegoat that excuses them from investigating social problems.'

As opposed to the punch-drunk critics in the British media, Mathews has questioned the motivation of the BBFC in deciding to withhold certification for *Natural Born Killers*—after it had originally passed it last September. Dismissing the claims of the BBFC that it was looking into the allegations that the film had resulted in murder, Mathews says that its motivation is a lot closer to home. 'James Ferman [BBFC director] feels he can't upset his political paymasters at the Home Office', he says.

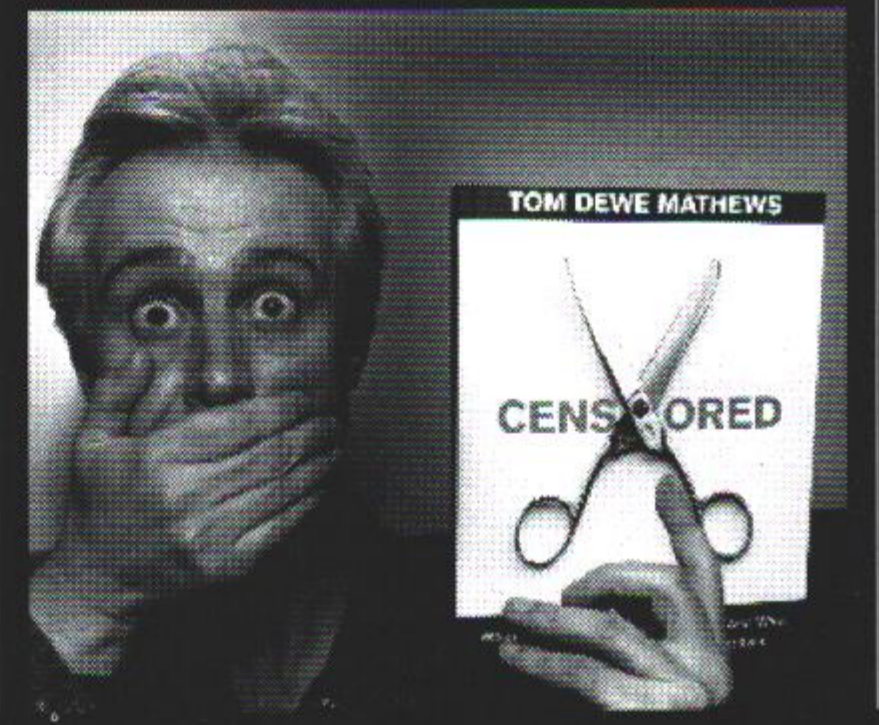
The irony of the campaign against *Natural Born Killers* is that the film itself is a satire on the influence of the media in creating a violent society. A film that emerged out of the moral panic about screen violence has now itself become a victim of that panic. A film whose plot derives from lurid media tales of violent America is now deemed to have incited that same violence. As Stone himself says, it is an endless hall of mirrors.

The argument against *Natural Born Killers* is based entirely on anecdote and prejudice. In all reports, on both sides of the Atlantic, commentators have had to rely on little more than the confession of the 14-year old Texan killer. As Mathews points out, 'one of the murders the film is supposed to have incited actually happened before *Natural Born Killers* had been released'.

Natural Born Killers' fingerprints have also been supposedly discovered in the shooting in Paris of four people (three of them policemen) by two students, Audry Maupin and Florence Ray. Ray's only comment on the shooting was 'C'est le destin' ('it's fate'). To the panic-mongers that was sufficient to link it to Mickey, a character in *Natural Born Killers*, who also claimed that the murders he had committed were fate. Nobody has yet pointed out that 'C'est le destin' is as common a riposte for French youth, as 'That's life' is for Esther Rantzen.

In fact the response to *Natural Born Killers*, like that to *Reservoir Dogs* or any controversial film of recent times, has little to do with its content. The censorious attitude that prevails in this country is less about the plot of any particular film than about controlling what people can see or do. Critics have seized on the film to promote the idea that we cannot be trusted to watch a violent film without causing mayhem ourselves. As Mathews puts it, 'it is not the films themselves so much as the people who see the films that upset the censors'.

Censored: The Story of Film Censorship in Britain, Tom Dewe Mathews, Chatto & Windus, £14.99 pbk



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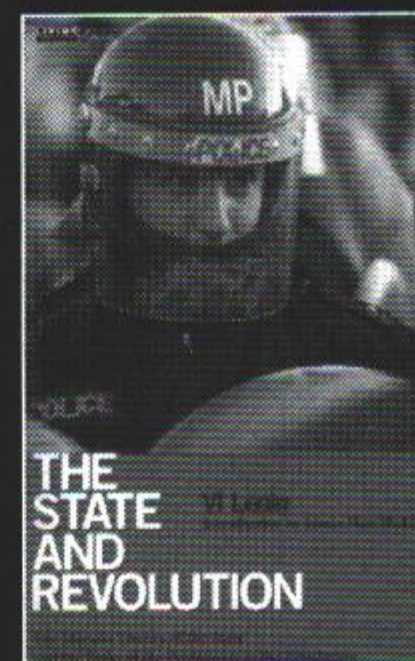
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Non-hippy world music



PHOTO: MATT BIRCHIT

Neil Davenport on the different sounds of Trans Global Underground

Critics who have reacted against the championing of Blur and Suede as defining 'Brit-pop', have often looked on Trans Global Underground (TGU) as the real torch carriers of 'British music'. TGU's inventive use of disparate styles, they argue, is an accurate reflection of multicultural Britain. TGU themselves are, quite rightly, largely indifferent to such parochial concerns. Their dazzling amalgamation of classical Arabian music, Indian film soundtrack, hip-hop and dub has little to do with the British scene but could have swirled up from anywhere.

TGU may have made a name for themselves by drawing from different ethnic sources but their success has come from their own creativity, not from being patronised by middle class world music fans. In fact one of TGU's major aims has been to move away from the earnest authenticity associated with world music.

'What we wanted to do', says singer Natacha Atlas, 'was to get away from the major labels' world music stuff, which did not involve house or hip-hop. And so we became involved with Nation Records

who wanted to put something out which was also very contemporary'.

The only problem with such a pioneering attitude was waiting for everyone else to catch up. After quickly recording their debut album *Dream of 100 Nations*, TGU had the frustration of having the LP shelved for 18 months by their previous label deConstruction. 'They were looking for something different', says band member Tim Whelan, 'but when confronted with it, they didn't know what to do with it'.

TGU slowly began to attract a bigger audience alongside the burgeoning popularity of the Mega Dog club nights in London. The open-ended, non-exclusive character of Mega Dog provided the perfect platform for Trans Global Underground. 'The good thing about the Mega Dog/Trance scene', says Tim, 'is that it has led to a whole lot of people listening to stuff they wouldn't have normally bothered with. Through that we kind of fitted in.'

TGU have been praised for their musical eclecticism, which works because it does not get in the way of straightforward listening pleasure. Their skill is to use various disparate influences sparingly, to skate across surfaces and throw them

around in fits and bursts. These various musical sources become cohered around flickering house-beats and thunderous tribal drums.

Their joyous, celebratory optimism often puts TGU in demand for festivals where they are a major draw. Natacha reckons that the festivals they have played at—from Norway to Israel—'lend themselves to what we are doing'.

Yet TGU are never reduced to the empty 'positivity' that marred club music in the early nineties. They are not a bunch of naive hippies who believe that a common humanity exists through a common musical language. On their current album, *International Times*, tracks like 'Holy Roman Empire' tear into the imperial arrogance of Western attitudes towards the third world.

TGU's more political outlook has turned out to be something of an irritant for some music journalists who ease their liberal consciences on what they perceive as the 'One World' sentiments of TGU. For much of the music press, it seems, it is acceptable, even quaint, to draw on third world music. Third world politics, of course, are a different matter. ●

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

James Heartfield looks at some of the renewed interest in Marxism and asks whether it is all good news

Marx and the Marxologists

Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International,

Jacques Derrida, Routledge, £35 hbk, £11.99 pbk

The Falling Rate of Profit: Recasting the Marxian Debate, Stephen Cullenberg,

Pluto Press, £35 hbk, £10.95 pbk

Marx's Theory of Crisis, Simon Clarke, St Martin's Press, £14.99 pbk

One of the peculiarities of the present is that just when Marx's critique of capitalism should be most pertinent, its name is mud. Associated with the brutality and waste of the Stalinist regimes, Marxism's critical power has for some time been obscured. On the other hand, the capitalist triumphalism at the collapse of the old Soviet bloc has been punctured by economic slump—creating new openings for Marxist criticism.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, until now known for his deconstruction of rationalism, weighs in to the debate about the market system with an aggressive polemic against the capitalist triumphalism of Francis Fukuyama. It was Fukuyama, a paid ideologue of the American Rand corporation, who trumpeted the fall of communism as 'The end of history', meaning the final victory of capitalism. To Derrida, Fukuyama's 'good news' about the end of history has rather too religious a ring to it.

Pointing to trade wars between the major economic blocs, 'pauperisation', 'the ferocity of the "foreign debt"' and the 'epidemic of overproduction', Derrida suggests that 'in order to analyse these wars and the logic of these antagonisms, a problematics coming from the Marxian tradition will be indispensable for a long time yet' (*Specters of Marx*, pp63-64). Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, along with Simon Clarke's *Marx's Theory of Crisis* and Stephen Cullenberg's *The Falling Rate of Profit*, is indicative of a renewed interest in Marxism provoked by the persistence of market failure in spite of the West's victory in the Cold War.

Gratifying as this renewed interest in Marxism might seem, each of the works reviewed here shows in its own way an unwillingness to draw Marx's conclusion about the failure of capitalism: that capitalism is a historically limited mode of production which must be overturned if mankind is to prosper. The tentativeness with which each of these authors approach Marx's analyses of the historical limits of capitalist accumulation shows that

they approve of the way that Marxism qualifies the case for capitalism, without embracing his project of social revolution. This is a version of Marx which, at its worst, reduces him from an optimistic propagandist for social change to a cynical Jeremiah revelling in the failures of present-day society.

Indicative of the half-hearted return to Marx is the unwillingness of these authors to embrace Marx's characterisation of the limitations of the capitalist accumulation process, and in particular the theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

It was in the latter half of the last century that Karl Marx elaborated a critique of capitalist society that has stood as a guide for revolutionaries ever since. The beauty of Marx's critique of capitalism was that it showed how the dynamic character of capitalist society was intrinsically linked to its limitations.

From the most advanced social theorists that preceded him, the political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, Marx took and reworked the idea that the value of commodities was an expression of the labour expended—at the normal level of productivity—in their production. To the political economists equal exchange on the market looked very fair, but their theory could not explain the source of profits. Profit, as Marx explained had its origin in exploitation. The surplus value that accrued to the capitalists was the difference between the money laid out in wages, what Marx called variable capital, and the value created by the workers employed.

Exploitation, the difference between the paid and unpaid labour of the working class has often been understood simply in moral terms, as though it was a question of workers being tricked by cunning employers. Marx showed that exploitation was not the exception, but the norm, the real basis of the profit system. For Marx, exploitation was the key to the dynamic character of the capitalist system. The surplus value created through exploitation was the basis of accumulation, ►

the perennial reinvestment of profits back into the production process.

Capitalist dynamism, however, also implies limitations, as the tendency towards ever greater productivity overshoots the narrow basis of production for profit. Marx explained how economic crisis arose out of the process of capitalist production itself, not on the market. Marx points out that the accumulation process tends to undermine the capitalist rate of profit. The reason for that is that not all capital invested creates surplus value. Apart from the variable capital laid out in wages, the capitalists also invest in machinery, plant and raw material which, while they are necessary for production, do not create new value. Marx called this portion of the capitalists' investment constant capital. Furthermore, he pointed out, the historical trend in the development of industry is towards a greater investment in machinery relative to the investment in men.

The displacement of variable capital by constant capital implicit in the development of the production process would reduce the portion of capital that produced new surplus value. Of course the mass of surplus value has to rise—if it did not then accumulation could not take place at all. But the ratio of surplus value to the total capital invested, the rate of profit, falls as a greater amount of capital is exploiting relatively fewer workers. The falling rate of profit acts as a barrier to investment, eventually leading to economic crisis. The rising mass of profits is not sufficient to finance a new round of investment. What this means is that the tendency towards crisis is inherent to capitalism.

Stephen Cullenberg is one of the editors of the American journal *Rethinking Marxism*, as well as the organiser of the colloquium at which Jacques Derrida gave the speech that was the basis of his *Specters of Marx*. Cullenberg's book, *The Falling Rate of Profit*, looks back over the debate among Marxists at the onset of recession in the seventies about the tendency towards crisis.

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As a reprise of the debate Cullenberg's book is very good. He shows that the two contrasting standpoints—that there is an inherent tendency to a falling rate of profit or that there is not—rest on different understandings of society. First he shows that the adherents of the falling rate of profit envisaged society as dynamic and therefore subject to transformation: 'If a falling rate of profit, and hence crises, are not permanent, built-in features of capitalism's laws of motion, then there is no objective necessity for the transition to socialism.' (p11)

Second, and this is his own contribution to the debate, Cullenberg shows that the different sides of the argument reflect different views about the way that capitalist society is interrelated. He describes how the underlying assumption of the adherents of the falling rate of profit is that capitalist enterprises are jointly engaged in the

exploitation of labour. As Cullenberg puts it, the whole takes priority over each of its parts. This is an important element in the Marxist analysis of exploitation, removing the theory from the narrow relationship of a particular employer to his employees and seeing it instead as a relation between wage labour and capital as a whole.

By contrast, says Cullenberg, the competing view of the rate of profit starts with the opposite assumption: that the whole of capitalist society is nothing more than the sum of its parts, the individual enterprises. Seen in terms of individual companies, the source of profits in the exploitation of labour disappears.

Cullenberg looks at the best known radical alternative to Marx's theory of the rate of profit, the Okishio theorem, first argued in Nobuo Okishio's article 'Technical change and the rate of profit' published in the *Kobe University Economic Review* in 1961. Cullenberg gives a version of the formula by which prices of production are estimated in the Okishio theorem which reads: $p = (1+r)(pA + pL)$. Without going into the definition of all the terms, the one term that needs to be defined is 'r' which equals 'the general rate of profit'. (p54)

Seen in terms of individual companies, the source of profits in the exploitation of labour disappears

For some reason Cullenberg thinks that the suspect part of the theorem is the assumption of 'a single, uniform, economy-wide rate of profit'. In fact the problem is that there is an assumption of a given rate of a profit at all. Where does it come from? Why is it the magnitude it is? The Okishio theorem can explain neither of these things because it is only a theoretical representation of the way that any individual capitalist works out his prices. After adding up his costs he adds his profit margin. He's not concerned where it comes from, only that he gets it. The remarkable part of this story is that anyone ever thought that the Okishio theorem was an alternative to Marx's society-wide theory of the rate of profit.

At this point Cullenberg ought to have consigned Okishio to the accountants and endorsed Marx's theory of the rate of profit. Instead he reacts against the revolutionary implications of Marx's theory, which he calls 'a reductionist approach to social theory and causality'. In particular Cullenberg accuses the Marxists and the capitalists of sharing the same assumptions about how capitalism works:

'despite the tremendous differences in approach between the "capitalist qua accumulator" of the traditional models of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and...the "capitalist qua profit maximiser" of the Okishio models they share a fundamental similarity. They both reduce the capitalist to a homogenous conceptual category which acts out its given role.' (p56)

Yes indeed. Both the capitalists and the Marxists assume that capital has to make a profit. Cullenberg thinks that assumption unjustified, to which one could only answer that he would make a very poor capitalist. Behind this weird point is Cullenberg's desire to visit a plague on both the Marxists' and the capitalists' houses.

Cullenberg's ham-fisted attempts to qualify Marx's theory of the falling rate of profit are an extreme version of the vulgarisation of Marxism, but even the best of these authors is reluctant to wholly endorse the argument. In *Marx's Theory of Crisis*, Simon Clarke, for many years a leading figure in the Conference of Socialist Economists, gives an excellent and exhaustive account of the development of Marx's theory. However, when it comes to placing the role of the falling rate of profit in the theory, Clarke is painfully tentative.

One of the more useful aspects of Clarke's book is that it shows how in their earlier works Marx and Engels described economic crises in more or less conventional ways. They believed crisis was due to overproduction of commodities, or the disproportionality of different branches of production. However, with the development of the theory, Marx began to show how these particular forms of crisis were just expressions of the underlying limitations imposed by the profit system. The importance of this approach was that it showed how crises were endemic to capitalist accumulation, rather than being merely conjunctural disturbances at the level of the market.

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Clarke cites one passage from Marx that has been used to argue that his theory of crisis was based on the overproduction of commodities. There Marx talks about 'necessary labour as the limit on the exchange value of living labour capacity or on the wages of the industrial population'. Many commentators have assumed this means that the low amount paid out in wages sets a limit on how many goods can be sold. However, Clarke explains that Marx is 'not referring to the limited consumption power of the mass of the population', but to the fact that the workers will only be employed if their wages are low enough to facilitate exploitation (p147). The key to the crisis tendency is always the ability or inability of the capitalists to exploit living labour.

In a similar fashion, Clarke shows how Marx dealt with the theory that crises were a consequence of disproportionality between different branches of production: 'he reformulates the problem of proportionality...in terms of the proportionality between necessary and surplus labour' which is to say the rate of exploitation. Clarke adds that 'Marx defines this as the specifically capitalist form of disproportionality, which underlies the predisposition to crisis in the capitalist mode of production.' (p151)

But good as Clarke's reading of Marx is, he is reluctant to place the theory of the falling rate of profit at centre stage. Having shown that the crises of disproportionality and overproduction are just particular forms of the underlying limits of the accumulation process, Clarke fails to show how these forms are linked to that process. So he writes:

'Although all three aspects of disproportionality, underconsumptionist and the tendency of the rate of

profit to fall play a role in determining the vulnerability of capitalism to crisis, the underlying cause of all crises remains the fundamental contradiction on which the capitalist mode of production is based, the contradiction between the production of things and the production of value, and the subordination of the former to the latter.' (p285)

Good as Clarke's reading of Marx is, he is reluctant to place the theory of the falling rate of profit at centre stage

This sounds very profound, but in fact it is just too general to be of much use. Demoting the tendency of the rate of profit to fall to just one of many conjunctural crises that may occur in capitalist production misses the point. The tendency of the rate of profit to fall is not a superficial characteristic of capitalism, like unsold goods or uneven development, but a fundamental law. Clarke himself quotes Marx as saying that it is 'in every respect the most important law of modern political economy, and the most essential one for comprehending the most complex relationships'. In fact the tendential fall in the rate of profit is just the same law as the law of capitalist accumulation, only seen from the other side, looking at its limitations instead of its dynamism. More superficial expressions of crisis can only be understood by relating them to this inner dynamic.

For that reason no actual crisis has ever broken out under the immediate spur of a fall in the profit rate, but the susceptibility of capitalism to crisis is conditioned by its relatively narrowing basis of profit. Even the contradiction that Clarke makes central, that between 'the production of things and the production of value', reaches its clearest expression in the falling rate of profit. In recent times the conflict between making useful things and making profits has been pushed to new heights by the difficulties of profitable investment. Consequently investors prefer to make money by speculating on the stock exchange, trading on shares and other assets, leading to an ever greater divergence between the productive economy and the fictitious paper economy of the City of London.

Clarke wrongly draws the conclusion that Marxism is just a theory of 'the permanent instability of social existence under capitalism', adding that 'from this perspective Marx is the first and most radical theorist of the "postmodern" condition'

Clarke's reworking of Marx's theory of crisis undermines the programmatic conclusion of the investigation of capitalism's inherent limits. Rightly arguing that there can be no single catastrophic crisis that will bring the capitalist era to a close, Clarke wrongly draws the conclusion that Marxism is just a theory of 'the permanent instability of social existence under capitalism', adding that 'from this perspective Marx is the first and most radical theorist of the "postmodern" condition' (p280).

The weakness of both Clarke and Cullenberg's investigations of the theory of the limits of capitalist ►

◀ accumulation is that they divorce the theory from the understanding that capitalism is historically limited. Clarke's point above would be correct if he were only arguing that the objective limitations of capitalism were not enough to make a revolution without the intervention of the working class. But assuming a condition of permanent instability assumes the permanence of capitalism.

Cullenberg's mistake is yet more grievous: looking at Marxism only as an interesting theory not as a means to transform society. As he writes of the competing theories of crisis, 'each theory literally constructs its own truth, and criteria for the validity of that truth' (p13). At which point theories become works of art where one can just as easily imagine that capitalists do not have to make a profit as imagine that Emma does not marry Rochester in the end.

The attraction of the idea of Marxism to modern radicals is best illustrated by Derrida's belated endorsement of Marx. Derrida fans will know that for some time the controversial philosopher has been avoiding saying anything about Marx, while promising to do so at a later date. Derrida jokes: 'Already I hear people saying: "you picked a good time to salute Marx!" Or else: "Its about time! Why so late?"' (p88)

Reading Derrida's extended and laconic essay, it is not hard to work out why he has endorsed Marx just when he is out of fashion. The attraction of Marx for Derrida is not the case for overthrowing capitalism, but the case merely for calling it into question. All through the seventies and eighties postmodernists inspired by Derrida were attacking Marxism precisely for its claim to represent the interests of humanity as a whole. That offended their preference for a plurality of different viewpoints. When capitalism seemed to triumph in the wake of the Cold War, however, it was the capitalist triumphalists who stood—or pretended to stand—for a common humanity. Consequently, Derrida has turned his deconstructive ire on capitalism, and used Marx to do it.

Derrida relates his own theory of deconstruction to Marxism: 'Deconstruction has never had any sense or interest in my view at least, except as a radicalisation, which is to say also in the tradition of a certain Marxism, in a certain spirit of Marxism.' (p92) But the radicalism that Derrida reads into Marxism is precisely its ability to undermine the claims of capitalism to be the best possible society. The minute that the Marxists claim to have an answer to the problems of how to organise society, deconstruction takes its leave from Marxism, or as Derrida puts it 'radicalises' Marxism.

Throughout the long Cold War the radical intelligentsia flirted with Marxism. The counterweight of the Stalinist countries and the left was a useful weapon in its own academic criticisms of society. These academics rarely endorsed any real social change, but always enjoyed the fact that the outlook of the establishment was open to a challenge, leaving some room for their own criticisms. Today the persisting failure of capitalism makes the project of transforming society all the more pressing. But if Marxism is to play a role in that project it will have to be a different Marxism than the rejuvenated complaints of the radical intelligentsia. As Marx said, the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point is to change it.

READ ON

Turning Japanese? Britain with a Permanent Party of Government, Helen Margetts and Gareth Smyth (eds), Lawrence & Wishart, £14.99 pbk

Written by journalists, academics and Labour politicians, *Turning Japanese* reflects the fear that Britain under the Conservatives is becoming a one-party state. It looks at Japan—where 38 years of one-party rule ended last year—as a model of how change could come to Britain.

There are some striking similarities between the two countries. Both the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Party governments have been tainted by corruption scandals—though the editors assert that while bribes and pay-offs to MPs are a feature of Japanese politics 'we have not seen this in Britain' (pix). Even if they did go to print before the cash-for-questions scandal, this assessment borders on national naivety—as if British members of parliament were more honourable than the Japanese.

But entertaining as these various comparisons are—especially Patrick Dunleavy's reflections on the end of political debate—the similarities between Britain and Japan end when you look at the relative strengths of the two economies. After all one-party rule in Japan brought prosperity and an increased role in the world.

Tessa Mayes

Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Cyberspace, Douglas Rushkoff, Flamingo, £6.99 pbk

For once the blurb on the back of the book is justified. Douglas Rushkoff is to nineties cyberculture what Tom Wolfe was to sixties pop culture: the chronicler of a generation, celebrating its aspirations and—between the lines—describing its limitations, often self-imposed.

It's all here: surfing the information superhighway (something like a hi-tech rerun of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*—it's not the places/information that matter, but the speed with which you pass them by); the New Edge convergence between mysticism and the veneration of technology; drug-taking as a chemical safety-blanket (the warm feeling of the E community); and the idea that going with the flow is as subversive as anyone can be.

Rushkoff profiles all the recognised makers and shakers in West Coast cyberculture: *Mondo 2000* editor RU Sirius, Dr Timothy Leary (from LSD to virtual reality as 'electronic LSD'), and ex-pat Brits such as Mark Heley, Fraser Clark and Terence McKenna. He also introduces a bevvy of up and comers—the face of 1996 is probably in there somewhere.

The world inhabited by the cyberculturists is narrow and blinkered. But the idea of cyberculture appeals to a broad range of mainly young people. Rushkoff succeeds in showing its appeal: solipsism is made to appear more attractive than ever before.

Like Wolfe 30 years ago, Rushkoff arrived on the scene as an investigative journalist, underwent something of a conversion, and left almost a missionary. The tenets of cyberculture are fantasy. But they are fantasies which are true to our times, and Rushkoff encapsulates them better than most. Read this book.

Andrew Calcutt

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