LIVING MARXISM

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The strange death of British politics

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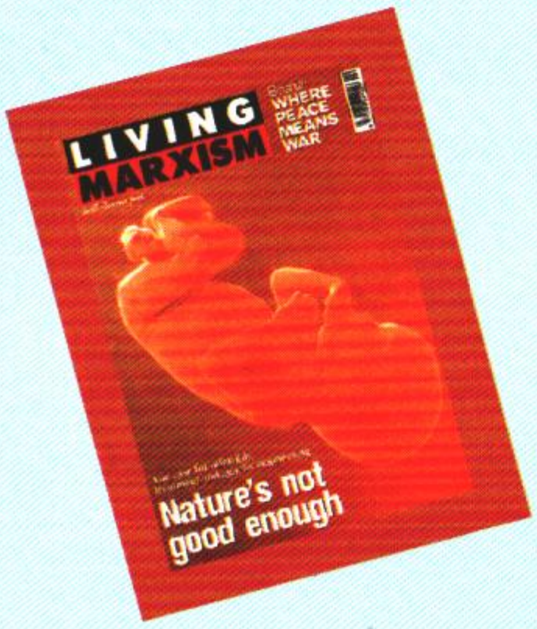

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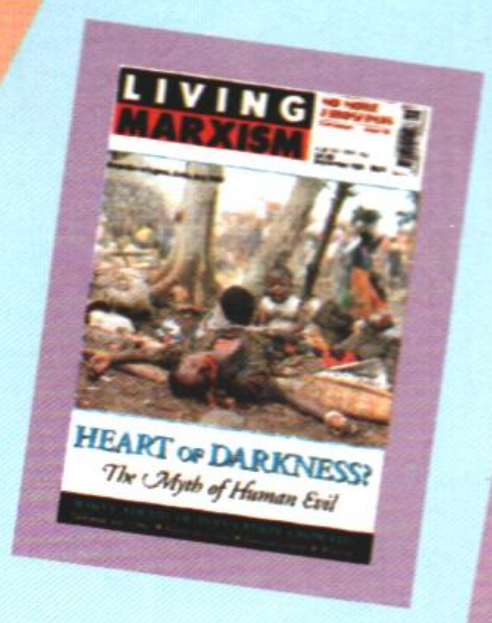

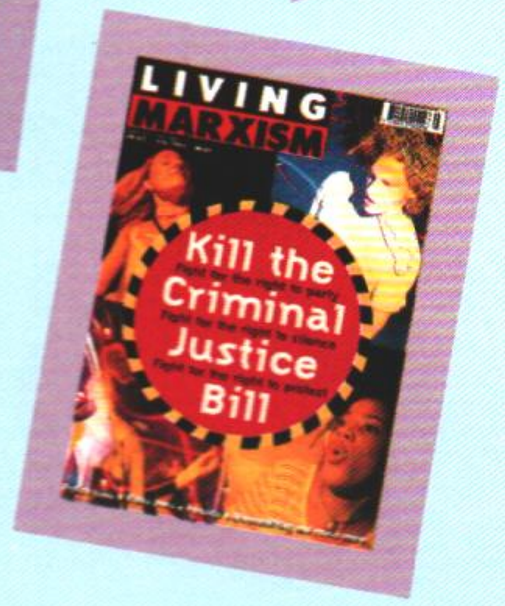

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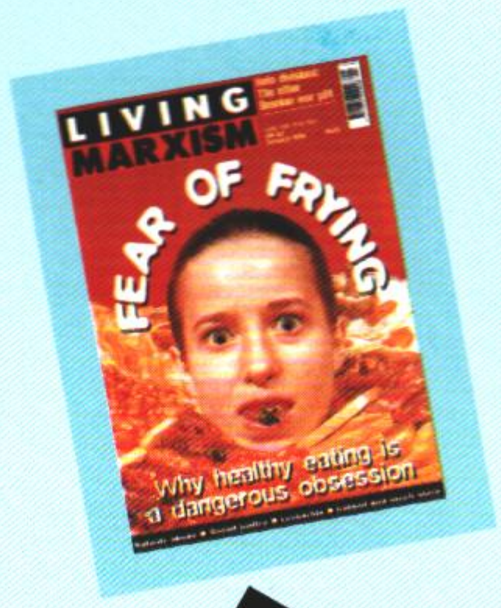

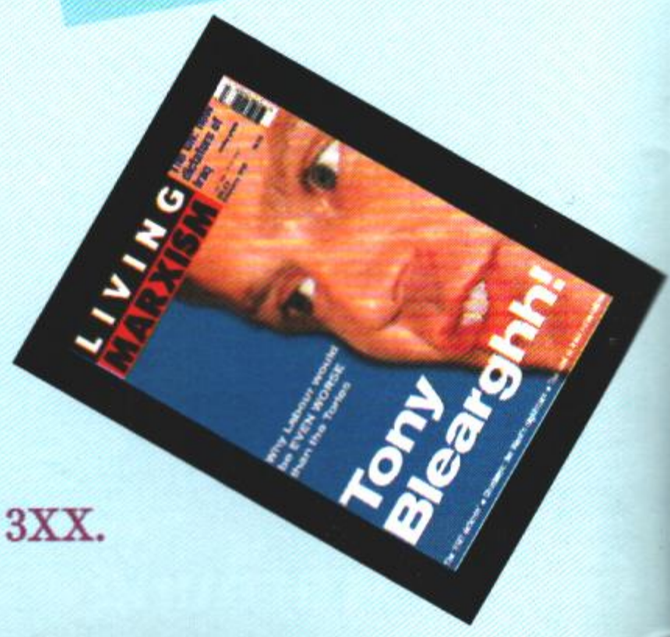

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The strange death of British politics

After 11 years of latex lampoons, *Spitting Image* is to be ditched by ITV this autumn. British politics has become so stale and uncontroversial that it can no longer be caricatured.

More than ever before, parliamentary politics and parties seem far removed from the problems facing most people in their everyday lives. Who outside of the political class really cares about the issues which preoccupy MPs today, from Clause IV and the single European currency to subsidiarity and regional devolution? Worse still, as politics becomes a narrow and technical affair, the focus of media attention shifts on to even less inspiring matters like the 'personalities' and sex lives of MPs.

As the old parties wither and debate stagnates, British politics appears to be dying. Yet it is a strange, silent death in which the corpse of the old order continues to run the country without facing serious opposition. This month's *Living Marxism* comes not to praise the British political system, but to understand what's going on, the better to bury it.

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No party stands for any principle, the left-right divide has lost all meaning and the big issues are not even on the agenda. Frank Füredi examines the intellectual crisis of contemporary politics.

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The old mass parties of left and right alike are a thing of the past, says James Heartfield.

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With the government groping for an international role and the old right searching for a national crusade, Helen Simons cannot see the Tories escaping from their turmoil over Europe.

Editor: **Mick Hume**
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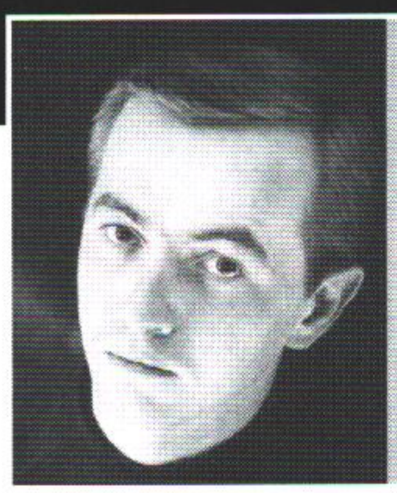

Mick Hume

Girls and boys

There has been 'a social and economic revolution' in women's lives, Labour frontbencher Harriet Harman told parliament in March. Harman was speaking in a full-scale commons debate on International Women's Day—an event which a few years ago would have been marked only by poorly attended meetings in a few drafty town halls.

It certainly appears that the prevailing values of society have shifted significantly in a feminist direction. Everything from the adoption of non-sexist language to the increased attention paid to rape or sexual harassment seems to indicate that things have changed. As a consequence, what are considered masculine values are definitely out of vogue in the mid-1990s. In the eyes of most commentators, being aggressive, assertive or competitive is now considered unacceptably macho behaviour.

The need to counter 'masculine values' is an underlying theme of many discussions. Even something as seemingly sexless as economic analysis demonstrates the trend. During that March commons debate, the Labour leadership announced its determination to see an end to 'men-only economics'. In the same month, one analysis of the Barings bank crash in the *Financial Times* blamed the dominant dealing room 'culture' among male financial traders like Nick Leeson, with its 'one simple value system: win or be damned'.

The revolt against 'masculine values' is most evident in the discussion of male violence, now widely portrayed as a growing threat to women, children and civilised society.

The Archbishop of York recently sought to pin the blame for family breakdown on the increasing number of aggressive young men who are seen as not worth marrying. Christina Hardyment of the *Daily Telegraph* got on her high horse to condemn the 'male aggression' of these 'unskilled, randomly violent...potentially murderous misfits who make the well-meaning mass of good citizens quail' (9 March 1995). The revival of the football hooligan panic has confirmed the worst fears of many such 'good citizens'. The attempt to associate masculinity with violence has now reached the point where some scientists claim that there could even be a genetic link.

The flipside of this process is the sustained attempt to elevate what are seen as 'feminine values', such as sensitivity, consideration, compliance and non-threatening behaviour. Ours is an age when it is considered good for everybody to cry and to seek counselling rather than trying to get on with it; and when the experience of being a woman is often seen as a qualification for occupying the moral high ground on any issue. As reviewer Christopher Dunkley has noted of the new trend in television drama, 'any positive aspect of any female character is credited to the woman's natural virtue, anything negative results one way or another from her relationships with men'.

Since few people want to be seen defending the boorish antics of 'the boys', this is often an easy argument to win. But we do not have to side with the ridiculous Iron Johns of the new 'men's movement' in order to spot some problems here. The attempt to exorcise 'masculine values' in favour of 'feminising' society has dangerous implications—for many men and women alike.

Take, for instance, the way in which influential critics of 'masculine values' now deem it out of order to be aggressive, assertive or offensive to others. That might sound all right to the comfortably off opinion-makers, who do not want their leafy lives disturbed by conflict and unpleasantness. But what about the many others who have to struggle and be pushy to survive? How is being sensitive and compliant going to help them get a decent wage rise from an employer, or deal with the hard-faced social security people? How will nice, non-threatening behaviour feed or clothe their families?

What might seem like a sweeping attack on 'masculine values' is not really aimed at all men. The sort of self-righteous middle class males who are influenced by the features on the *Guardian* women's page are not counted as men for the purposes of this debate. Instead, the focus always seems to be on the deficiencies of working class men, epitomised either by the football hooligan or the Leeson-style wideboy. Putting on a feminist hat and attacking working class men for their lager-fuelled aggression, sexism, homophobia, racism or greed has become the acceptable way for the genteel citizenry to look down their noses at the plebs in the 1990s.

The promotion of so-called feminine values is often little more than a celebration of the kind of docility, passivity and ability to suffer in silence which have traditionally been demanded of good wives and mothers. For working people trying to get on and improve our lives, embracing such values would mean accepting that we are powerless to change things. And who would benefit most from that? Cynics might say that it is particularly convenient for those running a slump-ridden economy, which cannot provide people with what they need, to promote the notion that we should reject the aggressive, grasping, greedy masculine values of the 1980s.

Never mind the problems of working class men, we are told, the priority now is to improve the status of women in society.

EDITORIAL

Yet the irony is that the implications of running down 'masculine values' are in some ways even worse for the majority of women.

For decades, women have sought to escape from the traditional stereotypes of feminine helplessness, passivity and general 'girliness'. In trying to win equality, they were trying to be *more like men*—at least in the sense of being more in control of events and more influential in the world. Now, however, women are not only being told to put up with the old crap, but to revel in it. The *Oprah*-ised media often seems to sanctify women's role as society's passive *victims*, whether of child sexual abuse, harassment, domestic violence or rape.

Of course, there have been changes in relations between the sexes. But these are less about the elevation of women to equal status with men than the dragging down of many men to the level previously allotted to women.

The much-vaunted 'revolution' in women's working lives is a case in point. The advance of 'flexible' working practices like part-time employment is often pointed to as evidence of women's progress in the jobs market. No doubt there have been improvements for some of the well-heeled women now associated with Tony Blair's New Labour. But women executives are still far more common in coffee adverts than in corporate boardrooms; recent figures suggest women make up just 2.8 per cent of senior managers and 9.8 per cent of all managers in British business. As for the mass of the female workforce, the average wage for a woman worker is now around 40 per cent less than for a man. In March, Tory trade minister Richard Needham even had to admit that Daewoo's women workers in Korea earn more than their counterparts in Britain. Some revolution.

The growth of part-time work has been widely presented as a good thing which allows more women to combine work with childcare. Everybody seems less keen to mention the fact that part-time work means part-time wages, otherwise known as poverty.

What the changes in work practices have achieved is to reduce millions of men to the kind of insecure, poorly paid employment once reserved for women. And the employers can do more than just get away with imposing such 'flexible' working today; they can even sell it as a progressive step towards the 'feminisation' of the workforce.

In practice, the sort of economic equality that is being established today is typified by the proposal to equalise the age at which men and women qualify for a pension in Britain; not by cutting men's retirement age to 60, but by raising women's to 65. At the level of rhetoric, the authorities are generous in their commitments to gender equality. But where hard cash is concerned, they ensure that it is a question of sharing out the misery.

A similar process can now be seen at work in the social and political spheres. Women have long been cast in the role of powerless home-makers with little part to play in deciding major issues. Instead, they have been relegated to more petty obsessions about their families, friends, bodies and health. This always represented a retreat from engaging with wider matters, something which women activists fought hard to overcome. Today, however, more and more men are being shunted into the backwaters of 'feminine' issues. The growing obsession with men's health and diet parallels the removal of working people from the political life of the country. Once the aim was to encourage more women to look beyond a narrow concern with relationships and smear tests, and take an active part in changing society. Now it seems men too are being told to stay home, feel their testicles and fret about fatherhood.

There is a final consequence of the campaign against 'male aggression' which has potentially dangerous consequences for us all. It continually invites the authorities to intervene in our affairs in order to suppress bestial instincts.

There is now a powerful notion that there is something inherent in males that can make them violent. Those who use dubious science to claim a genetic link make this point most explicitly. But even those who blame a poor social environment for 'male aggression' tend to imply that it is an unavoidable trait among certain types of men. These points come close to echoing the old primitivist arguments about the 'natural savagery' of Africans and others. As such, they must invite intervention and repression. After all, if the boys cannot help it, a policeman or 'caring professional' of one sort or another will have to be brought in to curb their aggressive instincts for them.

The focus on 'hardcore hooligans', like those few on display at the football in Dublin, makes many people sympathetic to calls for more controls. But the wider implication of the primitivist-style argument is that all humanity is imperfect, potentially destructive, and in need of firmer regulation and more censorship. Once we allow the authorities to brand people as beasts, who is to say where they will draw the line?

Before you know it, the feminist campaign against 'masculine values' and 'male aggression' has turned into a justification for aggressive interference in the lives of millions of men and women, while we are told to lie back and think of non-penetration.

LETTERS

The danger of 'sustainable development'

A Thomas (letters, March) wants to 'distinguish between the radical scientific theory and the Western governments' version of "sustainable development"'. But there is more common ground than environmentalists care to admit.

The idea of 'sustainable development' originated among bodies like the World Bank as a formula for putting pressure on third world countries to sort out their economy. This notion was modified by radicals along the lines of appropriate technology, meeting local needs and local self-reliance. Although these ideas are couched in terms of making the third world more independent and safe from exploitation, the underlying message is that people in the third world must expect less input from the West. But only the West has the technical means to sustain economic development, and so 'local self-reliance' translates as leaving the people of the third world to their fate (except when it's expedient for a Western politician to go there on a 'mercy mission'). This is where radical cultural relativism converges with old-fashioned theories of separate development, otherwise known as apartheid.

I agree with Ged (letters, March) that capitalism has 'corrosive effects on people and the planet'. For me, capitalism is corrosive because it stops people having enough effect on the planet, whereas the Greens say that we've already had too much. This is why they are unlikely to make common cause with me.

Richard Arnold *Leicester*

The best and worst of Japan

Excellent as Daniel Nassim's article was ('The West gloating at Kobe's graveside', March), I nevertheless found myself pulled up short by the final paragraph.

Firstly, is it fair to equate Japanese people's perseverance and civility in the face of such a tragedy with what is worst in Japanese society, namely its 'regimentation'? A tragedy shared often brings out the best in the human character. Ordinary people forget private antagonism and unite in common grief. Would Mr Nassim have said, for example, that the collective sense of mourning after Hillsborough was a symptom of British people's subservience to authority?

Secondly, I think Mr Nassim should be more balanced about how he uses expressions like 'the regimentation of Japanese society'. This is, after all, a prejudice about Japan that is taken as axiomatic in the West. What precisely is the difference between this form of veiled attack and the form taken by Western commentators? In their hands 'regimentation' becomes another stick with which to beat Japan and drum roll the values of their democratic tradition.

Julian Lagnado *Strasbourg, France*

Violence against women

The article 'Does porn damage women?' (March) made some fair points. The porn-stars-as-victims argument does need to be critically analysed. However, where the article let itself down was the throwaway comments made about Diana Russell, accusing her of dressing up her personal distaste as a political issue.

This comment is utterly impertinent and disrespectful. Russell is an international authority on violence against women. She is not a prude. She has spent her life uncovering the horrific abuse women have experienced at the hands of men, that people don't want to know about. For too long there has been chilling silence. We should not be too quick to shout Russell down.

Victoria van der Knaap *Bristol*

New Labour's conservatism

Lee Harrison (letters, March) correctly identifies a society with 'atomised individuals' as a problem. For the business class, a society of individuals apathetic towards all ideas (including its own) poses a threat to stability. For progressives, atomisation represents a barrier to engaging people in the project of human emancipation. The solution of the former—greater controls, censorship—is antithetical to the latter.

Harrison promotes the values of social justice and communitarianism. This progressive-sounding language of New Labour is dangerous because it obscures what is actually an attempt to reformulate the case for social conservatism. The New Labourites are justifying inequality nineties-style by positioning themselves 'above' group interests. In reality, by arguing for greater controls to deal with atomisation and by accepting limits to public expenditure, they are siding wholly with the sectional interests of Britain's moneyed classes.

Katie Joffee *Norwich*

On nuclear non-proliferation

I was recently passed two articles on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) from the November edition of *Living Marxism*, and I am writing to let you know that they have given a lot of pleasure to our executive committee.

When we had a good look at the NPT we realised what a ratbag of a biased, racist treaty it was. There was, we decided, only one place for it—the scrapheap. Then we got hold of a programme put out by British CND calling for limited extension of the NPT, with 12 conditions attached. This gave us some cause for concern. They had obviously done a lot of work preparing their brief but we just could not accept it. We stuck to our guns, but we felt some guilt about what might be seen as a betrayal.

So we were very pleased to come across the two articles in your magazine. It's really given us a buzz, because although we have support from two groups here (the Peace Council of Aotearoa New Zealand and Wellington Veterans for Peace), it's been somewhat depressing to note the number of non-governmental organisations which have been writing reams of what seems to us pointless material about how the NPT can be dressed up.

More recently I've come across your edition of last August which also contains the excellent editorial on Hiroshima, which we would like to make use of for this year's commemoration.

John Hampton, for the committee,
Wellington CND, *New Zealand*

Animal rights and wrongs

As a supporter of animal rights, I am shocked and disgusted to read the accusations levelled by someone as narrow-minded as James Heartfield ('Where's the beef?', January).

Animal welfare concern does not arise out of some nationalistic, xenophobic or misanthropic desire to inspire fear and loathing of the human race. Neither are animal rights incompatible with human rights. You will find that there are thousands of people whose support of both issues denotes a compassionate nature. You state that 'only people could come up with an idea like rights or suffering—concepts which are alien to the animal world'. The fact is that people have come up with the concept of suffering, and have inflicted its actuality on people and animals alike.

The incapacity for concern about another living thing denotes a base and immoral disposition. The attack on animal rights by *Living Marxism* shows a discrepancy between a purported compassion towards those people who suffer, and a total disregard for other living things who endure cruelty in different ways.

Rachel Pinder *London N16*

I can sympathise with James Heartfield's general point concerning the ascendancy of animal over human welfare. After all, Saddam Hussein systematically liquidated his own people with Western armaments and no one raised a peep. But oil a few ducks in the Gulf, and everyone's up in arms.

I think, however, that Heartfield has been reading too many of Norman Tebbit's stinking-hypocrisy articles. Why can't people support

both types of welfare? Also, Alan Clark's politics may stink, but at least he has been consistent in his views on animal welfare. He may indeed hate Johnny Foreigner, but also apparently the dense bastards that think it's fun to chase foxes in company with a pack of other grotty dogs.
Nick Warner *Southsea, Hampshire*

Selling controversy

It is quite something to find a defence of the advertising industry in a Marxist magazine ('Whose advertising standards?', March). Who, besides Ann Bradley, cares whether or not advertising is censored?

The encoding of visual, literary and verbal messages in advertisements has only one aim: to increase profits. Which is why, in the creation of no other static image does capitalism spend so much time, labour and money. The Italian clothing chain which Bradley mentions by name—twice—is not attempting to challenge the censor because it believes in free speech. It is not even interested in *Living Marxism's* 'Ban nothing'. It is interested in getting free editorial brand promotion, and your compliance demonstrates the power of advertising.

Government may decide that it is politic to tinker with fringe elements of advertising, but the big agencies and their clients have contributed handsomely to the Tories. No way will the party of capitalism harm capitalism's most visible hustlers as they sell, sell, sell.
René Gimpel *London W2*

Don't softsoap Myra Hindley

Ann Bradley is away with the fairies again. In her infantile article ('Myra Hindley—a bad woman', February), Bradley softsoaps Hindley's behaviour in hooking up with Ian Brady as a lifestyle choice and a brave alternative to the domesticity and drudgery of traditional women's work. She further holds up Brady's interest in 'poetry, politics and classical music' as superior to run-of-the-mill working class male pursuits—she is on the brink of holding up the vicious pair as revolutionary role models.

No, the torturing and killing of working class children is not an OK activity provided you read poetry and don't want to be a housewife. Myra Hindley can stay where she belongs, beyond the Pale, forever. And Ann Bradley should be relegated to the knitting patterns, until she recovers from her brainstorm.
Deborah Lavin *Kilburn, London*

The poverty of Popper

Neil Pellegrini (letters, February) points out that Karl Popper was against 'holistic planning', because for Popper this led to 'totalitarianism'. He claims that it is Marx who vacates reason in substituting human authorship of man's destiny for the 'historicist' inevitability of the 'laws of history'. But Marxists do not have a 'teleological plan' for society which passively moves from A to B aside from our own actions. If anybody vacates the core of reason—the human subject—it is Popper. The aspiration for the individual to realise himself in society is lost with Popper, for whom local and pragmatic knowledge must prevail, while reason is relegated to pragmatic contingency.

Pellegrini alludes to this when he claims that Popper's 'piecemeal approach is still scientific and rational'. But Popper reduces scientific procedure to a set of highly malleable and contingent relationships, dependent upon 'a provisional consensus that can be refuted at any time'.

Popper was an anti-communist Cold War hero who claimed that anyone who laid down a marker for reason—Plato, Hegel or Marx—was sewing the seeds of totalitarianism. During the Cold War, 'totalitarianism' was a powerful charge against Marxism. But those days are gone, and the late Sir Karl Popper can now be seen for what he was: the last anti-communist hero.
Robert Fletcher *New Cross, London*

The Clegg file

While I agree with Mark Ryan ('Shooting star', March) that the case of Private Lee Clegg is an example of government and media bias and hypocrisy, I feel it is a shame that Mr Ryan got one important fact wrong. He retold the lie that an RUC officer had seen Clegg's case file marked 'Not for prosecution'. It has been proved, and widely reported, that the female officer in question had left the RUC and could not possibly have seen the file. Ryan accuses the media of continuing to 'treat the lie as the truth'—then in the next paragraph is guilty of exactly that himself.
Mark William Ryder *Putney, London*

Healthy eating

Charles Murray (letters, February) writes 'I've made my New Year resolution which is to eat at McDonald's and spend the time I save in cooking and shopping in trying to do something about the rotten system we live under'. The system is rotten but it also stinks because of companies like McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, United Fruit, etc.

Murray also says that 'working class people cannot afford to eat healthily'. I know more working class people who cannot afford to eat regularly at McDonald's. Cooking your own food is not only healthier, but also much cheaper. Instead of trying to save time by eating out, start cooking and boycotting McDonald's—that's the healthier way to beat the rotten system!
Malou Spier *Luxembourg*

As I do very little of the family shopping, and, much to my shame, even less of the family cooking, I am somewhat loath to enter the debate regarding 'healthy' eating and the expense thereof. I must say, however, that I am absolutely staggered at the amount of porridge you can buy for a quid. And with supermarkets now selling milk very cheaply indeed, my advice to your readers is to have a big bowl of porridge (possibly with a spoonful of treacle) whenever they are hungry.
Martin Cullen *Wakefield*

Beyond a joke

Managers at Southwark council don't miss a trick when it comes to disciplining the workforce. This is the list of fines imposed on staff on 17 March (Red Nose day): not wearing a red nose—20p; late for a meeting—2p per minute; smoking—20p per fag; swearing—20p; jamming the photocopier—2p; failure to answer the phone with correct salutation—20p. Staff were also invited to do a colleague's job for the day (as well as their own), for a £20 donation by the colleague.

Still, it's all in a good cause, innit?
Stuart *London*

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

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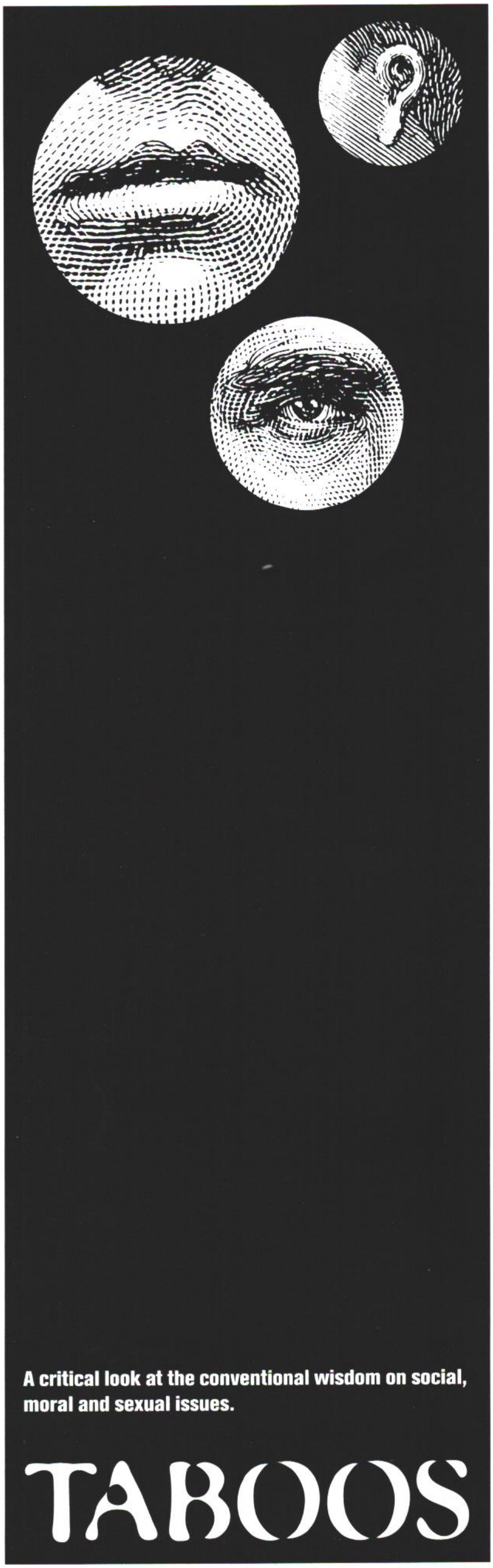


A critical look at the conventional wisdom on social, moral and sexual issues.

TABOOS

'Recovered memory': a morbid symptom

Michael Fitzpatrick investigates the dangerous preoccupation with 'recovered memories' of childhood sexual abuse

Memories of sexual abuse, usually of a girl by her father in early childhood, recovered in the course of psychotherapy as an adult, have led to a spate of allegations against parents on both sides of the Atlantic. Some parents, often middle-aged or elderly, have now mobilised to defend themselves, accusing therapists of planting or promoting 'false memories'.

In Britain last year a father was acquitted of raping and indecently assaulting his daughter, after claiming that 'phantom memories' of these events could have been induced by counselling. In the USA, however, several men are serving substantial prison sentences following convictions secured largely on the strength of 'recovered memories' (see F Crews, 'The revenge of the repressed', *New York Review of Books,* 17 November 1994).

There can be little doubt that there is widespread public sympathy for the survivors of abuse recalled in this way and support for sanctions against the perpetrators. In the USA campaigners are seeking to suspend the 30-year limit within which legal redress can be taken for cases of this sort.

According to Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, whose best-selling 1988 book *The Courage to Heal* helped popularise the notion of 'recovered memory' in the USA, 'if you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were' (p22). The symptoms of child sexual abuse which it is claimed may be manifested in an adult include depression, eating disorders, sexual dysfunction, low self-esteem, relationship problems, suicidal or self-destructive thoughts. It seems virtually any psychological difficulty can now be attributed to past sexual abuse.

A survey by the British Psychological Society of more than 800 chartered psychologists revealed that more than 90 per cent had seen adult clients in the past year who had reported sexual abuse as children (*Recovered Memories,* BPS, 1995, p19). More than 20 per cent had at least one client in the past year who had recovered a memory of child sexual abuse from complete amnesia. Furthermore, 90 per cent of these chartered psychologists believed that such recovered memories were 'essentially accurate' (p19). The fact that two thirds of the respondents also accepted the possibility of false memories does little to qualify the high level of credulity regarding recovered memories among British psychologists. As a trenchant critique of the report pertinently inquires, 'if such a high proportion of BPS therapists are finding child sexual abuse, what about "unqualified" therapists?' (L Weiskrantz, *The Therapist,* Winter 1995, p5).

Controversies about the validity and accuracy of memories of infantile sexual experiences go back to the emergence of psychoanalyis at the turn of the century. They also raise questions about the mechanisms of remembering.

The story of Sigmund Freud's *volte face* on the question of sexual relations between parents and their children is well known. In his early clinical interviews, Freud was surprised to find that 'almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father' (*New Introductory Lectures,* Vol2, p154). For some years he accepted these accounts as true and developed his theories accordingly. However, towards the end of 1897, in the course of his self-analysis, he came to recognise that, though some of these incest stories might be true, most were fantasies, expressing infantile sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex (E Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud,* pp278-81).

In the course of development, such sexually charged notions, which were incompatible with the demands of society, underwent *repression.* They were relegated to the unconscious, where they might subsequently give rise to pathological symptoms. Freud's recognition of infantile sexuality and its repression is widely regarded as the birth of psychoanalysis as a new science.

Freud regarded memories of childhood as inherently unreliable:

'The isolated childhood memories that people have possessed consciously from time immemorial...may equally be falsified or at least may combine

truth and falsehood in plenty.' (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,* Vol1, p414)

For Freud, the important point was that 'the fantasies possess *psychical* as contrasted with *material* reality', emphasising that *'in the world of neuroses it is the psychical reality which is the decisive kind'* (p415). We might add that, in the world outside the consulting room, it is vital to recognise the distinction. In court, of course, the *material* reality must assume the decisive importance.

The recurring metaphor of the recovered memory movement is that of replaying a video of some distant traumatic experience. This notion of memory as a storeroom of recorded events is at variance with the conception of memory as a process of reconstruction, first advanced by the psychologist Frederic Bartlett in the 1920s and confirmed by more recent researches:

'Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organised past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form. It is thus hardly ever really exact, and it is not at all important that it should be so.' (FC Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study of Experimental and Social Psychology,* 1932).

Again we might add a rider to the last sentence: the accuracy of memory is not at all important—unless it is to be taken down and used in evidence against us.

The contemporary neurologist Antonio Damasio explicitly repudiates video metaphors of memory:

'Images are *not* stored as facsimile pictures of things, or events, or words, or sentences. The brain does not file Polaroid pictures of people, objects, landscapes; nor does it store audiotapes of music and speech; it does not store films of scenes in our lives....In brief, there seems to be no permanently held pictures of anything, even miniaturised, no microfiches or microfilms, no hard copies' (A Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain,* 1994).

Until the recent wave of cases alleging recovered memories, there was a broad consensus supporting these views, arising from extensive clinical experience and scientific research. The sexual abuse of children by their parents has long been recognised, but as a relatively uncommon condition, and a rare one where infants are involved. Just as campaigners on the issue of Satanic abuse cannot point to any evidence of babies ritually mutilated or sacrificed, hospital casualty records appear not to confirm the large-scale gross abuse of infants recalled by some adults, which would be expected to produce immediate physical as well as long-term psychic damage.

Furthermore, adult memories of childhood events have always been regarded as highly suspect. While Freud considered that the period of childhood amnesia extended up to the age of five, six or even eight, the British Psychological Society reckons that 'poor memory from before the fourth birthday is normal' and that nothing can be recalled from the first 12 months (BPS, pp10-12). Yet, in the USA, 25 per cent of recovered memories are from before the age of two and 50 per cent before the age of four. Some therapists, in Britain as well as in the USA, believe in recovering memories back to birth (some return to past lives). 'Memory recovery techniques' such as hypnotism, guided meditation and 'truth drugs', long regarded as dubious, are now widely used.

So what is going on? The upsurge of public concern about recovered memories of child sexual abuse is a morbid symptom of a decaying society. At a time of heightened economic insecurity and political paralysis, there is a widespread sense of traditions in decline and familiar institutions falling apart. The family as the basic social unit of a disintegrating society is a particular focus of concern and anxiety. ▶

These pressures inevitably bear down most heavily on women, driving some into demoralisation and introspection. Once you give up on the future, the next step is to find something (or someone) in the past to blame for your current predicament. In this state of vulnerability and declining self-esteem, the 'recovered memory' strategy may seem a plausible response.

Two forces have converged to place women in what one commentator calls the 'macabre embrace' of patient and therapist, victim and vampire, in the recovered memory movement. These are the remnants of feminism and the burgeoning world of therapy.

Bass and Davis, the leading American proponents of recovered memory, claim no psychological expertise. Their roots are in the women's movement and in their encounter with numerous incest memories in women's groups. Their focus on incest survivors shares with groups concerned about domestic violence, rape, pornography and prostitution a common preoccupation with women as *victims*. This reflects the involution of a movement that set out proclaiming the goal of liberation and demanding equal rights. As the years have passed, the target of feminists' wrath has shifted away from society, to men in general, and increasingly to their aged fathers.

The retreat into recovered memory also reveals the tendency of the extreme subjectivism of the women's movement to descend into irrationality. If Andrea Dworkin can equate pornography and rape, and Catharine MacKinnon can dissolve the distinction between the description of rape and its actuality, then Bass and Davis can feel free to adopt an entirely subjective judgement of child sexual abuse. With his insistence on the validity of Freud's original belief in the reality of infantile incest, Jeffrey Masson (MacKinnon's husband) provides some theoretical support for the recovered memory movement (see *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*).

Some feminist authorities have sought to redefine sexual abuse in ways that would make most women victims. For E Sue Blume, it need not even involve physical contact: 'Incest can occur through words, sounds, or even exposure of the child to sights or acts that are sexual but do not involve her.' (*Secret Survivors: Uncovering Incest and Its After-Effects in Women,* 1990, p5)

Another authority has identified as 'emotional incest' a situation in which parents 'appear loving and devoted', but lavish attention on their children merely 'as an unconscious ploy to satisfy their own unmet needs' (P Love, *The Emotional Incest Syndrome: What To Do When a Parent's Love Rules Your Life,* p1). As Frederick Crews observes, the modern women's movement appears to have made 'victimhood into a test of authentic belonging' (*NYRB,* 17 November 1994).

When vulnerable people meet plausible therapists the scope for suggestion is high

The recovered memory movement illustrates a striking alignment between radical feminism and religious fundamentalism. Both are haunted by the spectre of evil, the Devil incarnated in the Father. This is particularly apparent in the area of Satanic abuse, with which there is a considerable overlap (see S Hinchliffe, 'Satanic ridicule', *Living Marxism,* January 1995). In Britain this link is personified by the feminist journalist Beatrix Campbell who is an ardent believer in both Satanic abuse and recovered memory. Perhaps her long experience as a leading member of the now defunct British Communist Party has made her sensitive to the dangers of selective amnesia, though her affinity for irrational theories and authoritarian solutions remains undiminished.

Feminists seeking victimhood have found in the world of therapy and counselling a growing body of professionals eager to confirm and reinforce this status (see B Adams, 'The counselling con', *Living Marxism,* March 1994). Despite the historic animosity between feminism and psychoanalysis, today's women's movement appears to have embraced a grossly vulgarised Freudian theory together with dubious techniques for exploring the roots of psychological problems in the unconscious mind. When vulnerable people meet plausible therapists the scope for suggestion is high.

Upon recovering memories of child sexual abuse, 'survivors' are recruited to an embittered movement which appears to regard the process of accusing and condemning the alleged perpetrators as therapeutic. Such confrontations are now being fought out in the courts or, even worse, in newspapers (see B Campbell, 'Mind games', *Guardian,* 11 February 1995). If the allegations are false, the devastating and grotesquely unjust consequences for all involved are obvious. Even if the allegations are true, it is difficult to see how such a process of reviving childhood traumas could be beneficial for women decades later.

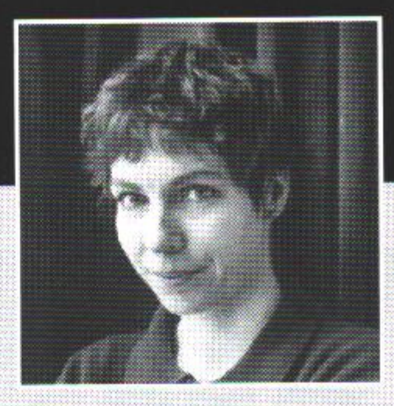
For most people following such cases, as indeed for many who are more closely involved, it is impossible to tell whether allegations are true or false. When stories are told by journalists taking advantage of personal or professional confidences, while other parties reply in anonymous letters ('name and address supplied'), and others still claim the protection of confidentiality, the confusion can only be deepened. Indeed, from the viewpoint of the 'recovered memory' zealots, the miasma of uncertainty, guilt, fear, shame and paranoia that arises from such cases may well be what makes it such a successful moral panic.

How can the conflicts generated by recovered memories be resolved? Many will end up in court, as the logic of a society turning in on itself in its most basic unit inevitably invites closer state regulation of individual behaviour. The moral panic about child sexual abuse culminates in an authoritarian intervention by the state.

In the course of writing this article, I recovered a long-lost memory of a song, by the American blues singer Taj Mahal. From a time (the 1960s) when people believed in the possibility of making a future, it suggests a more constructive attitude to the past:

'There is just no percentage in remembering the past/
It's time to learn and live again and love and laugh/
Come with me and leave your yesterdays, your yesterdays behind/
And take a giant step outside your mind.' ●

ANN BRADLEY



Of hedgehogs and men

On 3 March, House of Commons business began with Hugh Bayley, Labour MP for York, reporting on a 'horrific act of cruelty to a wild mammal in Yorkshire'. He presented a petition from a constituent, Mrs Pat Murgatroyd, about 'four 15 and 16-year old boys accused of causing unnecessary suffering to a hedgehog by dropping rocks on it, kicking and beating it with a fence post and thereby breaking almost every bone in its body'. The petition prayed the Honourable House would bring about an act of parliament that would give hedgehogs and other wild creatures legal protection against acts of cruelty. This petition had been signed by no less than 23 000 good citizens of Yorkshire. Nice to see them so motivated by such a crucial issue.

Moreover Mrs Murgatroyd's petition was only the appetiser to a morning when more than 250 MPs spent more than five hours debating, and agreeing to support, the Wild Mammals (protection) Bill. It was a debate peppered by accounts not only of cruelty to hedgehogs—routinely kicked, beaten and impaled on sticks, apparently—but of squirrels and fox cubs being nailed alive to trees and adult foxes hanged by the ears.

This is obviously inhuman and barbaric behaviour. I have no doubt about what I would like to do to a young vandal who crucifies an elegant squirrel—it involves a hammer, a tree, a bag full of nails and the perpetrator's scrotum. I suspect most people think such behaviour is degraded, degrading and intolerable. But do we really need parliament to pass laws about it?

Animal cruelty is a big issue right now—popular opinion has it that animals have rights and we should treat them as we expect to be treated ourselves. MPs can spend all morning debating the horrors of hunting, vote in favour of the Wild Mammal (protection) Bill, and just for once bask in the unreserved approval of their constituents. After all, as the *Mail on Sunday* explains, Britain has never been more concerned with the rights of animals and our responsibility to respect and protect them. Its recent survey showed that 70 per cent of the population want a ban on fox-hunting and 53 per cent would like to see shooting game birds outlawed.

Foxes are animals, animals hunt and are hunted

All this may seem like the harmless concern of the compassionate—but this degree of sentimentalism and absence of discrimination between animal life and human life is potentially problematic.

The common complaint that we have no right to kill foxes just because we think they are a nuisance goes unquestioned. Even those who support the hunting lobby are apologetic, insisting that it's the most humane form of pest control. Nobody seems to have the bottle to simply argue that hunting is OK because it is good fun and it does not matter if foxes are killed.

Foxes are animals, animals hunt and are hunted. That is what animal life is like. Hunting a fox is not like hunting a man who is conscious of what is about to happen to him, who dreads and anticipates his fate because he has a concept of death and knows it is the end of life for ever. A fox may run from the hounds from fear and instinct. Of course it experiences what it is to live, but with no capacity for abstract thought it cannot possibly fear death the way that we fear it, and so neither can it experience death in the way that we experience it. And that goes for hedgehogs, rabbits and squirrels too.

Until recently I was prepared to accept that the Beatrix Potter brand of sentimentality which encourages us to feel sorry for the veal calves, the foxes and other creatures abused by mankind was nothing more nor less than misplaced compassion. The action of those who will protest against veal but could not give a damn about social issues, I regarded as irritating and frivolous. But it is more than that. It is positively reactionary. You can see this most clearly in the way that sentimental claims for the meaningful character of animal life can be so successfully manipulated.

Take the latest intervention by the anti-abortion MPs. They have put forward a parliamentary motion entitled 'treatment of sentient creatures' which equates the killing of veal calves with the aborting of fetuses. It argues that if people think that veal calves are sentient creatures worthy of legal protection the same should be said for fetuses. There is a certain malign logic to this. If you believe that the factors which constitute meaningful life and make it important are those that mere animals have—biological life and a capacity to respond to stimuli—then it makes sense to argue that fetuses have it too.

But to equate biological life with consciousness devalues what is important and unique about humanity. It is our capacity to understand what it going on around us, to understand what it is to have life and to have a future that makes the denial of it dreadful. If a fetus is not conscious of being alive then it cannot fear death. If a veal calf has no sense of freedom then it cannot resent captivity. And while base animal instinct might make the fox fear the hounds, it certainly does not have a concept of cruel or wanton behaviour. From the point of view of a fox, rabbit or pheasant it makes no difference whether it is hunted down by a human for sport or another predator for dinner.

The irrational sentimentalism which has dominated recent discussions of animal welfare is a symptom of a society which is losing its capacity to reason. And with that, losing its capacity to value what is important about humanity. It is our capacity consciously to plan and execute actions which we believe are in our interests, whether to better our lives (such as when we seek to control our fertility) or simply for fun (such as when we hunt for sport), that makes us different from animals. They are biologically alive, yet not consciously alive and aware, and sharing the qualities which we believe make life worth living.

David Alton and his anti-choice cronies have a point: veal calves and fetuses do have something in common. Neither have consciousness or awareness—the precious attributes which make human life human and so significant. ●

What's left an

No party stands for any principle, the left-right divide has lost all meaning, and the big issues are not even on the agenda. Frank Füredi examines the intellectual crisis of contemporary politics

W

Who is left and who is right? Not so long ago such a question would have seemed bizarre. Ever since the eighteenth century, the conflict between the left and the right has been a dominant theme of Western political culture. Sometimes these conflicts were banal and superficial, but often they centred on fundamental differences over how society should be run. Today such conflicts are conspicuous by their absence. There are individuals who still identify with the left or the right. However, upon closer inspection, the old labels seem to lack any contemporary content.

British politics clearly illustrates the irrelevance of terms like left or right today. Of course old-fashioned Tories still use the word socialist to describe Labour, and sentimental lefties insist on labelling their opponents as fascists. But these terms say more about the people who use them than about political realities today. Many observers have commented on the absence of conflict over issues of principle. Only secondary matters separate Labour from the Conservative Party. As Simon Heffer of the *Daily Telegraph* put it, with Blair 'the electorate has two Tory prime ministerial candidates to choose between' (27 July 1994).

Butskellism?

The choice between Blair and Major has nothing to do with left and right alternatives. This was clearly brought home during the recent parliamentary exchanges over the 'excessive' pay rises given to company directors. Blair had expected to make good use of this populist issue against the Tories right up to the next election. But to his surprise, a Tory prime minister had little difficulty accommodating to populist sentiment on this matter and agreeing that something must be done. Major's ready condemnation of 'excessive' pay rises revealed that the debate was not over a broad issue of left-right principle, such as the distribution of wealth in society, but was a narrow discussion of the appropriate percentage point bonus for leading British executives.

It can be argued that the absence of substantial differences between the main parliamentary parties is not a particularly novel development. For example, during the fifties and sixties, the main parties accepted a consensus around welfare capitalism. This was the period of Butskellism (named after the Tory politician Rab Butler and the Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell), when the centrist leaderships of the main parties were guided by the philosophy of compromise. So isn't the Blair-Major show merely more of the same?

Interchangeable blandness

The similarities between the consensus politics of the postwar period and the situation today are fairly superficial. In the postwar period, there existed a positive consensus around the principle of welfare capitalism. Today there is no positive consensus about anything. What we have instead is the absence of any strong and positive views about matters of principle. It is this common negativity, rather than any positive agreement, which leads to the lack of substantive political differences between the Labour and Tory parties today. Both parties are prepared to negotiate a compromise on any policy, from Clause IV to post office privatisation. As a result, the lines that separate the parties are far from fixed. That is why, for instance, the Tories could win the 1992 general election as the party of low taxation, yet Labour can launch its campaign for the next election on the same ticket today.

The interchangeable blandness of today's political leaders reflects the end of the left-right divide, but did not cause it. The changing contours ▶

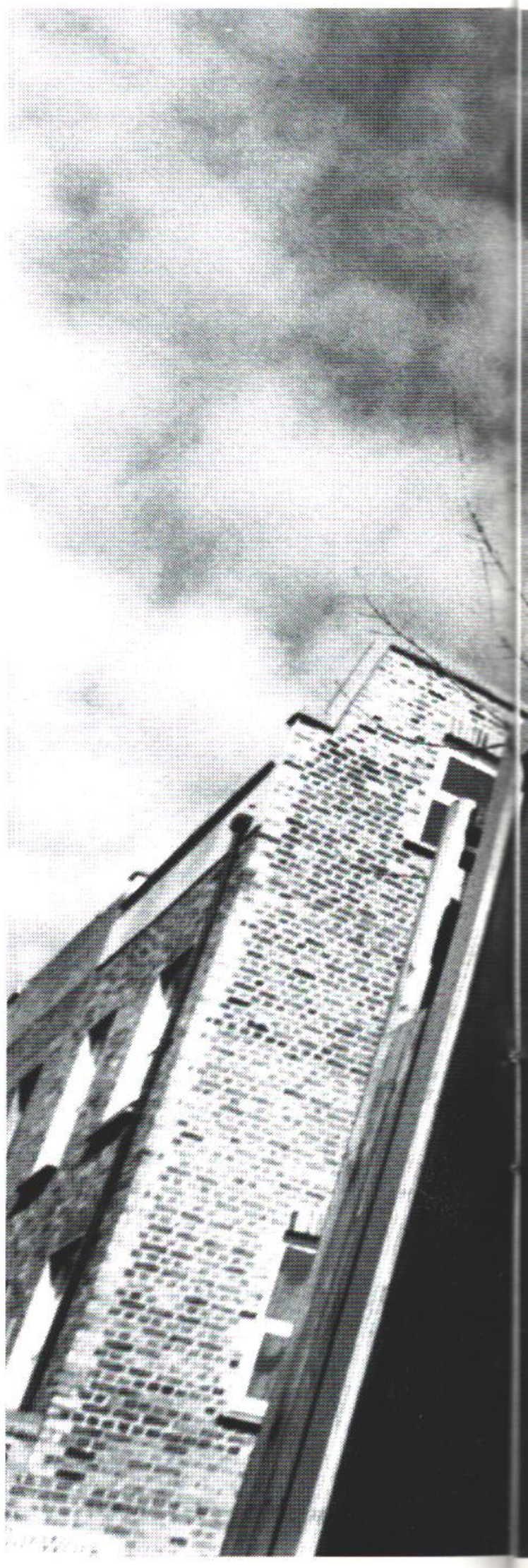


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

d ho's right now?

Right-wing politicians cannot reconcile the needs of the market with social consensus

of Western and, more specifically, British society provide the ultimate explanation of contemporary political realities.

The erosion of old loyalties and the break-up of the old political patterns have resulted from the suspension of class conflict. The suspension of collective conflict between workers, on the one hand, and the employers and authorities on the other has also encouraged the individuation of political life, a situation in which people think and act more as individuals than as members of a group or social class.

Many of the old constituencies have disintegrated, from trade unions to Conservative associations; at the very least their traditional political affiliations have been weakened. Both the core Labour and the core Tory social bases are far less significant than they were just a decade ago. One outcome of this process is the reduction of pressure on political parties—particularly pressure to act on behalf of a particular class. To some extent, the relationship between political parties and their constituencies has become indirect if not arbitrary.

Spin-doctors

The process outlined here often presents itself as the Americanisation of politics. The main features of the Americanisation of politics are the erosion of the link between class pressure and party, the ascendancy of political professionals and the rise of the 'personality'. Inevitably, the gap between politics and the lives of ordinary people has widened. The membership of all the major parties has plummeted, especially among the younger generations. More than ever before pragmatism and electoral calculations shape political culture. Of course, many of these tendencies existed before. Only now, however, has the declining influence of class loyalties helped to create a situation in which these tendencies exercise a decisive influence over politics and society.

One of the most striking features of the present conjuncture is the absence of any strongly held principle. Governments throughout Europe and America survive without any distinct programme, facing opposition parties which have no clear alternative to offer. This stagnation of Western political culture is the product of the failure of the political elites to take advantage of the defeat of the working class movement and its old political programme. Let's look at this point in a bit more detail.

The end of the Cold War was the culmination of a decade in which the capitalist elite succeeded in disciplining its domestic opponents. During the eighties, mass trade unions were defeated and marginalised, and mass unemployment forced the working class on to the defensive. Perhaps even more importantly, the establishment appeared to win all of the arguments. Everything from socialism to the welfare state was discredited during the high tide of the Reagan-Thatcher era. From this point onwards, the left ceased to represent any alternative to capitalism.

Ironically, in the nineties the right has not been able to take advantage of the left's defeat. The ruling elites have had too many problems of their own to take full advantage of the setbacks suffered by their opponents. The protracted period of economic malaise has fostered a climate of uncertainty. The long-term economic problems of global capitalism seem resistant to government policy, and most regimes have lurched from one stop-gap measure to another. The widespread disenchantment with the capitalist market is paralleled by a growing consciousness of social fragmentation. Right-wing politicians and thinkers have found it more and more difficult to reconcile the needs of the market with social consensus. The success of a handful of individual entrepreneurs is considered by many to be too high a price to pay for the breakdown of communities.

Pyrrhic victory

During the eighties, the ruling elites regarded the decade as a period of triumph and achievement. Today the eighties look very different. Often they are presented as the 'greedy eighties'—a period of selfish excess. The reinterpretation of the eighties reflects the mood of defensiveness among the ruling elite today. Immobilised by their own lack of direction, the authorities have not been able to enjoy the fruits of their victory over the old opposition. Policies like 'popular capitalism' or privatisation have lost their credibility. And they have not been replaced by other options.

The failure of policy-making is not just a result of the difficult problems thrown up by the economic slump. It also reflects the recognition that most policies are now inherently divisive. In Britain, for example, any further reduction in public services threatens the position and privileges of the middle class and other traditional supporters of the Tory government. Under these circumstances, most governments prefer to do nothing rather than risk greater unpopularity. As a consequence, the right, as much as the left, has nothing controversial to say. The left has still not recovered from the discrediting of welfarism and other forms of state interventionism. Now the right feels equally ill at ease with its free market rhetoric. The result is a stalemate where differences between parties seldom have any profound ideological significance.

Penny-pinching

The most exciting issues of controversy today are all about scandals and sleaze. Politicians can still get animated when one of their colleagues is exposed for fraud. Otherwise politics has become profoundly boring. Why? Because in the absence of programmatic alternatives, the political has become narrow and technical. Concepts like 'value for money' and 'efficiency' dominate the outlook of all parties. Increasingly politicians have acquired the vocabulary of managers and technicians.

In the recent period, many of the key political arguments have been about taxation as one party after another undertakes to spend our money wisely. The emphasis on taxation has turned politics into a celebration of the most narrow form of individual self-interest. According to the Tories, we are so many pounds better off than we were under the last Labour government. At the same time, the Blair team informs us that under a Labour local authority, every council tax-payer gains so many pounds compared with living under a Tory council.

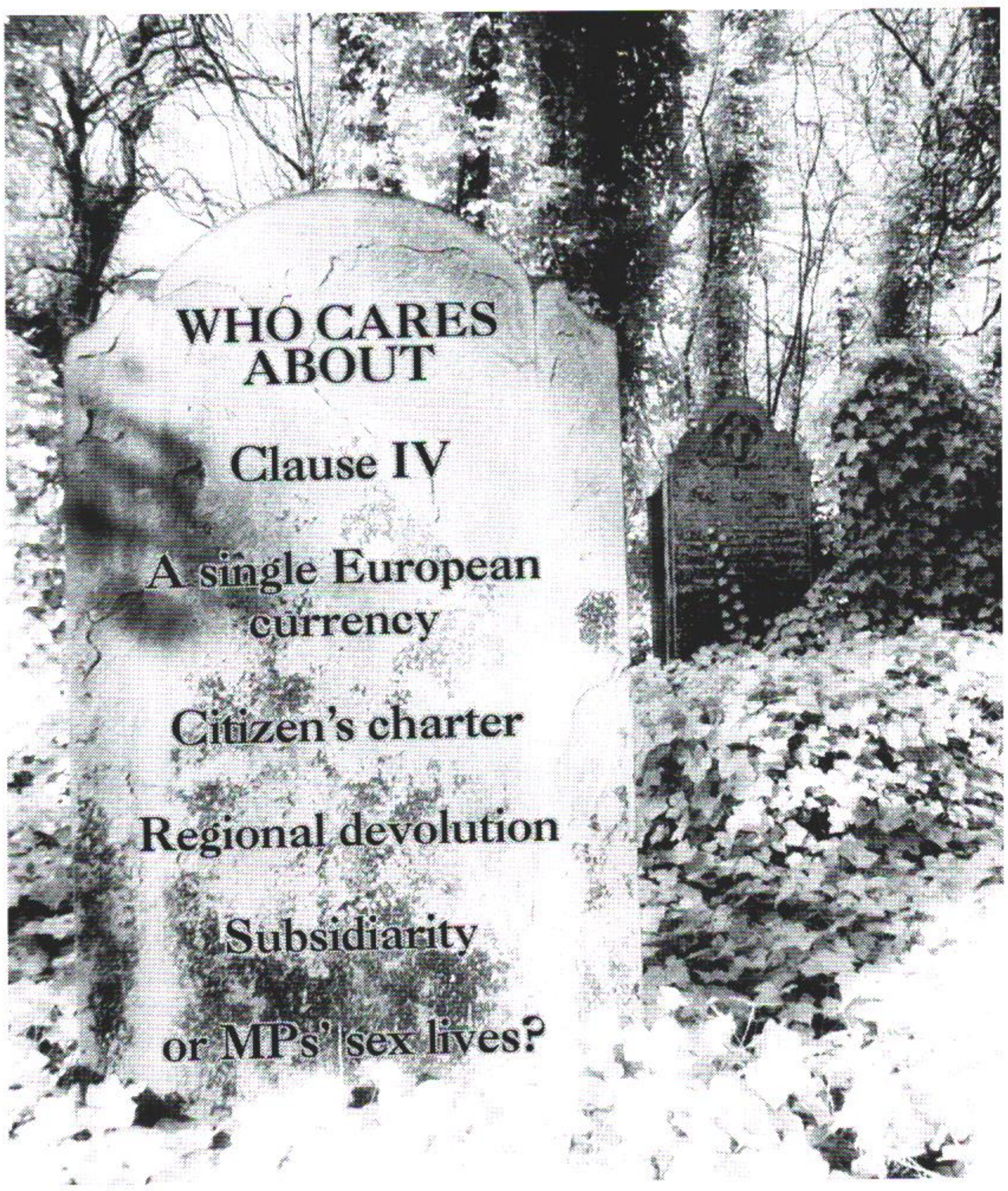
The preoccupation with the pennies in your pocket has meant that wider questions to do with the needs of humanity or society are seldom considered. So today, it is not possible to justify the building of a road on the grounds that it is in the interest of society as a whole. Self-interest, in this case in the form of a local lobby, can override the wider interests of society.

The narrow focus of political life means that arguments are always over the most trivial aspect of the problem. The recent controversy over the 'unfair' wage rise for the boss of British Gas provides a case in point. The announcement of the increase in the salary of chief executive Cedric Brown provoked a row because it coincided with the news that thousands of British Gas workers were to be made redundant. The objections raised by

PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

Labour spokesmen and media commentators focused on the 'insensitivity' of the timing of the announcement and the 'unfair' level of the executive's remuneration. Yet a far more important consideration—the livelihoods of working people—was ignored. Those who denounced the unfair level of the chief executive's remuneration were conspicuously silent about the consumption of army generals in redecorating their homes, although it is as meek as a lamb when it comes to nodding through the millions of pounds spent on arms every day.

The narrowing of the political also means its trivialisation. The diminishing scale of debate has had a damaging impact on political imagination. Conflicts and debates have become increasingly parochial



much bigger issue of defending the jobs and pay of British Gas workers. This is symptomatic of the narrow political culture of today.

The absence of any real debate about unemployment puts the outcry about executive salary increases into perspective. It indicates that all sides have accepted the employers' right to hire and fire at will— that is, the domination of money and profit over people's lives. The priority of profit over need is not considered a subject worthy of debate. Instead, what provokes an outcry are the most extreme abuses of capitalism. The issue being contested at British Gas is management insensitivity rather than the sackings themselves, or the public display of executive greed rather than the more routine, hidden practice of exploiting the workforce. In the same vein, Labour feels extremely bold in attacking the conspicuous

in character. Most protests are now by definition local and involve a limited time frame—against a local road-building scheme or the passage of a particular law. For the time being, the more fundamental problem of establishing the social conditions in which humanity can best realise its potential remains off the agenda.

The contemporary irrelevance of the terms left and right is best confirmed by the practice of the main political parties. It is not just that Labour is less left-wing than it used to be. Labour policies now systematically express sentiments which were traditionally associated with the authoritarian right. Blair's emphasis on law and order is a clear statement of political priorities. His concern with the issue of 'community' reveals the old-fashioned conservative commitment to stability and order.

Blair's slogan 'Tough on crime—tough on the causes of crime' encapsulates his conservative outlook. It is a dishonest slogan which tries to equate the symptom with the cause. Since it is easier to be tougher on the individual miscreant than on the capitalist system (the 'cause'), the predictable outcome of the policy will be more law-and-order measures. To be tough on crime requires merely more police and greater repression. To eliminate its causes requires a major transformation of society. There is a good chance that a Blair government might pursue the former. There is absolutely no possibility that he will even try to tackle the latter.

The term right is also increasingly problematic. The so-called conservative right has become a collection of buffoons in search of self-definition. What does it mean to be right wing in the nineties? A sentimental attachment to the Thatcher years carries little political conviction. In Britain, the Conservative right has temporarily become identified with the anti-European cause. It is characterised by passionate speeches about sovereignty and a resounding silence about little domestic matters like an economic slump. This motley collection of anti-Europeans does not even go through the motions of offering an alternative for British society.

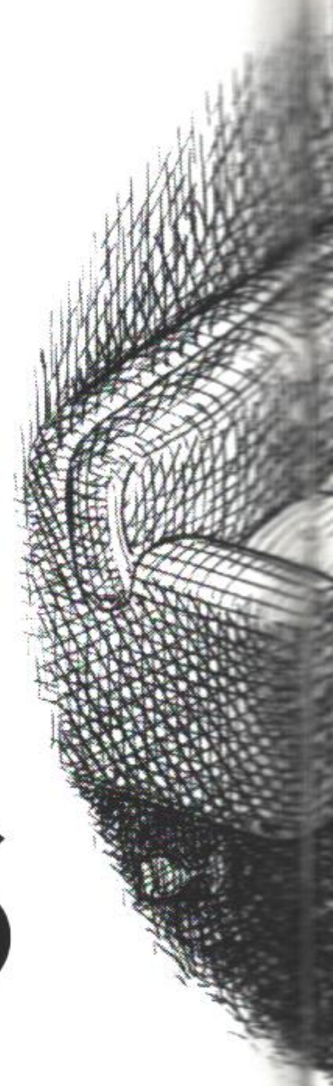
'Me too'

The intellectual crisis of capitalist politics afflicts all the parliamentary parties today. Moreover, the ideological problems of one party are inseparable from those of the others.

In the eighties, the most prominent victim of an intellectual and political malaise was the Labour Party. During that decade Labour simply divested itself of its traditional programme and opted for assimilating the ideas associated with Thatcherism. This was the period when the Tories held the political initiative and directly influenced Labour. In recent years, this relationship has been partially reversed. The failures of the past 15 years have put the Tories on the defensive. Now the Labour Party holds the initiative and the Tories are often forced to emulate their opponents. Ever since the abandonment of the infamous poll tax, the Tory cabinet has become increasingly politically correct. Its defensiveness on a range of issues from the movement of live animals to executive pay illustrates the trend.

This mutually reinforcing pattern of mimicry and emulation, the dominance of the politics of 'Me too', indicates the irrelevance of the existing political vocabulary. When to be left is to be 'Tough on crime' and to be right is to be against Europe, then clearly a new political language is needed to make sense of the nineties and beyond. ●

The old mass parties of left and right alike are a thing of the past, says James Heartfield



The parties are over

The Conservative Party has been losing an average of 64 000 members every year since 1960. If the decline continues at current rates, the party will have fewer than 100 000 members by the end of the century. Even if the party does manage to hold on to more of its members, many thousands could be expected to die in the next decade. The average age of today's 756 000 Tory Party members is 62, nearly half are at least 66, and only five per cent are under 35. These are the conclusions of a survey of Conservative Party members conducted by Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson (*True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership*).

In fact Whiteley *et al* have probably overestimated the party's membership, since, according to Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, just 500 000 members are paying dues, at an average of £10 a year (*Times,* 11 October 1994). Historically the Conservative Party has been the largest mass party in Britain, with a membership of between 2.5m and 3m in the 1950s. But the state of the party today begs the question whether the Conservative Party of 1995 bears any relation to its namesake of 1955.

A recent Young Conservatives conference underlined the party's difficulties. There were just 400 young Tories present. On that turnout the Young Conservatives is an organisation with less weight than the weekly January meetings of Brightlingsea Against Live Exports (average attendance 600). In the 1950s there were around 100 000 Young Conservatives.

Estimates of the active membership of the party are even lower than the dues-paying membership. Just 135 000 party members canvassed for the Tories during the 1992 general election—fewer than the 170 000 who canvassed for Labour. According to Whiteley *et al,* 165 000 members are regularly involved in some party activity, though they estimate that 17 per cent of members have stopped being active over the past five years, suggesting a '"de-energising" of the grassroots party over time' (p69).

In arrears

Even nine years ago, at the height of Thatcherism, the party was considerably more active than today. In 1986, according to Richard Kelly, at least one local or regional party conference took place somewhere in the country every week, involving about 20 000 participants overall (*Conservative Party Conferences,* 1989). Today the big showcase rally is largely a thing of the past.

The decline of the Tory Party is a drain on the finances of Central Office, whose debts run into millions. Last year Central Office raised £14.1m, of which only £745 000 came from the constituencies. Some big companies have already stopped giving money to the party, and as business donors grow more impatient with the Tories, cash is likely to become a real problem. Already dozens of constituency associations are subsidised by their MPs through House of Commons allowances for research and secretarial support (*Times,* 11 October 1994).

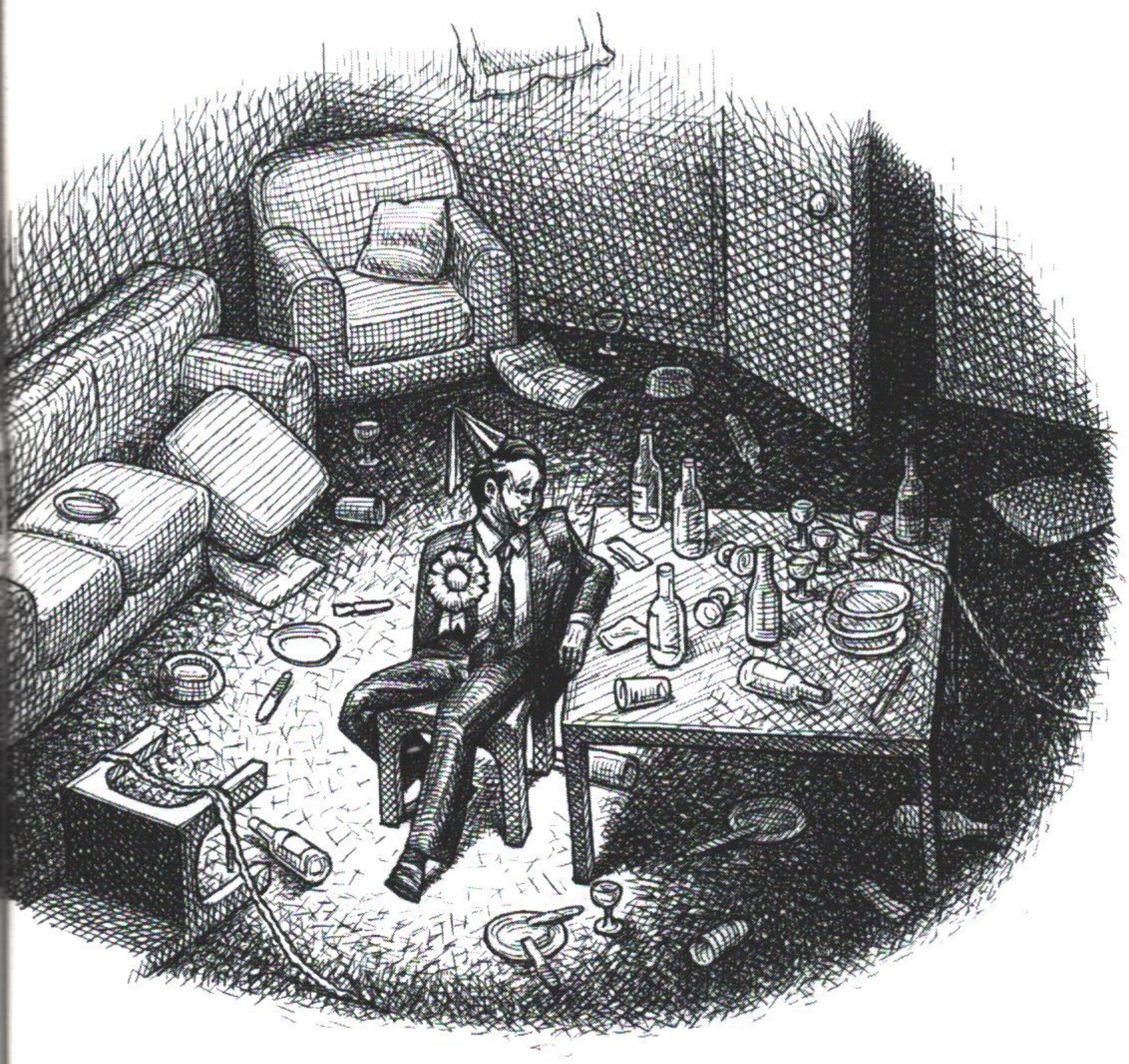
The decline of the Conservative Party is a historic trend that was not reversed by Margaret Thatcher. It might sound like good news to the party's rivals, but in fact Labour is locked into a similar decline. Previous research by Seyd and Whiteley put Labour's membership at just 311 152 in 1990, falling steadily from its 1952 peak of 1 014 524 (*Labour's Grass Roots*). According to John McIlroy, of the 279 000 members with which Labour started the 1992 general election year, 130 000 were up to three months in arrears with their party subscription and another 18 000 up to one year in arrears (*Trade Unions in Britain Today*).

Labour HQ in Walworth Road has claimed a rise in membership of 10 000 since the election of Tony Blair as leader. In fact Labour has been trying to rebuild its grassroots organisation since 1993 when it appointed 24 full-time agents to work with local parties. Behind the unspectacular attempts to recruit new members to Blair's New Labour, the social base of the party has been transformed.

Middle class, middle-aged

Historically, Labour's constituency party was an afterthought. The party was formed, financed and run by the trade union leaders. The constituency parties only came into existence so that middle class sympathisers could be roped into the party organisation.

Over the past 15 years the trade unions have become less important to Labour. Trade unions generally have fewer members due to the effects of Tory trade union legislation and job cuts in traditional industries. Since reaching a high point in 1979 of 13 289 000, membership of TUC-affiliated unions has been falling every year, reaching 8 928 000 in 1992. Trade unions have failed to organise in new industries as is shown by the



falling density of union membership from 56.9 per cent of the workforce in 1979 to just 41.8 per cent in 1992 (*Trade Unions in Britain Today*).

In line with the falling membership, fewer union members are affiliated to the Labour Party. In 1980, 6.45m union members were affiliated to Labour; the number had dropped to 5.3m in 1990. Since then affiliations have continued to fall. The largest union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, reduced its affiliation from 1.25m in 1990 to 750 000 in 1994. Affiliations are not a true guide to party support since union officials often affiliate more members than actually pay the political fund levy on top of their union fees. And since only 46 per cent of union members voted for Labour in the last election, it is safe to assume that not every political levy payer means to subscribe to Labour.

The decreasing importance of trade union affiliation for the Labour Party was recognised when the 1993 Labour Party conference increased the role of constituency parties under the 'One member, one vote' reforms. Only 19.5 per cent of trade union affiliates participated in the election for the new Labour leader last year, against 69 per cent of constituency party members.

The consequences of Labour's transformation from a party principally of trade union affiliates to one of constituency members are more important than the dry arithmetic suggests. Trade union affiliation was the only way that any number of working class people were represented in conventional party politics. Even that kind of representation was pretty tangential. Trade union delegations hardly ever consulted their members about how they should vote at Labour Party conference. But now there is no avenue at all for working class representation in parliament.

As one might expect the Conservative Party is overwhelmingly a middle class party—55 per cent of its membership is drawn from the salariat (teachers are the largest single occupational group) and 42 per cent earn more than £20 000. But then 49 per cent of the Labour Party is drawn from the salariat and as many as 30 per cent earn more than £20 000. And the Labour Party is ageing, perhaps not as much as the Tories, but with an average age of 48. Labour without the unions has been reduced to the middle class rump that the constituency parties were designed to involve.

Under Tony Blair the Labour Party has made a virtue of its middle class appeal, while carefully downgrading any policies that smack of its past links with the working class, like the commitment to nationalisation in Clause IV of its constitution. There are already signs that Labour is not only picking up middle class votes from the Conservatives, but that working class Labour voters are not bothering to turn out—as happened in February's Islwyn by-election.

As a consequence of Labour's self-conscious transformation into a party of Middle England, the electoral sphere has narrowed. Politics today is the preserve of polite society. The working class is not welcome in today's media-conscious political parties. The mass parties that were created to contest elections under full adult suffrage have been downsized as the working class has been elbowed out of the electoral sphere.

Same the world over

The decline of mass parties evident in British politics is not unique to this country. Every major Western nation has experienced a shrinking of its base of active political involvement. From France and Italy to America, the end of the Cold War removed the *raison d'etre* of the old parties of both left and right. Throughout Europe a pattern evolved where first the parties of the left lost support in the eighties, and then in the nineties the parties of the right were also deserted.

The decline of the British Conservative Party is part of a wider decline of right-wing parties due to the collapse of the old left/right framework of party politics. And the Conservative Party is probably one of the most established ruling class parties in the world.

The collapse of the old political framework is long overdue. Neither the parties of left or right had any solution for the problems that blight working people's lives today. Unfortunately the immediate consequence is that the political sphere has shrunk to exclude the majority altogether. However working people organise themselves in the future, it will have to be in opposition to the narrow and decaying political framework of Westminster. ●

True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership by Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson and *Labour's Grass Roots* by Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd are published by Clarendon Press, Oxford. *Trade Unions in Britain Today* (Second Edition) by John McIlroy is published by Manchester University Press.

ILLUSTRATION: CJ LEA

With the government groping for an international role and the old right searching for a national crusade, Helen Simons cannot see the Tories escaping from their turmoil over Europe

Give them enough Eu-rope...

The European nightmare refuses to end for the Tory Party. In the past six months the row over Britain's relationship with the European Union and the prospects for a single European currency has lurched from one embarrassing episode to another. First it was the 'rebellion' by nine backbench Eurosceptic MPs, then cabinet ministers publicly fell out over Euro-policy, and finally former chancellor Norman Lamont voted with the opposition on Europe.

Why is Europe once again the focus of such turmoil within the Tory Party? After all, nothing dramatically new or significant is happening within the European Union itself. The Maastricht Treaty and Britain's ignominious withdrawal from the Exchange Rate Mechanism are old news. There have been no serious ructions within the European Union in the past 12 months. The dynamic for the Conservative divisions and turmoil cannot be found within the EU. Instead, the Tory debate is a homemade affair, fuelled by British political calculations rather than the machinations of Brussels bureaucrats.

For a start, Europe is a problematic issue for the British establishment. The debate over the future of Europe focuses attention on the decline of British power and influence—a decline made more evident by the end of the Cold War.

On the edge

British national identity is based upon the notion that Britannia is 'second to none' and the 'envy of the world', even though Britain has long since slipped from the position of global supremacy which it enjoyed over a century ago. For 40 years after the Second World War, the Cold War enabled the establishment to maintain the illusion that Britain was a major world power, deputy to America's global policeman. However, the changes in international relations that were catalysed by the fall of the Berlin Wall have exposed such delusions of grandeur.

Nobody today could seriously call Britain a world power. Nor can it boast a 'special relationship' with another great power. Britain lacks the clout even to call the shots in regional affairs, as events in Bosnia so painfully illustrate. Today world affairs go on with or without Britain, which is sidelined as just one of the crowd of middle-ranking powers.

Nothing exposes this situation more starkly than Britain's role within Europe. Before the Second World War British power cast a long shadow over Europe. During much of the Cold War Britain remained the European nation with the highest international profile. Today the reunited Germany dominates the Continent.

Since the end of the Cold War the British government has tried to cope with the changes in Europe. On coming to office in 1990, Major declared that he would put Britain 'at the heart of Europe' and so shape EU policy in the British interest. Unfortunately for him, the rhetoric of the Tory conference hall has proved no match for the real power of the Deutschmark. British politicians still make a lot of noise, but the rest of Europe is no longer listening. Even the opt-out clauses that Major and his cabinet were so proud of wresting from the EU have caused little disruption to the union's affairs. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a German-led Europe will get on with things with or without Britain.

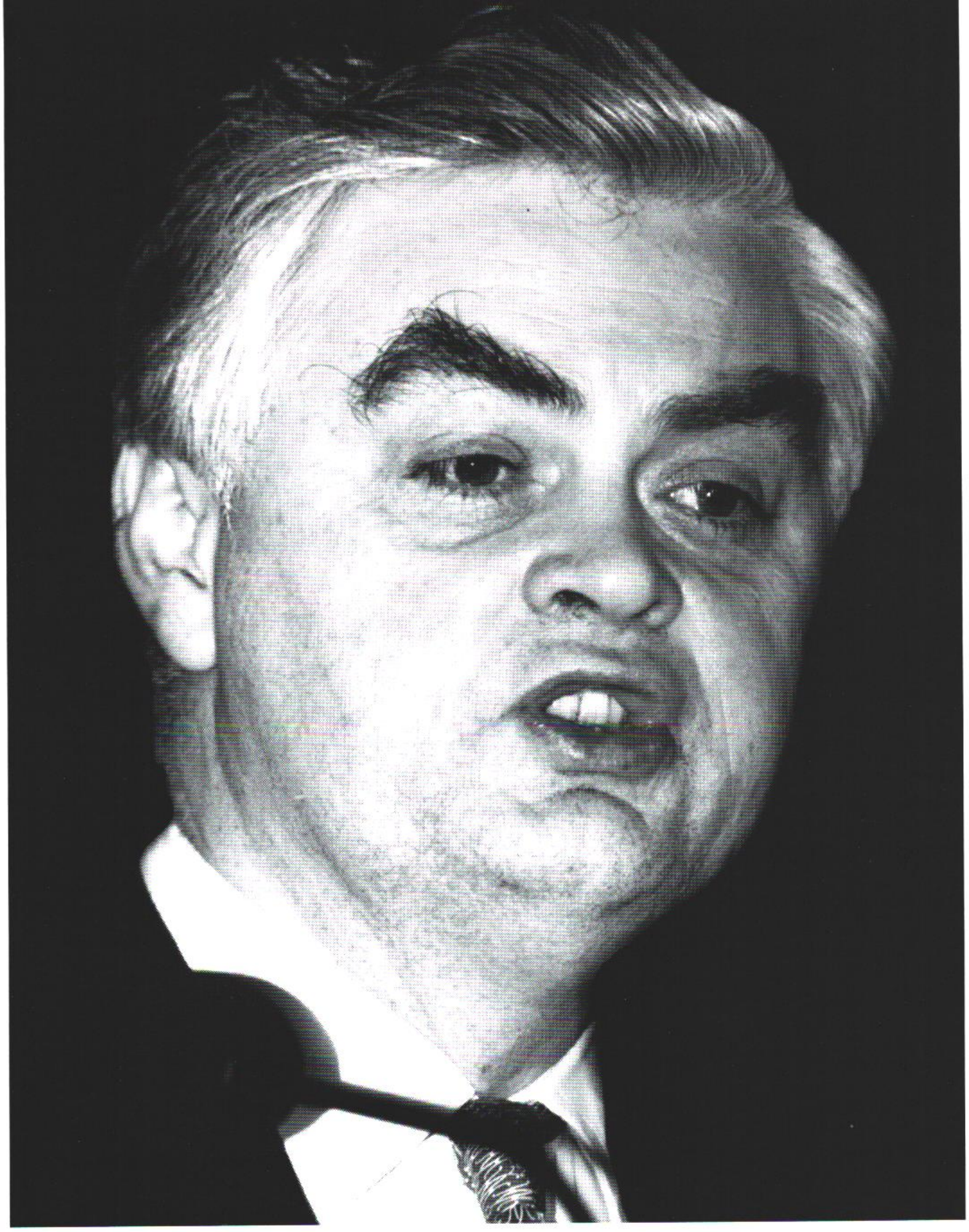
This state of affairs leaves the British establishment with an unresolvable dilemma. Inside Europe Britain has no distinctive role to play; but outside Europe it has even less to fall back on, since the disappearance of both the empire and the special relationship with the USA. Since Britain loses either way, it is hard for the establishment to reach a consensus on how to relate to the EU. That is why no major political party has been able to put forward an unambiguously pro-or anti-European policy in recent years.

The mighty fallen

Even those MPs who appear to be on the extremes of the debate find it difficult to take a hard line. Tory Euro-rebels describe themselves as simply 'sceptics', since none seriously imagines that Britain could leave the union. At the same time, ardent fans of the EU express doubts about the desirability of political union and all baulk at the idea of Britain being governed from Brussels.

Indeed, despite all the hype and drama surrounding recent commons votes on Europe, an examination of the policies under debate reveals that little separates Labour from the Tories. As one commentator observes on monetary union: 'Both leaders say that economic convergence is hugely important. Both hint that they would contemplate a referendum first. Both stress that nothing is imminent. Both agree that there is no absolute constitutional block on going into a single currency if it looks economically sensible. And both, of course, have divided parties.' (*Independent,* 2 March 1995)

It is against this backdrop of British uncertainty and ambiguity that the Tory Party is unable to keep the lid on its Euro rows. And there is an even more narrowly domestic dimension to the Conservative debate. Tory passions have been aroused not by events in Europe, but by the acute sensitivity of the traditional right to its present predicament within Britain.



Norman Lamont: Bitter and twisted Euro-rebel

The Tories today face a major party political crisis. The government's slump in popularity is now the longest and deepest in the history of British opinion polls. Trailing a spectacular 40 percentage points behind Labour, even most Tories have lost hope of reviving their fortunes before the next election. The collapse of popular support is a frightening reversal of fortunes for Tory MPs. For a decade they prided themselves on speaking for the nation. In particular the Tory right made much of its 'commonsense' policies that were said to have captured the hearts and minds of 'Essex man' and middle England alike.

Today all the causes that the right once championed inspire nobody. Recent attempts to recreate popular support through the 'Back to basics' crusade or the Citizen's Charter have proved embarrassing flops. The party can no longer inspire enthusiasm even among its own core supporters. It is now in the humiliating position of adapting to Labour's policies in an attempt to curry favour.

The old Tory right has reacted most fiercely to this state of affairs. These people have always represented the most ideological section of the Conservative Party. While the wets and the moderates were happy to approach each issue with an unprincipled pragmatism and get on with the practical tasks of governing, the right sought to galvanise a base of popular support for its ideas. It was the right that championed causes like popular capitalism and attacks on the dependency culture in the eighties. And it is the rump of the traditional right today which most acutely experiences its party's fading popularity and lack of big ideas.

All little-Englanders now

In the desperate search for a new cause to champion, the old Tory right has seen one issue after another—law and order, morality, education—blow up in its face. Now Tory right wingers have hit upon Europe as a cause that gives them more scope to win an audience. Since the issue is a genuine dilemma for policy-makers, it is hard for anyone to dismiss their Little Englander approach outright.

The Eurosceptics sense they may at last have found a real winner. Noticeably all the Euro-rebels have adopted the style of claiming that they speak for the British people on the matter of Europe. Their objective is to realign Tory policy in a more sceptical direction, to bring the party more in line with public opinion and so reverse its electoral decline—although many accept that this is only likely to happen after losing the next election.

Anti-Brussels rhetoric

The old right is probably not wrong to suggest that there is an audience for its anti-Brussels rhetoric. Traditional British nationalism excites few today. But the European Union is no longer a popular project either. Even nations like France which once cherished the European ideal have experienced a popular wave of scepticism. With Germany and the Deutschmark so powerful within the EU, it has become hard to sustain the dream of a partnership of equal European nations. Today it is more likely to be fear of losing out to the Germans, rather than a passionate belief in the European ideal, that will hold the European nations together.

There is also a sense in which the Eurosceptics can connect with a growing parochialism and anti-political mood in Britain. Today all forms of government are treated with disdain. Politicians of all shades are despised as sleazy and corrupt. If the sceptics can harness this sentiment to a crusade against the corrupt Brussels bureaucracy, they feel that they could really be on to something.

Salt in the wound

Gallop reported in March that nearly half the British electorate now describe themselves as Eurosceptic. If this trend continues, then, far from making their peace with Major for the sake of electoral appearances, the sceptics are likely to push harder on what they see as the right's one genuinely popular issue.

Whether or not the sceptics have correctly judged the mood of the nation, the European issue is not going to win the Tories any general election. Indeed, by re-raising the issue, they will only ensure that the party's divisions and lack of direction are continually exposed to the public gaze. As the bitter-and-twisted Norman Lamont has demonstrated, every personal and factional discontent within the Tory Party is likely to be expressed by sticking a finger into the Major government's Euro-wounds. ●

PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

A fundam

As Islamic fundamentalists are accused of launching a holy war, Tracey Brown looks behind the veil of Western anxiety

'This is a case of war', declared US federal prosecutor, Robert Khuzami, as he opened the trial against Shaikh Omar Abdel-Rahman in New York early this year. Rahman, a blind Muslim cleric, was accused of 'plotting a holy war against the United States' (*Times,* 31 January 1995). Since the bombing of the World Trade Centre in February 1993, the FBI has attempted to construct a much wider case against Islamic religious leaders in the city. All the rules of evidence have been suspended. Shaikh Rahman's sermons are cited as instructions to plant bombs. And all of this is acceptable because the motive is supposed to be fundamentalism.

In Pakistan 14-year old Salamat Masih and his uncle were recently tried on a charge of blasphemy, after the boy defiled a mosque. BBC newscasters, *Guardian* writers and the Foreign Office united in condemnation of the proposed death sentence (later commuted). According to one writer, the country had been hijacked by a 'syndicate of mindless mullahs', such that 'every utterance, every criticism, is an offence to the dignity of Islam and must be avenged!' (*Independent,* 17 February 1995).

Both trials, and the subsequent shooting of two American officials in Karachi, are seen as evidence that the world faces a new danger: Islamic fundamentalism. According to the new crusaders, the fanatics are so intolerant that they will just as happily execute a 14-year old boy as bomb the World Trade Centre.

In the six years since the fatwa was issued against Salman Rushdie, fundamentalism has been given centre-stage in world affairs.
Few places seem immune to the development of fundamentalist forces. In Paris there have been rows about girls wearing the veil to school and open conflict between the French police and Muslims. Last Autumn armed police patrolled parts of London during an Islamic conference at Wembley. Universities have attempted to outlaw Hizb ut-Tahrir, a group said to have links with fundamentalist organisations. In many major conflicts, from Algeria to Azerbaijan, fundamentalism is identified as the main source of antagonism.

'Islamic bomb'

Willy Claes, the new secretary-general of Nato, recently suggested that EU money intended for Eastern Europe would be better spent on combating fundamentalism in North Africa (*Times,* 9 February 1995). In Claes' opinion, fundamentalism is the biggest threat to world security since communism. When you look at the panics that periodically develop around the possibility of an 'Islamic bomb', it is clear that many others think likewise.

Indeed a growing number of Western scholars, journalists and politicians are worrying about the possibility of a clash between fundamentalism and the West.
Last year, for example, the *Economist* devoted almost 20 pages to drawing the patronising conclusion that Muslims would have to learn to accept some aspects of the modern world in order to avert a crisis (6 August 1994). Two years ago the American foreign affairs specialist Samuel Huntington wrote *The Clash of Civilisations,* anticipating a world divided into mutually intolerant factions. At the time it was mostly dismissed or ridiculed as simplistic and fatalist. Now his pessimistic views are seen as a warning of the coming fundamentalism.

But, on closer inspection, fundamentalism is more elusive than the ringing warnings suggest.
Throughout 1993 most foreign affairs journals gave prominent space to predictions about the imminent spread of fundamentalism across Africa, the proof of which would be uncontrollable waves of immigration to the West.
In fact, one of the highest rates of increase in immigration requests has come from Eastern Europe where people's lives have been disrupted by the 'spread' of the free market.

Just as foolishly, journalists claim that the character of Islamic societies is fixed by incompatibility with anything Western. In this argument, Islamic countries are afraid to adapt to a modern age that might undermine fundamentalist claims to authority.
In fact anybody who still has the nerve to make a trip to Iran will be amazed at how easily you can buy a pair of Reeboks or get hooked up to CNN.
The fear of fundamentalism has created a reality-gap so large that the foreign pages of most newspapers read like a holiday brochure from hell.

The foreign policy experts have been looking for a new bogeyman for some time. In the past the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc provided an easy scapegoat for Western policy. As long as there was a communist menace, Western military prowess and global domination were justified. In the name of anti-communism, America kept a firm grip on its allies as well as its enemies. American troops occupied the globe from Berlin to the Philippines.

Dwindling loyalties

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, new motivations for Western domination have been sought.
In a moment of cynicism, US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell said that, after the defeat of Saddam Hussein, he was running out of enemies to fight, with only Fidel Castro and Kim Il-Sung still putting up an opposition to the West (see W Bello, *People and Power in the Pacific*).
Nato chief Claes' suggestion that the new menace is fundamentalism seems to fit with the need for enemies.

ental fear

PHOTO: MARTIN ADLER/PANOS PICTURES

The prophet armed? The faith of these Mujahedin fighters is as terrifying to the West as their rifles

But there is more to it than that. If the panic over fundamentalism was just a cynical attempt by government ministers and generals to frighten the public and justify their huge military expenditures, that would not explain why discussion of the issue is so widespread, or why fear of fundamentalism has so gripped the Western imagination. Willy Claes might manipulate the idea of fundamentalist uprising to justify keeping the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation intact, but he is not responsible for generating fear of a new threat. Nato can barely get its act together sufficiently to organise a bombing raid in Bosnia these days, let alone lead a major conspiracy against the public.

So why is there such fear of fundamentalism? There is no substance to these scares—but that does not stop them taking off. When Islamic groups were banned in British universities, did anyone ask whether Jewish or gay students really had suffered the intolerance and systematic attacks predicted? Events for which there are other, more obvious explanations, are frequently put down to fundamentalism. Very few people have substantial knowledge of local politics in Egypt or Pakistan, for example. Yet a great many are willing to accept that these countries are held in the grip of fundamentalist terror.

Fundamentalism needs no explanation because it appeals to the nervousness and uncertainty prevalent in our society. In the post-Cold War world, the Western outlook is being shaped by slump and insecurity. Old alliances are becoming less reliable. At home, Tory ex-ministers vote against the Tories in parliament and in all Western countries fewer people ▶

Western governments tolerate only those they wish to tolerate

than ever demonstrate any loyalty to the old parties. Concern about the increase in crime, truancy and pregnancy among young people is indicative of how little confidence there is that society can offer a future.

It is against this background of Western uncertainty that the menace of fundamentalism has been conceived in the fearful imaginations of politicians and scholars who feel that the world is out of control.

They are projecting their own insecurities on to the rest of the world in the form of a hyped-up fundamentalist threat. The desire within the Western elites to protect themselves from an uncertain world is expressed in a discussion about defending civilisation against fundamentalism.

When someone thinks that everyone is against them it is reasonable to be sceptical about their fears. When Western ideologues talk incessantly about the fundamentalism that is 'out there' waiting for them, we should be just as sceptical. Fears of fundamentalism tell us more about their state of mind than about real global developments.

For the cause

The discussion about fundamentalism provides good clues to the preoccupations of Western elites. Take the extensive media coverage given to any rumour of fundamentalists disrupting the Middle East 'peace process' with anti-Israeli suicide bombings. In fact, suicide bombings are so rare that you can guarantee that you have heard about most of them. So, why do they strike such fear into the hearts of the Western authorities?

For the Western elites, suicide-bombers symbolise fundamentalist faith and fanaticism in an age when nobody in Europe or America seems to believe in anything much. The very idea of somebody being willing to die for a cause, for their belief in an ideal, is something quite alien to Western politics today. Few people in the West believe what their governments say about anything, let alone being prepared to fight for what their leaders say is right. Anyone with the confidence to profess a principle must seem very threatening to a Western elite absorbed by its own lack of big ideas. In our nervous society, the danger of extremist ideas is a common fear—just look at the coverage given to any recent demonstration in Britain. It is this impotent loss of self-confidence that leads Western governments to become fixated on the possibility of such ideological weapons being available to an opposition characterised as fundamentalist.

In his book, *Some to Mecca Turn to Pray,* Mervyn Hiskett betrays a jealous belief that fundamentalists can draw on loyalties that are absent in Western societies, particularly the status that is given to family relationships, with arranged marriages and parental responsibility. Recent discussion in the USA has focused on the fact that a third of children are currently born outside of marriage. Lack of parental responsibility and standard-setting is blamed for undermining the American way of life. In such circumstances the elusive 'fundamentalist' is endowed with the capacity to overtake the West by virtue of a kind of unswerving tribal solidarity. These supposed features of fundamentalism have little to do with reality. They demonstrate the extent to which the cry of 'fundamentalism' invariably expresses a Western loss of confidence.

The most dangerous fraud lies in the assumption implicit in all of the concern about fundamentalism. Namely, that the West has evolved to some advanced, liberal state which all should rally to defend against the siege of the mad mullahs.

The fact that liberal commentators often lead the condemnation of fundamentalism, warning of the dangers to women and gays in Islamic societies, only serves to inflate the panic. They seem far more keen to focus on the repressive character of fundamentalism over there than to identify the problems of our own society over here. In fact, without the kind of liberal campaigns against fundamentalism that seek to highlight examples in the third world of women being treated badly and intolerance towards minorities, it would be very difficult for Western elites to create a society-wide sense of the wolf at the door.

'Bloodlust'

It is precisely because feminist campaigners and human rights groups opposed to fundamentalism have put the spotlight on the non-Western world that it has become acceptable to speak so loosely of its barbarism and lack of civilised behaviour without appearing racist. In *Nine Parts of Desire,* an influential new book about women and Islam which has been widely promoted in the liberal press, feminist writer Geraldine Brooks feels free to talk about the 'bloodlust' Muslim men express towards adulterous women; few conservatives would feel comfortable using such language to describe Asians or Arabs in the 1990s.

Fighting a phoney war against fundamentalism offers perhaps the best hope for Western elites to establish some sense of consensus today. Having a tête-à-tête with Women Against Fundamentalism is invaluable for governments incapable of creating popular campaigns of their own. The agendas of both liberals and reactionaries are at one on the question of locating atrocities and dangers in someone else's camp. The only difference is that the liberals are better placed to encourage fear of third world extremists because of their anti-racist, right-on credentials.

Tolerant repression

By drawing attention to an imagined resurgence of dangerous non-Western values, it is possible to create the sense that the West's own 'civilised values' have a real existence that benefits us all. When, for example, university authorities outlaw groups deemed intolerant and the police protect Salman Rushdie, they are asserting the existence of their superior values of tolerance and choice.

The truth is that the most pressing examples of 'intolerance' which confront us today are the Western discussions about what should be done with the fundamentalists. It is not fundamentalists who are seeking to ban free speech in British universities. Nor is fundamentalism to blame for holding people in barbaric conditions in refugee camps across the third world. It was not the fundamentalists who won the approval of the West for suspending the elections in Algeria—the Islamic Salvation Front had just won the vote—and it is not fundamentalists who have massacred thousands of opponents of the Algerian regime.

There is much that commentators find to criticise in groups and societies deemed non-Western, and it is all done in the name of tolerance and moderation. In fact, the preservation of Western standards of behaviour appears to be so important that it can justify the use of any action or force to defeat the fundamentalists and their extreme ideas. Western governments' claims of tolerance and other laudable values clearly refer only to those ideas and people that they wish to tolerate. And, unlike their toy enemy army of intolerant fundamentalists, the Western elites have the political and military power to witch-hunt the entire third world in the crusade against fundamentalism—all in the name of defending civilised values, freedom, tolerance and the rights of oppressed minorities. ●

Organised in association with

LIVING MARXISM

HIROSHIMA THE WEEK

International Anti-War Conference

Central London

Friday 28 July-Friday 4 August 1995

On the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the conference Hiroshima: The Week will discuss the threat of repression and war.

NO MORE HIROSHIMAS

The Campaign Against Militarism hosts the weekend Friday 28 to Sunday 30 July, dedicated to ensuring that there are no more Hiroshimas.

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Illustrations courtesy of the Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels

NO MORE HIROSHIMAS

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Friday 28-Sunday 30 July

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- Western media images of Japan
- A critique of the Non-Proliferation Treaty
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- War at the movies
- 'Yellow Perils' then and now
- Low-intensity conflict
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- **Frederik L Schodt**, specialist on Japanese *manga* comics, author of *Inside the Robot Kingdom*
- **Professor Frank Barnaby**, author of *Role and Control of Weapons in the 1990s*
- **Joan Hoey**, director of the London International Research Exchange and author of *Images of Japan*

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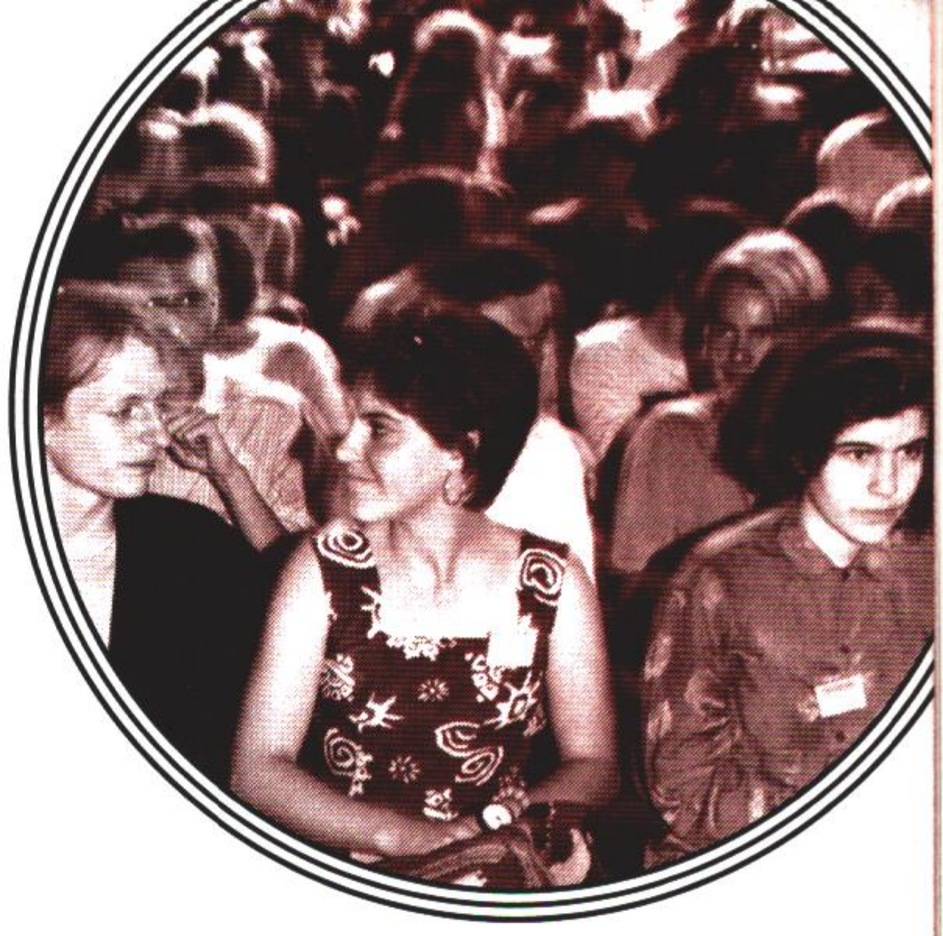

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- Introduction to Marxism
- The medicalisation of society
- Myths of Confucian capitalism
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Israel's new Berlin Wall

The Middle East 'peace process' is institutionalising apartheid-style oppression of the Palestinians, says Eve Anderson

The peace process has 'reached a state beyond collapse' according to Palestinian local government leader Saeb Erekat. Many believe the hope of peace between Jews and Arabs is being destroyed by Muslim extremists—a view strengthened by suicide bombings like the January attack on the Beit Lid road in which Islamic Jihad killed 20 Israeli soldiers and one civilian.

But fundamentalism is not unravelling the peace process. Suicide bombing missions are a symptom of the sense of utter desperation that many Palestinians feel in the face of Israeli intransigence, and a growing awareness that the peace deal offers them nothing.

Israel is moving towards a system of economic apartheid. After the Beit Lid bombing, the Israeli authorities closed the Gaza Strip, preventing tens of thousands of Palestinians going to work in Israel. The Israeli authorities are moving towards a permanent closure, as thousands of imported workers from South-East Asia and Eastern Europe replace Palestinian labour inside Israel. The Israelis are also building six industrial parks along the Gazan border, which will allow them to continue exploiting cheap Palestinian labour while keeping Palestinian workers out of Israel itself.

In addition to economic exploitation, the Palestinians still face political repression—2000 Palestinians have been arrested since the Tel Aviv bus bombing in October last year, joining the 5000 existing political prisoners. The Israeli attorney general has agreed to extend the period of 'administrative detention', a euphemism for internment without trial, from six months to a year.

Gradually the real nature of the 'peace' deal is becoming clear. Palestinian protest and activism were recently rekindled over the issue of expanding Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. There are already over 130 Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, containing around 125 000 settlers, in addition to the 155 000 settlers in East Jerusalem. Slowly the West Bank is being 'cantonised', broken up into islands of Palestinian territory surrounded by a sea of hostile Jewish settlements. This process is rendering meaningless the moves to create an autonomous Palestinian state loosely based on the territory of the West Bank.

Moderate Palestinians protest that, by building new settlements on Arab land, the Israelis are going against the letter and the spirit of the Oslo Accords and the Cairo Agreement. But the tragedy is that the Israeli government is not violating the peace treaties in pursuing settlement expansion.

According to these agreements, settlements are to remain under Israeli jurisdiction until their fate is decided in the permanent status talks three years from now. Nowhere is a freeze on settlements mentioned, except for a verbal pledge made under duress by the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, in order to induce the Americans to release $10 billion in loan guarantees. Even this pledge was hugely qualified by the rider that the settlement freeze would exclude East Jerusalem and the building of 2000 housing units in the West Bank to accommodate 'natural growth' (*Middle East International,* 20 January 1995).

To heap further humiliation on the Palestinians, Israel has cancelled the Palestinian elections which were due to take place last July, before being delayed until last October and now indefinitely delayed due to the 'security' situation (The Law Society, *Human Rights in a Period of Transition, the Case of the Occupied Territories, Jericho and the Gaza Strip*, p14). They are also refusing to redeploy Israeli troops away from Palestinian population centres. To cap it all, the Israelis are now redefining what 'redeployment' means. To the Palestinians, redeployment means moving Israeli troops out and so ending the military occupation. To Rabin, however, redeployment means only a three-day withdrawal for the elections, with Israeli soldiers resuming their positions once the polls close.

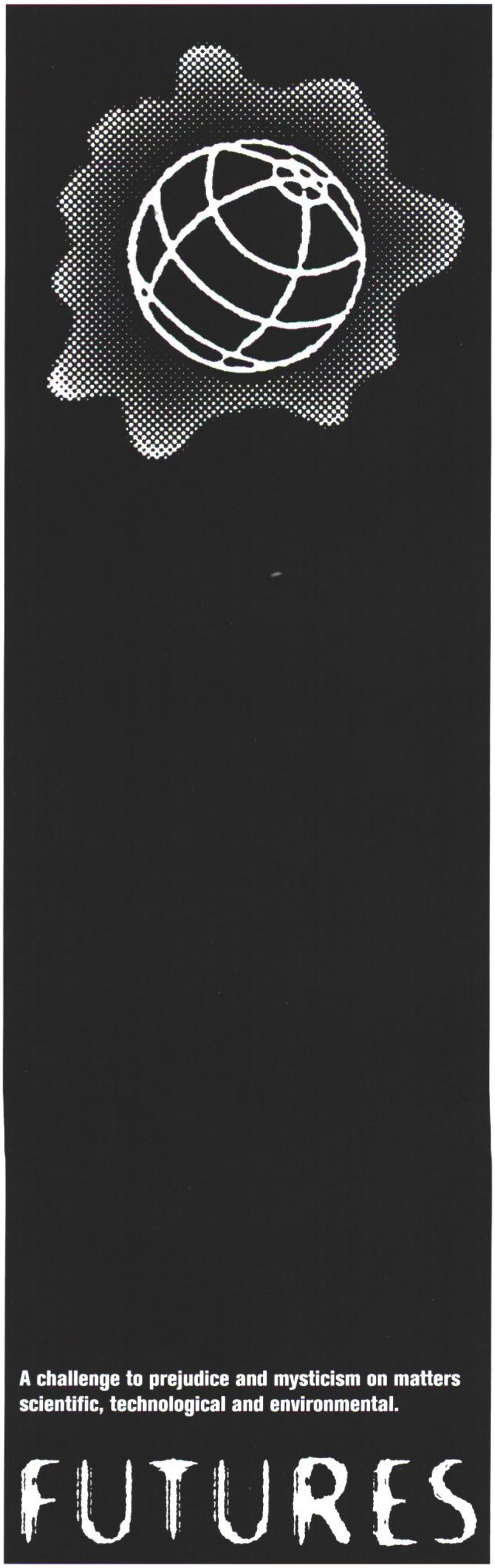
Far from conceding to Palestinian aspirations for equality, the Israeli authorities are planning a new system of subjugation. The latest plan cooked up by Israeli Defence Force (IDF) generals is for a $400m network of 'apartheid highways' dissecting the West Bank. These roads will allow settlers to by-pass Palestinian towns and villages and reach Israel under the protection of IDF patrols. They will be reserved for the exclusive use of Israelis. The plan has already been foreshadowed by an 'Arab-free' access road being built for settlers at Netzarim.

In addition to the 'apartheid highways', a new Berlin Wall is being proposed by the Israelis to separate the West Bank from Israel. The wall is claimed to be a barrier to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel. It will be over 100 miles long, cost over $150m and take a year to build. Critics of the plan point out that it would leave over a million Palestinians on the Israeli side of the new frontier. Government spokesman Uri Dromi responded that 'the two populations will be separated but not necessarily by a fence'. (*Independent,* 25 January 1995). In other words, there will be more troops, electronic surveillance, arrests, interrogations and controls on the movement of Palestinians within Israel. It is widely suspected that Israeli segregation plans also include the formal annexation of large swathes of the West Bank.

Many now make the point that Oslo is dead, but not yet buried, and call on the USA to intervene to rescue the 'peace process'. The truth is that this is the peace process; the Israeli authorities have the right to do all of this and more under the terms of the agreement with Yasser Arafat's PLO, and they have the full support of Washington for their actions.

On a state visit to the Clinton White House last November, Rabin came away with the promise of continued US aid, up to 5000 US troops for the Golan Heights as part of any peace deal with Syria, two 'supercomputers' denied to Israel since the mid-1980s, and hundreds of millions of dollars to complete Israel's Arrow missile programme. The USA is footing the bill for the 'peace process', but the Palestinians are paying the price. ●

PHOTO: STEVE FORREST



Global warming has got the world all steamed up, with the experts seeing all kinds of problems and dangers in climate change. But, ask John Gillott and Dominic Wood, why couldn't we adapt and thrive in a warmer world?

Who's afraid of global warming?

An iceberg the size of Oxfordshire has left Antarctica, a continent which has warmed by 2.5 degrees celsius over the past 50 years; Western Europe has just suffered severe flooding for the second time in five years; satellite data shows that ocean levels are rising twice as fast as was previously thought. Coming on top of 15 years of confirmed rising global temperatures, these extremities and symptoms of change have been widely interpreted as proof that global warming has begun.
At the end of March, delegates from all over the globe were due to gather in Berlin to discuss the consequences, and what measures should be taken in response.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), over the next century we should expect global average temperatures to rise by between 1.5 degrees and 4.5 degrees celsius, as a consequence of a rise in the atmospheric concentrations of those gases—principally carbon dioxide—which act as a blanket, keeping in the heat which the Earth soaks up from the sun. More empirical data and greater scientific understanding of many issues, in particular the way the oceans and clouds interact with the climate, will in time enable scientists to be more precise about their predictions. But, despite the uncertainty about the detail, most who have studied the issue agree on two things: global warming will occur, and human activity, principally the burning of fossil fuels, is the cause. (For a discussion of the science and the uncertainties, see *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing*, by John Houghton, co-chair of the Science Assessment Working Party of the IPCC).

Without going into all the ins and outs of the predictions here, let us assume that global warming is taking place. What conclusions should we draw, and should we be worried? The consensus view is that global warming highlights the way we have abused the planet, and that, yes, we should be worried—for hard times lie ahead for both nature and humanity.

John Houghton finds in global warming a deeply moral message, speaking of a society that has ignored God's injunction to care for the planet. His antidote is that we should 'embrace the preservation of the earth as our new organising principle'. Greenpeace writes of the 'climatic cancer afflicting our economies, our ecosystems, and our children's future prospects'. Global warming is, it believes, 'potentially the biggest of the threats to the future of the natural environment and the human species'. Kevin Costner's new movie in-the-making, *Waterworld*, presents a vision of the human condition 500 years hence if nothing is done: the polar ice caps have melted, and people exist as pitiful creatures eking out a living in floating cities menaced by bands of terrorists.

So, *something must be done* shout the delegates in Berlin. And that something is: reduce the emissions of carbon dioxide so as to slow, and eventually stop, global warming. The problem is that such a plan is technically quite difficult to implement, and politically even harder, since governments are neither prepared to pay for new technologies, nor to make industry pay.

The resulting mixture of fear about global warming and concern that not enough will be done to slow it down provides a potent pessimistic brew for the environmentally minded. It leaves them with a gloomy perspective on the future. In the past we used to believe humanity could take control of events; now, it is argued, all we can do is batten down the hatches and hope for the best. Anthony Giddens,

the Cambridge sociologist who has influenced Tony Blair, expresses this beleaguered mindset in *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*. The world we live in today, he observes, is dominated by feelings of 'dislocation and uncertainty'. In these circumstances, writes Giddens, the reactions which human-induced changes such as global warming evoke 'are often as much about *damage control* and *repair* as about an endless process of increasing mastery' (pp3-4).

However, before we all start beseeching governments to stop global warming, and condemning them when they don't, we might re-examine the most basic question of all: is global warming bad for nature and humanity?

Global warming is not a problem for nature. The planet has no preferred state, no ideal climate or temperature. Nor for that matter is there an ideal or 'normal' carbon dioxide level. As JM Adams and FI Woodward have observed, 'from the geological record it is becoming increasingly apparent that the earth's history has been characterised by continual change' ('The past as a key to the future', *Advances in Ecological Research*, Vol22, 1992, p259).

There are numerous historical examples of extreme temperature variations and of fluctuations in carbon dioxide levels. The dinosaurs lived in a world that was 10 to 20 degrees celsius warmer than today, in which carbon dioxide levels were between five and 10 times higher. In the warm period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, temperatures were on average one degree higher than today, while in the 'little Ice Age' that followed, they fell significantly lower. Nor is it the case that the threatened *rate of change* in global temperature over the next century is uniquely rapid. Evidence presented to this year's meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science indicates that shifts in global temperature of up to seven degrees celsius have occurred in as little as one year! And as recently as 8000 years ago, it appears that the Earth abruptly cooled by four degrees before rapidly warming again 200 years later. ▶

MONTAGE: ALEC CAMPBELL

So, the planet as a whole can cope with rapid changes in temperature. Indeed, this is the normal way of things. Humanity is not doing anything to nature that nature has not done to itself. John Houghton's reflections on the story of Genesis and our failure to live up to the trust placed in us by God is simply religious prejudice. Greenpeace's talk of the threat to the 'natural environment' is ecological prejudice. Of course, human-induced change in the climate might lead to the extinction of a particular species or the ruination of a local ecosystem. But that's just the way of things—the extinction of species because of climate change is part of the natural cycle. For one reason or another, fully 99.99 per cent of all the species that have ever existed are now extinct. (Like the scale of the threatened warming, there is some uncertainty about this. If in doubt, add another nine after the decimal point).

What about the effect of climate change on human society? There is no evidence that a warmer world would be bad for humanity as a whole. Some of the areas that now grow particular crops might find it hard to do so, but elsewhere it would become easier. People living in low-lying areas might have to move if sea levels rose, but there is nothing problematic about this in principle.

No, a warmer world in itself would not be a problem. However, a *warming* world, a natural world in rapid transition and change, would throw up problems for humanity. But, and this is an important but, humanity can adapt. For example, as Houghton points out, our increased knowledge of crops and developments in genetics give us the capacity to manage food production in a changing world.

What is more, humanity might even take advantage of change, making the motto 'necessity is the mother of invention' into a reality. At the very least, natural change should not be seen simply as a burden that we must bear and adapt to with difficulty. It is a fact that in the past changes in climate have often accompanied human invention and development. Human imagination and art began some 30 000 years ago during the last major Ice Age, and the end of that Ice Age, 10 000 years ago, marked the beginning of agriculture. In more recent times, the transformation of the life of Europe during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment occurred during the little Ice Age. We would not want to claim too strongly that there was a causal relationship between natural change and human advance, but at the very least it is fair to say that change in nature need not be a barrier to human progress.

Of course, our society is far more advanced than its predecessors.

Modern society has changed the way we relate to nature compared with periods in which people experienced natural change in a much more unmediated and severe way. However, this difference is to our advantage: the more advanced a society, the greater its technical abilities, the better it will be able both to cope with change, and use it to its benefit.

Reducing the scale of production would only put us at the mercy of climatic extremes

Whatever measures are taken now to limit emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, global warming is going to occur to some degree if the scientific models are correct. The accumulations of gases already released will see to that. One lesson we need to draw from history and the experience of the world today is this: if contemporary society is to face up to the challenges of global warming, there can be no place for conservationism. Indeed our environmental doom-mongers could help bring their own nightmares to life if some of their policy recommendations were acted upon. For underlying many of the calls from Greens to cut carbon dioxide emissions is the belief that global warming is a warning to reduce the scale of human production. This would only put us at the mercy of climatic extremes. What is needed is *more* of that kind of human activity, especially in the fields of science and technology, if we want to protect ourselves from the impositions of nature.

Conservationist sentiment is not the only problem. The way in which modern society itself is managed is a barrier to finding ways of dealing with global warming. The limits to how we can deal with climate change are not given by nature, but are imposed by the inefficiency and inequality of the capitalist system. This is especially so in today's global economic slump.

Existing technical abilities and resources are unevenly spread over the globe. The poorer nations will find it harder to cope with the consequences of global change than will the more advanced nations. Over the next century, it is estimated that it will cost the richer nations one per cent of their GNP to cope with the change, while the poorer nations will need to spend two per cent. And, as a comparison of the impact of an earthquake in Japan with one in Iran demonstrates, the richer nations suffer less from the same shock than do the poorer ones.

Furthermore, economic stagnation imposes constraints on investment in the new technologies which could help to reduce global warming or to protect us against its effects. The IPCC has worked out the cost of building sea defences that would protect coastal areas and islands for the next century, assuming sea levels rise in line with IPCC predictions on global warming. At 1991 prices they estimated $11 billion for the protection of the Caribbean Islands, $36 billion for Asia, $4 billion for the Pacific Islands, $106 billion for North America, and $50 billion for Western Europe. Compare these figures to the $1.5 billion given to the UN sponsored Global Environmental Facility to tackle the problems brought about by global warming, to preserve biological diversity, to protect the ozone layer, and to protect international waters. It is hardly surprising that small island nations are fearful for their survival!

Most importantly of all, capitalist society is incapable of planning the sort of long-term measures that are required in the face of a warming planet. For example, if sea levels do rise, it will probably be impractical to safeguard much of the more populous parts of Bangladesh from increased risk of flooding. What then? It requires planning and cooperation between nations if such changes are not to lead to loss of life and deprivation on a large scale. The parlous state of the world economy, and the intense rivalries this engenders between competing capitalist nations, does not give us too much cause for hope that such planning and cooperation will be forthcoming. Yet without planning and flexibility, change might further exacerbate international rivalries and conflict.

Looking to the future: it would probably be to our advantage to limit climate change. Indeed, it should be a long-term goal of humanity actively to manage the global climate. But the doomsday scenarios painted by environmentalists reveal more about their own state of mind than about likely real developments. If we are to aspire to manage the climate, we must shake-off the perception of humanity-as-victim which currently dominates thinking about the consequences of climate change. After all, if we really are incapable of adapting and dealing with change, what chance do we have of controlling any aspect of the world in which we live? ●

April marks the first anniversary of the election of an ANC-led government and the birth of 'the new South Africa'.

Power to which people?

Charles Longford returned home for the first time in 18 years to discover that some things have certainly changed for the black majority, but not for the better

Before: black masses mobilised against the apartheid regime in the 1980s

Arriving back in South Africa, my mood was a mixture of elation and trepidation. Images of the violent past mingled uncomfortably with doubts about 'the new South Africa'. Nothing had prepared me for what I found.

In physical terms, black people are more visible than in the past. Today there are black tourists, and some black South Africans can be seen in public swimming baths, on beaches, in restaurants, bars and even in white middle class suburbs. However, in political terms, the *black masses* are invisible.

The black resistance movement which made change possible is gone. The masses, whose sacrifices in the fight to end apartheid earned them the international accolade of 'the struggle nation', have been removed from the political map. They are playing no part in deciding the future of South Africa. The only time they enter public discussion today is as the victims of apartheid—the problematic legacy of the past. In conversations, in the press or on television, black South Africa is a world of statistical nightmares—from rape and crime to strikes and unemployment, from housing and education shortages to deaths on the roads. The list is endless and all-embracing.

The legacy of apartheid is indeed enormous. Walking through Langa township in the Cape brings it home; the marketplace is a filthy, derelict bus station where blacks sell sheep's heads perched precariously on upturned oil barrels. There are many similar townships with hundreds of thousands (and in some places, millions) of residents, many of them unemployed and living in desperate conditions.

White South Africa remains what it always was—a citadel of privilege, opulence, conspicuous greed and little culture. But there have been changes. Today the white suburbs are military encampments with 20-foot high walls, razor wire and electrified fortifications. Private rapid-response security firms abound. Obsessed with crime and rumours of car-jacking, residents venture out beyond their castle walls (by car, of course) only to the huge shopping malls where armed guards, secure garages and piped music provide the conditions for a daily gossip about crime, rape, etc. Occasionally, they will go out to eat—usually on the black maid's night off—in restaurants with armed guards on the door. Inside there are a few middle class blacks. They are part of this new urban environment, but still sit apart from the whites.

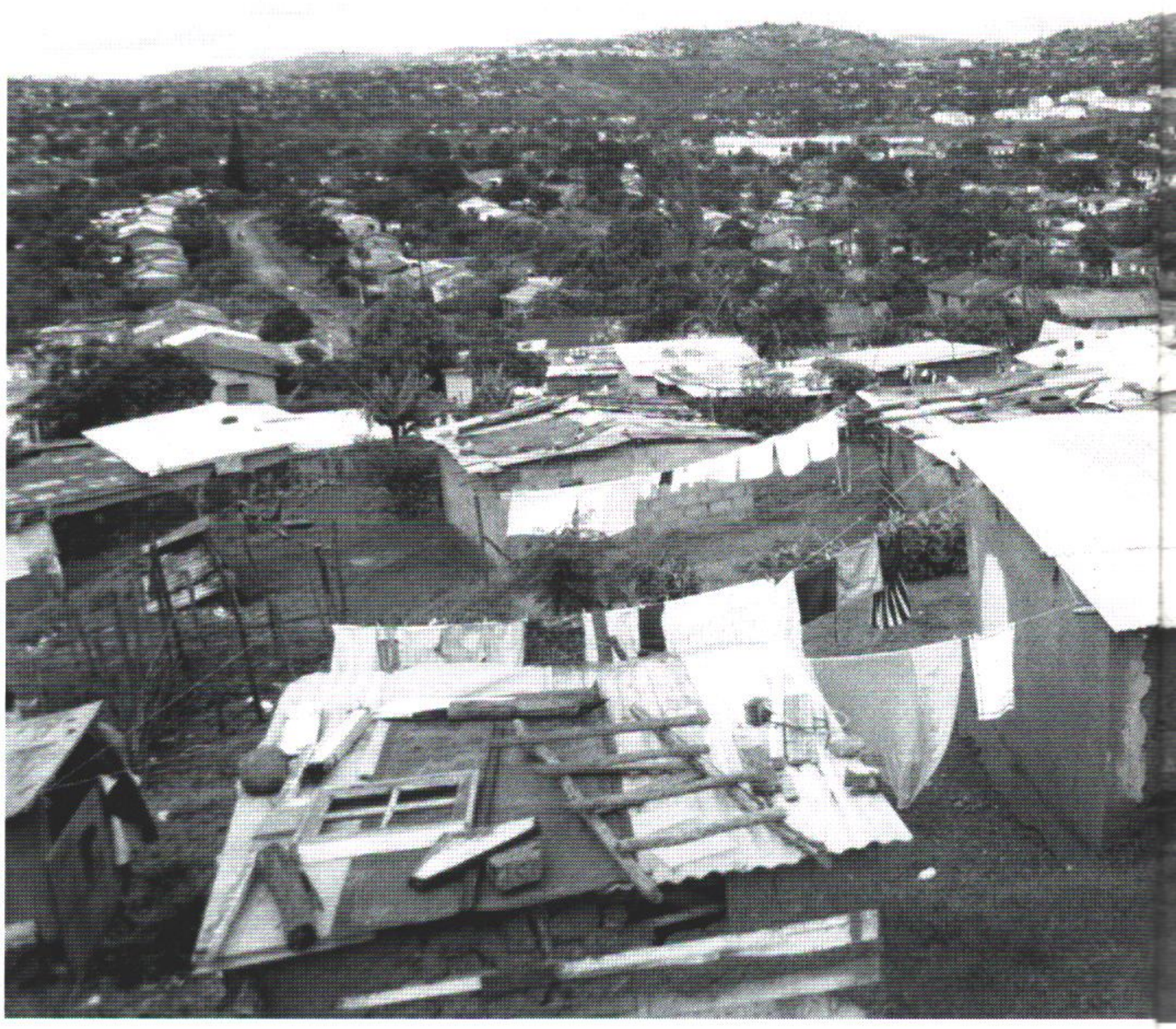
At first I thought that citadel white South Africa must be a response to the threat from the black masses demanding recompense for the years of suffering under apartheid. But no: the remarkable thing about black South Africa is how muted its demands for change really are. When the Centre for Policy Studies surveyed black expectations at the end of 1994, ▶

it discovered they were far more moderate than had been feared by those (particularly within the ANC) who foresaw disaster if the new government failed to deliver quickly on its election promises of houses, jobs and services.

In the townships I was often told that black people did not expect miracles and knew it would take generations to overcome apartheid's legacy. When I pointed out that there was enormous wealth in South Africa and asked why it had to take 'generations' for the majority of people to get some of it, the response ranged from hilarity to patient explanations of how the ANC-led government of national unity was tied by commitments made during the negotiations process that led to last April's elections.

Now I could see what had changed most dramatically in the new South Africa. Not the desperate material circumstances of the black masses, but their political perceptions and expectations. Yesterday's demand for freedom, equality and justice has been replaced by a consciousness of the limits imposed by the market economy, and the politics of low expectations.

The black masses have been transformed from the subjects of change to its objects, from collective strugglers against apartheid to its individual victims. As a consequence the black masses have become atomised, their bold movement fragmented into millions of insecure individuals who accept the need for self-restraint in their demands. The external policeman of apartheid has been replaced by the policeman within.



The black struggle for liberation has been destroyed and buried. And, what is worse, far too few of those who fought for freedom recognise that fact or why it has happened. How did this situation come about? These developments are the result of a political process which has matured over time, particularly since the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC in 1990.

The idea of limiting black demands has been at the heart of the ANC's political programme for decades. Influenced by the 'two-stage revolution' theories of the South African Communist Party, the ANC leadership focused the energies of the movement narrowly on a struggle against apartheid oppression and for the right to vote. The broader struggle to transform society, and to address the deep-seated social and economic inequalities built into South African capitalism, was postponed until the indefinite future. When the collapse of the Soviet bloc put the old left on to the defensive, that postponement became permanent. Aware that it could now entertain political change without endangering its wealth and social status, the ruling white elite embarked upon negotiations with Nelson Mandela and the ANC which culminated in last year's elections.

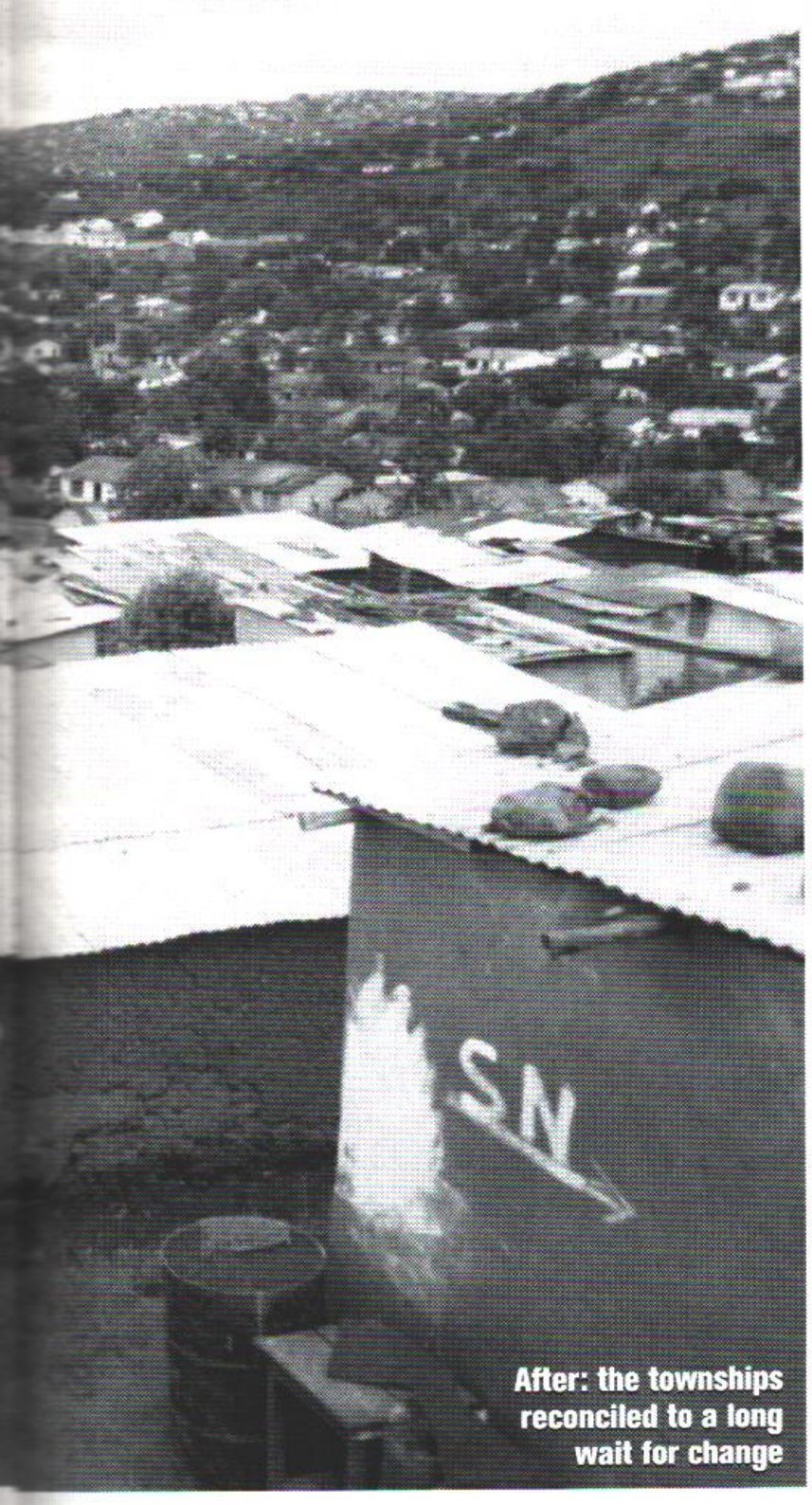
The election of an ANC-led government was hailed as a great blow for freedom. But the political approach popularised by the ANC ensured that freedom would be more formal than real. ANC politics had separated cause and effect, treating apartheid—the denial of democratic rights to the black majority—as something separate from the capitalist exploitation by a white minority which this oppression facilitated. As a result, when apartheid was formally abolished, the underlying relations of inequality and exploitation remained; there may no longer be a law penning impoverished blacks into shanty towns, but the operation of the market economy ensures that they cannot afford to go elsewhere.

The election of Mandela and the ANC did nothing to challenge these harsh realities. Instead, in the eyes of the government, almost overnight South Africa became the land of indeterminacy, where there was apparently no social cause of the poverty affecting millions of blacks; no past, just the given present; only a market economy with problems and objective limits that had to be respected.

This is the new political landscape in South Africa. The ethos of the ANC-led government of national unity, expressed in Nelson Mandela's pleas for reconciliation—the 'forgive-and-forget' philosophy—has separated cause and effect, and the past from the present. As a result, the black masses have been transformed from yesterday's heroes into today's victims; from the subject of change into the passive objects of state policy. Their centrality to forcing change on to the agenda has been buried in the forgotten past. The proud members of the 'struggle nation' have become passive constituents of a 'victim nation'.

Talking to ANC members who had once been imprisoned by the apartheid regime, the pervasiveness of this outlook became clear. In a moment of rare criticism, attacking the ANC leadership over allegations of corruption and 'gravy trains', they expressed their anger at the condition of black South Africa. However, it soon became clear that they were angry that they had so far not reaped any benefits from last year's elections. While some were working in some of the thousands of Non-Governmental Organisations that dominate black South Africa, others were more ambitious. One woman spoke of her desire to establish an alternative tourist company which would provide tours to the 'real South Africa'—the black townships (including one or two nights in a township matchbox house).

Being involved in a struggle of course entails getting something out of it. But the notion of being 'owed something' as individuals for time served in the past suggests that these activists have given up the struggle to change society. They now cast themselves in the role of passive recipients of government handouts. The very idea of making a living from taking tourists around black townships suggests that these hellholes are expected to remain part of the new South Africa. It also signifies the end of black solidarity. In the past, the experiences of black South Africa forged a powerful sense of



After: the townships reconciled to a long wait for change

solidarity and a collective striving for change. Now the hardship of others has become the basis for individual enterprise. That changed mindset of an ANC activist reveals the extent to which the actions and ambitions of black South Africa have been constrained today in a way the apartheid regime could only dream about.

South Africa's black townships had always been melting pots and galvanizers of black solidarity. They were built like concentration camps and surrounded by apartheid's armed forces. Inside the common experience of oppression created a spirit the apartheid regime was never able to pacify. Attempts to divide black society along ethnic lines failed repeatedly. That has all gone. Solidarity has been replaced by individual anxieties and fears. Ethnic identities have become more important today than in the past. Communities which opened their arms to all those engaged in the apartheid struggle are now closing ranks against the perceived 'total onslaught' on finite resources by 'foreigners'.

During a visit to Tembisa township (the second largest after Soweto) I met a young spokesman of the Self-Defence Units (SDUs) which had been set up to defend the community against armed attacks by Inkatha supporters—a campaign of terror which the apartheid government had sponsored and then depicted as barbaric 'black-on-black' violence. We spoke of how the community had stood together against this onslaught. When we turned to the present and how the government was clamping down on the SDUs (in some cases trying to amalgamate them into the local police forces) there was no more talk of solidarity. They should keep the SDUs, he said, to help control the flow of illegal black 'foreigners' from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, whom he blamed for the rise of unemployment and crime in the townships.

Not only has the ANC-led government established a new market-oriented realism, it has also managed to persuade black South Africans to take personal responsibility for the system. This achievement has been consolidated through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the cutting edge of the new South African capitalism.

The RDP is replete with the jargon of 'development' and consultancy, emphasising the importance of 'people-centred' processes. Every page of the programme contains phrases like 'people-driven sustainable development' or 'grassroots gender-sensitive empowerment' or 'accountable bottom-up resource allocation'. The moral message at the heart of the RDP is 'We are all in this together, building the new South Africa'.

However, in July last year it became an open secret that the ANC, in an International Monetary Fund Letter of Intent, had accepted that economic growth would have to take priority over the redistribution of resources. This committed the government to holding down key areas of public spending, restraining wage rises and consumption, concentrating resources in the hands of business investors and not raising corporate taxes. To top it all, the RDP was not even included as a budgeted item in the new government's priorities—it will be funded by cutbacks in other budgeted areas. The 'people-driven' RDP is really nothing more than a 'market-driven' austerity campaign. 'We' might all be in it together, but those at the bottom are clearly going to be in it a lot deeper than those at the top.

But the RDP is more than a programme of austerity. It is a new code of capitalist morality, promoted by the emerging South African elite as it sets about recasting the forms of domination in post-apartheid society.

Today the RDP impinges on every sphere of life. Businessmen and large corporations boast of their commitment to the RDP by launching highly publicised affirmative action schemes to help a few black workers into jobs. In conditions where the market is seen as the only way to organise society, it is surely only a matter of time before it is openly proclaimed that the pursuit of profit is an RDP goal, since it will create resources which can be used for redistribution some time in the indefinite future. On the other hand, anyone holding up or even criticising the RDP is now seen as a problem to be severely dealt with. For example, black workers in trade unions are now branded as an elite taking resources away from the poorest of the poor.

The moral motto 'We're all in this together' means that black South Africans now have to take responsibility for the market system. Having been told that there is no relationship between deprivation (which created the necessity for the RDP in the first place) and the market economy, individual responsibility not collective action is the only recourse open to the black masses.

The more the ANC-led government, and its apologists and critics alike, emphasise 'self-empowerment' and 'people-centred' growth strategies, the more the moral message is driven home: South Africa's problems and solutions lie in the behaviour of its people. 'Self-empowerment' in conditions of low expectations and austerity can only mean one thing: policing yourself. And when this cannot be controlled, then the state will be quick to step in and help out. Restraining the masses by nurturing the policeman within is the crowning achievement of the first black government of South Africa.

Sidelined through the negotiations process and left with no alternative but to cope with the market, the past sacrifices of black South Africans compel them to make the best of their predicament. The ANC-led government is regarded as their government. After all, obtaining the vote and putting the ANC into power has always been the primary goal. The new elite's projection of joint responsibility places the moral responsibility for future success on to the shoulders of those who have effectively been disenfranchised; the black masses. The logic is compelling and debilitating: by restraining yourself and limiting your demands for change, black South Africans are told, you are doing your bit for the new non-racial society.

The new elite feels safe with this view of the black masses as victims. The masses are invisible in the political process, reduced to a collection of individual victims who can be controlled by the moral strictures of black society itself. What remains unclear, however, is the extent to which black South Africa will continue to go along with this. Already there is impatience and anger. There is no doubt that turbulent times lie ahead.

As I flew over the sprawl of Johannesburg on my way back to Britain, I found myself agreeing with the view that it would take some time before South Africa was really rid of apartheid's legacy—but not in the sense that this is usually meant. It will take a new generation of black youth, untainted by the past politics of low expectations, to discover the basis for a renewed collective struggle for social change.

The key to resolving the problem lies in the development of a new generation of political ideas in South Africa. The experience of black South Africans proves that poverty and suffering alone are not enough to make people keep fighting for liberation. Political leadership, vision and inspiration will also be required. Only then can the collective struggles of the past and the human spirit of resistance they represented be appropriated as part of a new movement for social emancipation in South Africa. ●

The authorities have tried to blame Nick Leeson for the state of the global financial system. Phil Murphy thinks that's rich, given that every major bank and corporation is now gambling millions on the international lottery of the derivatives market

'It's him'

Since the initial wave of panic passed, the public response to the collapse of Barings Bank has been a fraudulent attempt to 'ring-fence' the crisis and minimise its significance. We have been told that Nick Leeson, the Watford wideboy, singlehandedly threw the world finance markets into chaos either through incompetence or criminal fraud. As Chancellor Kenneth Clarke told the House of Commons, 'it appears to be a *specific* incident *unique* to Barings centred on *one* rogue trader in Singapore'.

But if Leeson was a disreputable rogue, why did Barings pay him £200 000 a year and offer him a £1m bonus before the collapse? Because, as manager of Singapore-based Baring Futures, he made a lot of money for his employers from his financial dealings. Profits from his subsidiary arm of Barings grew eightfold from just over £1m in 1992 to nearly £9m in 1993. In the first half of 1994 his personal contribution grew to over £18m—around one third of Barings' total profits.

Leeson 'gambled' in derivatives because that is what he was employed to do (for an explanation of derivatives trading see box overleaf). An analysis of what happened, reported in the *Independent,* revealed that 'a substantial proportion of Nick Leeson's ruinous contracts in high-risk derivatives was proprietary trading on Barings' own account, not the fraudulent unauthorised trading the bank has claimed' (4 March 1995).

It is illegitimate to scapegoat Leeson as a lone miscreant. It is just as dishonest to blame his bank for failing to control his 'rogue' dealing. It is now clear that Leeson's controllers had been aware of the unusual scale of his operations since January. It was common knowledge in the Singapore financial markets and several representations were made from the Singapore authorities to Barings' London head office seeking reassurance. So why did the most respectable of banks encourage Leeson to carry on gambling? Because the Queen's bankers, like all financiers today, were desperate for the potential profits.

Passing the buck

Barings' audit of Leeson's work last summer noted that he was a valuable asset to the bank and should not be restricted, or even offended by criticism, for fear that 'the loss of his services to a competitor would speed the erosion of Baring Futures' profitability greatly'. It is reported that Barings advanced him between £700m and £800m to cover his stake in the weeks leading up to the collapse. Like every other bank today, Barings had made money from the risky derivatives business in the past and was in no position to ignore it this time.

Can the buck be passed from Barings to the failings of its senior regulator, the Bank of England? Those who criticise the Bank's failure to reel in the dealers misunderstand the role it plays for British capitalism. The Bank's main concern is not to uphold some notion of 'fair play' in the financial markets, but to preserve the City of London as an attractive and lucrative base for international financial activity, whether British or foreign. This rests primarily on the City's reputation as a relatively unregulated financial centre, where nobody pays too much attention to which corners you cut in order to make money in these austere times. The Bank is wary of attempts to probe and regulate its constituents' affairs, since this could undermine London's reputation as a good place to do business.

The reason why neither Barings management nor Bank of England officials acted to restrain Leeson's derivatives gambling is straightforward; this is how most of the players in the international economy survive these days. Derivatives trading has taken off over the past few years as the latest substitute for investing in real productive activity. For all its aura of mystifying complexity, derivatives dealing can be simply regarded as the 1990s version of the financial speculation in shares and property which all the big companies were up to in the 1980s. With the meltdown in property and stock markets at the end of the last decade they have just moved on to a different form of credit-driven financial activity—derivatives trading.

Barings' derivatives dealings were certainly not 'unique', and that is what gives this affair global importance. Other banks are doing exactly the same, and with much bigger bets than Barings. NatWest, Barclays and Midland are among the world's largest derivatives traders. In 1993 the derivatives arm of Barclays contributed over £500m of total group profits of £664m; for Midland it was £585m out of £844m. (Midland's performance in 1994 confirms the dangers of derivatives gambling, too—it only made £33m from derivatives having lost millions trading in bond derivatives.)

Barings' collapse points to the underlying fragility of scores of major banks and other financial institutions. All of them are now heavily engaged in what is called 'proprietary trading'; that is, trading in the markets on their own behalf, rather than pursuing the old-fashioned practice of lending money and charging clients for providing various financial services.

Bread and butter

In a stagnant economy such traditional banking business is no longer profitable enough. Hence proprietary trading—and the dangers that go with it—is no longer the 'icing on the cake', but is fast becoming the bread and butter of the banking world.

And it is not just banks which survive through financial gambling today. Many companies which would be classified as 'industrial' or 'commercial' do the same. Their profit figures rely more and more upon ▶

PHOTO: PRESS ASSOCIATION

their corporate treasury departments—their own internal banks—rather than on the production or sale of goods and services. A report published by the Economist Intelligence Unit days after the Barings debacle confirmed that the world's largest companies are making widespread and growing use of derivatives. Over half of the respondents in a survey of around 100 leading international companies conceded that they regarded derivatives as an 'essential and regularly utilised tool'.

A roll-call of institutions which have *admitted* major losses from the derivatives markets gives an idea of how widely this dodgy tool is being used: Allied Lyons, Procter & Gamble, the German mining giant Metallgesellschaft, Volkswagen, the Japanese oil company Kashima Oil. Even some local authorities trying to stretch their budgets have suffered, such as Orange County in California and Hammersmith and Fulham council in London. Doubtless these are only the tip of the iceberg. With the Barings crash they must all sense that they are at risk too. And they would not all be 'lucky' enough to be taken over by someone bigger.

The anxiety generated by Barings has been enhanced because it comes on top of a series of financial mishaps, ranging from major currency turmoil through the Mexican financial crash to the failed takeover of another famous City firm SG Warburg. The more this sort of thing happens, the more the recognition grows that the money men are living on borrowed time; the financial economy of manipulation and gambling is not a secure or long-term substitute for the real economy of production.

Dutch courage

In the City of London, there are additional reasons for concern. Barings was a *British* bank that was had for breakfast in the *East Asian* markets—and there was little that Britain's captains of finance and industry could do about it. This kind of thing is a painful reminder that their days of economic and financial power are over, and that the balance of economic dynamism has shifted decisively from Europe to East Asia. The fall-out from the Barings crisis has also called into question the position of the City as international capital's favourite deregulated location—and this is the last jewel in Britain's faded economic crown.

Equally worrying for the City is the fact that the British state (in the shape of the Bank of England) proved incapable of rescuing one of its banks which got into 'a little local difficulty'. The Dutch takeover provides only limited relief. Everyone knows the collapse of one bank can have a dangerous spin-on effect. All of the banks and finance houses lend and borrow from each other and make deals at each other's expense. Thousands of deals connect the financial house of cards. One card falls, and the rest panic over how long the structure will stand—especially since the Bank of England no longer seems able to pick up the pieces.

The feeling of things being out of control was reflected in the final excuse offered for Barings; the suggestion that *nobody* could really be blamed, since nobody can influence such a vast, interconnected and complex world economy, where trillions of footloose dollars circulate the globe at the touch of a computer key. Derivatives trading especially conforms to the image of a world which has become incomprehensible and uncontrollable.

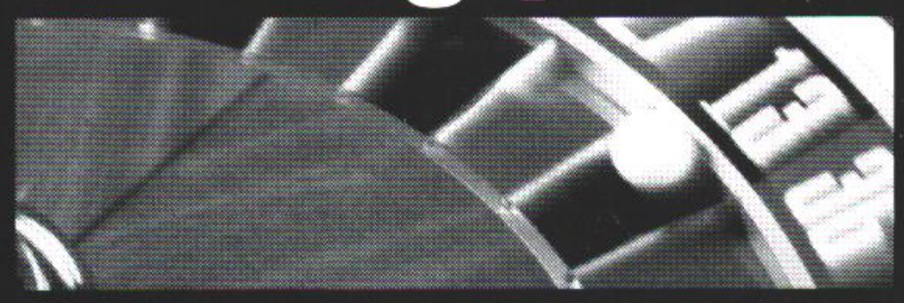
Invisible fist

James Buchan pandered to this prejudice in the *Independent on Sunday:* 'I would be surprised if Mr Leeson remotely understood the nature of the contracts and markets on which he had staked his life....The bankers I spoke to all said that speculation in derivative financial instruments could not be controlled.' (5 March 1995) In fact, as many other bankers confirmed in the financial press, Leeson's sort of trading is technically very easy to understand and control through a simple system of regular audits and reports, and automatic limits on traders' exposure. The issue Buchan avoids is that in today's slump, the desperate drive for profits means that controls are weakened or simply ignored.

This type of 'analysis' is more a sigh of despair than an explanatory theory. It is part of that notion which blames the invisible hand of 'globalisation' for everything that goes wrong within the international capitalist system. As John Major puts it, at its crudest, don't blame the government for British job losses, we live in a global economy.

In many ways this notion is more dangerous than the attempt to divert the blame for the state of capitalism on to the man from Watford or the old Lady of Threadneedle Street. The message is that we should not even attempt to understand, control or change the world; it is all too complex and dangerous and global for insignificant little us to handle or meddle with. The theory of globalisation is becoming the most mischievous scapegoat of all, a mystical apology for a rubbish system in which gambling and speculation have replaced the provision of goods and services as the focus of economics. ●

Deriving profits



Derivatives trading in general, and especially the sort Leeson lost nearly £1 billion on, is much simpler than its image suggests. It is about gambling on the future. The bet is on the price something will be at some later date. In essence it is not much different to the gamble on which horse will win a race, except that the return on the stake can be much higher.

The original idea of derivatives was to provide a producer or trader with some insurance against unexpected movements in prices which could disrupt their future business. In recent years, however, derivatives trading has exploded with a life of its own as an arena for money-making. The main distinction between derivatives and other financial instruments is that you only lay out a portion of the value of the underlying asset but you can benefit from all of this asset's price fluctuation.

The 'something' speculated upon can be a real commodity, such as a mineral or agricultural product, including things as diverse as oil, soya beans, wheat, live hogs, pork bellies, shrimps, cheddar cheese or the orange juice of the film *Trading Places.* Or the 'something' can be a financial instrument: the level of interest rates, the level of currencies, bond or share prices. It is the latter which feature in the Barings affair. This market in share, or equity, derivatives has developed rapidly since around 1987, as an offshoot of the derivatives markets in foreign exchange and interest rate products which took off as a form of speculative investment in the 1980s.

Derivatives fall into two broad types: futures and options. A futures contract is an agreement traded on a specialised exchange for the future delivery of a certain quantity of a commodity or financial instrument at a price set at the time of contract. Most futures contracts are cash-settled, so the underlying asset itself is never delivered. The buyer of the contract simply receives (or pays out) the difference between the contract price and the market price of the underlying asset. The buyer is said to be 'long', the seller 'short'.

An option gives the purchaser the right, but not the obligation, to buy (a call option) or sell (a put option) a certain quantity of a specific asset at a fixed price at, or before, a future date. The buyer of the option pays the seller a premium for this right.

In the case of the Barings debacle Leeson bought tens of thousands of futures contracts (went long) in the Nikkei 225 stock market index, gambling on a rise in Tokyo share prices, so that when mid-March came the contract price at which he 'bought' the shares would be well below the market price at which he could 'sell' them. When instead the market fell Leeson began to accumulate book losses instead of his hoped for book profits. He then started trading in share options to try to make up the loss. With the market continuing to fall this only compounded his losses. He lost the bet and was branded a crook. But if he had won, as he had done before, no doubt he would have been the blue-eyed boy of Barings and an outstanding example of British entrepreneurship.

TOBY BANKS

Hands off Sooty

While veal protesters are attracting national attention (despite the British Veterinary Association's complaints that the animals are suffering from 'stress-related diseases' as a result), the plight of other creatures goes largely unnoticed. The Vegetarian Society's new 'Suffering Seas' campaign goes some way towards addressing a neglected area—namely fish, whose two-second memories make it difficult for them to organise themselves. However, animal rights present problems for those animals who have, rather like Page Three girls, chosen to capitalise on their entertainment value in a way that is considered by today's moral guardians to be inappropriate or degrading. Television's animal community is having a particularly hard time of it, with Pinky and Perky and the PG Tips chimps falling foul of political correctness by allowing themselves to be 'exploited' by the programme-makers, and setting a bad example to young children and animals.

If this wasn't bad enough, one of TV's most famous creatures, Sooty, has been the subject of sleaze allegations. After five decades in television, during which time he became a byword for professionalism and wholesome entertainment, he stands accused of transgressing broadcasting regulations on 'product placement'. Apparently, Sooty has been forgetting to remove copies of his videos and other merchandise from the studio set before filming, and said items have been featuring prominently in his programmes.

As yet there has been no campaign to defend Sooty, although with filmed evidence of a lifetime's systematic abuse at the hands of a father and son, I expect he will get off with a course of counselling. If not, he could try his luck in Australia. As one might expect of a country where vicious little koalas are treated as a national treasure, and the healthy sport of kangaroo boxing is banned, the place has become a haven for pests of all kinds. No creature is too small or anti-social to command its own noisy lobby, as a Sydney shopkeeper found out when he swatted a mosquito in front of customers—he has since had his shop picketed by angry animal rights protesters. And if Sooty has immigration problems in Australia, he might consider Sweden, where a burglar has been ordered to pay £250 damages for shocking a parrot.

The news that Tony Blair has been voted Britain's sexiest male politician by readers of *Forum* magazine was greeted with an air of resignation by those of us who entered multiple votes for John Prescott. But the fiery Prescott need not despair. According to a member of his parliamentary team, 'various ladies have been sending him their knickers through the post'.

Some readers may find this surprising, but they underestimate the sexual magnetism of skilled orators. The effect of demagogues upon worshipping crowds is well documented, but less is known about more intimate situations, in which, with their powers concentrated on a single listener, such men become irresistible. Even John Major, whose public performances leave much to be desired, was as a young man able to turn the head of a mature woman during their intimate discussions about Lambeth council. Given John Prescott's awesome reputation as a firebrand speaker, one can only speculate about what he is like behind closed doors. An example of his extemporising in the House of Commons should persuade any remaining doubters:

'I mean that's an example of this government that believes in the private sector and is in fact damaged the public sector's handling within the public sector in a number of these areas. And you can go on with them in other areas. So I think the basic point that it is necessary in order to have private capital in our industries to get the extra resources that we do want, that you have to be privatised is not borne out by the facts in other countries and neither should we have it here also and if he's any doubts about that go and have a look at the reports that talk it.' (As reported in *Hansard*)

'Correspondence' should be sent to John Prescott MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Trauma update (sensitive persons should seek professional advice and read on only in the presence of a trained counsellor):

- Shell-shocked soldiers got short shrift in the First World War, and things weren't too great in the second one either. But all that has been put right. There is now an officially recognised 'commemoration' trauma, caused by events like the D-Day celebrations, which bring on post-traumatic stress disorder by reawakening memories. Despite this, a ban on BBC2's war films season looks unlikely, as does the cancelling of the VE and VJ-Day jamborees.

- A survey by the Prison Governors Association shows that more than 60 per cent of prison 'managers' suffer from stress-related conditions, including 'the feeling that "my brain doesn't work"'. No further questions.

- Police officers who were 'involved in' (that's 'caused' to you and me) the Hillsborough disaster have been awarded around £250 000 each to compensate them for their distress. This compares very well with the going rate for killing pedestrians and other drivers, and shooting unarmed members of the public. Nice work if you can get it, lads.

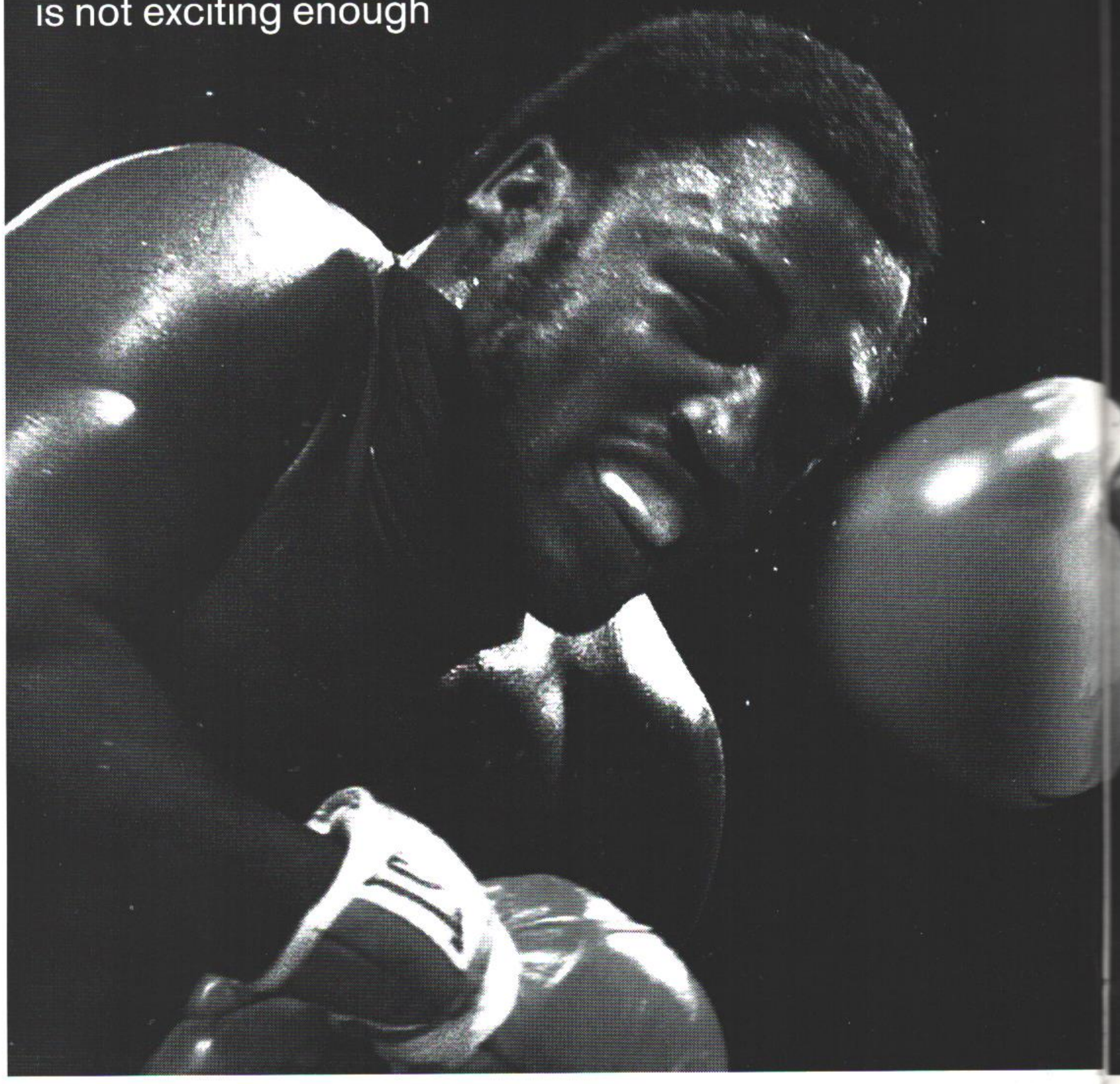
- Hospital staff, in contrast, are receiving no cash payments, but counselling services are helping them to cope with the strain of the extra work that is being dumped on them.

- *My Way* has been withdrawn from hospital radio playlists because the line 'And now the end is near, and so I face the final curtain' is deemed too depressing. The ban has not yet been extended to include cold dirty understaffed wards or other features of hospital life which have occasionally prompted complaints.

- The Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs of the European parliament highlights a hitherto neglected problem. Clause 116 'maintains, in the light of discrimination in Britain and France against people who play "rugby league" that people should be able to participate in sports such as "rugby league" without fear of reprisal or discrimination'. Fortunately, rugby union is as yet exempted. ●

Shadow box

As the calls for a ban on boxing grow louder, Alec Campbell and Mark Collings suggest that the real problem with the sport is that it is not exciting enough



The knockout punch from Nigel Benn that left Gerald McClellan in a coma and fighting for his life has given renewed force to the argument that boxing is a barbaric practice which should be banned. It seems strange in a world filled with barbarism and violence that campaigners should focus their attention on a sport (and one that is statistically safer than, say, motor racing or mountain climbing). But it is also, it seems to us, an argument that turns the real problem with boxing on its head. The trouble with boxing today is not that it is too barbaric, but that it is too insipid and boring. Fights involve token bouts between mismatched opponents, with little skill or heart for a real battle.

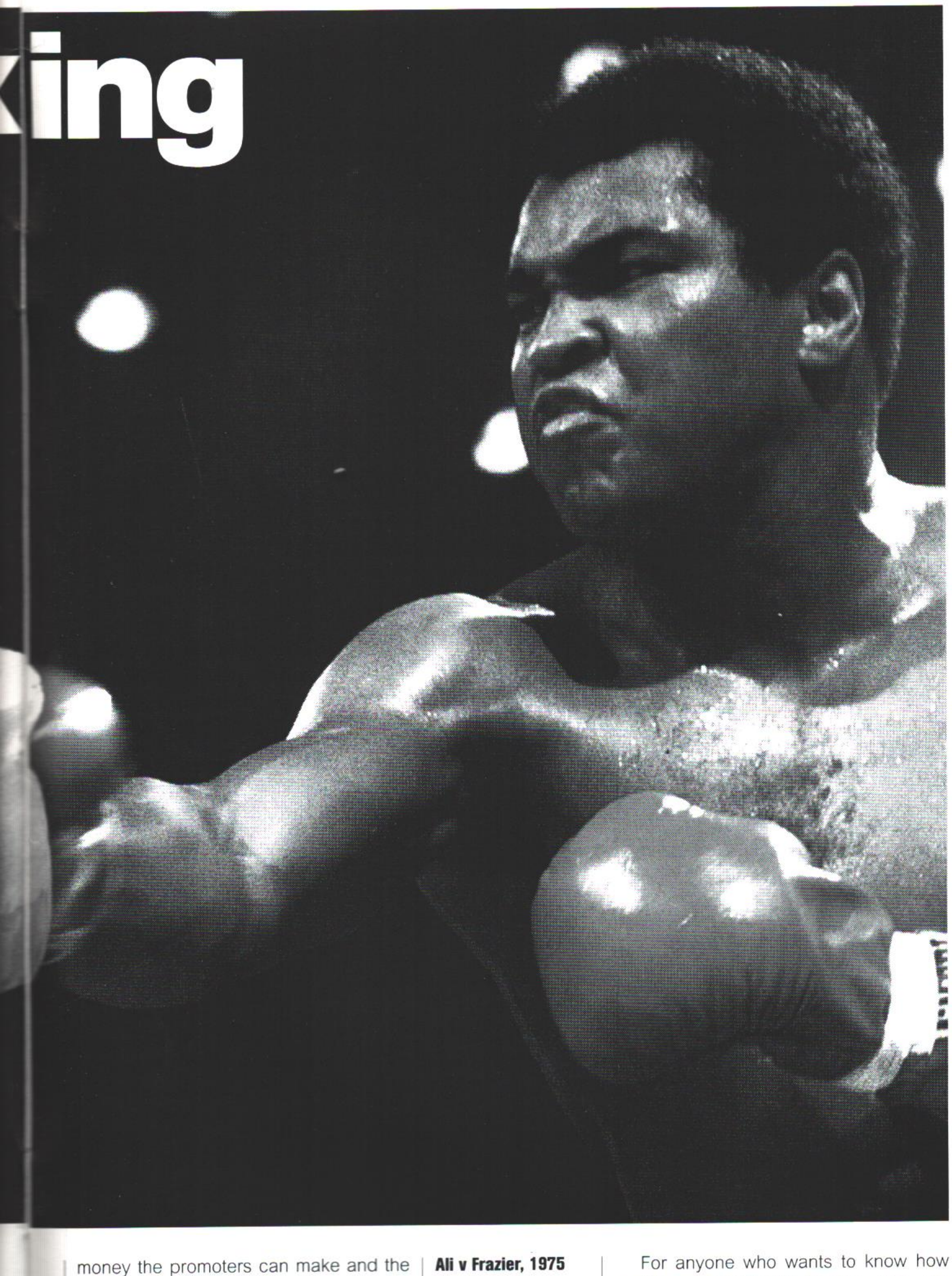
We would say that boxing is at its best when it is most punishing, when two fighters manage to pull together all the elements that make up their trade—timing, speed, skill and power—and battle it out head to head. Whatever else you may say about the Benn-McClellan fight at least it was exciting, compared to much of what passes for boxing today.

The last boxer to exude such excitement was 'Iron' Mike Tyson. In November 1986 Tyson went into the history books as the youngest heavyweight champion of the world. He was just 20 years old when, in his twenty-eighth fight, he KO'd Canada's Trevor Berbick to win the WBC heavyweight title. It should have been the start of a great championship reign. Instead Tyson was convicted in 1992 of the rape of Desiree Washington and imprisoned. By the time he was sent down, he had already lost his world title to James 'Buster' Douglas in Japan. Douglas fought a young man whose life outside the ring was taking its toll of his boxing ability. Tyson was KO'd in the tenth round.

Tyson was due to be released from jail at the end of March this year, and has pledged to return to the ring. His return has got promoters, managers and fellow fighters licking their lips in anticipation of lucrative payouts. Three years of incarceration have not dimmed Tyson's qualities as the most potent force on the heavyweight boxing scene. But the fact that many should now look to a man who has not put on a pair of boxing gloves for four years, not only to regain his world title, but to restore some glamour to the ring, is an indication of the degree to which boxing has lost its spark and excitement.

Since Tyson lost his title, it has changed hands several times, each time in more farcical circumstances, until it ended up in the hands of a balding, 18-stone granddad, George Foreman. It is a sad indictment of the state of boxing that as Tyson sets out to regain his world title, he is likely to meet the man who 20 years ago was pummelled to defeat by Muhammed Ali, in the famous 'Rumble in the Jungle' in Zaire.

Boxing has always spawned more than its fair share of seedy promoters whose sole aim has been to make money from their fighters. Today, however, the alliance of TV companies and promoters such as Don King, whose malign presence seems to hover behind every major fight, pulls more weight than the world boxing authorities. As the sport has been completely taken over by the money men so it has fragmented. Today there are three major heavyweight titles (the WBC, IBF and WBA) as well as a plethora of lesser titles like the WBO, WBF, WBU, IBO and IBC to name just a few. The more 'world champions' there are, the more



Ali v Frazier, 1975

money the promoters can make and the more title fights the TV men can show.

It is inconceivable that any fighter (or rather his manager or promoter) would risk his chance of a championship shot by facing a worthy opponent. Boxers fight for worthless titles against no-hope opponents, all for the sake of pulling in the cash for the promoters. The result is boxers without the requisite skills, and mismatched fights which contain no tension or excitement.

For anyone who wants to know how exciting heavyweight boxing can be, you have to go back to the sixties and seventies. Watching BBC 2's recent replay of the Ali-Foreman world title fight of 1974 reminded us of how gut-wrenchingly exciting boxing was in those days. It was the time when the big four—Muhammed Ali, Joe Frazier, Ken Norton and George Foreman—fought a series of bone-crunching bouts to dispute the world title.

The seventies began with Joe Frazier as world champion, Ken Norton ranked as world number one, the 21-year old George Foreman as reigning Olympic champion and Muhammed Ali, still undefeated, back in the ring after the US Supreme Court overturned his conviction for refusing to fight in Vietnam.

'Smoking' Joe Frazier, so-called because of his ability to keep the heat on his opponent with his no-nonsense pressure style of fighting, was a bull-like banger from Philadelphia with one of the most devastating left hooks in boxing history. Norton, short, muscular and crouched low with arms criss-crossed, was powerful enough to have been a great champion in any other era. George Foreman dominated the early seventies with intimidation. Like Tyson after him, he beat many opponents before they stepped through the ropes, cowed by his reputation as an awesome puncher.

And then there was Muhammad Ali, unquestionably the greatest of them all. By the seventies Ali was no longer the dancing master of the 1960s. Nor was he as big a puncher as the other three. Faced with the pressure tactics of Foreman, Frazier and Norton, Ali was forced to rethink and adapt his style, which made him a more complete, and greater, champion.

Between them, these four battled it out for the title of the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. The result was a series of classic bouts that spanned the decade. In March 1971 Ali met Frazier in a championship bout that was promoted as 'The Fight of the Century'. Ali went down under a Frazier left hook, but got up to finish the fight. Frazier was named undisputed champion by unanimous decision. Three years later, Foreman knocked out Frazier in the second round to take the title. The following year, Ali knocked out Foreman in the eighth round of the 'Rumble in the Jungle'. In between times Ali had his jaw broken by Norton, though he won the rematch; while Norton had been beaten by Foreman.

Twenty years ago, four great champions fought each other to be undisputed king of the ring, in the process honing their skills and thrilling the world. Today, dozens of pretend champions avoid each other and put TV audiences to sleep knocking out journeymen with a clumsy jab. Boxing today has no undisputed champion in any division. While Tyson may regain his crown, and possibly reunify the heavyweight title, it would be against men who are like shadows of the past champions. ●

A right royal madness

The Madness of King George is a *King Lear* for our age, argues Richard Woolfenden

Screaming, face-contorted, trousers at half-mast, crouched against the outer wall of his Lincolnshire asylum in winter, King George III uncontrollably shits. His loyal subjects turn on their heels. The camera zooms out skyward leaving His Highness in bawling agony. It is a picture of utter humiliation.

The Madness of King George is a film about a *real* king, a king in the physical and emotional, as opposed to a purely historical, sense. Nigel Hawthorne's hilarious and harrowing portrayal of an ailing king, combines with Alan Bennett's rich screenplay and Nicholas Hynter's intelligent direction to capture the contrast between the private and public world of the monarch in a way that puts to shame the work of the paparazzi crowded on the slopes at Klosters. 'Goodnight Mrs King', George says to his wife Charlotte. 'Goodnight Mr King', she tenderly replies. Dressed like Wee Willie Winkie, Hawthorne climbs into bed but a pain in his stomach forces him to try to relieve himself by farting. Grimacing, grasping one of the four-posters, he is unsuccessful and suddenly collapses in agony. The pain and the madness have only just begun.

George III (Nigel Hawthorne) with the future of England in his hands

The *Madness of King George* tells the story of a king whose routine of rule is torn apart by an undiagnosable disease which acts as a catalyst for madness. We are left guessing as to whether porphyria, a much-disputed genetic disorder, is the cause of George's lunacy. But Bennett's screenplay, which he adapted from his own stage production, suggests that the loss of the American colonies, the creeping disrespect of parliament and the caddish, unprincely behaviour of his son may all be reason enough for the public humiliation of the king.

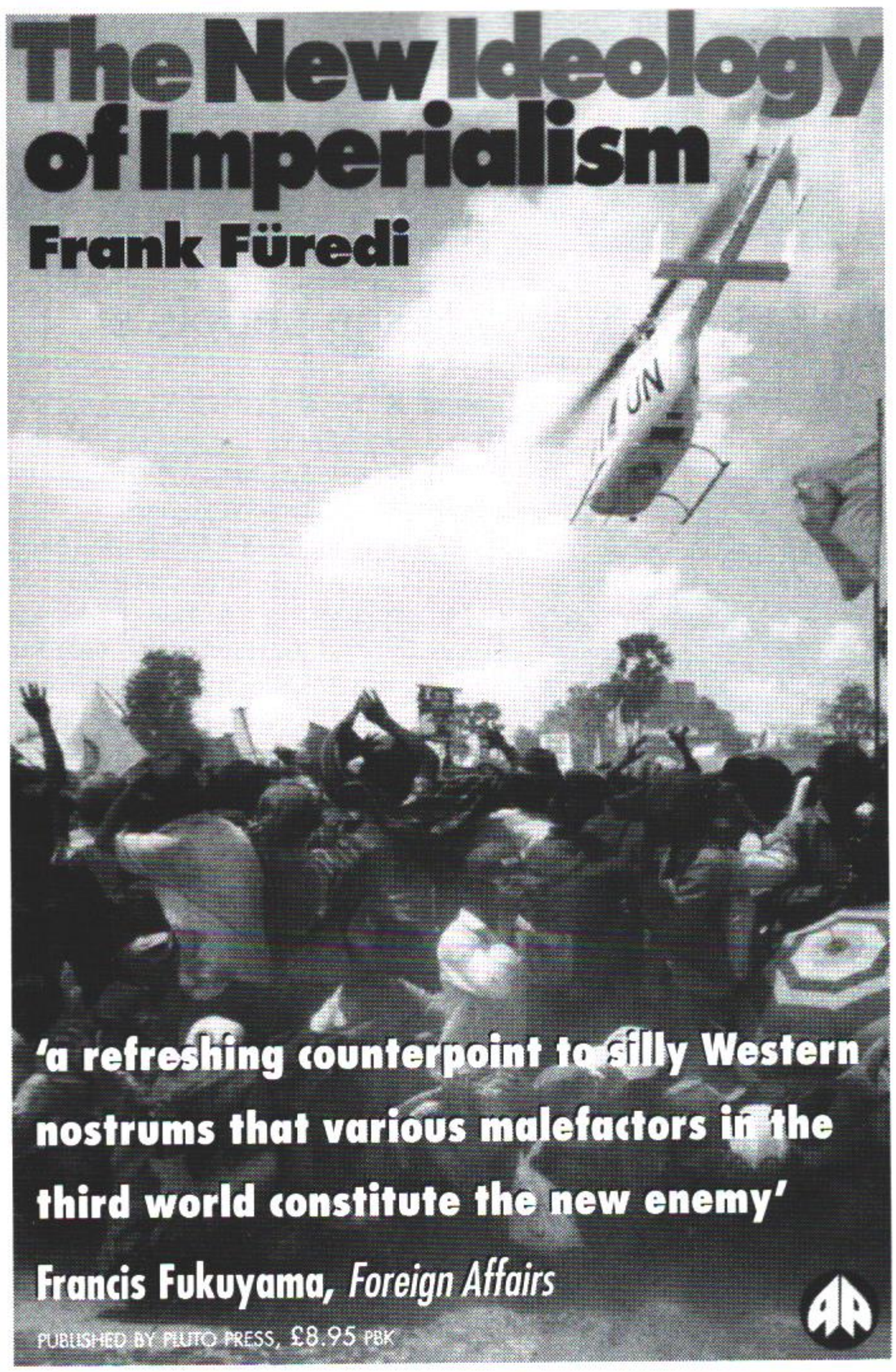
George's affliction is undoubtedly a metaphor for our own beleaguered House of Windsor. Prince Charles admits to his infidelities to Jonathan Dimbleby on national television; George III simply gropes his mistress Lady Pembroke in front of his wife Queen Charlotte and other onlookers. In the triumphant final scene, the camera swoops from an aerial shot of St Paul's cathedral into a close-up of the royal family mounting the steps to the cheers of a public throng. 'We must try to be more of a family', the king tells his wife and children. 'There are model farms now, model villages, even model factories. Well, we must be a model family for the nation to look to.'

Yet if the film resonates with the echoes of contemporary royal problems, such links are implied rather than made explicit. Bennett is far too intelligent a writer to turn his film into a political treatise, any more than he has made it into a historical piece or a period drama. *The Madness of King George* works on too many levels to be so easily categorised.

Bennett's skilful adaptation for the screen manages to retain the poetic qualities of language more associated with the theatre. Hawthorne's king, hardly a great communicator with his subjects, nevertheless grips the audience with mumblings and speeches that range from the base to the sublime. George's linguistic idiosyncrasies chart his decline into insanity and final return to stability. He has an eccentric, nervous habit of uttering 'What, what?' at the end of every sentence, a mannerism which covers up his embarrassment at being unable to communicate with his subjects. During his madness, his self-consciousness disappears and his 'what, whatting' ceases. When it returns, we know that the king is on the mend. The irony, of course, is that while madness allowed George to communicate more freely with his subjects, the return to sanity is also a return to the social isolation of the monarch.

In the closing stages of the film, the serenity of a recuperated King George is conceived in a beautiful pastiche of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The opportunistic, turncoat Lord Chancellor pays a visit to the court to proclaim his loyalty to the king. George demands that the chancellor takes the part of the loyal daughter Cordelia to the king's own Lear in a reading of Shakespeare's tragedy. King George and Lear have both suffered from a madness that has driven them away from their families and caused intense physical and mental pain. Bennett seems to draw our attention to the healing qualities of great drama as we watch George become mesmerised by his own performance of Lear's reunion with Cordelia. In a film that reworks the themes of madness and status, Bennett appears not to be satisfied by mere allusion to Shakespeare's play and instead openly incorporates it into the fabric of the film, a move which succeeds in heightening the emotions and pathos of Nigel Hawthorne's character. ●

PHOTO: SAMUEL GOLDWYN COMPANY/CHANNEL 4 FILMS



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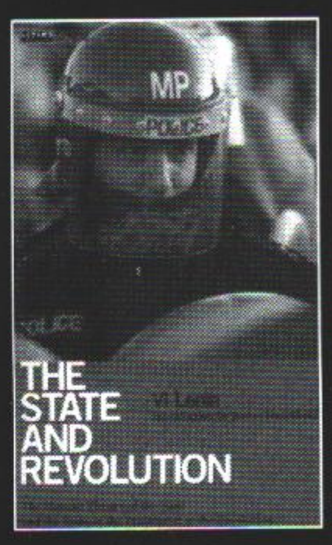

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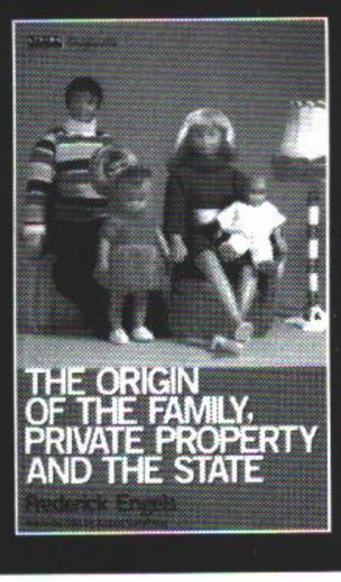

THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE

Frederick Engels

NEW

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Rogers' Parisian folly

Louis Ryan prefers the Lloyds building's monument to money to the people's palace of the Pompidou Centre

There are few architects more associated in the public mind with high modernism than Richard Rogers. The distinctive lines of his two most famous creations—the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Lloyds building in London—are iconic of everything that architectural traditionalists, such as Prince Charles, loathe. Yet in his recent Reith Lectures, Rogers seemed to have been seduced by those very Prince Charles-like ideas of 'sustainable development' and of building for the 'community'.

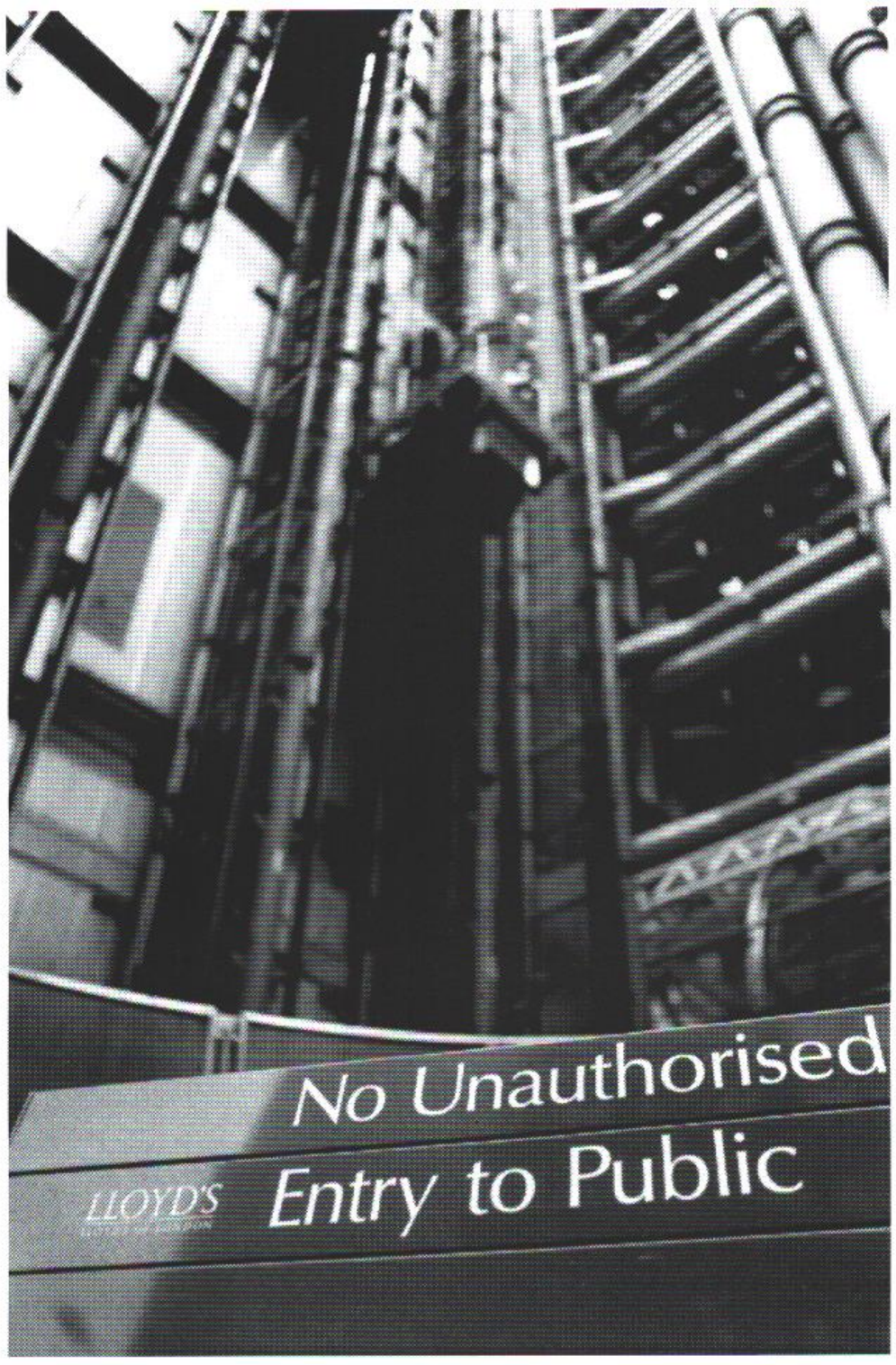
In the case of Prince Charles there is at least some consistency between his parochial concern with 'community' and his unimaginative taste in architecture. There is, however, something sadly incongruous about a brilliant modernistic innovator like Rogers espousing such views—especially when this leads him to idealise an often sordid reality. Rogers' concern with building for the 'community' also involves him in some frustrating contradictions. The contrasting fate of the Pompidou Centre and the Lloyds building attests to this, the one built as a kind of 'people's palace', the other a monument to capitalist money-making.

'One of the exhilarating moments of my career', Rogers claimed in his first Reith Lecture, 'was when the Parisian authorities agreed to give half the site they set aside for the Pompidou Centre to a public piazza'. But the reality of that piazza—the Place Beauburg outside the Pompidou Centre—has not corresponded with Rogers' communitarian idyll. The Place Beauburg is more like a giant sieve of humanity, filtering the constant flow of tourists and leaving behind a semi-permanent residue, composed of three-chord buskers, punks, winos and Christian evangelists. The sense of decultured, slump-induced atomisation is palpable, as the seventies pop songs and hymns of praise mingle with the permanent stench of urine. And always, of course, there is the police, forever on the lookout for ethnic diversity of the wrong sort.

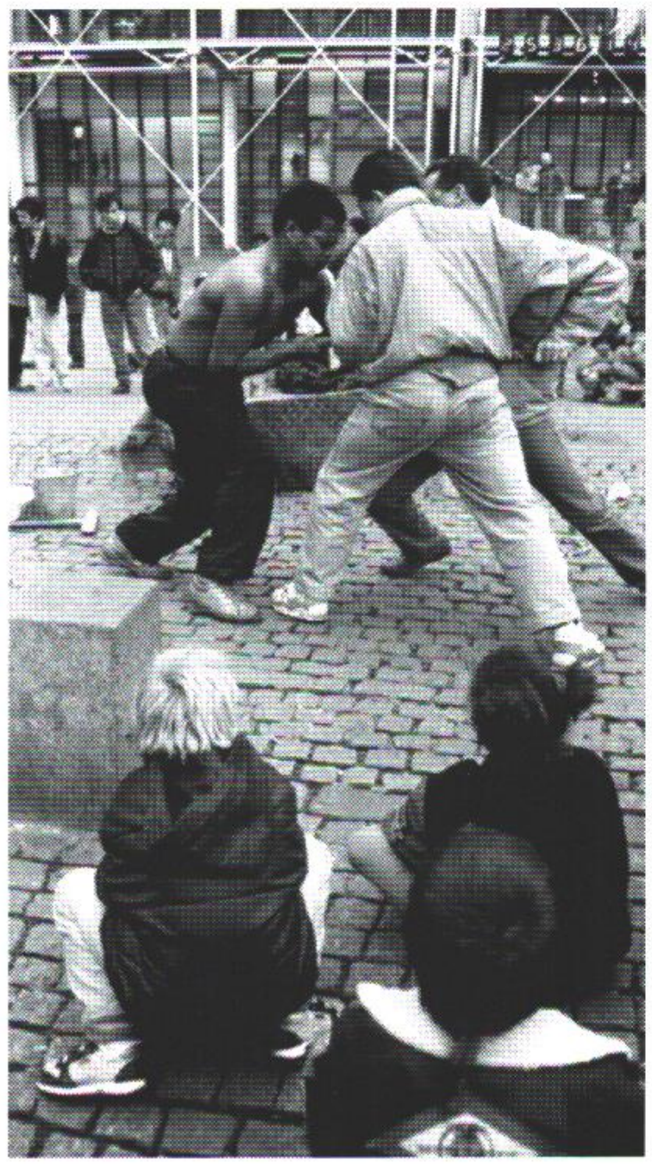
The steady degeneration of the Place Beauburg shows the absurdity of trying to create a community space for a community that does not exist. A similar conflict between architectural ideals and social reality is evident in the Pompidou Centre itself. The aim here was 'to establish not remote museums, but vibrant public meeting places' which would enable 'two-way participation between people and activities/exhibits'.

In a society in which ordinary people were engaged in the conscious and collective shaping of their lives, such a concept of a museum would very likely flourish. But it is utopian to suppose that people can take an active role in their cultural experience when in every other respect they are simply reacting as best they can to forces beyond their control.

It is not surprising then that the Pompidou Centre should lend itself more to distraction than to interaction. The huge internal spaces tend to emphasise the sense of aimlessness, making it feel chaotic when full, and desolate when empty. Yet the building itself is hugely inventive, if a little ungainly, and there are moments when one can glimpse the potential it would have in a different social context.



Private harmony, public discord: the Lloyds building (above) and the Pompidou Centre's piazza (right)



PHOTOS: MICHAEL KRAMER

The contrast with the Lloyds building is instructive here. The building owes a great deal to the experience of the Pompidou Centre, though even in purely formal terms it is decidedly superior, confirming Rogers as one of the most creative architects of our time. The interior especially is breathtaking: the 93-metre high atrium, at the centre of the building, leads the eye in a thrilling upward rush through unimpeded space. The view from the top, looking downwards on to the marble floor and the silent interplay of escalators, is equally impressive. The silent movement up and down between these vantage points reveals a masterpiece of harmonious invention. But more than the architectural features, it is the difference in ambience between the two buildings which is striking.

In the Lloyds headquarters, as against the Pompidou Centre, the unity of the architectural conception is complemented by a sense of common purpose among those who use the building. Of course it is a common purpose of a narrow kind, born out of subordination to a money-making enterprise. The paradox is that Rogers' greatest architectural achievement, the one that gives us the most exhilarating sense of man's potential, is inescapably a temple of private property, accessible only with a special pass through imposing security. Conversely, the Pompidou Centre, freely open to all and self-consciously user-friendly, leaves one feeling almost as futile and atomised as the losers who congregate on the piazza outside its doors. ●

THE MARXIST REVIEW OF BOOKS

Peter Ray explains why homosexuality has turned respectable

Going straight

Sexing the City: Lesbian and Gay Politics within the Activist State, Davina Cooper, Rivers Oram, £30 hbk, £11.95 pbk

A Simple Matter of Justice?: Theorizing Lesbian and Gay Politics, Angelia Wilson, Cassell, £35 hbk, £10.99 pbk

Stonewall 25: The Making of the Lesbian and Gay Community in Britain, Emma Healey and Angela Mason (eds), Virago, £6.99 pbk

My American History, Sarah Schulman, Cassell, £12.99 pbk

Stonewall 25: The Making of the Lesbian and Gay Community in Britain was published last year to celebrate 25 years of gay liberation. Angela Mason, co-editor and Executive Director of the gay lobby group Stonewall, outraged some gay commentators with her introductory remark:

'It would be difficult not to sense a feeling of optimism and hope about lesbian and gay politics. At the "fag" end of the twentieth century, as other progressive movements fail and falter, lesbians and gay men are the one social group for whom life seems to be getting better.' (p3)

Despite accusations of complacency about the position of lesbians and gays, Mason has a point. The rest of the book is largely made up of statements by often rather rich and famous lesbians and gay men about how great gay culture is and what terrible things homophobia and the closet do to people. This would indeed have been inconceivable 25 years ago.

The lesbian and gay community has come a long way from the Stonewall riot of 1969 when Manhattan's drag queens fought the police for three nights and indirectly gave birth to 'gay liberation'. Today community queens sit on consultative committees with the police and are even on occasion entertained by prime ministers and princesses. A ritual nod to Stonewall is still *de rigueur,* however, as a radical heritage of riots and persecution remains quite attractive to a movement that is not averse to a little civil disobedience in pursuit of justice. However, all in all, the gay community is a pretty respectable outfit nowadays.

How things have changed. Just seven years ago lesbians and gays were the prime target of every reactionary politician and newspaper. In Britain, Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act was passed to ban councils from any promotion of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship'. The law seemed to be the beginning of a campaign to drive gays back into the closet. As Sarah Schulman describes in *My American History,* the campaign against gay men in America led to the closure of New York bath houses under the pretext of stopping the spread of Aids.

The anti-gay climate of the eighties was a corollary of the pro-family policies of right-wing governments in Britain, America and elsewhere. The more important family values were as a bulwark of conservatism, the more that homosexuality stood out as the negation of straight respectability. Today the antagonism between the establishment and gays has mellowed. The age of consent for gay men in Britain was recently reduced from 21 to 18: still not equal with the heterosexual 16, but a considerable liberalisation from a Conservative government. How did the gay community make the transition from 'loony left' cause to respectability?

Part of the answer is supplied by Davina Cooper's *Sexing the City*. As Labour's youngest and most left-wing councillor in the London Borough of Haringey in the eighties, Cooper struck a heroic pose, spurring on the opponents of Clause 28 in a leather jacket from the marble balconies of the Civic Centre in Wood Green. Her book provides a candid account of lesbian and gay participation in the municipal radicalism of the eighties, and its limitations in advancing lesbian and gay sexual politics.

Though she does not spell it out, Cooper demonstrates that, despite the name, the 'loony left' period was one in which lesbian and gay politics were transformed from the pursuit of liberation to the promotion of a special interest. In the mid-1980s, in Manchester and several London boroughs, Labour councils adopted equal opportunities policies that included lesbians and gay men and set up various initiatives intended to aid homosexual ▶

users of council services: everything from funding gay community centres to instituting gay nights in municipal swimming pools. These policies caused huge controversy which culminated in the 'positive images' row in Haringey.

In 1986 workers in Haringey's lesbian and gay unit sent a letter to teachers reminding them of the council's policy commitment 'to promote positive images of lesbians and gays' in the borough's schools. The letter provoked outrage among the council's Conservative opponents and led to the formation of the Parents' Rights Group (PRG), which opposed the idea that homosexuality should be taught as 'an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality'. Nationally the Tory Party seized on this row and incorporated its terminology—promoting homosexuality as an acceptable alternative—into Section 28 of the Local Government Act, provoking the largest gay rights demonstrations ever seen in Britain.

It was the very process of 'empowerment' engendered by 'state activism' that turned lesbians and gays into a respectable 'community'

In *Sexing the City* many of the activists in this process are interviewed, and they tell an interesting story. The whole strategy of using local councils as a forum for the promotion of homosexuality emerged as the heady days of the seventies sexual revolution dwindled away. The commercial gay scene was growing, 'increasingly...gay men could lead gay lives' and in these circumstances 'identity affirmation rather than sexual deconstruction became the priority' (p23). Political horizons were being lowered—no longer were gay activists seeking to overturn the heterosexuality required by the regime of the nuclear family. Lambeth council leader Linda Bellos comments that she no longer found lesbian separatism an appropriate strategy; 'realism' and 'anti-utopianism' were taking over among lesbian feminists. As Cooper puts it:

'What was demanded was not "revolution" but reforms that would defend and protect social identities such as homosexuality. Thus the focus shifted towards state provision and services including those of local government.' (p23)

Many lesbian and gay activists joined the Labour Party and found sympathetic ears for civil rights and anti-discrimination arguments among its left wing. However, there was little serious questioning of society's moral norms. 'For many, the admission of lesbian and gay "equality" on to Labour Party agendas was something to which they had given little thought—a knee-jerk reaction of the "right-on" left.' (p29) At the same time, key gay activists report that 'as an organised community...they [gays] were not a primary motivating force in establishing lesbian and gay municipal structures' (p33). That was done by the council and Labour Party machines. 'We were very introspective and insular', says Linda Bellos, 'local government took the initiative' (p33).

It would seem that the idea of protecting the lesbian and gay social identity was never in itself all that controversial. Even the PRG representative at a Haringey council meeting at the height of the positive images controversy felt obliged to say: 'We acknowledge gays and lesbians living in communities are subject to prejudice. We are not inciting hatred against gays and lesbians. We don't object to the existence of this element of our society or their right to be regarded as people.' (pp115-16) It matters little that this disclaimer does not sound entirely genuine, since, as Cooper points out, the very fact that the right deemed it necessary to make the statement indicates the 'dominance of a quasi-liberal sexual politics'. So what was all the 'loony left' fuss about?

In fact it was not gay lifestyles that offended the Tories, locally or nationally. As long as homosexuality remained behind closed doors it was no problem to the Parents' Rights Group. Their concern was not homosexuality, but heterosexuality, and in particular the heterosexual family. It was only because the family was perceived to be weak that lesbians and gays became the target of a shrill moral crusade.

Of course none of these policies—nor for that matter Section 28 itself—had much impact on the ground, and the reaction of the right does seem paranoid when the real extent of lesbian and gay initiatives is considered. The fashion for lesbian and gay units passed, as much a result of spending cuts in the austerity of the nineties as of the impact of Tory anti-gay laws. The important effect they had was to establish the idea of 'the gay community' through municipal support for the various voluntary projects and quangos. Cooper concludes that the benefit of the council struggles of the eighties was the 'sense of empowerment, that state activism, however contested and difficult, had provided' (p186).

In fact it was the very process of 'empowerment' engendered by 'state activism' that turned lesbians and gays into a respectable 'community'. In the days of gay liberation, out homosexuality was a self-conscious challenge to the staid world of heterosexual respectability. But the attempts to 'defend and protect' lesbian and gay lifestyle choices against the reaction of the eighties made so many concessions that those lifestyles themselves became a model of sexual responsibility.

The 'positive image' of lesbians and gays was that they were straight

The 'positive images' put forward by Haringey and other local authorities invariably emphasised the most respectable face of homosexuality. Lesbians and gay men were represented in stable and caring relationships, ideally caring for children, as in the children's book *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin,* which became embroiled in the Haringey row. In fact the 'positive image' of lesbians and gays was that they were straight. These straight gays were even more responsible sexual partners than heterosexuals, always using a condom and carefully enquiring into their lovers' sexual histories.

Working through the local authorities was an education for a generation of gay activists. They were being tutored in how to make their case respectable. In the process they were making a 180-degree turn. Where homosexuality had been the antithesis of sexual responsibility, it was rapidly becoming its exemplar.

Lesbian Avenger Sarah Schulman shows how even in the USA the reaction against homosexuality was a kind of education in how to become respectable. When the big campaigns to close the bath houses took off, gay activists fought to ensure that they kept the initiative in 'changing lifestyles'. She quotes proposals from Michael Kallen of the gay Coalition for Sexual Responsibility on how to reform the bath houses: 'hand each patron—upon admission—a brochure and a condom...the lights turned up to reduce anonymity and to encourage people to talk about health issues and safe-sex practices...community groups to come in and do education on their premises.' (*My American History,* p105) With gay activists like these, who needs bigots?

The authors are united by their contempt for the majority, who are held culpable for anti-gay prejudice

Today gay pressure groups like Stonewall see the empowering experience of local government activism as having laid the basis for their campaigns for law reform like that around the age of consent. *A Simple Matter of Justice?* deals with the new politics of gay campaigning. The question mark in the title bears witness to the lowered horizons of lesbian and gay activists. Adopting the language of justice implies a demand for equality. However, the contributions here all tend towards the idea that the appropriate goal is the defence of difference, the preservation of lesbian and gay lifestyles, rather than equal rights.

Most of the authors are united by their contempt for the majority, who are held culpable for anti-gay prejudice. Angelia Wilson describes the electorate as 'those who see heterosexuality threatened by the granting of human rights to gay men and lesbians'(p2); journalist David Smith complains of 'working class homophobes'; to Paisley Currah discrimination 'serves no legitimate government interest except to give public sanction to private biases'. Indeed, whenever straights are blamed for the oppression of lesbians and gays, the authorities are excused for their anti-gay campaigns. The arguments in *A Simple Matter of Justice?* reflect the failure of lesbian and gay activists to win wider support when they were under attack. The conservative conclusion is that society at large will never grant equal rights for lesbians and gays, but the state might be persuaded to protect the gilded ghetto of lesbian and gay lifestyles.

David Evans' exceptional essay, '(Homo)sexual citizenship: a queer kind of justice', argues forcefully against the idea that homosexuality is a condition determined by biology. Gay activists have supported the idea that homosexuality cannot be taught—either you are or you are not. But, as Evans points out, the idea that homosexuality is natural cannot serve as a basis for claims to just treatment. For people to be treated equally, like must be compared with like, but if 'gay men and lesbians can't help being what they are' then they are 'morally, because biologically, distinct' and have the right only to be treated as such, 'outwith the moral community'. To the extent that natural difference is relied upon, claims to '"fairness" and "equality" have been conceded' (p134).

Evans is quite correct to point out that there cannot be equality between those who are different. However, his own alternative to the view that there is a natural division between homosexuality and heterosexuality is even worse.

Following the French sociologist Michel Foucault, Evans questions the idea of legal equality, saying that equality before the law only disguises the real inequality of power between straight and gay identities. However, Evans' rejection of the formality of legal equality does not lead to a demand for real social equality, only to a demand for respect towards different identities.

Evans thinks that sexual identities are not natural but 'socially constructed': 'As consuming citizens we seek to purchase our fetishized individual unique sexual identities and lifestyles within the increasingly self-imposed confinement of sexual communities.' (p116) He concludes that if we can popularise the idea that sexual identities are socially constructed in this manner then there will be the basis for a regime based on 'equality of respect' between those who have purchased different sexual identities. But equality of respect is not the same as equal rights. It means that in Soho's Old Compton Street lesbian and gay lifestyles are allowed, but elsewhere they might constitute disrespect towards family values, and need to be curbed.

Evans' version of the way that lesbian and gay identities are 'socially constructed' overemphasises choice. Sexual identities are not like purchases. Whatever people do individually, the choices available are not written and performed in '"cultural scenarios" in the form of intra- and inter-personal scripts' as he describes it (p115).

Evans' version of the way that lesbian and gay identities are 'socially constructed' overemphasises choice. Sexual identities are not like purchases

The lesbian and gay lifestyle promoted in these books is not an inter-personal script or individual purchase. Rather it is the outcome of a bruising and intense education that wider society put lesbian and gay activists through in the eighties. In that sense the identities that have been created —through the offices of local government, the imposition of Section 28, the Aids campaign and the lowering of the age of consent—are quite definitive.

Lesbian and gay identities are respectable lifestyle choices today that encourage serial monogamy and sexual responsibility; they are counterposed to the bigotry of the masses, and prefer protests and lobbying to the ballot box. In a recent TV appearance, leading queer activist Peter Tatchell asserted that unlike straight men, gay men were not 'rough, aggressive and domineering', and he lightheartedly proposed that: 'It might be a good idea for any enlightened government to look at ways in which more men could be encouraged to be gay, because then you wouldn't have football hooliganism, yobs rampaging around council estates and ripping things to pieces.' (*Out of Order,* 8 February 1995)

When homosexuality can be promoted as a bulwark of respectability, it is easy to understand why pressure groups like Stonewall might be optimistic, but their status as a 'progressive movement' must be questionable.

The Death of Economics, Paul Ormerod, Faber & Faber, £6.99 pbk

As a one-time economic forecaster, Paul Ormerod has written an exposé of economics as it is practised that is readable and funny. His thesis is compelling: economics does not work. He shows how the models of economic behaviour used by academic economics are so divorced from reality as to be useless as a guide to the economy. In particular Ormerod shows the absurd assumptions made by mathematical models of the economy that seek to demonstrate that there is a general equilibrium at which all commodities get sold. To reach an equilibrium, economic models must 'assume a continuum of traders' which means that the number of people trading is infinite; that there is no passage of time; and that everyone knows the prices of all the commodities.

On top of the sheer implausibility of academic economic models, Ormerod recounts that the models of real economies used by forecasters are unreliable. The single most reliable method of predicting economic figures, he says, is to reproduce last year's figures.

But good as Ormerod's exposure of economic orthodoxy is, his main purpose is to elevate the idea that nothing can be understood all that well because we cannot know the effects of our decisions. On the one hand he is scathing of the free market orthodoxy for its failure to take into account social factors—by which he means environmental damage or the negative impact of poverty and unemployment. On the other hand he implicitly rejects the idea that the economy can be planned, because he assumes that it cannot really be understood.

Of course it is fair enough to make the point that a capitalist economy is in its nature spontaneous and irrational. But the conclusion that its operation cannot truly be understood is illegitimate. That only makes a virtue out of the problem and ends up ruling a rational social order out from the beginning. Ormerod is a critic of the orthodox apologetics of the theory of general equilibrium, but his own chaos theory of the economy is just as great a mystification.

James Heartfield

War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century, Alvin and Heidi Toffler, Warner Books, £5.99 pbk

Pop futurolgists Alvin and Heidi Toffler have turned their hands to analysing the development of warfare. *War and Anti-War* looks at changes in the way that war is fought and links these to the Tofflers' own schema of social change: first wave (pre-industrial), second wave (industrial) and third wave (post-industrial, knowledge-based societies).

Principally, *War and Anti-War* is concerned with the transition from second-wave societies, with their massed armies and sheer scale of force, to third-wave societies where new technology means that the way war is conducted can change. The Tofflers cite the service cuts and rapid deployment of technology as evidence that war will be different after the 'third wave'. And not just different, but less destructive.

According to the Tofflers, emerging technologies have the potential to reduce bloodshed to a minimum. They discuss precision tactics such as electronic strikes against enemy communications or the insertion of special forces with Bond-like gizmos and substances to immobilise equipment. In Somalia, US armed forces were reputedly armed with 'toffee guns', designed to immobilise opponents with a blue fluid that rapidly dries rock-hard—like prompt cement.

But toffee guns apart, thousands of Somalis were killed in the technologically advanced operation. The only discernible advantage of the new technology was the massively disproportionate death-tally between the overarmed UN forces and the often unarmed Somalis. The real change brought about by new technologies is 'more bangs for your buck', an increase in effective force. As to non-lethal technologies, Northern Ireland's nationalists can attest to the fact that plastic bullets kill you too. So do not be surprised when you read about the first toffee gun death.

Since the First World War, the Western powers have relied more and more upon military hardware while reducing the numerical strength of their armed forces. As a consequence, the Tofflers manage to present the poor and the powerless countries of the third world as the real warmongers, because they are supposed to have many people under arms. Meanwhile the Western states with the military might to destroy the world promote their global authority in the guise of non-violent toffee guns and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. *War and Anti-War* pins the blame for militarism on the usual fall guys—religious fundamentalists, terrorist regimes, tribal warlords—while excusing the overwhelming murderous might of the West as 'non-lethal'.

Dave Alvis

The Times Guide to the New British State: The Government Machine in the 1990s, Michael Dynes and David Walker, Times Books, £16.99 hbk

'A village in which post is delivered and everyone is on first name terms while underneath, as in Ambridge, there is back-biting and name calling.' This anodyne metaphor for Whitehall hides some of the world's most effective repressive machinery: £1.6 billion worth of Metropolitan Police, 10 700 spies at MI5, MI6 and GCHQ, and a sprawling network of departments, official bodies and quangos that govern every aspect of life. Dynes and Walker are good at describing Whitehall. In particular they show that the informal character of British government is flexible while still having clear lines of command.

They are less successful at uncovering the 'new local governance', where Whitehall is taking responsibilities away from elected authorities to hand them over to quangos. One figure they do cite is that the burgeoning unelected bodies in Wales already spend as much as £2.2 billion—approaching the £2.7 billion spent by local authorities. The small matter of the police force (outside London) and the armed forces is a glaring omission from this survey of the state.

William Deighton

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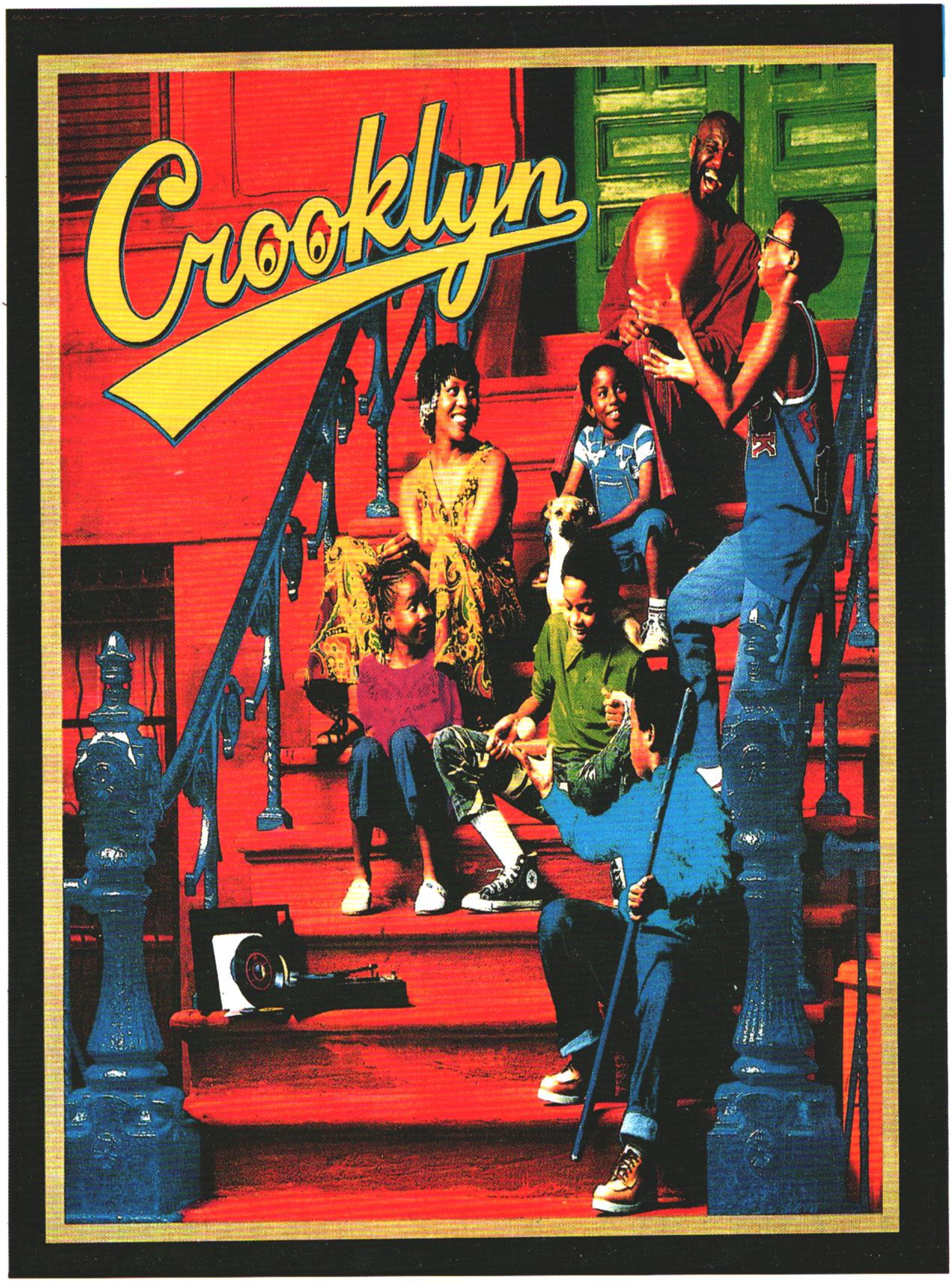

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