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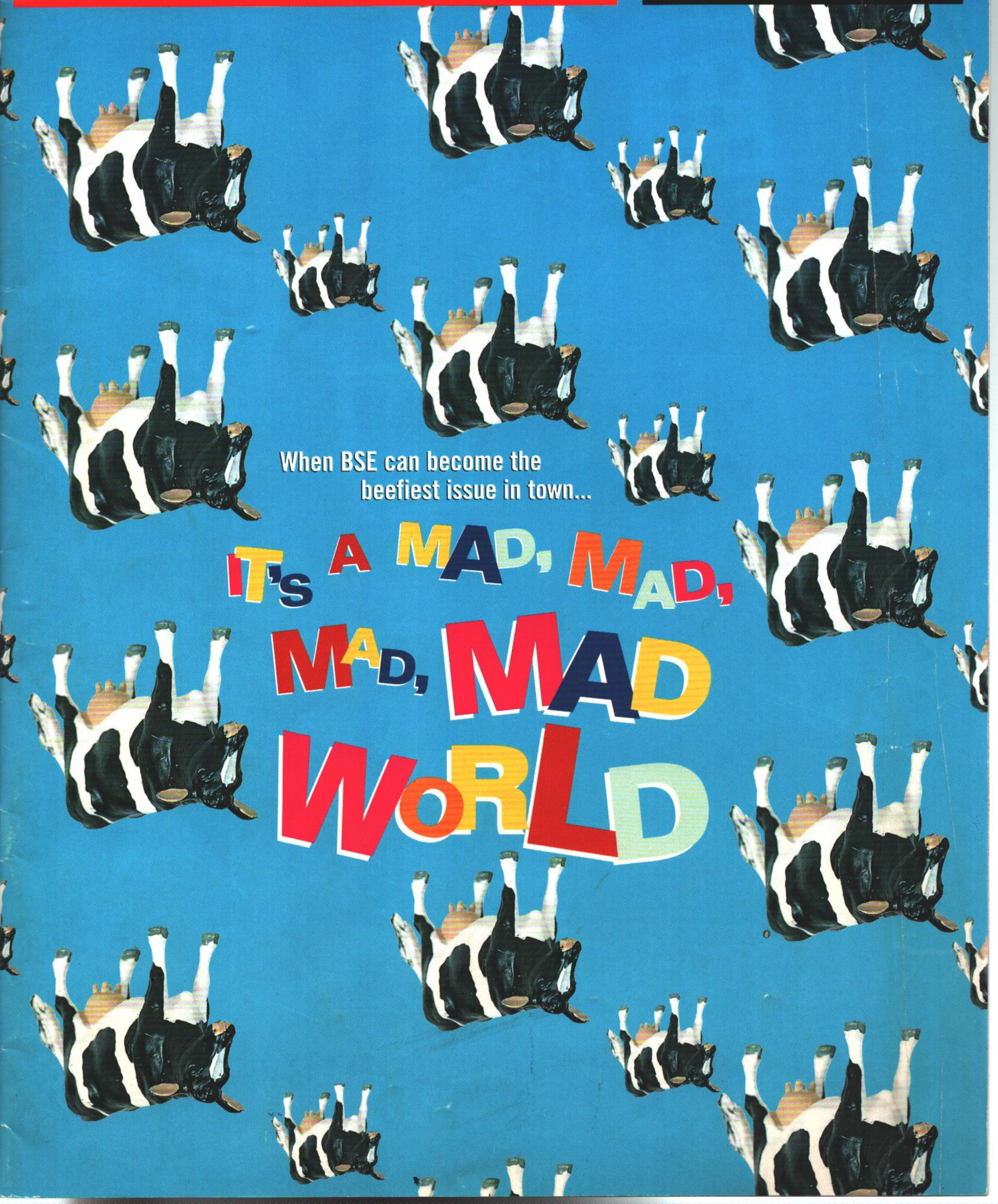
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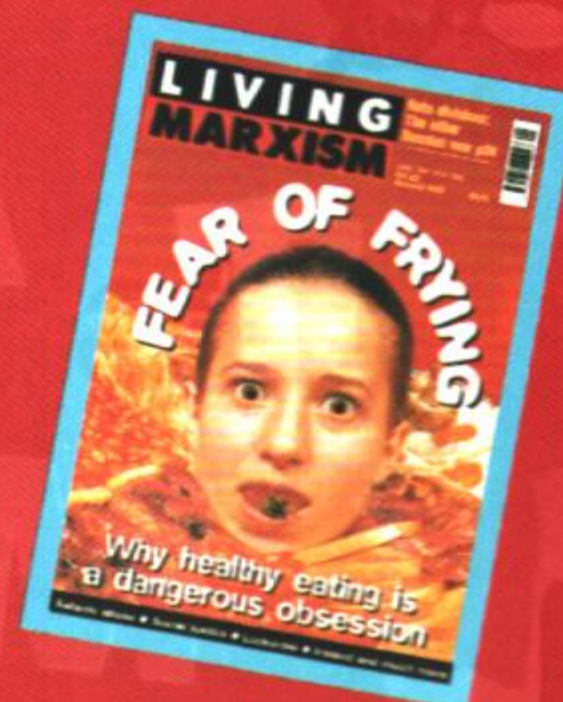
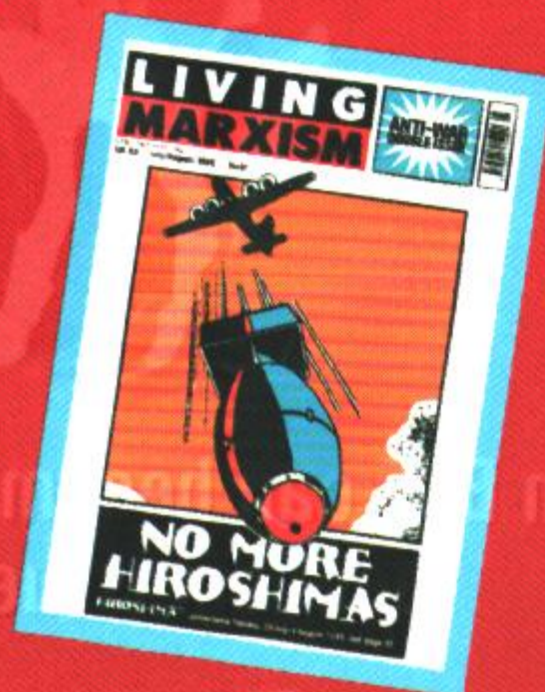
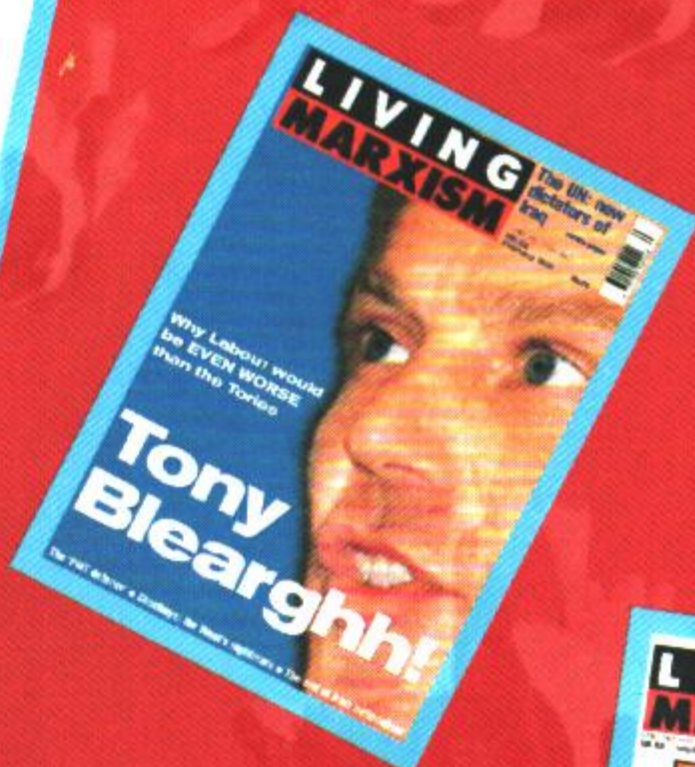
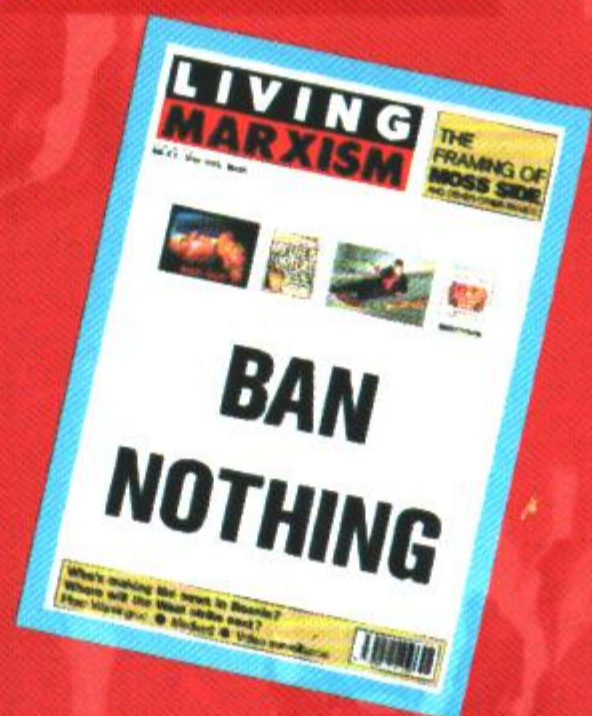
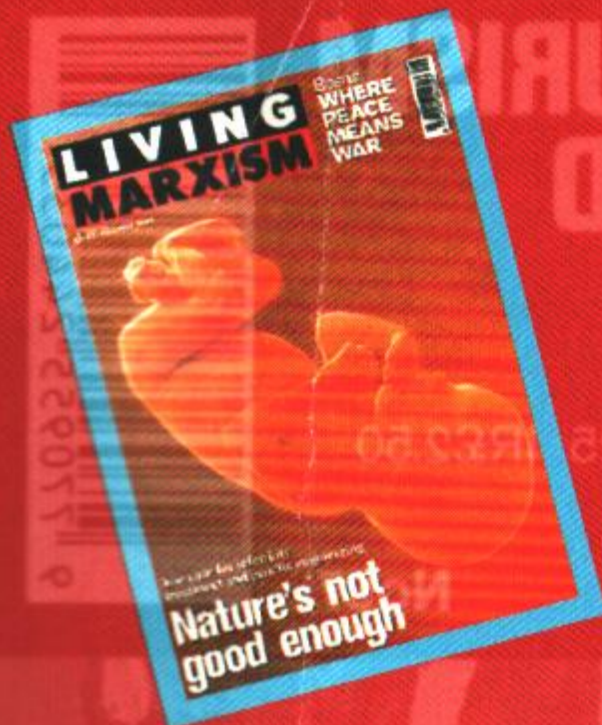
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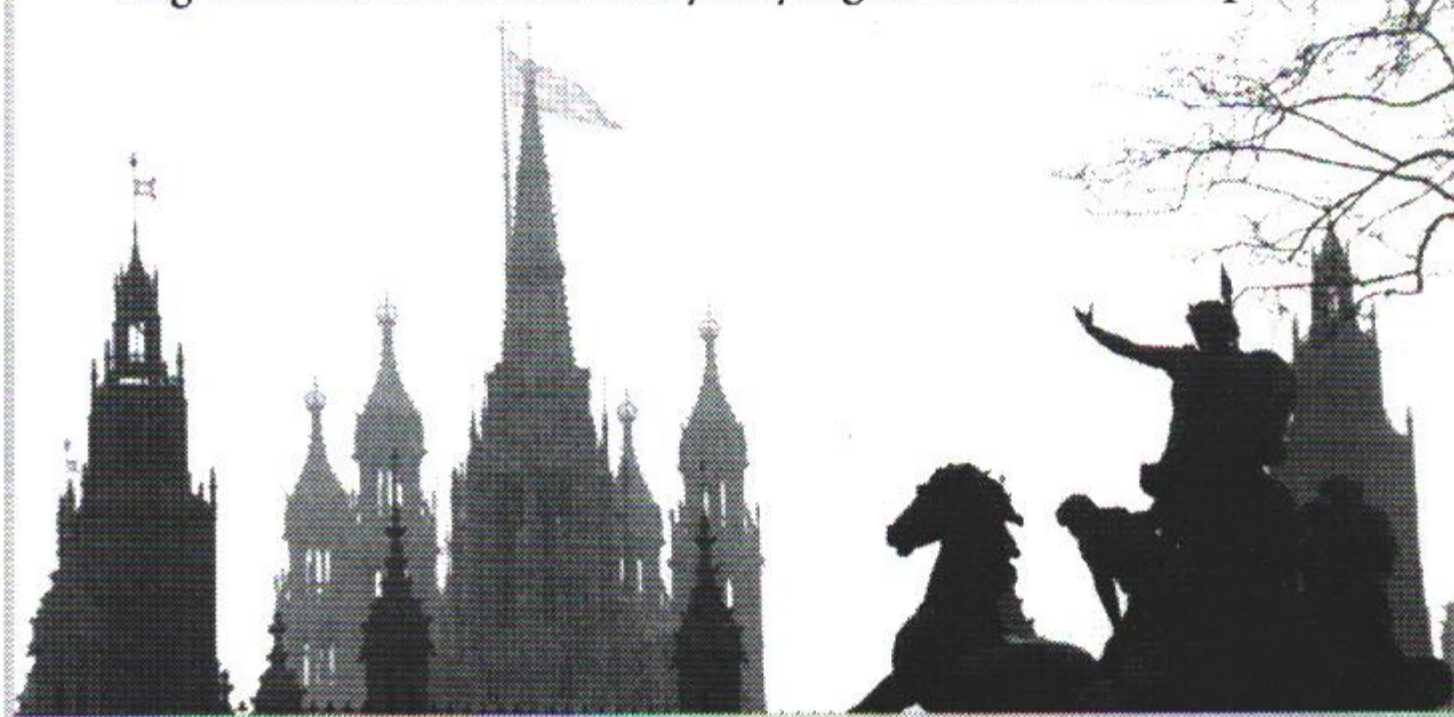
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THE STATE OF THE STATE TODAY

centre pages

Frank Furedi argues that the new debates about the ineffectiveness of government action are mystifying the issue of state power.



FOR THE TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY

page 27

James Heartfield would rather take his chance with the plebs than rely on the experts.



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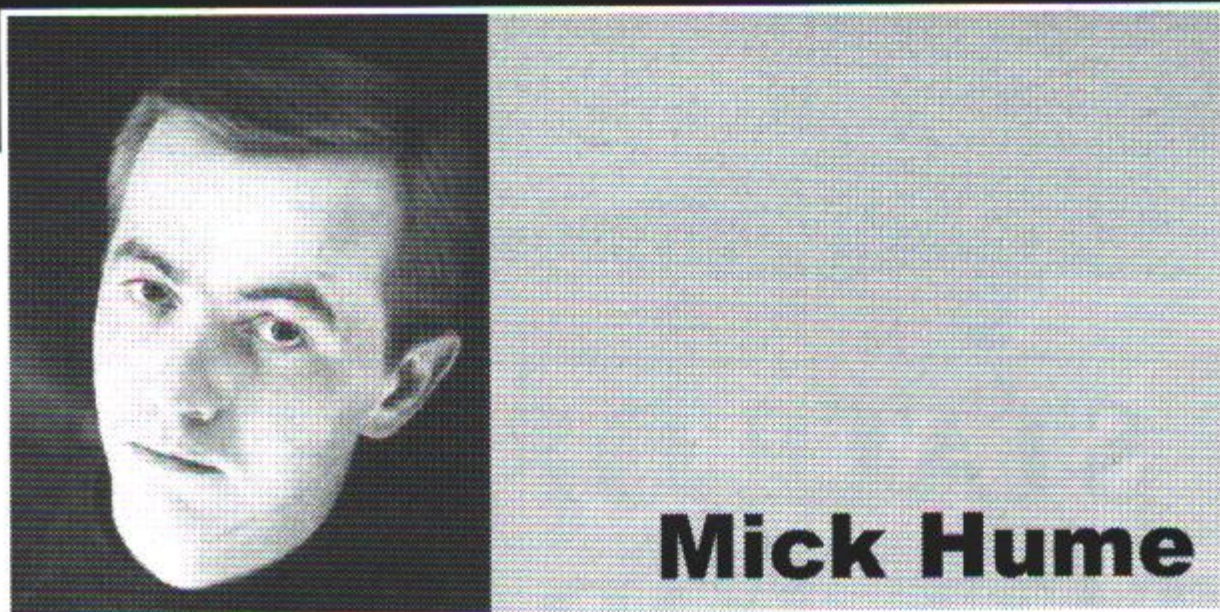
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Mick Hume

Why mad cows are bigger than EMU

For months the media has been full of excited talk about political ferment, Tory Party splits and defections, and impending general elections. So why, some have asked, have most of *Living Marxism's* front covers and lead features focused on apparently non-political issues: like the panics about the contraceptive pill and the coming of new plagues, the circus surrounding the National Lottery and Princess Diana, or the scares over ecstasy and now mad cow disease.

Our unconventional choice of issues is motivated by something more than a journalistic bid to cover topics a bit hotter than boring old Major and Blair. It reflects a real shift in the character of political debate and in the way that different issues now influence people's lives—a shift which anybody who hopes to make an impact on public opinion today has got to come to terms with.

More than ever, there is now a yawning gulf between the world of parliamentary politics and the world where the rest of us live. This is not, as some experts would have it, because most people are deeply apathetic about political debate. It is because there is no real political debate for anybody to feel apathetic or otherwise about in Britain today.

A glance at the Conservative government's legislative programme confirms that the Tories have nothing left to offer, save the fag-ends of their privatisation drive and more and more law-and-order measures. New Labour's dramatic alternative was summed up in January, when Tony Blair promised Japanese businessmen that a Labour government's priorities would be

keeping the lid on public spending and holding down inflation—in other words, carry on Treasury austerity. Against this background of political exhaustion and inertia, the two sides of the House of Commons conduct a phoney war, swapping little insults and soundbites in a 'debate' devoid of contrasting visions of society.

The fiercest battles today are fought within the parliamentary parties rather than between them. Without coherent programmes and stable constituencies to hold them together, the old parties look more like loose collections of squabbling factions. Most of the tensions inside Blair's New Labour have been temporarily suppressed, as everybody tries to button their lips until after the election. Inside the despairing Tory Party, however, it is every man and woman for him or herself. The defection of Emma Nicholson MP to the Liberal Democrats, following the departure of Alan Howarth MP to Labour, shows the Conservatives tearing themselves apart. Yet here, too, the most striking thing is the lack of impact which these dramas now make on people outside the parliamentary world.

In the past, defections and splits from the major parties—such as the break-up and realignment of the Tory Party over Irish Home Rule around the First World War, or the radical Independent Labour Party's breakaway from Ramsay MacDonald's Labour in 1932—tended to be around big national issues and shook the political system to its foundations. Today's disputes look tame by comparison. Those splitting are either marginalised figures living in the past (like Arthur Scargill and his putative Socialist Labour Party), or embittered

individuals seeking to settle scores or advance their careers (like Howarth and Nicholson). Meanwhile, everybody else goes about their business unmoved by Labour's rows over women-only shortlists or Tory controversies over the Euro-currency.

As the run-up to the next general election begins, public loyalty to any of the major parties is at a low ebb. That is why, despite the unprecedented collapse of Tory support in the polls, New Labour's leaked internal reports show that Blair's team are still not sure of winning themselves. Most people—and especially younger people—are entirely detached from the political process. There is a general sense that everything which goes wrong is somehow the government's fault, but no real enthusiasm for any other party or policy either.

It might be thought that a critical magazine like *Living Marxism*, which owes no allegiance to any parliamentary party, would be keen to encourage the mood of disaffection from traditional politics, say with some tub-thumping frontpage features about Tory corruption. But things are not so straightforward today.

The widespread anti-politics feeling now goes much deeper than simple hostility to the incompetence of Major or the opportunism of Blair. It is underpinned by a broader loss of belief in the idea that any political movement, or any collective of people, could act to alter things for the better. And that is a major problem for those of us who want to change the way the world is run.

The coincidence of an economic depression with the exhaustion of the old politics of both left and right has created

a unique kind of consensus: one which senses that capitalist society is going nowhere, but which accepts all the same that there is no alternative to the status quo. The result is a mood of political paralysis. There is a widespread feeling of uncertainty and powerlessness among people whose lack of faith in politics reflects the fact that ultimately they no longer feel very confident of anything or anybody, including themselves. This is where the important influence of the 'non-political' issues like mad cow disease, highlighted in *Living Marxism*, makes itself felt.

As Dr Michael Fitzpatrick examines elsewhere in this issue, the irrational scare over the potential spread of BSE marks another advance for Britain's collective anxiety. These days we are exposed to an endless stream of panics and scares about supposedly increased risks to our personal health, personal safety and personal security. Beefburgers, alcohol, ecstasy, sex, hitchhiking, road rage, computer porn, knives, peanuts and scratchcards are just a few of the more recent dangers which people have been told pose a growing risk to them and their children.

While a few of these scares may seem too silly to have much impact, overall the plague of panics acts and interacts to reinforce a general sense of insecurity in society. Such social insecurity can only encourage conservatism and regression at every turn.

The constant emphasis upon the need to live more 'sensibly' and act more 'responsibly' these days is pressing everybody to batten down the hatches and take fewer chances. And if people are becoming more reticent about experimenting in their personal lives, they will be many times more reluctant to stick their necks out in public or political life. That is one reason why countering the paralysing impact of the 'non-political' scares and panics is such a priority for those of us who want to gain a hearing for political alternatives today.

Countering the paralysing impact of these 'non-political' scares and panics is a priority

The first thing to grasp is that we are dealing with an entirely unprecedented situation. Of course, the media have always spread scare stories about crime and disease. The difference today is that, for the first time, circumstances have combined in such a way that these issues are often the *decisive* ones shaping people's outlook on life.

In particular, the demise of the old collective identities associated with left and right, and of class politics, has removed an important counter-pressure. People left with a more intense sense of themselves as atomised, powerless individuals, disconnected from any wider social or political arena, are naturally more preoccupied with concerns about personal health and safety. They are also more likely to fall prey to demands for more authoritarian measures of regulation, protection and control—demands which the law-and-order lobby of both New Labour and the old Tories are eager to accommodate. That is why, if we want to shake up the public climate of today, a panic about mad cow disease really is a more pressing matter to deal with than an issue like EMU which preoccupies the political elites but leaves others cold.

Coming to terms with the sea-change that is occurring in political life has important consequences for our own actions and arguments. It means that, if we want to have

something relevant to say today, we have to evolve our politics in a new direction. Many of the issues and slogans traditionally thought of as 'left-wing' are at best irrelevant now. The job in hand is to look at things afresh, in order to identify what are the most powerful contemporary ideological barriers to the spread of revolutionary ideas at the end of the century.

That is the project which *Living Marxism* has been engaged in over the past couple of years. As a result of our efforts to pioneer a new generation of anti-capitalist politics, and to test the efficacy of different arguments today, we have come closer to understanding the demands of the new climate in which we all live and work.

If it is to be an appropriate tool for countering conservatism in our times, the politics of *Living Marxism* will often have to be developed around the apparently 'non-political' issues which exercise such influence in the here and now. As the countdown to the general election raises the political temperature, we will be seeking to intervene in the campaign around these themes. Anybody who might have thought that our recent emphasis on such issues was a temporary diversion before we get back to talking about 'real' politics is going to be as disappointed as they are outdated. Far more than anything coming from the ailing beasts of Westminster, this is the real politics of today.

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

Rotten lottery

'A killjoy's and loser's guide to the lottery' (December) left me feeling rather disillusioned. I thought that being a communist meant believing that all humans deserve equal wealth, rights and opportunity. It seems that communism has been redefined. A communist is now someone who (despite the existence of widespread deprivation) should regard £20m residing in a singular bank account as 'harmless fun'.

Blaming the lottery for the ills of society is irrational, and the article rightly chastises those who look upon the working classes as a mass of weak-willed idiots. However, the lottery warrants criticism, for it epitomises everything that is abhorrent about capitalism. It is the crowning glory of the self-centred money culture, giving random sums of money to individuals whose case for receiving it is no stronger than anyone else's.

Many people regard their lives as being unconsummated without riches and luxury. Surely we should be attempting to put things into perspective for them, and campaigning to get money channelled into areas where it is needed. If random cash handouts worth millions are not worth criticising for being unfair, then what is exactly? Am I a 'killjoy' for complaining about the luxury that the royal family revels in?

Ted Thornhill *Buckingham*

Mick Hume, in his 'Killjoy's and loser's guide to the lottery' quotes right-wing journalist Boris Johnson, who called the lottery 'a tax on stupidity'. I recently came across a published interview with right-on singer Edwyn Collins, in which he cites a friend and *Face* writer's description of the lottery as 'the stupidity tax'. At a time when all sorts of commentators have hit upon the purchase of lottery tickets as an opportunity to pontificate about the supposedly feckless, irresponsible and generally stupid behaviour of working class people, it seems all the more important to me not to give in to any aspect of the new urban myth of the lottery as the root of all evil.

Carole Hempson *Norwich*

Safe SM

The Law Commission recently published its recommendations on amending the laws on assault in the aftermath of Operation Spanner. Readers may remember this case, in which 16 men who had admitted engaging in sado-masochistic (SM) sexual activities were convicted of assault and given prison sentences and fines, despite the fact that the 'victims' had all willingly consented—they were sentenced too for complicity in assaults on

themselves. While the sentences were decreased on appeal, the convictions were upheld and the case is now due before the European Court of Human Rights.

The Law Commission recommends bringing SM, together with other activities like body-piercing, tattooing, religious circumcision and mortification, contact sports and medical procedures, under a general principle that a person over 18 should be able to consent to an assault providing it does not cause 'serious injury'—anything that is permanently disabling, maiming or disfiguring. It would be left to the courts to decide the precise definition, though the commission doesn't regard what the Spanner defendants did as serious injury, so they presumably would not have been convicted under these recommendations. Liberty, SM Gays and support group Countdown On Spanner have welcomed the recommendations, which seem to be the most liberal of the alternatives the commission considered. But in reality the report marks yet another backward, authoritarian measure in our increasingly policed and controlled society.

Though the commission appears to reject the judge's decision, it accepts the principle that people cannot unconditionally consent to assault for sexual gratification: it simply wants the line to be drawn in a different place. If its proposals become law, it will bring a whole new area of behaviour under the formal control of the police and courts for the first time, giving the state the right to decide what does and does not constitute acceptable SM activity and to pry even further into our bedrooms.

There are other implications too. Tattooing, for example, has long been a commonplace activity, and though it was disapproved of by 'respectable' people, the only questions on which it was seen as appropriate for the law to intervene were those of safety and hygiene. Now tattooists will have to worry about whether their work is 'disfiguring' or not, and the chattering classes will pontificate about whether it should be allowed above the neckline or across the knuckles.

Of course the law has never accepted the principle that people have unconditional rights to decide what to do with their own bodies. However, before Spanner, SM sex was a grey area that the law had never seen fit to regulate. Now it is yet another area of life where we cannot be trusted to look after ourselves, and where external standards have to be applied. The solution is to be more laws, more interference, more police prying and almost certainly more prosecutions for those who cross the line. The fact that supposedly progressive organisations can see it as a positive step is a sign of ever-lowering horizons.

Des de Moor *London SE14*

Rescuing the subject

In 'Rescuing the subject' (November), Frank Füredi tackles a long overdue problem of how to be critical but offer something positive in our anti-political times. The feeling that nearly everyone is anti-political and no one believes in the efficacy of human action is all-pervading in the article. Travelling overseas at the moment, two of the big issues appear to be Nigeria and the French strikes. Do the French strikes show that some people believe in the efficacy of human action, or are they just 'going through the motions' as Füredi suggests? How best to affect change in Nigeria? The response of a Nigerian friend is not to buy Shell petrol. Are protesters going for the wrong target and falling prey to the theory of globalisation? Does the state always have to be the target?

Füredi concludes with the need for a new critique 'which outlines the relationship between the impasse of the capitalist system and the intellectual and psychological trends which this has given rise to', but ends with 'a critique is no more than words'. I would like to know what practical results will follow.

Finally, while in the Australian outback, some friends and I happened upon a Shell 'road train' that was parked up. We stopped and met the driver of this triple-tanker. Should we have talked about the effects of the capitalist impasse or done a Thelma and Louise on his truck? We sat on the fence and took a photo of his gleaming chrome cab instead.

Tim Gibson *Australia*

What's your alternative?

I am a 32-year-old American graduate student at Stanford University. Recently a friend of mine from India who subscribes to your magazine gave me a copy (the December 1995 issue). I was impressed by the incisiveness of your criticism, and particularly by the number of articles which took special aim at the paternalistic way—genuine or otherwise—in which governments treat the public as children to be controlled for their own good.

Having said that, however, I have two observations. Almost without exception, your magazine seems to express automatic support for any group or cause to which the ruling Western powers, particularly the British or American governments, are opposed, eg, the Hussein regime in Iraq, the PIRA in Ulster. I can only assume that you do not offer unqualified support for the above, but merely side with them in an enemy-of-my-enemy sort of way, as they represent (to you) the lesser evil. But glossing over the undeniable dark side of such groups greatly detracts from your credibility by putting you on the same disingenuous level as those you criticise. You no longer

appear to be above the partisan fray, but just another propagandising party putting your own spin on the truth.

Secondly, your criticism was conspicuously unaccompanied by any concrete counter-proposals. It is one thing to point out—quite correctly—the hypocrisy of boycotting French goods over nuclear-testing in the South Pacific. But your contention that the Non-Proliferation Treaty is merely a means for the permanent members of the UN Security Council to maintain their nuclear monopoly—while also undeniably correct—begs the question. If wider availability of nuclear weapons is indeed your position, you are wise not to trumpet it.

In sum, though impressed with your articulation of the thesis that the real problem in all these issues is a fundamental flaw with the organisation of society, I am curious exactly what program you propose in its stead. While the title of your journal implies the alternative you have in mind, some specifics would be helpful, especially considering the variety of schools of thought which claim the label 'Marxist'. I am particularly curious how individual rights would fare, given that Marxist regimes do not exactly have a stellar track record in that area.

Robert Edwards *Stanford, California*

What's in a name?

In the last couple of issues, various correspondents have complained that the name *Living Marxism* is a stone around the neck of the magazine, which should be dropped immediately. I think they are living in the past, perhaps reliving the days of the Cold War when the M-word really was as welcome as a veal crate at a vegetarian dinner party. But the world has moved on, and these days I find calling myself a Marxist prompts fewer negative responses. Rather than becoming preoccupied with the idea of a name change, it would be better to occupy ourselves with the development of ideas for these changing times.

May I also remind these correspondents that name changes and relaunches have often been the kiss of death to newspapers, magazines and political parties. I lost count of how many times *Today* was relaunched, and each relaunch brought it closer to becoming one of yesterday's papers. And when the official Communist Parties of the West changed their names to the Nice and Democratic Alliance, it was generally (and in their case rightly)

interpreted as an admission that they had been wrong all along.

Stephanie Carter *London*

Not just a black thing

Christopher Hill (letters, January) takes issue with Eddie Veale ('A black and white case', November) for arguing that the case for equality will have to be won within white America. Instead Hill points out that black people have had to fight and die for equality. Whilst the bravery and tenacity of many blacks over the years is beyond question, Hill is naive if he imagines that equality can be achieved by those who are completely isolated. As long as the American establishment is successful in dividing society along racial lines, then blacks will be both marginalised from economic and political life, and cut off from their essential allies in the white working class.

Hill is on the right lines when he notes that 'poor whites' have had to be persuaded by 'divide-and-rule politicians' that 'blacks and immigrants are the root causes of their problems'. But he would rather talk about racism being 'fixed' by minorities than face the daunting task of challenging this view in wider society. As long as anti-racism is confined to the ghetto, that is where black people will remain.

Mark Butler *Workers Against Racism*

Misunderstanding Marcuse

I've not yet read Gillott and Kumar's *Science and the Retreat from Reason*, but Michael Fitzpatrick's review of it ('Standing up for reason', December) is a succinct defence of rationalism in a time when the latter is increasingly disparaged. It is marred, though, by a taint of dogmatism antithetical to the rationalist project of open-ended enquiry. To caricature the Frankfurt School as confused opponents of science who are responsible for the medieval fantasies of the deep greens is to miss out on some of the most suggestive areas of dialectical thought. I accept that these writers' isolation and, as Fitzpatrick says, the disruption by fascism that they suffered, led to significant errors, but not all of their work can be dismissed—and certainly not by labelling it irrationalist.

Marcuse and Adorno's concern was not to maintain the myth of Reason that is eternal, ahistorical and unconnected with ruling class interest, but to see the limitations of *bourgeois*

rationalism (particularly its 'narrowly instrumental scientism') and, indeed, how irrationalism was its dark counterpart, one that emerged out of capitalist crisis. As for Marcuse's 'anti-scientific prejudice', in one of his last essays he wrote: 'Is it still necessary to repeat that science and technology are the great vehicles of liberation, that it is only their use and restriction in the repressive society which makes them into vehicles of domination?' What Marxist could quarrel with that?

Bill Hughes *Manchester*

Abortive arguments?

I am confused by the arguments about abortion presented in *Living Marxism*. In her article about Naomi Wolf ('Why having a baby did not make me anti-abortion', December), Ann Furedi argues for a woman's right to decide on the future of her pregnancy, whether we approve of her decision or not. However, John Gillott ('The spectre of eugenics', January) says that we should criticise a woman who refuses to abort a fetus with a genetic abnormality. He puts forward a type of utilitarian ethics, with the goal of improving the health of the whole population. Presumably Gillott would also support a woman's right not to have an abortion.

David Hall *Newcastle upon Tyne*

Turned on by Turnoff

I would hazard a guess that the erudite Professor Sir Max Turnoff ('Rationing health-care: a top doctor speaks', January) will be lined up for further honours next New Year's Day. I must confess that this dreadful character's utterances raised more than a whole-hearted laugh when I read them. This was quickly silenced when it became glaringly obvious that Mr Fitzpatrick had extracted a complete and honest collection of responses from the interviewee. Sadly I must report that the measures Turnoff proposes will doubtless come to pass and the government will get off scot free. I must commend Mr Fitzpatrick for the skill he used in getting this pillar of the medical profession to come clean and do it in such a wonderfully entertaining manner. Give him a chat show post haste.

Steve Crowder

PS You may wish to post this in the comments/discussion area of your new Web page, which I might add is progressing very well.

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

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

Living Marxism, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX fax (0171) 278 9844 e-mail editor@junius.co.uk

Protecting the innocents abroad?

Jan Montague questions the assumptions behind the campaign against sex tourism

Exposés of paunchy, socially inadequate Western men travelling with fat wallets to impoverished parts of the world to buy sex with exotic young women have been a regular feature of women's magazines in recent years. Most of these articles read like little more than titillating photo-stories presented in the language of moral condemnation and international sisterhood. Now, however, 'sex tourism' has become a serious social policy issue. In February the House of Commons will debate government proposals for a legal crackdown on the sex tourism industry, and the breadth of the consensus that something must be done will be on view at a London conference on sex tourism featuring both right-wing Tory MP Ann Winterton and left-wing Labour veteran Joan Lester.

Cities like Bangkok and beach resorts in South America have become synonymous with prostitution, gaining a sordid reputation for the availability of teenage women in brothels and strip clubs as well as on the streets. Campaigners against sex tourism are particularly concerned about these teenagers. Six UK charities—Anti-Slavery International, Cafod, Christian Aid, Jubilee Campaign, Save the Children (UK) and the NSPCC—joined forces in March 1994 to form the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism. The coalition is campaigning for more extensive legislation to enable British courts to punish sex tourists from this country, and is seeking to raise awareness of the problem among holiday companies and tourists.

The government's proposals for a legal crackdown on organisers of foreign sex tours echo the coalition's demands to treat such prostitution as child abuse and extend child protection legislation to deal with the problem.

But both the coalition and the Labour Party want the law to go much further, enabling the courts over here to punish individual Britons for what they do with young prostitutes over there.

It is not hard to see why many people support calls for action on such an emotive issue. The coalition's literature features shocking examples of abuse, like the 12-year old prostitute Rosario from the Philippines who died after doctors removed from her uterus part of a broken sex toy, several inches long, with a rusty screw at one end; or Noi from northern Thailand who was beaten repeatedly and made to service eight men a day in a brothel in the southern tourist centre of Phuket.

But will legislation do anything to stop this brutal exploitation? And what will the consequences be of extending British law to cover what happens overseas?

The notion that any British law could help stop the exploitation of Third World teenagers in the sex trade ignores the real reasons why sex tourism exists. Contrary to the impression given by campaigners, the prostitution of young women (and men) in the Third World is not the same thing as child abuse in Britain. Instead, it is the consequence of an impoverished socio-economic system in which everybody has to work in desperate circumstances from an early age, and where Western-style childhood is a luxury available only to the rich few.

Seen in this light, the campaign's concept of 'international child abuse' can make little sense, in a divided world where there is no such thing as a 'universal child'.

In many of the examples cited by campaigners, the 'child' prostitutes had worked in terrible conditions in factories

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

TABOOS

or on the land to support their families for several years before they even entered the sex trade. One teenager from Sri Lanka, Sampath, was working as a builder's labourer before he reached his teens, but became a prostitute because he could earn four times as much by having sex with tourists. He had to take responsibility for his entire family at an age when the average European child is more concerned with getting off with other teenagers or increasing their Nintendo score than with earning enough money to support parents and siblings.

When children have to survive in what we see as the adult world of responsibility and work at such an early age, it should not be a shock to see them enter the adult world of sex. It is estimated that there are one million child prostitutes in Asia alone. Such an industry will not disappear unless the large numbers involved are given some practical, alternative way to survive.

Against the background of innumerable child abuse scares in this country, any mention of mixing children and sex is guaranteed to press the panic button with a British audience. But if we react to the issue of sex tourism in this knee-jerk fashion we will miss the major issue at stake: not questions of individual morality, but of the exploitative and unequal relationship between rich and poor countries which puts Western men in a position to use Third World women and children as just another cheap tourist attraction.

The idea of teenagers being forced out of economic necessity to have sex with older men might be repulsive. But if we confine our objections to a moralistic concern with the means by which they try to survive—prostitution—rather than targeting the problem of an impoverished society that leaves them with no other choice, then we are on dangerous ground. A moralistic approach will inevitably focus on criticising individual behaviour—not just of the sex tourists, but of the teenager who decides to become a prostitute or their desperate parents who willingly send them into the trade. Although campaigners say they are anxious to avoid stigmatising the child, their focus on the consequences of poverty rather than its causes can only end up condemning the prostitutes.

The much-publicised example of the successful prosecution of a sex tourist in Sweden, which is held up by British campaigners as a model for legislative changes, makes this clear. The 14-year old girl whom the man had allegedly sexually abused was flown to Sweden to give evidence in court and then returned to Bangkok for 'rehabilitation'. It is difficult to see how her brief glimpse of a different world, ►



PHOTO: HELDUR NETOCNY/PANOS PICTURES

where she was paraded as a prize witness for the benefit of the world's media, could have been of any benefit to her; getting a taste of what sophisticated Stockholm has to offer certainly seems unlikely to have dampened her determination to do whatever she has to in order to escape the poverty of Bangkok. Yet the idea of sending her back to be 'rehabilitated' implies that she is somehow to blame for her situation.

Campaigners claim that rehabilitation schemes for child prostitutes and re-education programmes for regions that have become heavily dependent on sex tourism are a vital part of the fight against 'international child abuse'. Yet such programmes must be based on the assumption that the problem is partly caused by the decisions made by people involved in prostitution, hence the need to re-educate them to make different moral choices. David Ould of Anti-Slavery International says that campaigners do not want to impose 'our' values on people in the Third World. But whose values are they being force-fed through the Western charities' re-education programmes?

By turning the problems of the Third World poor into issues of immoral behaviour, the campaign against sex tourism can do nothing to help young people involved in prostitution. Worse still, the campaign for more legislation to deal with alleged offences committed abroad could create new problems.

Campaigners point out that Britain lags behind Australia, Germany, Sweden and the USA where extra-territorial legislation has been introduced for child abuse offences. 'Extra-territoriality' is the extension of the law of one country beyond its borders, to bring under its jurisdiction the acts of its nationals when abroad. In the past, British imperialism and the movement of British subjects to the colonies encouraged extra-territoriality. Currently, extra-territoriality applies only in cases of treason, murder, torture and war crimes, but the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism and the Labour Party argue that sex tourism involving young prostitutes is child abuse and should be treated just as seriously as these offences.

The coalition argues that the poverty of countries like Thailand makes it difficult for them to implement their own laws, and that wealthier countries have a moral obligation to extend their legal powers to stop it. They point out that Britain and the other 169 signatories of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child have committed themselves to international child protection.

The argument for extra-territoriality reflects the unequal relationship between



the countries of the West and those of the Third World. It is inconceivable, for example, that Britain would allow the Thai government to legislate about what anybody can do in London. This double standard reflects the relations of domination between the West and the rest. In calling for British and other Western governments to act against child abuse abroad, campaigners only endow that domination with moral legitimacy.

The assumption appears to be that we could all turn into paedophiles at the sight of a Thai teenager in a bikini

However it is motivated, the consequence of extra-territoriality is to undermine the independence of the country in which the offence has been committed. The coalition suggests that Western police forces move in and train Third World police in paedophile detection, and urges the implementation of a 'multi-agency' approach to the problem of international child abuse. In practice this means the institutionalisation of Western charities as policing agencies abroad. Asked about the problems of collecting evidence in cases of sex tourism, David Ould conceded that 'it would be clearly tricky', but insisted that British non-governmental organisations are 'only too happy to supply evidence'. At a time when Western charities and aid agencies are increasingly assuming responsibility for running the economic and political affairs of impoverished parts of the Third World, the crusade against sex tourism provides another pretext for interference in other people's affairs.

The argument for extra-territoriality also sets a dangerous precedent for extending British law to cover other cases where people do things abroad that are illegal here—such as when people travel to Amsterdam to take advantage of the more relaxed drug law enforcement there. Many people travel abroad precisely to escape the petty constraints of British society, and any move which sets a precedent for making behaviour outside the country subject to the same constraints we encounter at home can only be bad news.

The coalition is explicit that its aim is to constrain individual behaviour. It is highly critical of the government's proposals to deal only with sex tourism organisers, because this would do

nothing to punish individual tourists who have sex with children abroad. The coalition admits that it is less concerned with pursuing known paedophiles—'preferential child molesters'—who may already be known to Interpol, than with deterring 'situational child sex abusers'; that is, ordinary tourists who may get caught up in a 'set of circumstances peculiar to holidays, combined with attitudes to places and people identified as foreign that may easily lead to the sexual exploitation of a child by a tourist'. The assumption appears to be that there is a paedophile inside us all, waiting to be unleashed by the sight of a Thai teenager in a bikini, and in need of pre-emptive restraints.

Technical difficulties make it unlikely that new legislation would lead to any great increase in prosecutions of British tourists. Indeed campaigners against sex tourism explicitly argue that they are more concerned with setting up a legislative deterrent that will instil in us a proper sense of British responsibility. As the Labour Party's campaign bulletin says, 'while there will inevitably be some difficulties with legislation of this sort we believe that this is a moral issue...British citizens should uphold our national moral standards':

'Child prostitution is not going to go away until we deal with the underlying reasons why it exists, immense poverty on the one hand and, on the other, a group of people who are willing to traffic in and sexually exploit children. However, we cannot condone our part in this trade, we must find the political will to ensure that Britons that sexually exploit children overseas face the penalties when they return. This is a problem that we have to see as partly of our own making. We have a moral obligation to act upon it.'

In Labour's eyes it seems that the problem is 'partly of our own making', not because British capitalists have done so much to create a situation where the only career opportunity for impoverished Third World teenagers is to sell their bodies, but because of the immoral behaviour of a handful of seedy tourists.

The international relationship between rich and poor is here reposed in moral terms. British citizens are told they have a moral duty not to add to the problems of the Third World by behaving as irresponsibly as the locals. In the past, Britain's status as an imperial power bred a sense of innate racial superiority over Johnny Foreigner; today's crusaders are in danger of recreating a sense of British and Western superiority in terms of a supposedly higher moral sensitivity towards the victims of the world. ●

Nuts to risk factors

Looking at the health pages in newspapers and magazines, it is hard to believe that someone isn't having a lot of fun sending out bizarre press releases to see if they get reported. Somewhere, someone must be running a contest to see who can get the most bizarre story about a 'health risk' into print.

How else do you explain the serious reporting in national broadsheets of a campaign to prevent KP foods from distributing free samples of peanuts to three quarters of a million homes, on the grounds that they represent a health risk?

It is the kind of story that makes you check to see if it is 1 April; but no, one David Reading really did tell the *Sunday Telegraph* that he was taking legal advice to see if he could stop an impending spring promotion of nuts, because they constitute a danger to the lives of those who receive them. 'To put people at risk by introducing nuts into their homes', he told reporters, 'is at best grossly insensitive; at worst it is extremely dangerous'.

Reading is chairman of the Anaphylaxis Campaign and he is understandably sensitive to the risks of nuts. A year ago, his 17-year old daughter died from a nut allergy. The experience prompted him to set up a support charity for those similarly afflicted. Fair enough. But Reading's own personal tragedy does not alter the fact that deaths from peanut allergies are very, very rare and that it is extremely silly to make a big deal out of a freebie that many of us would welcome.

And although it shows touching sympathy, it is just as silly for the marketing company used by KP to take Mr Reading's concerns on board. They have, apparently, obtained a list of Anaphylaxis Campaign members' addresses so that they can make sure no nuts are delivered to their homes, and have devised child-proof packaging which carries a warning.

It is crazy. By no stretch of the imagination can nuts be considered a health hazard—any more than any other food or substance which can provoke an allergic reaction. You might as well argue that a TV thriller enjoyed by millions is a health hazard because it increases stress which might just be fatal to someone hovering on the brink of a heart attack.

And it gets worse...if you survive your free sample of peanuts, watch out for the pavement. Another beyond-parody report explains

that the National Consumer Council (NCC) has decided that pavements (yes, pavements) represent a worrying hazard.

Launching what the London *Evening Standard* described as a 'tough, new "Pedestrian's Charter"', the NCC's chair, Lady Wilcox, pointed out that 'pavements can be a major hazard for the unwary'. She warned that the consequences of falling in the street should not be trivialised. 'It's not just scraped knees and battered egos; a nasty fall can mean broken bones, facial injuries and even death.' The NCC is appalled that the government collects no statistics on pavement accidents—a reason, the council believes, why so many go unreported and the risk of pavements is underrated. Furthermore they are horrified that so many of us think that when we fall over it is our own fault, and so fail to seek compensation.

Now much as I hate the government and think it criminally neglectful of the nation's health and well-being, even I can appreciate why it may not have occurred to the Tory cabinet to set up a sort of 'grazed knees register'. And much as I like the idea of claiming compensation every time I trip up on a kerb, it seems pretty daft to expect someone else to take responsibility for what is my day-dreaming. Let's face it, most of the time when we fall over, it is our fault!

The trouble with these issues is that not only do they exaggerate risks out of all proportion—I mean just how many people are killed falling on pavements each year—they also make morons out of all of us by implying that we are too stupid and incompetent

to cope with the challenge of an unexpected free sample or broken paving slab.

Ask David Reading if his teenage daughter would have been likely to eat a packet of peanuts that she knew would cause her a severe reaction just because they dropped through the letter-box, and the answer would almost certainly be no. I am sure Lady Wilcox does not rank walking to the shops among her most perilous experiences. Certainly it is unlikely that the world-weary editors who run the stories or the journalists who write them concur with the tone of terror in which these risks are reported. So why do they assume that the rest of us are incapable of maintaining their sophisticated level of self-preservation? Probably because their contempt for ordinary people is only matched by their sense of their own self-importance. ●

If you survive your free sample of peanuts, watch out for the pavement

Punishment shootings in Belfast are not a threat to the Northern Ireland 'peace process', but a symptom of it, says Mark Ryan



Alleged drug-dealer Ian Lyons shot dead in Lurgan in January

PHOTO: FACEMAKER

Peace

Direct Action Against Drugs, an IRA front organisation, has shot dead several men involved in drug-dealing and petty crime in Belfast over recent months. The killings, along with a big increase in punishment beatings, have sparked a debate as to what the IRA is up to.

RUC sources suggest that the killings are part of an IRA campaign to 'stake out its turf', and consolidate its position as judge, jury and executioner in nationalist areas. Others argue that the campaign is aimed at appeasing the 'hardliners' within the IRA, peeved at their lowly role since the ceasefire. The reasoning behind all these theories is that violence was the sole rationale for the existence of the IRA: if IRA members can no longer take out their violent urges on members of the security forces, then drug dealers and petty criminals will do just as well.

The reality is more that the killings are part of a desperate effort by the IRA to stem the collapse of morale and order within the nationalist community.

Common cause

Since the onset of the peace process, and especially since the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, petty crime has escalated within nationalist areas. Burglary, joyriding and drug-dealing are now rampant. It is the proliferation of this petty crime which the IRA is attempting to deal with, rather than the activities of large drug syndicates. Most of those shot by the IRA are little more than small-time thieves trying to sustain their drug habits.

Drugs are still rare within Northern Ireland compared with Britain, and certainly in comparison with Dublin, where large areas of the inner city have been ravaged by heroin and cocaine. While ecstasy and cannabis are on the increase in Northern Ireland, seizure figures for heroin and cocaine are minuscule. The IRA appears to have seized on the issue of drugs as a politically acceptable way of cracking

down on the crime wave which is sweeping nationalist areas.

The outbreak of crime and anti-social behaviour is a sign of collapsing morale and fragmentation within the nationalist community. This collapse is a direct result of the peace process initiated by Sinn Fein and the IRA. The end of the struggle against British rule has destroyed the sense of common purpose which once held such communities together and gave them the strength to fend off the corrosive effects of extreme poverty and social decay.

Strongly republican areas such as West Belfast were always noted for their low level of crime. This was not, as some have suggested, because the IRA ran a brutal system of summary justice. If that were true, then the IRA's present campaign of retribution would surely beat back the crime wave once again. Yet, no matter how drastic the measures taken by Direct Action Against Drugs, the crime continues, proving not only that there is no correlation between crime and punishment, but that something else must have been responsible for the high sense of discipline among nationalists.

It was not the threat of rough justice which kept anti-social behaviour at a low level in areas such as West Belfast. It was the exacting demands placed on everybody as a result of the war. The first thing that visitors to places such as West Belfast noted was the strong sense of pride, self-reliance and dynamism in the area. Although there was chronic deprivation—70 per cent unemployment in some parts—the sense of alienation and social decay which usually goes with it was remarkably absent. Through the experience of a popular struggle for liberation, people had learned to stand on their own feet.

Faced with such a formidable opponent as the British army and its local allies, nationalist communities were forced to fall back on their own

process sparks crime wave

resources. Under these circumstances, people quite naturally relied on their neighbours for help, and gained strength from the knowledge that they did not face the enemy alone. Narrow self-interest generally took second place to the needs of the community. However bleak prospects may have been at times, common ideals and aspirations united the republican communities, making short-term hardships and sacrifices bearable.

Neighbourhood watch

For these reasons, anti-social behaviour such as burglary or drug-dealing was inimical to the entire community. It was not simply that people were terrified to do such things. It was just that such petty behaviour would have been repugnant to almost everybody, a betrayal of their neighbours. There was no need for codes of conduct, everybody knew what acceptable behaviour was, and that it was in their interests to act accordingly. Only the most persistent offenders fell foul of IRA punishment squads. However, even the punishment squads were operating within the wider rationale dictated by the war. The IRA was particularly severe with criminals, not just because they broke the bond of solidarity, but because the security forces used them as touts.

As a result of the IRA ceasefire and the 'peace process', that wider rationale which held people together and guided the IRA's actions has fallen apart. Without the common struggle against British rule, the sense of solidarity is lost. Now it is every man for himself. Without that sense of common purpose, the old taboo against preying on your neighbour is being undermined. If the pressure of war brought out the best in everybody, the peace process brings out the most base, petty and ignoble. As well as the outbreak of crime, there has been an alarming rise in sectarian attacks from nationalist areas—dozens of Orange halls and Protestant churches have been burned down since the ceasefire.

As for the IRA, since it is no longer an agency of resistance to British rule, its crime-busting makes it little more than an armed neighbourhood watch. During the war, IRA punishments were simply a way of dealing with anti-social individuals. Now the IRA is charged with the task of preventing social breakdown. It may as well try to roll back the waters in Belfast Lough.

The 'peace process' has been an unmitigated disaster for nationalists. Not only has it failed to deliver the gains which republican leaders promised 18 months ago, but it has destroyed the major achievement of 25 years of struggle. It is true that the war was taking an increasingly heavy toll, that it had reached a dead end and that a new strategy was required. But any new strategy should have aimed to develop the power and control which ordinary people had over the course of the struggle.

Instead the peace process took the initiative away from the people themselves and placed it in the hands of political fixers in Dublin, Belfast, Whitehall—and, as is becoming increasingly evident, in Washington. For the first time since 1969, the nationalist people no longer have any say in their own political destiny. It is this loss of power, and the self-respect that goes with it, which has nourished the feeling of futility and despair among ordinary people.

For that reason, the churchmen, politicians and editorialists who call for more 'political initiatives' to offer hope to the young and alienated are asking for trouble. It is precisely political initiatives hatched in secret conclaves which are responsible for the social breakdown of nationalist areas. The political initiative of the peace process took the fate of Ireland out of the hands of its people. More political initiatives from London, Dublin or Washington can only compound the problem, concentrating power in the hands of a few, while robbing it from the many.

The most constructive initiative that could be taken now would be to end the current 'peace process' altogether.

As a result of the IRA's punishment shootings, the cry has gone up again that the 'peace process' is in danger. This refrain has become as tedious as the old ritual condemnations of the IRA. The killings in Belfast can only be considered a threat to the peace process if you believe that the real aim of that process is to bring peace and stability to the communities of Northern Ireland. If, however, you understand the 'peace process' as a strategy designed finally to defeat the republican struggle and to consolidate a new form of domination over Ireland, things appear very different. The drug-related killings, the spiralling crime wave, and the growth of sectarianism are simply the side effects of the peace process as it destroys every last vestige of independent political life in Northern Ireland.

The 'concerned' RUC

The predatory character of the peace process can be seen in the cynical response of the British government to the recent killings. That the government might be concerned either for the welfare of Irish nationalists or drug-dealers strains credulity, given the murky involvement of the security forces in promoting criminality in nationalist areas in the past. The government has simply seized on the killings as a way of turning the screws on the IRA to start handing over its guns. Even more dangerously, the authorities are exploiting concern over drugs, crime and child abuse as a means of getting the RUC back into republican areas from which it was expelled 25 years ago. Far from being concerned at the prospect of social breakdown in places like West Belfast, the government relishes it and sees in it an opportunity to enslave the people of those areas. Only when that enslavement is complete will the peace process finally come to an end. ●

A mad, mad, mad,

Public concern about Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, or 'mad cow disease') spreading to humans (in the form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, CJD) is the latest in a long line of health scares. The novel feature of the BSE/CJD scare, however, is that it is a panic about a disease which does not actually exist.

Promoters of earlier health scares could at least point to a real disease—AIDS, necrotising fasciitis, meningitis—even though they have always exaggerated the scale of the

problem and the extent of public risk. Though CJD has long been recognised as a very rare degenerative brain disorder, there has *not been a single case* in which its transmission from cattle infected with BSE to a human has been demonstrated.

Recent events mark a historic achievement for the cult of the new public health—a health scare, not about a disease, but about the possibility of a disease. In the increasingly virtual reality of late twentieth-century society, we have a real panic about a virtual disease.

The mad cow disease panic was triggered by a statement in December from the eminent neuropathologist

Sir Bernard Tomlinson, who announced to the world that he had personally decided to forgo the humble hamburger for fear that he might succumb to the ravages of CJD. The consequences were dramatic. While government ministers tried to reassure the public that beef was safe, scientific experts and consumer groups disputed these claims and controversy raged in the media. Local education authorities and schools all over the country soon removed beef from their menus. Butchers and supermarket chains reported a slump in sales of beef in the pre-Christmas period.

What are the facts? The disease BSE was first recognised in 1986, and quickly discovered to result from feeding sheep offal to cattle in order to boost their protein intake. A similar condition—scrapie—has long been known in sheep, and it became clear that the practice of using whole sheep carcasses, including brain and spinal



The panic over BSE or mad cow disease is more than just another health scare, says Dr Michael Fitzpatrick; it is the most irrational symptom yet of the morbid anxiety paralysing society



mad world

cord tissue, to prepare high-nutrient cattle feeds, had led to the emergence of BSE. This practice was banned in 1988.

Scrapie in sheep, BSE in cattle and CJD in humans share a number of common features. They cause a progressive loss of motor coordination and other neurological impairments, leading rapidly to death. In humans intellectual impairment proceeds rapidly to dementia. Examination of brain tissue after death reveals a characteristic 'Swiss cheese' or 'spongiform' appearance.

It is clear that these conditions may be transmitted—by 'prions', proteinaceous infectious particles—both within and, more unusually, between species. Scrapie has been known among sheep for 200 years and some 150 000 cattle in Britain have been identified as infected with BSE. The exotic disease kuru, a form of spongiform encephalopathy similar

to CJD, is believed to have been transmitted between humans through the practice of cannibalism by some indigenous peoples of New Guinea up to the 1950s. The therapeutic use of growth hormone extracted from human pituitary glands has resulted in the transmission of a small number of cases of CJD. However, a decades-long incubation period between infection and the appearance of the clinical syndrome, is characteristic of the human spongiform encephalopathies.

In the large majority of cases, in fact, the cause of CJD is obscure. As two British authorities pointed out, 'it is...[a] misconception to suppose

that every case of CJD must have been caught from somewhere':

'About 15 per cent of cases are wholly genetic in origin, and in nearly all the remaining cases persistent and extensive epidemiological investigation has failed to find a contamination event, leading to the proposition that these cases are idiopathic.' (RM Ridley and HF Baker, 'Who gets CJD?', *British Medical Journal*, 25 November 1995)

The upsurge in concern about BSE/CJD has arisen because of reports of the recent diagnosis of CJD in four ►





farmers and two teenagers in Britain (see 'CJD and BSE: any connection?', *British Medical Journal*, 25 November 1995). There has been an increase in reported cases of CJD in Britain, from around 30 a year in the 1980s to 42 in 1993 and 54 in 1994. While these developments justify expert scrutiny, the numbers are so small that the increases are of dubious statistical significance.

The demand for proof that BSE does *not* cause CJD is absurd

The number of reported cases is currently around one for every million people in Britain each year. The incidence of CJD in Britain is similar to that in European countries in which cattle are not infected with BSE. Indeed Austria has a higher rate of CJD and no BSE. Improved methods of diagnosis and the greater awareness of the condition may well have resulted in the recognition of more cases. The European consensus on the possibility of a link between BSE and CJD was summed up by the contributors from the Netherlands to the *British Medical Journal's* special feature: 'Taken together, the epidemiological evidence does not point to a causal link between BSE and CJD.' (A Hofman and D Wientjens, 'Epidemiological evidence concerning a causal link', 25 November 1995)

Risk society

Why then, if there is no evidence that BSE causes CJD, is there such a wave of panic about the dangers of eating beef? Three factors have contributed to a public mood that is acutely responsive to such a scare.

The first is the psychology of the contemporary 'risk society'. The panic about mad cow disease took off in a society which has become preoccupied with collective fears of impending doom and with individual anxieties about threats to health, security and safety. We worry about nuclear war and global warming, AIDS and Ebola, mugging and burglary, road rage, child abuse and violence against women. The collapse of established frameworks in the fields of economics, politics and morality has created a uniquely insecure society.

The corrosive effect of the collective anxiety neurosis can be discerned even among the most hard-headed scientists. The epidemiologists quoted above

add the following qualification to their statement that the evidence does not point to a causal link between BSE and CJD: 'but, unfortunately, [it] does not strongly reject that possibility either'. The absurd demand for conclusive proof that BSE does *not* cause CJD has been endlessly repeated by politicians and journalists.

The peculiar difficulty of having to prove that something does *not* cause something else arises from the presumption that some familiar activity—like eating beef, walking down the street, driving to work, breathing—should now be assumed to be of lethal danger until proved otherwise. This is indeed a mad, mad world, one in which all men are potential rapists and child abusers, all strangers dangerous and all encounters with the natural environment immanently life-threatening.

'Better safe than sorry'

In normal times people accept that there are risks in everyday life, take routine steps to avoid them, and carry on with their lives. They accept that there are dangers abroad, some more predictable than others, and learn to live with them. But we are not living in normal times. Today a morbid anxiety permeates society, inflating risks and demanding a level of reassurance that can never be achieved. The very indeterminacy of the risks that preoccupy people provides full scope for the upsurge of irrational fears.

An editorial in the *Guardian* illustrates the mindset of the risk society ('Mad cows and Englishmen', 8 December 1995). It acknowledges that 'there may not be a link' between BSE and CJD but insists that 'there are genuine worries':

'People who ate infected meat in the late 1980s may not show signs of the disease until way into the next millennium. Then, if the doomsday scenario proved right, biblical numbers could suffer loss of coordination, intellect and personality—just like the wobbly mad cows seen on television.'

Though it is not clear what intellectual impairment or personality changes were experienced by those cows, we get the drift.

How the press loves a 'doomsday scenario'! Leaving aside the risk of being overtaken by rival doomsday scenarios long before 'way into the next millennium', this one is built on the presumption that 'infected meat' can cause CJD. As we have seen, there is no evidence for this presumption. Yet in a few sentences we have proceeded on this non-existent basis to dementia and death on a 'biblical' scale.

When confronted with the absurdity of such a doomsday scenario, our panic promoters take refuge in indeterminacy—'it could happen', 'unlikely perhaps, but not impossible', 'you can never be certain'. This sequence, reinforced with those scary images of wobbly mad cows, leads inexorably to the familiar cautions that 'you can't be too careful', 'better safe than sorry', and advice to stop



whatever everyday activity is linked to the latest risk that has been discovered.

If you cannot prove with mathematical certainty that beef is safe, then, the logic runs, the sensible course of action is to stop eating it. However, as consumer experts have hastened to advise us, this is by no means as straightforward as it might seem. Potentially brain-curdling beef products find their way into cakes, puddings, biscuits, even gelatin drug capsules and fruit gums. Avoiding beef requires a high level of vigilance and close attention to the small print on food packaging.

An alternative course of action is to eat only beef produced by organic farmers. But, as a helpful *Guardian* article explained, this too requires considerable effort:

'Go to a butcher who is knowledgeable and committed to selling organic meat. Find out which farm he gets his beef from and check that with a list of organic farms provided by the Soil Association.' (16 December 1995)

Another alternative would be to get a bullock (from an approved organic farm of course) for your own back yard or allotment—perhaps the Soil Association also provides a DIY butchering guide.

The price of the mad cow disease panic is not only the extra financial cost of these alternatives, but the cost in time and energy spent in reading food packages, checking out butchers and working out alternatives to beef.



Ironically, the resulting dementia may prove even more rapidly progressive than that of CJD.

Another factor contributing to the mad cow disease panic is the popular hostility towards modern farming techniques which are widely regarded as a violation of the laws of nature. From this perspective, BSE is, like the lethal viruses that are said to threaten new plagues, an example of the revenge of nature against human arrogance and interference (see 'An epidemic of fear', *Living Marxism*, No84, November 1995).

According to an editorial in the *Sunday Times*, 'nature has a habit of inflicting retribution on those who break its rules': 'Natural herbivores have been turned into carnivores for the sake of improved farm productivity' ('Nature's revenge', 17 December 1995). The *Guardian* agreed, arguing that 'the root cause' of BSE was 'intensive farming': 'turning vegetarian animals into meat-eaters was asking for trouble.' (8 December 1995)

These views reflect modern society's extraordinary collapse of confidence in itself. It is a simple fact, familiar to every schoolchild before the corruption of the national curriculum by green prejudice, that human civilisation is based on 'breaking the rules' of nature, on increasing the productivity of nature by cultivating plants and domesticating animals. Agriculture is by definition a violation of nature. Its intensive development has allowed humanity increasing autonomy from hunger and the arbitrary effects of the elements.

One can imagine the neolithic equivalent of the editor of the *Guardian* wringing his hands at the sight of people clearing and ploughing the land and telling them that they were 'asking for trouble'. When Jethro Tull invented the seed drill at the beginning of the eighteenth century there was no shortage of pundits arguing that nature would exact its revenge against such intensive farming methods. Yet this and other techniques developed in England in this period are generally agreed to have made a decisive contribution to the emergence of the capitalist system so celebrated by the editor of the *Sunday Times*.

Success story

Undoubtedly in the course of history, humanity has experienced disasters as well as successes in its attempts to raise productivity and improve living standards. Undoubtedly, too, the social organisation of modern society, its capitalistic character, has imposed grave restrictions on the application of science and technology in the interests of the whole of global society, while unleashing the destructive potential of these developments in the uncontrolled quest for profit. But none of this is an argument for abandoning the attempt to advance and improve the human condition.

In fact the BSE story shows the effectiveness of modern methods of monitoring potential environmental hazards, at least in the advanced capitalist world. A new technique was introduced, found to cause a new disease and banned—all within two years. Surveillance systems for disease are so sensitive that they can detect events long before they can be considered significant in whole population terms.

Yet instead of sleeping soundly, secure in the knowledge that humanity is safe from BSE/CJD, the nation is having nightmares about wobbly cows and mass dementia, which are assiduously promoted by doomsday-obsessed editorialists. The resonance for doomsday scenarios, and the popularity of the notion that the source of all our problems lies in the very attempt to increase human control over nature, reveals the deep dependency of modern society.

Les rosbifs

A third theme in the mad cow panic is the view that government ministers cannot be trusted to tell the truth about the health risks of beef. Consumer groups have pointed to the links between the agriculture ministry and the beef industry, hinting at corruption and cover-up. These allegations lead to calls for an 'independent inquiry' and for more information, particularly in the form of labels on food products revealing their beef content, so that consumers can make 'informed choices' about what to eat.

This theme is popular among the more radical critics of the government—see 'Crazy Tories are risking our lives' (*Socialist Worker*, 16 December 1995). Yet, while echoing popular cynicism about politicians, the usual alternative recommended is to put our trust in some quango of government-appointed experts or in an even more anonymous and unaccountable agency responsible for labelling food products. Instead of questioning the whole scare, this approach amplifies anxieties—implying that the risks may be even greater than the government admits—and offers illusory solutions.

The very fact that radical scepticism about the statements of government ministers can be so readily allayed through the establishment of an inquiry or the provision of more information, reveals its superficiality. In fact, such scepticism is more a manifestation of the wider culture of mistrust than a specific questioning of governmental authority. The result is to reinforce the notions that everyday life is full of mortal hazards, that you cannot trust anybody, not the government, not the scientists, in the end, not even yourself. The outcome of this process is universal paranoia and paralysis.

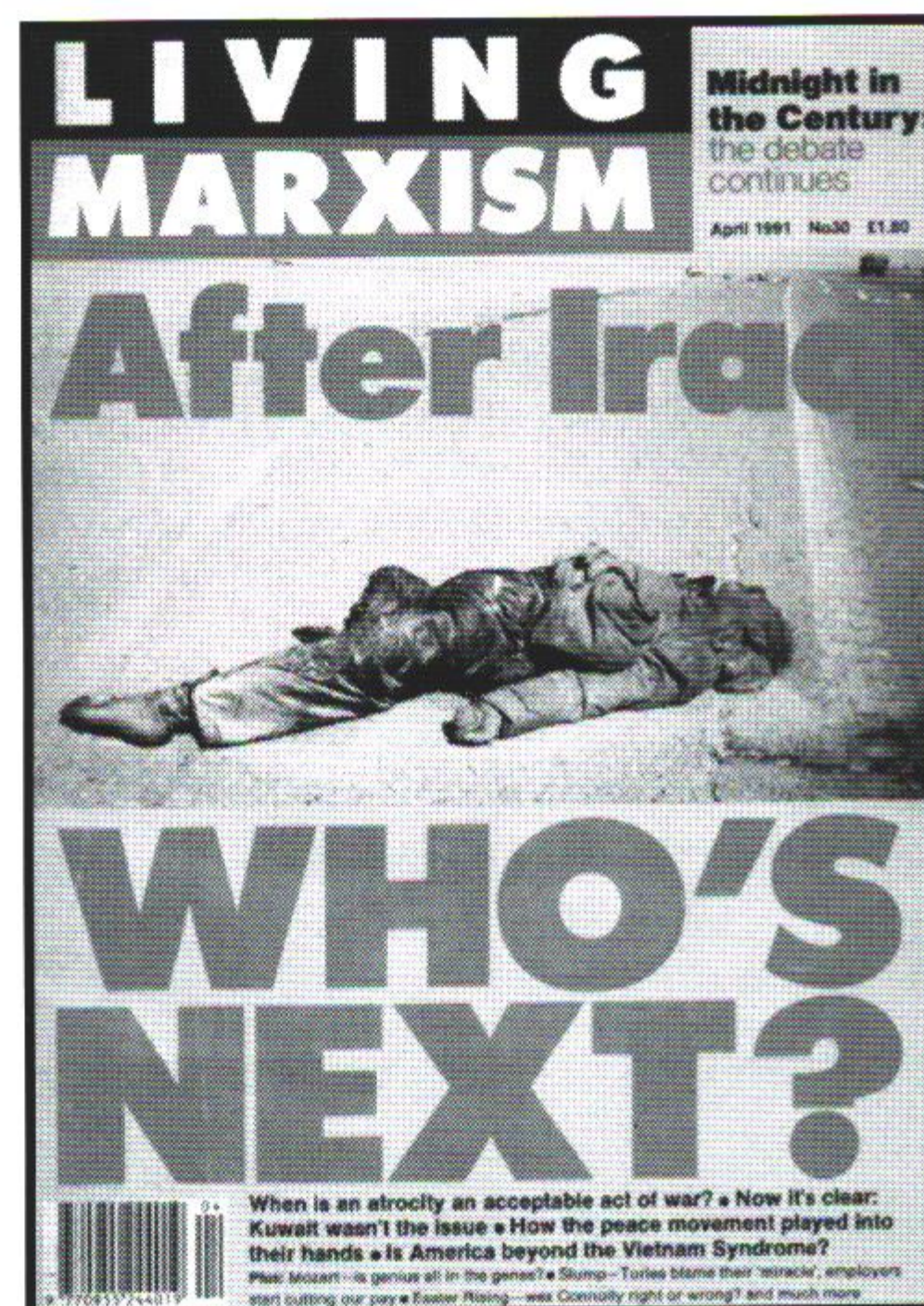
Mad cow disease may be no danger to human health, but the mad cow panic reflects wider trends that are profoundly damaging to human welfare in the widest sense. The only positive outcome of the whole affair may be a drop in the price of beef. As the French might say, to a nation they once mocked as '*les rosbifs*' in the name of a national delicacy British people now fear to eat, *bon appetit!*

Maggie's recovered war memories

'This is a tale of how to tell lies and win wars, and how we, the media, were harnessed like beach donkeys and led through the sand to see what the British and US military wanted us to see in this nice clean war.' *Guardian* war correspondent Maggie O'Kane's *mea culpa* about how she and her colleagues lied to the world about the war in Iraq resounds with ironies.

Five years too late, O'Kane uncovers the war propaganda that galvanised the Western alliance against Saddam Hussein. Kuwaiti babies were not dashed on the floor, so that their incubators could be taken back to Iraq (the story was invented by the American public relations firm Hill & Knowlton). Satellite pictures taken before Desert Storm did not show a quarter of a million Iraqis poised to invade Saudi Arabia as General Colin Powell claimed, but a withdrawal from Kuwait. It was not a war in which the enemy was always killed clinically by 'smart bombs', but one in which Iraqi troops were buried alive by allied bulldozers or massacred as they were trapped in their grid-locked vehicles, fleeing Kuwait on the Basra road.

Scoop! Five years after these stories were exposed in the pages of *Living Marxism*, Maggie O'Kane deigns to tell us that she and the rest of the press pack in Iraq had been lying all along. O'Kane's admission was featured in the *Guardian*, (16 December 1995) and on Channel 4 (3 January 1996). The same stories were featured in *Living Marxism* during the build up to Desert Storm, and in particular in 'Atrocities and acts of war' by Kenan Malik, April 1991, and 'Eye-witness in Kuwait' in the same issue, and later in 'The rotting remains of Iraq' in August 1993.



April 1991

You might be tempted to think that Maggie O'Kane has learned her lesson about selling war propaganda as fact. Think again. In the years that followed the Gulf War, O'Kane was the *Guardian's* war correspondent in the former Yugoslavia. During that time the press—and particularly the liberal press—acted as a mouthpiece for war propaganda against the Serbs. As *Living Marxism* has systematically exposed, Western propaganda against the Serbs has been quite as vitriolic, dehumanising and manipulative as that against the Iraqis.

Maggie O'Kane was the living embodiment of the propaganda war against the Serbs. In September 1992 we criticised her 'emotive reports from Bosnia about Serbian jihads, ethnic-cleansing, cattle trains, concentration camps and killings' for taking liberties with the evidence and using heart-tugging rhetoric to 'describe events torn from any economic, social or political context'.

Fresh from peddling propaganda against Iraq, the Western press descended on the former Yugoslavia to demonise the Serbs, accusing the Bosnian Serbs of conducting 'another Holocaust' against Muslims and Croats, and organising 'rape camps' for women detainees. These stories were usually based on hearsay, written without verification, often lifted directly from military sources, and invariably in emotive terms that were closer to propaganda than news. Atrocities that UN investigators linked to Bosnian government forces—like the infamous Sarajevo bread queue massacre—were arbitrarily attributed to the Serbs.

These propaganda stories were consistently exposed in *Living Marxism* at the time, as we sought to report the simple truth that this was a civil war in which all sides had committed the usual atrocities, but the Serbs had been singled out for political purposes (see 'The invention of a Holocaust', September 1992, 'Rape camps: what will they think up next', February 1993 and 'Laptop bombardiers', July 1995). For journalists like Maggie O'Kane, though, it was less important to question the anti-Serb line than it was to strike a moral pose. Wearing her heart on her sleeve, O'Kane was a soft touch for every Bosnian government briefing. Appointing herself to the role of champion of the oppressed and victimised, O'Kane excused herself from the difficult work of sifting propaganda from fact.

After Iraq, it ought to have been clear that dehumanising the supposed enemy with atrocity stories is more than a question of journalistic record. More than 200 000 Iraqis were killed in the Gulf War—civilians cowering in bomb shelters, conscripts fleeing the battle and trained soldiers alike. The extent of the slaughter was made acceptable to public opinion by the journalists who laid on a steady diet of anti-Iraqi stories. In Bosnia, too, journalists paved the way for the Nato bombing raids against the Bosnian Serbs, and the creation of hundreds of thousands of Serbian refugees, by painting them in the worst possible light.

Presumably we will have to wait another five years before Maggie O'Kane admits that she was 'harnessed like a beach donkey' by the press officers of the Bosnian government and its American allies.

Will Deighton

So what's new about New Labour?



One thing that Tony Blair is sincere about is that Labour has changed, says Tom Edwards

Everybody realises that there is something different about the Labour Party today compared with the past. The Tories accuse Tony Blair of stealing their policies while the left denounces the party leadership for 'betraying Labour's socialist principles'. Despite this perception of some sort of change, however, all of Blair's critics also seem to agree that the fundamentals remain the same. They believe that behind Blair's clique lies the old Labour movement dedicated to socialism.

Both the Tories and the left are united in the illusion that sooner or later the patterns of the past will recur. The Tories try to strike fear into the hearts of Middle England, warning that 'old Labour' lurks behind Blair's facade and that the trade unions and the left will come out of hiding after the general election. For its part, the left desperately clings to the hope that somehow a Labour victory will rekindle people's 'socialist aspirations' and herald a new period of political radicalism.

In waiting for the past to return, these responses badly underestimate how much is new about New Labour. The reality is that Labour is now a totally different party compared to its past, both in terms of policy and organisation.

Although most commentators accept that there has been a 'modernisation' of Labour policy, few have come to terms with how profound the change is. Labour has not simply shifted some policies a few notches to the right (as the left claims), or done a good PR job on ►

making its policies look moderate (as Michael Heseltine claims). New Labour has torn up its traditional policy on all of the key issues which defined the meaning of Labourism through most of this century: from the welfare state and nationalisation to trade unionism and nuclear disarmament.

The Attlee government of 1945 was previously accepted as the high point of Labour history, the party's policy reference book for the postwar period. It established Labour as the party of the welfare state, which enshrined universal benefits that would look after people 'from the cradle to the grave'. It was the government which set up the National Health Service, nationalised the railways, mines, steel and car industries.

In the past, Labour leaders were proud to claim credit for the welfare state. Today the Labour leadership is rather ashamed of its past. There was no big celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the election of the 1945 Labour government last year. Instead Blair used the anniversary to make a speech noting that the policies which Labour pursued in 1945 were appropriate for Britain then (indeed, as he pointed out, many of them enjoyed cross-party support), but not for now.

New Labour has declared war on its own political legacy, the welfare state. A battle strategy for far-reaching reform outlined in the 1994 Commission for Social Justice report has rapidly become party policy. Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor, has indicated that under Labour, benefits will cease to be universal entitlements (the keystone of Labour's old welfarist outlook), and instead will become privileges granted once the applicant has proven that they are genuinely 'taking responsibility' to train themselves and find a job.

Labour is now promoting itself as the party that can best deal with the problems that the Labourist welfare state has created. Blair told David English, owner of the *Daily Mail*, 'We all agree the welfare state has got to be radically reformed. Who's going to do it? You may find I am the only one who has the will to do it'. English, the arch-Thatcherite, responded by advising his readers to at least think about voting for Blair.

New Labour's ideological break with its past is symbolised by the dumping of the old Clause IV of the party constitution, which committed Labour to nationalising the 'commanding heights' of industry and redistributing wealth to 'workers by hand or brain'. Since Beatrice and Sidney Webb wrote the clause in 1918 as a response to the radical demands aroused by the Russian Revolution, it has held an almost biblical importance for Labour activists as proof of the party's commitment to socialism. In making a priority out of ditching Clause IV, Blair was making the point that state socialism is a thing of the past.

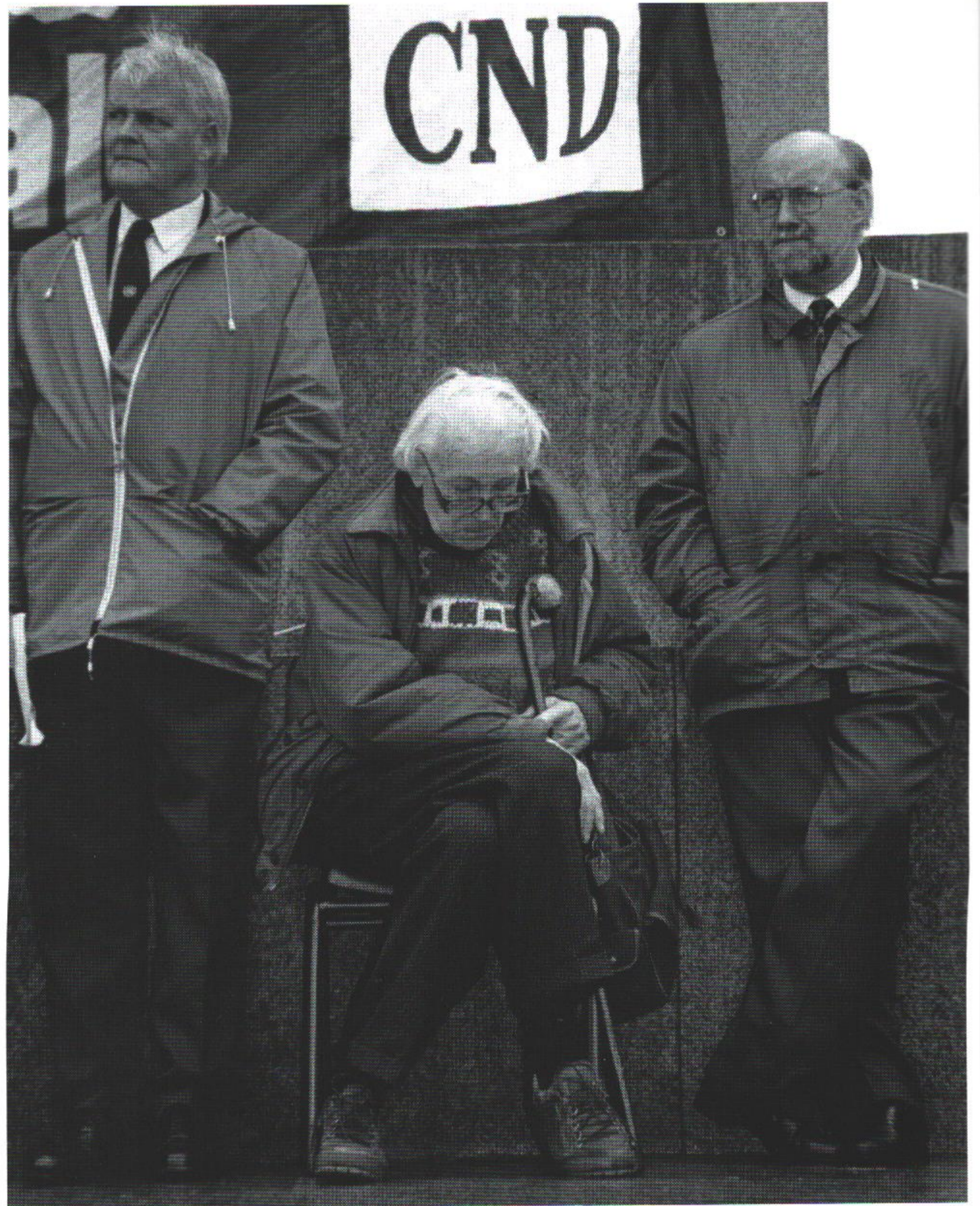
Once nationalisation was Labour's pet solution for every economic woe; now it is a dirty word. Even where a commitment to nationalisation could prove electorally popular, such as pledging to renationalise a privatised British Rail, Labour has doggedly avoided the issue. At the 1995 party conference, the highpoint of Blair's speech was the announcement of Labour's sweetheart deal with BT. Where once Labour would have

condemned privatised companies like BT as private sector monopolies and demanded their renationalisation, now the Labour leader's office and the BT board, which includes Norman Tebbit, are bosom buddies.

On every important issue, Labour policy has been not so much reformed as ripped to pieces in recent times. The last totem of the left, the paper commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, went at the last party conference when delegates voted to maintain the Trident submarines with their nuclear capabilities.

In fact New Labour's organisation has changed at least as radically as its policies. The party can no longer be considered the political wing of a labour movement; not just because of its organisational reforms, but because the movement that Labour represented in the past no longer exists.

Formally the unions still retain a lot of influence within the Labour Party. They control 70 per cent of the vote on policy at Labour conference, and 12 of the 27 seats on the National Executive Committee (NEC) which is



Nuclear disarmament, last vestige of Labour's past has been retired along with former leader Michael Foot

Even those commentators who accept that Labour policy has been 'modernised' tend to see the party as basically the same organisation as it was. Blair's success in transforming policy is put down to his party management skills and seen as a reversible process. The argument goes that the unions and the old left are only keeping quiet while Blair sneaks Labour into power, after which they will resurface and reassert their control over the party machine. The Tories never tire of pointing to Labour's links to the trade unions in a desperate attempt to conjure up images of the 1978-79 winter of discontent.

responsible for the day-to-day running of the party. In 1993 the unions donated £4.7m of the Labour Party's total income of £8.8m. Behind these apparent continuities, however, the real relationship between the unions and the party has been entirely transformed over the past few years, with the power shifting securely into the hands of the Labour leader.

In the past the trade unions had weight within the Labour Party not simply because they gave money, but because they represented something in the world outside of the party constitution. The union 'block' vote represented a powerful

block of interests in society, a real labour movement incorporating millions of people. The labour movement leadership played an important role in capitalist society, as the mediators between working people and the employers. This relationship was ratified in the 'beer and sandwiches' meetings between union leaders and Labour ministers at Downing Street.

The unions no longer have the same relationship to society as they did when Labour was last in power in 1979. Union membership has shrunk every year since its peak in that year. By 1993 trade union membership had fallen by 4.5m to 8.7m, the lowest figure since 1946 (*Employment Gazette*, May 1995). Not only has membership fallen, but so has union activity. In 1994, 278 000 working days were lost through industrial action—the lowest figure since 1891. The final total for 1995 is expected to be slightly higher, at around 350 000 days, but still tiny compared to the 29m lost in 1979 and 27m lost in 1984.

Defeated, legally neutered and shunned by employers and government, the old British unions have become empty shells that are irrelevant to most people's lives. As Lisa Simms, a 21-year old delegate to the TUC's 1995 conference put it, 'The next youngest delegate must be about 30 and the speakers are about 40 at least. If you're young and sitting at home watching the TUC on TV it probably won't seem relevant to you' (*Guardian*, 14 September 1995).

The unions' loss of pull in society means that there is no real basis for them to influence the Labour Party. This is why the unions no longer set any policy agendas. The growing irrelevance of the unions can be seen in the constitutional reforms that have taken place since the last general election, such as the reform of the trade union block vote and the introduction of one member one vote (Omov) in the election of the party leader.

These organisational changes ratify the real collapse of union influence within society and hence the Labour machine. The trade unions set up the Labour Party to argue their case in parliament. Today the unions are largely an embarrassment which remind the Labour leadership of its failed past. Tony Blair insisted on a leadership election under the new Omov system because he did not want to be seen as a union appointee. Similarly with the vote on Clause IV; although Blair's team stitched up trade union support, they were most preoccupied with winning support within the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs). Winning the battle over Clause IV thanks to old-fashioned union block votes would have been a hollow victory.

The organisational reforms have often been presented as a step towards greater inner-party democracy. Yet a measure like women-only shortlists is just as undemocratic as the old block votes. The new party reforms are not about democracy, but about demonstrating that New Labour feels itself accountable to a different section of society; not the labour movement bureaucracy of old, but the new elite of middle class professionals epitomised by the well-heeled women Blair wants for MPs.

Alongside the unions, the other bastions of the old left like local government have little clout today. Walsall council in the West Midlands has been targeted by the Tories and Blair's team as

a 'Loony left' throwback to the eighties, and compared to Militant-run Liverpool with accusations of the Labour group being a 'party within the party'. However, all that the row over Walsall really proves is how much Labour has changed.

Walsall council is pursuing a dramatic version of the Tories' own competitive tendering policies, devolving power to 53 'neighbourhood councils' and allowing them to decide who they buy services from. In the eighties, the Militant-run Liverpool council conducted its campaign against government spending cuts backed by city-wide strikes and popular protests before Neil Kinnock's Labour leadership stepped in to suspend the district Labour Party and expel leading councillors. By contrast, Blair suspended the Walsall district Labour Party and most of the Labour group councillors in immediate response to a press conference held by the Tory Party chairman; the only response that Walsall's supporters could manage was to write a few letters to the *Guardian*.

The last Labour conference was a funeral for the old labour movement. Party conference used to be a showdown between left and right. Last year the leadership had its most successful party conference, not losing a single vote. There was no set piece battle over the minimum wage, unilateral disarmament, or education policy. The left's only campaign—to reverse the NEC's decision not to endorse Liz Davis as a parliamentary candidate—was easily crushed by the leadership and seemed like a pathetic pantomime compared to the battles of the early eighties. Today, conference is more like an American-style convention where the leadership uses the opportunity to monopolise the media.

In fact the Clinton White House now has more influence in setting the Labour Party's policy agenda than the unions or party conference. Blair has modelled himself on Bill Clinton and the relationship between the American administration and the Labour Party is now more important than the one between Blair and Bill Morris, leader of the Transport and General Workers Union.

After the 1992 election defeat, rather than doing the rounds consulting constituency and trade union activists to find out what went wrong, Blair and Gordon Brown were to be found thousands of miles away consulting with the Democrats about their White House victory. In the past you would have found a train of union delegations to the leader's office; now Clinton's advisers shuttle across the Atlantic for high-level conferences with Labour. Brown's Treasury team is in close correspondence with Robert Reich, Clinton's labour secretary, and Larry Summers, the deputy secretary to the US Treasury. When Blair wanted to talk about the 'Super Information Highway' he did not get on the phone to the communications workers unions,

but dispatched Labour frontbencher Chris Smith to consult US vice-president Al Gore.

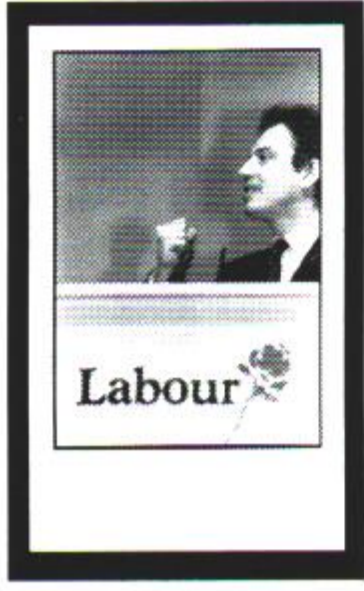
Jonathan Powell, the man in charge of the Labour leader's office, is typical of the Blair team inasmuch as he has none of the trade union links which would once have been obligatory for Labour insiders. Powell was, however, first secretary at Britain's Washington embassy, and was put in charge of smoothing relations with the Clinton administration by the Tory government, before he left the Foreign Office to work for Labour.

Bill Clinton has more influence on Labour's policy than either the unions or the party conference

The severing of Labour's old ties has allowed the leadership to dump the political baggage that went with them. Blair is free to pick up any soundbites or policies from either side of the Atlantic that will go down well with Westminster lobbyists and Fleet Street commentators. However, although the party is now free from the baggage of its past, New Labour is a far from stable entity. It lacks both the political coherence and the sense of purpose of the old labour movement. The party's old roots in society have withered, and it has yet to grow new ones.

Blair's team has made a lot of mileage out of the success of its membership recruitment drive. Yet most of Labour's much-heralded new members come from the same groups as its existing members—and the newest, most dynamic elements in contemporary society are noticeable by their absence. According to a survey carried out by *Labour Party News*, 65 per cent of new members were men and 69 per cent over 35. Nearly a third were aged between 45 and 60, and a fifth are over 60. Only 10 per cent were under 25; New Labour has not cemented a relationship with a new generation.

Labour's relationship with the old working class gave the party a certain coherence, despite its internal political conflicts. Without its old roots in the labour movement, New Labour is likely to be just as prone to the kind of factionalised personality clashes that have plagued John Major's government. Gordon Brown, Robin Cook and John Prescott are all reported to despise each other. At present, without the responsibilities of power these clashes have few consequences. How stable and united the party proves to be under the pressures of running a stagnant British capitalism remains to be seen. One thing is for certain: we will find no clues by studying the experience of past Labour governments. That party is over and done with. ●



What about women who aren't MPs?

Away from New Labour's boasts about increasing the number of women in parliament, Ellie Lee examines what a Blair government might offer the rest of Britain's women

New Labour has had a lot to say about the need for more women MPs and all-women shortlists in its selection procedure for MPs. Yet amid all the arguments about the pros and cons of promoting women within the Labour Party, Tony Blair's team has been less forthcoming about what it plans for women outside the party.

There seems to be an assumption in place that Labour policy is somehow better than the government's on issues that affect women's lives. But is it? A glance at 'Labour's Strategy for Women', written by parliamentary frontbencher, Clare Short, suggests that, while Labour might offer some professional women a career move into parliament, it offers the rest of us little or nothing.

● Women and jobs

What Labour says: 'Labour wants to encourage genuine flexibility in work, which both women and men may enjoy. Quality part-time jobs should allow people to combine work with other responsibilities—such as caring for children or elderly relatives—and with leisure pursuits and other interests.'

What women need: Financial independence is the bottom line if women are to be free and equal. Women need an income sufficient to pay the bills without being reliant on anyone else. Without this they are

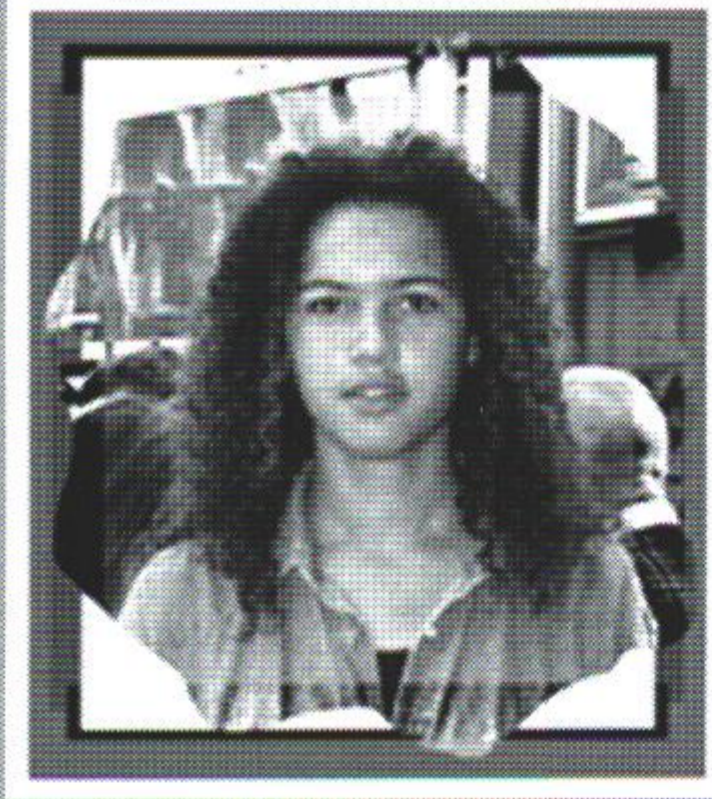
reduced to the level of minors, dependent on others for their upkeep. To be independent, women need proper jobs with a proper wage, and free childcare facilities to allow them to work full-time. Labour suggests the opposite for women—part-time jobs alongside unpaid toil caring for children and the elderly.

Whether you call it 'flexible' or 'quality', the problem with part-time work is that it pays part-time wages. Combining such work with caring for children and old people is not something women 'enjoy'. In practice it means poor pay and a greater

domestic burden. In fact, for many women Labour's 'proposal' simply ratifies the desperate situation they are in already. Trying to disguise this reality with words like 'genuine' or 'quality' changes nothing.

● Women as carers

What Labour says: 'Labour wants to see a comprehensive package of high-quality community care to empower users and carers to shape the services they want and need.... We would want carers to have access to clear and detailed information about



support services available, and for carers and users of services to be consulted about the package of services they are provided.'

What women need: 'Community care' means women shouldering more responsibility for the elderly and sick. These Tory policies are about cutting spending on services, and getting families to pick up the pieces. Women need to see an end to community care—not its expansion under a Labour government.

If the Labour Party was really interested in 'women as carers' it could provide the money to take the weight off women's shoulders. Instead it makes no commitment at all to funding. All Labour offers is 'information' and 'consultation'. So we can have a leaflet that tells us we have to look after elderly relatives, and be asked what we think about it; but don't expect any real resources.

● Women and welfare

What Labour says: 'The Labour Party believes there is a need for a fundamental review of the operation of the Child Support Agency. In particular we feel a review should look at the possibility of setting up an appeals procedure to examine cases

The CSA also has extensive powers to poke its nose into people's private and financial affairs—the last thing that women need.

● Women and childcare

What Labour says: 'Increasingly employers are recognising the need for quality childcare, but only the largest employers can take effective action on their own. Government must take on a coordinating role....

Labour's national childcare strategy will be based on a partnership approach, involving local authorities, schools, the voluntary sector, employers, trade unions and parents in building a system which aims to offer quality and affordable early years and out of school care.'

What women need: Women need access to round-the-clock childcare if they are to work and play a full role in society. Only if this is available can women have the freedom to make decisions and choices about what they do and when. It might seem straightforward that a party promoting an interest in women's equality would

● Women's reproductive health

What Labour says: 'A free House of Commons vote on the proposal that only one doctor's opinion be needed to obtain an abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy....If women choose a termination they have the right to safe, quick, free and legal treatment, with counselling.'

What women need: The right to abortion on request, without asking anyone else's permission. Why should we be concerned with a doctor's, priest's or MP's opinion on whether or not we should have a child? Women also need access to facilities where the operation can be done for free. In reality, Labour offers neither.

Like the Tories, Labour refuses to take a stand even on the minor matter of allowing early abortions on the say-so of one doctor rather than two. Labour supports a free vote in parliament, instead of adopting a party position—making abortion a matter of conscience rather than a matter of women's rights. Labour policy is similarly useless on who pays. In many parts of the country, NHS abortion



where there may be exceptional circumstances. Past settlements including "clean break" settlements should be taken into account.'

What women need: Scrap the Child Support Agency. Women need an income of their own. Instead the CSA makes women dependent on getting money from the estranged fathers of their children—men whom they may well want nothing more to do with. The only winner under the CSA system is the Treasury, which cuts women's welfare benefits by the amount they are supposed to get from the father.

make the provision of childcare a priority. Yet even on this simple matter the Labour Party manages to avoid the real issue.

Who cares about 'partnership'? It is of no importance to us who provides the childcare, as long as it is there. It does not matter if Old MacDonald and his farm are involved—what matters is that women get childcare now. If Labour was genuine about providing adequate childcare it would stop beating around the bush and commit itself, as the government-in-waiting, to fund comprehensive provision. Instead it passes the buck.

services are woefully inadequate, meaning women have no option but to go private. If Labour was serious about providing free treatment as it claims, it would surely demonstrate a willingness to stump up the cash for the services women need.

The Labour Party statement on women has nothing to say on the issue of fertility treatment for women who are unable to conceive. The only conclusion we can draw is that it does not want to put its neck on the line and argue for the merits of such treatments—especially when a powerful body of medical and moral opinion now says that *in vitro* fertilisation should be the first treatment to be rationed when resources run short in the health service. ●

Frank Furedi argues that the new debates about the ineffectiveness of government action are mystifying the issue of state power

Until recently the dominant theme of modern political theory was the question of the state. Philosophers, ideologues and politicians debated whether the state was an institution which preserved authority or freedom, a tool of repression or of liberation. While there were conflicting opinions about its role, the one issue that was not in dispute was state power. All shades of political opinion agreed that, if not omnipotent, the state was potentially a powerful institution.

Many of the most important past debates were about clarifying the nature of state power, determining whether the state served the interests of elites or the whole of society. The intensity of the deliberations around these issues was motivated by a recognition that state power had a crucial impact on social and political developments. According to some theories, the state could even be an all-powerful totalitarian institution.

Today, many of the past debates about the state sound old-fashioned. The term 'state power' itself is used less frequently and interest in the subject has declined. This intellectual shift is the product of circumstances in which the state appears less relevant. Indeed, in contrast to the past, many political thinkers now emphasise the irrelevance of state action.

The idea that belief in a powerful state has outlived its shelf-life transcends political divisions.

Throughout the eighties, prominent conservatives like Margaret Thatcher scorned the pretensions of state intervention. She argued that no state or government could 'buck the market'. Her wisdom was summed up by the phrase 'There is no alternative'. At the time, Thatcher's Tina was interpreted as merely a rallying call for free-marketers. But Tina expressed far more than this. If indeed there

is no alternative—if there really is only one possible course of action—then the scope for state intervention is extremely limited. From this perspective state action is seen as fundamentally subservient to far more potent market forces.

Impotent government?

During the past 15 years, the conviction that there is no alternative, and that therefore only a modest role can be assigned to state action, has become accepted across the political spectrum. All the main European political parties subscribe to this view. Even formerly radical thinkers accept this approach. So, for example, in retrospect, Eric Hobsbawm, the left-wing British historian, has declared that Thatcherism was inevitable: 'even the British left was eventually to admit that some of the ruthless shocks imposed on the British economy by Mrs Thatcher had probably been necessary.' (*Age of Extremes*, 1994, p412) The affirmation of the conservative doctrine of Tina by a leading theoretician of the left reflects the mood of the times.

Most left-wing thinkers concerned with policy issues now go so far as to call for a reorientation from the state to other institutions. For example, the Labour-sponsored Social Justice Commission has concluded that



'what central government can do for people is limited, but there is no limit to what people and communities can be enabled to do for themselves'. This shift of focus from state policy to self-help is significant. What appears as an enlightened advocacy of community initiative is actually an acknowledgement of a palpable sense of powerlessness. This is not a choice between equivalents. There is no symmetry between community action and the exercise of state power. Even at best, what local communities can do is insignificant compared to the potential power of the nation state. But if the state can do little for its citizens, then clearly any discussion of social or economic policy becomes academic. Individual responsibility becomes the motor force of society.

The diminished significance attached to the state is symptomatic of a general mood of low expectations which pervades society. In political life, there is a growing disbelief in the effectiveness of state action. Such attitudes are not merely a response to the failure of radical experiments in the old Soviet bloc. Nor are they simply a response to the failures of the welfare state. Even routine state functions and policies associated with middle-of-the-road governments have been seen to have failed.

Various theories, particularly those associated with the concept of 'globalisation', have been mobilised to explain the reduced effectiveness of the state. According to these theories, no nation state can control the international forces unleashed by the world market. Theories of globalisation emphasise the limitations of the nation state primarily in the sphere of economics. But cynicism about the relevance of the state is not restricted to economic matters. On social policy issues from health to education, there seems to be little correspondence between the objectives of state policy and actual outcome.

Even policies close to the hearts of state bureaucrats have failed to

achieve the desired results. Law and order is a case in point. Governments have undertaken to tackle crime and to win respect for law and order, and spent fortunes to this end. And yet, despite all the noise, the ruling elites are now more concerned about law and order than ever. Many experts have abandoned any possibility of solving this problem. Most initiatives now have the far more modest goal of containing crime, not solving it. The ongoing problem of order provides the clearest illustration of the sense that there are strict limits to the effectiveness of state policy today.


Unchallenged authority

Has the state really become such a weak institution? Is it really the case that it lacks the power to be decisive? And if so, why?

In reality the thesis of the powerless state is a fiction. The state today is not materially any weaker than 20, 40 or 60 years ago. The economic policies of the state have always been subject to world market forces. No single nation state could ignore the fluctuations of the world economy. Many a government has suffered the humiliation of seeing its economic policies destroyed by global realities during the past century. At most, today's globalising trends represent a quantitative and not a qualitative change in the balance of power between nation states and the world economy.

In every respect, the state still occupies a decisive role in the lives of capitalist societies. The state sector is directly responsible for a significant slice of economic life. Anywhere from 35 to 48 percent of the GDP of the advanced economies is subject to state control. Such economic power is matched by the state's monopoly over the means of coercion. There is little doubt that the state has considerable powers of surveillance, regulation and control.

The power of the capitalist state can also be grasped in a negative sense. In contrast to the past century, the capitalist state faces no serious political threat. In the past, the state faced ►



The state of the state today



strong hostility from significant sections of the population. For a time, the fear of subversion or of working class revolution was an important issue for the state's rulers. The knowledge that many people were prepared to fight against the state helped to restrict the scope for ruling class action.

Today, the capitalist state faces no threat from radical or revolutionary forces. The issue of internal security

Paradoxically, the Thatcher-Reagan era led to an expansion of state activities

is virtually non-existent. The main domestic threat to the state comes from a handful of individuals with an axe to grind. Individual acts of terror, such as those perpetrated by right-wing American militias, do not represent a threat to the state. In Britain, the absence of any real concern with state security is shown by the fact that the security agencies MI5 and MI6 are continually looking for activities to justify their existence.

Given the absence of any serious threat to the capitalist state, how can we account for the pervasive sense of powerlessness regarding its influence?

It is not so much that the state has lost its power, but that its existing institutions are no longer appropriate for the job it has to do today. Since the late eighties the capitalist state has lacked coherence and focus, as the ruling classes, whose interests the state serves, prove unable to work through their objectives in changing circumstances.

Easy target

The ruling elites have been disoriented by their own attempts to reorganise the institutions of the state. By the mid-seventies, sections of the political elite such as the Thatcherites in Britain had recognised that the typical postwar form of the state—the welfare state—was no longer appropriate to the harsh conditions facing contemporary capitalism. During the eighties the campaign against the welfare state escalated. Having undermined the welfare state, however, the capitalist class was faced with the question of what to replace it with. To this day, the question remains unanswered.

Events have shown that it was far easier to undermine the legitimacy of one state form than to win support for another. Right-wing politicians have discovered that attacking the welfare state was a far more plausible project than finding new solutions to the social

problems which gave rise to it in the first place. That is how the situation remains today. The ideology and many of the practices of the old form of the state have been undermined and even destroyed. But nothing solid has been put in its place.

To be sure, the welfare state was neither dynamic nor efficient. It was an outcome of what the capitalists considered a necessary compromise at the end of the war but saw as outdated 40 years later. However, the new fashion for a semi-privatised 'Tendering out state' provides no solutions for the exercise of state power. The preoccupation with economic efficiency and value for money in state practice reduced state action to the level of providing sewage disposal. It seriously underestimated the many vital political functions of the state. Above all, the state's task is to represent and protect the general interests of the ruling class. It provides the institutional framework for cohering those general interests, as well as the political means to enforce them.

For all its sins, the old welfare state did provide the framework for the representation of elite interests as well as the exercise of power. Under Thatcher and Reagan, this framework became weakened. Yet the state did not become more efficient than previously. Despite successive campaigns which targeted state expenditure, the proportion of the national wealth devoted to funding the state remained more or less the same as before.

The Thatcher-Reagan formula of the minimalist state proved a major exercise in self-deception. Modern society cannot be run on a minimalist basis. If anything, capitalist society now survives through an extension and not a reduction of rules and regulations. That is why, paradoxically, the Thatcher-Reagan era led to an expansion of state activities. Since the eighties, the state has become more intrusive than ever. Issues which hitherto were partly outside the sphere of state supervision—health, education, family life—have been thoroughly saturated with officialdom. From cigarette-smoking to parenting, new petty rules have been drawn up by zealous officialdom.

Few theoreticians have commented on the paradox of the state expanding at a time when right-wing governments are officially wedded to 'rolling it back'. Nor has the state's tendency to expand into new areas of society received any serious consideration. Instead of addressing these important new developments, most writers have interpreted the confusion of the ruling elites to mean that the state has become weak.

The state only appears weak because its institutions are not

effectively structured to deal with the routine problems of today. In the past, ruling class political parties interacted with state institutions like the civil service to constitute a consciousness of the general interests of capitalism. Today, these past practices no longer work in the same way. Throughout the West, conflicts of interest between different sections of the ruling elites overwhelm the search for a coherent elite consensus. The disintegration of the political system in Italy provides an extreme example of this process. The issue in Italy is not so much corruption or the Mafia, but the fact that the ruling class lacks an accepted system of political rules for the conduct of its affairs in the present. The Italian example is only the most transparent one. In America the conflict between president Clinton and the Republican Congress, which temporarily shut down the government, clearly illustrates the same trend.

Wolf in sheep's clothing

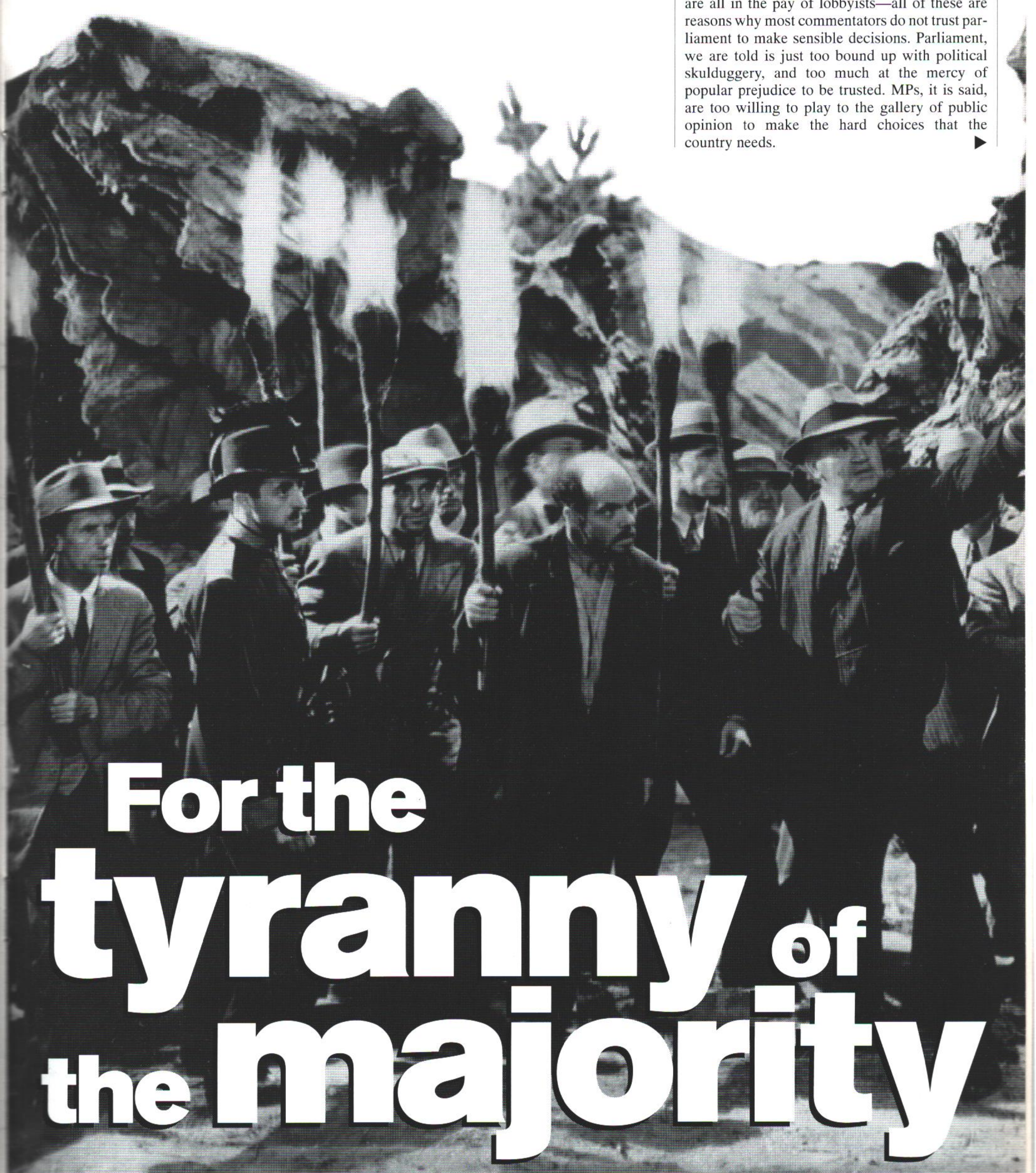
The new theories of the impotent state confuse these trends with some new illness weakening the power of state action. Consequently, they remain oblivious to the character of the crisis of elite politics and the nature of contemporary power.

In the contemporary discussion, the specific problem of ruling class coherence has been represented as the general problem of the state. The failure of the ruling class to sort out its problems has been recycled as 'proof' that effective political intervention is impossible. That is why the thesis of the powerless state is so damaging. For if indeed state intervention is doomed from the start, then any general attempt to solve the problems of society needs to be abandoned. From this perspective, there is no point in even trying to alleviate the difficulties we face. It is an argument for reconciling people to their bitter existence. Those who belittle the power of the state today are not really talking about the state. They are dismissing any possibility of society coming up with solutions to its problems.

Of course, in insisting upon the potential effectiveness of state action and intervening in society, we are not defending the state as it exists. Anyone concerned with freedom and human emancipation will be deeply suspicious of state intervention. The state remains a coercive and intrusive instrument of domination—indeed, as *Living Marxism* has made a project of pointing out, state interference in our affairs is more pervasive than ever today. The problem is that it is precisely these issues of power and domination which remain masked in the contemporary discussion about state impotence. ●

James Heartfield would rather take his chances with the plebs than rely on the experts

It is commonplace today to hold parliament in contempt. The braying of the back benchers, the snide attacks on personalities and point-scoring that stands in for debate, and the widespread belief that the honourable members are all in the pay of lobbyists—all of these are reasons why most commentators do not trust parliament to make sensible decisions. Parliament, we are told is just too bound up with political skulduggery, and too much at the mercy of popular prejudice to be trusted. MPs, it is said, are too willing to play to the gallery of public opinion to make the hard choices that the country needs. ▶



For the
tyranny of
the **majority**

◀ In particular, parliament is considered untrustworthy when it comes to defending people's rights. The Home Office's decision to deport Saudi Arabian dissident Mohammed al Mas'uri at the behest of Britain's foremost arms customer, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, is only the latest example of politicians running roughshod over liberty. Last year, Home Secretary Michael Howard was found in contempt of court for expelling a Nigerian asylum-seeker from the country in defiance of a court order.

In fact Michael Howard has become a regular target of judges and all the rest of 'the great and the good'. As Home Secretary, Howard has fallen out with the inspector of prisons judge Stephen Tumim over the treatment of prisoners, as well as the governor of Parkhurst over responsibility for escapes. Judges have accused

Now the European Court of Human Rights has made the British government pay compensation to the relatives of the three. The model of extra-parliamentary constraint upon the workings of parliament is gaining credibility. Lord Lester favours incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into British law, to act as a kind of restraint on the law-makers, tantamount to a written constitution. Lester's proposal has the support of the civil rights organisation Liberty.

On the face of it, the case for restraining parliament to secure our rights seems overwhelming. However, this is an argument that rests on one fundamentally absurd proposition. The idea is that parliament is too easily swayed by financial or populist motives, and that instead, dispassionate experts, who have no axe to grind, should

safeguard our civil liberties. But since when has the judiciary been a reliable safeguard of our civil liberties?

Far from being defenders of ethnic minorities, judges have for years handed down higher sentences on average to black defendants than to white. British judges have been rubber-stamping

If politicians really were guilty of playing to the gallery, wouldn't you expect them to be more popular?

Howard of taking on too many powers; the notion that judges might be presuming to interfere with elected government does not seem to have occurred to anybody. Howard is certainly a draconian home secretary, but unlike the ermine-clad judiciary, we can vote him out of office.

The perceived failure of politicians like Howard to stand up for liberty has suggested to some that we need more durable safeguards for people's rights.

The Independent newspaper argued after the al Mas'uri case that the right of granting asylum should be taken out of the hands of the Home Secretary. The newspaper thought that asylum was too important an issue to be made into a political football, and would be handled better by an independent body, like the judiciary. Of course, there are precedents. Increasingly, British judges, and European judges too, feel that they have the right to restrain the politicians.

Most MPs have welcomed the proposals of the Nolan commission to subject parliament to regulation from an external authority, for the first time since it ordered the execution of King Charles I. To most, including the Labour and Liberal politicians who are wholeheartedly for the new regulations, the issue is straightforward. Their instinctive support for any kind of regulation means more to them than any old-fashioned ideas about the sovereignty of parliament. Only ex-prime minister Ted Heath has sufficient feeling for the virtues of an elected parliament over an unelected judiciary to oppose the commission outright. Later this year another judge will hold politicians in the balance when Justice Scott reports on the 'arms to Iraq' affair.

Most controversially, the European Court has found against Britain in the case of the Gibraltar Three, an IRA active service unit which was gunned down, unarmed, by British agents in 1988.

the racially motivated immigration and asylum laws for years. As far as the treatment of Irish suspects is concerned, British judges conspired to keep the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six in jail for 14 and 16 years respectively, despite having access to all the evidence that undermined their convictions. Throughout the 25-year war in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, the British judiciary colluded with the no-jury court system. Nor for that matter did the European Court of Human Rights have a great deal to say about the systematic suspension of the most basic democratic rights of the nationalists of Northern Ireland throughout that conflict, waiting until hostilities had ceased before registering its protest about the assassination of the Gibraltar Three. Today judges in Britain are quite as draconian as they have ever been, overseeing the creation of the largest prison population in Europe.

At first it is hard to see why anyone would think that judges would be more disposed to defend someone's civil liberties than parliament would. Parliament, unlike the judiciary is at least open to public scrutiny, and, most importantly, Members of Parliament are held accountable at election time. That ought to mean that they are more responsible to public opinion than the judges.

However, for the critics of parliament, that is precisely the problem. In a foreword to Liberty's *Human Rights Human Wrongs*, an alternative report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the organisation's General Secretary Andrew Puddephat makes this qualification about parliament's ability to defend people's rights:

'no democratically elected politician can afford to neglect the force of majority opinion. It has proved difficult for politicians to champion the rights of lesbians and gay men or the interests

of the black community or other minority groups who have experienced prejudice, hostility and discrimination.'

Puddephat continues: 'A Bill of Rights can afford such protection and (in that protection is provided through the courts) can be free from the pressures of the majority, often evident in a democracy.' (pxiv)

As Puddephat explains it, politicians would like to support the rights of lesbians and gay men, black people and other minorities, but unfortunately all those bigoted oiks in their constituencies will punish them at the ballot boxes if they do. Imagine the scene: Michael Howard, Peter Lilley, Michael Portillo, Jack Straw and Peter Mandelson all secretly wishing that they could stand up for civil liberties, but just too frightened of what the electorate would say if they did. The picture is unlikely. Politicians are the people who have done most to stir up hatred against others, they are not the victims of popular prejudice. After all, if politicians really were guilty of playing to the gallery, wouldn't you expect them to be a bit more popular than they are?



None the less there does seem to be a certain kind of logic to Andrew Puddephat's argument. Surely it is in the nature of majorities to persecute minorities? And if democracy is a system that favours majorities over minorities then democracy must lead to the persecution of minorities. Any number of polls can be produced that show that most people disapprove of immigration, or favour hanging.

American constitutional lawyer Lani Guinier has been concerned with the protection of the rights of minorities in a democracy. Guinier first came to prominence in 1993 when president Clinton proposed her for the post of attorney-general. Then her view that electoral boundaries should be drawn so as to guarantee black representation got her black-balled by conservatives in Congress. Guinier answers her critics in her book *The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy* (1995).

Guinier cites the warning of the early American president and constitutional authority James Madison that 'if a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure' (p3).

'I pursue voting systems that disaggregate The Majority', she adds, 'so that it does not exercise power unfairly or tyrannically' (p5). To back up her argument, Guinier shows how white majorities, especially in the American south, have conspired to dilute black representation, always keeping real power-making one step beyond the level at which blacks get elected.

Now that might be a convincing argument, or it might not. One thing is clear, though. It is an argument against democracy. Guinier might prefer to say that she wants to introduce safeguards for minorities into democracy. But what she is really arguing is that democracy itself is a bad thing.

After all, the rule of The Majority, or even the tyranny of The Majority, is what the word democracy means—from demos, 'the people'. Perhaps Andrew Puddephat is right. Perhaps democracies have always persecuted minorities. But even if he was right, what he means is that democracy is a bad thing, and he should say so. What could Guinier's proposal to 'disaggregate The Majority' mean? Sabotaging democracy.

But are Guinier and Puddephat right? Does democracy necessarily mean the persecution of the minority? Well, in one sense, yes, of course it does. Majority rule implies that the minority loses. But the idea that the minority which loses in an election or an open debate has to be a racially distinct minority, like blacks, or that it must be a persecuted minority, like lesbians and gays, does not follow at all. In fact the more open a democracy the better chance there is of challenging those kinds of prejudice.

The case for democracy eludes professionals like Guinier or Puddephat. That case is not just that democracy is orderly or moderate—it need not be any of those things. The real case for

democracy is that, potentially, majorities will make better decisions than minorities. As long as someone is prepared to argue the case, majorities have a basic interest in freedom that elites do not.

To lawyers and civil rights campaigners that proposition seems to go against all their experience. Fighting for an unpopular cause can make it seem that the great British public are the last people you would ask to fight injustice. By and large most people's everyday prejudices can seem pretty petty and intolerant. To the liberally minded it makes more sense to trust the experts to take a more measured view. Instead of arguing for a case among the majority of people, they prefer to lobby the authorities for a more rational policy.

But however intolerant public opinion is, the authorities and the experts will always end

Majorities have a basic interest in freedom that elites do not

up being worse. The Majority will always start off from a position of prejudice, but most people have no vested interest in repression or persecution; there is a chance of arguing them around, just as long as you are prepared to work at it. By contrast, the powers-that-be always start off sounding very moderate and understanding, but the defence of their elite position means that they are implicated in the denial of people's rights and will always end up on the side of repression. They cannot be persuaded to act against their own privileged interests. In fact the only reason they always sound so liberal is because years of experience have taught them to be cautious about sticking the boot in. All of their compassion is just so much sugar on the bitter pill.

Those who despair of popular prejudice are the people who do most to reinforce it. Every time that someone tries to side-step having the hard argument with a sceptical public opinion they only succeed in shoring up those prejudices. Appealing to the experts and the authorities to sort things out only means that the mass of people are isolated from public debate—the very conditions in which prejudice can thrive.

These days it is accepted policy to keep the masses in the utmost ignorance possible. Health educators readily admit to each other that the incidence of Aids is much smaller than anticipated. But when it comes to teaching people about the dangers of unprotected sex, they deliberately exaggerate the risks. Anyone who dares to tell the truth is roundly denounced for giving people 'dangerous' information. So profoundly do such professionals mistrust ordinary people that they think that the truth is too difficult for them to handle. The consequence of refusing to engage honestly with public opinion

is that the 'experts' turn themselves into professional liars. 'Expertise', which ought to mean greater insight, is degraded into more outrageous prejudice and misinformation.

According to Lani Guinier, the best way to defend the rights of minorities is to 'disaggregate The Majority'. But which minorities is she really talking about? Does it really help black minorities to see the mass of Americans divided against each other? On the contrary, 'disaggregating The Majority' was the whole rationale behind racial division in the first place. America's elites set The Majority of working Americans at each other's throats by making them fight for jobs and resources along ethnic and racial lines. Black Americans paid the heaviest price for that, corralled into rundown inner cities, kept on the very edges of the job market and harassed by a colonial-style police force. Guinier's proposed remedy—guaranteed black representation—would only make racial division into a formalised political institution. Already the black political leadership in the cities only serves to isolate blacks from the wealthier, white suburbs. By handing blacks control of the cities, and promptly moving out of town, business has kept its tax dollars out of black hands.

The minority that has most to fear from The Majority is the elite of professional and propertied classes that runs society in its own interests. When Lani Guinier quotes American conservative James Madison about protecting the rights of minorities, she neglects to say that the minority that Madison was talking about was the minority of property-holders. Madison was warning the wealthy few that they would have to stop the mass of voters ganging up on them and curbing their wealth.

These days, this self-serving elite of the rich and powerful likes to imagine that it is the victim of persecution by an aggressive majority. In Madison's day elites were more self-confident. They had no qualms about standing up for property and privilege. But today elites are less confident. Instead of trying to pass themselves off as the master race, they are more likely to dress up as the persecuted minority. Big companies and governments love to get a woman to front their operations. Nothing suits them more when it comes to facing down opposition than playing the role of the underdog. Of course, that is all for show. Power is power. But these days power comes wearing the guise of powerlessness.

The polemics against the bigotry of the masses and the untrustworthiness of elected politicians serve an important purpose. Passing themselves off as the enlightened and persecuted few is one way to undermine the claims of the many.

As against all the judges who want to rein in the democratic process, and civil liberties campaigners who want to undermine majoritarianism, the mass of people still provide us with the best chance of making the best decisions—as long as someone is prepared to take the case to them. To the elites that prefer to rule by dividing, The Majority might look like a tyranny. For the rest of us that is democracy, the rule of the majority. ●

Consuming

Will spending in the shops end the economic slump and save the government? Don't put your money on it, says Phil Murphy

What is the state of the British economy today? At the start of the year most economic commentators expressed scepticism about chancellor Kenneth Clarke's forecast of three per cent economic growth for 1996. Top City analysts Goldman Sachs predict growth at 1.7 per cent, barely half the Treasury figure. The *Economist's* forecast of 2.4 per cent was more typical, but still £3 billion worth of output short of government predictions.

It is hardly surprising that few share the official optimism about the British economy. Everyone knows that while 'the recovery' can be illustrated in statistics and graphs, it has not meant much in the real world of working and living and making ends meet. The corner around which, government spokesmen tell us, the recovery will begin to have some real impact seems like the longest corner in history. It just keeps going round and round, never reaching an end.

Most of the New Year economic doubters homed in on Clarke's belief that consumer spending will provide the main push behind growth this year. In the November budget, the Treasury revised its consumer expenditure forecasts upwards to 2.25 per cent in 1995 and 3.5 per cent in 1996. At the time more than a few eyebrows were raised. The *Financial Times* commented that this forecast was 'intriguing, and politically significant': 'In the run up to the general election consumers are expected to act as an increasingly significant motor for growth.' (29 November 1995) Since then the doubts have not dissipated.

Feelgood factor

With last year's export boom having petered out, investment levels continuing to disappoint expectations, company storerooms overflowing with excess stocks, and government spending under the axe, cynics might conclude that it was only a matter of time before the government's attention turned to consumption levels. By default, consumer spending is

the last remaining possible source of market demand to stimulate economic activity.

The government's wishful thinking is that the public will spend and spend the economy into rekindling the recovery after last year's growth slowdown. The hope is that a few tax cuts and modest earnings increases will induce us back into the spendthrift ways of the eighties. One-off factors are predicted to help the spending bug bite this year, as many people find more cash in the bank due to the maturing of Tessa accounts and the handouts from a spate of building society mergers.

Despite all this, few economists outside the inner circles are as optimistic as the Treasury. Most doubt, given the general grip of economic and social uncertainty, that we can expect any resuscitation of a consumer 'feelgood factor' in the near future. However, there is a bit more to the exchange on spending levels than a dispute over Treasury forecasts. The very fact that consumption, rather than production, is the focus of economic debate is a significant sign of depressed times.

Customer power

There seems to be a preoccupation with consumption in every discussion about the character of British society these days. In the 1990s discourse on where global capitalism is heading, Britain is classified as a front-line 'consumption economy', alongside the likes of the USA, Canada and Australia, in contrast to the 'production economies' of Germany, Japan and East Asia.

This theme parallels another discussion about the role and power of the consumer at the end of our century. The underlying sentiment is that economies today are much more consumer driven than producer driven. Instances of the new influence of consumer power are often cited, most recently the way German motorists apparently helped to force the Shell corporation to reverse its plans to dispose of the Brent Spar oil rig at sea.

Such eulogies to consumer power are usually tempered by the view that consumer trends are not that straightforward. Discussion swings between the notion that information technology and developments such as home shopping 'empower' the consumer, to the argument that greater uncertainty and insecurity in the world today fosters a higher saving, lower consuming public. In a recent book *The Unmanageable Consumer* (1995) Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang argue that while the ideology of consumerism remains in place, consumers show signs of being more defensive, more unpredictable, more insecure—in short, unmanageable.

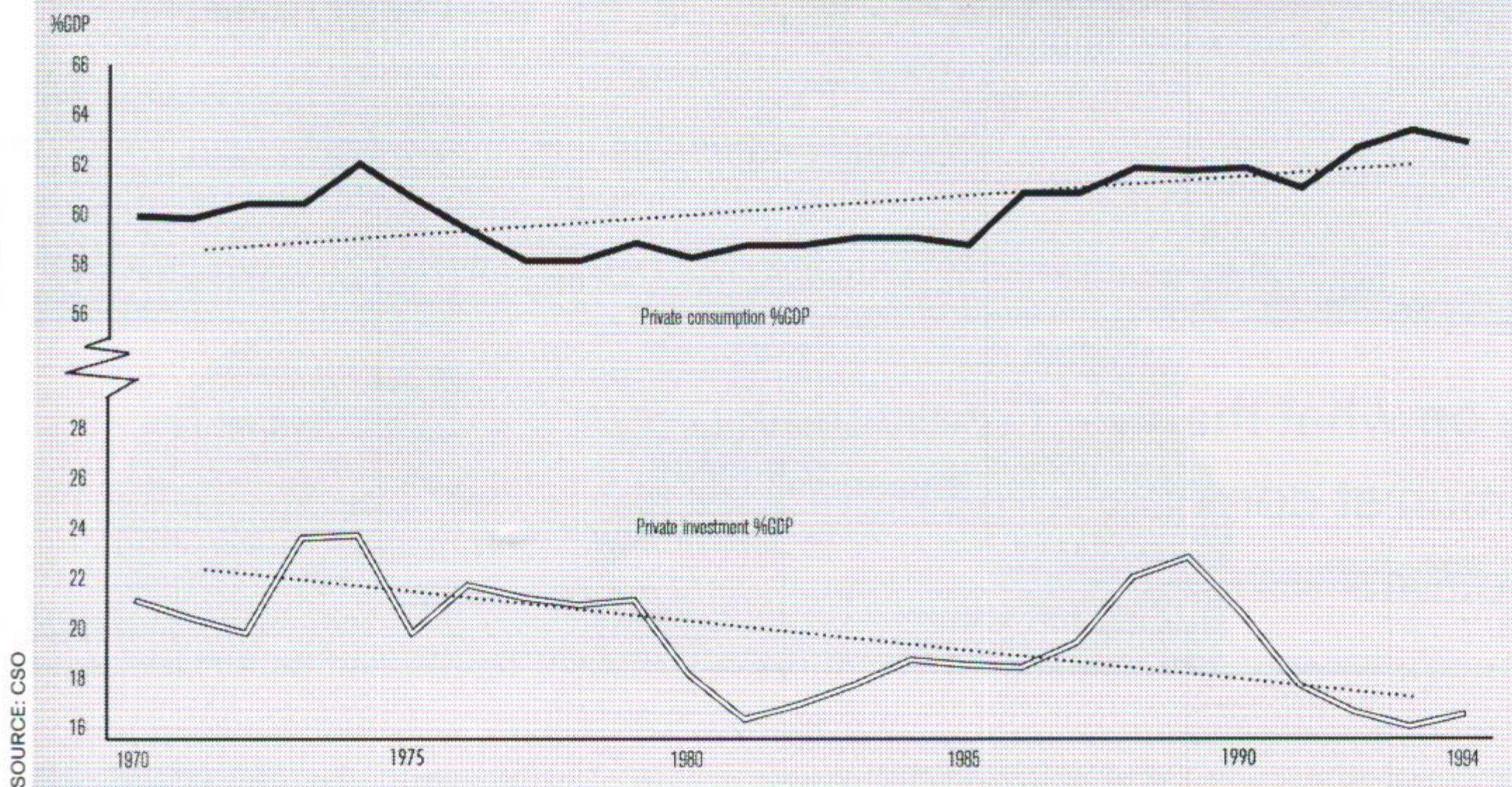
Woopies

The prestigious Henley Centre for Forecasting doubts if the 'feelgood factor' among consumers will return this side of the twenty-first century, if at all. Economists speculate endlessly on the prospects for consumption. Was the reported Christmas spending spree genuine? Or was it simply a case of shoppers picking up early sales bargains in big stores at the expense of independent retailers? Does negative equity in the housing market provide a permanent block to the return of free and easy spending? Is the ageing of the population good or bad for consumption? Some analysts anticipate a Woopies spending boom (by Well-Off Older People). Others bemoan the greater caution of the over-40s, said to be hanging on to their cash to help support children who might not leave the nest due to poor employment prospects, as well as supporting ageing parents and indeed themselves in old age as state welfare provisions dwindle.

Overall the balance in the debate is that the nervous nineties breeds a more cautious consumer who will not fulfil the government's hopes. From the staid Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to the even more staid Trades Union Congress, everybody emphasises the dampening impact of job insecurity. As a result, the OECD is predicting growth in consumer spending in Britain

passions

1 UK consumption and investment



Falling investment and rising consumption (above)...leaves Britain at the bottom of the investment tables (below left)...and of the growth league (below right)

2 Investment levels in the G7

	Gross fixed capital formation as a percentage of GDP (1993)	Average annual growth in investment volume 1989-93 (%)
Japan	29.8	0.7
Germany	22.2	0.9
France	18.9	-0.9
Canada	18.0	-1.2
Italy	17.1	-2.3
USA	16.2	0.6
Britain	15.1	-2.1

SOURCE: OECD

3 Real GDP growth in the G7

	Annual average 1960-90 (%)
Japan	6.3
Canada	4.2
Italy	3.9
France	3.7
USA	3.2
Germany	3.1
Britain	2.4

SOURCE: OECD

of around half the official forecast, at little more than two per cent in 1996.

The most interesting aspect of this debate is not who is right on spending levels—though the evidence favours the more pessimistic voices—but that a discussion about the British economy is now so narrowly preoccupied with levels of consumption. Consumption features so prominently in the frame only because production is so feeble.

Britain's economic problems are not caused by a shortage of market demand, from consumers or anyone else. The sluggish growth of output is due to production problems, not selling problems. In capitalist society goods are not produced in order to meet

consumer needs; if that were the case, there would be a permanent boom as companies produced enough to satisfy the public's desires. In reality, capitalists only produce goods and services which can be made and sold at a sufficient profit. If production is not profitable in the first place, consumers will not even be offered the chance to buy British goods and will have to turn to imports. What differentiates boom times from slump for British business is the availability of profitable investment opportunities for capitalists in this country.

The current obsession with consumption turns what is happening in the economy upside down. For example, the economic significance

of employment insecurity is trivialised when it is bemoaned merely as the explanation for weak consumer demand. Of course, it is common sense that unemployed people, or employed people fearful of losing their jobs, will spend less in the shops than people who feel their jobs are secure. This is not an issue of weak consumer demand, however, but of a weak productive base to the economy; why else is secure employment a scarce commodity these days? To blame lower consumer demand is a circular argument. It turns a consequence of economic slump into a cause.

Sour grapes

Consumption is particularly important in an economy like Britain's, but this stems from the previous weakening of the dynamic of production. Over the past 15 years or so, economic growth theory has tended to play down the role of productive investment. This is little more than a self-serving justification for market economies which have not been able to sustain adequate investment levels. Consumption fills the investment gap and new 'theories' seek to reassure us that nothing fundamental is wrong: productive investment is redefined as not that important anyway.

However, the figures reproduced here tell a different story (left). Britain's relative economic decline and its slide down international competitiveness tables have got nothing to do with the state of consumption and everything to do with the weakness of British investment. Figure 1 shows the secular fall in investment and the compensating rise in consumption. Figure 2 shows that Britain is at the bottom of the Group of Seven (G7) league in investment—which just happens to coincide with it being the slowest growing G7 economy in recent decades (see Figure 3).

The fact that debate about economic prospects focuses on consumer spending is itself a sign of British economic stagnation. Today's obsession with consumption levels is symptomatic of a pervasive slump. Capitalists no longer able to boast of their productive powers reassure themselves that they are way up there in the consumption stakes. The truth is that those who can, produce; those who cannot, consume.

Restructuring the management



Lena Cairns on what the West really thinks of the 'Communist comeback' in December's Russian elections

After Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party won 157 seats in the Duma (Russian parliament) in December, headlines in the American and British press seemed to betray renewed fears that Red Russia was on the march again, just six years after the end of the Cold War. 'It's back, Communism II, coming soon to Russia', declared the front page of the *Economist* (16 December 1995). *Time* magazine conceded that Zyuganov 'may not be a throwback to Stalin, but he's still pretty bad news' (8 January 1995). 'Two green lights for big Red vehicle', suggested the *Guardian* (20 December 1995), in its bid for the anti-communist wordplay award.

All predictable enough, you might think. Yet the headlines proved in marked contrast to the articles themselves, which turned out to be decidedly low-key. In fact the 'Return of the Red Menace' hysteria tended to run out of steam after the first paragraph. Compared to the anti-communist scares of the past, this was a rather pathetic panic. Despite the drama of its front page, the *Economist* quickly concluded that the return of the Communists in Russia was not such a bad thing. *Time*'s Bruce Nelan had to admit that the party 'recognises a mixed economy, has renounced atheism and is ready for serious political dialogue to persuade the voters'. Hardly the stuff of a new Cold War.

Most Western journalists and politicians are uncertain about their response to the Russian elections. Businessmen are not leaving in droves. Nobody is pulling millions out of the St Petersburg banks. Indeed, the media has had to acknowledge that in Russia it is 'business as usual'. So why the big headlines?

Brian Mawhinney, the desperate Conservative Party chairman, gave a clue when he used the elections in Russia to declare that, with communism at our elbow once again, we cannot entertain the idea of an ex-CND organiser (Tony Blair) as British prime minister. Mawhinney is not the brightest of men, but it is unlikely that even he really thinks that we are about to see the Iron Curtain descend once more. Like most Western politicians, however, he finds any suggestion that we are witnessing the familiar ideological battles of the past a warm and comforting one.

Harvard Bolsheviks

The old divisions of right and left and the anti-communist rhetoric of the past seem invitingly definite amid the uncertainty and confusion of politics in the 1990s. You could almost hear sighs of relief from the headline writers when Zyuganov took the majority. On the surface, it seemed we were back in the reassuring world of the Cold War where Western commentators knew what they stood for and who their enemies were.

Unfortunately for them, it is only on the surface. The briefest examination of Russian affairs shows that there has been no return to ideological confrontation. Instead, Russia has reached a kind of stagnant equilibrium. The economy trundles along, neither booming nor going bust, while no politician, whatever their personality cult, has the capacity to transform the country, let alone launch a battle with the West.

The attractions of the past have blinded many Western commentators to the real situation in Russian politics. The scare stories about a Communist 'comeback' ignored the fact that members of the old Communist Party have not exactly been out in the cold since the return of capitalism to Russia. Even in the early eighties they were sending their children to Harvard, setting up foreign bank accounts and taking a cut of any deal within reach. When market relations were restored with the end of the Cold War, there were relatively few casualties paraded for the cameras. Most members of the old Communist elite were already in the process of safeguarding their positions by turning themselves into pro-market reformers and nationalists.

There is no right, no left and no competing political visions in Russia. The parties are just shifty collections of careerist individuals trying to suss out whose back to scratch next. General Alexander Lebed has just announced plans to hitch up with the Communist Party in his bid for the presidency



Despite its frontpage warning (above) the *Economist* knows it's business as usual in Red Square (top)

this year. And while Western editors like to pigeonhole Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrats as the far-right bogey, those who study Russian politics at close quarters are trying to work out just what the maverick members of this rag-bag party have in common.

Having discovered that, despite the best efforts of the headline writers, it is hard to fit current Russian affairs into the old framework, many Western commentators became unwilling to draw any conclusions about December's elections. The *Guardian* ended up suggesting that the vote 'should be greeted calmly: whatever the result, it is only a page in a long chapter ahead' (15 December, 1995). In other words, tomorrow is another day; so much for analytical journalism.

World Bank socialists

The unwillingness to offer any firm analysis of the broader situation in Russia can in part be put down to confusion about what exactly the country is supposed to be moving towards. Not only do the stories of future prosperity seem out of place in Moscow, they now seem strongly at odds with Western economic conditions. Unable to sustain the grand visions of a market miracle and a democratic success story, social commentators in both Russia and the West have fallen back on the reassuringly vague notions of 'a developing civil society' and 'gradual reform' to describe the

unpromising situation across the former Soviet Union.

Even the World Bank, an institution that is supposed to pioneer the development of market relations in Russia, has lost its way. Lack of large-scale foreign investment and continued stagnation has forced the bank to switch its attention to patching up the effects of the market. For example, money granted to Russia's federal employment service, to assist in building a free labour market, has now been made conditional upon establishing centres of excellence for disability employment training. The bank that was entrusted with the historic mission of building a powerful capitalist economy in Russia has been reduced to tinkering with disabled employment initiatives of a kind more usually associated with British borough councils.

Everybody now has a sense that the market revolution in Russia has not gone according to plan. But since so few in the depressed West are now enthusiastic fans of the eighties-style free market, the headline claims that Zyuganov presents a threat to it ring rather hollow. That is why even the most vehement Cold Warriors of the past could not sustain their anti-communist invective around December's elections. An article in the *Sunday Times* summed up the new ambivalence about the market in Russia: 'Nations such as Russia and those in the former Eastern bloc that had never known capitalism

reached for the golden ring without understanding the price tag.' (24 December 1995)

Western pessimism about the development of the market in Russia means that ideological principles have fallen by the wayside. The story behind the headlines is that it is considered of no great importance who gets elected. It is good form for Western newspapers and political debate to play up the petty power struggles between Kremlin and Duma personnel, but there is an underlying sense that none of this much matters. What does matter to the West is that a new management structure comes into place in Russian society. As Simon Sebag Montefiore wrote in the *Sunday Times* last year, 'We must hope...that Russia does not overturn a bizarre new truism emerging: that communists make the best managers of capitalism'.

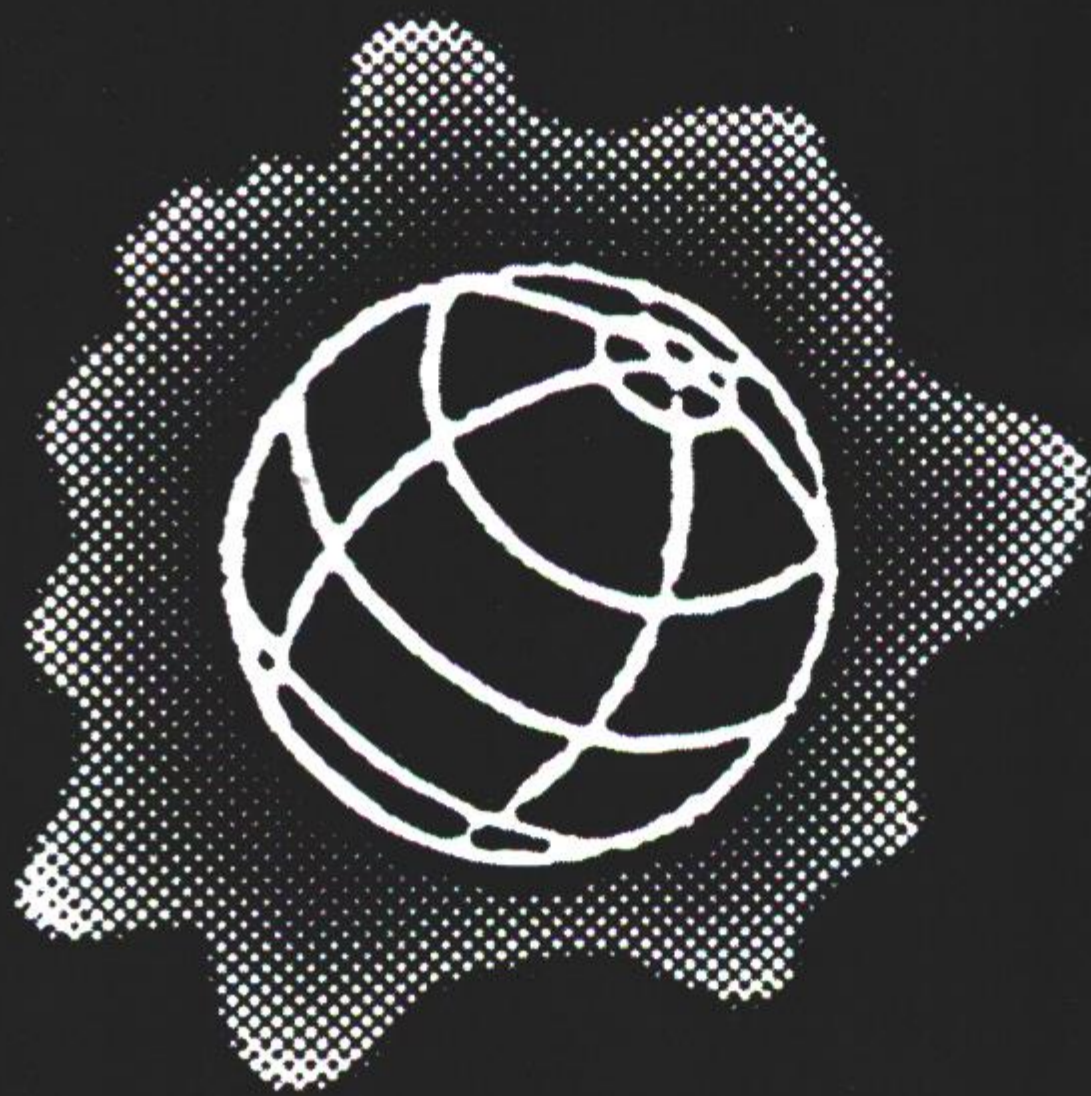
Communist managers

In other words, what Russia needs is not politics, but to be run from behind the scenes by people who are not naive enough to believe that capitalism will bring prosperity for any great number. The low horizons of Western commentators have led them to see the old Communist Party as as good a set of managers as anyone. The elections are really just a sideshow. Indeed Russian voters are frequently blamed for causing political upheaval—as when they thumbed the reforms by electing Zhirinovskiy. Russian politicians are seen as buffoons, best kept out of the public arena—a perception that has been greatly assisted by Boris Yeltsin's diplomatic gaffs. Few Western commentators would object to seeing the voters turfed out of the polling booths altogether, and Russian politicians out of politics.

Western anti-marketeters

When you consider that for more than 50 years the West rested its own democratic credentials on its crusade to bring democracy to the Soviet bloc, the current trend for Western experts to criticise the market and condemn the democratic process in Russia does not bode well for the capitalist system into the next century.

The real danger is not the return of a Stalinist menace, nor militant Russian nationalism. The real danger lies in the Western elites' own low expectations of capitalist democracy, which are leading them to dismiss the importance of safeguarding it in favour of a more authoritarian system of behind-the-scenes management—in Russia today, and who knows where tomorrow. There is indeed a spectre haunting Europe, but it has little to do with the Communist Party of Russia.



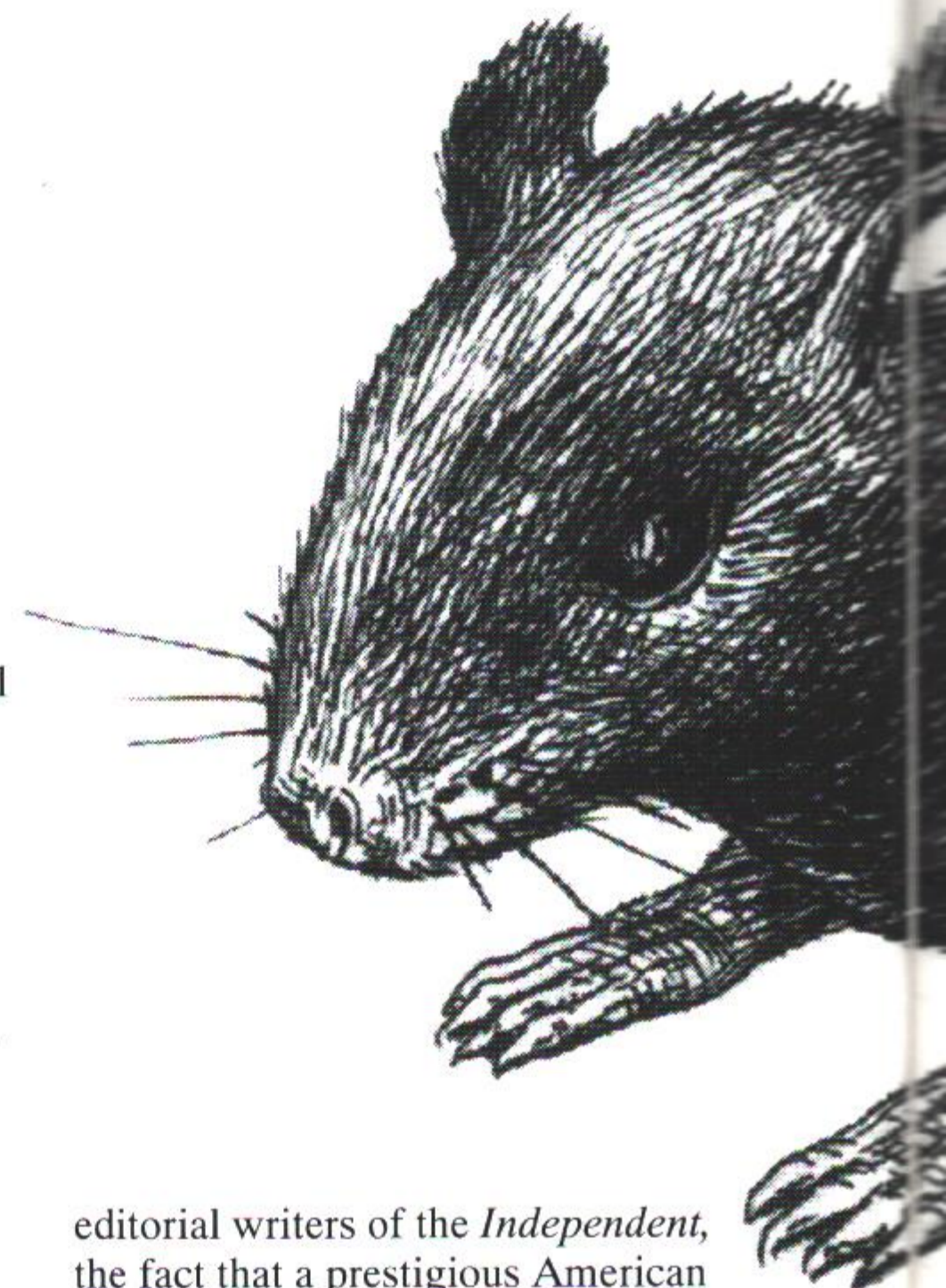
Of oncomice and men

The 'oncomouse' has become the latest focus for the global controversy over animal rights and genetic engineering. It is a mouse, but not as we know it; a specimen genetically engineered to be highly likely to develop cancer, used as a research tool by scientists seeking treatments for the disease. Ever since the European Patents Office in Munich granted Harvard University a patent for the oncomouse, a coalition of animal rights activists, environmentalists, radical scientists and religious leaders has campaigned to have the patent torn up.

The battle of the oncomouse, which as we go to press looks set to be raised in the European Parliament, sheds some interesting light on the raging debate over the ethical pros and cons of life-patenting.

Animal rights groups oppose the patent because they object in principle to the genetically engineered creation of a cancerous mouse for experimental purposes. The British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection and Compassion in World Farming have declared themselves 'totally opposed to the patenting of animals because the availability of patents will give a massive commercial boost to genetic engineering. In many cases this risks imposing great suffering on the animals involved'.

Other opponents have focused their fire on the patenting process itself, attacking the 'immoral' notion of treating animal life in commercial terms. The British Patent Concern Coalition says that patenting the oncomouse 'means treating life itself as a mere commodity, with adverse moral and practical consequences for humankind, the animal kingdom and the natural environment'. For the



editorial writers of the *Independent*, the fact that a prestigious American university wants to make money out of the work indicates that 'something has gone far wrong with our calculus of moral standards'.

In order to clarify the issues at stake it is useful to separate out two points of contention. First there is the question of animal rights and genetic engineering: is it right that anybody should make such an animal as the oncomouse? Second there is the issue of the commercial exploitation of such a creation: is it right that the oncomouse should be patented? To the first question, an unequivocal 'yes'. The oncomouse should have been made, and possibilities for developing other similar research tools should continue to be investigated.

Animal rights campaigners argue that the oncomouse is of little use in fighting cancer since animal models do not accurately replicate diseases in

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

FUTURES

When it comes to patenting genetically modified mice, John Gillott finds he has more time for the arguments of the biotechnology industry than for those of its radical critics

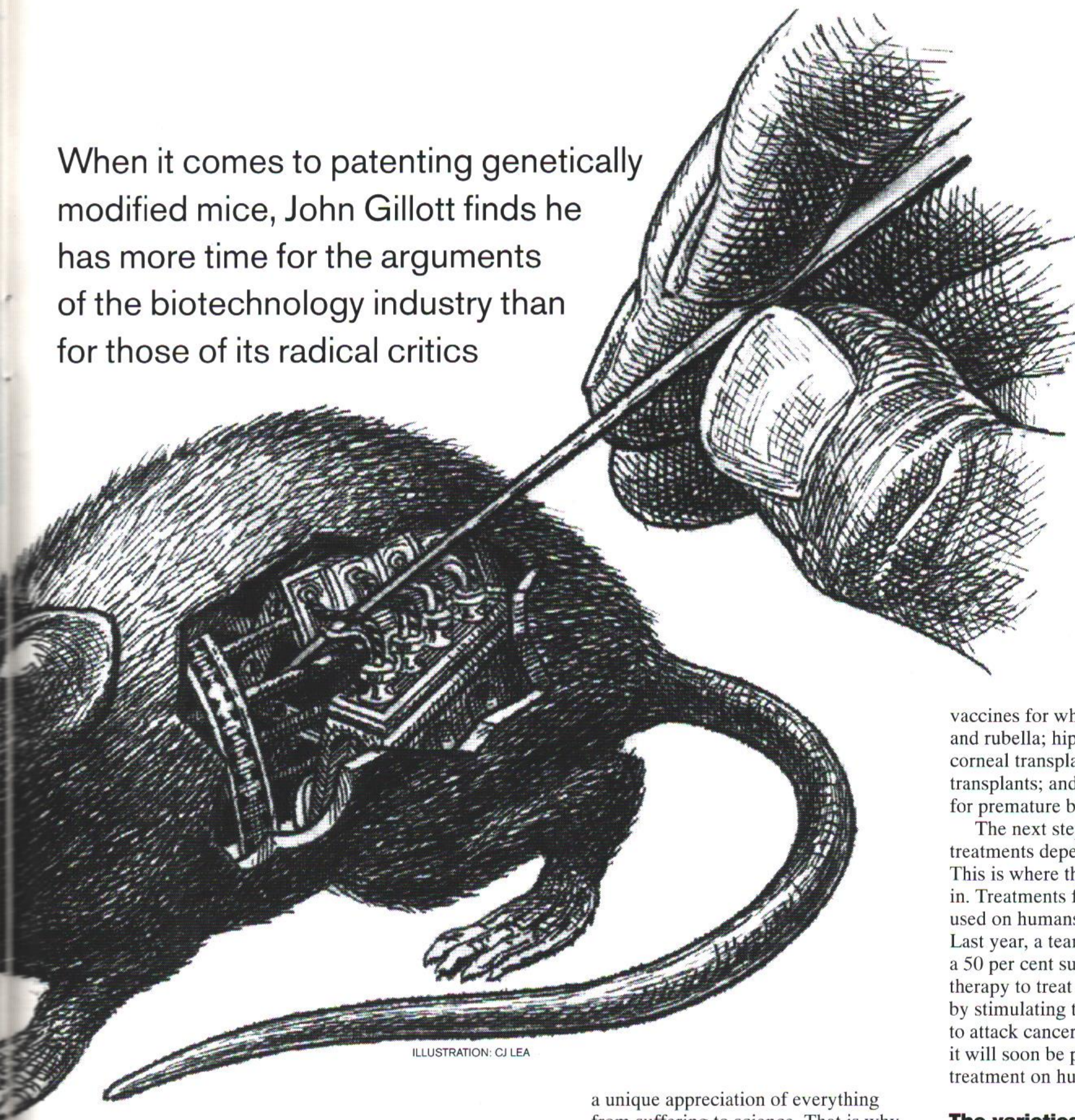


ILLUSTRATION: CJ LEA

humans. They also argue that too little weight is given to the 'extreme suffering experienced by oncomice'. Objecting to experiments on animals in general, Peter Singer, a leading theorist of the animal rights movement, argues that 'either the animal is not like us, in which case there is no reason for performing the experiment; or else the animal is like us, in which case we ought not to perform an experiment on the animal which would be outrageous if performed on one of us'.

The animal rights case is wrong in both its arguments. Animals *are* biologically like us—which is why they have proven to be good research tools for medical science. But they are not like us in any other respect. They lack all of the complex intellectual, psychological and emotional factors which give humans

a unique appreciation of everything from suffering to science. That is why it is legitimate for people to see animals as less than human, and to use them as a means to a human end.

The study of evolution and modern genetics provides plenty of evidence as to the usefulness of animal models for studying disease in humans. For instance, the basic mechanisms of cell reproduction and malfunction are the same in humans and animals, which is why animal research can reveal a lot about cancer. Practical experience proves the point. The Imperial Cancer Research Fund points out that 1300 children are cured of cancer each year in the UK, and that 'the advances in radiotherapy, drug treatments and bone marrow transplantations which have made this success possible owe an enormous debt to animal research'. Animal research was also vital in developing treatments for other diseases and conditions: insulin for diabetics;

vaccines for whooping cough, polio and rubella; hip-replacement surgery; corneal transplants; drugs for organ transplants; and life-support systems for premature babies, to name but a few.

The next steps in developing cancer treatments depend upon genetic science. This is where the oncomouse comes in. Treatments for cystic fibrosis now used on humans were first tried on mice. Last year, a team in America achieved a 50 per cent success rate using gene therapy to treat mice with breast cancer by stimulating the immune system to attack cancer cells. It is hoped that it will soon be possible to use the treatment on humans.

The varieties of oncomouse used in these and other experimental procedures are clearly useful in modelling human disease. Animal models are not only useful, they are essential unless we think it legitimate to experiment on humans. Inevitably mistakes will be made at first, leading to side-effects and death among the subjects experimented on. Better that mice die than humans, surely?

A hardline animal rights person would say not. But many other people would say that it is better to experiment on mice, if this is useful in studying disease, than on humans. This is why it is necessary for animal rights campaigners who want to turn public opinion against the oncomouse to claim that animal models are of little use for studying disease in humans. But they are wrong: animal models were useful in the past, and they will continue to be useful in the future, despite advances *in vitro* and *in vivo* ►



experimental methods in biomedical research.

What about the distress caused to animals in research? Scientists rightly seek to minimise any distress. They regard animal experiments as a necessary evil in the fight against cancer. But for some this is not enough. Peter Singer, for example, believes that creating an oncomouse is as wrong as creating an 'oncohuman'

An oncomouse does not know that it is a mouse, never mind an oncomouse

for experimental purposes, that the suffering caused would be equal in both cases.

The issue of whether animals experience pain and suffering as humans do raises some important and interesting scientific questions. A detailed examination of these contentious questions will have to wait for a future issue of *Living Marxism*. Here, space allows only a brief response to the equation of human and animal suffering made by Singer and others.

There is a key difference between the distress caused by experimenting with an oncomouse and a hypothetical oncohuman. The complex interplay of psychological and physical elements in human suffering marks it out as unique. The fact that humans are capable of dwelling on their experiences is central to suffering and pain. We can understand pain, anticipate it and fear it. If it results from deliberate intent, real suffering and anguish follow. An oncohuman would have the potential to experience all these emotions as its conscious mind dwelled upon the physical effects of the cancer—the potential to hate its maker, to feel victimised, to dread death. By contrast, an oncomouse does not know that it is a mouse, never mind an oncomouse. It has no idea that it exists or that it has cancer. And it has no awareness of its impending death or its causes. All in all, an oncohuman and an oncomouse are quite different things. The creation and use of an oncomouse cannot be reasonably equated with the nightmare scenario of scientists torturing oncohumans.

The argument in defence of developing the oncomouse is also an argument for regarding all of nature as a resource to be used by humanity. Animals should be no different from mineral resources in this regard, and

the genetic modification of animals ought to be seen as a development of existing husbandry practices.

Where does this leave the second issue in the oncomouse controversy: the case against patenting the oncomouse for commercial exploitation? Patents are awarded for novel inventions. The oncomouse clearly is an invention. (It uses an ordinary mouse as a building block of course, but many other inventions also build upon natural processes.) For the biotechnology industry, this justifies a patent. Are they right?

When the European Commission tried (and failed) to get the European Parliament to endorse a directive on life-patenting in March 1995, this magazine carried a piece against gene patenting in general and human gene patenting in particular. It pointed out that the very idea of patenting genes was ridiculous—they are discoveries, not inventions. The article argued that the commercialisation of basic research, of which patenting of genes is a part, represents the privatisation of knowledge; as such it creates barriers to effective research by hampering the free flow of information within the research world.

The commercialisation of research using tools such as the oncomouse raises problems as well. However, the situation is different to the patenting of human genes in some important essentials. For a start, unlike genes, the oncomouse is an invention of science. Secondly, the research tool—the cancerous mouse—is once removed from the basic knowledge of genes. This means that the patenting of the oncomouse does not have the same detrimental effect on the free-flow of information within the scientific community as the patenting of a basic gene.

These points suggest that, all in all, there is no more and no less of a reason to object to the patenting of the oncomouse than there is to object to the commercial patenting of any other invention, such as a new drug or a new machine.

Those leading the opposition to patenting of the oncomouse may seem to be engaged in a radical campaign against greedy capitalists. After all, their target appears to be commercialism rather than biotechnology. But appearances can be deceptive. In reality, most of those who oppose the oncomouse patent are opposed to the product, and would oppose it even if it was never patented. Why else single out the oncomouse patent and other patents linked to biotechnology? If patenting for profit was the real issue, we should expect to see the campaign complaining about the activities of all commercial organisations, not

just biotechnology companies.

What really appals leading opponents of the patent is the very idea of treating a mouse like a machine. They oppose the patent because it legitimises the product and will lead to the production of more cancerous mice. By wrapping the campaign up in right-on rhetoric about exploitation and profits, they hope to garner more support. In this context, criticism of money-making is really just another way of criticising the manipulation of genetic material by humans. Anti-commercialism here serves as a cover for expressing an unpleasant distrust of the motivations of people working in the field of biotechnology. If this point of view prevailed, significant harm would be done not to commercial interests, but to human well-being.

Some within the scientific community have sought to take a stand in defence of the oncomouse. Unfortunately their response has generally been rather defensive. For example, an editorial in *Nature Medicine*, 'Biotechnology and God', written in response to the American coalition of campaigners headed by Jeremy Rifkin, clearly identified that another agenda was being pursued under the banner of anti-commercialism. Its response, however, was to suggest that perhaps ways should be found to take the commercial motive out of biotechnological research in order to assuage the critics. This misses the point about the current debate. Commercialism is not the real target under attack; indeed the reaction to the role of the profit motive in biotechnology is out of all proportion to the real problems that commercialism currently causes in the field. Rather than joining in a phoney attack on profit-making, scientists would do better to illustrate the gains to be made for humanity from an instrumental and manipulative approach to nature. Making an uncompromising case for the oncomouse would be a good starting point.

There are critical points to be made about the role of commercial interests in the field of biotechnology, and the way in which capitalism degrades science more broadly. The 'Futures' section of *Living Marxism* has often made these points and will continue to make them. But this is not the issue here. Commercial imperatives must be criticised for the right reasons. To join in with the anti-patenting lobby on the particular issue of the oncomouse would be to endorse what is at heart a regressive, anti-science, anti-humanist campaign. By contrast, upholding our right to develop tools like the oncomouse can be a useful step towards setting a human-centred agenda.



Curse of the eighties

The current eighties revival must be good news for the makers of Filofaxes, which show no sign of being superseded by electronic organisers. However in a bid to outflank other potential nineties rivals such as Body Shop calendars and counselling services' diaries, they have introduced a new addition to their latest catalogue. Tucked alongside the usual small bore rifle scoring charts and bird-watching logs, the well-stocked organiser should now contain Cat No132608—Menstrual Calendar. Don't leave for that important Stonehenge fertility festival without it.

First *God's Gift* (beefcake beauty pageant meets Mike Reid's *Runaround*), then *Pyjama Party* ('Babe-tastic Katie Puckrik brings you the ultimate girls' night in'), and now *The Girlie Show*, Channel 4's new Friday night after-the-pub slot, which aims to 'flip the script of laddish culture' with regular spots such as 'Girls' night out' and 'Wanker of the week'. Every time you turn on the telly these days, you get women behaving badly. (In fact, that's another one: *Dressing for Breakfast*, in a stunningly original twist on *Men Behaving Badly*, offers the stunningly inventive conceit of two sexually frustrated middle class women sharing a flat and acting like arseholes.)

This sudden arrival of the 'Lass' on our screens follows years of media attempts to launch a female version of the so-called New Lad. In previous columns I have reported on the Marie Antoinette-style fads of London's female professionals. Rather than dressing up as shepherdesses and playing in picturesque peasant cottages, they have now dived into the hen night culture of strippergrams, Chippendales and dancing around the handbags. Anything tacky and 'common' will provide the necessary *frisson*, although it has to be nice and safe—actually mixing with the lower orders would be a little too risqué. So it is all done at a safe distance: bingo in Clapham, an Ann Summers night at a friend's flat in Islington.

There have also been concerted efforts to talk up the phenomenon of female aggressiveness and general lairiness. Girl gangs and female 'road rage' (and, of course, 'trolley rage') are just the latest examples. Jenny Eclair, the current holder of the Perrier Award for stand-up comedy, is seen as the leader of a whole school of yob comediennes. And, although her anti-men rant could come from any eighties Ben Elton routine, where Elton's 'male feminism' is seen as pathetic, Eclair can appear confident and ballsy.

Yet, far from representing a dangerous new 'macho' femininity, these developments merely show how sanitised and 'feminised' society at large has become. Men—and particularly working class men—are monitored and controlled at every turn by surveillance cameras and codes of conduct, all of which exist in the name of protecting

women and children. The most obvious example of this is the complete control of football grounds, and the influx of middle class female spectators, resulting in an unlikely situation where Jo Brand—who used to declare that she wished football fans would all kill each other—now includes a routine about football chants in her stand-up act.

The current promotion of 'caring' values has endowed women with a spurious moral authority. But it has also given them the leeway to behave a little more 'wildly'—in the safe, Nineties kind of a way. This has been hailed as a new-found freedom, and a sign of liberation. In the shadow of the nineties nanny state, though, it looks increasingly like the freedom of the playpen.

As a staunch supporter of 'standards' in broadcasting, I was delighted to see that the recent repeat of the documentary *Playing Out* was shown well after the 9pm watershed—a time when young children would be unlikely to fall under its pernicious influence. How sad then that the foul language which must have influenced the

decision should have been perpetrated entirely by 10-year old children, all of whom were safely in bed at the time.

Full marks, too, to Asda, Safeways, Sainsbury, Tesco and WH Smith, all of whom have boycotted *TV Hits* for printing a reader's letter which asked 'What is oral sex?'

Congratulations also to London Underground for banning a Marie Stopes poster for including the 'offensive' word 'vagina'.

And well done Mablethorpe, for responding promptly to complaints by removing the nipples from the logo on its tourist brochure. A small but significant victory for decency: my letters were not in vain after all.

As I keep pointing out, we live in dangerous times, surrounded on all sides by potential hazards. Wakefield District Council has recently introduced the controversial 'wheelie' bin to the area, and already there have been several instances of old people suffering serious injury from falling into them while trying to clean them out, stamp down rubbish and other such innocent pastimes. The council has issued a leaflet telling people how to take care of the bins in a safe way, but as a former candidate for office myself in the Wakefield area, I feel fully justified in declaring it a case of too little, too late.

The quote at the end of last month's column, warning of the threats to our national sovereignty was from esteemed elder statesman Mr (soon to be 'Sir?') Michael Jagger. ●

Old people are suffering serious injuries falling into wheelie bins

The 'good God' of modern painting



MONT SAINTE-VICTOIRE SEEN FROM BIBÉMUS, C.1897, THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART: THE CONE COLLECTION

The Cézanne exhibition, which opens at London's Tate Gallery in February after four months in Paris, is set to be one of the most important shows of the decade. Louis Ryan explains how Cézanne transformed artistic representation

The artistic character of Paul Cézanne was strikingly anticipated by the novelist Honoré de Balzac in a short story called *The Unknown Masterpiece*. Published in 1834, five years before the painter's birth, it is the story of Frenhofer, a prodigiously gifted but difficult and reclusive artist obsessed with the creation of a painting which would transcend all previous styles in an image of supreme beauty. The story ends with Frenhofer committing suicide in front of his unrealisable picture.

A friend of Cézanne's in his last years tells of the painter's reaction when Balzac's story came up in a conversation: 'He rose from the table, stood in front of me, and, striking his chest with his index finger, identified himself without a word, but by this reiterated gesture, with the character of the story. He grew so moved that tears filled his eyes.' Unlike Balzac's creation, however, Cézanne was able to realise his artistic vision, so much so that Picasso considered him to be the 'father of us all', while Matisse saw him as 'a sort of good God of painting'.

Cézanne's life-work provides the single most important link between two defining moments in the history of art: the Impressionism of the 1870s and 1880s, which inaugurated the modern epoch in painting, and the Cubist revolution led by Braque and Picasso, which began to take shape shortly after Cézanne's death in 1906. Virtually all twentieth-century art movements draw on the pictorial revolution unleashed by Cézanne's work. In his own lifetime, however, Cézanne was spurned. As late as 1904, one critic described his work as 'false, vulgar and mad' while another suggested that his paintings 'might have been done by a Madagascan'. By this time, Cézanne was living as a virtual recluse in his native Provence, struggling to realise a new conception of painting which he had developed almost single-handedly.

The extraordinary difficulty experienced by Cézanne in realising an integral work of art had deep roots in the new social conditions of his period. The progress of industrialisation, the growth of the urban masses and the corresponding disruption of traditional modes of life all led to a new alienation of the individual from society. As society and the individual seemed to become divorced, individual feelings and perceptions appeared fragmented and illusory.

This widening gulf between individual perception and wider social developments was reflected in the avant-garde artistic trends of the period, most strikingly in the development of Impressionism from the 1860s onwards. Impressionism divested painting of the heavy draperies of outmoded historical, mythological and religious themes, bringing instead a purely individual perception to bear on scenes of everyday life. At the

same time, the old emphasis on preconceived composition and unified perspective gave way to a more subjective evocation of mood and atmosphere, realised on the canvas through touches of colour corresponding to the visual and emotional impressions of the painter.

Cézanne was most influenced by Impressionism in the early to mid-1870s, when he worked with Pissarro in a small village near Paris. Comparing similar scenes painted by Pissarro and Cézanne, we find the latter striving towards a more structured, geometrically rigorous composition. Over the next 20 years this would develop into a defining characteristic of his mature work. The new structuration could not be a throwback to the preconceived armatures of traditional painting. The pictorial rationalism of the Renaissance, developed in the French tradition by Poussin and David, had long since been reduced to jaded academic formulae by the official Salon painters of the nineteenth century (so-called because, as establishment artists, they could exhibit their works in the Salons of Paris). Cézanne recognised that the timeless formalism of the old masters was no longer appropriate to his own dynamic and unstable epoch. As the Marxist critic Max Raphael has observed, 'Had Cézanne merely grafted historical compositional form on modern (impressionist) modes of seeing, he would have been a mere eclectic, an academician'. But, wrote Raphael, Cézanne's greatness lay in his ability to 'refashion the classical in a completely new way and at the same time to give nature classical solidity'.

The search for a new synthesis forced Cézanne to transcend Impressionism. While he learned vital lessons from artists such as Monet and Pissarro, a man of Cézanne's temperament could not long remain content with their naively sensualist approach. Instead he reintroduced rationalism to painting, but a rationalism that took account of the seemingly irrational world of the late nineteenth century. For Cézanne, reason would have to become the unfolding method of emotion itself, the logic of feeling as it engages with the innumerable difficulties that nature presents to the mind. 'Everything, and particularly art', Cézanne maintained, 'is theory developed and applied in contact with nature'.

Cézanne's new conception of pictorial realisation would inform every aspect of his artistic practice, from the individual brush-stroke to the finished painting. He came to regard each separate touch of pigment as a concrete, specific individuality. No longer a mere cipher for some element of the scene being represented, it now asserted its own material presence on the canvas. Later abstract art proceeds from the constructive function of Cézanne's stroke and from his new sense of the picture surface as a material presence in its own right.

An early instance of this is in Cubist collage, where cut-outs from newspapers or menus are pasted into a still-life composition. For Cézanne himself, however, the apparent abstraction of the individual touch of colour was arrived at not through a random or subjective approach, but through the most searching visual analysis of the objects he sought to represent. Moreover, the autonomy of each brush-stroke is only one moment in the unfolding logic of construction. For Cézanne each stroke was both integral to the overall conception of the painting, and at the same time discontinuous from it.

Striking examples of this procedure may be found among Cézanne's seven different paintings of the Mont Sainte-Victoire in Provence. Looking at the one pictured (left), one can see how it is constituted through the progressive resolution of local contradictions. These are acute and dramatic in the foreground, and gradually modulated towards the base of the mountain. Thus a sense of depth is achieved, not through the conventional methods of perspective, where lines converge precisely to a vanishing point, and the objects in the distance become smaller at a fixed rate, but by relaxation of contrasts between local colours. The triangular mass of the mountain partially reverses this tendency, so that its grandeur is asserted against both the foothills and the sky. As a result, each successive plane of the painting seems to be created before the viewer's eye, making the method of creation take precedence over the image itself. Through these means Cézanne attempts to overcome the gulf between perception and reality.

The method which Cézanne developed in his late period was no mere formula which could be applied in a routine fashion. Each new subject, whether landscape, still-life or portrait, presented specific challenges to the concrete working out of his pictorial idea. Often Cézanne would work on a painting over a number of years. If anything, his new understanding only increased the difficulties of realisation, while at the same time spurring him on to still greater efforts. 'I am old and ill', he wrote towards the end of his life, 'and have sworn that I will die painting'. After so many disappointments through life, this was one wish that would be granted him.

In October 1906, he was caught in a storm while painting a landscape near his studio in the hills of Provence. Exposed to torrential rain for several hours, he was brought home unconscious in a labourer's cart and carried up to bed. The following morning he rose at dawn, as usual, to work outside on the portrait of his gardener. He came back in a state of collapse. A few days later he was dead, surrounded by the paintings that had changed the course of art. ●

Bill Clinton would approve of Carl Franklin's adaptation of Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*, says Graham Barnfield

Los Angeles, 1948. Ezekiel 'Easy' Rawlins is a mortgage-holding war veteran, newly down-at-heel thanks to aircraft industry lay-offs. In keeping with the pattern established by John Huston's *Maltese Falcon* (1941), he accepts a dodgy job for easy cash, taking him into the crevices where his mysterious patron Albright (Tom Sizemore) cannot go. Unlike the lantern-jawed heroes of forties low-life detective work, Rawlins is black. This is the source of the ambiguity that

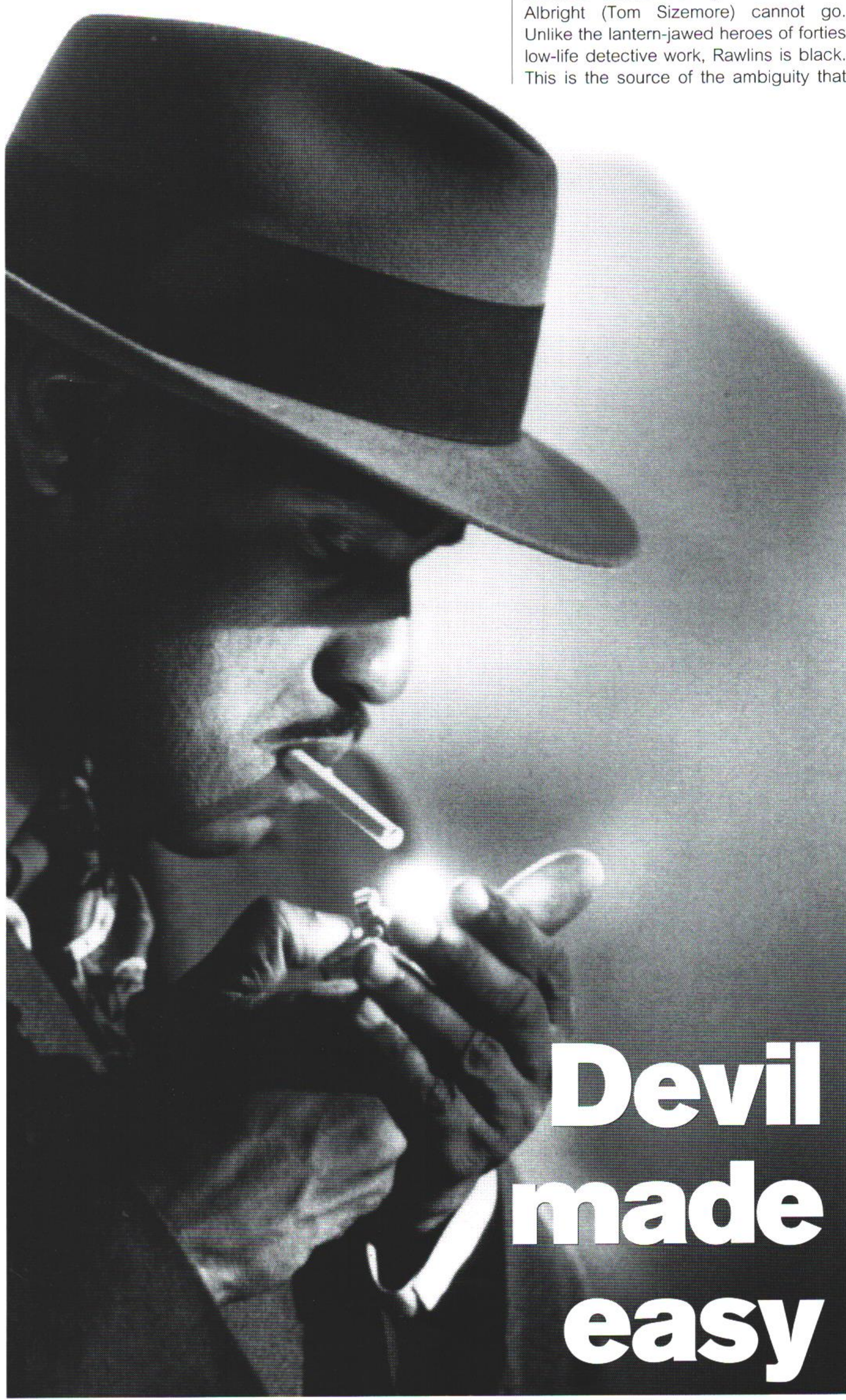
underwrites Carl Franklin's screen adaptation of Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Mosley and Franklin take us into the familiar territory of violent film noir, akin to Franklin's earlier *One False Move* (1993).

What made the novel different from other pulp fictions was its evocation of race in postwar America. Searching out a missing woman may be the staple of countless private eye thrillers, but this time it is refracted through the prism of postwar racial tensions. Like the best fifties flicks, paranoia is ever present. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, however, the uncertainties are not about reds under the bed, but about crossing the colour line.

Denzel Washington, fresh from his *Crimson Tide* performance, is superb in the lead role, giving expression to the burning anxiety that lies beneath Easy's cool exterior. That anxiety is provoked in particular by Daphne Monet (Jennifer Beale), the eponymous *femme fatale* engulfed in the sordid underbelly of white Los Angeles. Unlike the classical hardboiled dick, such as Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Rawlins has to think twice before pursuing her. If Hammett 'took murder out of the venetian vase and dropped it into the alley', then Mosley has populated the alley with redneck cops prepared to ensure that blacks know their place.

But while the film version of *Devil in a Blue Dress* is clearly infused with racial tensions, Franklin seems to be unwilling to pursue the issue too hard. He seems somewhat torn between creating a straightforward period piece and pursuing the racial themes. The ambiguity of Rawlin's position is softened when, for example, in contrast to the novel, Franklin takes the stream out of Easy's relationship with Daphne. In Franklin's adaptation race works mainly as an unspoken assumption, so much so that police billy clubs are probably the only aspect of life in 1948 that is not lovingly created.

Opening as it did during the OJ Simpson trial, *Devil in a Blue Dress* created a major stir in the USA. *Entertainment Weekly* described it as a sociologist's tour of urban Negro culture. But that is its real problem: its view of race from a safe distance, rather than from the inside as in Mosley's novel. Outside of flashes of fire from Denzel Washington and Don Cheadle (who plays Easy's wild associate Mouse), it is altogether too sedate, too fifties—in the *Happy Days* sense of that decade—to capture the ambiguity either of noir or of Mosley's novel. Walter Mosley achieved national fame when Bill Clinton declared him to be his favourite novelist. Franklin's version of *Devil in a Blue Dress* is Mosley as Bill Clinton might read him. The central dilemma of race remains largely unexplored and Mosley's compelling vision is lost in the nostalgia of a period piece. ●



**Devil
made
easy**

Why shouldn't Sky Sports televise the major sporting tournaments? asks Kenan Malik



The Sky's not the limit

The Sky, it would seem, is falling in on televised sport. After capturing the rights to live coverage of Premiership football and England internationals, Sky Sports will from next year also show Endsleigh League, Coca-Cola and FA Cup matches (though it is excluded from providing live coverage of the Cup Final itself). In boxing, Sky has exclusive rights to fights involving Frank Warren's boxers (who include Frank Bruno, Nigel Benn and Naseem Hamed) as well as Mike Tyson's first five comeback fights. Golf's Ryder Cup and both major US championships will be shown only on Sky, while Rupert Murdoch (who owns Sky) will virtually control the new Rugby League Superleague which begins this year.

Sky's growing sports coverage has upset a lot of people, not least executives from the terrestrial TV channels, which have lost out. Politicians from Labour's Jack Straw to Tory Seb Coe have joined in the campaign to 'stop Murdoch' and to preserve the major events of the sporting calendar (such as Wimbledon and the FA Cup Final) for terrestrial TV.

Opponents of Sky TV argue that most sports fans do not have access to satellite TV, and that Murdoch's monopoly allows him to interfere in the running of the sports for which he provides TV coverage. In fact, around six million people now have access to satellite and cable TV, not including those who watch it in the pub. Of course, it is true that many more people still only have access to the terrestrial channels. The point is,

however, that without Sky, *nobody* could have watched many of the sports now being televised. Sky Sports' breadth of football coverage—including two or more live Premiership matches a week, Scottish matches on English TV, and under-21 and schoolboy internationals—far outstrips anything that terrestrial TV previously offered or is willing to offer now.

When the BBC had a monopoly over cricket coverage, it confined itself to home test matches and one-day internationals, the big showpiece cup games and the occasional Sunday League matches. Sky, for the first time, has brought viewers live coverage of overseas tests (and not just ones involving England), together with a much broader coverage of county championship and domestic one-day games. Again in tennis and golf, Sky, unlike the BBC, provides coverage not simply of the showpiece domestic events, but a wide repertoire of foreign tournaments.

Sky may not reach the whole population, but it is surely watched by the majority of sports fans, who are better served than by the BBC. Four years ago, the BBC was covering a test match between England and New Zealand; England required one more wicket to take the match and the series. The BBC decided to pull the plug on the match at this critical moment and to return to its normal schedule. As a dedicated sports channel, Sky has both the flexibility and the nous not to be so cavalier with its viewers.

Contrary to what the purists and snobs may claim, it is also the case that, as a dedicated sports channel, Sky often provides a better quality of coverage. Eric Cantona has called Andy Gray's *Bootroom*—a tactical dissection of particular matches—'the best football programme in the world'. Camera techniques, too, have benefited. It was Sky, for instance, that introduced the 'super slo-mo' camera which allowed viewers (and probably the England batsmen too) to see for the first time exactly how Shane Warne produced his googlies and leg breaks.

Of course, Sky has done all this not out of the goodness of Rupert Murdoch's heart, but to make a profit. Sky's commercial needs have often overridden the wishes of both spectator and sportsman. The timings of everything from the start of Premiership matches to the finish of golf tournaments have been adjusted to meet Sky's requirements. The most blatant attempt to interfere in a sport has been Murdoch's attempt to enforce control over the transfer of players in the new Rugby League Superleague, as a way of preventing top teams such as Wigan grabbing all the best players and hence reducing the televisual appeal of the matches.

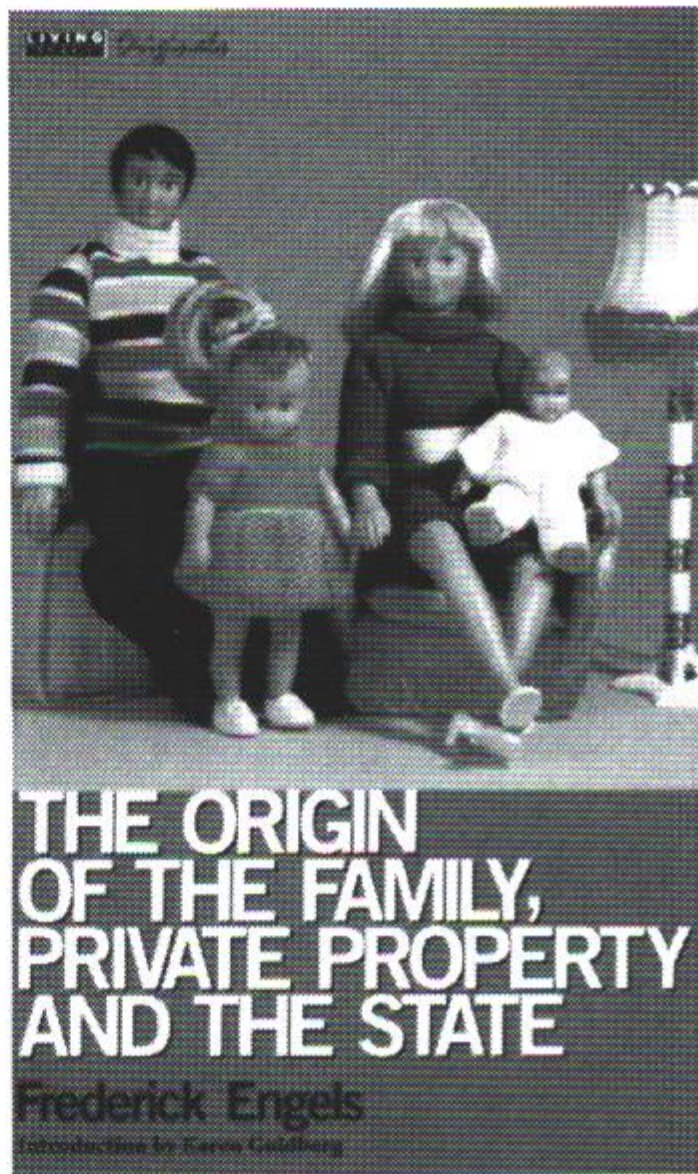
But such interference is not unique to Sky or to Rupert Murdoch. Why did the Irish team fry in the noon Florida sun during a match in the 1994 World Cup? Because the kick-off times were organised to meet TV needs, even though Sky was not involved in televising the tournament. In athletics, the needs of (terrestrial) TV forced a delay in the start of the marathon in the last World Championship; it was run in much hotter conditions than normal and many runners suffered from heat exhaustion.

While Murdoch's attempt to control Rugby League's transfer market is unique, commerce has long dictated the movement of players between clubs in many sports. The reason why Wigan has won the Rugby League championship for seven successive years is that it has the money to attract the best players. Again money from TV mogul Silvio Berlusconi turned Milan into Europe's premier soccer team. On the other hand, Alan Sugar's attempt to run a football club like a computer company was responsible at least in part for the departure of Jurgen Klinsman from Tottenham Hotspur.

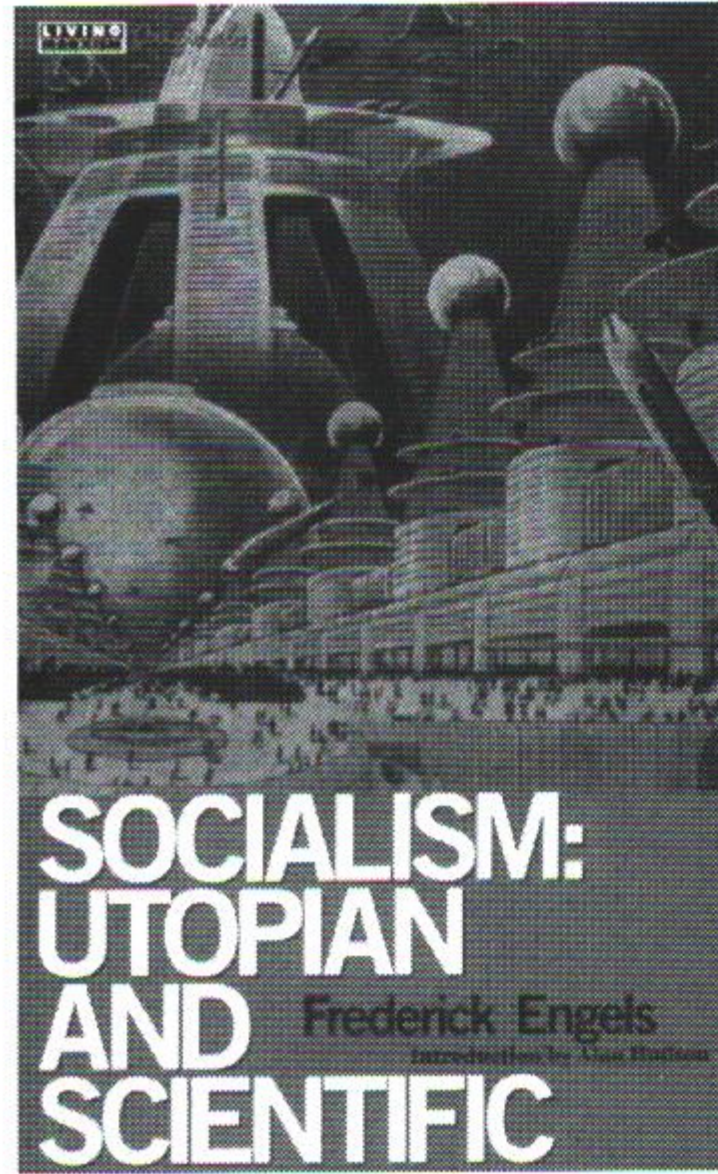
Much of the opposition to Sky Sports is pure snobbishness. It comes from those who want to preserve the FA Cup Final or Wimbledon as a 'national institution' rather than a sporting spectacle. These are the same kind of people who berate fans for chanting through the national anthem or for abusing the referee. Perhaps the BBC can provide a special sanitised version of sporting events for such people, while leaving the rest of us to watch the real thing on Sky. ●

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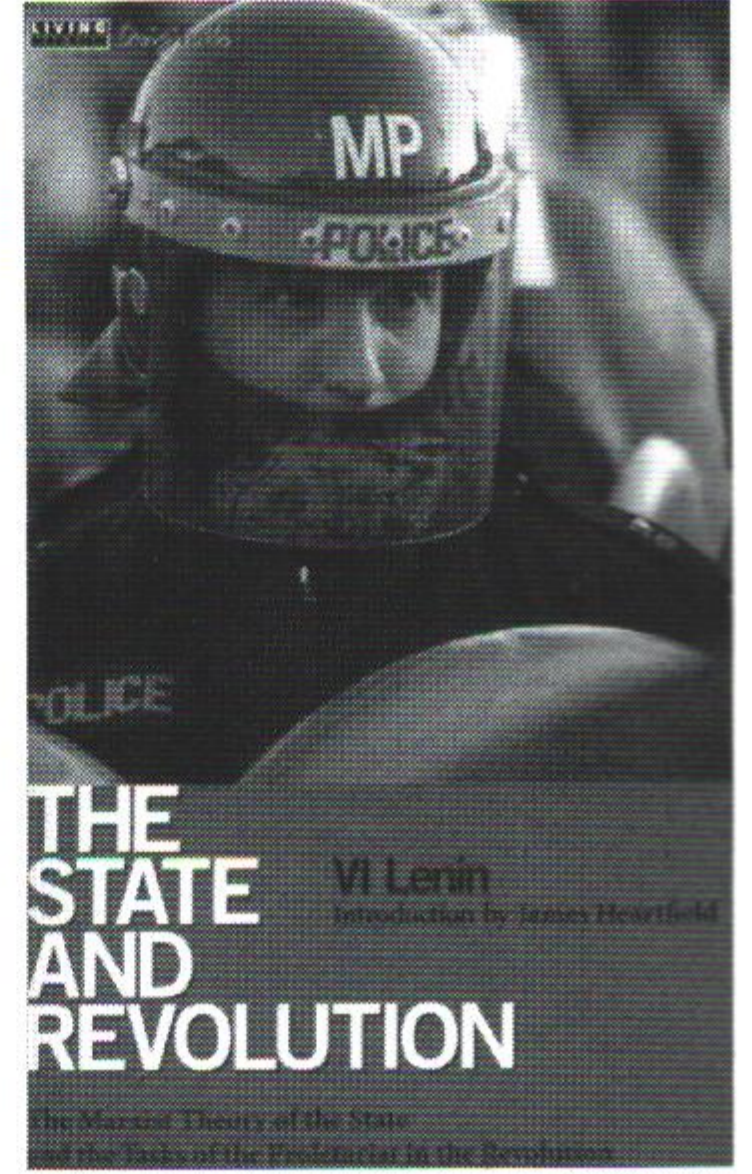
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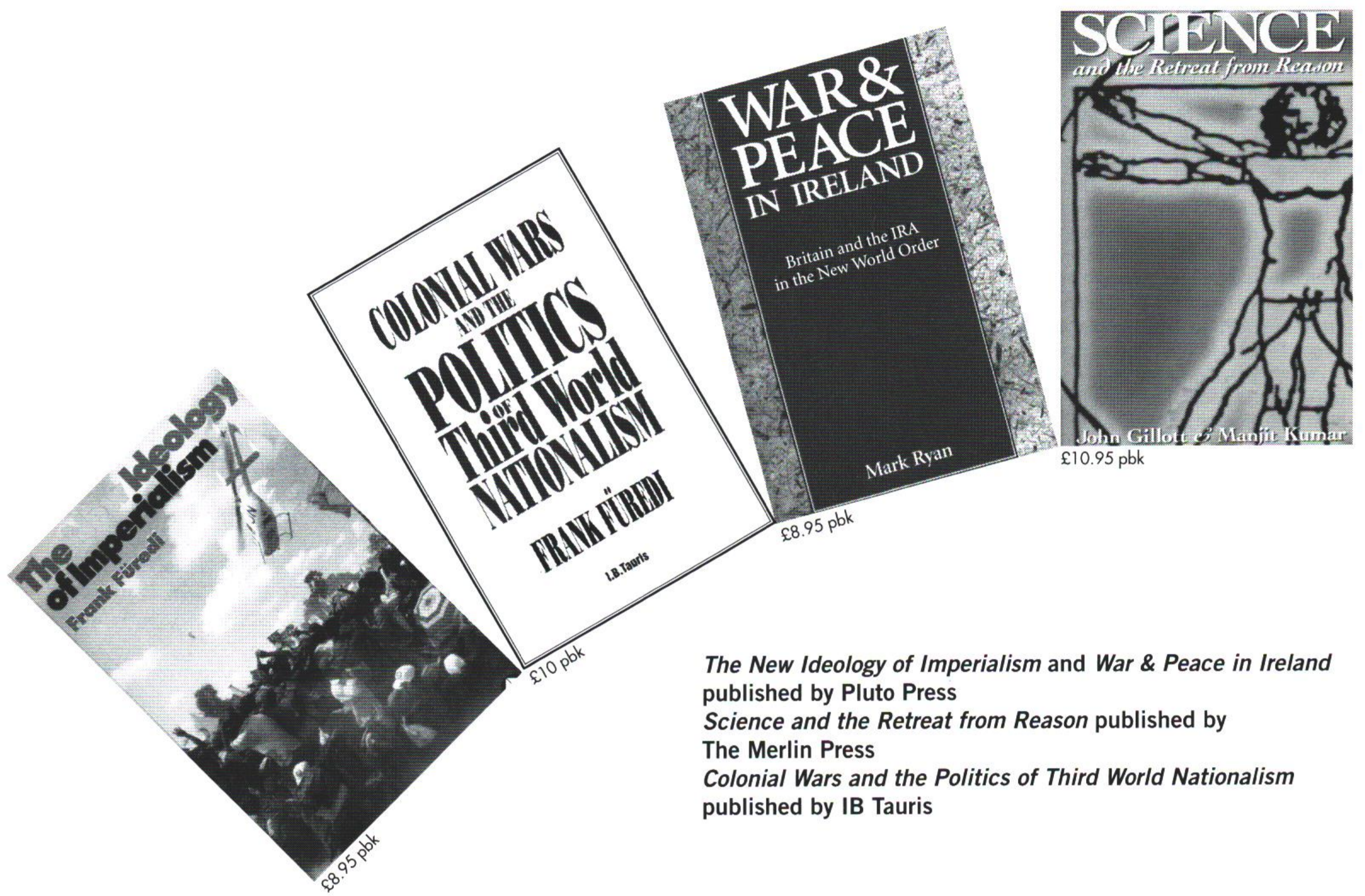
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MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Helene Guldberg takes issue with the increasingly influential feminist critics of the scientific world

A woman's nature?

Love, Power and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences, Hilary Rose, Polity Press £12.95 pbk

Science for the Earth, Tom Wakeford and Martin Walters eds, with a foreword by Stephen Hawking, John Wiley & Sons, £6.99 pbk

Facing the Future: The Case for Science, Michael Allaby, Bloomsbury, £16.99 hbk

Feminist academics are putting science and medicine in the firing line. Much of their criticism is focused on the advancement and application of reproductive technology. In this vein, Hilary Rose, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Bradford, presents reproductive technology as an 'imperialising technoscience which seeks to invade women's bodies and women's lives ever more intimately' (*Love, Power and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences*, p172). Infertility treatment, fetal surgery and embryo genetic screening, she argues, are part of the 'technologisation of birth' which disempowers women by alienating them from their 'product'.

But what has the increasing 'technologisation' of the creation of life got to do with 'disempowerment'? Is it not more 'empowering', and potentially liberating, to be able to use medical technologies to control if, when and how we get pregnant, and to minimise the chances of a child being born with serious defects, rather than leave reproduction to the whims of nature?

The feminist attack on reproductive technologies is typical of the increasing tendency today to emphasise the drawbacks rather than the benefits associated with medical advance. One *Guardian* journalist has even claimed one of the 'greatest achievements' of the feminist movement to be its ability to 'act as a whistle-blower on the medical establishment' (13 November 1995). Thanks to the widespread suspicion of 'experts' and scientists today, and the general uncertainty within society, these criticisms tend to strike a chord more broadly.

In recent years the feminist critique of science has gone beyond criticising the treatment of the female body to question the fundamental tenets of science itself. Increasingly, the attack is focused on the very foundation of science—its allegedly 'androcentric', or male-centred methodology, epistemology and conceptual framework.

Feeling under siege, and seeking explanations for their loss of public standing and funding, some scientists are preparing for battle. At a recent conference in New York, 'The Flight from Science and Reason', a group of scientists gathered forces to take up the fight against the rise of scientific creationism, New Age alternatives, homeopathy and aromatherapy, UFOism, astrology and feminism. Successful pot-shots were taken at some of the most ridiculous developments within the radical science movement—feminist algebra, queer quantum physics and Afrocentric molecular biology—but none of the contributors was able to tackle the question of why cynicism towards science is growing.

In *Facing the Future: The Case for Science*, Michael Allaby responds to this 'unholy caravan of anti-science pessimists' by encouraging people to 'always look at the bright side of life'. He argues that 'in uncertain times it is optimism that we need. Unless they are challenged vigorously, the pessimists who rejoice in the predictions of apocalypse may prove themselves right. Their prophecies may prove self-fulfilling because of the despair they have engendered'. Although Allaby's sentiments are admirable, a call for optimism is not going to be good enough. The ideas embodied in the feminist criticism of science must be confronted—just as the broader anti-science prejudices are confronted by John Gillott and Manjit Kumar in their book *Science and the Retreat from Reason* (reviewed here in December).

One of the major claims of the feminist critics is that scientific investigation and scientific discovery necessarily embody male values and male norms. An earlier collection of essays, *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and the Philosophy of Science*, (1983) edited by Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, marked the beginning of this debate about the value-laden nature of a 'masculinist' ►

pursuit of scientific discovery. Scientific knowledge, they argued, is socially constructed in a male-dominated world, and explanations for the genesis, rejection and acceptance of scientific ideas should be sought in the social sphere rather than the natural world.

The justification for this assertion is that science is produced in specific social circumstances, and nobody, including scientists, can be immune from the particular norms and values that predominate at the time. In *Discovering Reality*, Ruth Hubbard, Professor of Biology at Harvard University, argues that 'science is made by people who live at a specific time in a specific place and whose thought patterns reflect the truths that are accepted in wider society' (p45).

The objectivity of science rests on the fact that nature is separate, and governed by different laws from society

Fair enough. Nobody is immune from the dominant outlook of their time. But Hubbard goes on to claim that there is no such thing as an objective, value-free science, and that scientific questions are decided, and scientific controversies resolved, in accordance with the ideology that shapes the society in which science is done. For scientific facts to be believed, she argues, they must fit the worldview of their times.

In a more recent collection, *Science for the Earth*, Lyn Margulies, of the US National Academy of Sciences, agrees: 'Scientists, like everybody else, have their outlook blinkered both by their cultural context and by those who pay for their research allotments', she writes in an article titled, depressingly, 'A pox called man', from a quote by the arch anti-rationalist Friedrich Nietzsche.

It may seem like common sense to point out that scientific and technological advances do not take place in isolation from society at large. However, the dangerous conclusion reached by many feminists is that, since scientific enquiry is shaped by social pressures, science cannot be seen as a body of knowledge that is objectively testable.

There is an important interplay between scientific advances and the dominant ideological and political forces out of which they develop. Society always frames the boundaries and sets the goals for what science can and cannot address. The close link between the military and scientific establishment forged through the Cold War is a case in point. The practical and theoretical advance of many areas of science has been led by military objectives, and research related to the military has been at the cutting edge in the development of science.

In this sense, it is true that science emerges out of society. The motivation of individual scientists will be shaped by their particular experiences and the dominant political and ideological culture in which they live. Hilary Rose aptly dispels the myth of the 'disinterested' scientists living in a bubble separate from the influences of their society. Feminist critics are also right to question the Enlightenment view of the unique moral character and personal virtues of scientists in their 'devoted, disinterested, self-denying search after truth'.

But the objectivity of science does not rest on the disinterested character of scientists. It rests on the fact

that nature is separate, and governed by different laws, from society. Science is the study of nature, with its own laws, and the trajectory of science is to move towards a closer and closer approximation of those laws. In this sense the beauty of science is that it has its own measure of success. The acceptance or rejection of scientific claims does not depend on the personal or social attributes of the scientists. Independent of politics and culture, one set of scientific ideas will transcend another set of scientific ideas on the basis of them being a closer reflection of the laws of nature. However much scientists are influenced by the dominant norms and values, it is not their personal outlook that ultimately drives science forward.

When looking for evidence for the social construction of science, most feminist writers turn to the social sciences. Hubbard convincingly shows how the rise of socio-biological explanations of human behaviour has been shaped by the ideological trends within society. She is right to point out that the increasing dominance of naturalistic explanations of what makes us tick is not based on novel scientific developments, but on the conservative ideological climate of our times. However, the natural sciences cannot be understood in the same way as the social sciences. If natural scientific theories are not true, if they do not match how nature works, then they will not survive.

It is interesting that many feminist contributors to the debate about science emphasise how the political, cultural and social forces in any given period shape the outlook and action of natural as well as social scientists. However, none of them questions the ideas within society which may have shaped their own critique of science.

It is always assumed that experimentation is going to produce more trouble than it is worth

The outlook of the feminist critics seems to be shaped by a society that has lost confidence in its ability to move forward. Human activity is no longer seen to be a solution to our problems. In fact, the notion of humanity seeking to take control over its own destiny and deal with the obstacles we may face is viewed with apprehension and disdain. Human beings are not expected to experiment and get things right. It is always assumed that experimentation is going to produce more trouble than it is worth. It is as a result of this fatalistic perception of human activity that there is now a strong ambivalence towards science; and it is this culture that the feminist critics of science emerge out of, and also feed into.

A central feature of the feminist criticism of science is the rejection of the idea of humanity being separate from, and standing above, nature. This comes across in Hilary Rose's *Love, Power and Knowledge*, where she argues that 'masculinist knowledge' has taken the form of an 'intense emphasis on the domains of cognitive and objective rationality, on reductive explanation, and on dichotomous partitioning of the social and natural worlds' (p32). She goes on to argue that 'by contrast, a feminist epistemology which is derived from women's lived experience is centred on the domains of interconnectedness and caring rationality, and emphasises holism and harmonious relationships with nature' (p33).

According to this view, domination is the premise of the 'male' scientific enterprise. And domination is expressed every day in the laboratory in the way that living organisms are treated. The Harvard 'Oncomouse', a mouse genetically constructed in order to facilitate cancer research is something Hilary Rose takes great exception to. She advocates 'love, as caring respect for both people and nature' as the ethic necessary to reshape knowledge (*New Statesman*, 13 May 1994).

Francis Bacon's dictum 'Knowledge is power' is viewed with disdain by most of the feminist critics

Evelyn Fox Keller, Professor of Mathematics and Humanities at the North-Eastern University, similarly argues for a move away from a science striving to 'dominate' nature to one aspiring to 'converse with' nature. She argues that women are less constrained by the impulse to dominate nature and have a nurturing 'feeling for the organism' under investigation ('Gender and science', in *Discovering Reality*). Experimentation should involve listening to and respecting nature rather than imposing one's will on it. So forget science, a *New Scientist* article declares ironically: 'The world is entering the Age of Aquarius, where feelings and empathy will matter more than cold facts and mere logic.' (10 June 1995)

Rose explains the alleged gender differences in attitudes towards nature on the basis of the sexual division of labour, which allocates society's 'caring' tasks primarily to women. In *Discovering Realities*, psychoanalytical explanations of gender difference are more to the fore. Employing Sigmund Freud's theory, Keller argues that science is essentially an Oedipal project. The emphasis on power and control so prevalent in the rhetoric of Western science is here seen as the projection of a specifically male consciousness, shaped by the need to cut away from the close attachment to the mother in the pre-Oedipal period. This means that men become increasingly alienated from their feelings and from nature.

In his 1983 text, *Fathering the Unthinkable: Masculinity, Scientists and the Nuclear Arms Race*, Brian Easlea also draws on psychoanalytic theory to comprehend man's relationship to nature. He argues that male science is rooted in a 'uterus envy'. Unable to create life naturally, in the way women can, men are driven by an inexorable desire to demonstrate their power over nature, in order to reaffirm their masculinity.

Whether or not we accept that there are gender differences in attitudes to nature, and regardless of the varying explanations for such differences, it is worth questioning whether a 'masculine' desire to control, manipulate and dominate nature is necessarily a negative phenomenon.

The sixteenth-century champion of the 'new science', Francis Bacon, proposed the basic idea of human mastery over nature. His famous dictum 'Knowledge is power' is viewed with disdain by most of the feminist critics. Yet it is only mastery of our environment that has allowed human beings to minimise the destructive aspects of nature upon our lives, and improve our condition. The birth of modern science and medicine was the result of

a process in which people developed an awareness of our ability to shape and influence the world around us, rather than leaving it up to divine intervention. The history of medicine, for instance, is the history of human intervention in order to correct nature's faults.

When discussing scientific developments, many feminist critics seek the moral high ground. Unlike 'the cold-hearted men in white coats' female scientists show 'consideration, empathy and love for the object under investigation'. However their love, empathy and concern is often rather selective. In *Love, Power and Knowledge*, Hilary Rose refers to the search for a genetic cure for cystic fibrosis, Huntington's disease, cancer and other debilitating diseases as 'mawkishly sentimental'. She ridicules the 'journalistic celebration of technological geewhizzery' in which scientists 'heroically' compete to map mutant genes for diseases. What gives Rose the right to rubbish the motivation of scientists working on the Human Genome Project? Put into practice, the anti-technology attitudes of loving, caring feminist scientists would condemn people with genetic disorders to restrictive, debilitating and painful lives.

The feminist criticism of science is not just an attack on science, but on human advancement. Science is necessarily about improving humanity's ability to dominate nature. And it is only through increasing our control over nature that we can minimise its harmful effects and improve the quality of our lives. By challenging the belief that humanity is above nature, feminist scientists reject the idea of using nature as a resource to improve our condition. This soggy meshing of humanity and nature can only lead to scientific and social inertia.

Put into practice, the anti-technology attitudes of loving, caring feminist scientists would condemn people to genetic disorders

The ideas espoused by feminist critics of science have wide appeal today, at a time when experimentation and acting positively on insight are viewed with apprehension. But without experimentation, with all of its unforeseen consequences, there can be no advancement of scientific knowledge nor of humanity. Current critics of science always end up promoting caution towards scientific advance and minimising its potential benefits. They lower expectations about what science can offer and help foster a narrowing of horizons within society.

Those who refuse to separate the use from the abuse of science end up providing an apology for the shortcomings of society. The abuse of science is not seen as an indictment of capitalist society, but of science itself. This can only let the powerful authorities and institutions responsible for the abuse of science off the hook. Instead, feminist critics of science like Hubbard and Rose present the problem as a general one of human—and especially male—arrogance and domination; as a result, they blame everybody and, therefore, ultimately, nobody.

A radical critique of science today should not argue for curtailing experimentation. It should indict society for failing to encourage more of the attempts to control nature for our benefit, which are now condemned as masculinist domination.

States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind, Richard Kearney, Manchester University Press, £40 hbk, £14.99 pbk

What happens when you ask a lot of intellectuals what they think about the state of Europe? Richard Kearney is the man to find out. As professor of Philosophy at University College Dublin, it is Kearney's job to import continental ideas to Irish academics. This collection of interviews with (mostly) European thinkers spans two decades from an interview with Herbert Marcuse, just before his death in 1976 to more recent ones with Noam Chomsky, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida.

If you were to distil the conversations they would read something like this: we West European intellectuals are very tentative about blowing our own trumpet; our values are not exclusionary, but very pluralistic and multicultural—unlike those intolerant and fundamentalist Muslims and East Europeans.

Probably the most commonly recurring idea is that of 'fundamentalism', a catch-all term to slag off everyone who lacks European gentility. To his credit, Paul Ricoeur shows the shortcomings of the idea: 'it is immediately a pejorative word that prevents good analysis...we put one word over a multiplicity of events', he warns, but then carries on to use the term as if he had not made those points.

Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian-born, but French-practising philosopher of linguistics, sums up the caricature of the fundamentalist mindset: 'The exaltation of origins and of archaic folk values can take violent forms because one wants an enemy...the enemy will be the *other*: the other ethnic group, the other nation, the scapegoat and so on.' Well that is all very profound. Those ignorant Arabs and Serbs just cannot sustain a sense of their own worth without having someone else to kick around.

The weak point of the argument is that Kristeva and the rest, so sensitive to prejudice in others, are blind to it in themselves. All this talk about the 'fundamentalisms' outside Europe says nothing about what is really going on in the world. It only tells you about the prejudices of European intellectuals. They see fundamentalists everywhere else because they themselves are so lacking in belief that even the ersatz nationalisms of Eastern Europe look like deeply held identities. Next to the overwhelming self-doubt of European Christianity, even as lackadaisical a faith as Islam can look like the high point of religious fervour.

James Heartfield

We Don't Want to March Straight, Peter Tatchell, Cassell, £4.99 pbk

Anyone who believes in democracy and equality must oppose the ban on homosexuals serving in the military. But Peter Tatchell is less interested in the question of equality posed by the ban than he is in using the issue to denounce heterosexual men for what he sees as their inherently macho militarism.

On the surface, Tatchell comes across as a staunch

anti-militarist, emphasising the oppressive character of homosexuals exercising their 'right to serve'. He unequivocally condemns the Gulf War and points out that 'it is no consolation to those on the receiving end of military abuses that the perpetrators are lesbian or gay' (p46).

Moreover, Tatchell argues that the contemporary gay movement, by campaigning for the right to serve, 'lends legitimacy to the armed forces' (p3). Recalling that the Gay Liberation Front linked its challenge to the sexual values of capitalist society with opposition to the wars fought by Britain in Ireland and the USA in Vietnam, he bemoans the 'turn-around' in the perspective of the gay movement: 'A movement that began in 1969 with the aim of changing society now seeks conformity with the straight status quo.' (p2) Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether the status quo could still be called 'straight' if it really did accept gays' right to serve on equal terms, the conformist trend in the mainstream gay movement can hardly be denied. But if the campaign for the right to serve shows the conservatism of the 'assimilationist' wing of the gay movement, *We Don't Want to March Straight* demonstrates the equally reactionary character of radical sexual politics.

Tatchell calls on gays to reject the military because it is a straight institution. He details the military's 'homophobia', its 'toleration of queer-baiting and bullying' and the repressed homoeroticism of its 'culture', all of which he intelligently argues have been key aspects of its functioning. But his narrowly gay perspective leads him to isolate this symptom of traditional militarism, and pretend that the 'domination and aggression which is such a common feature of heterosexual masculinity' (p16) is *the* problem with the military. The fact that the military is paid for and led by a specifically capitalist elite in pursuit of its particular interests seems to be a secondary matter for him.

In this way, despite his criticisms of militarism, Tatchell not only lets Western elites off the hook for their crimes against humanity in Iraq or Ireland or Vietnam, but instead blames the 'culture' shared by millions of ordinary people who are so often the victims of militarism. Tatchell's real agenda is neither anti-militarism nor equality, but the promotion of homosexuality as morally superior to heterosexuality because gay men are supposedly more 'caring and creative' and less 'yobbish' than the straight male values which dominate the military. This sneering posture towards the majority must give the establishment a hard on when it comes from its opponents.

The 'tide of history' is against the military's ban, as one British judge put it recently, because the old traditions of the British establishment are bankrupt, and only the crusty top brass of the military itself is really prepared to fight to keep gays out. Tatchell never considers the possibility that the establishment might be able to take homosexuals on board, however reluctantly, and transform the values through which it organises and justifies its domination at home and abroad, precisely because of the elitist sentiments of the gay movement which *We Don't Want to March Straight* epitomises.

Peter Ray

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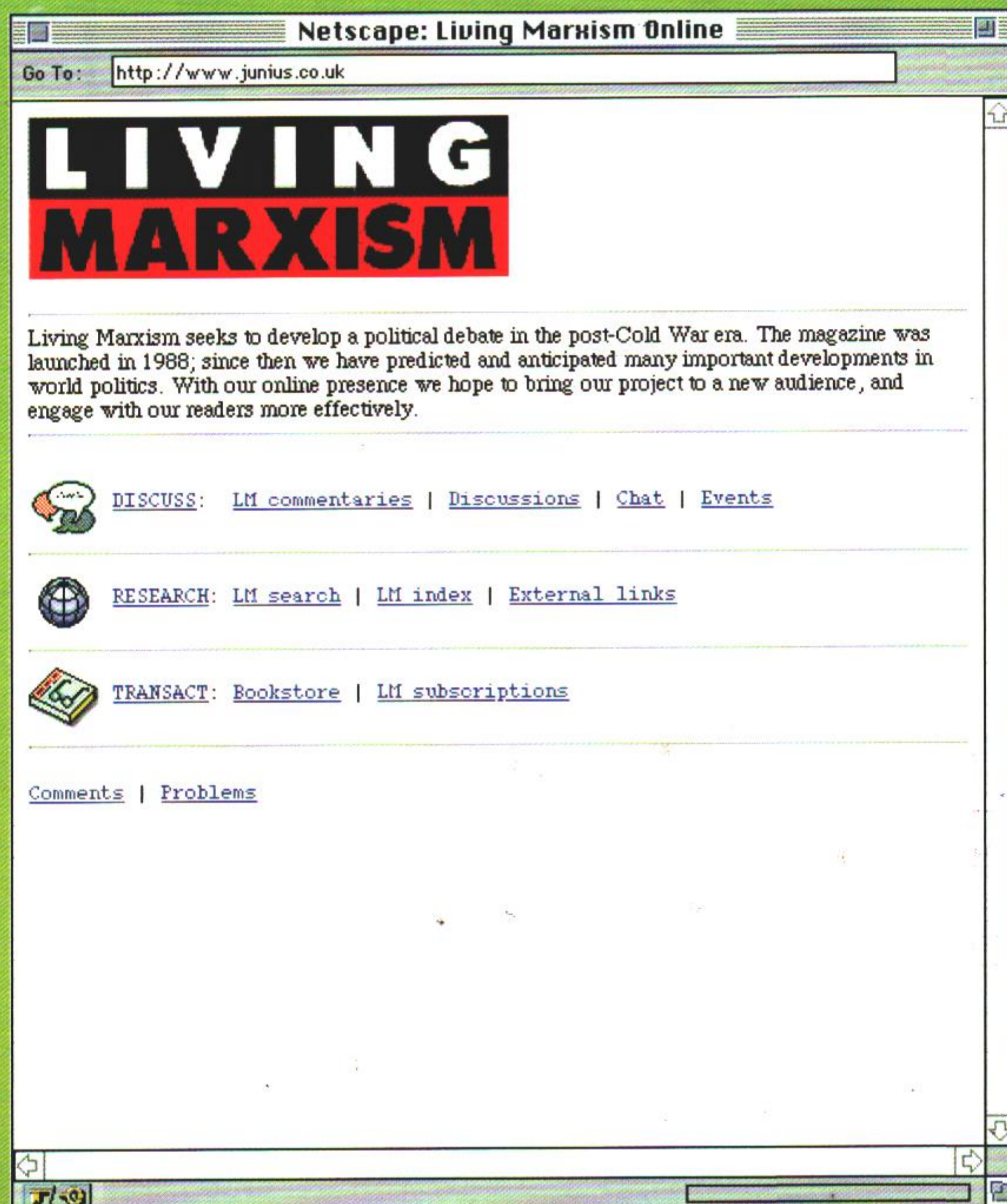
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