

LIVING

MARXISM

THE WEEK

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The dangers of safety

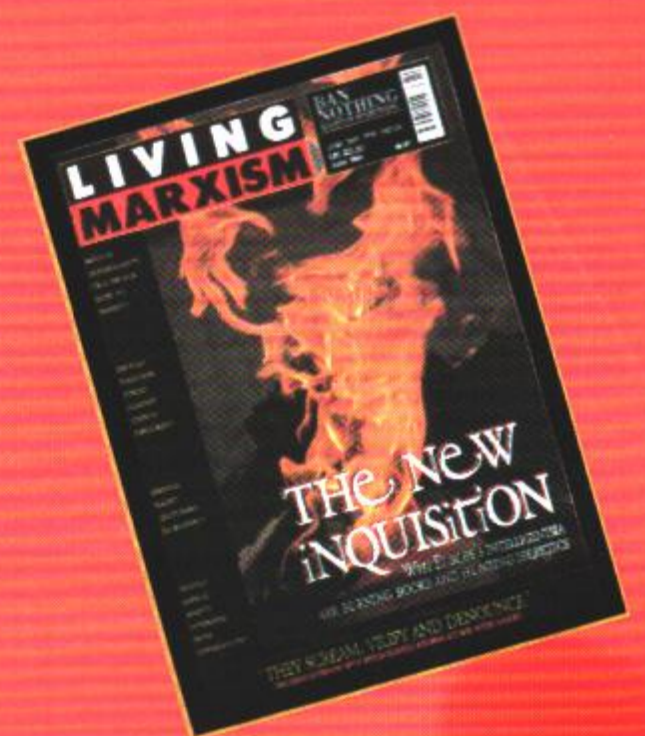
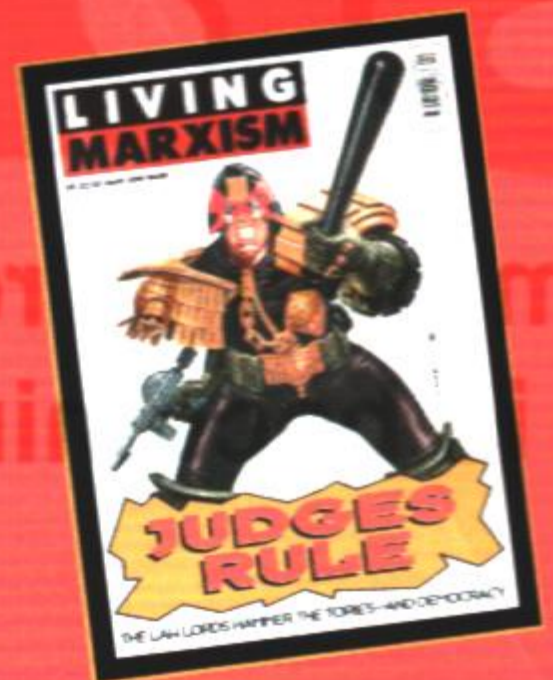
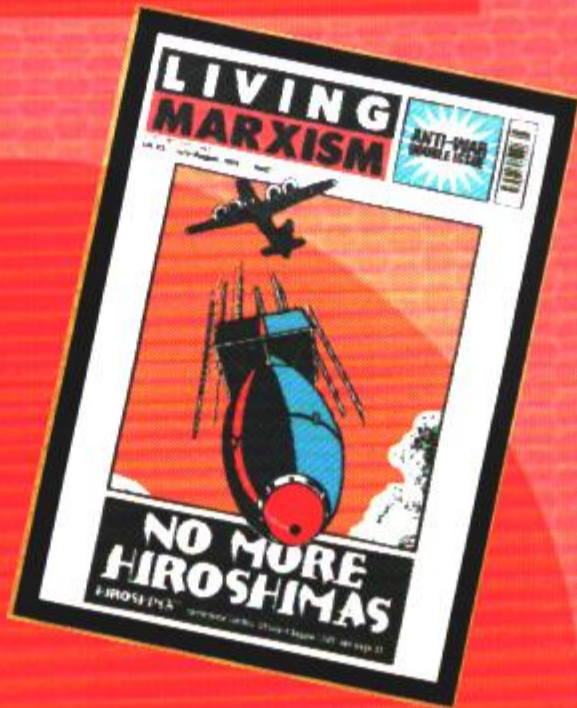
From beef to road rage, avoiding risk is becoming an obsession

Is breast for baby best for you?
Who's hiding behind Europe?

What's wrong with tourism?
Can the world feed China?

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Ice T interview

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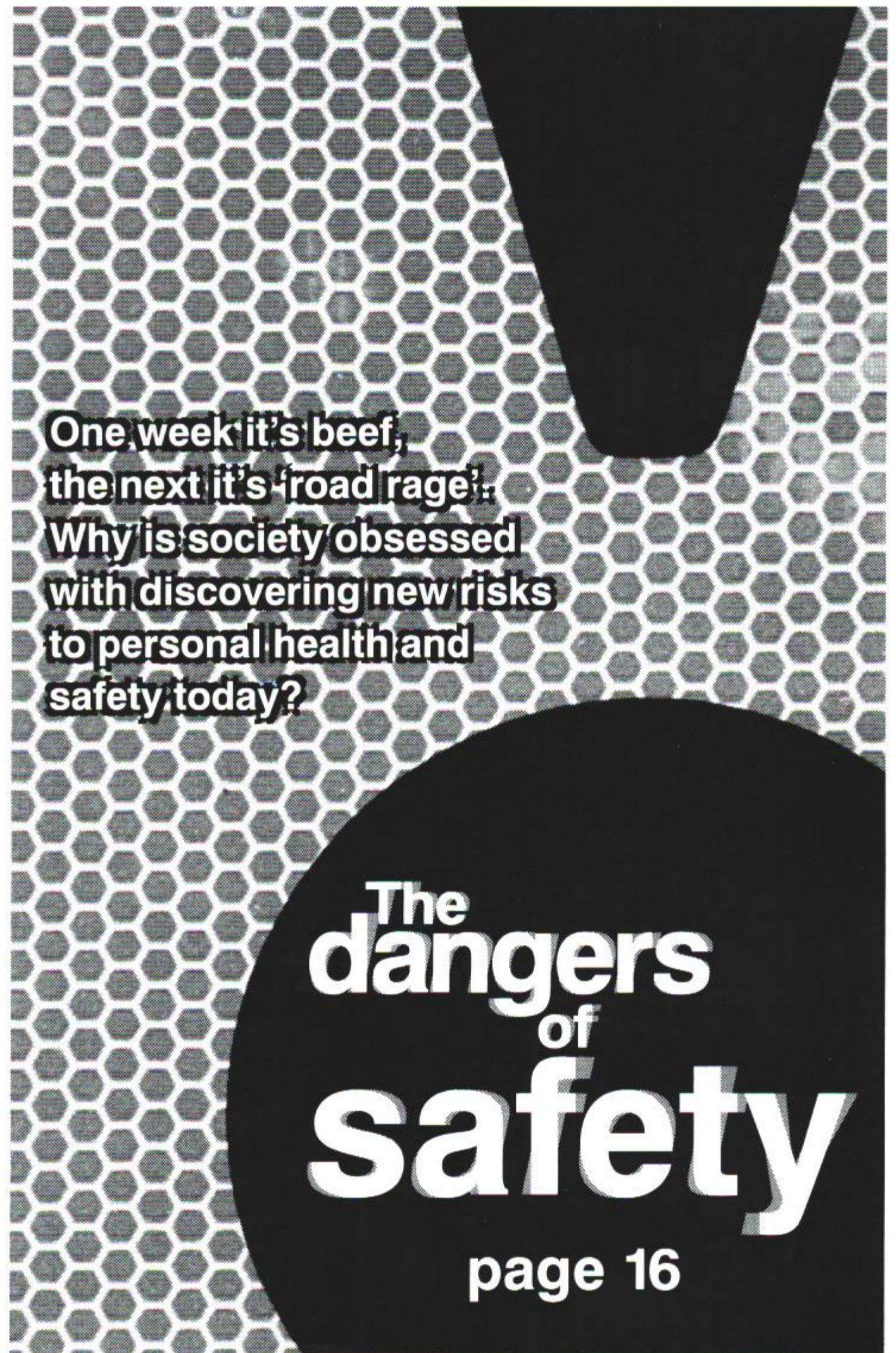
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In this special *Living Marxism* feature, Frank Füredi examines the roots of contemporary risk-consciousness, and suggests that it is creating a victim culture in which humans are viewed as fragile creatures in need of protection from life.

This is a double July/August issue of *Living Marxism*. We will be back in September. Have a revolutionary summer.

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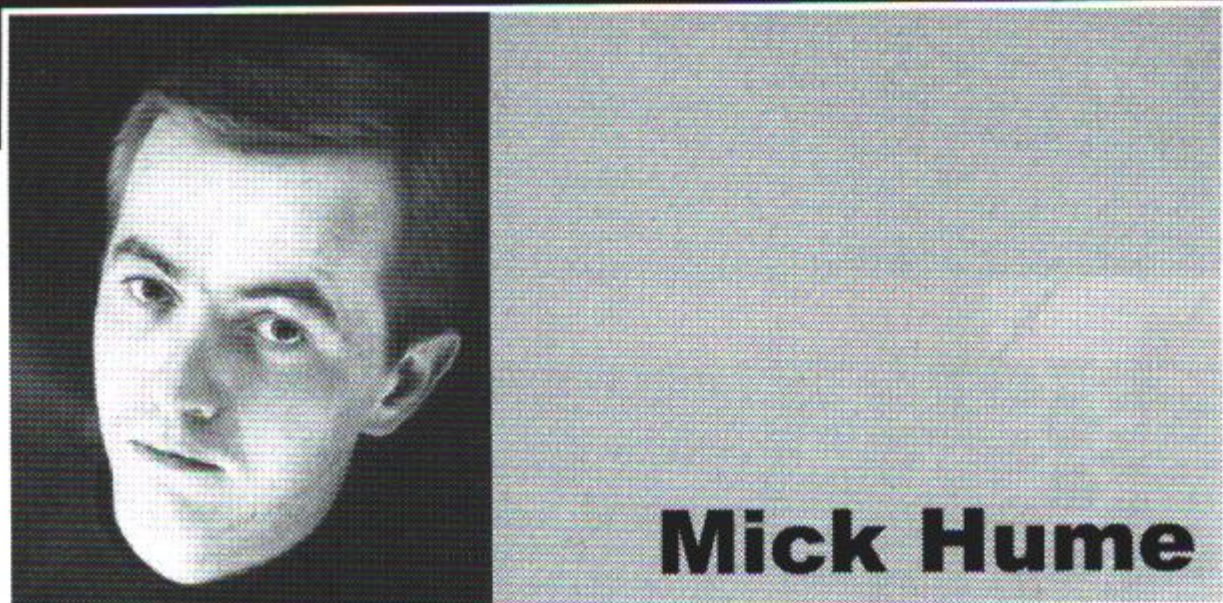
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Mick Hume

Forget poverty, let's talk about the real issues

From 26 July to 1 August in central London, *Living Marxism* is hosting The Week conference; seven days of controversial and innovative discussion, designed to challenge many of the complacent assumptions of our age (see p23 for details).

Many issues which seem to be the subject of endless debate in parliament and the media today are in fact only ever seen from one point of view. There is no longer any real left-right divide on issues as diverse as the environment, the beef scare, male violence or teaching methods. At The Week, we aim to present a clear alternative view on matters which too often are nodded through without question.

People who pick up *Living Marxism* or come to a conference like The Week sometimes find it difficult to understand why we discuss the kind of issues that we do. Why, for instance, is this issue of *Living Marxism* organised around Frank Furedi's challenge to the contemporary obsession with risks to personal health and safety (p16)? And why are the major discussions at The Week planned to focus on the theme of 'Challenging the victim culture'. What do such matters have to do with left-wing politics?

The assumption is that a magazine with 'Marxism' on its masthead ought to be devoted to protesting about unemployment, poverty, welfare cuts and the other economic problems created by capitalism, rather than addressing issues of the kind which have featured recently in *Living Marxism* (from plague scares to the parenting crisis).

This notion reduces Marxism to a kind of poor man's version of populist economics; while the Tories bang on endlessly about how economic success and the 'feelgood

factor' are just around the corner, Marxists are supposed to respond in kind by chanting about the poverty and deprivation that are the flipside of the capitalist coin.

Marxism is here misunderstood as little more than defending the underdog against the system. It becomes reduced to a dogmatic ritual of complaint about how greedy the rich are, how bad the world is, and how poor ordinary people are. In fact that has nothing to do with Marxism as we know it.

Of course, we are well aware of the exploitative character of capitalist economics. Clever analytical insights are not necessary to see that there are a lot of poor people around; all you have to do is walk through any town or city in the country. Nobody needs *Living Marxism* to tell them that poverty, deprivation and need are ugly features of our society. They can read that in respectable publications like the Rowntree Trust reports, and hear it from countless church pulpits on any Sunday morning.

The point is not simply to describe the world, however, but to get people to change it. In which case the more important question is not how poor people are, but what makes people act as they do today? What needs to be explained is not just the general exploitative character of capitalism, but the specific determinants which lead people to respond to problems in a particular way in particular circumstances.

This approach throws up some interesting new questions. For instance, why can bogus health panics now move many people to boycott beef or flood helplines for information about formula baby milk, yet the hard facts about inner-city poverty provoke little or no reaction? Why do many people seem more animated about the highly unlikely prospect of being attacked in their

cars than about the all-too-real possibility of being made redundant?

These are far from peripheral issues. Because if poverty and related economic problems cannot move people today, then in political terms they do not really matter. There must be something else going on, some new problems that need to be understood if we are to alter the climate of thought and action in society. For those of us concerned to change the way things are, the really interesting questions revolve around working out what those new issues are, and how to address them. To sit back instead and put on the old record about poverty and unemployment would guarantee that we are out step with the way in which problems are now perceived.

Over the past year or two, *Living Marxism* has gone some way towards identifying key changes taking place in society. These changes have often been misunderstood or missed altogether by those who would stick to a rigidly economic explanation of events.

A good example of the need to cope with fresh political challenges came with the recent controversy over a Mintel survey, published in June, which revealed that more than half of 20-24 year olds in the UK now still live at home with their parents. Everybody sensed that there was a different kind of problem here. But what was its cause, and what might the solution be?

A standard reaction among critical commentators was to identify the new stay-at-home attitude among young people as a consequence of economic insecurity, caused by unemployment, low wages, the removal of welfare rights, cuts in student grants and so on. The simple solution then became to demand more jobs, better training and cheaper housing, in traditional

left-wing style, and imagine that everything would be all right if only we could slightly raise the taxes on the rich and the benefits to the poor.

This knee-jerk economic analysis missed the point that, in previous times, most people would have left the parental home precisely to escape from poverty and make their way in the world. People have often travelled around the globe in search of a job. Yet today, a big proportion of British youth reacts to the same economic problems by hiding away at home. Clearly there is something more than ordinary economic insecurity at work here—especially since those young people with decent jobs showed little inclination to fly the nest either.

What that survey revealed above all is that many young people today are afraid of the world. This is a new and dangerous development.

The convergence of various economic and political trends in society has created a situation in which more young people are likely to react to events as insecure individuals, seeking protection from the real and imagined problems of everyday life. Whether that protection is to be provided by government health inspectors, the police or their parents, the consequence of seeking it is the same. It reinforces the notion that young adults are really powerless children, incapable of standing up for themselves or taking control of their own lives.

This is a much bigger problem than a simple shortage of cash. It is a bad case of social paralysis. Poverty cannot explain why so many young people are effectively afraid to leave the house they grew up in. Nor can complaints about poverty inspire those people to act any differently. The twentysomething generation are not going to try to change the world so long as they are too nervous of it to change their own bed sheets and light bulbs.

The standard economic explanation of a

Marxism is misunderstood as little more than defending the underdog

problem like this might sound radical, it might even be what people accept as 'Marxist'. But in fact it is mundane, banal and deeply conservative. It assumes that the problems created by capitalism, and the solutions to them, are basically always the same. Such a narrow vision reduces Marxism to a Stone Age dogma and fails to see everything that is new and important about the problems we face today.

The fear of the world expressed by those young adults is only one aspect of a pattern of avoiding risk and seeking safety which now runs right through life. It is a pattern which begins with children being taught to fear adults (escorted to school by their parents, discouraged from playing outside) and ends with adults who are afraid of children (supporting New Labour's calls for child curfews, refusing to teach disruptive pupils, worrying about elder abuse). Unlike the poor, who, as the old saying has it, are always with us, this atmosphere is entirely a product of the present. Understanding and addressing it is also the most pressing problem of our times.

The climate of fear and uncertainty, in which caution is always the watchword in everything we do, is the determining influence on political and social life in the late 1990s. It influences how people see everything from the food they eat to the people they meet. And it presents the most serious contemporary barrier to convincing

more people that it is both possible and necessary to act together to change society.

The worship of caution, the belief that everybody needs protecting from everything, can only reinforce the view of people as passive victims of life rather than active shapers of their destiny. The popular obsession with safety is not a capitalist conspiracy; but by paralysing resistance, it has become the most effective ideological defence which the system has today.

That is one reason why *Living Marxism* has expended so much energy of late confronting moral panics and health scares, rather than detailing the extent of poverty and homelessness. It is also why discussions at *The Week* will focus on challenging the victim culture, not complaining about how much corporate executives get paid or how many lottery tickets the poor are conned into buying.

We all know that poverty still exists. But telling ourselves and others how terrible it is will create nothing more than deeper depression. Exposing the causes and the consequences of the obsession with caution, on the other hand, can be the first step towards forging a new sense of people as problem-solvers rather than risk-avoiders. It is certainly a more practical approach to tackling today's political problems than the tired sloganising of the poor man's Marxists who, like other dogmatists before them, seem to think that money is the root of all evil.

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

Disruptive pupils

We expect teachers to be attacked by Tory ministers like Gillian Shephard, so it was no great shock when Shephard recently tried to pin the blame for falling educational standards on poor teachers rather than on poor resources. And we are long past being surprised at New Labour's attempts to 'out-Tory' the Tories, so it was anticipated that David Blunkett would also feel the need to put the boot into 'bad' teachers. But it comes as a bit of a shock to hear *Living Marxism* joining the chorus of condemnation.

Claire Fox ('Disruptive pupils: teachers give wrong answer', June) takes issue with the increasing use of exclusion to deal with unruly children, suggesting that teachers should stop feeling so victimised, get on with the job, and use more appropriate means of discipline. What a cheek!

No matter how effective a teacher's discipline may be, there will always be a small number of pupils who need to be removed from mainstream classrooms. This problem is made more difficult due to lack of resources. Teachers rarely have classroom assistants or nursery nurses who could take a disruptive child to one side. Support from other professionals, such as educational psychologists, is rare because their workloads are too great. These and other inadequacies often mean that temporary suspension or permanent exclusion are the only means by which a teacher can effectively do her job.

Not only do teachers face poor resources, but their professional and legal standing is also under attack. Is it any wonder that teachers are finding it more difficult to discipline when their teaching methods and discipline measures are being constantly questioned? It is true that teachers should be fighting to change these unacceptable conditions, and we deplore the unions' tactics which are a distraction from this. In the meantime, how is a teacher expected to accommodate a violent or emotionally disturbed child, as well as adequately educate the rest of her class? According to Claire Fox, such a problem does not exist, and if you think it does then you should resign. Such a position is unrealistic and will only serve to encourage those who like to blame teachers.

Natalie Boyd and Stuart Derbyshire
Manchester

I agree with Claire Fox's conclusion that naughty children are not the biggest problem facing teachers today. However, I do not think that a union campaign for better wages and conditions, or telling teachers to be more responsible, is a sufficient response to the current confusions in education.

An underlying problem is educationalists' lack of confidence and direction at all levels. This leaves individual teachers in a state of

confusion, and often they are left to their own devices as to how best to impose discipline on classes. It becomes all too easy to see a particularly disruptive pupil as a major problem when, in reality, a more consistent approach to exerting authority on the part of senior management would help no end.

I remember when school was somewhere so different to life outside that our differences in terms of class, race, etc, were minimised. Whatever the home background of an individual pupil, the general expectation was that certain rules and standards applied to us all. The precondition for this was that educationalists knew what they wanted to teach and were confident in applying certain rules. Today the opposite is the case. Instead of common standards applied to all, schools are supposed to 'be aware' and 'take account' of each individual's special circumstances.

Where I work, a disruptive pupil was recently sent out of class, only to be praised by a deputy head for having turned up to school, given her difficult home life. What kind of a confused message is this sending out to pupils? What kind of constructive, consistent discipline procedure is this creating for individual teachers to operate in? And what a patronising attitude to pupils, most of whom are capable of a lot more than merely turning up to school.

A Segal *London*

Brand him a crackpot

I read with interest the article on the self-proclaimed 'scientific racist' Christopher Brand ('Why ban racist Brand?', June). While agreeing that his views should not be suppressed, I felt that there are certain issues the article failed to take into account.

If anyone is to publish an academic paper in a reputable journal, at least one referee is required to ensure that what is published makes sense. Given this, one should not be surprised if a reputable publishing house does not want to be associated with the crackpot ideas of an undistinguished academic. I am sure many manuscripts are rejected on the grounds that they simply are not good enough for publication: that hardly amounts to censorship. If you were to decide that this letter is not worth publishing, would that be censorship also? Of course, Mr Brand is free to publish at his own expense.

As for Mr Brand continuing in his post, he can only do so if he is judged to be competent in his job. This job requires him to mark examination papers, and to rate students' performance. To carry this out properly, he must not only be fair but, equally importantly, he must be perceived to be fair. Given the views he has expressed, I do not see how this can be possible. If a doctor were to say that he believed disease to be a result of demonic possession, and that the only

possible treatment was exorcism, I'm sure he should be perfectly entitled to hold such views. But I doubt whether we'd want to put him in charge of patients.

Himadri Chatterjee *Feltham, Middlesex*

The meaning of Marxism

So Sue and Paul Farmer (letters, June) think that *Living Marxism* is a million miles from revolutionary Marxist analysis. What baffles me is why such people ever subscribed to *Living Marxism* in the first place. If, as they imply, they prefer a more 'traditional' political approach, they would be better catered for by taking out membership of the ISO.

The unorthodox approach taken by *Living Marxism* in giving priority to themes such as health issues is to be applauded. That the rest of the left has failed to understand the new authoritarianism is hardly surprising since they have often been its chief architect, calling for the banning of racist lecturers and pornographic books, defending aspects of political correctness, and holding reactionary views, as in the mad cow scare.

Living Marxism's approach is to challenge the trend that portrays ordinary people as piteous individuals. Only when this view is defeated can the working class begin to fulfil its revolutionary task. Keep up the good work.

Karl Travis *Canberra, Australia*

ps Why was Toby Banks axed? His regular columns were full of wit and humour and I found him a joy to read.

I was aware that some people living in Cornwall feel themselves so isolated from life in the rest of the UK that they want to declare Cornwall a separate country. However, I had not noticed, until I read Sue and Paul Farmer's letter, that Cornwall has slipped off the planet. Certainly Truro, where they live, has.

They berate just about everyone who is writing about real events in today's world. They deride those authors who are attempting to get to grips with new phenomena such as victim culture and anti-science currents. These manifestations of an increasingly censorious society are what politics today are all about. This has by-passed Sue and Paul. Do they really believe that all we need to do as revolutionaries is to explain how capitalism is in crisis and how Britain continues to oppress the Irish?

While I too think that the analyses provided by Mark Ryan and Phil Murphy are principled and correct, unless we connect with consciousness as it is, with people's lived experience, and explain these 'baffling obsessions', you might as well be on another planet. Or indeed, in Cornwall.

Sheila Phillips *London*

Living Marxism is a very different kind of magazine to the one I first started reading in 1990. Then there were issues such as Ireland, racism, imperialism (the Gulf War), etc, which were interesting and polarising. Now moral and cultural questions dominate the publication, to the virtual exclusion of politics or economics. While I disagree with most of the Farmers' letter, I could not help but agree with some points in it.

The magazine is now obsessed with the intricacies of social policy: parenting, the rights of children, and many other similar issues. I am not sure that support for revolution can actually be built on the basis of this kind of thing. You can gain a nod of agreement if you say to people 'how pathetic it is to target single mums, who try so hard in the best interests of their children'. But you are scarcely convincing anyone of anything. The same people who nod their heads might well despise the single mum in their street who spends all her money on booze and cigarettes and whose children are the scourge of the neighbourhood.

I believe that more emphasis needs to be paid to economic issues and relations between the imperialist powers. These issues appealed to people concerned to change the big things, whereas the obsession with social policy is depressing and remains on the level of changing the small things in life. No matter how many people you talk to about 'parenting', it will take some big external impulse to wake the working class up. I have always assumed that rising tensions between the imperialist powers would be the thing to turn the political situation around.

David Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Of apes, pigs and men

Dr Jennifer Cunningham ('Planet of the apes', June) asserts that the report of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, *Animal-to-Human Transplants: the Ethics of Xenotransplantation*, 'has caved in to the animal rights lobby' in recommending that non-primate species should be regarded as the source animals of choice for transplantation. Even more seriously, she manages to convince herself that the report may pose 'a broader threat to research in the whole field of xenotransplantation and beyond'. But to take such a view requires ignorance both of the law and of the development of British research, a casual attitude to the risks of disease transmission, and a very selective reading of what the report says about baboons.

It is not this Council that has invented the principle of 'weigh[ing] the likely adverse effects on the animals concerned against the benefits likely to accrue'. That is the law—see the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, Section 5 (4)—and nothing about that principle as enshrined in the Act and in its implementation has hampered the promising research into xenotransplantation reviewed in the report.

Disease transmission may be a greater risk between nearly related species. Dr Cunningham is rash to applaud the highly publicised transplant of baboon bone marrow into a San Francisco AIDS patient. In that case inadequate attention appears to have been given to the fact that the source animal was not free of potentially dangerous pathogens. Jonathan Allan comments in *Nature Medicine* (January 1996, p19) both on the risks and on the political pressure applied to the review panel.

The report nowhere refers to the 'rights of baboons'. The report's argument is that the routine use of baboons as source animals would rapidly lead to their extermination. Pigs, by contrast, breed rapidly. On that score it is calculation, not sentimentality, that led to the choice of pigs as a source for organs. Nothing in this disturbs the logic of the report's argument that limited use of primates for research into xenotransplantation is ethical.

So what is Dr Cunningham complaining about? The report reviews a wide range of arguments about the use of animals in medical procedures. It nowhere endorses a belief in animal 'rights'. The report sets out a framework for proceeding with xenotransplantation with the necessary safeguards for both humans and animals.

David Shapiro Executive Secretary, Nuffield Council on Bioethics London

What objective reality?

As a mathematical physicist I have been following the debate in your letters page arising from the review of *Science and the Retreat from Reason* (December 1995). I am confused about what is meant by the objective character of reality. If this implies that there is some reality underlying all experiments then it does not exist, nor has science ever required it to exist. This has nothing to do with interpretations of quantum mechanics, it is simply a mathematical consequence of various simple quantum experiments that can be done; and it is provable, for

instance via Bell's inequalities. Any attempt to assume that there is an objective reality can be contradicted by experiment. This presents no problem for science at all: science has always been about establishing relations between the results of experiments not trying to describe the 'reality' that gives rise to these results.

Stefan Davids Leigh-on-Sea, Essex

Normal kids

Setting aside the contrived moralism of the 'safe sex' storyline of *Kids*, which your reviewer ('Adult fantasy', May) rightly criticised, the broader reaction of moral indignation to the film deserves comment. Remembering my post-GCSE summer 'holiday' of 10 years ago, far from being off the mark with its observations, for me *Kids* gave a pretty accurate sketch of the lives of bored teenagers.

All the supposedly terrible things the kids get up to in the film, and which have had the reviewers up in arms, struck me as pretty normal behaviour. Many of them are things that I did, or at least tried hard to do in my teenage years. Those I did not do, I certainly knew people (for better or worse) who had done. And I was from rural Northumberland, not the Bronx.

When Telly says that all he thinks about is fucking, we may not like his turn of phrase or his casual ignorance of what others may want or think, but I defy you to find a teenage boy who would not sheepishly admit the same. So Telly takes this desire to its logical conclusion, but I lose count of how many gropes in darkened cupboards I was involved in during my adolescence, silently hoping the girl would relent just the once. That she never did is neither here nor there. Many of them did (with someone else) at the next party, or the one after that!

Does this make me a misogynist and a potential rapist, or some maladjusted sicko? Does it make me one of the monsters that Clark's *Kids* have been branded? No, it just means I had a normal, lower middle class, boring teenage life. The moralists who feign outrage at the film should get real and stop pretending that censoring it will do anything to help today's pissed-off kids.

Jim Minton London SW17

So, farewell then

I am going outside. I may be gone some time.
T Banks London

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

Is breast for baby best for you?

Ann Bradley ignored the cries of the media panic-mongers and Islington Earth-mothers, and switched from breast-feeding to formula milk when she felt like it

Mothers who bottle feed have had a hard time of it lately. As if National Breast-Feeding Week was not enough, suddenly—out of nowhere—arrived perhaps the most ludicrous in a line of ludicrous food panics; the scare about there being nasty chemicals in formula baby milk.

Women who choose bottle instead of breast are now being told that they are not only exposing their babies to an increased risk of gastroenteritis, chest infections, eczema, cot death, emotional deprivation and a lower IQ, but possibly to the future prospect of infertility and testicular cancer.

The baby milk panic is a joke, and a sick one at that.

The sorry saga started in March when the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods issued an information sheet which disclosed that minute quantities of chemical compounds known as phthalates were present in infant formula milk. This was not particularly surprising news. Phthalates, which are added to plastics to make them bendy, are everywhere.

There are more than 7000 compounds which are used in crisp bags, chocolate wrappers and plastic containers. It has been known for years that tiny amounts of these compounds can leak into the foods they wrap. Given that bendy plastic is used in the

manufacture of formula milk it would be surprising if little traces of phthalate were not present. Appropriate safety levels are already set by the EU scientific committee on foods. Amounts of the chemical found in baby milk were lower than this safety limit, which itself includes a 100-fold safety factor.

Even the link between phthalates and the theoretical risk of damage to sperm is not new. Over a year ago, I wrote a rather tongue-in-cheek piece for a men's magazine reporting that research from the agriculture ministry's food science laboratory in Norwich had showed that phthalates could leak into chocolate from wrappers. At that time, it was already common knowledge in the scientific community that xenoestrogens cause problems for the cells responsible for pumping out sperm in rats. Of course, the amounts fed to the rats were enormous, and informed scientists were pretty unexcited about the probable consequences for humans. The message then was that phthalates are used throughout the printing and plastics industry and are pretty much unavoidable—besides which there is no conclusive proof they have any effect on human sperm. Lots of animal studies do indicate an affect on humans, while others do not.

Dr Colin Poole at the Imperial College of Science and Medicine has

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

TABOOS



PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

suggested that the dose a person would have to eat to achieve the level that affected the rats would be 'like eating half an ounce of PVC every day'.

Even now, those in the know are singularly undisturbed by the connection between phthalates in baby milk and testicular problems. Dr Richard Sharpe, of the Medical Research Council's Reproductive Biology Unit in Edinburgh, has been working with xenoestrogens and rats in Edinburgh. He is articulate, loved by journalists because he's always good for a quote—which is usually a description of an egomaniac who delights in sensationalism. But not so, Richard Sharpe. He rubbished this particular panic as 'a scare based on uninformed speculation', and went on to explain that, in any case, even the effect on the rats had been minor and had not been confirmed in any other species of animal.

So why all the fuss? Why, when the *Independent on Sunday's* environmental correspondent turned this rather old-hat information into a frontpage story ('Alarming levels of chemicals that could impair human fertility found in leading brands of baby milk', 26 May 1996) did the 'scoop' trigger a full-scale medical panic, sending anxious mothers racing to their

doctors and jamming the hastily set up telephone helplines? Surely it could have been dismissed as total nonsense from the start.

In the current climate, probably not. Once this particular fuse was lit, it was bound to explode for two reasons. First, it was a potential problem involving babies, and these days all you have to do is mention harm to children to generate instant hysteria. Children's safety is at the top of the family politics agenda, and the notion of children being put at risk because of an official cover-up on chemicals in baby milk was a gift for anyone with a point to make about anything from food quality to freedom of information.

But perhaps the biggest reason why the issue could snowball out of all proportion was because bottle-feeding is already stigmatised. The bottle is widely seen as the second-best way of nurturing a baby, and there are lots of Earth-mother types jostling for space in the *Guardian* to make the point that 'breast is best' in that particular 'let that be a lesson to you' tone that Islington liberals specialise in. Many mothers who bottle-feed are already thoroughly guilt-tripped about depriving their baby of the benefits of the breast, and so are already primed to panic when a journalist looking to get his by-line in a prominent place in the paper

suggests that they might be condemning their children to the misery of infertility.

In the debate which filled the pages of the press for days after the initial story, at least one letter-writer bluntly stated what was obviously in the minds of many more—that a good outcome of this panic was that it might drive more women to breast-feed.

Well, at the time of writing, it has been four months since I gave up breast-feeding my infant and introduced him to the delights of SMA gold cap. And with some experience of both breast and bottle-feeding, I must admit to being singularly irritated by the breast-feeding fanatics who have made this panic their own.

There are undoubtedly two good reasons for breast-feeding. It is better for the baby's health in the early months, as it allows the child to benefit from its mother's antibodies. The colostrum which is produced in the first few days—before the proper milk is produced—is particularly beneficial in this respect. As a consequence, breast-fed babies tend to suffer fewer stomach upsets than their bottle-guzzling contemporaries.

The other short-term benefit of breast-feeding (which the Earth-mothers tend to ignore but which definitely helped sell it to me) is that it the easiest way for a new mother to get her body back into shape quickly after giving birth. The hormones produced in the process cause your stretched uterus to contract down and it burns off a phenomenal amount of calories.

There are moments also when breast-feeding is a delightful way of relating to your baby, although in my experience these moments are vastly outnumbered by the hours of discomfort suffered from rock hard, swollen, milk engorged breasts, when I was sitting in meetings while infant was enjoying milk that I had lovingly expressed earlier. The main advantage with formula milk is that right from the start other people can help out with feeding and baby-sitting while you have a night out. The other advantage is that you don't have to worry about leaking breasts.

I remember, shortly after being delivered, reading the final section of a pamphlet on breast-feeding helpfully left for me by the midwife. It made the point that breast-feeding would be difficult, but if I persisted I might find it the most rewarding thing I ever did in my life. To me this was the saddest thing I had ever read. Comparing a biological, basically animalistic, function with the human mental creativity of even writing an article is truly warped. For a cat, a cow or a sheep, suckling might be the most rewarding thing it can do, but for a woman—give me a break.

It amazes me that the breast ►

feeding fanatics can be so surprised that, while 63 per cent of mothers start by breast-feeding, after six weeks only 39 per cent are doing so and that percentage rapidly drops off further. The latest panic prompted a discussion about why women were 'forced' to give up the breast. A recent survey showed that most women turn to bottles because they need to return to work before the

Levels of dioxin in breast milk exceed WHO safety limits

child has been weaned at about four months. Just one mother in five is still breast-feeding at six months.

Return to work is undoubtedly a factor, but I would be surprised if for many women that is anything more than a reason of convenience, a good excuse to be shot of it. You see, you have to have a good excuse to give up the discomforts of breast-feeding, because it is so responsible, wholesome and motherly. Turning away from this righteous path is difficult even when you are confident, assertive and independent.

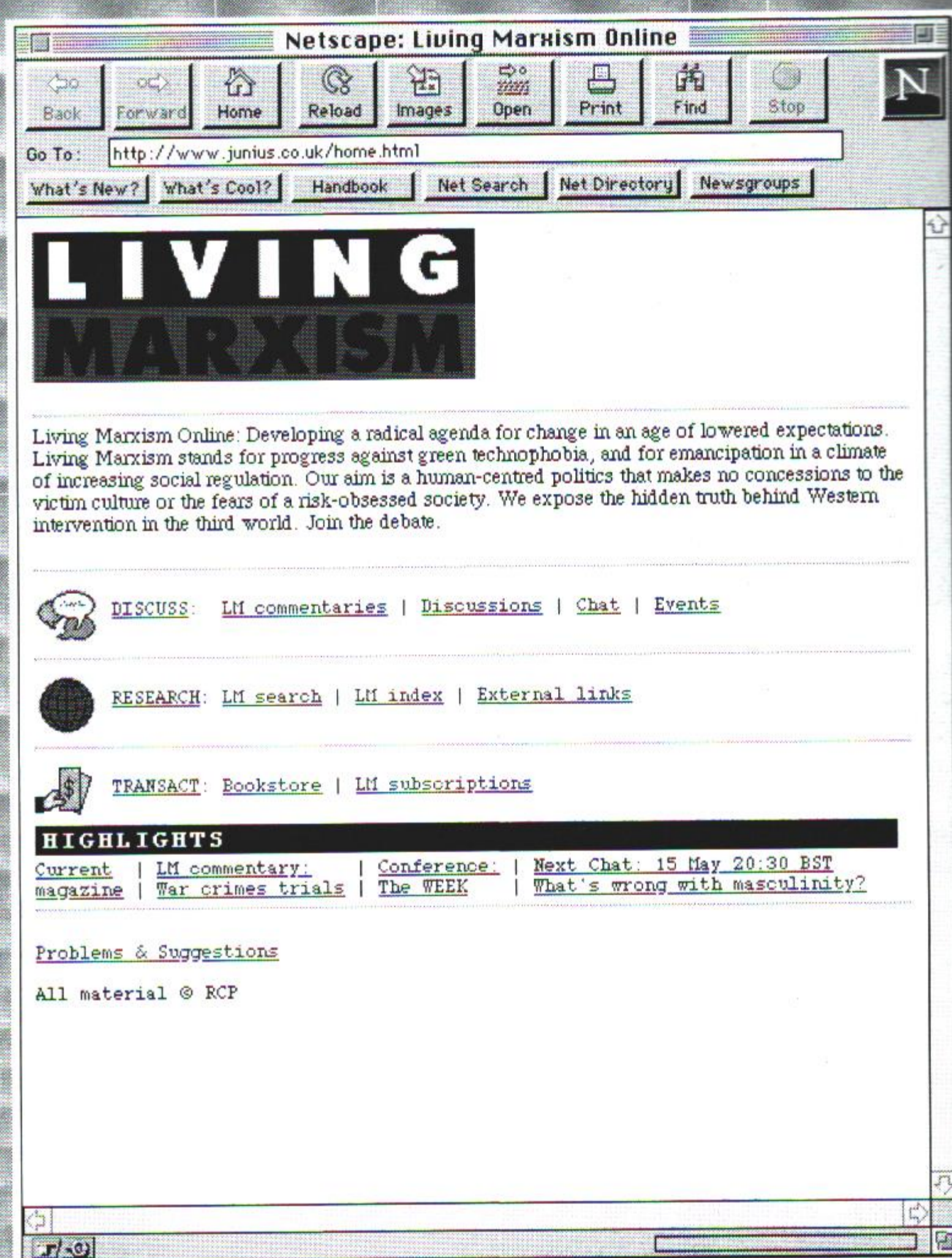
'I find it distracting when my breasts leak during sex and I want to get them back to their natural recreational state' is not considered a good enough reason to deprive one's child of nature's goodness and subject him to chemical formula. But why shouldn't it be?

New mothers are always uncertain and guilty. New mothers who have tried to breast-feed and cannot, or who have taken a rational decision never to start, are particularly susceptible to worries that they are somehow jeopardising the health of their new-born. One thing none of us needed was an irrational, baseless panic about phthalates in baby milk. Even less did we need the anti-bottle-feeding brigade using the opportunity to rub salt in open sores.

It seems, however, as though we bottle-feeders might have the last laugh. We might be dosing our infants with traces of phthalates, albeit traces that are a fraction of internationally accepted levels, but as for breast-feeders...Friends of the Earth has suggested that the levels of dioxin in breast milk exceed World Health Organisation safety limits by more than 10 times. Does this mean we will see the women's pages packed with advice to women to change to formula? Somehow I doubt it.

Ann Bradley is convening the course *Victim Culture at The Week* conference in July (see page 31).

ONLINE



<http://www.junius.co.uk>

Who are you calling a pervert?

I thought Safeway's new advertisements in which Harry, the nation's favourite toddler, tries to chat up a playmate, Molly, from his supermarket trolley were rather nauseating. They were just too cutesy for words. Bruce Willis set a trend for adult voiceover baby action films in *Look Who's Talking*—and while it was amusing the first time it has now been done to *rigor mortis*. The Harry ads also stuck in my craw because they were so over-hyped—special ads in the papers telling you when you could video the ads, little competitions where you win if Harry says the phrase on your scratchcard. And video booths in supermarkets for those of us who forgot to set our videos at home to catch up on the 'banter and witty observations' (Safeway's description, not mine) when Harry met Molly.

Given that the wittiest line in the witty banter was 'I suppose a snog's out of the question', if you didn't catch the ads, in my opinion, you didn't miss much. But, of course, this is just my opinion. In the opinion of Tony Banks, the Labour MP, you missed an opportunity to be depraved and corrupted.

To my mind the ad was a harmless bit of fun (albeit unfunny). The idea was simply 'let's pretend babies think like adults', a kind of Johnny Morris joke only using babies instead of small furry animals from the antipodes. Tony Banks, however, looking at it through different eyes, thought the advertisement 'quite deplorable'. Why? Because, he told the *Independent on Sunday*, 'it involves an overtly sexual situation which is handled in an unsophisticated, stereotypical way'.

You are inclined to forgive the man and dismiss him with sympathy as needing a humour transfusion (yes, it is unsophisticated and stereotypical, Tony, that's the point.) But have a think about it. He went on to claim that the ads 'are dangerously close to encouraging people who molest children, and who like to think very young children have advanced sexual thoughts'.

Call me naive but this thought had never occurred to me. Not for one minute did it cross my mind that these ads would bring out the paedophile in anyone. And I find it difficult to imagine what kind of mind it takes even to imagine that other people's sexual fantasies might be unleashed by such anodyne, unsexy TV.

I don't doubt the sincerity of Mr Banks' concern to protect children. I am sure he is genuinely concerned about what other people might think. But there is something disturbing in his attitude.

What Banks' reveals in his comments is the contempt in which he holds ordinary people, something which is typical of New Labour. The

'I don't think this but I'm sure there are people who do' is typical of those who are constantly braying for more censorship. 'Of course this film, TV programme, book, whatever is not going to corrupt you or I—but what about the less cultivated masses.' It is the Lady Chatterley obscenity trial—'would you let your wife or servant read it?'—all over again. Except that at least DH Lawrence intended his work to have erotic undertones. There is lots of sex in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; there is none in the Safeway's ad. Whatever makes Tony Banks assume that the majority of TV viewers are more morally corrupt than himself?

Banks' comment makes some other dodgy assumptions. One is that there are a significant number of individuals whose sexual identity is sufficiently confused for them to be encouraged into perversion by a Safeway's ad. Just how depraved does he think we are?

Another assumption is that we 'potential paedophiles' are too stupid to understand that children do not really think the kind of adult thoughts attributed to them in this ad. You have to wonder if his next crusade will be against that car advert which shows a conference of babies demanding cars with space for all their toys. Perhaps Mr Banks thinks this will lead parents to strap their infants into the driving seat.

There will be those who will answer that even if the ad provokes a salacious thought in one person, it is one too many. One lunatic, as we saw at Dunblane, can cause havoc and misery beyond description. But the concept of applying such a precautionary principle to TV viewing would mean that nothing could be broadcast in case it was misinterpreted by one crazy.

The moral policemen, and Tony Banks seems to want to place himself at the forefront of their ranks, would probably argue that he is speaking out in the interests of the children who might be molested, while I am scoring cheap political points. I would disagree. In fact implying that child sexual abuse can be triggered by something as banal as this Safeway's advert, can only serve to normalise it. Such an argument is in tune with the new feminist school of thought which objects to the use of the label 'paedophile', on the grounds that children are sexually threatened by all men and not just by a few identifiable perverts.

Banks should get real—the number of people whose sexual fantasies were fuelled by Harry's chat-up lines can probably be counted on one hand; unless, that is, by suggesting it might be a common response, he has helped to make it more acceptable. ●

The Safeway's ad was a harmless bit of unfunny fun

Who's hiding behind Europe?

...just about everybody in British politics who wants to avoid being held accountable, says Jennie Bristow

Never mind mad cows. What about mad news items? Through May and into June, the news headlines were dominated by bull semen, the vital issue on which John Major chose to launch his 'beef war' against Europe. Yet, as one *Observer* columnist pointed out, the sums of money lost by British farmers due to the Euro-ban on semen and other bovine by-products were 'trifling. They're next to nothing. They really don't matter' (26 May 1996).

So what has been going on? Why has Europe once again become the central issue of media debate in Britain? It was certainly not due to public demand, as some journalists admitted in their more lucid moments. A feature by Andrew Grice and Michael Prescott in the *Sunday Times*, which started off in excited terms about how Europe might save Major and damage Tony Blair, concluded with the sobering confession that 'despite the passionate views held by the politicians...Europe does not exercise ordinary voters in the same way' (26 May 1996). But that has not stopped journalists and politicians going on a Euro-binge.

Perhaps Tony Blair came closest to explaining the furore when he told the *News of the World* that the government was suffering from its own peculiar form of BSE: Blame Someone Else (26 May 1996). The point Blair omitted to make, however, is that New Labour and everybody else from the left to the right of British politics is

using the issue of Europe in a similar way: as a smokescreen to hide behind, an excuse for their problems, and a device to avoid being held accountable for their ideas and actions.

Take, for example, the hysterical rantings of the 'Eurosceptic' right. In parliament, Tory backwoodsmen clamour for different fishing quotas, different theme tunes for Euro '96 and a different attitude to all things European. Several leading newspapers headline similar gripes on a daily basis, from the *Sun*'s 'Beware the EU dragon' editorial on St George's Day to the *Daily Mail*'s '12 reasons why we won't be celebrating Europe Day'.

According to the Eurosceptic right, the EU is responsible for all Britain's problems: its rising level of debt, the slow decay of its fishing fleet, the unpopularity of its ruling party. Although the British fishing industry has been in decline for decades and a few yards of water is unlikely to revive it, the fact that the Spanish 'steal our fish', as Norman Tebbit wrote in the *Sun* (6 June 1996) can now be held up as the cause of all Britain's problems.

Even the most naive of little Englanders would be hard-pushed to make a convincing case that withdrawal from the EU would bring about a dynamic economy, a huge fishing industry and a united and popular Tory Party. The furthest most are prepared to go is to the point suggested by David Smith of the *Sunday Times*, where Britain adopts

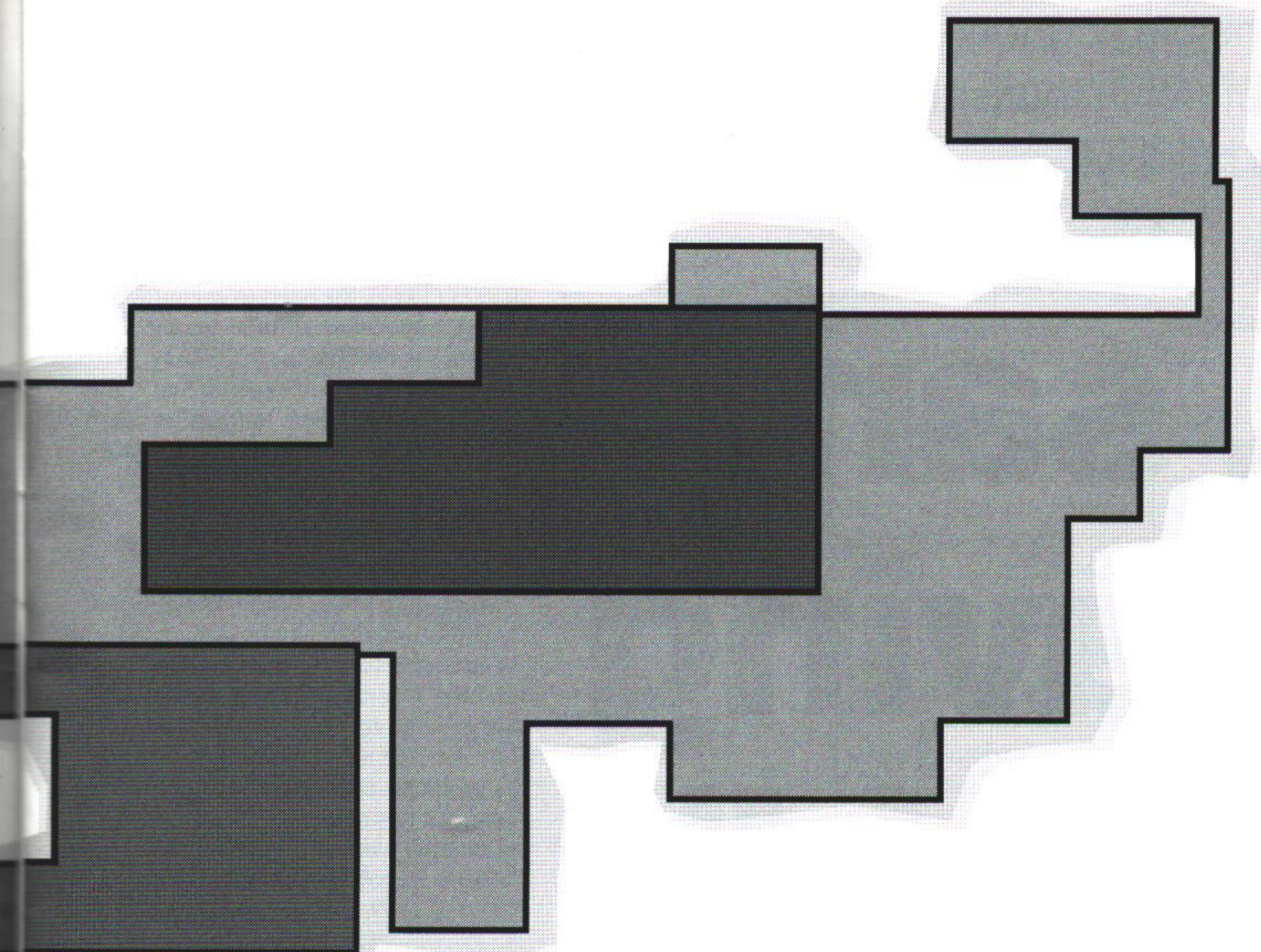
a position like Norway's—half in, half out of the EU.

The Hokey Cokey-type pontificating around the issue shows two things clearly. The right has no alternative to Europe; and it does not want one. The right likes to bang on about Europe all the time because it gives it a cause, without the responsibility of providing an alternative. As long as Britain is in the EU, the EU is to blame for everything that goes wrong in Britain. The last thing any of them really want to do is to leave Europe, and face sorting out the mess themselves.

Gay-bashing fraud

The Major government will indulge the right's anti-EU rhetoric in order to give it something to bang the drum about and keep its troops in line. But the government is also secretly happy to use the institutions of Europe to get itself off the hook and avoid being held accountable for controversial decisions. Major may attempt a pale imitation of Action Man over a few quids' worth of bull semen, but he is quite willing to use the powers that be in Brussels when it suits him. Having European institutions in place to enforce policy which is necessary but repellent to the traditional Tory constituency can be a useful face-saving device for a party in so precarious a position as the Conservatives.

A good example is the ongoing controversy about the ban on gays in the armed forces. On this issue, the Tory Party is compelled to take



a traditional stand, for fear of further disenchanting its blue-rinsed voters. However, the government also knows that, as a British judge said of the ban, 'the tide of history is against it'. A leaked memo from the Ministry of Defence, published in the press at the end of last year, suggested that the government's preferred solution to this dilemma would be for ministers like Michael Portillo to maintain public support for the ban on gays, but be overruled by the European Court of Human Rights. The Tories could then get the embarrassing issue off the agenda, blame Europe, and avoid having to answer to their supporters for changing the rules and offending their prejudices.

Blaming everything on Europe is a desperate attempt for a discredited government to give itself some breathing space. In every circumstance, whether they agree with EU decisions or not, the Tories can play the victim of big nasty Brussels, bravely battling to defend little Britain from being squashed.

Fear of the mob

The left and the liberal press in Britain have been highly critical of the Tories' manipulative approach to European issues, accusing the right of xenophobia and the government of hypocrisy and of electioneering. Yet the opposition parties and critical papers like the *Independent* and the *Guardian* are no better. They, too, are hiding behind the European smokescreen.

Blair's ambivalent attitude to the 'beef war'—'we will support the government so long as Britain wins'—was, like Major's stance, motivated more by domestic electoral calculations than by anything happening in Europe. More importantly, the Euro furore has revealed that the instincts of the British left are even more anti-democratic than those of the Tories.

One of the reasons the *Independent* gave for opposing the *Mail's* anti-European charter was that the EU often provides a more 'efficient forum for dealing with problems'. For 'efficient', read elite. Through using the institutions and procedures of the EU, it is possible to sidestep the task of tackling your own government and winning over the British electorate. The enthusiasm for European institutions expressed by many liberal papers and campaigners reflects the fact that they feel more at home lobbying the urbane bureaucrats in air-conditioned European courts and commissions than they do rubbing shoulders with the sweaty masses in the arena of British politics and public debate.

Today, leading supporters of every radical cause from anti-racism to homosexual equality seem convinced that the only place to put their case is in Europe. They have effectively given up trying to win an argument with the British public—not because their arguments are too weak to win, you understand, but because the public are too stupid or bigoted to understand.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the recent panic about the Tories' whipping up 'xenophobia' over beef. All it took was a few cranky *Daily Mail* commentators to make some anti-European points for the left and the liberal press to start screaming about the right mobilising the xenophobic tendencies of the electorate. As one article in the *Observer* put it, 'For the nationalist wing of the Conservative Party, Satan has found a new instrument' (in the institutions of Europe). From which we should conclude that 'the flag and the question, Who speaks for Britain? will loom larger and larger as the election approaches' (26 May 1996).

Brussels bureaucrats

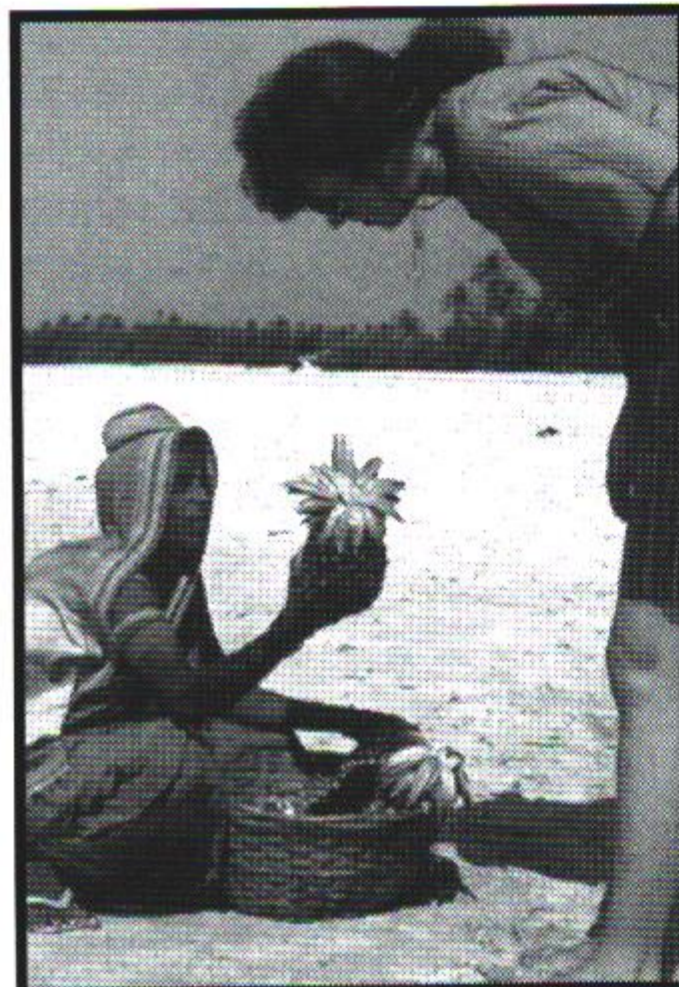
For many liberal commentators, it seems that a large section of the British electorate is a stage army of flag-waving, lager-swilling Gazza caricatures, waiting to be marched up the hill by the Tories. How much more civilised to discuss the finer points of one's case with Europe's judges and commissioners than to compete for the attention of the xenophobic mob. Yet anyone with their eyes open to the changing face of politics should know that old-fashioned nationalism does not have the same impact as in the past. Even Thatcher's Falklands War would not do the trick for the Tories today in the way that it did in 1982, never mind Major's farcical beef war. The only motive force behind the 'xenophobia' panic is the liberal left's willingness to believe that stupid British voters can easily be duped by a display of tub-thumping nationalism, a danger which can only be ameliorated through investing more power in the bodies of the EU.

There is nothing inherently xenophobic about being against the institutions of Europe, just as there is nothing internationalist about taking a pro-EU stance. The danger with Europe is that it devolves power further and further away from the electorate into the hands of officials and judges who represent the interests of Europe's powerful elites and are accountable to nobody else. When governments hand the responsibility and blame for everything that happens to the EU, and oppositions run to the courts and commissions of Europe seeking change, then the opportunities for any electorate, whether it be British, German or Spanish, to hold its rulers to account for anything become ever more remote.

European institutions are the symbols of unaccountable power in an anti-democratic age. It is important to challenge their increasing influence over our affairs just as we oppose the Tories' little England posturing. There is more at stake here than a bit of bull semen. ●

Club 18-30 is out, responsible eco-tourism is in. But, asks Jim Butcher, lecturer in tourism, what's wrong with a bit of hedonism on holiday?

'Sun, sand and saving the world'



'A spectre is haunting the planet: the spectre of tourism.' The opening cliché from a recent study sums up the dominant view of tourism today. Since Swiss academic Jost Krippendorf criticised tourism as a burden on cultures, economies and environments in his seminal work *The Holiday Makers* (1984), the need to encourage a more responsible attitude among tourists has become the orthodoxy for travel writers and experts. Sun, sea and sand, or 'mass tourism' is out. Sustainable, eco and green tourism are the new buzzwords. Even Magaluf is 'going green', blowing up 20 mass market hotels in a quest to rediscover its past beauty.

According to the World Travel Organisation, there are now more than 500m tourists a year, compared to 25m in 1950. Where travel was once seen as a good thing which broadened the mind, the new school emphasises the problems thrown up by increased travel.

Reading a book like Jonathon Croall's apocalyptically titled *Preserve or Destroy: Tourism and the Environment*, it is difficult to tell whether he is describing people going abroad on holiday or going off on a war of conquest. Tourism, according to Croall can 'ruin landscapes, destroy communities, pollute the air and water, trivialise cultures, bring about uniformity and generally contribute to the continuing degradation of life on our planet'.

Green guru Jonathon Porritt complains that tourism has had an 'adverse effect on traditional ways of life, and on the distinctiveness of local cultures'. The way in which the nomadic Maasai are said to have been displaced from their traditional hunting grounds to make way for Kenya's national parks has become a *cause célèbre* in these circles.

Lager louts

'Mass tourism' has been put in the frame, accused of desecrating areas of natural beauty and traditional cultures around the world. In response, everybody from the United Nations to local councils has endorsed sustainable tourism. There are even non-governmental organisations like Alpacation and Tourism Concern devoted to promoting this approach. The Federation of Nature and National Parks in Europe recently published *Loving Them to Death?* which defined sustainable tourism as that which 'maintains the environmental, social, and economic integrity and well-being of natural, built and cultural resources in perpetuity'.

The key to this kind of tourism is believed to be teaching us how to behave responsibly during our fortnight

of freedom and fun. The spirit of ethical tourism is captured in the motto 'Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time'. Our annual opportunity to do exactly what we want has become yet another area of our lives where we are bombarded with advice and guidance. Good tourist guides no longer stick to pointing out the best beaches and hottest bars, but tell us to cycle or walk rather than drive, to learn about the local culture, and respect it. In addition there are the now customary warnings about sex (diseases), sun (skin cancer), crime (foreigners generally), and, inevitably for the British 'lager lout' of the hated Club 18-30 variety, alcohol consumption.

Compost

The environmental group Ark has published *The Ark Guide to Sun, Sea, Sand and Saving the World*—a pretty big burden to bear when you are trying to get laid, pissed, a tan or to find the bus back to the hotel. Perhaps as a concession to youthful exuberance, they add that we can 'still have fun'. Thanks. Tourism Concern's code for backpackers in the Himalayas even suggests that we can help the locals respect their own environment, by advising us to teach guides and porters to follow conservation measures.

Typical of today's sustainable tourism projects is the Proyecto Ambiental Tenerife, an EC-funded rural development charity based in the mountains of Tenerife. Visitors can help sustain traditional farming techniques by getting involved in compost-making, and can help the survival of local culture by researching the mythologies of the goat-herders. To volunteers and tourists, the project emphasises that 'the taking of knowledge by outsiders without any form of compensation becomes tantamount to theft or rape'. Not exactly 'wish you were here', is it?

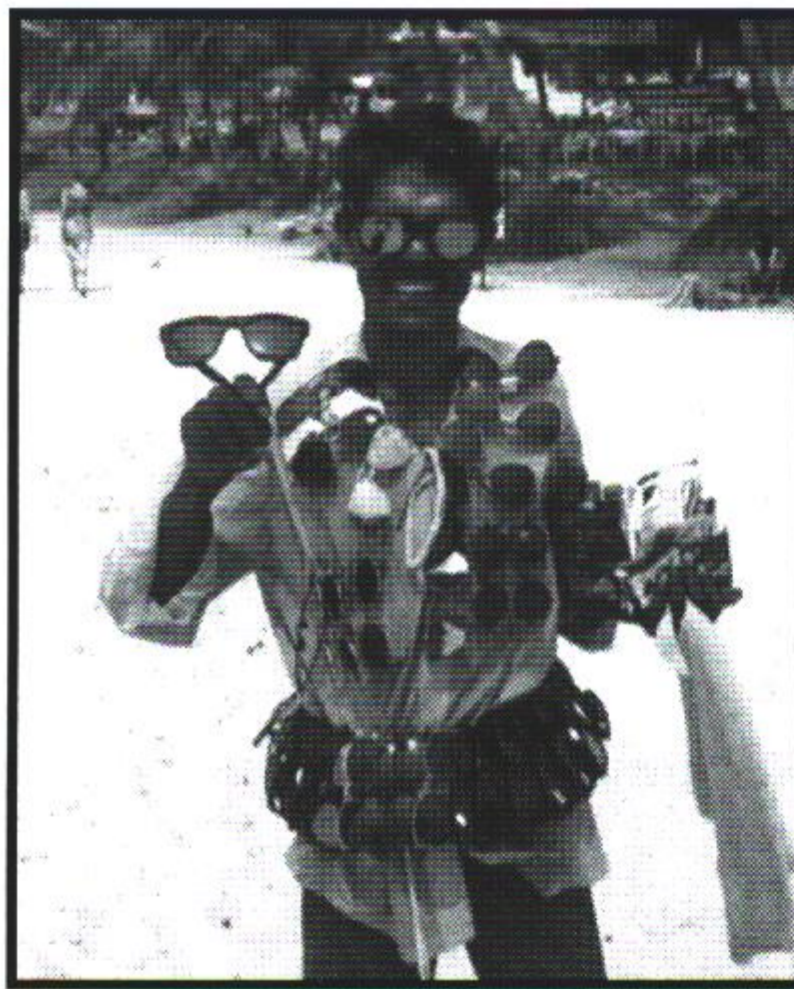
Alison Stancliffe of Tourism Concern admits that holidays are supposed to be about escaping the stresses and strains of working life, but says the trouble is that this involves 'closing your eyes to the things you normally care about'. Hedonism, once the virtue of tourism, becomes redefined as a threat. Caution and wariness are the catchy slogans of the new tourism.

In the last century Thomas Cook, pioneer of the package holiday, was prepared to defend his tours against the allegation that they devalued travel by making it more widely available. He referred to his tours as 'Agencies for the Advancement of Human Progress'. After all, Cook argued, 'railways and steamboats are the

result of the common light of science, and are for the people'. Today this advancement is held to have proceeded too far. The sort of changes that Western societies have undergone, leading to vastly better living standards and allowing their members to travel the world, are considered by the sustainable tourism school to be neither realistic nor desirable in places like Kenya.

Sustainable tourism is not just a recipe for a miserable holiday. It is also doing a disservice to the Third World peoples whom it claims to want to protect. To champion 'authentic' African or Asian or Latin American culture in the face of commercialism, or to insist that things in these societies must be left as they are 'in perpetuity', is to rule out any expectation of economic growth or development. The argument for sustainable tourism implicitly accepts that these societies are going nowhere.

Two authors writing on a sustainable tourism project in Annapurna, Nepal, protest that 'village youths are easy prey to the seductiveness of Western consumer culture, as tourists are laden with expensive trappings such as hi-tech hiking gear, flashy clothes, cameras and a variety of electronic



gadgets'. But what is wrong with Nepalese youths aspiring to own a camera and wear fashionable clothes?

The assumption here is that Nepalese culture must be respected and preserved. This presumably means that Nepal will remain one of the poor countries that tourists patronise, rather than one of the 20 countries from which 80 per cent of tourism is generated. The defence of indigenous culture sounds radical, but by elevating cultural difference to a determinant of development, an acceptance of underdevelopment 'in perpetuity' is reinforced.

Sir Crispin Tickell, authoritative proponent of sustainable tourism, has argued strongly for 'the preservation

of such environments and cultures' in Nepal and the Amazon basin. He believes that we should 'glory in our differences rather than subordinate ourselves to some grey middle standard'. But what are the major differences separating Nepal and the Amazon from our world? Both suffer severe poverty and a lack of modern medical provision. Neither enjoys levels of wealth, educational provision, telecommunications or electricity provision in any way comparable with the UK. Very few Nepalese enjoy the benefits of Sir Crispin's high office—including the means to travel widely, if at all. Preserving poverty—and even glorying in it—would surely be a more accurate summary of the consequences of sustainable tourism for the people of these regions.

There is some truth in the view that the arrival of tourism into an area can upset subsistence economies. In Goa, India, according to Tourism Concern, 'five-star tourism' has denied local fishermen access to the coastline, while rice paddies, cashew plantations and pasture land are under threat from six planned golf courses. Campaigners organised 'World No Golf Day', claiming that 'golf may seem like a harmless sport, but in fact people throughout the Third World are suffering because of it'.

Goan away

Yet the real problem facing the Goan economy is not the side-effects of over-developed golf tourism, but the lack of proper economic development that could free the locals from dependence on either subsistence fishing or caddying for fat tourists. Emphasising the need to protect local economies in the face of unplanned development rules out of order a discussion on the sort of thorough-going economic development that is needed to reduce grinding poverty in a place like Goa.

Alternatively, if you are one of the 'guilty masses' you might prefer a Thomsons package to the Hotel Las Vegas in Puerto De La Cruz on the north coast of Goa, with its mini-golf, sun terrace, aerobics and, according to the brochure, 'plentiful nightlife'. It may not be Nirvana, but at £365 half board for seven nights in July, it may prove a value for money alternative to sanctimonious advice from well-meaning kill-joys.

Meanwhile, those seeking an 'authentic' holiday experience in an unsullied, culturally preserved setting might ponder the experience of tourists in Kenya treated to a dance by the nomadic Maasai in full traditional costume. What they did not know was that the locals were chanting words to the effect of, 'Give us your money, and go home'.

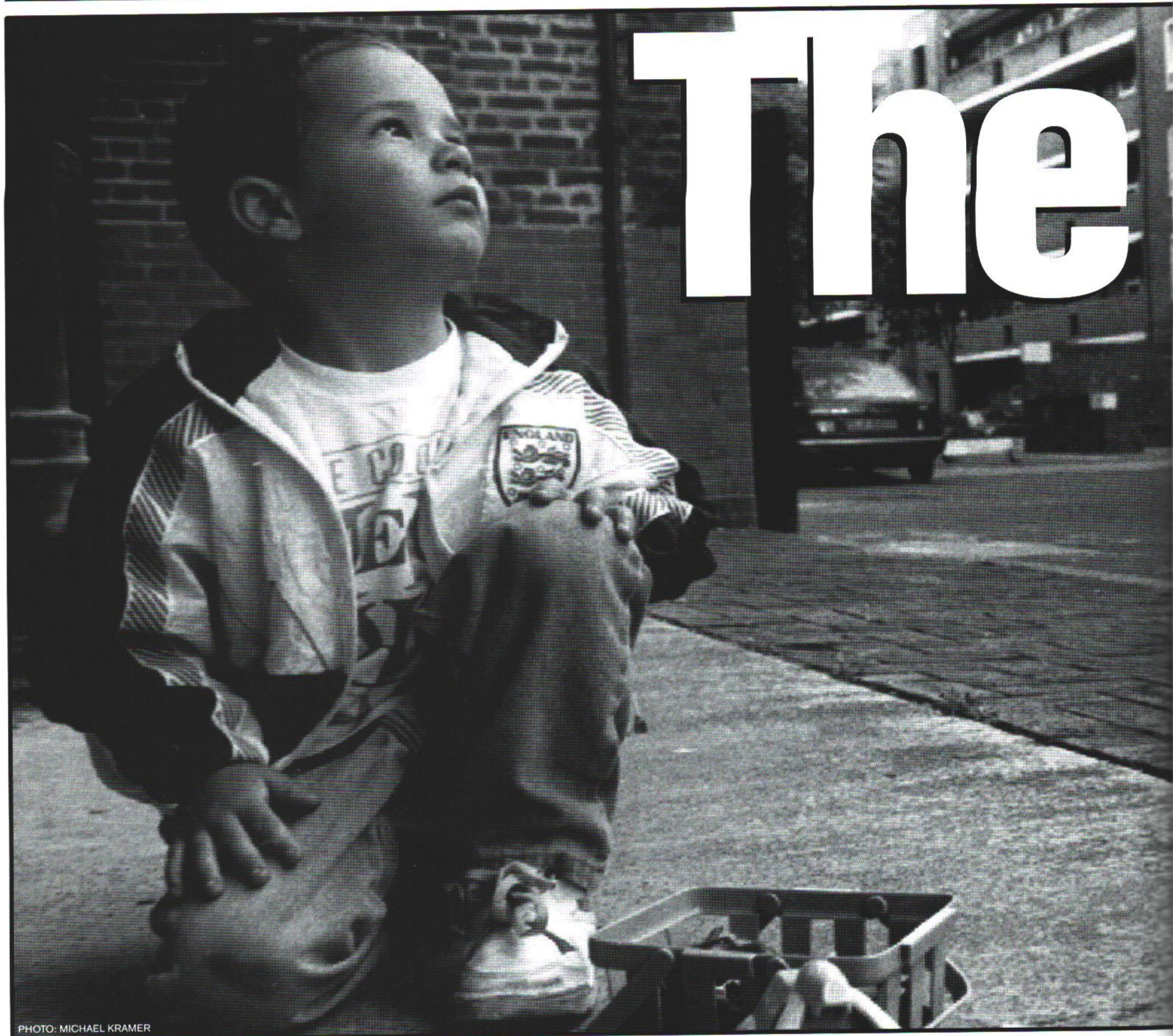


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

One week it's beef, the next it's road rage. Why is society obsessed with discovering new risks to personal health and safety today?

Frank Furedi examines the roots of contemporary risk-consciousness, and suggests that it is creating a victim culture in which humans are seen as fragile creatures in need of protection from life

Safety has become the fundamental value of the nineties. Passions that were once devoted to a struggle to change the world (or to keep it the same) are now invested in trying to ensure that we are safe. The label 'safe' gives new meaning to a wide range of human activities, endowing them with unspoken qualities that are meant to merit our automatic approval. 'Safe sex' is not just sex practised 'healthily'—it implies an entire attitude towards life. And safer sex is only the most high profile of the safety issues today.

Personal safety is a growth industry. In a trend which took off in the United States but has swiftly crossed the Atlantic to Britain, hardly a week now passes without



dangers of safety

some new risk to the individual being reported, and another safety measure proposed. A wide network of charities and organisations has grown up with a view to offering advice on every aspect of personal safety, and the same concerns are echoed in the programme of every major political party.

Every public and private place is now assessed from a safety perspective. Hospital security has emerged as a central concern of health professionals. Concern for protecting newborn babies from potential kidnappers indicates that a preoccupation with safety can never begin too soon. In the USA, a scare about violent baby-sitters has led to a massive expansion of the nursery security

business. In British schools, too, safety is a big issue. The comprehensive range of cameras, swipe cards and other security measures that are now routine make many schools look more like open prisons. Meanwhile car phones are sold as safety devices to protect women who fear violent attacks on their vehicles, and the electronics industry speculates that it is only a matter of time before cctvs become a standard household item.

Trade unions rarely organise industrial action over jobs or pay any more. The main focus of their energies is lobbying management to improve safety at work and protect their members from abuse or

harassment. On campus, students are regularly briefed about safety issues, as student unions dish out rape alarms and advice on safe drinking. Even drug-taking has become associated with the safety issue. Many now justify their preference for Ecstasy on the grounds that it makes them feel safer.

Through the media, we are all continually reminded of the risks we face from environmental hazards. When the survival of the human species is said to be at stake, then life itself becomes one big safety issue. And almost from day to day, the catalogue of new risks confronting us expands further. One day it is thrombosis-inducing contraceptive pills, the next day we are ►



◀ threatened by flesh-consuming super bugs. In the meantime we cannot trust the food we eat. Beef and peanuts are only the latest items to be declared unsafe. Nor can we expect to be able to drink the water out of our taps.

Recent panics about falling sperm counts, baby milk and beef, none of which was supported by the known facts of the matter, led some observers to ask a few questions about the contemporary obsession with the alleged risks facing society. But even those who react sceptically to a particular panic tend to underestimate the breadth of safety concerns. Public panics about the health risks supposedly linked with beef or electricity cables are only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed such panics often have little to do with the specific issues involved. They are made possible by the way in which safety consciousness has been institutionalised in every aspect of life today.

Once a preoccupation with safety has been made routine and banal, no area of human endeavour can be immune from its influence. Activities that were hitherto seen as healthy and fun—such as enjoying the sun—are now declared to be major health risks. Moreover, even activities that have been pursued precisely because they are risky are now recast from the perspective of safety consciousness. In this spirit, a publication on young people and risk takes comfort from the fact that new safety measures were introduced in mountain-climbing:

‘Nobody is going to prevent young men and women from taking risks. Even so, it is obvious that the scale of such risks can be influenced for the better. During recent years rock-climbers have greatly reduced their risks thanks to the introduction of better ropes, boots, helmets and other equipment.’

(M and M Plant, *Risk-Takers: Alcohol, Drugs, Sex and Youth*, 1992, pp142-43)

The fact that young people who choose to climb mountains might not want to be denied the *frisson* of risk does not enter into the calculations of the safety-conscious professional, concerned to protect us from ourselves.

The evaluation of everything from the perspective of safety is a defining characteristic of contemporary society. When safety is worshipped and risks are seen as intrinsically bad, society is making a clear statement about the values that ought to guide life. Once mountain-climbing is linked to risk-aversion, it is surely only a matter of time before a campaign is launched to ban it altogether. At the very least, those who suffer from climbing-related accidents will be told that ‘they have brought it upon themselves’. For to ignore safety advice is to transgress the new moral consensus.

A consciousness of risk

Risk has become big business. Thousands of consultants provide advice on ‘risk analysis’, ‘risk management’ and ‘risk communications’. The media too has become increasingly interested in the subject, and terms like ‘risk society’ and ‘risk perception’ now regularly feature in newspaper columns. Indeed there are so many apparently expert voices trying to alert us to new dangers that their advice often seems to conflict, and confusion reigns over exactly what is safe and what is a risk. Is the occasional glass of wine beneficial or detrimental to health? Should men take an aspirin daily to avoid heart attack, or should it be avoided for fear of bleeding ulcers and other side-effects? Women are told to diet and exercise to stay healthy, but they are also warned that, later in life, this may increase their risk of osteoporosis.

There may be different interpretations about the intensity and quality of different threats to our safety. But there is a definite anxious consensus that we must all be at risk in one way or another. Being at risk has become a permanent condition that exists separately from any particular problem. Risks hover over human beings. They seem to have an independent existence. That is why we can talk in such sweeping terms about the risk of being in school or at work or at home. By turning risk into an autonomous, omnipresent force in this way, we transform every human experience into a safety situation.

A typical pamphlet by Diana Lamplugh, a leading British ‘safety expert’, advises the reader to assess the risks in every situation. For instance, it invites passengers on public transport to keep alert:

‘The wise passenger never loses sight of the fact that public transport is still

a public place. There is open access to stations. No-one is vetted, everyone is acceptable as a passenger. Moreover when we travel we are often unable to move easily and avoid trouble.' (D Lamplugh, *Without Fear*, 1994, p51)

Here, the word 'public' is equated with risk; the presence of other, unknown people is presumed to be a problem. When even such a routine experience as commuting to work becomes associated with fears about safety, then being at risk becomes the overriding determinant of the human condition.

Every good bookshop is now stacked high with volumes devoted to analyses of risk and risk-perception. One of the assumptions which influences this risk literature is the belief that we face more risks today than in the past. The advance of science and technology is assumed to have damaged the

Why worry about 'a chance in a million'?

environment in such a way as to store up new and potentially catastrophic risks. According to the cruder versions of this thesis, the problems we face are so severe that it cannot be too long before humanity becomes extinct. Books with jolly titles like *The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction* have begun appearing in the bookshops—and on the best-sellers lists.

Most serious contributors have to accept that in real terms people live longer than before, and that they are more healthy and better off than in previous times. But many argue that the social, economic and scientific advances which made these improvements possible have only created new and bigger problems. Influential writers and thinkers now argue that new technological hazards have given risk a boundless character. They suggest that it is no longer possible

to calculate the dangers involved in scientific developments. Because of the fast pace of events today and the global forces that are now at work, it is argued, human actions have more far-reaching and incalculable consequences than ever before. Consequently, it is not just a question of not knowing. The outcome is not knowable.

From this perspective, where every new technological process is suspected of causing unseen damage to the environment, the experts and academics insist that a heightened consciousness of risk is a rational response to the dangers of modern living. Even many sociological accounts of risk believe that an awareness of the destructive consequences of technology and science provides the basis for the wide-ranging concern with safety today. Disasters such as the nuclear accident at Chernobyl or the oil tanker spillages of recent years are said to have helped to alert the public to the dangers around us. Many theorists of risk regard the heightened public concern with safety as a sign of a responsible citizenry, newly and personally aware of the problems of pollution and environmental damage. According to Ulrich Beck, author of the widely discussed *Risk Society*, 'damage to and destruction of nature no longer occur outside personal experience in the sphere of chemical, physical or biological chains of effect; instead they strike more clearly our eyes, ears and noses' (quoted in *THES*, 31 May 1996).

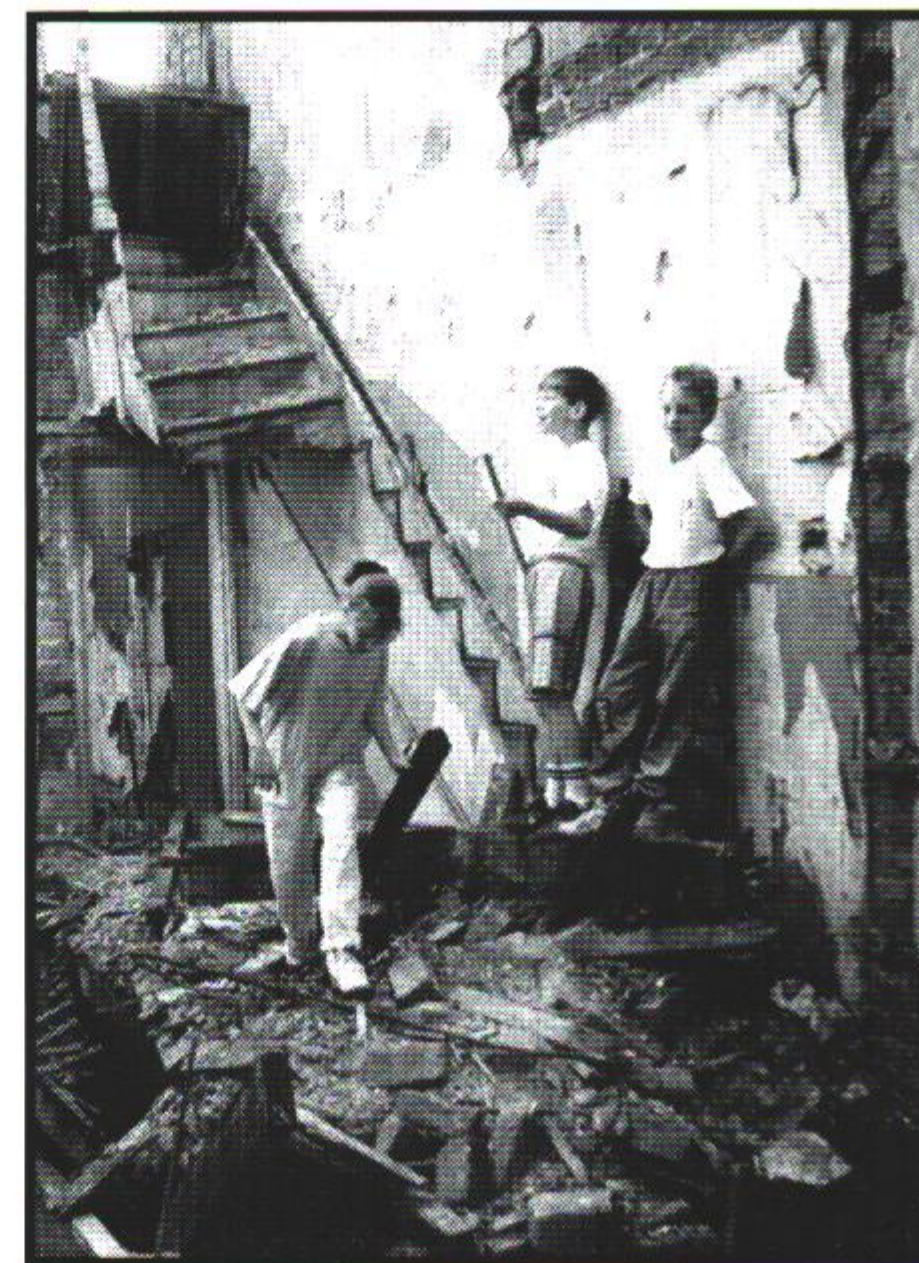
The emphasis on the dangers now posed by technology and science is surprisingly narrow in its focus. In reality, public perceptions of and anxieties about risk today cannot be understood as reactions to a particular incident or technology. Nor does such anxiety have much to do with the real scale and intensity of the danger. For example, far more people die from an inadequate diet than from the widely publicised presence of toxic residues in food. Clearly the risks that kill you are not necessarily the ones that provoke and frighten you. Disasters and catastrophes have happened throughout history. But the reaction to these events has varied according to the mood that prevailed in society at the time.

The different public reaction to the destruction of the first Apollo spacecraft in January 1967, and of the space shuttle Challenger, 19 years later, is instructive in this respect. When Apollo caught fire and three astronauts were killed, America was shocked and horrified. However, despite widespread anguish and concern about the incident, the future of the prestigious moon project was not put to serious question. In contrast, the response to the destruction of Challenger turned into a full-scale panic that led to a loss of nerve. For many this tragedy was proof that technology was out of control. The US space agency Nasa was itself so badly traumatised that it took almost three years to launch another space shuttle.

Two comparable tragedies, two very different reactions. Why? Because public perception and response to any event are subject to influences that are specific to the time and place. Such responses are likely to be shaped not so much by the disaster itself, as by a deeper consciousness which prevails in society as a whole at that moment.

A perspective which situates events more in their historical and social context would suggest that today's increased concern with safety and risk has little to do with the advance of technology and science. After all, it is not just the outcome of technological and scientific developments which provoke anxiety and fear.

An intense sentiment of risk-aversion now prevails in virtually every domain of human activity. Unfortunate incidents which in the past would have been shrugged off as bad luck are now interpreted as indications of



a major danger. The murder of a young British woman in Thailand in January 1996 led to the explosion of advice about 'safe travel'. Here a rare personal tragedy was recast as a risk facing all British tourists. 'Don't let "chance in a million" happen to you' was the title of one advice column in the *Daily Telegraph* (20 January 1996). The obvious question—why worry about a chance in a million?—was, of course, not raised. Instead backpacking was reinterpreted as a general safety issue.

As the issue of 'safe travel' suggests, the contemporary concern with security has little to do with any new or technologically manufactured risks. The demand for safety and a growing sensitivity to risk are just as obvious in relation to personal and individual experiences as to environmental and more general matters. In practice, society acknowledges this. When, for example, ►

◀ attention is drawn to 'children at risk' or 'women at risk', the danger in question is neither technology nor science. It seems that the consciousness of risk is likely to have more to do with something in everyday life than with a fear that technology might blow civilisation away.

The worship of safety

So how to account for the worship of safety? It is generally acknowledged that we are living through insecure times and that as a result people are more anxious and predisposed towards fearing risks. In an interesting contribution, Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky have argued that modern societies are confronted with an increased awareness

unless its outcome can be understood in advance. Under this principle, which is now widely accepted as sound practice in the sphere of environmental management, the onus of proof rests with those who propose change. Since the full consequences of change are never known in advance, the full implementation of this principle would prevent any form of scientific or social experimentation. By institutionalising caution, the Precautionary Principle imposes a doctrine of limits. It offers security, but in exchange for lowering expectations, limiting growth and preventing experimentation and change.

Although the Precautionary Principle is usually discussed in relation to environmental management, it now provides a guide to life in many other spheres—health,

society and the individual. Many observers have commented on the relentless process of individuation that has occurred in recent decades in Western societies. Changing economic conditions have created an insecure labour market, while the transformation of service provision has increasingly shifted responsibility from the state to the individual. The individuation of work and the provision of services have made survival much more of a private matter. As a recent report by Mintel showed, adults in Britain now tend to look at the future with fear (see *Independent*, 16 May 1996). For most adults (61 per cent), health was the greatest worry. This emphasis on health is important. It is through the issue of health that a peculiarly individuated concern with survival acquires shape.

The Precautionary Principle puts the onus of proof on those who propose change



of risks because more decisions are now taken in an atmosphere of uncertainty. This approach has the merit of interpreting the sense of risk as a social construct, related to the prevailing subjective consciousness of society, rather than a reflection of increased real dangers. But what is the connection between insecurity and risk-consciousness?

Insecurity is useful as a descriptive but not as an analytical category. Insecurity as such does not necessarily lead to risk-aversion or a fear of science and technology. In some cases, societies that feel insecure may well look to science and technology to provide security. Today, by contrast, insecurity is bound up with a strong, conservative sense of caution.

The importance of the so-called Precautionary Principle suggests that we are not merely concerned about risks, but are also suspicious of finding solutions to our predicament. According to the Precautionary Principle, it is best not to take a new risk

sexuality, personal safety or reproductive technology. What seems particularly striking about the contemporary period is not its insecurity, but the profoundly conservative manner in which this condition is experienced. Yet most commentators on risk do not make a connection between the preoccupation with safety and the impulse of conservatism. Indeed many of the supporters of the Precautionary Principle, or advocates of the different safety campaigns, would see themselves as critics of the system rather than as conservatives. Consequently safety and the attitude of caution are now treated as inherently positive values across the entire political spectrum.

The cautious individual

The main reason why today's insecurity has created an intense consciousness of risk has to do with the changing relationship between

Changes in the labour market alone cannot account for the process of individuation. Economic change has been paralleled by the transformation of institutions and relationships throughout society. The decline of participation in political parties and trade unions points to the erosion of traditional forms of solidarity among people. This has been most clear with the demise of traditional working class organisations. Many mainstream commentators have interpreted this trend through what they call the decline of community. Even as fundamental an institution as the family has not been immune to this process. The changes in family ties and relations have had a deep impact on people's lives. Today, one out of three children is born outside of wedlock. Among those who marry, the rate of divorce is very high. In these circumstances, the security of family life is an ideal that is rarely realised.

The mutually reinforcing combination of economic dislocation and the weakening

of social institutions has accentuated the tendency for society to fragment. This problem of social cohesion has implications for the daily routine of individuals. Many of the old routines and traditions of life can no longer be taken for granted. Even the role of the family as a system of support is put to question. Under these circumstances, expectations and modes of behaviour inherited from the recent past cannot be effective guides to future action. Relationships between people 30 years ago may not tell us very much about how to negotiate problems today.

The sense of fragmentation is reinforced by a lack of consensus about what society's values should be. Many traditional norms are now strongly contested. When British newspapers reported that one out of three children were born out of wedlock, some used the traditional term 'illegitimate' while others took strong exception to this pejorative appellation. One *Guardian* columnist accused the *Times* of superstition and prejudice (3 June 1996). Such disputes over fundamental questions of what is right and wrong have always existed. The difference is that today issues to do with morality and basic norms are contested far more often and more intensely. This lack of consensus on elementary norms of behaviour fuels uncertainty about life. The lack of agreement about basic matters like the relationship between children and the family helps to generate confusion about every aspect of human conduct.

When social roles are continually subject to modification and when what is right and what is wrong is far from settled, people are entitled to feel unsure about the future. All of these processes strengthen the process of individuation. What emerges is a decidedly cautious individual.

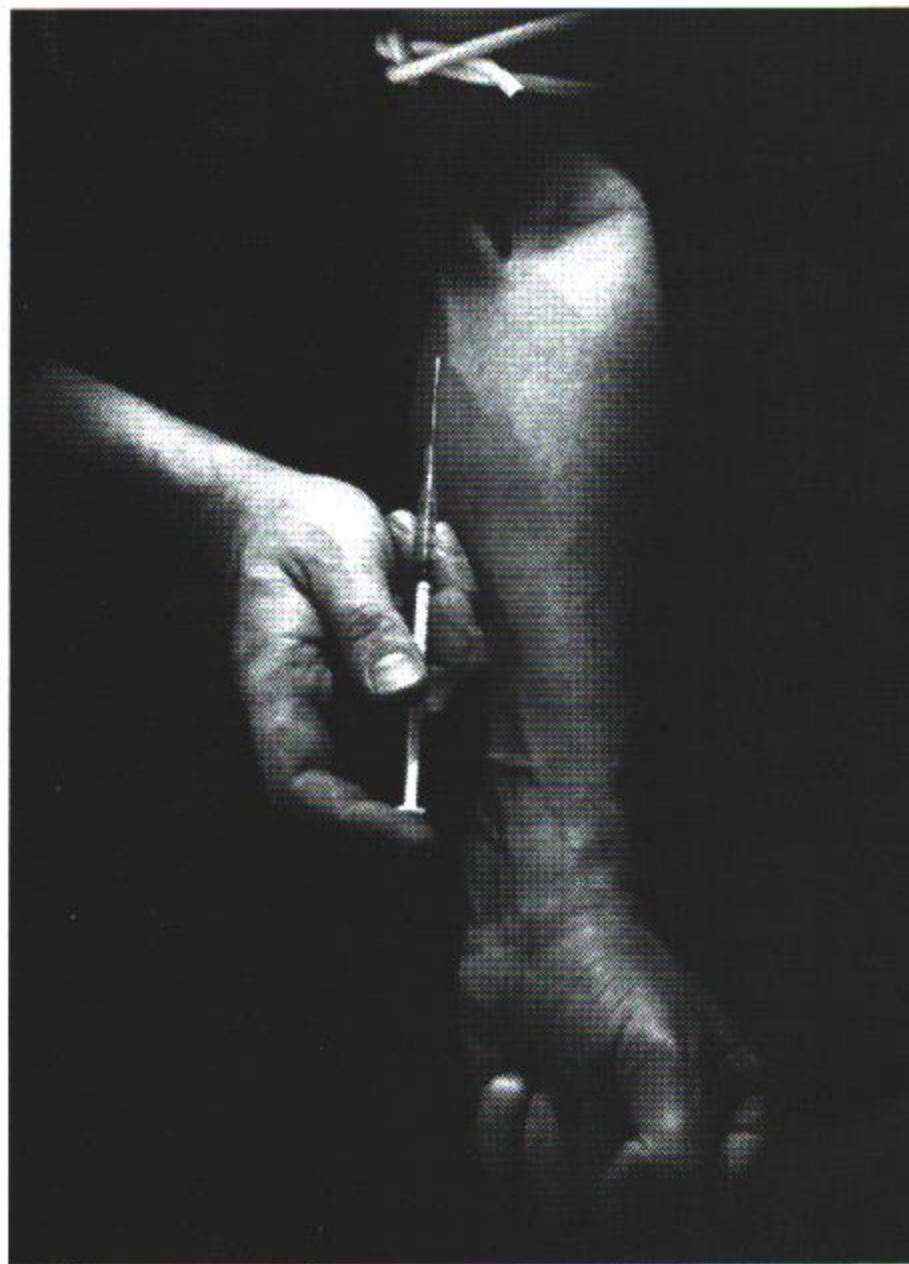
Diminished sense of control

Probably the most important consequence of the changes described above is a diminished sense of individual control. Since so many aspects of everyday life can no longer be taken for granted, many activities that were once routine have become troublesome. This leads us to the main thesis of this article: that when attitudes and ways of behaving can no longer be taken for granted, experiences which were hitherto relatively straightforward, now become seen as risky. This is the key to understanding the obsession with risk and safety in society today.

Take the uncertainty which now prevails over the so-called crisis in parenting. This insecurity is in part due to the changing character of the family; but it is also due to the shift in relationships between parent and child and between men and women, coupled with a lack of clarity about what is acceptable behaviour today. Parenting and

the conduct of family life, long taken for granted as something you just got on with, have now become far from self-evident. Nothing seems straightforward. It is as if parenting has become a minefield. The diminished sense of control which results from these developments exacerbates insecurity and the sense of being at risk. Not surprisingly, the family becomes seen as a dangerous site where many of the participants are held to be continually at risk. The family home is no longer portrayed as a refuge—but as a jungle where children are at risk of abuse and where women are at risk of domestic violence.

In the same way, changing practices at work mean that relationships between colleagues can no longer be taken for granted. The new preoccupation with harassment and



bullying indicates that work is now seen as a place where you are at risk. Changing relations between men and women certainly mean that little can be assumed. A look or gesture may now be interpreted as either a routine sign of affection or as a mild form of harassment. Debates about the definition of rape and of abuse show how an explosion of risks follows from a situation where nothing can be taken for granted.

The decline of old conventions creates a situation in which individuals feel that they have less control over their lives. This in turn inevitably helps to consolidate a sense of insecurity. We feel exposed and unsafe. It is this experience, rather than any fear of technology running out of control, which makes us so preoccupied with personal safety today. As a result, being at risk itself comes to be portrayed and accepted as a way of life.

The notion that being at risk is the same as being alive is clearest in the case of

children. In discussion of childhood today, one threat seems to give way to the next. Children are assumed to be at risk not only from abusing adults, but from bullies and abusers among their peers. During the past decade, the issue of safety has also dominated discussions on the position of women, who are presumed to be at risk—permanently—from male violence. Even men are now said to face new risks. The recent literature on masculinity has argued that those who have a strong 'masculine orientation' are risking their health, since the rigidity of male gender roles prevents men from asking for the help they need. (See M Kaplan and G Marks, 'Appraisal of health risks: the role of masculinity, femininity, and sex', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, Vol17, No2, 1995, p207)

The diminished sense of control turns even the most basic of human activities into an issue of safety. We are continually warned of the risks posed by sex and by the food we eat. Is it surprising that such preoccupations increase our suspicions of strangers, and make us vulnerable to panics about crime, road rage and other dangers to our personal safety?

Can't cope

The difficulty that individuals appear to have in controlling their lives today has strengthened the conviction that people are not up to much. Indeed the contemporary preoccupation with playing safe and avoiding risks is related to the belief that human beings are not really capable of overcoming the problems that confront them.

Those who insist upon the Precautionary Principle, do so largely on the grounds that humanity is not able to anticipate the consequences of its innovation. Many theorists of risk society argue that human knowledge does not so much provide solutions as create problems. According to Beck, 'the sources of danger are no longer ignorance but knowledge'. The equation of knowledge with danger suggests that human beings are not capable of controlling the consequences of their own action. The model of Frankenstein serves to highlight the horror lurking behind the pretensions of knowledge and science. From this perspective, people are portrayed not so much as problem-solvers, but as the problem itself.

The end result of the obsession with risk is to endorse a diminished sense of humanity and of the human potential for improvement. The individual that emerges from this discussion is quite a pathetic creature. Human failures are treated not as errors of judgement or as experiments that can be learned from, but as natural conditions which are inevitable for a species that cannot cope with the everyday trials of life. In turn, the assumption that humans will fail to cope increases the range of possible risks. ►

◀ These days human failure is made comprehensible by reference to the many medical or psychological conditions or syndromes that are said to afflict people. There is a clear correlation between the invention of new risks and the 'discovery' of new conditions. People who are declared 'at risk' are often also diagnosed as suffering from a new medical or psychological condition.

The contagion of new disorders has particularly affected children. The number of children defined as having special needs or suffering from some disorder or instability has accelerated at furious speed. In New York public schools, approximately one in every eight pupils has now been classified as 'handicapped'. A growing number of children are diagnosed as hyperactive, suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, post-traumatic stress or dyslexia. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that bad school grades can be ascribed not to a lousy education system, but to Academic Achievement Disorder.

Adults are not spared. According to some estimates, 20 percent of Americans suffer from some form of diagnosable disorder. Depending on the definition used, almost half of all Americans can now be described as obese or suffering from an 'eating disorder'. People who have difficulties negotiating relationships are said to suffer from Adjustment Disorder. Those who show a pattern of 'perfectionism and inflexibility' are said to suffer from 'obsessive-compulsive disorder'. Those who are shy have 'social phobia'.

Then there are the new addictions. The National Association on Sexual Addiction has estimated that between 10 and 15 percent of Americans are addicted to sex. According to some 'food addiction deserves to be taken just as seriously as alcoholism' (see *Addiction Letter*, July 1995). The invention of new addictions is by no means a uniquely American phenomenon. British academics have been quick to jump on the bandwagon and now ominously hint at the risks of hitherto unknown dependencies. One academic is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to study shopping addiction. And two academics from the University of Plymouth have concluded that children obsessed with computer games show symptoms of addiction, since they 'appear to enjoy the same euphoria as do smokers and heavy drinkers' (quoted in *Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Weekly*, 10 March 1994).

Through the construction of new conditions, syndromes and addictions, more and more social problems have become medicalised—that is, recast as medical problems over which people can have little or no control. This tendency serves to highlight the many flaws of the human being, and offers a rather sad representation of people's potential. We are simply not expected to cope. The fact that so many people are suffering from traumas, disorders



PHOTOS: MICHAEL KRAMER, DAVE CHAPMAN AND ANDREW CALCUTT

and syndromes reinforces the view of the fragile individual who constantly needs monitoring and protection from the risks of everyday life.

Our uncertain society has increasingly adapted to the standards of its most 'fragile' members. The outcome of this process has been the emergence of a *culture of victimhood*. Since everybody is at risk, everybody is a victim. People are now routinely offered counselling throughout their lives to help them get through the experience of victimisation. The effect of such therapeutic intervention can only be to reinforce the consciousness of risk, by raising your 'awareness' of the dangers surrounding you. Any attempt to control the direction of your life is discouraged. In the United States, people who attempt to overcome their 'condition' and get on with their lives are diagnosed as suffering from a 'perfectionist complex'. Instead the cautious pursuit of safety becomes a goal in its own right.

Diminished humanity

The celebration of safety alongside the continuous warning about risks constitutes a profoundly anti-human intellectual and ideological regime. It continually invites society and its individual members to constrain their aspirations and to limit their actions. The call for restraint can now be heard everywhere, be it in discussions on science, school results or living standards. Such continuous lowering of expectations can be justified through an exaggerated presentation of the destructive side of science, or through the projection of people as fragile individuals, who cannot be expected to cope.

The advocacy of safety and the rejection

of risk-taking has important implications for the future. If experimentation is discredited, society effectively acknowledges its inability to tackle—never mind to solve—the problems which confront it. The restrictions being placed on experimentation, in the name of protecting us and our children from risk, actually represent the dissipation of the human potential.

The paradox is that the search for safety is bound to backfire. Throughout history, greater safety and security have always been the by-products of innovation and experimentation. Life has become safer as human society has progressed and mastered nature. Safety was not something that could be acquired just by wanting it. Those who propose to avoid risks and gain safety will invariably find that what they acquire instead are obsessions. On the contrary, it is the extension of human control through social and scientific experimentation and change that has provided societies with greater security than before.

Today the fear of taking risks is creating a society that celebrates victimhood rather than heroism. We are all expected to compete, like guests on *Oprah*, to prove that we are the most put-upon and pathetic people in the house, the most deserving of counselling and compensation. The virtues held up to be followed are passivity rather than activism, safety rather than boldness. And the rather diminished individual that emerges is indulged on the grounds that, in a world awash with conditions and crises and impending catastrophe, he or she is doing a good job just by surviving.

Frank Furedi is convening the course *Redrawing the Boundaries of Humanism* at The Week conference in July (see page 23).

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Most importantly, the weekend's discussions will seek to question the powerful notion that playing safe and acting the victim is the most that we can hope to achieve today.

Weekend sessions include:

- Challenging the victim culture
- New Labour: new authoritarianism
- Who needs compensation?
- The growth of therapeutic politics
- Tolerance, harassment and censorship
- How to deal with monstrous pupils
- The precautionary principle
- Male violence and state power
- AIDS as metaphor
- Is racism on the rise?
- What's wrong with human rights
- Who wants to be a stakeholder?
- Whatever happened to the working class?
- The trouble with men
- Do the disabled need rights?
- The rise of soft totalitarianism

BRINGING THE CULTURE



THE WEEK is organised around 16 five-session courses (outlined over the page), backed up by individual workshops which cover a broad range of issues. These will include:

- Is there a demographic time-bomb?
- Eco-tourism ● The debate about Affirmative Action ● Race and biology
- Is communism making a comeback in the East? ● Report from the Russian election front ● Are all Germans guilty?
- The feminisation of work ● The parenting deficit ● Child prostitution ● The science and politics of fetal pain ● The philosophy of five-year olds
- Is everything really relative? ● Who wants the right to work? ● Defending free speech ● Futurology ● Masculinity and femininity in cyberculture ● Opera v soap opera

...and many more.

THE WEEK

Morning courses

Redrawing the Boundaries of Humanism

Convenor: Frank Furedi—author of *Mythical Past, Elusive Future* and *The New Ideology of Imperialism*

Today's intellectual climate is hostile to social experimentation and the potential for humans to make their own history. This course outlines a materialist approach to making humanism relevant for our times.

The subject in history ♦ Marx's engagement with humanism ♦ The reaction to reason ♦ Rescuing the subject ♦ Confronting caution

Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity*, Polity
Istvan Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, Merlin, 1975
Frank Furedi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*, Pluto, 1992

Beginning a Marxist Critique

Convenor: Suke Wolton—editor of *Marxism, Mysticism and Modern Theory*

This course seeks to separate important developments in society from the current trivialisation of politics. In the process, the discussion will take people through a Marxist approach to understanding the world today.

A materialist critique ♦ Women and social change ♦ Nationalism and ideology ♦ Demanding freedom ♦ Making history

Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Junius, 1995
VI Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Junius, 1994
Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, Pluto, 1990

Gender, Culture and Relativism

Convenor: Jennie Bristow from Genderwatch

This course will examine how the popular 'gender-focus' to discussions of development has distorted the real problems facing the people of the Third World, and has been manipulated by Western governments and agencies.

The creation of the Third World woman ♦ The female circumcision debate ♦ The relativist defence ♦ Who's empowering whom? ♦ No change without freedom

H Pietila & J Vickers, *Making Women Matter: the Role of the United Nations*, Zed Books, 1994
J Peters & A Wolper, *Women's Rights, Human Rights*, Routledge, 1995
Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Junius, 1995

Rights and the State

Convenor: James Heartfield—books editor for *Living Marxism*

A critique of the new forms of state power, this course examines the real meaning of ideas like 'enabling' and 'governance'. It will ask how the case for democratic control can be made today.

The critique of power ♦ Class rule ♦ Police and thieves ♦ The empowerment myth ♦ Tyranny of the majority

Frederick Engels, *The Role of Force in History*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1968
Peter Hennessy, *The Hidden Wiring*, Victor Gollancz, 1995
David Rose, *In the Name of the Law*, Jonathan Cape, 1996

Evening courses

Is the Market Triumphant? Convenor: Sheila Phillips

Theorising the C...

Globalisation and Power

Convenor: Norman Lewis

The aim of the course is to present a critique of current theories of globalisation, and provide an alternative framework for conceiving the main determinants of international relations in the twenty-first century.

Globalisation, the West and the rest ♦ The moral condemnation of the South ♦ Global power and sovereignty ♦ Globalisation, continuity and change ♦ The world is still in a state

M Featherstone, S Lash, & R Robertson (eds), *Global Modernities*,

Sage, 1995

P Hirst & G Thompson, *Globalisation in Question*, Blackwell, 1996

N Lewis & J Malone (introduction) and VI Lenin, *Imperialism*, Pluto, 1996

The Greening of Society

Convenors: Dominic Wood and John Gillott—author of *Science and the Retreat from Reason*

This course will examine the mainstreaming of environmentalism, and take a critical look at environmental issues from global warming and the loss of biodiversity to business ethics and sustainability.

Environmentalism: reposing the issues ♦ The character of environmental protest ♦ The greening of the market ♦ Sustainable development: implementing environmentalism ♦ Confronting the politics of limits

Murray Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity*, Cassell, 1995

Richard North, *Life on a Modern Planet*, Manchester University Press, 1995

Richard Leakey & Roger Lewin, *The Sixth Extinction: Biodiversity and its Survival*, Weidenfeld, 1996

The Education Debate

Convenor: Claire Fox—lecturer in Further Education and the Education editor of *Living Marxism*

Education is now posited as the answer to everything from saving the economy to rescuing moral values. This course will question conventional wisdom on issues like qualifications, curriculum, and comprehensives.

Learning the limits ♦ Is everyone special? ♦ In loco parentis ♦ Learning for life—vocationalism ♦ Lifetime learning—lifelong dependence

J & P Leadbetter, *Special Children*, Cassell, 1993

JM Halstead and MJ Taylor, *Values in Education and Education in Values*, Falmer, 1996

Phil Hodgkinson & Mary Issitt (eds), *The Challenge of Competence*, Cassell, 1995

Genes and Behaviour

Convenor: Helene Guldberg

This course will question the influential notion that human behaviour is shaped by the interaction between genes and environment, and will explore the uniqueness of human beings.

Are human beings unique? ♦ So what is human nature? ♦ What is wrong with the interactionist model? ♦ What's in a word? ♦ Humanity and nature

Luria & Vygotsky, *Ape, Primitive Man and Child*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992

Gribben & Gribben, *Being Human: Putting People in an Evolutionary Perspective*, Phoenix, 1995

CIBA Foundation, *The Genetics of Criminal and Anti-Social Behaviour*, John Wiley, 1996

THE WEEK

Afternoon courses

Victim Culture

Convenor: Ann Bradley—*Living Marxism* columnist and medical journalist

This course will examine how conservative and feminist thought now interacts and converges around the powerful culture of victimhood. The aim is to provide a coherent alternative to victim culture.

Fin-de-siècle fatalism ♦ The discovery of abuse ♦ The explosion of risks ♦ Men at risk ♦ Celebration of powerlessness

H Roberts, SJ Smith, C Bryce, *Children at Risk? Safety as a Social Value*, Open Univ Press
R Mawby and S Walklate, *Critical Victimology*, Sage, 1994
W Kaminer, *The Recovery Movement and Other Self-help Fashions*, Addison-Wesley, 1993

Reconstructing Social Engagement

Convenor: Sabine Reul

Discussions of gender, difference, morality and risk now all express the view that we cannot expect to achieve very much. This course will discuss how the power of people to change the world can be reposed for our time.

What makes us human? ♦ What happened to freedom? ♦ Gender, sex and fatalism ♦ Real empowerment ♦ Rebuilding humanity today

Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage, 1992
Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, New Left Books, 1970
Suke Wolton, *Marxism, Mysticism and Modern Theory*, Macmillan, 1996

Policing the Family

Convenor: Ellie Lee

Domestic violence and the abuse of children are seen as major problems of our times. This course examines contemporary attitudes to the family, and seeks to assess the impact of greater state intervention into family life.

Public and private ♦ Women, men and the family ♦ Parenting ♦ Policing men ♦ Children's Rights

Diana Gittins, *The Family in Question*, Macmillan, 1995
Marianne Hester, Liz Kelly and Jill Radford, *Women, Violence and Male Power*, Open University Press, 1996
Anna Coote, *Families, Children and Crime*, IPPR 1994

Media, Culture and Mystification

Convenor: Phil Hammond from the London International Research Exchange

This course examines popular approaches to understanding the media and culture, explores their importance for developing a critique of contemporary society, and advances an alternative view on the role of critical journalism.

Is the medium the message? ♦ 'Informed choices': the moral agenda of media studies ♦ The limits of culture ♦ The myth of cultural difference ♦ Distorted communication and heretical journalism

James Curran & Michael Curevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society*, Edward Arnold, 1991
Richard Hoggart, *The Way We Live Now*, Chatto & Windus, 1995
Fred Inglis, *Cultural Studies*, Blackwell, 1993

Evening courses

Counter-Culture: Rebellion and Reaction Convenor: Rebecca Young

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Frank Furedi, *The New Ideology of Imperialism*, Pluto, 1994
John Harris (ed), *The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, Pinter, 1995
Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, OUP, 1995

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VI Lenin, *Imperialism*, Pluto, 1996
Paul Krugman, *Peddling Prosperity*, Norton, 1995

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National Deviancy Conference, *Permissiveness and Control*, Macmillan
R Jowell et al (eds), *British Social Attitudes: 12th Report*, Dartmouth, 1995

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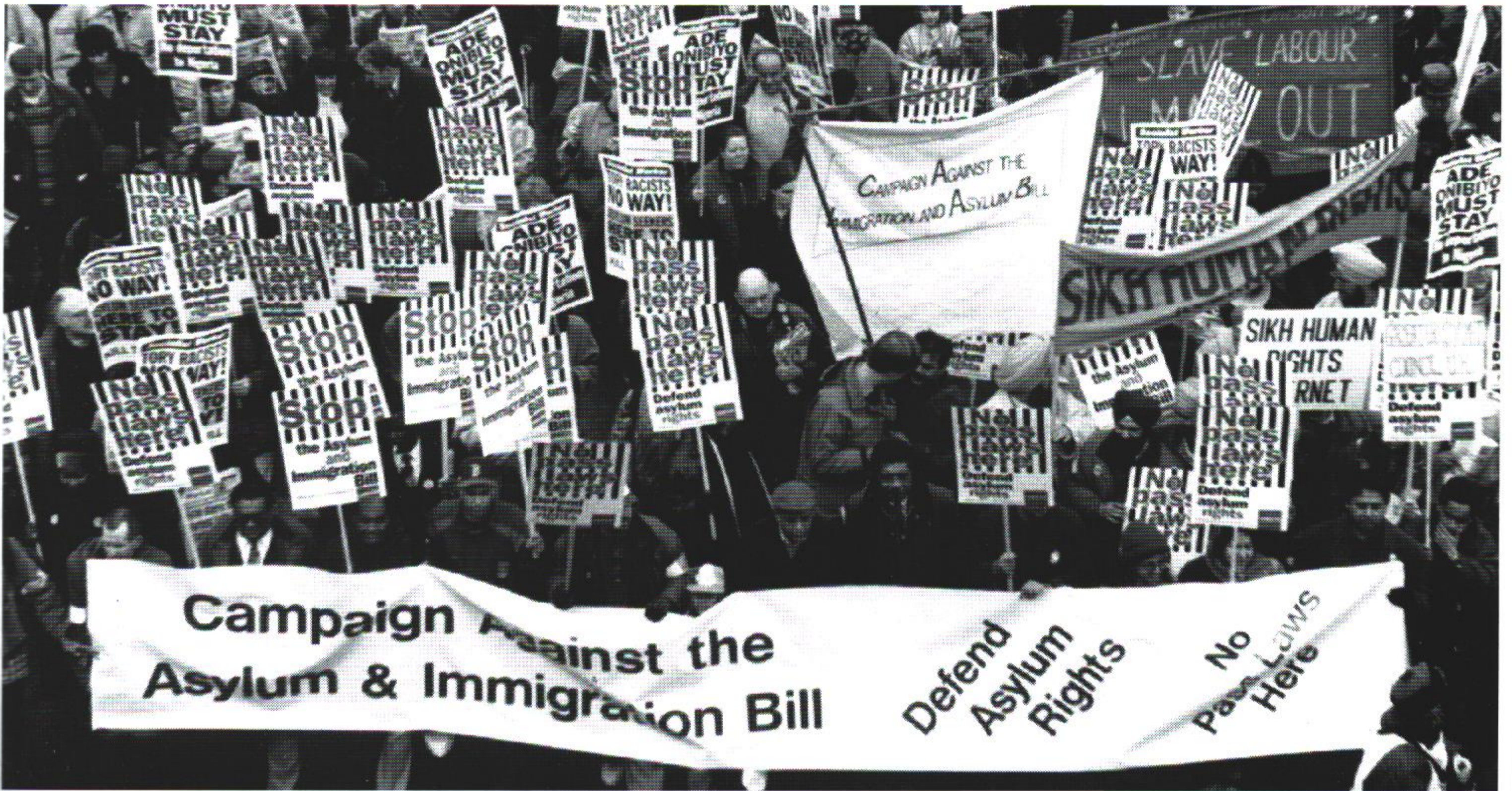
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For once, the government is right; many of those who apply for asylum in Britain probably are 'bogus refugees' by its standards.

But that, argues Mark Butler, is precisely why we should stop trying to squeeze people through the asylum loophole and start campaigning for an open door

Lost in the asylum loophole



At the beginning of May the *Daily Mail* alerted its readers to 'a breathtaking capitulation to political correctness'. The unlikely woman responsible for the PC declaration was Home Office minister Baroness Blatch. Her crime was to announce that the Conservative government's new asylum legislation would no longer use the word 'immigrant' because 'the word immigrant is perceived by some—however irrationally—as having a pejorative connotation'. The minister said that she was taking into account the 'anxieties of minority communities', after having

consulted with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Right Reverend David Young, liberal-minded Bishop of Ripon.

Yet, while many supporters of refugees' rights were celebrating this 'victory', the House of Lords was busy rejecting an amendment that would have removed the sections of the Asylum Bill giving the police and immigration officers new powers to stop and search people suspected of being illegal immigrants—powers that would surely do more than a word to stoke the 'anxieties of minority communities'. A week or so

later the peers supported a clause within the bill that will result in fines of £5000 for employers who take on an immigrant who does not have permission to work. The word may be set to change, but the reality of discrimination looks set to stay.

For more than 30 years, anti-immigrant campaigns and successive attempts to tighten the immigration legislation have been an important part of British politics. It has become harder and harder for people from other ►

countries to emigrate to Britain. In particular the 1971 Immigration Bill and the 1981 British Nationality Act removed citizenship rights from millions of people. The result? By the late eighties there was no primary immigration into Britain. Entry was now only available to those with a connection, for example, people marrying a Briton or moving to be with a spouse or parent who was already settled in Britain. Even then, the would-be immigrants have been subjected to intrusive and humiliating interrogations by immigration officers seeking to prove that their marriages were bogus.

For some time this has been seen as a successful strategy for getting around the immigration laws. However, what is given with one hand can be taken away with the other, and what seemed like a good way of helping people who wanted to enter Britain is now backfiring. The people who suffer are—as always—those who have the least control over what happens to them—in this case the immigrants themselves.

The Tory government moved to close the refugee loophole with its first Asylum Bill in 1993, followed by another in 1995. The argument the Conservatives selected to justify their anti-asylum campaign was straightforward: most of those who were claiming political asylum were not genuine political refugees, but were merely 'economic refugees' trying to move to Britain from poorer countries by pretending that they had been persecuted.

In a Department of Social Security press release in December 1995,

justifying the proposal to remove many benefit rights from those seeking asylum, Peter Lilley insisted that 'We rightly believe in giving asylum to people in genuine fear of persecution. However, 70 per cent of those who claim asylum do not arrive as refugees but come as UK visitors, tourists or on the understanding they will maintain themselves, and will not have access to benefits'. When these visitors later decide to lodge a claim for asylum, said Lilley, this automatically entitles them to benefits 'at the taxpayer's expense' which 'cannot be right'. Shortly afterwards Home Secretary Michael Howard echoed Lilley's sentiments, stating that Britain 'must be a haven, not a honey pot'.

Through the two asylum acts, the government has restricted access to welfare provision such as housing; introduced finger-printing to stop second attempts at claiming asylum if the first

should fail; given immigration officers the power to return asylum applicants to the last 'safe' country they were in; and reduced rights of appeal. All of these actions were justified on the grounds that most applicants were not really fleeing persecution, and the sooner they were dealt with and disposed of, the sooner the deserving cases could be processed.

At first sight it appears that there has been a great deal of opposition to the government's asylum legislation. There have been major demonstrations in London, a damning report by Amnesty International and wide media coverage of campaigns for asylum-seekers such as Nigerian Ade Onibiyo and Saudi dissident Dr Mohammad al-Mas'ari. Ex-Tory MP Emma Nicholson even cited the legislation as one of the reasons for her defection to the Liberal Democrats.

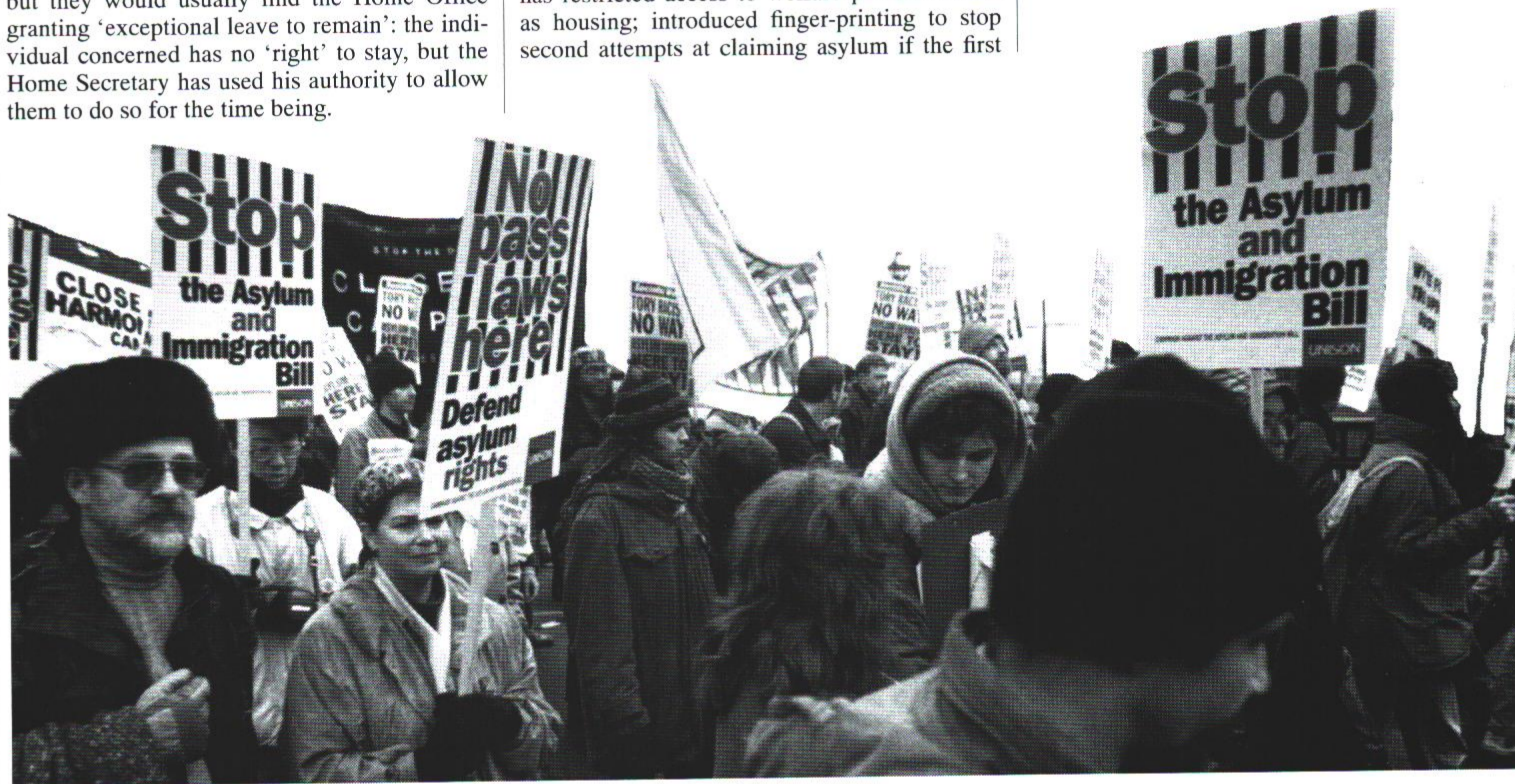
Respectable figures such as church leaders have led the way in protesting against the asylum laws both inside and outside of parliament. The recent Church and Nation Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland stated that 'The Church must support, help, befriend and if necessary defend asylum-seekers needing sanctuary, and so fulfil the law of Christ' (quoted in *The Runnymede Bulletin*, April 1996). Bishops opposed the latest Asylum Bill in the Lords, ensuring that torture victims and unaccompanied children were exempted from the bill's 'fast-track' procedures.

The trouble is, however, that none of this opposition confronts the government's central premise: that most people claiming asylum are not genuine refugees. The Church of Scotland report, for example, reassures any potential critics that it 'is not suggesting, much as it might like to in view of scriptural injunction, that no system of control is needed'. Some controls are required because you cannot trust everyone: 'There are some deceitful applications, and measures have to be taken to withstand the devices of racketeers in the immigration field.'

There are now 60 000 to 80 000 people in Britain waiting to hear if they have asylum

The increasing limitation of possibilities for entry into Britain has unfortunately been met with hesitant opposition. Rather than a resolute rejection of racial discrimination and defence of the rights of people to live where they choose, those looking to help immigrants have found it easier simply to 'play the system', by trying to manoeuvre people through the maze of rules.

Instead of challenging the racist redefinition of British citizenship, it became commonplace for immigration lawyers to suggest that prospective immigrants should claim refugee status and lodge a claim for political asylum, as a way of earning a right to stay in Britain through the back door. In most cases the 'refugee' would not be given political asylum, but they would usually find the Home Office granting 'exceptional leave to remain': the individual concerned has no 'right' to stay, but the Home Secretary has used his authority to allow them to do so for the time being.



PHOTOS: DAVE CHAPMAN

In fact all campaigners tend to ignore the fraudulent applications, preferring to focus on the 'real' ones or quibbling over the extent of the problem. The Refugee Council says that while 80 per cent of claims are rejected, '20 per cent get a positive decision'. The Immigration Law Practitioners' Association is concerned that 'genuine' refugees will lose benefit. Kumar Murshid, secretary of the Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill, argues that the number of applicants for asylum 'is very low compared to other European countries, let alone as a proportion of refugees worldwide' (*Morning Star*, 16 April 1996). Amnesty International's report in mid-April challenged the Home Secretary's claim that only four per cent of appeals against rejection for passing through a safe country succeed; they say it is 40 per cent — in other words, Amnesty argues that there are more than 10 times as many 'genuine' refugees as the government claims.

The common feature of all the asylum campaigns is that, rather than challenge the government's central argument against bogus refugees, they try to sidestep it by emphasising how many of their cases are 'genuine' according to the government's criteria. The result of this approach is that people seeking to enter Britain are being advised to pursue the 'special case' status of political asylum with even more vigour than in previous years, just as the government is tightening up the rules. The country they have come from must be described as dictatorial and they must present themselves as victims of horrific torture.

The way in which immigrants are degraded by being forced to play the asylum game in this way was well illustrated by a *Guardian* report of 23 March. The Medical Foundation for the care of Victims of Torture verified that a Cypriot asylum-seeker's back bore 100 scars. Amazingly, Lynn Parsons for the Home Office told the applicant in a letter that the government believed '[your burns] were inflicted at your request in an attempt to strengthen your claim'. Instead of getting on with his life, the man from Cyprus is locked in limbo while a technical debate continues about whether he was tortured or has burned his own back.

And, if their first attempt fails, the would-be immigrant is told by campaigners that they should immediately lodge an appeal to try to prove that they really are political refugees. As a result, there are now some 60 000 to 80 000 people in Britain waiting to find out if their applications for political asylum have been treated favourably. This number is growing: out of 21 300 refusals last year, only 2800 left the country or were deported. The rest are appealing.

By playing the game and trying to gain refugee status, these people awaiting appeal have managed to stay in Britain for now. But this is no way to live; tens of thousands who simply want to continue the life they have begun to build in this country are forced to spend their time going from one appeal to the next, with the shadow of failure and threat of deportation hanging over them. And for all of this they face a formidable rate of refusal. Even those who do succeed do so only on the whim of the Home Secretary. Last year only 1300 applicants were recognised as

refugees (out of 44 000 applications), while a further 4400 were given leave to remain for a limited period.

To fear, insecurity and the likelihood of ultimate failure is added the further indignity of having to prove to the British authorities that 'over here' is better than 'over there'. Campaigners for Dr al-Mas'ari, for example, informed us that while Saudi Arabia is a totalitarian regime, Britain is the bastion of democracy. The result is that what should be a debate about Britain's own discriminatory laws becomes an argument about whether some other country is democratic or not.

For example, in March the Refugee Council produced a 70-page report showing the countries of origin of those who had their applications refused, focusing in particular on the 720 Nigerians who have been refused asylum since Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution last November.

All we have here is a tussle between different representatives of the British great and the good about whether Nigeria or Rwanda or any other foreign country is civilised enough to appear on Michael Howard's 'white list' of safe countries. And nowhere is the British government's central argument about bogus refugees swindling democratic Britain being contested.

Those who campaign for asylum rights are doing migrants no favours. They shout loudly about the lack of democracy in the Third World, yet appear to accept without question the right of the Conservative government to tell people that they are forbidden from entering Britain. By arguing that certain categories of people should be allowed into this country, campaigners implicitly (and often explicitly) accept that other groups should be excluded. A division is made between those who deserve and those who do not. The accepted distinction is between those who have been tortured and those who have not, between those fleeing political persecution and those fleeing economic deprivation, between those countries considered 'safe' and those that are unsafe.

But why should we accept the right of Michael Howard, or of Amnesty International for that matter, to draw arbitrary lines about who can and cannot live where? This sounds like the old immigration politics of first and second class citizens, only dressed up in the rhetoric of the human rights-conscious nineties. Asylum is nothing more than a loophole in a system of discriminatory immigration laws—and one that is narrowing fast. It is not worth defending in its own right.

The real issue should not be about debating the difference between economic and political refugees. The government is very probably right to say that many people who claim asylum are really trying to escape poverty, and are simply using claims of political persecution as a ticket to get past immigration officials. But so what? That should not diminish our determination to oppose discriminatory laws and defend immigrants' rights.

After all, if campaigners are indignant about the lack of political freedoms in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, surely they should be equally concerned about the lack of economic opportunities in the Indian sub-continent. If they pity the screams of the torture victim, then why not the cries of the millions of children who die of diarrhoea every year, or the anguish of the masses denied the basics of a decent life around the world. The tortured soul of the British liberal has always held a special place for the educated dissident and poet, but precious little room for his poverty-stricken cousin.

The liberal conscience holds a special place for the educated dissident but not for his poverty-stricken cousin

The issue is that anyone should be allowed to move and live where they see fit, and that the state should not have the right to impose pass laws. Peter Lilley should be told (along with the Refugee Council and the Church of Scotland) that we do not care whether there are 'bogus' refugees by his standards or not; everyone who wants to should be able to come here. There should be freedom of movement for all, which means not an asylum loophole but an open door policy in Britain.

Such an uncompromising approach is not high-minded idealism. It is the only practical way to challenge the ideological foundations of the government's anti-immigrant legislation.

When Peter Lilley talks of the cost to the taxpayer he is not really discussing money. The amount spent on all asylum-seekers is £79 million a year, from a total Income Support budget of £16 billion—less than half of one per cent. Lilley is making a political point, setting up immigrants as 'scroungers'. In response, arguing for an open door says that we do not accept that immigration contributes to unemployment, lack of housing or poor education. After all, through 17 years during which Britain's industry and services have been in almost continuous crisis, the one promise the Tories have kept has been to keep the 'wrong' sort of people out of the country.

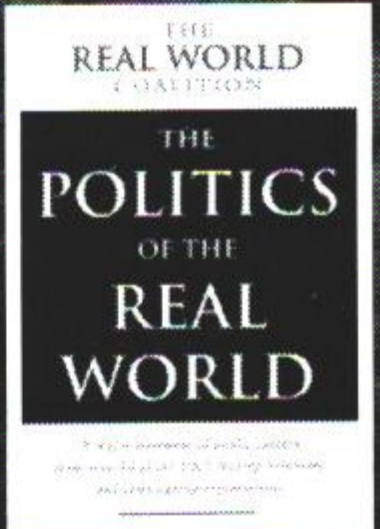
The government is prosecuting a campaign that seeks to blame the least powerful people in the country for some of Britain's economic problems. It is a pathetic and desperate effort. Yet the opposition to this offensive insists on conceding the central ground on which the Tory argument is premised. It is time to stop making concessions and looking for loopholes, and start campaigning for an end to all of Britain's discriminatory immigration laws.

Campaigners who think such a strategy is unrealistic might remember that last year, of those who took their advice and played the asylum game, only 1300 achieved refugee status. ●

Politics of the **Unreal** world



The Real World Coalition's manifesto for radical change would make things even worse than they are, says James Heartfield



A new opposition is on the rise. Forget the fact that the number of days lost through strikes are at their lowest ever, or that trade union membership is on the slide. Forget the fact that the police can make dawn raids on football fans for publicity purposes and detain them without challenge. Forget the fact that the IRA and the PLO have gone respectable, seeking the diplomatic support of the United States. Those events are not the issue. Radicalism today is to be found in the tree houses blocking the Newbury by-pass or the protests of the World Development Movement against Shell or the growing animal rights movement.

As the Conservative government lurches from one disaster to the next, a new spirit of radical oppositionism can be seen in the widespread rejection of free market triumphalism. On television the *Broke* series purports to give a voice to the victims of capitalism, while commentators everywhere decry the materialism and greed of the rat race. The spirit of the new radicalism can be seen in the widespread rejection of establishment politicians. Parliament is denounced as a talking shop, or worse still a shouting shop, where dogma-bound politicians are locked in an adversarial system that sees agreement as a sign of weakness.

More than ever before, it seems, the old order of free market economics and state power is being by-passed altogether by new social movements and other radical groups. In April a coalition of voluntary and campaigning organisations came together to give an organisational form to this new spirit. Organisations in the Real World Coalition include Christian Aid, Charter 88 and the Catholic Institute for International Relations, as well as Friends of the Earth, Population Concern, Oxfam and the United Nations Association. The Real World Coalition published its own manifesto, *The Politics of the Real World*, which was well received in the quality press.

Fighting talk

Their goals certainly sound radical, aiming to 'raise the importance of environmental sustainability, social justice—including the eradication of poverty, in this country and internationally—and democratic renewal in UK political debate'.

But *The Politics of the Real World* manifesto indicates a problem with contemporary radicalism. Its analysis of the present seems to be critical of the status quo, but its specific proposals for what has got to change are disturbing. The practical consequences of the Real World manifesto are threefold: that the standard of living should be drastically cut; that the West should

tell the underdeveloped world how to live; and that democratically elected government should give way to quangos and self-appointed voluntary organisations.

The reactionary implications of the Real World programme are hidden by the fact that it is posed in terms critical of the status quo. Prefaced by soothing words of concern for the poor, by angry denunciations of Third World poverty and by fierce attacks on the corruption of parliament, the manifesto strikes a radical note. It draws its emotional impact from real injustices and failures.

But this kind of criticism should be questioned in turn. Are its proposals likely to improve things or make them worse? As an exemplar of contemporary radicalism, it shows how the contemporary critics of capitalism often end up proposing something that is even worse than what we have now.

Austerity

The cornerstone of the Real World manifesto is its rejection of economic growth, which it calls the 'dominant model' of progress. Citing the persistence of poverty, especially in parts of the Third World, and the degradation of the natural environment, it argues that 'further economic development on the model of the past will continue to exacerbate these problems'. Because 'they are not, as supposed, symptoms of the model's failure, but of its success' (p11). On one level, this is an iconoclastic denunciation of the trickle-down economics of the free market. Its sweep is impressive, challenging not just the distribution of resources, but the dominant model of economic progress in toto.

As sweeping as these criticisms are, the question is who are they directed against? For all the talk about rejecting the 'dominant model' most fire is directed not at capitalism as a social system (indeed the manifesto insists that the market is 'essential'), but at the supposedly excessive consumption habits of working class people. The manifesto chides that 'the average British citizen consumes approximately 20 times the environmental resources of the average Indian, and more than 200 times that of a person born in one of the least developed nations of sub-Saharan Africa'. This is the kind of guilt-trip that your mother used to lay on you when you left food on your plate, but it says nothing about the causes of world poverty. Clearly all the Real World Coalition's concern for the poor is utilised to lecture 'the average British citizen' to tighten his belt.

The new Jerusalem of sustainable development is a dreary cross between 'make do and mend'

and Eastern Europe under Stalinism:

'New patterns of living will be required involving shorter and fewer daily journeys, more use of public transport, greater reuse and recycling of materials, longer lasting products and more efficient energy consumption.

'Where additional consumption is required it will often have to be in the public sector, on goods such as public transport, environmental protection, healthcare and education.

'It cannot be expected that the disposable incomes of ordinary, reasonably comfortable households in Britain will rise significantly year on year.'

The false premise of this argument is that the excessive consumption patterns of 'ordinary' households are responsible for poverty in the Third World and the inner cities. But from whose point of view are working people consuming too much? The idea that you could reduce poverty by lowering consumption is a contradiction in terms.

The Conservative government could only look on in envy at these 'radical' proposals made by the Real World Coalition. 'If only we could get away with state-organised rationing and a nationwide austerity package', they might say. The reason that the Real World Coalition can get away with these arguments is because they are posed in terms of a critique of the free market policies that the Conservatives have pursued for the past 17 years. In content, however, this is the most effective apology for the market imaginable in current circumstances. It yokes people's real sympathy with the poorest sections of society to a policy of income restraint and less consumption. In effect, it shifts the blame for capitalism's problems on to the very people who are at the receiving end of those problems, people working hard to maintain what the Real World Coalition condescends to call their 'ordinary, reasonably comfortable households'.

First World First

The second plank of the Real World manifesto, its determination to address the issue of poverty in the Third World, seems to lend force to its case for austerity at home. But on closer inspection the coalition is no friend to the people of the developing world. Instead its concern is to stabilise Third World societies and to keep immigrants from the South out of Britain.

This kind of concern-cum-self-interest is characteristic of the way the coalition looks at the 'Real World'. On the one hand, the coalition wants ►

Anti-road protesters ascend to the heavens—and look down on the rest of us

Who is The Real World Coalition?

- Alarm UK
- Birmingham Settlement
- Black Environment Network
- British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres
- CAFOD
- Catholic Institute for International Relations
- Charter 88
- Christian Aid
- Church Action on Poverty
- Employment Policy Institute
- Forum for the Future
- Friends of the Earth
- KAIROS
- Media Natura Trust
- Medical Action for Global Security
- Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation
- New Economics Foundation
- Oxfam
- Population Concern
- The Poverty Alliance
- Public Health Alliance
- Quaker Social Responsibility and Education
- Save the Children Fund
- Scottish Education and Action for Development
- Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Environment Alliance
- Sustrans
- Town and Country Planning Association
- Transport 2000
- Unemployment Unit
- United Nations Association
- Worldwide Fund for Nature
- International Institute for Environment and Development



to take on the mantle of high-minded altruism, so as to appear to stand above all selfish interest. So the manifesto frequently reminds us that it is based on an 'ethical' or 'moral' view. On the other hand, it intuitively knows that people just will not buy into a policy for helping the Third World without any payback. In attempting to repose the question of giving aid to the Third World as one of self-interest, the coalition betrays its true character by choosing the most degraded appeal to narrow self-interest on offer: you have to help those immigrants in their own country, or they will come over here.

The argument runs as follows: noting that poverty in the South leads to conflict, the manifesto goes on to warn darkly that 'an inexorable consequence of poverty-related conflict is the movement of people and the creation of refugees'; furthermore 'the industrialised world cannot insulate itself from these concerns' because 'the mass migration of peoples cannot be confined within the Third World' but will lead 'inevitably to immigration pressures on the richer nations'.

The manifesto goes on to argue that 'the only viable approach is preventative: to tackle the causes of large-scale migration from developing countries at source'. The proposed package of policies to develop the Third World, then, is not motivated out of altruism or solidarity, but the need to stem the tide of immigrants that haunts the imagination of the Real World Coalition over here.

Anti-people

With this kind of concern for the people of the Third World it is not surprising that the central plank of the Real World Coalition's strategy is to limit population growth there: 'In the large industrialising countries (such as China, India and Brazil) such [population] growth compounds the burden caused by rising consumption.' The coalition goes on to endorse the programme of action on population growth agreed at the Cairo conference in 1994. But the programme of action was widely criticised by Third World governments who understood its import—Third World people are a 'problem', and the fewer of them there are the

better. Those burgeoning masses in China, India and Brazil could be forgiven for asking to whom, exactly, is their rising consumption a burden? Not to themselves, but to the IMF and World Bank which are currently trying to force many Third World governments to adopt austerity programmes to meet the interest payments on their debt.

The *Politics of the Real World* purports to speak out for the people of the Third World. It is full of bitter criticisms of the World Bank and the IMF. Those criticisms give a radical veneer to its arguments. But in sum, what is the strategy outlined for the developing world? That the economies and politics of Third World countries should be subordinated to the needs of the Western nations. They demand that economic policy should be geared to keeping immigrants out of the West. They even demand that men and women should be 'educated' (by worthy souls like the Real World Coalition's members) to have fewer children, so as to reduce the presumed burden of their wholly understandable desire to better themselves.

Democracy in the balance

The cutting edge of the Real World manifesto is its programme for political reform, which it sees as the precondition for implementing the other proposals. From the outset the coalition draws succour from the failure of the existing political apparatus. Accurately, it observes that:

'Many people today feel that something has gone wrong with British society and British politics.... Yet the political system barely seems to register what is happening. It is hardly surprising that public disillusionment with politicians and parliament has never been higher.'

By contrast with the traditional political parties, the coalition claims to represent 2.1m members and supporters and a 'substantial groundswell of public opinion in favour of a "new politics"'. But this 'new politics' appears in many ways to be worse than the old. Indeed, for all its radical rhetoric, the *Real World Coalition* seems very close to the real world of the old establishment and highly dependent on its patronage.



Friends of the Earth

The manifesto proclaims the most modest ambition of putting 'pressure on political parties' and 'influencing the political system'. A glance at the list of coalition members reveals some major international aid organisations—like Oxfam and Save the Children—with multi-million pound budgets, royal sponsors and hundreds of paid workers. Others are closely linked to

service, the churches and the great and the good, its critical take on Westminster is sincere: 'We do not see how the challenges facing this country and the world can be properly addressed within the constraints of Britain's present political system.' This sounds like a denunciation of the political establishment, but it is worth considering where the Real World Coalition thinks that power should lie if it is not with the elected politicians in Westminster.

It explains that 'reform must be founded on a new culture of participation, and this can only arise "from the bottom up", from civil society'. All of which sounds very approachable and friendly, but what is 'civil society' exactly? Throughout 'civil society' is identified with the 'voluntary and community-based groups [that] must play a central part in any strategy of renewal'.

In fact 'civil society' is a code word for all the different groups that make up the Real World Coalition. As the manifesto says 'Real World is in itself a manifestation of this process. We seek not merely to argue for democratic revitalisation, but to reflect it'. So this is where democratic revitalisation will come from: middle class pressure groups, charities and church groups, run by the sort of people who get jobs to 'do good work' instead of working to live. Charity work has always been one of the ways that the idle rich have kept themselves busy. It is one of those things that makes them feel good about themselves by giving them a purpose. It stops them feeling like they are just freeloaders. But it also invests their pet projects with all the sanctimony of selfless altruism. Without a hint of self-consciousness the Real World Coalition asserts that the ideas of 'civil society' 'are the moral source of government'.

From the standpoint of the middle class pressure groups and charities that make up the Real World Coalition, it might seem obvious that the more influence they have upon the way society is organised, the more democratic that society is. But nothing could be further from the truth. As bankrupt as the present political system is, at least parliamentary democracy is based

on the idea that those who rule should seek a mandate from the electorate. The goal of the Real World Coalition, by contrast, is to exercise power by circumventing the vulgar contest for public opinion.

According to the Real World Coalition, its agenda is closer to the concerns of ordinary people than the bankrupt parties ensconced in Westminster. That seems like an accurate reflection upon parliament, but there is nothing realistic about *The Politics of the Real World*. For the vast majority of people in the advanced as well as the underdeveloped world, the coalition counsels austerity and restraint. Few people would recognise anything real about the crank concerns of the Real World Coalition.

Radical complaint

These middle class do-gooders have confused their own narrow outlook and distaste for working class lifestyles with a popular upsurge. But intuitively they know that no majority could ever be won for this kind of conservative agenda. That is why they recoil from constitutional democracy, preferring the exclusive networks of a middle class 'civil society'. Instead of fighting for a hearing from the mass of people, they prefer to get the ear of the powers that be. Presumptuously, they imagine that more influence for them counts as a democratic revitalisation of society.

This kind of radicalism we can do without. The only thing that is radical about it is that it is prepared to go further and deeper in disenfranchising ordinary people and cutting their living standards than a Conservative government would ever dare. In the absence of any alternative, the complaints of the middle class sound radical. The unreal politics of the Real World Coalition demonstrate that this is an alternative that could only make things worse.

● The Real World Coalition's manifesto, *The Politics of the Real World*, is published by Earthscan, £6.99 pbk

James Heartfield is convening the course *Rights and the State* at The Week conference in July (see page 23).

The Real World Coalition aims to exercise power by circumventing the vulgar contest for public opinion

the churches—Christian Aid, Catholic Institute of International Relations, Kairos, Church Action on Poverty. Others are dependent on local government support.

Even by comparison with the old parties, the Real World Coalition is highly autocratic. The first time that the vast majority of the 2.1m members of the coalition knew about its existence was probably when it was announced in the press. The first glimpse they got of its manifesto was when they bought a copy in a bookshop.

Oh so civilised

It appears that *The Politics of the Real World* was written by one person, discussed with a few pals, vetted by a committee of representatives of the key coalition members and then rubber-stamped by other signatories on behalf of their mass memberships. This is a procedure that makes the role of union block votes at the old Labour Party conference look like a model of mass participation. No doubt the 2.1m will be reassured by the author's acknowledgement of 'various extremely helpful but unnamable officials of government departments and international agencies'.

Close as the coalition is to the civil

Megacities



The modern city is widely seen as a monster whose growth needs to be restrained. Dave Cowlard thinks that what the world needs now is more real urbanisation, not less

Cities, it seems, are out of fashion. In June, the city became the focus for international debate as Istanbul hosted the second United Nations conference on human settlements, Habitat II. The headline for one report on the conference expressed the current anxieties about the city in stark terms: 'Global warning: cities harm people' (*Guardian*, 1 June 1996). Wally N'Dow, Habitat's general secretary, summed up the conference mood:

'A low-grade civil war is being fought every day in the world's urban centres....The overwhelming speed at which the world is urbanising leaves little time to adapt. We are witnessing daily urban catastrophes. Youth is going to seed. Drugs are rampant in cities, crime and terrorism is increasing. We risk a complete breakdown in cities.'

Habitat was the last in the series of UN conferences which started with the Rio summit on environment and development in 1992 and included the Cairo population conference of 1994.

The diagnosis of the problem presented in Istanbul echoed the concerns about environmental degradation and overpopulation developed at these previous conferences.

The consensus view at Habitat II was that cities provide a hotbed for practices which, in the words of the *Guardian's* John Vidal, lead to 'declining resources, growing competition, food scarcity and environmental problems'. The conference outlined a 'brown agenda' to tackle environmental and social problems in the city.

Although Habitat focused on the 'megacities' in developing countries, the analysis of the problem of modern cities is believed to have a worldwide application. Shortly before the UN conference began, a small group of protesters in Wandsworth, south London applied their own interpretation of the new agenda as they occupied 13 hectares of derelict land owned by Guinness. They set up a makeshift camp of tents and huts made from 'recycled material', planted a vegetable patch, and attracted a lot of media attention. The

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

FUTURES

or megaproblems?



PHOTO: DAVE COWLARD

occupation claimed to show how cities could be refashioned to meet the needs of local people rather than of big business—or rather, why big businesses like Guinness should work with local people to improve the urban environment.

Whatever the differences in scale between the UN discussion of the megacity and the protest at Wandsworth, their common theme was that large-scale urban development is a major problem of our day. But is the notion that the city is a problem justified? A glance at the current discussion of the Third World megacity suggests a different interpretation.

The familiar image of the megacity is the bursting shanty town with streets filled with sewage. Large-scale homelessness or near-homelessness is often given as evidence that the city is over-burdened and close to collapse. The image is of ceaseless and rapid urbanisation running beyond the capacity of people to manage, as in Wally N'Dow's talk of a 'complete breakdown'. But this vision is more a product of anti-urban nightmares than a reflection of reality.

Two reports accompanied the proceedings of Habitat II. The first was the United Nations Population Fund annual report on the state of the world's population, which predicts that cities will be 'overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of the poor and dispossessed'. But the other, *An Urbanising World*,

produced as the official report of the Habitat conference, avoided such hyperbole by displaying a basic familiarity with the facts. Megacity growth slowed down during the 1980s. Old projections for population growth in cities are accordingly now accepted to have been overestimates. For example, it had been estimated that Mexico City's population would grow to over 31m by the year 2000. Latest figures based on 1994 studies have now revised this to 16.4m. A similar trend can be seen with the estimated growth projections for Rio de Janeiro (estimated population by 2000 down from 19.4m to 10.6m), Calcutta (19.7m to 12.7m), and Seoul (18.7m to 12.3m).

Not only is the likely growth of megacities exaggerated, so are the problems. No-one is pretending that large cities are trouble-free today. But the blunt claim that 'cities harm people' is a wild misrepresentation of the problem.

In the Third World, people's problems need to be put in the context of overall capitalist development. The spread of the market system, with its demands for efficient and cost-effective production, has destroyed the old ways of life in rural areas dependent on subsistence agriculture. As a result, the harshest conditions in poor countries are in fact not to be found in the cities, but outside them, in the backward countryside. Life-expectancy

is higher in the city, medical care, primitive as it is for many, is better than in rural areas and, despite the problems, basic hygiene is better. Rural migrants continue to be drawn to the city because it offers them the possibility of a better life than that offered by the rural sector.

The central appeal of city life is the greater possibility of employment. Improvements in agricultural productivity have pushed up rural unemployment around the world. Staying in the rural areas offers grim prospects for most people. A large percentage of the migrants who move into the cities go to join other family members. This allows them to enter an existing network of contacts which can help with employment and housing needs.

Of course there are many things which need to be done to improve cities. But what is needed is more real urbanisation, not less.

The problem is that many parts of megacities are not really cities at all: they are just large collections of poor shelters, more like camps than cities. Not only is there dire poverty, but there is little or no industry, transport, shops or employment to balance the residential sprawl. The trouble is not too many people, but too little infrastructure to support them.

Without the developed infrastructure of proper urban life, the chance of a substantial improvement over rural standards of living will be lost. ►

All of these are issues which can be addressed through properly organised economic growth and investment. But capitalism is, in many parts of the world, incapable of providing these things. A world economic system which has allowed parts of great old cities like New York and London to decay lacks the dynamism to develop new world megacities like Sao Paulo in Brazil.

Unfortunately, the discussion of the city today rarely highlights these issues. The anti-developmental bias which leads to an exaggeration of problems also produces a distinct lack of enthusiasm for anything resembling large-scale urbanisation. Under the influence of a narrowly environmentalist agenda, influential strands in the contemporary discussion of the city appear more concerned with limiting the impact of human civilisation on the planet than they are with applying technology and capital to civilising the urban world.

Much of the current discussion around the need for a sustainable city rests on the projection that cities consume too many resources and create too much waste. This argument has been presented through the idea of the 'ecological footprint' of a city. The term was coined by the Canadian environmentalist William Rees, and is concerned with defining the amount of land required to supply a city with food and timber products as well as the area of growing vegetation required to absorb its carbon dioxide output. Rees describes this as the 'carrying capacity of local and distant ecosystems' (*Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, 1995).

This approach has been adopted by the writer Herbert Girardet who was influential in drawing up the British proposals for Habitat II. He has argued that while cities occupy only two per cent of the world's land surface, they consume 75 per cent of the world's resources. Girardet has used London as an example to show how its 'footprint' extends over 20m hectares, more than 125 times the city's actual area. He is concerned not only with the use of resources, but with the subsequent generation of waste.

The implication of the ecological footprint idea is that a city should try to make as little impact as possible on the natural environment. This is said to be a necessity in the face of John Vidal's list of 'declining resources, growing competition, food scarcity and environmental problems'. In fact, the world's impending food and resource crisis is a figment of the eco-doom merchants' imaginations (for an example of the gap between the rhetoric and the reality, see the critique of the alleged food shortage facing China on p47 of this issue

of *Living Marxism*). The only consequence of accepting the ecological footprint idea would be to endorse the lack of the kind of development which millions of the world's city-dwellers desperately need.

To see just what practical proposals flow from the mistaken analysis of urban blight, I went down to Wandsworth to talk with the people occupying the Guinness site. Their idea

Wandsworth's urban village is modelled on Bolivian squatter camps

is that sustainable villages can be built within cities, and that in this way cities can be redesigned to meet local needs while causing less harm to the environment. That is the PR. The reality is a group of losers scavenging an existence off the local economy: their huts made from roadside cast-offs and chipboard from Texas; eating near-rotten food thrown out by local shops. Somebody had given them a bath so that those foolish enough to stay there all the time can get the occasional wash.

Environmental activist George Monbiot, spokesman for The Land Is Ours and *Guardian* columnist in (occasional) residence at Wandsworth, made the point that the urban occupation was modelled on Bolivian squatter camps. In other words, we are all supposed to take inspiration from the Bolivian experience of bare survival in squalid conditions. This is where the anti-urban bias in much of the writing on the sustainable city takes us. In the Third World context, it is often posed as injecting an element of the rural into an urban setting. In reality, it amounts to turning the survival strategies of the residents of Bolivian squatter camps into a model of urban development.

What people living in the Third World need is more development. In fact what all cities need is development. The logic of the sustainable city argument draws the opposite conclusion, that the city should become more like the backward village. We are only reminded of the grim conditions facing the urban poor in the megacity as a prelude to calls for the North to learn from the lifestyle of those in the South.

Those who want to build villages in cities tell us that recycling is the future. Suggested 'best practices' for women in the West are now supposed to include, for example, recycling

nappies—ie, washing and drying them—rather than using disposable ones. In this way the all-day drudgery forced upon women in poorer countries is turned into environmentally sound practices that women in the West should adopt by choice.

By taking as its point of departure a preoccupation with environmental limits, the 'brown agenda' turns a concern with poverty into a justification for the persistence of the backward conditions which breed it, in the name of environmental sustainability. It leads to a redefinition of what people should expect from life. Making do, all that capitalism offers people in many places, is presented as something to aspire to.

Not everybody is as myopic as Monbiot and his colleagues. The world's cities, particularly the megacities, are an indication of the changing economic balance in the world. David Satterthwaite of the the International Institute for Environment and Development has shown that 199 of the world's 281 cities with populations over one million are in the world's 25 largest economies. A high proportion of those cities with high growth rates are in Asia. In 1990, 10 of the larger megacities were in Asia. By 2025 this looks set to rise to 19 (*People and the Planet*, Vol5 No2). As the Asian economies pull away from the Third World and become the new centres of global economic dynamism, their highly sophisticated megacities look set to become a model of how to live in the future. Many Asians take pride in their cities as expressions of their advance.

It is projected that by the turn of the century, half of the world's population will be living in cities. The social problems facing many people in the cities of the developing world are severe—from a lack of housing to poverty and disease. Who should learn from whom? It seems clear that the way forward is to seek to generalise from the most advanced megacities, not to fantasise about building sustainable villages in cities or to romanticise the life of Bolivian squatter camp residents.

Cities remain the productive and dynamic centres of human life. The concentration of large populations potentially allows for a fuller expression of what humanity can do together, breaking down parochial prejudices and opening up possibilities for communication and interaction. That many of the world's cities are currently unattractive places is an argument for more development and design, not an ecologically minded retreat.

Dave Cowlard is convening the course *Theorising the City* at The Week conference in July (see page 23).

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Childwatch

Tents should be erected in school playgrounds to shield children from the sun, says skin specialist Dr David Harris. And cardboard toilet rolls are being banned by schools, after a report in the *British Medical Journal* blamed them for spreading disease.

Counselling news

Patients at Cornish hospitals are being offered counselling by a witch, Ms Cassandra Latham. And Mr Philip Heselton has been appointed 'pagan chaplain' of Everthorpe Prison near Hull, although he claims that prison is the wrong environment for rituals.

Market traders in Horsham have been banned from shouting because it is disturbing counsellors 'trying to build a rapport' with their clients at the neighbouring therapy centre.



Broadcasting standards

The 'erotic' Nissan Micra ad has been criticised for 'teaching children bad table manners'. (Prior to handcuffing her boyfriend the woman eats with her fingers.)

A man's game

Following protests from the darts world about cable TV's legendary topless darts contests ('undermining the sport of darts and demeaning women'), another unlikely haven of political correctness has appeared: *Boxing News* has turned down an advert for a traditional gala night because the men-only event was 'sexist'.

Health

The BBC's always sensible *Watchdog* programme warned of the dietary risks of overindulgence during Euro '96. In keeping with other less than enthralling official festivities, its suggested menu included celery and raw carrots in place of beer and crisps.



Consultant physician Jean Monroe believes clothes should carry health warnings, and require clearer labels to explain potential health problems relating to tight shoes and trousers and dangerous dyes and chemicals. 'Assertive' women can make men impotent, according to a *Relate* report.



National Constipation day featured a cartoon competition to dispel the stigma of the condition. Constipation as lifestyle choice, anyone?

CARELESS TALK

'To compare making love to David Ginola to having sex with Paul Gascoigne is like comparing eating caviar to cold porridge.'

Former *Playboy* centrefold Marianne Hallberg, who claims to have had them both. Not all they are cracked up to be, then, these French lovers.

'They may not like our beef, but we don't think much of their goalkeeping gloves.'

Grandstand's hockey reporter, exposing illegal German equipment

'The modern world has corrupted things. For many winning is all that matters.'

Stan Kent (80) bemoans the fate of guinea pig showing. Breeders use talcum powder and cosmetics on their pets, and pluck their whiskers with tweezers (RSPCA, take note).

'He doesn't want to take on political issues or all the ecological issues and be seen as the Body Shop of football. There are things that make him angry, though—like bad driving.'

Jon Holmes, spokesman for Saint Gary Lineker

'The police aren't like real people to us. They're the enemy....It's like people I killed in Malaya [in the army]. You don't feel remorse.'

Harry Roberts, police killer, who surprisingly hasn't been granted parole after 30 years in jail.

'Dreary little bigots who rely on bigotry for support.'

Billy Connolly on SNP MPs

Shooting from

Ice T, the Godfather of gangsta rap, tells it straight to Kunle Olulode

'If you really knew me, I've got the heart of a little boy....It's on my dresser right next to my bed.'

And then Ice T laughs. The assembled journalists in Channel 4's boardroom also laugh, but a little nervously. They are unsure whether the Iceman is taking the rise out of his own flamboyant reputation, or out of their discernible distaste for rap and the culture that surrounds it.

Ice T is not some wannabe gangster. He can arguably claim both to have founded gangsta rap, and to have lived it. Since 1989 he has released a string of ground-breaking West Coast recordings—*Rhyme Pays*, *Power*, *Original Gangster*, *Home Invasion* and now, *The Return of the Real*. T was out there doing it when the likes of Dr Dre and the now departed Eazy E were still body-popping in silver lamé.

It is his popularity—with a white as well as a black audience—and his outspokenness that has won Ice T his notoriety. In 1991, T's thrash metal offshoot group Body Count recorded the controversial single 'Cop Killer', sparking a hysterical campaign both from the LAPD and politicians, Democrat and Republican. An even greater furore followed the release of his 1993 album *Home Invasion* on the Time-Warner controlled Interscope label—the cover of which depicted a white child surrounded by the imagery of black icons. Congressmen and Time-Warner shareholders called for his head. Shortly afterwards Ice parted company with his record label. He is now signed to Virgin.

Ice T has ridden the vernacular of gangsta rap into areas unimaginable back in the days of breakdancing, fat Adidas trainers and breakbeat DJs. From Hollywood to the *Gaby Roslin Show*, T continues to shoot from the lip. But Ice dismisses any talk of being a role model for young blacks:

'The thought of me sitting here and being expected to say something that's gonna help the world is the most ridiculous shit. My whole life was based on harming people. I had no intention of ever doing anything right at all. I was gonna get rich off the streets, I was gonna win my house in a crap game, I was gonna rob. Now I'm making music and movies, it's totally different, it's like a dream.'

This refusal to accept roles thrust upon him flavours his comments about Channel 4's *Baadasss TV*, which opened for a second run this spring. Depending on your point of view, Ice has enhanced or undermined his reputation by co-hosting the show with Andrea Oliver. The programme has incurred the ire of both would-be censors and the politically correct for its sexual content and irreverent attitude towards black culture. It has also been criticised by many black people for demeaning black culture. I asked T about the criticisms.

'The show is stupid, totally stupid—it's meant to be stupid! But it's the only show I would have wanted to do, because I'm always seen as serious. The show is not scripted. Me and

Andrea have total control over the programme, so it's all our fault. We just let it flow.

'I'm totally aware that not everybody will laugh at the same stuff I laugh at, but I think the real problem comes when other people try to dictate what other people should enjoy. If you've got a person on the show who ain't funny, you've got to make a joke. You don't want to diss them, so you've got to make it humorous. The other day we had this group, sold 15m records, called...er...Boney M. I'd never heard of them. I just said to them: "I was probably in jail or something at the time."'

'If you want positive', Ice adds, 'there's other shows that provide it'.

According to Ice, gangsta rap happened by accident. 'I was just living a particular lifestyle. I started to rap about how I was living. It's not something you set out to do initially.' While he loves newer sounds like Mobb Deep, Biggie Smalls, Nas and Spice1, Ice thinks that rap is not as fresh as it was. Hip hop as a culture, he says, is dead.

'At the time we first did it, gangsta rap was not a proven formula. People used to say to us: "You can't say that! You're not going to get on radio, they won't play this." I said, "Fuck it then. Maybe I'm not supposed to make records, but I'm going to do it my way."

'Today, when a new artist does it, it's like a proven formula, so it's not as risky. It hasn't got a cutting edge now because it's already been done.'

But Ice will have no truck with the

the lip

criticism that rap has lost its soul by becoming big business. The real problem, he says, is not that rap is big business today, but that it was not always that way. As he points out, in the early eighties millions of dollars were made from young black kids who did not have a clue, and so ended up simply not getting paid.

Ice is contemptuous of the claims that rap is no longer street.

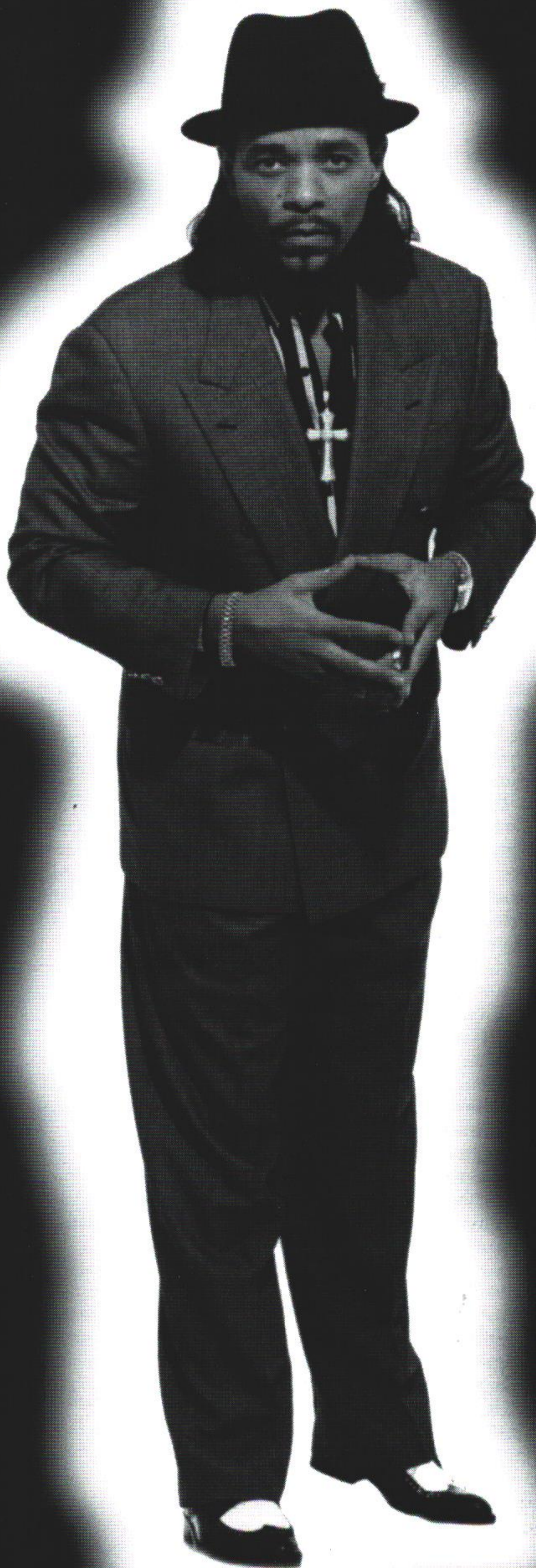
'You've got to understand when someone like me who's been making rap music—who lives it, grew up in it—walks into the office of a label, and there's a 21-year old white kid, that lives with his mother and he's listening to a rap tape of some kid surviving, living day-to-day, and he tells me it doesn't sound street! Imagine what feeling runs through my body!

'I ask him, what would make it more street. And he says some bullshit like, "Make them shoot more people". They don't understand that there are all kinds of facets to black people.'

Ice has little time either for the 'keep-it-real', in-the-ghetto mindset that pervades current debates about black culture. 'To get the fuck out of the ghetto is as real as you can be. People who say you should stay in the ghetto are all the people who've got gold. No one wants to live there. The ghetto is not a black community, it's a poor one. There's no reason to stay there.'

Ice T's *The Return of the Real* is out on Virgin; *Baadasss TV* is on Channel 4, Fridays, 11.40pm.

PHOTO: DANA HURSEY



The

TS Eliot has been accused of being an anti-Semite. Louis Ryan thinks the critics have missed the point

wasteland of prejudice

If TS Eliot were alive today, he would very likely feel himself 'pinned and wriggling on the wall', like his poetic anti-hero J Alfred Prufrock. The man pinning him down is Anthony Julius, better known until recently as Princess Diana's lawyer. A man of many talents, Julius is also the author of a new study, *TS Eliot: Anti-Semitism and Literary Form*, which marshals the scattered evidence of Eliot's hostility to Jews, both in his poetry and his prose. Julius' aim is to show that Eliot's anti-Semitism was not an incidental blemish, but an integral part of his outlook.

Julius' work has detonated a fierce debate about Eliot's work and a re-evaluation of his reputation. James Fenton, professor of poetry at Oxford, gave a lecture in May entitled 'Eliot v Julius'. Fenton came down firmly for the latter, describing the grand old man of twentieth-century English literature as a 'scoundrel'. The poet and critic Tom Paulin also came out against Eliot, writing a long and enthusiastic review of Julius' book in the *London Review of Books*. With one or two exceptions, the defence of Eliot has been half-hearted and embarrassed.

There is little question that Eliot was an anti-Semite and that his prejudices were woven into his poetry. But in their tirades against Eliot, critics like Julius, Fenton and Paulin seemingly fail to understand the nature of both anti-Semitism and art.

Eliot himself claimed that 'I am not an anti-Semite, and never have been. It is a terrible slander on a man'. But that was in 1958, after the Holocaust, when overt anti-Semitism had become taboo.

His prewar poetry tells a different story. One of his early poems 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar' contains the lines, 'On the Rialto once./The rats are underneath the piles./The Jew is underneath the lot./Money in furs. The boatman smiles.' Then, again, there are the lines from the poem 'Gerontion': 'And the Jew squats in the window sill, the owner,/ Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,/ Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.'

Lines such as these have raised hackles in the current controversy, but little exception was taken to them at the time they were published. That is a point Eliot's current critics seem to have missed: in the interwar years anti-Semitism wasn't peculiar to Eliot, but was the general outlook of the intelligentsia. As John Carey shows in his book *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, it would be difficult to find a mainstream writer, philosopher or poet of that period who was not anti-Semitic.

Eliot's anti-Semitism did not flow from peculiar prejudice, but from his disillusionment with society and his desire to restore a sense of moral order—a disillusionment and a desire with which most of his intellectual contemporaries concurred.

Eliot's sense of despair and foreboding is brilliantly caught in his masterpiece, 'The Waste Land', which is at the centre of much of the current controversy. 'The Waste Land' remains one of the poetic landmarks of this century because it captured in its oblique language a defining historical moment, its fragmented imagery mirroring the sense of collapse and disorientation following the First World War.

In 1933 Eliot delivered a lecture entitled 'After Strange Gods', in which he expresses his attempts to come to terms with the unprecedented social dislocation and upheaval of the time:

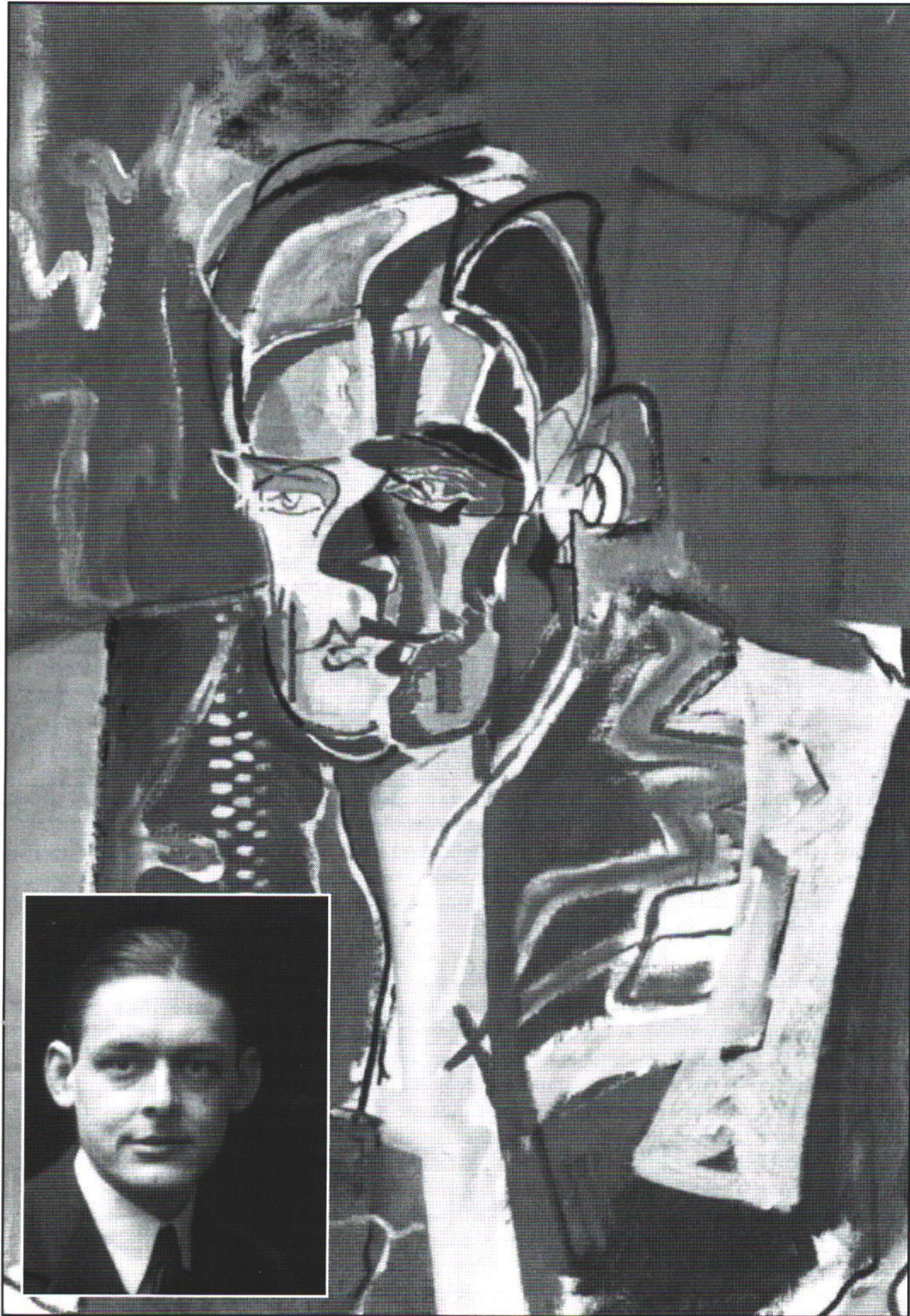
'The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterated. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable. There must be a proper balance between urban and rural, industrial and agricultural development. And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated.'

The language of race and religion, with its corollary, the exclusion of alien elements, were basic components of the conservative outlook at this period (as, in a different fashion and language, they still are today). In building their case against Eliot, Julius, Fenton and Paulin pay insufficient attention to the general climate of anti-Semitism that existed at the time.

Eliot's critics also miss the point about Eliot's own work. Consider the opening to 'Dirge', a poem that Eliot had originally intended for 'The Waste Land', and which is causing so much ire today:

Full fathom five your Bleistein lies
Under the flatfish and the squids.
Graves' Disease in a dead jew's eyes!
When the crabs have eat the lids.

There are several more lines of similar nastiness, concluding with an image of



Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to
windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once
handsome and tall as you.

Such a process of poetic transformation throws light on one of Eliot's own comments on Milton: 'We can certainly enjoy the poetry and yet be fully aware of the intellectual and moral aberrations of the author.' This is not a convenient liberal fudge, but a recognition of the fact that a realised work of art has a degree of autonomy from the outlook and even the intentions of the creator. 'The Waste Land' as a poem transcends Eliot's subjectivity as it draws closer to inner coherence, sloughing off in the process the more obtrusive expressions of the poet's own viewpoint.

Many of Eliot's contemporary critics both fail to distinguish between Eliot's poetry and his politics, and seem to want to censor his poetry because of his politics. Julius has said that his intention is to censure Eliot, not to censor him. Paulin, however, suggests that he would be willing to countenance both approaches: 'hate poems are offensive, and the offence which Eliot's give has been largely palliated or ignored for more than 70 years....Those poems have been in practically continuous print since they were first published, *yet there has been no protest at this, and little protest at the poems themselves.*' (Italics added)

The fairly obvious suggestion here is that Eliot's 'hate poems' should not be in print. Elsewhere Paulin deplores the fact that Julius' book was rejected by the Oxford University Press on the grounds that it might prove 'too controversial'. 'So much for scholarship, so much for free speech', he exclaims. But Paulin cannot have it both ways. He cannot deride OUP's timorous policy while at the same time calling for restrictions on what he finds objectionable in Eliot—unless he wishes to subscribe to a 1990s version of the view that 'a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated'.

Julius' book ends with a particularly appropriate and moving response to the Eliot controversy, by the Jewish poet and man of letters Emanuel Litvinoff. Shortly after the war, he read his poem 'To TS Eliot' to an audience in London. The poem was both a tribute to, and an indictment of, its dedicatee. Eliot himself was present. When Litvinoff had finished, an eye-witness recounts, 'most of the audience began to clap...but Stephen Spender rose angrily and shouted that Litvinoff had grossly insulted Tom Eliot who was the most gentle of men...for his part, Eliot, in the chair behind me, his head down, muttered generously, "It's a good poem, it's a very good poem".'

lobsters scratching at Bleistein's gold teeth. But 'Dirge' was dropped from the final version of 'The Waste Land', at least partly on the insistence of Ezra Pound, to whom the final poem was dedicated. Pound himself, a poet who ended his career as a propagandist for Mussolini, was much more rabidly anti-Semitic than Eliot. So when Pound wrote '?? doubtful' in the margins of 'Dirge', it was not out of any tender feelings for Jews. Rather, both Pound and Eliot recognised that the relatively crude nature of 'Dirge' had no place in such a complex and sophisticated work as 'The Waste Land'.

Poetry, like all art, does not simply

present the poet's subjective outlook in an unmediated fashion, but transforms it. Indeed, the reason that much of Pound's poetry, or that of the earlier Eliot, is inferior to 'The Waste Land' is that in the former the author's voice lies too close to the surface.

By the time the 'Death By Water' theme had become Section IV of 'The Waste Land', the passage had changed completely in content and tone from 'Dirge'. The drowned man undergoes a 'sea change' from the derided Bleistein to the enigmatic figure of 'Phlebas the Phoenician'. The section ends on a note of limpid indifference:

LIVING MARXISM

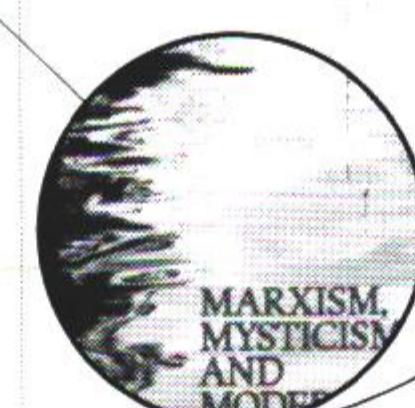
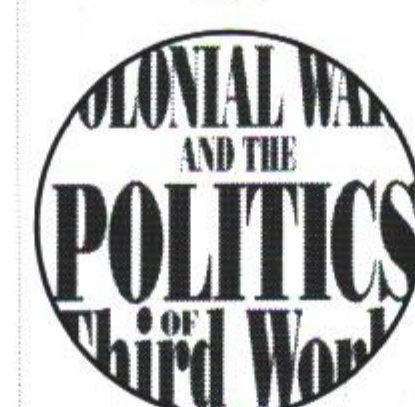
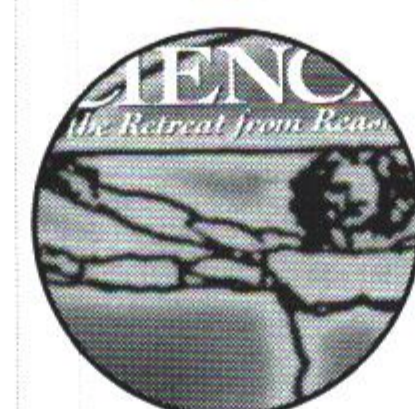
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MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Fears that there are too many people for the world to feed are greatly exaggerated, says Dominic Wood

Eating Chinese

Who Will Feed China? Wake-up Call for a Small Planet, Lester Brown, Worldwatch Environmental Alert Series, Earthscan, 9.95 pbk

Full House: Reassessing the Earth's Population-Carrying Capacity, Lester Brown and Hal Kane, Worldwatch Environmental Alert Series, Earthscan, 10.95 pbk

State of the World 1996, Lester Brown et al, Norton and Worldwatch, 12.95 pbk

China Since 1911, Richard Phillips, Macmillan, £40 hbk, £12.99 pbk

In *Who Will Feed China?* Lester Brown makes three increasingly startling propositions. First, he argues that China will soon be unable to feed itself. Then he suggests that, if the Chinese population continues to grow, the whole world will be unable to meet China's demand for food. And finally, he says that even trying to feed China would be irresponsible, futile and could lead to the destruction of the planet.

These dramatic claims will be listened to. Lester Brown is the president of the Worldwatch Institute and, since 1984, editor of the prestigious *State of the World* publication. Both Brown and the Institute have established themselves as an authority on environmental issues.

The basis of Brown's argument is that the combination of a loss of cropland, stagnating crop yields and a growing population is breaching the Earth's carrying capacity. In *Full House*, which Brown co-wrote with Hal Kane, this argument is focused at the global level, but in *State of the World 1995*, Brown introduces the 'China Factor' which he has expanded in detail with *Who Will Feed China?*. In sum his argument is that we are facing the prospect of a global food shortage, which China will trigger.

By focusing on China, Brown puts the argument that there are too many people in the world across in a dramatic fashion. To claim that a country the size of China is incapable of producing enough food for its citizens, or to argue that the combined effort of the world's food producers is insufficient for the demands of the Chinese population, certainly grabs the attention. But is there any proof to justify his fears? A closer examination of the evidence suggests that Brown's anxieties are greatly exaggerated. The tendency to exaggerate problems like overpopulation is all too prevalent today. These gloomy prognoses lead to some alarming proposals, like forced birth control, but they greatly underestimate the capacity of people to resolve these problems through more creative methods.

Brown concentrates on the loss of cropland as the most significant factor affecting food production in China. In *Who Will Feed China?*, he argues that despite its size, China faces a problem of land scarcity. China, he says, is not blessed with a vast amount of fertile land, and because it has such a large population, the fertile land it does have is doubly important. To make matters worse, the productive land happens to be in the areas where most of the people are, and is being lost to non-farm uses as China industrialises. Industry, and with it roads and urban sprawl, is proving to be more lucrative than farming.

Brown explains the loss of cropland as an inevitable consequence of industrialisation in a country that is already densely populated. He cites the example of Japan, where industrialisation took place at the expense of farming. By 1994, Japan had to import 72 per cent of its food in order to feed its population, although it had previously been self-sufficient.

China, Brown warns, has sustained comparable losses of cropland over the past few years, and the prospect of China becoming dependent on grain imports seems very real. In 1990, China had to import grain for the first time in its recent history—just under two per cent of the 346m tons of grain consumed. Brown sees this as the beginning of an era in which the Chinese are going to have to increase their imports of food significantly.

But why is the loss of cropland so significant in Brown's assessment of future levels of food production? If the past 20 years are anything to go by, then sustaining the necessary increases in agricultural yields to keep up with a growing population, will depend on the productivity of the land, not how much land is harvested. This has been the case throughout history. Even where there are increases in the total amount of land used, the productivity of the land is still the most important factor.

China is a prime example of this. It has been one of the most impressive countries in recent years at ►

improving agricultural output. Since 1975 wheat yields have more than doubled, making China the world's largest producer. Across Asia and the Pacific region, wheat production has increased by 139 per cent over the past 20 years, achieved with an increase of just 19 per cent more harvested land. Demand could have been met easily without any increase in acreage, but the fact that more land was used led to reductions in the price of wheat and an increase in the percentage of wheat consumed in people's diet. In Richard Phillips' somewhat begrudging history of modern China, there is nonetheless a better estimation of Chinese successes. He notes that despite doubling its population since 1911, wealth per capita has grown (*China Since 1911*, p278). In just seven years, between 1978 and 1985, the total grain production in China increased by 50 per cent.

The question of whether China can feed itself does not depend upon the absolute amount of land that is farmed, but on the relative productivity of this land

These increases were not the result of using more land, but of getting more out of the land and resources available. The use of fertiliser and irrigation was the main source of the dramatic increases. The question of whether China can feed itself does not depend upon the absolute amount of land that is farmed, but on the relative productivity of this land. The productivity of the land in turn is not given by nature, but is determined by the extent to which science and technology is applied to develop the land.

Brown acknowledges that this was the case in the past, yet does not consider it as an option for the future. He points to stagnating yields over the past decade to argue his case. His future projection for China is of diminishing per capita crop yields, and an increase in food imports. But even if he is correct on this matter, it would be wrong to interpret it as a consequence of a limited resource supply in China. Rather it is due to the redirection of resources from agriculture into industry. Brown rather mischievously confuses the question of whether China *could* feed itself, with a question of whether it *should* feed itself. China may well choose to carry on down the road of industrialisation, even if this means relying on food imports. But this will be an economic decision of the Chinese government, and not a question of the limits imposed by nature.

In reality, China still has plenty of scope to improve its crop productivity by putting into practice the most advanced agricultural know-how. China's rice yields have increased dramatically since the late seventies, but they are still only about 80 per cent of Japan's. Even more ground could be made with wheat. China's yields are about 50 per cent of those in Britain. This is partly due to the climate, but new wheat varieties have been designed for regions with low rainfall.

At present, the gap between Britain and China is not narrowing mainly because there is still poor land maintenance in China, and because the best technology on offer is not being used in China's still-impoverished agricultural sector. Increasing the amount of fertiliser will lead to increases in yields, but if there is bad land management, and inadequate farming techniques, then

the fertiliser will begin to have a negative impact on the soil's productivity. China is at a point where it could either develop its agricultural practice to Western standards, or it could reduce the amount of fertiliser it uses on its crops. Currently, the Chinese government is opting for the latter option, but again, this is an economic decision of the Chinese government, made within the terms of the relative constraints of economic development, rather than any absolute constraints imposed by nature.

So why, given China's relative success in developing its economy, does Brown make the opposite point, that China is faced with starvation? The answer seems to be that China's population, at 1.2 billion, is a fifth of the global total and so makes for some dramatic statistics. As Brown says, 'Multiplying 1.2 billion times anything is a lot.' (*Who Will Feed China?*, p30) But Brown's manipulation of the statistics should not deflect us from the content of his argument. The question that Brown is really posing is not whether China can feed itself, but whether China should be allowed to make the transition from a food-producing nation to an industrial one.

Even Brown has to concede that China, now emerging as a major industrial player, would have little problem paying for its food imports. 'Given its trade surplus with the United States alone, China could buy all US grain exports.' (*Who Will Feed China?*, p103) It would seem to make more sense from China's point of view to buy the necessary amounts of food with the export gains of their industrialisation programme. After all, Japan seems to be doing all right for itself despite having to import three quarters of its food. Living off foreign rice has not stopped Japan becoming an economic superpower.

Yet, for Brown, importing food in this way is not an option for China. 'Who could supply grain on this scale? The answer: no one.' (*State of the World 1995*, p20) He assures us that if the Chinese were to import food on the same scale as the Japanese, it would mean that by the year 2030 the gap between China's food consumption and production would be a deficit 'roughly equal to the world's entire 1994 grain exports of more than 200m tons' (*Who Will Feed China?*, p97).

Brown mischievously confuses the question of whether China *could* feed itself, with a question of whether it *should* feed itself

Which leads us to Brown's second proposition, that there is not enough food in the whole world to feed China's booming population. 'The bottom line is that when China turns to world markets on an ongoing basis, its food scarcity will become everyone's scarcity.' (*State of the World 1995*, p20) It is clear now that Brown's central concern is not over potential shortages in China, as the title of his book might imply, but in Western countries such as Britain. He argues that countries in the developed world have achieved sustainability as far as food production is concerned and they should be followed as an example by the rest of the world. 'The European Union, consisting of some 15 countries and containing 360m people, provides a model for the rest of the world of an environmentally sustainable food/population balance.' (*State of the World 1996*, p12)

At the global level, Brown focuses on the current

stagnation of crop yields. As in China, the massive increase in world grain production over the past 40 years was due to rising crop yields per acre. But, rather than seeing this as an example of human ingenuity, meeting needs as and when they arrive by improving productivity, Brown interprets it as an argument against the prospect of any future developments. He suggests that we were lucky to get away with population growth for 40 years, but the use of fertilisers, irrigation and biotechnology has now been exhausted. He sees little prospect of equivalent increases in crop yields in the future, arguing that we have used up all of our options.

But what basis, other than doomsday pessimism, is there for suggesting that humanity cannot improve on the gains of the past? Simply realising the known potential crop yields worldwide today would vastly increase world crop production, before we even consider the potential for new breakthroughs in agricultural science such as gene technology. It has been estimated that the Third World alone could feed 32 billion people, five times the present global population, if the existing level of Western agricultural techniques were utilised there.

To meet the demands of the world's growing population, it is necessary to invest in new technologies that can increase yields in the most productive countries, and implement existing know-how to raise crop productivity in countries currently under-producing. But Brown sees research into these matters as a low priority. In *Full House*, he proposes a 'Global Food Security Budget', in which he allocates 48 per cent of the budget for conservation and reforestation, 25 per cent for family planning, 20 per cent for educating children and adults, and less than eight per cent for research into agriculture (p215).

The invocation of generations to come is not an expression of a hope for the future, so much as an injunction to lower our aspirations today

In *Who Will Feed China?*, Brown is even more explicit in calling for, and supporting, population control as the most effective way of resolving any food shortages. Fewer people, not more food is his answer. The most illiberal consequences of environmental arguments, which have usually been played down in the past, are aired candidly in *Who Will Feed China?*. Even trying to feed the world's population into the next century would be irresponsible according to Brown. It would destroy the planet. The only option for him is to stop population growth, reduce the numbers of people, and minimise the use of resources.

It is here that Lester Brown and the Worldwatch Institute are a little out of step with contemporary anti-Chinese attitudes, openly supporting the Chinese government's efforts to reduce human numbers with its one-child-per-couple policy. Brown argues that the Chinese leaders have put into practice what all the governments at Rio have only promised, and reminds us that sustainable development is about protecting the rights of future generations. He suggests that: 'Like China, other governments will have to carefully balance the reproductive rights of the current generation with the survival rights of the next generation.' (*State of the World 1996*, p13) But

this invocation of generations to come is not an expression of a hope for the future, so much as an injunction to lower our aspirations today.

The message behind sustainable development, so far, has been that cutting back on our levels of consumption is necessary, but also sufficient, to save the planet. For Lester Brown, however, this is not enough. It will simply give us more time in which to cut population. Sustainability, Brown argues, requires a reduction in human numbers: 'The bottom line is that achieving a humane balance between food and people is now more in the hands of family planners than farmers.' (*Who Will Feed China?*, p141) And invariably this kind of policy will mean that governments will have to ride roughshod over the freedom of their citizens, just as the Western powers will have to dictate the terms to any country unwilling to forego population growth.

This kind of exaggeration of problems serves not to concentrate the mind so much as to paralyse us with fear

Challenging the call for population control today demands a more rational approach to questions of economic growth than can be found in the *State of the World*. The tendency of environmentalist groups like Earthscan is towards an absurd and unsustainable pessimism about the prospects for economic development. This kind of exaggeration of problems serves not to concentrate the mind so much as to paralyse us with fear. Scare stories about world starvation, augmented with visions of the yellow hoards descending on Europe, serve to dramatise some very old-fashioned ideas.

While environmentalists like Lester Brown raise up false problems like world starvation, they also disguise some real problems, like the uneven distribution of economic and political power internationally. In Brown's schema, the failures of world capitalism are represented as the naturally given limits that no man can put aside. Where we ought to be looking at the problem of how man's productive capacities can be liberated from the narrow constraints of a profit-driven system, Brown advocates cutting back production—a policy which all too conveniently parallels the real effects of the capitalist slump.

The political domination of the West over the less developed countries is also whitewashed by these starvation scares. What in practice could only mean the imposition of a Western policy agenda on Third World governments is sanitised and given a rosy glow: it is not that the West wants to keep China down, you understand, only that everyone should be concerned over the problems of overpopulation which threaten us all. In the past, the Panglossian idea that everything was the best in this the best of all possible worlds was a very effective way of undermining opposition to the capitalist order. Today the gloomier the prognosis, the more effective it is considered to be in undermining any hope for a better world.

Dominic Wood is convening the course *The Greening of Society at The Week* conference in July (see page 23).

Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain, Frank Mort, Routledge £13.99 pbk; **Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas**, Mairtin Mac an Ghaill (ed), Open University Press, £12.99 pbk; **A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality**, Gail Hawkes, Open University Press, £11.99 pbk

The merit of Frank Mort's new book is in the detail. He paints engaging vignettes of the stylists, theorists and entrepreneurs who marketed ideas and images of masculinity to the consumers of the 1980s and early nineties. Mort has said that he tried to do a book on politics and society (along the lines of his *Dangerous Sexualities*, 1987) but found himself writing about style. His choice of subject, albeit unconscious, is surely justified: there are grounds for suggesting that the preoccupation with style was one of the defining elements of the eighties. But Mort tends to accept style in its own terms, rather than explaining what prompted its perceived significance. This means that the descriptive passages in *Cultures of Consumption* are more rewarding than its analysis.

Understanding Masculinities is also diminished by the authors' failure to explain the unprecedented interest in their subject. Editor Mairtin Mac an Ghaill introduces his theme with the observation that 'until recently masculinity has tended to be absent from mainstream academic research'. The essays in this collection summarise and comment on the plethora of theories and plurality of masculinities that 'until recently' were noticeable by their absence, but you will have to look elsewhere for an explanation of why so many competing notions should have come into existence almost overnight, and what this might tell us about contemporary society. However, there are some useful insights. Sallie Westwood sheds light on the politics of the Child Support Agency; Jeff Hearn, in the concluding contribution, demonstrates that 'masculinity is often a gloss on complex social processes', and warns against the tautologies which ensue when a causal power is falsely attributed to the descriptive term 'masculinity'.

A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality is more penetrating. Gail Hawkes is quick to unearth the shortcomings of the academics' proposition that masculinity is a 'social construct': 'an understanding of sexuality simply as a fiction leaves unexplored the parameters of the concept and the processes by which these are constituted....To describe some social phenomenon as a "social construction" is to give a name to an end-point...we can say all these things; (to paraphrase Marx) the point, however, is to account for them'. One thing Hawkes fails to account for is her own assumption about the subversive potential of sexuality.

Andrew Calcutt

Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance since the Sixties, George McKay, Verso, £9.95 pbk

Reading George McKay's first book is like talking to an older brother I never had. While I played school sports,

he was at free festivals. While I read about the exploits of anarcho-punks Crass in *Smash Hits!*, McKay was following the band. Only in later life would our interests coincide more actively: opposing the Criminal Justice Bill meant that I was tree-climbing in Cinder Path Woods one week and helping to set up Liverpool Against the Bill the next. McKay's continuing fascination with and participation in such campaigns forms the backdrop of his collection of essays on the historical roots of contemporary lifestyle politics.

Senseless Acts of Beauty is an interesting, though hagiographic account of British counter-culture, shot through with personal anecdotes and a sense of outrage at the conduct of police and politicians over the past three decades. Starting with the Free Fairs and festivals of the sixties and seventies, McKay charts the growth of what he calls Temporary Autonomous Zones, those private and public spaces that fell briefly into the hands of various hippies, where the participants could 'do their own thing' and reject straight society's predominant values. Knowing the terrain, McKay knows all the main instigators, too. He introduces us to people like Penny Rimbaud, seventies festival organiser and the brains behind the Crass collective, who is currently the informal guru for animal rights, pacifism and the rest of the mish-mash of ideas that gives today's crusties the semblance of coherent opinion. Searching for the 'hidden history' of the culture of resistance, though, is the weakness of the book more than its strength.

McKay's enthusiasm sweeps aside a more sober analysis. While showing that road protesters, squatters, the Dongas Tribe and Earth First come from a long line of marginal, often cranky dissenters, he welcomes their contemporary growth as a sophisticated reaction to 'Thatcherism'. Rather than a growth of a new campaigning consciousness, though, the current spasm of these movements represents the way that any two-bit Nimby or new age mystic can acquire status in today's political vacuum. McKay assumes that the cultures of resistance are a challenge to the contemporary malaise, but they are instead a symptom of it. The isolation of the counter-culture from broader social trends effectively closes down any discussion of wider political issues.

The isolation of the counter-culture is clearest in relation to the Criminal Justice Act—treated here as a mean-spirited attempt to 'criminalise diversity' and clamp down on alternative lifestyles. What McKay cannot see is the wider insecurities that the government tried to mobilise and which inform many of New Labour's authoritarian policies. McKay has little sense of the problems faced by working class people, in keeping with his counter-culture stance. In that world the concerns of 'materialist breadheads' are scorned and city-dwellers who 'lunch out' on a part-time traveller lifestyle are almost as great a target for abuse as the ultimate bogeyman, the construction worker.

This collection celebrates the marginality of dropping out. It echoes the millenarian predictions of ecological disaster and human extinction made by its sect-like subjects. Worse still it endorses the small is beautiful, little Englander outlook that pervades Britain's 'beat-up buses, beleaguered squats and treetop barricades'.

Graham Barnfield

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