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CAPITALISM'**

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September 1996 No93



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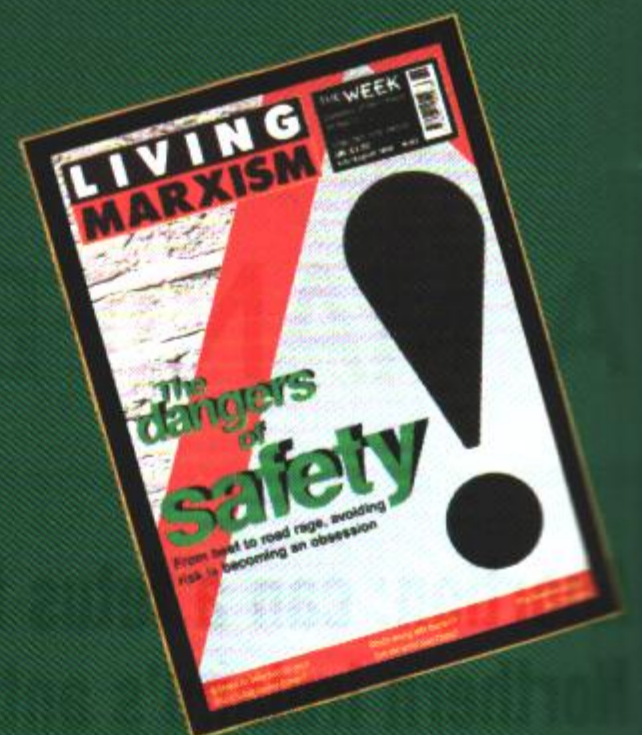
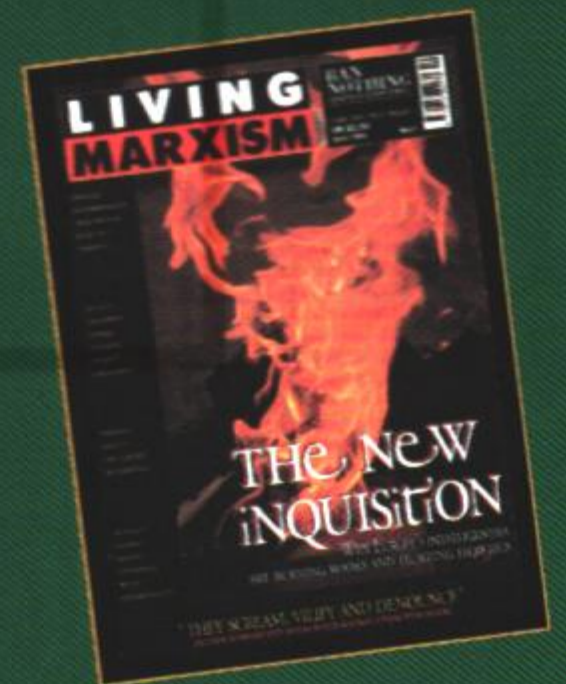
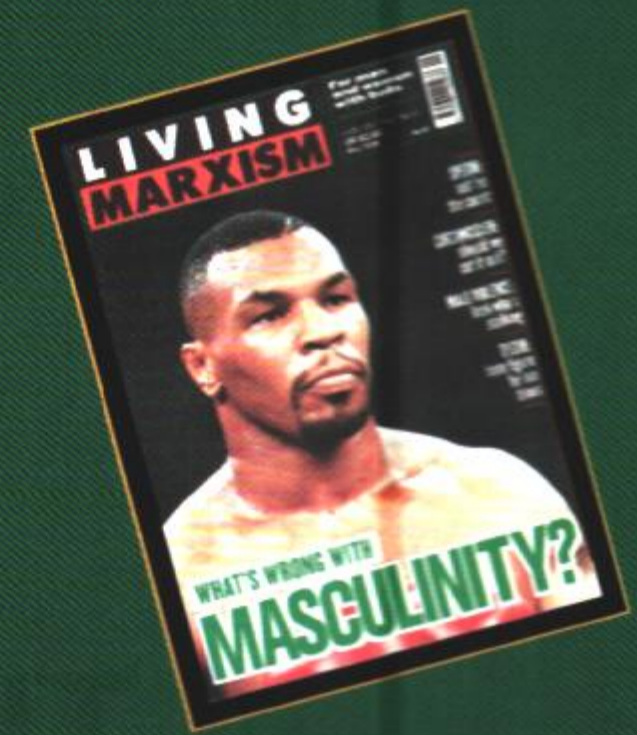
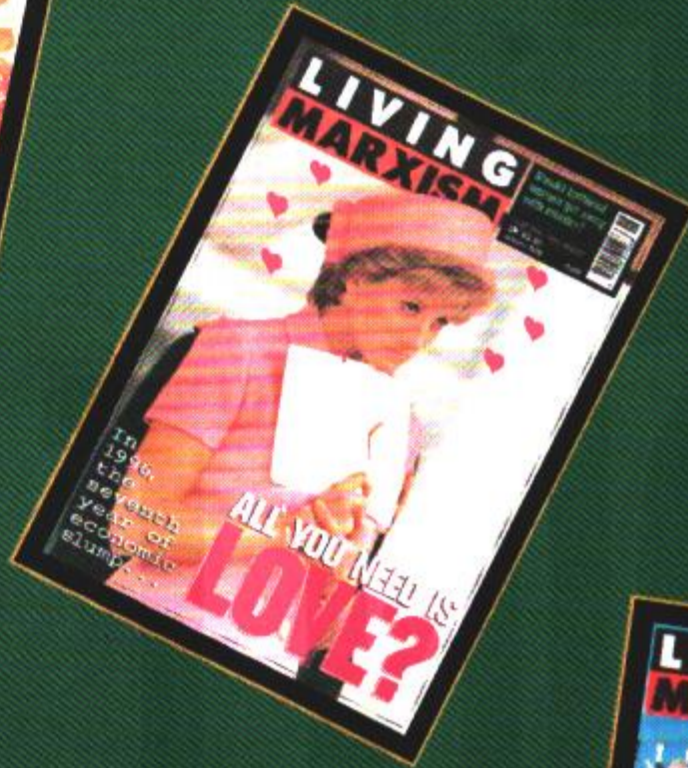
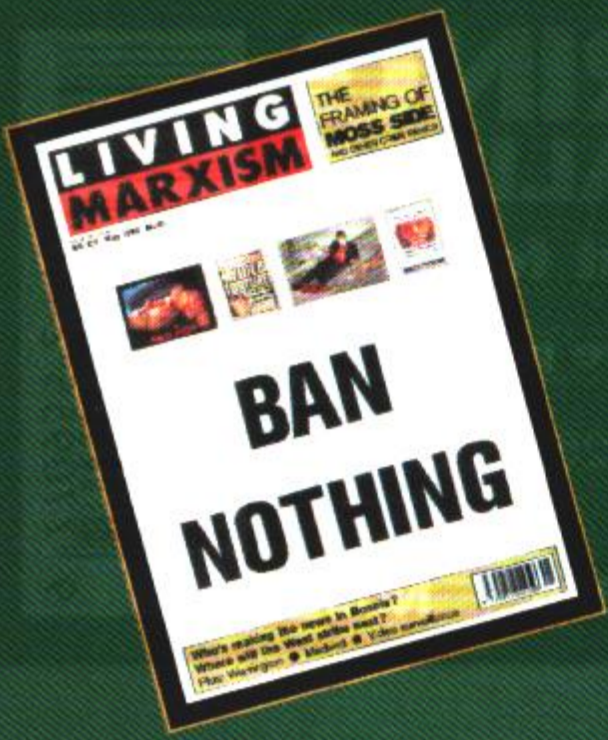
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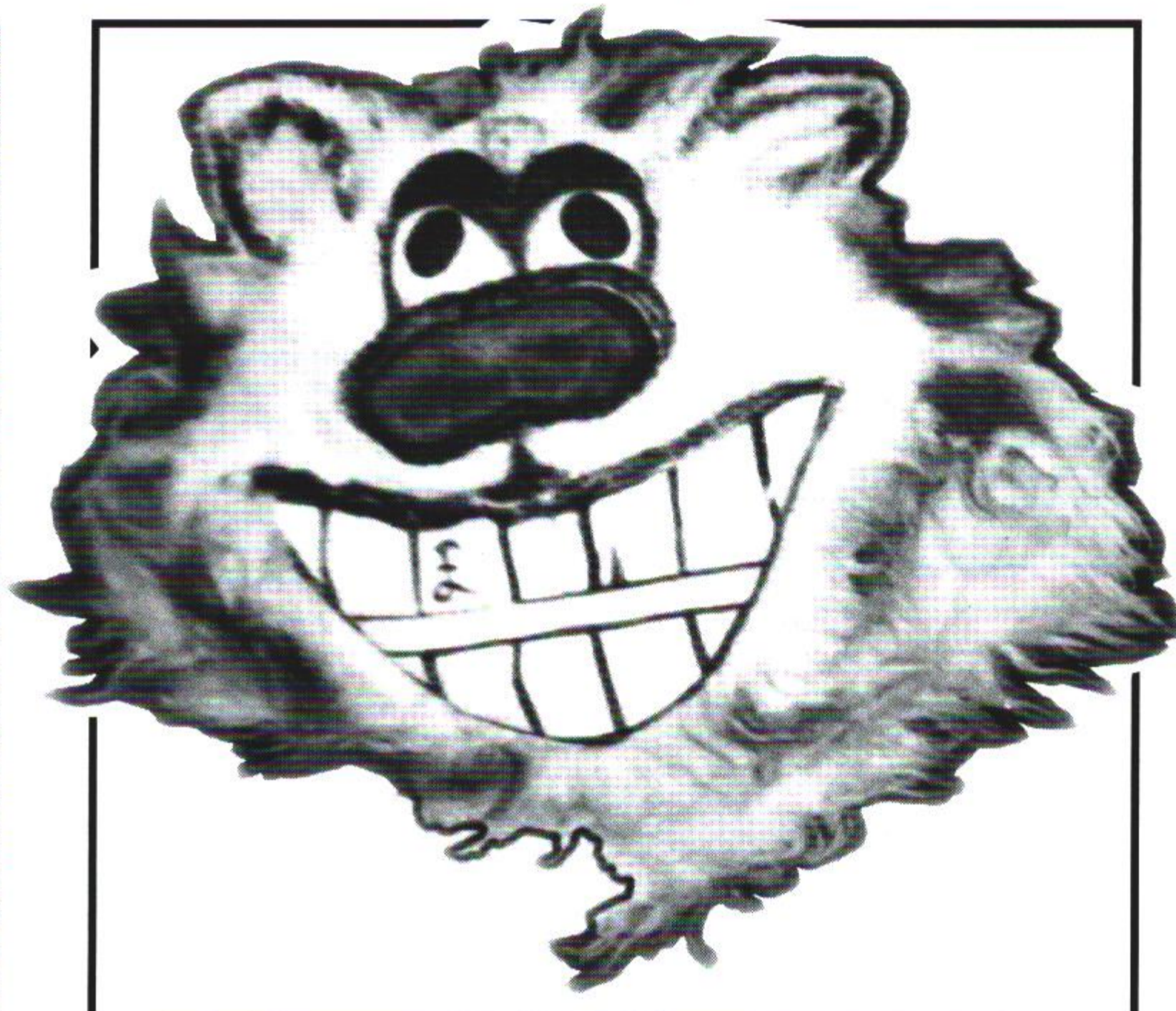
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## CARING CAPITALISM

centre pages

In the eighties they told us that 'Greed is good'. But in the nineties, World Bank officials, Wall Street consultants and other pillars of the establishment seem to have swallowed an old left-wing phrase book, as they join in criticising inequality and condemning corporate 'fat cats'.

Phil Murphy investigates the rise of the new responsible, caring capitalism, and asks what's in it for them—and for the rest of us.

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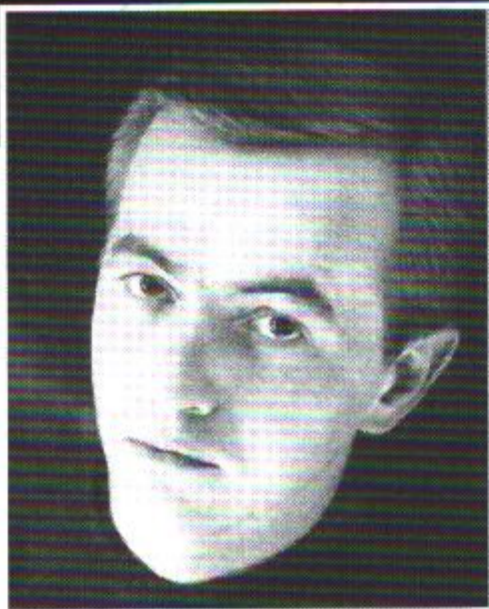
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**Mick Hume**

# A manifesto

**T**he *Living Marxism* manifesto, *The Point Is to Change It*, was unveiled at The Week conference in London at the end of July. In writing the book, we had to tear up many of the longstanding assumptions of left-wing politics and look at things afresh. That was a struggle; but at the end of it, we have produced what we believe is above all a manifesto for our times.

How do you elaborate a manifesto that is appropriate for today? The answer is far from self-evident. The world has changed almost beyond recognition over the past few years of political and economic uncertainty, and the traditional manifestos of left and right alike are as much use as yesterday's newspapers. Neither the free market bluster of 'popular capitalism', nor the state-centred dogma of welfare socialism has any relevance to the society of the 1990s. The hard question is: what should replace them?

Sensing that the politics of the past half century are exhausted, but fearful of bold experiments, many have tried to cope with the new developments by seeking refuge further back in the ideas of the past. Their emphasis has been on saving, returning to, or recycling bits of older political traditions. The results have tended to prove only that there is, as Rupert Murdoch's ad men would say, no turning back.

As Phil Murphy points out this month in his feature on the new 'caring capitalism', some right-wing ideologists have responded to the loss of faith in eighties-style free enterprise by recycling the eighteenth-century philosopher Adam Smith. The founding father of cold-blooded free market thinking has been magically reincarnated as a moralist with a social conscience.

Others have gone back further still in their search for something to believe in, and have tried to breathe life into primitive, pre-capitalist ideas. The new worship of 'nature' in our environmentally minded age, and the accompanying mistrust of anything

man-made, reflects this retreat into ancient mysticism.

The old left likes to pretend that nothing really changes about capitalist society, equating past with present by pointing out that some people are still unemployed or poor today just as they always were. When the left tries to come up with 'new' ideas, they look like relics from the Stone Age of socialist thought. The fashion is for repackaging notions of Utopian or 'ethical' socialism, which Karl Marx and Frederick Engels ridiculed as outdated more than a century ago, or for seeking contemporary relevance in the work of socialist monuments like William Morris.

Everybody, it seems, is trying to come to terms with the present by filtering it through the values of the past. But all that they achieve by knocking the dust off old ideas is to cloud their vision. One question which those involved with *Living Marxism* have been grappling with over the past two or three years is this: how can we engage with the new trends that count in society, without slipping back into the comfortable but ill-fitting ideologies of the past?

The consensus we have arrived at is that, if we are to make revolutionary ideas relevant to the present, we cannot begin from what was said by somebody years ago, whether it be Adam Smith, Adam and Eve or even Karl Marx. Instead, we need to shake things up and challenge the complacent assumptions of our backward-looking age.

Our starting point has to be understanding society as it exists now: identifying which problems prey on people's minds today, and sorting those issues which help to clarify the situation from those which spread further confusion. Our manifesto, *The Point Is to Change It*, is a product of that deliberation.

Because it is designed to engage with what's important today, much of *The Point*

*Is to Change It* bears little resemblance to a manifesto from the familiar radical tradition. It is not a book of complaints about the problems of exploitation, unemployment and poverty created by capitalism. Don't worry, we have not changed sides on these issues. We are as fiercely opposed as Marxists have always been to the ways in which people's lives are degraded by a society that subordinates everything to the pursuit of profit. However, over the past couple of years we have come to understand that there are new barriers which need to be overcome before we can begin to convince people to act against the usual ills of capitalism.

The political climate which confronts us today is unique. There is now a general tendency to inflate and even invent problems which are supposed to beset people, whether the threat is said to come from food, disease or violent crime. Such a mood of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism is not unknown, and many commentators have drawn comparisons with the doom and gloom of the 1890s. But there is a second factor at work which does make the situation entirely new.

The flipside of the current problem-mongering is the constant diminishing of the potential for people to do anything about it. There is now a widespread assumption that we are more or less incapable of changing things for the better, an assumption that 'There is no alternative'.

The combination of these two factors is creating a paralysing atmosphere in society. We are encouraged to retrench, avoid risks, and live our lives according to the 'precautionary principle', which dictates that you should never do anything unless you can be absolutely sure of the outcome beforehand. The pervasive sense of uncertainty and caution is inevitably breeding a deeply conservative outlook across a society which often looks like little more than a collection of vulnerable individuals. So long as that attitude holds so many in

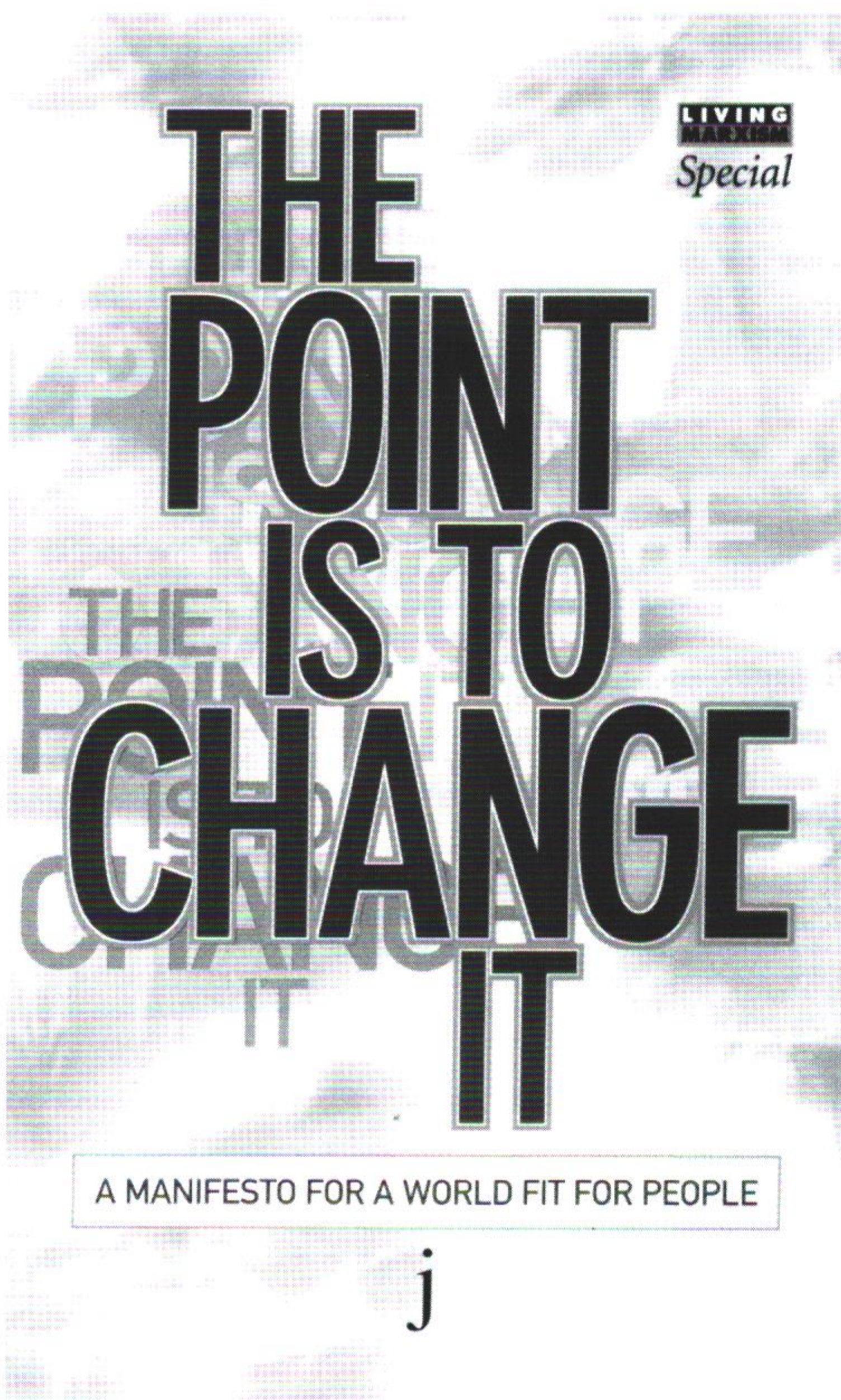
# for our times

thrall, there can be no prospect of tackling social problems old or new.

This is the difficulty we face today. And there are no precedents to guide our response to the current impasse. We have to work it out for ourselves. In attempting to do that at *Living Marxism*, we have not only found that the left-wing ideas and arguments of the past miss the point. They make matters worse.

For example, in the disillusioned and downbeat spirit of our times, nobody seems to have a good word to say about the condition of capitalist society. That might conventionally be thought of as a boon for Marxists, an attitude which we should encourage and applaud. But things are different today. All of the complaints and the moans are no threat to the status quo, because they are underpinned by the loss of faith in the ability of people to act to improve matters. The acceptance that there are new limits to what we can achieve turns disillusionment with capitalist society into passive cynicism and fatalism. If our manifesto was simply to echo the popular complaints about capitalism today, it could only reinforce such an attitude of resignation. And who would benefit from that?

It is the same story with another left-wing totem, bemoaning the fate of society's victims and underdogs. Today everybody wants to champion the cause of the victim —of abuse, or homelessness, or crime, or some new syndrome. But the way in which this language of old radicals has caught on is nothing to celebrate. Focusing on the plight of the underdog today does not encourage people to struggle for liberation. Instead, in the current atmosphere, it only ►



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## Editorial continued

◀ endorses the notion that we are all victims, weak and incapable of coping with life. Far from sparking resistance to the powers that be, it leads to demands for them to provide us with more protection and supervision from risks to personal health and safety. Without any sense of the ability of people to determine their own destinies, what begins as a radical-sounding defence of society's victims will end up as a call for more authoritarian regulation.

The way in which the meaning of issues has been turned around in recent times presents a new challenge for a manifesto like *The Point Is to Change It*. It is no longer enough simply to criticise the shortcomings of capitalism. There is a more pressing need to criticise the cynical and fatalistic critics, to take on the problem-mongers and prophets of doom, and make a positive case for bold action in pursuit of human emancipation.

The real problem today is that people are too afraid even to utilise the potential of what we already have, never mind to go beyond. That is why *The Point Is to Change It* makes a determined defence of the gains of humanity to date—democracy, science, reason—against the new armies of critics. And it is why our manifesto insists that much more progress is possible, if only we could raise our sights to see a new horizon.

Those of us who still believe that it is possible to change the world and improve the human condition have very different tasks today than we might have had in the past. We have to counter the various warnings of Armageddon and insist that the end of the world is not nigh. And we have to turn the current discussion of the problems of society on its head. The problem is not that people are unfit to live in the world, so that they need more protection, more restraints and regulations. The problem is that the world is not fit for people, and we need to shape it more decisively to our will.

'Our reply to all of the pleas for caution and restraint is that until now humanity has only learned to crawl', concludes the *Living Marxism* manifesto for a world fit for people: 'Our problem is not that we are too ambitious, but that we continually hesitate about experimenting with new solutions. We need a revolution in outlook, so that we can continue to advance and give new scope to human creativity.' Such a revolution in outlook points the way towards a revolution in the present, rather than the past. ●

## Does teacher know best?

In their reply to Claire Fox's article 'Teachers give the wrong answer' Natalie Boyd and Stuart Derbyshire (letters, July/August) seem to think that *Living Marxism* should not be allowed to talk back to teacher. But I stopped thinking that whatever teacher said was right some time ago. 'Question everything' means question whether teachers are right to go on strike against 'disruptive pupils', too. Answer: no.

The furore over so-called disruptive pupils is a reflection of the tendency to exaggerate problems, not of cuts in education. When adults get intimidated by children *Living Marxism* is right to tell them to pull themselves together.

**Murray MacDonald** *Fife*

Natalie Boyd and Stuart Derbyshire misunderstand the focus on disruptive pupils when they assume that New Labour, and presumably the teachers' unions, are trying to 'out-Tory' the Tories. In the North-East, New Labour is innovating divisive campaigns and policies, forcing the Tories to keep up with the extent of official intrusion into daily life. Nigel de Gruchy of the NAS/UWT stood with Hebburn Comprehensive school pickets to keep a 12-year old out of school. At the same time, Durham education officers scoured the streets with Northumbria police to round up truants with a view to prosecuting the parents. Meanwhile a family in Tony Blair's Sedgefield constituency face eviction unless they control their teenage son after school hours.

It is not new for children to test their teachers and parents, irrespective of the resources at their disposal. The new aspect is the New Labour focus on children's misbehaviour. The Tories look on enviously as New Labour ideas maintain parents and teachers in the permanent stand-off over their children which Claire Fox identified.

**Ian Adams** *Newcastle*

I'm horrified by Claire Fox's article. In France, we are now facing the same problems as English teachers. In the Paris suburbs and other big cities, we are fighting against violence and drugs. One of my colleagues, an Arabic language teacher, was smashed with a baseball bat last week. He's in a coma. I suppose that Fox will blame him. In primary schools teachers are scared to death. When a pupil falls in the playground, the infuriated parents hurry in and beat them. Last year, a young teacher was accused of having strangled a boy. Cops came to school, then they summoned the father and it appeared that it was he who strangled his son. But the harm was done. The young teacher had to go into

a mental clinic. I suppose that Fox would say this man was not able to be a teacher. A true Marxist has to stand with teachers not against them.

**Marie Dufour** *Paris*

Claire Fox has no idea of the importance of the threatened strikes/real stoppages of work on the rest of the teaching unions. What we need is for a group of workers to say: No, we ain't doing it! The fact that the NASUWT is the major union to do that has missed the writer of this nasty, knocking, tabloid-style article.

Teachers in general want nothing to do with strikes that will bring them grief, loss of earnings, poor press and nothing but shit! The fact that I may be prepared to give the lead, and strike on my own (as I have done in sympathy with the NASUWT coming out) is neither here nor there. The important factor is the level of involvement, which is still at an all-time low in all the teaching unions in the London and South-East area. It's not just the responsibility of the leadership to lead (as the NASUWT is doing!). Members also have some responsibility to take the lead. The fact is that the members in Nottingham (Glaisdale school) did actually do that. You may not like the issue! The fact is, they said to the whole of the country and the Tories anti-union laws: We're going out. Stuff you! I support that, as do many of the teacher union militants.

**Rodney Kay-Kreizman** *Croydon*

## The Brand affair

Himadri Chatterjee (letters, July/August) agrees that Chris Brand's views should not be suppressed but feels my article ('Why ban racist Brand?', June) should have taken account of the issue of academic standards.

However, the issue here is not academic standards. John Wiley & Sons did not withdraw *The g-Factor* because they thought it was not good enough for publication. The blurb on the back of the book claims that 'Brand has provided a concise, accessible and critical review'. The withdrawal of the book had nothing to do with its scientific merits, or lack of them, but everything to do with the stir Brand caused by telling the *Independent on Sunday* he was a 'scientific racist'.

Similarly, the calls to have Brand removed from his teaching post had nothing to do with any evidence of biased marking, but everything to do with the demands to curb controversial ideas, and the claims that some students find him intimidating. We cannot dodge the question of academic freedom and start talking about the lack of scientific merit in Brand's ideas, nor throw in the question of Brand's ability to mark

students' work objectively when the real debate is about whether students can cope with lecturers with strong views.

**Helene Guldberg** *Manchester*

I find it hard to understand how *Living Marxism* can write articles supporting negative freedoms such as freedom of expression ('They scream, vilify and denounce', and 'Why ban racist Brand?', June). Is it not more appropriate to write about how contemporary society can be revolutionised so that individuals are in community with each other? Because if you are writing in defence of people expressing private views, you are indirectly supporting capitalism. *Living Marxism* states that it stands for human emancipation in an age of lowered expectations. I am beginning to think that *Living Marxism* is lowering its own expectations of a revolution occurring if it feels the need to print these articles.

**Jonathan Gulson** *Watford*

### **Breast is best**

So Ann Bradley ('Is breast for baby best for you?', July/August) prefers the creativity of *even* writing an article to the bovine creativity of assisting another human being's growth. The rest of us should be so privileged! On a sliding scale, how would she rate other shit jobs that women indulge themselves in as an alternative to breast-feeding? For the majority of women I am prepared to bet that breast-feeding wins hands down. So please, Ann Bradley, do not use your own middle class experience to justify your prejudices against Earth-mother types and implicitly all other women who would like to have the privilege of spending a few short months nurturing their child without feeling guilty about not nurturing their bank balances.

**Mary Wild** *Whitstable, Kent*

### **Foul play**

I would like to draw attention to the twisted reporting of events in Trafalgar Square after the England-Germany game. The reality was a party atmosphere rather than one of aggravation. That is, until the police decided it was going home time. Two or three bottles were thrown at them as they moved in. Does this give them justification for baton-charging several thousand

people and trampling on those who fell over?

Some escaped down Northumberland Avenue, with acts of vandalism being committed along the way. As retribution for not catching the culprits, 300-400 people in the square were rounded up, held for two hours without charge, searched and photographed. The press by this stage were nowhere to be seen, being in their offices concocting their one-sided stories.

You may have heard this tale before, but this does not reduce the need for telling it. Real examples are all the more important today as the lack of pressure for accountability can mean a large divergence between the rule book and what actually happens.

**John Ritchie** *Essex*

### **Ethics of animal research**

David Shapiro (letters, July/August) of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics objects to my submission that its report on the ethics of animal-to-human transplants makes dangerous concessions to the animal rights lobby ('Planet of the apes?', June). But his retreat into the council's cautious language cannot disguise the central message of its report.

Shapiro argues that the report nowhere endorses a belief in animal 'rights', but merely reviews a range of arguments about the use of animals in medical procedures. Let us be clear, while the Nuffield report recommends pig organ transplantation into humans, it rejects the use of primates as organ donors, other than in a few exceptional circumstances. It accepts the use of only 'very small numbers' of primates as recipients of organs from non-primates in research to develop xenotransplantation. According to the report, this, 'while undesirable', can be justified because of the potential benefits of the research. But why should this be 'undesirable'?

The report argues that the 'high degree of evolutionary relatedness between human beings and primates both suggests that xenotransplantation of primate organs and tissue might be successful and also raises questions about whether it is ethical to use primates in ways that it is not considered acceptable to use human beings'. That statement is, to say the least, equivocal about the pre-eminence of human interests in vivisection involving primates. At a time when human uniqueness is everywhere disputed, Nuffield's ambivalence

can only serve to strengthen the arguments of the animal rights brigade.

**Jennifer Cunningham** *Glasgow*

Dr Jennifer Cunningham's argument that 'the divide that matters is between humanity and the animal kingdom as a whole', lays her open to the charge of speciesism. On a similar moral level to the irrational claims of racists and sexists, the speciesist claims that membership of an arbitrary club entitles humans to disregard the interests of the excluded.

The animal world exists as a continuum of mental capacity from the humblest amoeba, through the insects and mammals up to primates, with humans at the very top. Each is capable of a larger degree of awareness and suffering than the one immediately below. Surely when choosing an animal for our own use, we should minimise the amount of animal suffering by descending as far down the hierarchy as is practical. In fact to use baboons when pigs are available is not only unethical but at odds with current practice. Since becoming a vegetarian, the one taste that I really miss is that of a bacon sandwich. I wonder if Dr Cunningham could tell me what a baboon burger tastes like?

**Rob Crilly** *Nottingham University*

### **Hello! and goodbye**

Recent readers letters have been right in noting the emergence of articles concerning such diverse subjects as breast-feeding, peanuts, parenting, circumcision, BSE, etc. Can I take this opportunity to ask when you will be printing a problem page, Top 10 Tips, knitting patterns, fashion supplement, and a trendy new diet followed by the usual recipe for chocolate cake? Yours facetiously,

**M Proops**

PS I'm switching to *Hello!* cos it's cheaper and more political.

### **Unreal reply**

I was going to reply to the letter from Stefan Davids (July/August) suggesting that there is no such thing as 'objective reality'. But I could not decide whether his letter was just a figment of my imagination, so I decided not to bother.

**Trevor Allen** *Coventry*

## **We welcome readers' views and criticisms**

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

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# There is no such thing as 'fetal pain'

Pain specialist Dr Stuart Derbyshire argues that the misguided discussion of fetal pain will have serious negative consequences for the treatment of pregnant women and for scientific practice

**In June** a group of anti-abortion parliamentarians published a tract asserting that fetuses experience pain from the tenth week of gestation. Such a debate seems a strange preoccupation for politicians who cannot be expected to know one end of a nerve cell from another, but it has since been the subject of questions to ministers and parliamentary debates. The issue will be re-raised when MPs and peers return from their summer recess and a self-appointed 'pro-life' committee of inquiry reports.

The agenda of those who have raised the issue of fetal pain is clear. If they can establish that fetuses feel pain it is bound to generate public unease about abortion procedures. Already the anti-abortion lobby is talking in terms of 'the pre-born' writhing in agony as they are ripped limb from limb—not a pretty thought, however pro-choice you might be.

The discussion also helps to encourage the assumption that there are no qualitative differences between fetuses and babies. It fosters the notion that fetuses are just 'pre-born' babies with the same capacities—and so are worthy of the same care and treatment. The consequence of this would be to reduce the status of the woman to that of a 'walking womb', with no right to decide what happens to her pregnancy. But then her rights tend routinely to be ignored as all eyes focus on the fetus.

It is not surprising that the anti-abortion lobby has raised this issue. But it is surprising that its views have struck a chord with the medical establishment and with 'pro-choice campaigners'. Everybody seems to agree that this is a 'difficult' issue which needs careful consideration.

Even the most strongly pro-choice voices appear to concede that fetal pain experiences might be possible after 26 weeks of pregnancy. More equivocal voices suggest that the pro-choice argument should evade the issue by arguing for easier access to abortion before 10 weeks.

What needs to be said is simply this. Fetuses do not and cannot feel pain—not at 10 weeks, 26 weeks or 30 weeks—because pain-experience depends on consciousness and fetuses are not conscious.

The question of fetal pain became an issue for some of the medical profession in the mid-1980s, as a consequence of research which indicated that a fetus is capable of a behavioural response to sensory stimulation. Advances in fetal surgery, which now include placing valves into the heart and injecting red blood cells into the liver to prevent anaemia, meant that neonatal surgeons and experts in embryology were becoming increasingly concerned about the potential consequences of invasive practice, including the concern that the fetus may feel pain. This concern was given a major boost by research from Dr Anand, then a research fellow at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, which demonstrated that neonates—new-born babies—undergoing surgery had a much improved clinical outcome if they received anaesthetics of a kind usually reserved for controlling pain during adult surgery.

It may come as a shock to hear that, until very recently, it was not considered necessary to use anaesthesia with new-born babies. But the reasons are entirely rational. The use of anaesthetic is not without risk. Even in adults there

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

## TABOOS



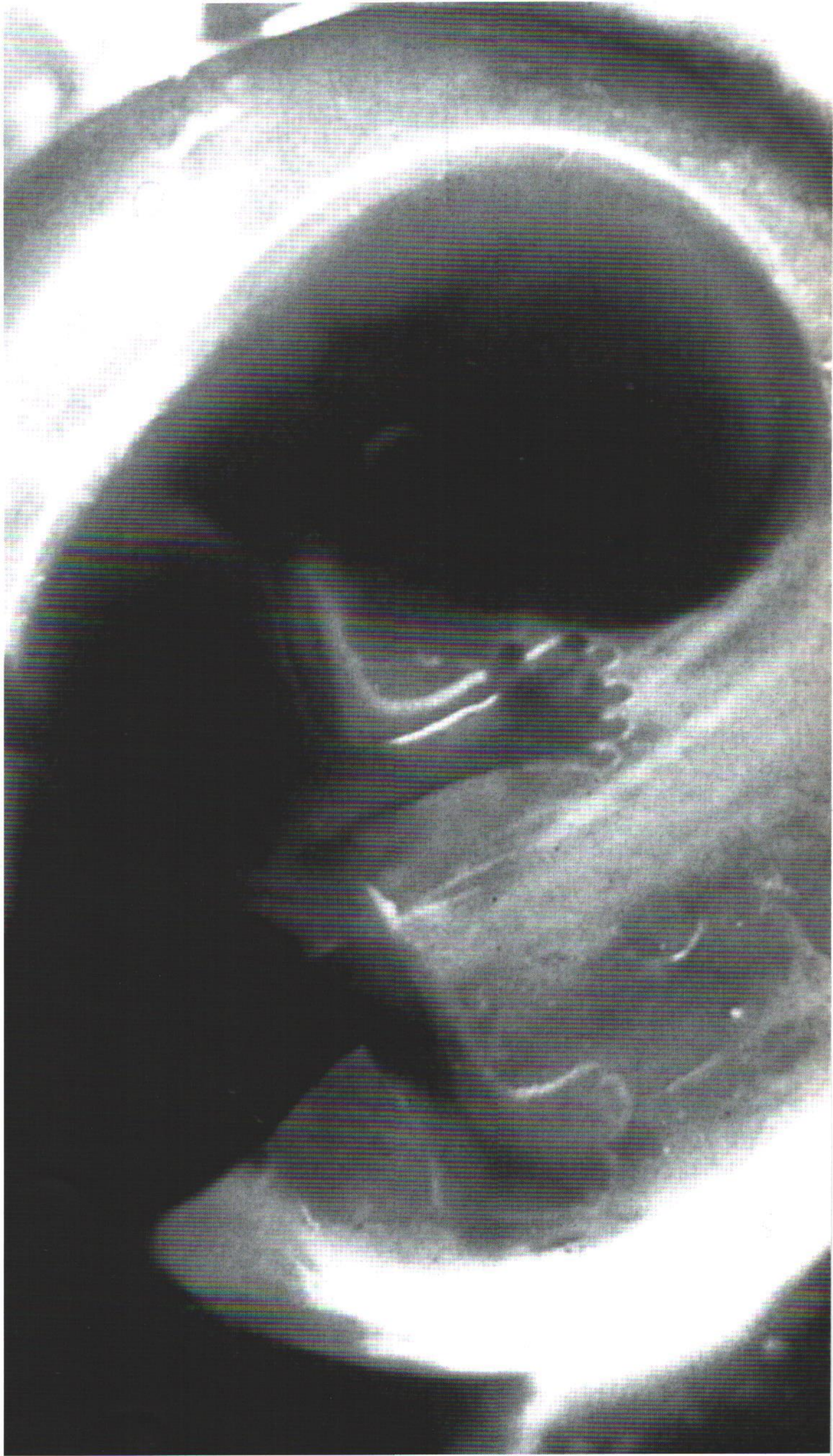
is a small risk of respiratory depression which can be fatal; for a new-born baby with underdeveloped lungs this risk is heightened, becoming greater if the baby is premature. In addition, it was widely assumed that the new born lacks the biological sophistication necessary for pain-experience. Anand's work overturned these assumptions.

The work of Anand is complemented by that of Professor Maria Fitzgerald from the Department of Anatomy at University College London. For over a decade, Fitzgerald has investigated the nervous system of the rat fetus and the human fetus, with special regard to the developmental neurobiology of pain. She concludes that several basic mechanisms must be connected up in the human being in order for pain to be experienced. The peripheral nerve fibres (that is, the nerves in your outer skin and inner organs) have to be connected to your spinal cord, which in turn needs to be connected to your brain. There are then several circuits within the brain which have to be operational and connected before the biological pain system is operational. According to Fitzgerald's studies, the final link in the pain system (between a cluster of grey nuclei in the brain stem, the thalamus, and the outer rim of the brain, the cortex) is completed at approximately 26 weeks' gestation.

The suggestion that the biological system for pain is operational after 26 weeks is bolstered by studies of invasive procedures. Touching the fetus prior to 26 weeks often results in a generalised response. Repeated skin stimulation, for example, results in hyper-excitability and a generalised movement of all limbs of the body. Such behaviours are characteristic of a purely reflex response. Observations of the fetus after 26 weeks, however, indicate localised movement and avoidance responses to invasive needling. Behavioural studies with very premature babies have demonstrated that the response to noxious stimulation becomes more focused and organised, and can be better discriminated from other distress responses after 26 weeks.

**It is now** also clear that the fetus of post-26 weeks' gestation launches a stress response to invasive needling, entirely analogous to the response shown by Anand in new-born babies. In 1994 a team at Queen Charlotte's Hospital in London successfully demonstrated that intrauterine needling to obtain a blood sample from fetuses of 20-34 weeks' gestation resulted in a hormonal stress response, as indicated by increased cortisol and  $\beta$ -endorphin concentrations in fetal plasma.

As a consequence of this research, the previous objections to the use of anaesthetics in the new born and the fetus, on the grounds of danger ►



and minimal biological development, are now untenable. After 26 weeks, the human fetus has the necessary biological apparatus for pain, shows a localised behavioural response to stimulation, and launches a hormonal stress response to needling. But is this sufficient evidence to conclude that the fetus can experience pain?



## Whether the fetus feels pain hinges on the question of its conscious development not of its biological development

Whether or not the fetus feels what we understand as pain hinges not on its biological development, but on its conscious development. Unless it can be reasonably demonstrated that the fetus has a conscious appreciation of pain after 26 weeks' gestation, then its responses to noxious stimulation are still essentially reflex responses, exactly as those prior to 26 weeks. This is appreciated in varying degrees by the experts.

Xenophon Giannakouloupolos and his colleagues at Queen Charlotte's admitted that 'a hormonal response cannot be equated with the perception of pain'. In a paper written for the Department of Health, Fitzgerald even went so far as to say that 'true pain-experience [develops] postnatally along with memory, anxiety and other cognitive brain functions' ('Fetal pain: an update of current scientific knowledge', May 1995). In other words, to claim that a fetus feels pain makes as little sense as suggesting that it has kept a mental diary of its time in the womb.

**As Fitzgerald has** pointed out, pain-experience is now widely seen as a consequence of an amalgam of cognition, sensation and affective processes, described under the rubric of the 'biopsychosocial' model. Pain has been understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon for some time, and this understanding is reflected in the current International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) definition of pain as 'an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage' (H Merskey, 'The definition of pain', *European Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol6, 1991).

If this 'multi-dimensionality' is the basis of conscious pain-experience, it makes no sense to attribute this experience to the neonate or fetus which is naive as to all the cognitive, affective

and evaluative experiences necessary for pain-awareness. This is accepted in the current IASP definition of pain, which is further extended to state that 'pain is always subjective, each individual learns the application of the word through experiences related to injury in early life'. Pain does not somehow spring forth 'from the depths of the person's mind' prior to any experience. That would be an essentially metaphysical view of pain, which logically suggests that all the higher mental functions should be present at, or before, birth.

**In other words,** the experience of pain is a consequence of developmental processes through which the fetus and new-born baby have yet to pass. According to one developmental model of pain, stimulus information is eventually organised and elaborated in the central nervous system with respect to three hierarchical mechanisms. The first two mechanisms in the hierarchy are perceptual-motor processing followed by schematic processing. Both these mechanisms are considered *pre-conscious*.

Perceptual-motor processing involves the activation of innate motor reactions to stimulation. Schematic processing involves the automatic encoding in memory of these stimuli and associated reactions to produce a categorical structure representing the general informational and sensory aspects of aversive stimuli. In addition, it is suggested that a set of *conscious* abstract rules about emotional episodes and associated voluntary responses arise only over time, as a consequence of self-observation and conscious efforts to cope with aversive situations.

While far from ideal, this model does outline how the pressure of interacting with others gradually forces the subordination of our instinctive, unconscious biology to our developing conscious will. The model shifts us away from a static interpretation of pain towards one in which the reflexive responses to stimulation are developed, and subordinated, according to the dynamics of developing awareness. Pain can then logically be understood as a conscious, developed response which a fetus could never be capable of experiencing.

**The failure of** the medical and scientific community to tackle the issue has allowed the idea that a fetus can feel pain to gain momentum, strengthening the anti-abortionists' hand. The emotive notion of fetal pain has gone largely unchallenged in the medical journals, the newspapers and in the House of Commons. Last year, anti-abortion crusader David Alton MP introduced an adjournment debate in which he insisted that information on fetal pain

should be issued to women considering abortion (*Hansard*, 136, 1995). This debate was followed by an early day motion calling on the Department of Health to disseminate information 'to medical staff and mothers' and to 'come forward with proposals for avoiding pain in pre-term surgery and abortion' (*Hansard*, 140, 1995).

It has also been proposed that the Abortion Act and the Criminal Justice Act be amended to make it a crime to inflict pain on the fetus. The Rawlinson committee (a noted anti-choice organisation set up in 1993 to examine the implications of the 1967 Abortion Act) was recently resurrected to examine the question of fetal pain. Although, in the interests of balance, I was invited to give evidence to the committee, it seems likely that it will eventually come out in support of the existence of 'fetal pain' and recommend further restrictions on access to abortion.

The attempt to undermine public confidence in the provision of abortion is only one negative consequence of the misguided discussion around fetal pain. The discussion is also encouraging researchers to take an anti-scientific stance, which denies the possibility of answering the question 'do fetuses feel pain?' and undermines the current, well-supported model of pain.

**The emotional hype** around fetal pain is also likely to have a detrimental impact upon medical research and practice beyond the cry for restricting abortion. Earlier this year, the *Daily Express* ran a headline suggesting that babies may feel pain during childbirth. This view was based on the research from Queen Charlotte's Hospital and was endorsed by one of its principal researchers. It seems unlikely, however, that a process which the overwhelming majority of people has passed through—being born—is having long-term detrimental consequences, and there is some evidence to suggest that the increased hormonal release around birth is important in stimulating growth and regulating development. Such work is likely to be overlooked if fetal pain becomes an accepted view. Acceptance of fetal pain will mean that anaesthetic practice may be introduced when there is no clear rationale for its use and where it is likely to be at least uncomfortable, if not dangerous, for the mother-to-be. How long will it be before someone calls for an increase in Caesarian sections to avoid fetal/neonatal 'pain'?

Good clinical research into the effects of anaesthesia on the fetus and the new-born baby is clearly required. But misguided sentimentality about the possibility of fetal pain can only have negative consequences—including undermining the very basis of the clinical research itself.



# What about the women?

**T**here are times when you open the papers and you think the world has gone mad. This summer we saw headlines reporting the ethical concern about the destruction of 'abandoned' frozen embryos—produced during infertility treatment, stored for future use and then never claimed by the people who produced them. Couples came forward to 'adopt' them rather than see them perish. Vigils were held outside infertility clinics and Christian fundamentalists gathered at Westminster Cathedral to pray for the souls of these four to six-cell blastocysts, while Catholic leaders demanded that priests be present with the embryos at the time of the destruction.

No sooner was this particular medieval-style morality play over than the saga of selective reduction slid into its place. This was even more bizarre, as selective reduction—the procedure by which the lives of one or more fetuses in a multiple pregnancy are terminated, leaving one alive—has been used since the late 1970s, and while it isn't common, the case of the twin fetuses that caught the media's attention certainly was not unique.

Both of these dramas were staged against the background of a broader discussion about whether the fetus feels pain during abortion—an issue which is set to dominate discussions on reproductive medical ethics for the coming year.

The discussions in themselves betray the extent to which the agenda in reproductive healthcare has been redrafted. When abortion was legalised in the late 1960s, the discussion focused on the benefit of law reform to women and to doctors.

Probably the single most influential factor in swaying public opinion on the issue was the thalidomide tragedy, when hundreds of severely deformed babies were born to women who had taken the drug Distaval during pregnancy. The idea of a woman being forced to carry a pregnancy to term knowing that her child would be severely disabled was quite rightly thought abhorrent. There was next to no concern about the rights of the fetus—and indeed such a discussion would have seemed bizarre. Abortions were seen as being for the benefit of women's health and well-being. It was the woman who was the focus of concern.

The woman was still at the centre of the picture when infertility treatment was first developed in the late 1970s. *In-vitro* fertilisation was a means to resolve a couple's infertility. When Louise Brown, the first test-tube baby, was born in 1978 nobody wept any tears for the embryos that had perished along the way.

Today there is a bizarre equivalence drawn between woman and

fetus—as if they are two human beings equally worthy of consideration. Medical professionals involved in the treatment of pregnant women talk of having two patients. Professor Lord Robert Winston has emerged as one of the more eloquent defenders of legal abortion, but when he was quizzed on Radio 4's *Moral Maze* about whether surgeons operating on the fetus in the womb had one or two patients, he stressed that the fetus was a patient. Presumably he has not thought through the logic of his position.

If the fetus at 23 weeks can be a patient in its own right, that implies a doctor has a duty of care to it—and as a doctor's duty of care usually precludes killing, where does this leave late abortion? If as Professor Winston allows, the fetus has patient status in its own right, what happens to the woman when she objects to a medical procedure that the doctor insists is in the interests of her future child? Should she be strapped down and forced to undergo a Caesarian section delivery against her will?

The minute fetuses are given legal status, the woman carrying it is reduced to a vessel. The 'old-fashioned' answer to the question put to Winston is that any procedure performed on a fetus *in utero* is done at the request of the woman and

with her consent—she is the patient—because she is the conscious, aware person.

The anti-abortion movement has been quick to use recent issues to reinforce the notion that embryos and fetuses are people too. But the acceptance of the principle that abortion techniques and infertility treatments should give due regard to the humanity of the embryo or fetus has consequences beyond the debate about abortion. It is degrading to our entire notion of what is important about the quality of human life.

Embryos and fetuses are worthy of respect in so far as they are potential persons—but that is where it ends. They have no self-interest because they have no self. A fetus, even at the latest stage of pregnancy has no sense of itself, no sense of life and death or of past and present, and no sense of fear. To say that this potential being possesses all that is worthy of respect in a human being is insulting to humanity. It reduces human life to its least special quality—biological existence.

At a recent meeting I attended, a man in his sixties voiced his bemusement at the debate about fetal pain. 'I always thought abortion was for the benefit of the woman', he said. 'The fetus is supposed to be dead. If it hurts them, then kill them quick.' He has a point. ●

## When fetuses are given legal status women are reduced to vessels

What can the Girl Guides do when teenagers are more interested in screaming at boy bands than in swearing allegiance to God and the Queen? Jennie Bristow reports on the identity crisis afflicting another of Britain's imperial institutions



# Guiding principles

Jenny, a Year Nine pupil at Varndean Secondary School in Brighton, lasted six months in the Girl Guides. 'All the Brownies went straight to Guides', she explains, 'but I didn't feel comfortable in the atmosphere. I thought it would be more fun, but everything was so serious—lots of religious stuff and too many team games'.

Her friend Bronwen, 14, agrees. 'I liked things like camping and the games, and the new uniform wasn't too bad, but I'm not religious and it put me off. Some of my friends still go because they like the company, but none of them are into the religious side of it.'

Would the Guides' recent attempts to transform their image make any difference? They both shook their heads. 'It's been like that too long', said Jenny. 'People have other things to do', Bronwen added.

Jenny and Bronwen are typical of the problem facing the Guide Association in recent years—that for whatever reason, fewer and fewer girls want to turn themselves into Girl Guides. The organisation which grew steadily from its inception in 1910, doubling its membership between 1940 and 1980, has found its numbers dwindling at an alarming rate over the past 15 years. From a peak of 858 601 uniformed members in 1980, in 1995 the numbers were down to just under 700 000—below 1970 levels.

The Guide Association is acutely aware of this problem, and has taken measures to stem the decline. In 1987, desperate to boost the numbers of recruits, the Guide Association created a new category of 'Rainbow Guides' for girls aged between four and six. The only effect was to lower the average age of its membership. The combination of a stable Brownie intake and a rapidly growing Rainbow membership has resulted in a membership base of which 57 per cent is under 10 years of age, 27 per cent is between 11 and 14, and a measly three per cent between 15 and 18.

### Vision statement

The fact that the Guide Association is becoming increasingly dependent on primary school children is a bitter irony for the movement which dropped the word 'Girl' from its title in 1994, to 'reflect the fact that more than 76 000 members were over 18 years old' (Background Journalist Notes). What the figures reveal is that the Guide Association is now less a youth organisation than a playgroup: while it plays an invaluable role for busy parents seeking to offload their offspring for a few hours of free childcare, keeping the interest of girls who are old enough to start thinking for themselves is increasingly difficult.

When the Guide Association

produced a 'Vision Statement' in response to the membership crisis, it concluded that there was a desperate need 'to make Guiding fresh, attractive and available to everyone who wants it and take down any barriers which prevent us from fulfilling that purpose' (1992). The association is now in the middle of a full-scale policy review, aiming to transform itself into an organisation more appropriate for the times. And it is finding that the big 'barriers' to its growth are the core principles of the Guide movement itself.

As every good ex-Brownie knows, the Scout and Guide movements were babies of the British Empire, when Britannia ruled the waves and the whole world was a potential enemy. Robert Baden-Powell, a major-general in the British army, returned a hero from the Boer War and set himself the task of turning shabby British youth into warriors. The publication of his



*Scouting for Boys* in 1908, which aimed to teach various army skills in the form of games, formed the basis of the Boy Scouts. When Baden-Powell realised that girls wanted to join in too, he gave them their own movement, named after a reserve regiment called the Guides with whom he had fought in India.

The original philosophy of the Girl Guides oozed the Empire spirit of the times in everything from its uniform to the role it saw for women. The first ever Guide handbook, entitled *How Girls Can Help to Build the Empire*, combined tips on wartime scouting tactics with training for womanhood. So on page 235 of the 450-page manual, Guide leaders are instructed to tell their girls that 'in a colony women have to be and are real helpmates to men. They not only take an intelligent interest in men's pursuits, but often cut out and make clothes for them, make the bread, churn the butter, salt the meat, cure the bacon, brew the beer, and teach the native "boy" how to cook, and to wash the family linen'.

The structure and the philosophy

of the Guide movement has always been grounded in these traditional and military origins. Guides are organised into patrols of six, which elect and then obey their own leader and second-in-command. Salutes, slogans and army songs such as 'Taps' form the best-known aspect of Guiding rituals. Before joining the organisation, girls have had to make a promise of loyalty to God, the Queen and the country, and swear to obey 'Guide Laws' dictating how they behave.

The early Guide Laws reflected the kind of values ingrained in the original Guiding movement. 'A Guide's duty is to be useful and to help others', 'A Guide obeys orders', and 'A Guide smiles and sings under all difficulties' are just three of Baden-Powell's own 'ten commandments', designed to develop girls into competent, upstanding young women able to serve their men and their country without grumbling (*Tomorrow's Guide*, 1966, p14).

### Demilitarisation

Apart from some minor changes in language and uniform, the Guides has remained pretty much wedded to its original values throughout most of this century. Towards the 1970s, the Association took a few steps to update the uniform, handbook and to place less emphasis on the more overtly militaristic. For example, in 1968 the names 'Guide Leader' and 'Assistant Guide Leader' replaced the tradition of calling women who ran Guide units by the names of 'Captain' and 'Lieutenant'. The report of the working party set up to reform the Association explained that 'we believe that the time has come to drop the terms Captain and Lieutenant which, when used in conjunction with each other, have a military sound' (*Tomorrow's Guide*, 1966, p21).

However, the Association itself admits that the alterations made today need to go way beyond simple modernisations of language and image, and involve a total reinvention of the key principles of Guiding. The Guide Association has begun to realise that everything about the movement, from its image to the values on which the movement is based, runs contrary to the spirit of our changed times.

In its Vision Statement, the Guide Association seeks to emphasise that it is still more than just a recreational club for toddlers. Within the framework of the Promise and the Guide Law, Guiding aims to provide a unique 'environment of fun, friendship and adventure underpinned by spiritual and moral values'. However, the question is what are the 'moral values' that can be seen as relevant today?

The three absolute principles on which membership of the Guides has always been based—loyalty to God, ►



the Queen and the country— have formed the backbone of the organisation. The Guide Promise, to which all new recruits have to agree, was supposed to make girls feel part of something higher than themselves, and maintain the Empire spirit of the past.

### Today's Guide Association looks more like a touchy-feely women's group than a military training programme

Yet today, all three of these institutions are held up for question. At a time when Church of England vicars openly question the established notion of 'one God', the monarchy finds itself riddled with scandal and divorce, and old-fashioned British nationalism is held up as an evil afflicting football fans and fascists, any movement remaining tied to these institutions is hardly likely to attract teenagers in droves.

The fact that the institutions to which Guiding is closely tied are so discredited is not a problem that the Guide Association can solve through internal reform. Just as the original movement was a product of wartime Britain and reflected the values and ideas of the time, today's Guides are a reflection of the new values of the 1990s. As the Guide Association attempts to reorient itself around the values of today, the results can be as amusing as watching your elderly aunts dance to disco music.

#### Zen Buddhism

In 1993, recognising the need to adapt itself to the new, the Guide Association modified its promise to take into account the reaction against established religion. The old oath to 'do my duty to God' was replaced by the more subtle promise 'to love my God' which, as a brief read of the new *Guide Handbook* reveals, is designed to accommodate everyone from humanist to atheist to Zen Buddhist. The *Handbook* takes a page to explain painstakingly that while some people are religious, 'others don't feel as if they belong to any religion, but they do believe in God, and they try to do what they think God would like them to do'. At the end of this section, new recruits are asked 'how can you show you respect the religious beliefs of others?', and are invited to find out about their own faith and all the other ones.

The problems faced by the Guide Association in justifying why girls should believe in God is magnified in its equally clumsy attempts to explain the importance of the monarchy and nationhood. When it comes to 'serving

the Queen', the girls are told to feel sorry for her, because 'it can't be very nice to be watched everywhere you go, even on holiday!'; and patriotism is reduced to the idea that 'we can find out about our own country, its history and customs, so we can tell other people about it'. What was once a simple oath, summed up in three words, now takes three tortuous pages of the handbook to explain.

The obvious lack of conviction in its traditional principles has not stopped the Guide Association from attempting to instil a certain set of values within the movement. When I asked Denise King, head of Guiding Services at the Guide Association HQ, what she considered to be the main aim of the Guides today, she told me that 'it is the same as it always has been: to provide girls and young women with the opportunity to be all that they as individuals can be'. The only difference today, she said, is that 'the complexity of social changes' means that the values promoted have to differ quite fundamentally from those of the past.

A couple of examples illustrate just how different the values of today are seen to be. While the Guides are rooted in militarism and war, the Guide Association now focuses its work around the theme of 'peace'. Where the early Guide movement placed great emphasis on self-discipline and the

any more, but Guide Wear', she said. 'We think that what the girls wear should reflect the fact that they are all individuals and need to express themselves in their own way.'

Today's Guide Association looks more like a touchy-feely women's group than the military training programme it once was. By attempting to reorient itself around the 1990s values of multiculturalism, individualism and self-obsession, the Guide Association hopes to give itself 'a clear vision for its future which is not solely based on yesterday's ideas' (Vision Statement). This is supposed to be a vision based on some clear principles which, while they may make Baden-Powell turn in his grave, are deemed more relevant to the youth of today.

#### Boyzone

The problem is that the Guide Association simply is not relevant today as anything more than a recreational activity. In the past, the fact that the girls saw themselves as part of a movement aimed at building the Empire and defending the flag meant that the values of the movement had some meaning. Today, the fact that the Guides advertises itself as 'a game for life', and cannot justify its own beliefs to 10-year olds in fewer than five pages of text, means that it is very



notion that 'A Guide smiles and sings under all difficulties', and the Guide Law reaffirmed this message until the end of the 1980s, the 1990s Guide Law has ditched any commitment to self-control. Instead, the *Handbook* encourages girls to 'explain your feelings to yourself' and to talk to other people about their problems.

Even the new uniform, which was revamped in 1990 by designer Jeff Banks, is more than a cosmetic change to attract fashion-conscious teenagers. As Denise King explained, the transition from woggles and stiff leather belts to t-shirts and jogging bottoms was more a reflection of the fact that kids today object to uniform full stop. 'We don't even call it uniform

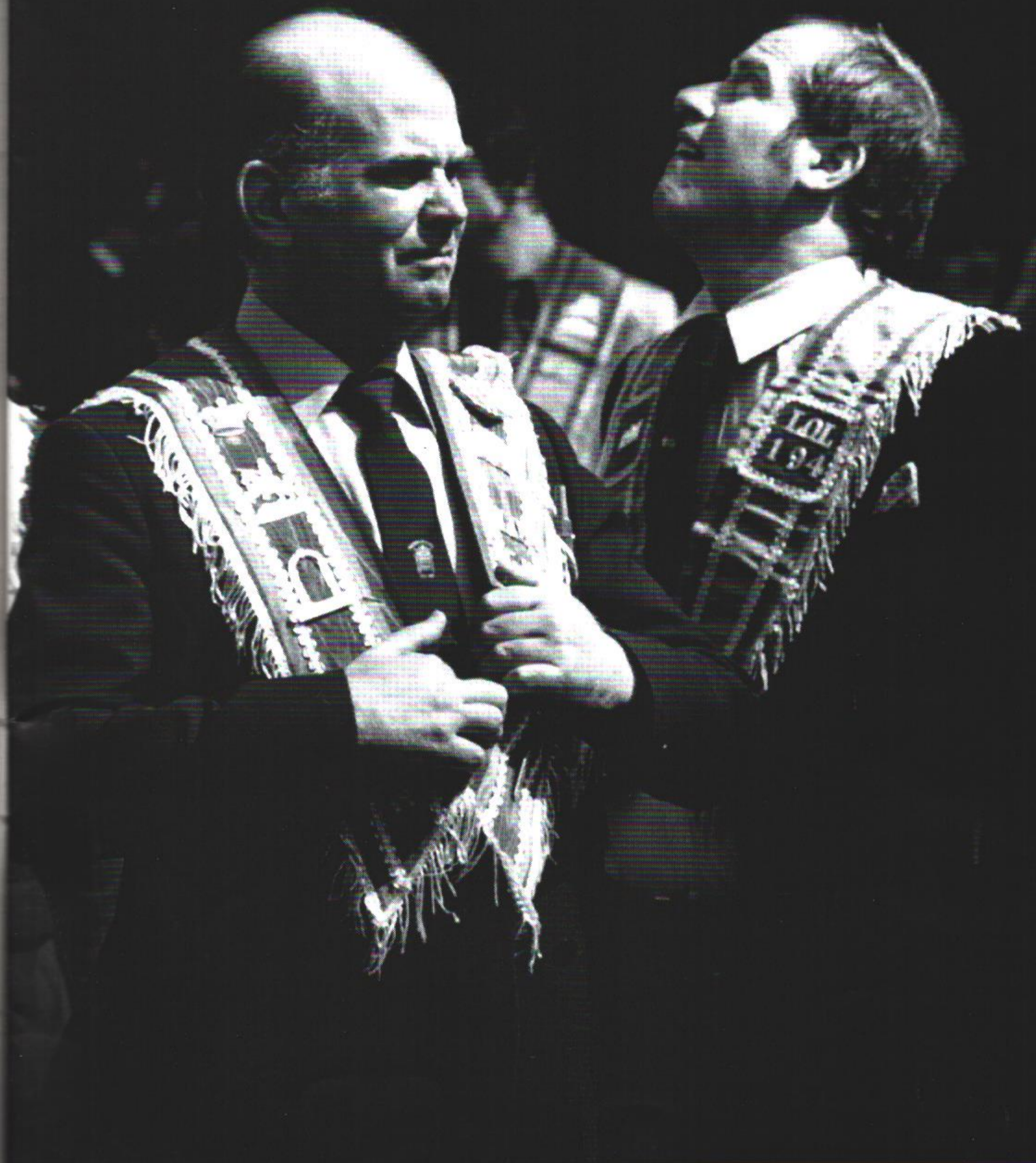
difficult to see why any girl should want to do anything more than play.

My sister Anna, aged 19, who has been a Guider for the past two years, summed up the problem well. For her, the biggest problem is the lack of commitment among the girls. She used the example of a unit activity in which each Guide patrol was making a flag to use on the forthcoming International Camp at Kibblestone, near Stoke-on-Trent. 'One patrol made a lovely flag and then ruined it by writing "Boyzone" and names of other pop groups on it', she complained. 'This just shows that some girls don't understand what it means to be part of the movement.'

Do you blame them?

Marches and riots may come and go, but the Northern Ireland 'peace process' seems to go on for ever. Mark Ryan believes the process is indestructible because, despite the summer of symbolic conflict, neither nationalists nor unionists have anything else left to fight for

# The peace process rules



At the height of this summer's marching season, in the aftermath of the violence at Drumcree, nearly everybody agreed that the peace process was finished, that Northern Ireland was again on the edge of the abyss. Prophets of doom, like Cardinal Cahal Daly, head of the Catholic church in Ireland, predicted catastrophe after the RUC allowed the Orangemen to parade down the contested Garvaghy Road in Portadown. Yet, a few weeks later, here we are again, the violence has fizzled out and the all-party talks are about to resume their tedious course after a leisurely summer recess.

Why did the pundits get it so wrong? Because they share the view that nothing much has changed in Northern Ireland, that the fragile peace could easily be destroyed and the Six Counties plunged once again into the old conflict. The British media talks of the resurgence of tribal hatreds, while the leaders of what is called 'nationalist Ireland' talk of a return to 1969. Both sides are very wide of the mark.

Take the comparison with 1969. On the surface it seems plausible enough. In 1969, as in 1996, it was the provocation of triumphalist Orange marches which sparked a Catholic response. But the comparison ends there. In 1969, the initial clashes were simply the catalyst which revealed the deeper unresolved conflict between Irish nationalism and the British state. August 1969 was the first stage in a spiral of conflict which culminated in the deployment of British soldiers and the collapse of the old order.

## The future isn't Orange

1996 is very different. Rather than bringing an underlying conflict to the surface, the summer riots revealed nothing but the exhaustion of both nationalism and Unionism in Northern Ireland—which is why it all fizzled out so quickly. Within days, the all-party talks had resumed (with Sinn Fein still begging to be allowed in), and the two governments were back on amicable terms. Half of the paras sent in response to the initial panic around Drumcree were withdrawn within a week, a stark contrast with the events of 1969, after which troop levels continued a remorseless increase for four years. Most telling of all was the response of Catholics. After 1969 they queued to join the IRA and fight to end British rule in Ireland. This time, the barricades had hardly come down before they were lodging their compensation claims to the British state.

Rather than serve as a catalyst for a wider conflict, the marching season provided a pretext for all sides to cover up their vacuity and lack of principle. They chose the issue of symbols and ►



marching traditions for the very reason that there is nothing left of substance to fight around.

The fact that Unionist leaders took a stand in defence of such relics as the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys says a lot about the decrepit state of Ulster Unionism. There was a time when Unionists stood for the Union. Since the peace process, however, the

Protestant threat. Since it abandoned the struggle to drive Britain out of Ireland, there is hardly any reason for Sinn Fein/IRA to exist independently, there being little to distinguish it from the moderate SDLP. The one thing it can offer which the SDLP cannot is to defend Catholics from an imagined Protestant threat. This is why Sinn Fein has taken such a firm stand on the issue of parades, and its members have busied themselves infiltrating, or more often setting up, residents associations in affected areas. These aspiring community-protection services can only justify their existence by talking up the threat from without. If there was no Orange Order, Sinn Fein/IRA would have to invent one.

### Nationalists who aren't

Yet despite the efforts of Sinn Fein and the Unionists to find a new rationale for their existence, the riots were no more than riots; outbursts of uncoordinated violence that ended as quickly as they began. There is nothing to sustain these conflicts today. Such confrontations in the past were part of the broader contest between the British state and Irish republicanism. Orange marches were one of the more peripheral aspects of a political tradition commanding mass support which gave its allegiance to the Crown against the popular demands of Irish nationalism. The political collapse of Irish republicanism in the course of the peace process has changed that picture completely. It has removed the political rationale of both nationalism and Unionism.

To be an Irish nationalist today no longer means wanting separation from Britain and national independence. It is more likely to mean wanting greater intervention from London, Dublin and Washington to help deal with your Protestant neighbours and to ensure 'parity of esteem' between the 'cultural traditions'. If Unionist and republican leaders were not so desperate to find a rationale for their existence, the Orange parades would have about as much political significance as a gathering of Morris dancers in an English village on a Saturday afternoon. The sort of violence seen in Northern Ireland in July is the pettiest sort of sectarian squabbling. When Catholics and Protestants clash over such events, they really are fighting over nothing.

Both Unionists and republicans are following a simple strategy: shout as loud as possible in order to conceal the emptiness of your position. None of the parties to the conflict has any political principle on which to stand today. Sinn Fein/IRA wants nothing more from life than to be allowed into all-party talks. The British government has renounced any 'selfish, strategic or economic interest' in Northern Ireland.

All of this has left the Unionists thoroughly bewildered. Without the clash of principles, the struggle between two competing claims to sovereignty, which once lay at the heart of the Irish Question, there is nothing to sustain any of the old parties.

It is the lack of any real principles which explains the obsession with culture in Northern Ireland today. It would seem to be an iron law of history that the more people bang on about culture and their unique cultural identity, the less of any real substance they have to say. In Northern Ireland laying claim to some bogus cultural heritage has become a matter of life and death for old organisations like Sinn Fein and the Orange Order. Unionist culture as it was displayed during the marching season was a sorry sight indeed. The marchers had hardly arrived at the church at Drumcree before they had exhausted their repertoire of triumphalist ditties and had to fall back on playing Tina Turner over the PA system. The Catholic equivalent of this annual display—the West Belfast Festival—is at least as bad. Organised mainly by Sinn Fein, it is heavily subsidised by the British government. Begun in the declining years of the war, the festival grew in importance as the war fizzled out. As a celebration of backwardness and parochialism, it makes the Orange Order look almost modern.

The exhaustion of the old parties explains the remarkable durability of the peace process. The service which the peace process performs for all of them is to cover up the emptiness at the heart of politics in Northern Ireland.

### Peace stampede

Without the peace process, all the parties would have to stand on their own merits and principles. None of them can do this any more. Instead they all justify their actions in terms of advancing the peace process. Not only does this make them look highly virtuous, it also absolves everybody of responsibility for their actions. Gerry Adams no longer has to account to his supporters for the pitiful end of Irish republicanism. He does not have to sign any surrender documents. Instead he can say that he has done his bit 'for the peace process', and that the lack of progress is the fault of the British government. For its part, the British government is no longer faced with the unenviable task of finding arguments for the defence of the Union. Now its only professed commitment is to the maintenance of the peace process. Naturally, when things seem to get out of hand, the British government can blame Sinn Fein.

The peace process acquires a life of its own because nobody can afford to scupper it and boldly assert their

## The Apprentice Boys are neither apprentices nor boys, but dour old men from a Pathe newsreel

question of the Union is off the agenda. The republicans are no longer fighting to end it, nor is the British government fighting to uphold it. Instead the Unionists have tried to maintain their increasingly shaky position by appealing to the need to preserve their 'culture'. The Orange Order is central to this project.

The Order was once a potent symbol of Protestant Ulster, bringing together people from every generation, class and sect of Protestantism in unyielding hostility to both Catholicism and Irish nationalism. Since the 1970s, however, the Orange Order has been in decline. Today it is predominantly middle aged, middle class and rural. To most young Protestants the men of the Orange Order, decked out in bowler hats, sashes and rolled umbrellas look faintly ridiculous. The Apprentice Boys who marched in August to commemorate the shutting of the gates of Derry against King James II in 1689 are even more peculiar. They are neither apprentices nor boys, but dour old men, most of whom look like they escaped from a Pathe newsreel.

### Cultural studies

The Orange Order claimed that it had been parading down the Garvaghy Road in Portadown for 189 years and that stopping the parade was an attack on its 'cultural identity'. A few years ago it would have been bizarre to hear hard-faced loyalists talking like media studies lecturers. However, Unionism has lost its traditional sense of purpose. As a result, Unionists now justify their existence by pretending to represent an imperiled culture, as if they were on a par with a tribe of Amazonian Indians.

The fact that the Unionists have taken a stand on the issue of parades is good news for Sinn Fein/IRA, which can now pose as the defender of the Catholic community from the perceived





Celtic dreams on  
a Derry gable-end

PHOTO: JOE BOATMAN

own interests, since none of them has a clear and independent interest to assert. It appears as if the peace process is under constant threat from all sides. The reality, however, is that the peace process is almost indestructible, and that all the parties are no more than tools at its disposal. If any party ever suggested that it put its own interests before the peace process, it would not have much of a future. However, there is little

chance of that happening for the simple reason that the old politics are exhausted. It is the peace process which is strong, and the parties which are weak.

The more power the peace process acquires, the less there is for the people of Northern Ireland. The elections which took place at the end of May are an example of the anti-democratic nature of the peace process, even by the undemocratic standards of Northern Ireland. The elections undermined every known democratic principle (see below). Most importantly they destroyed the principle that the people should have any public representation. The only purpose of the elections was to elect representatives for all-party talks. The only purpose of the all-party talks was to seek agreement between the different parties. The fact that the different parties, and those who voted for them, may not have wished to reach agreement was immaterial to the whole charade. Since the only acknowledged virtue is to advance the peace process, and since advancing the peace process means seeking agreement, the awkward matter of what the people might want has to be dispensed with.

When Ian Paisley entered the talks saying he was going there to represent the people who voted for him, he was simply saying what any elected politician might say. From the point of view of the peace process, however, it was the wrong thing to say. He should have said something like: 'I am entering these talks to seek

an agreement which will respect the diversity of all our people.' In other words, to do the opposite of what he was elected to do. The very principle of representation is hostile to the spirit of the peace process, since it implies that the interests of the electorate are more important than 'peace and reconciliation'.

### Less is more

That is why it is those parties which received the lowest number of votes which have the most authority in the peace process. The old parties are suspect because they still represent people and therefore cannot be wholehearted in their support of the peace process. However, the small parties—the loyalist UDP and PUP, the Women's Coalition and Labour—have authority in the talks precisely because they represent so few people. They do not have to worry about defending their constituents, and so can devote their energies solely to the advancement of the peace process.

The stronger the peace process, the less say the people of Northern Ireland have in their own future. The old parties and organisations will cynically exploit any lingering sectarianism in order to justify their existence. The new parties and organisations can only increase their share of power by excluding the people from public life. As long as people are fighting each other over nothing, the authorities can stay on top, and the peace process will stay on track. ●

# 'Democracy is not about the majority'

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition got one per cent of the votes in the May elections. So why has it been hailed as a force for 'consensual democracy'? Brendan O'Neill talked to Monica McWilliams, the coalition's chief negotiator in the all-party talks

**F**ounded only weeks before the 30 May elections, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition made a point of avoiding Northern Ireland's 'constitutional question'. Neither nationalist nor Unionist, the coalition's campaign posters read simply: 'Wave goodbye to the dinosaurs, vote NI Women's Coalition.'

Political commentators and academics on both sides of the Irish Sea welcomed the coalition as a breath of fresh air. David Sharrock of the *Guardian* was pleased to see a non-sectarian party among the usual Northern Irish rabble, praising the coalition for 'politically and socially covering the spectrum of Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and Unionist, republican and loyalist' (*Guardian*, 27 May 1996). For Belfast journalist Jack Holland, the Women's Coalition represents a healthy frustration with 'ordinary politics'—which in Northern Ireland means the 'sectarian politics of deadlock, impasse, bloody violence and refusal to compromise' (*Irish Post*, 22 June 1996). Holland sees the Women's Coalition as an attempt 'to get off that ►



particular merry-go-round, to try and view things from another perspective'.

So where did the Women's Coalition spring from and what does it stand for? I talked to Monica McWilliams, the coalition's chairwoman and one of only two women taking part in Northern Ireland's all-party negotiations. 'The Women's Coalition stands for three things', McWilliams told me.

## The vast majority of people in Northern Ireland show little interest in McWilliams' consensual democracy

to a stage where we looked around at the squabbling between the nationalist parties and the Unionist parties, and thought, "this isn't representing us".'

For the Women's Coalition, Northern Ireland's political agenda has been dominated by the 'national question' for far too long. McWilliams wants to change this. 'For 25 years now there has been this dominant political discourse in Northern Ireland, where competing groups have claimed to represent "the people". As a result, we have a conflict-ridden society.' So what would the Women's Coalition like to see on the agenda? 'Well, we want to move towards a more consensual democracy. We want to avoid referring to "the people" as if there were no minorities. Democracy is not just about 50 per cent of the electorate. You know, if you add up all the minorities within

even make up the 20 per cent of voters who did not vote for the four main parties? Not exactly. The traditional cross-community Alliance Party received 6.54 per cent, and a further 9.38 per cent was split between three smaller Unionist parties: the United Kingdom Unionist Party, for which Conor Cruise O'Brien stood, and the two fringe loyalist parties which have emerged out of the loyalist paramilitaries over the past two years. This means that 95.73 per cent of the vote on 30 May was split between two mass nationalist parties, five Unionist parties and the traditional cross-community Alliance Party. That leaves a paltry 4.27 per cent of the vote to be shared out among McWilliams' 'minorities', which include her own Women's Coalition, the Greens, the insignificant Labour Party



'Inclusiveness, equity and human rights. We have incorporated the informal politics that women in Northern Ireland have been building down the years, and feel that the time is right to nudge mainstream politics along. We want to move away from the fixated positions and towards accommodation and agreement. Ultimately we want to have an inclusive and realistic dialogue.'

### Minorities in the majority?

According to McWilliams, the Women's Coalition was born out of ordinary women's frustration with Northern Ireland's polarised political agenda. 'An increasing number of women were expressing disappointment with the same old political parties saying the same old thing. So the coalition was formed to take advantage of what we saw as the only opportunity to have our voices heard in Northern Ireland. We just got

our society they would make up about 50 per cent also. We want a democracy based on consensus, one which celebrates diversity.'

But how true is it that McWilliams' 'minorities' make up 50 per cent of the population? For McWilliams, 'the minorities' are those who feel isolated from Northern Ireland's 'dominant political discourse'; in other words, those who refuse to vote for either nationalists or Unionists. At the 30 May elections, however, 79.81 per cent of the overall vote was split between the two main nationalist parties and the two main Unionist parties. The two nationalist parties, John Hume's Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Fein, won 36.84 per cent of the vote. The two Unionist parties, David Trimble's Ulster Unionists and Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists, received 42.97 per cent.

So do McWilliams' 'minorities'

and cranks like the Natural Law Party.

I put it to McWilliams that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland show little interest in her notion of 'consensual democracy'. It would appear that even if the Northern Irish electorate is getting tired of the 'dominant political discourse' it still finds it preferable to the Women's Coalition. 'You talk about "the majority"', McWilliams responds, 'but we want to avoid using that term. In a conflict-ridden society such as Northern Ireland, a term like "the majority" is problematic. What we need now is consensus and agreement'. McWilliams sees the Women's Coalition's role as nudging mainstream politics in Northern Ireland away from the adversarial and towards consensus. In reality, however, the Women's Coalition is an electoral failure with no right to be at the all-party negotiations at all, never mind attempting to dictate an anti-democratic agenda.

The Women's Coalition got a measly 1.03 per cent of the vote, while the Ulster Unionist Party got 24.17 per cent. The Women's Coalition has two seats at the all-party talks; the Ulster Unionists have three. How come? Because even by Northern Ireland's standards the 30 May election was an anti-democratic farce, gerrymandered to ensure that the unrepresentative 'politics of consensus' would shape the all-party talks.

### Gerrymander

The election was fixed so that the top 10 parties each got either two or three seats at the all-party negotiations. This means that Labour, which just scraped into the top 10 with a pathetic 0.85 per cent of the vote, has got almost as much clout at the talks as the Ulster Unionist Party which came number

The 'politics of consensus' is about undermining democracy. It is about replacing the agenda which has been endorsed by the electorate with one which is more suitable to the British government. Clearly Britain does not want anything fundamental discussed at the talks, which explains why there is so much emphasis on consensus. And it makes more sense for the British to let a politically correct group of women set the new anti-politics, anti-democratic agenda, instead of some old reactionary Tory or bigoted Unionist. The Women's Coalition was not elected by the people to discuss the future of Northern Ireland. It was effectively appointed by the British government to dilute the talks and to keep a check on any silly ideas about majority rule and democracy.

mechanism as 'spectacular progress'.

The minoritarianism of the Women's Coalition has been used as an argument against the excesses and the crude majoritarianism of Unionists like Ian Paisley. On *Newsnight*, after the polls, Monica McWilliams chastised Paisley for claiming to represent 'the people'. By doing so he was refusing to allow for diversity and for the protection of minority rights, McWilliams argued. This might sound very radical, and undoubtedly many people will have been pleased to see an old bigot like Paisley get a ticking off. But what McWilliams was really objecting to was the democratic principle of majority rule.

The Women's Coalition finds Unionism objectionable not because it is the political expression of Britain's undemocratic division of Ireland, but because it is popular and majoritarian. The British-supported agenda of the Women's Coalition is so anti-democratic that a situation has been created in which someone like Paisley, who has not got a democratic or libertarian bone in his body, can now sound like a champion of democracy.

### Minority rule

'Democracy is not about who's got a majority', McWilliams told me. 'That has been the problem in Northern Ireland. What we need now is a democracy based on consensus.' Ironically, the minoritarianism of the Women's Coalition is being used against the claims of Unionism in much the same way that Unionism has been used against the claims of Irish nationalism in the past. Those who take pleasure in seeing Unionism kicked in the teeth in this way should think again. Who really benefits from this degradation of the principles of democracy and from the promotion of minority rights over majority rule?

In 1921, Britain ensured that democracy in Ireland was 'not about the majority' by enforcing partition against the democratic wishes of the Irish people. In the 1990s, democracy in Ireland, we are told, is 'not about the majority', but a question of protecting minority rights and celebrating diversity. But, whether democracy is undermined through partition or the 'politics of consensus', the result is the same: Ireland's most significant majority, the Irish people, are denied the right to run their affairs.

Monica McWilliams might see the all-party negotiations as a way of giving women a voice and moving Northern Ireland towards a more consensual democracy. For me, the 30 May elections and the ensuing all-party negotiations serve as a timely reminder that the British government is incapable of delivering democracy in Ireland.

**Table: Disproportionate representation**

Political party	Number of votes	No of seats at all-party talks	Votes per seat
<b>Ulster Unionist Party</b>	<b>181 829</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>60 610</b>
<b>SDLP</b>	<b>160 786</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>53 595</b>
<b>Democratic Unionist Party</b>	<b>141 413</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>47 138</b>
<b>Sinn Fein</b>	<b>116 377</b>	<b>(barred from talks)</b>	<b>—</b>
<b>Alliance Party</b>	<b>49 176</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16 392</b>
<b>UK Unionist Party</b>	<b>27 774</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9 258</b>
<b>Progressive Unionist Party</b>	<b>26 082</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13 041</b>
<b>Ulster Democratic Party</b>	<b>16 715</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8 358</b>
<b>NI Women's Coalition</b>	<b>7 731</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3 866</b>
<b>Labour</b>	<b>6 425</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3 213</b>

(Above) Votes cast and seats gained in the May elections to the all-party talks


one, with almost a quarter of all votes cast. This makes a mockery of any concept of representative democracy—which, whatever McWilliams might say, is based upon majority rule.

Of course, there has never been any democracy in Northern Ireland, which was founded by Britain as a sectarian statelet to ensure a permanent Protestant majority. But today's gerrymanderers put yesterday's to shame. In the past, electoral boundaries in Northern Ireland were fixed to ensure under-representation of the Catholic community. Today the electoral process is gerrymandered to ensure that nobody is represented, not even the political parties themselves. As a result, an organisation like the Women's Coalition, which represents virtually nobody, can waltz into the talks, claim the moral high ground as the 'representatives' of a beleaguered minority, and set a new agenda.

One of the first things agreed at the all-party talks was the 'sufficient consensus' procedure. A 'triple-lock mechanism' has been introduced to the talks to judge when 'sufficient consensus' has been reached on a particular issue. 'Sufficient consensus' requires a majority of the total valid votes cast in the recent elections, which between them must represent a clear majority of *both* the Unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. But, and here's the catch, 'sufficient consensus' must also have the support of the majority of the political parties participating in the all-party negotiations. This effectively hands minority groups like McWilliams' coalition the right to veto decisions which have been supported by 'a clear majority of the Unionist and nationalist communities'. No wonder David Ervine of the minority Progressive Unionist Party described the introduction of this

# 'Saving the Third

The new focus on defending human rights in Western foreign policy can be even more dangerous than old-fashioned imperialism, says Helen Searls



**H**ow times change. During the Vietnam War of the sixties and early seventies, the radical philosopher Bertrand Russell and his pacifist pals staged a mock war crimes tribunal to condemn America's bloody invasion of South-East Asia and to expose the atrocities Washington was committing against the Vietnamese and Cambodian peoples. Today, the USA and its allies on the United Nations Security Council are running real war crimes tribunals to convict those accused of atrocities in the Yugoslav and Rwandan civil wars. Yesterday's international criminals have metamorphosed into today's global judges. And what's more, the Bertrand Russells of our age—the radical journalists and non-governmental organisations—are demanding that the Western powers intervene even more extensively around the world.

No more than a decade ago, during the Cold War, it was clear to many that the West was the biggest bad guy in international affairs. The USA, Britain, France and the rest were prepared to do whatever was necessary, from staging coups to fighting full-scale colonial wars, in order to crush opposition to their power. Western intervention against radical regimes in Vietnam and Nicaragua, or support for reactionary regimes in Chile and South Africa, provoked waves of protest across America and Europe. The radical intelligentsia spoke out against the self-serving and brutal Western foreign policy, and many were prepared to pay the price for their oppositional stance. Novelist Fredrick Forsyth, for example, took up fictional writing only after he was sacked as a foreign correspondent at the BBC for refusing to toe the Foreign Office line on the Biafran War in 1969. A decade later John Pilger saw his hard-hitting film on Cambodia banned as it was judged to be too sensitive for US interests in the region.

Today all that has changed. The battle lines have blurred. In the

nineties new rules govern international diplomacy, and the 'big issues' have altered. Nowadays, the political reputations of Western leaders are built not through gunboat diplomacy like Margaret Thatcher's Falklands War, but by supporting humanitarian causes like human rights or the rainforest.

Take the issue of human rights. Throughout the Cold War, Western governments turned a blind eye to the torture, injustice and murder carried out by anti-communist regimes which they armed and supported across the Third World. Now, Western politicians actively highlight human rights abuses

in the South, championing causes ranging from the rights of the indigenous people in Ogoni, Nigeria to the rights of the girl child in China. Today it seems the West is no longer embarrassed by human rights campaigns. Far from being banned, John Pilger's most recent film about human rights in Burma was awarded primetime viewing slots this year.

The West's newfound concern over human rights is not just talk. The compulsion to protect the weak also drives Western governments into practical action around the globe. It is widely accepted that only the selfish

# World from itself'

and amoral could allow atrocities to go unchallenged. International leadership is measured by the response of different nations to the cries for action. Ethics and morality provide an important backdrop to modern global politics. And the humanitarians are no longer simply the aid workers and charity activists. Today Western governments, and bodies like the World Bank, yesterday's villains of world affairs, are deemed to have a key humanitarian role to play.

The transition to humanitarian diplomacy has been remarkably thorough. The Overseas Development Administration (ODA)—the aid wing of the Foreign Office—has been transformed. It now boasts a people-centred policy framework and, in the past five years, while other government departments have been under pressure to slash budgets, the ODA has tripled funding to NGOs involved in grassroots projects in the Third World. Even the British army has dramatically changed its style. Recruitment adverts suggest that soldiers are more likely to dig wells for impoverished villagers or to hand out food relief to famine victims than to kill enemy forces. Rambo, it seems, need not apply.

The European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank and even Nato have shifted policy in line with a more humanitarian agenda. UN peacekeeping operations are at an all-time high. The World Bank now uses its considerable clout to force Southern governments to work with local people. About half of the Bank's projects in Africa are now in partnership with local groups; it devotes resources to

developing 'opportunities for women and girls'; and declares its concern with the environment, local democracy and social welfare in the South.

The humanitarian politics certainly poses some new questions for those of us who have campaigned for self-determination for the Third World and against Western intervention. Have the imperialists of yesteryear really turned into the philanthropists of today? How should those concerned with liberation respond to the sea-change?

In answering these questions it becomes clear that the new humanitarianism is built on a number of assumptions. Taken together these create a framework that is beneficial to Western governments and debilitating for anyone trying to improve the lot of Third World societies.

## Southern discomfort

The new humanitarian agenda is based on the assumption that the South is morally destitute. In both government circles and non-governmental organisations, the South is seen as a place where ethnic passions inevitably lead to bloodshed (Rwanda), or where corrupt governments are planning nuclear holocausts (Iraq, North Korea) and where international drug dealers evade prosecution (Colombia, Nicaragua). It is also a place of human rights abuses (Burma, Indonesia, and many more). This is the image of the South that now informs serious policy discussions.

Not only is the South dangerous, it is depicted as lacking any recognisable morality. An apparently authoritative report in the *Sunday Times* illustrates this approach. In Rwanda, the reader is told 'that Rwandans found it more natural to tell lies than to tell the truth' (31 July 1994). These people simply do not understand the difference between right and wrong. With such lax morals it is little wonder that the South is so frightening.

Once you accept that the

Third World is an arena of human rights abuses, tribal passions and bloody conflicts, then it seems morally right that the more 'civilised' countries should play a role in showing the South a better path to tread. The North can interfere in the South as much as it likes. It is no longer seen as an exploiter or imperialist. The likes of Tory minister Baroness Chalker now have no shame in boasting that Britain is teaching the South how to conduct its affairs—be that how to run an election or how to organise family planning. And if they won't learn then the 'civilised' nations feel morally justified in taking matters into their own hands. Endorsing this approach allows commentators to go right down the colonial road and debate whether the West should 'remake African nations' to save the continent from self-annihilation (*Independent*, 26 July 1996).

The new humanitarianism is also built on the assumption that Third World countries will not, and indeed should not, develop into economically and socially advanced nations. This is the clear message behind the fashionable policy of 'sustainable development'. In the industrialised North, 'sustainability' may sound caring and morally right, but in the Third World where people struggle against poverty, it smacks of double standards and defeatism. The South is being told to make do with what it has. The transformation of these brutalising societies is no longer mentioned. Such a limited agenda promises nothing but misery to the people of the South—and ensures their continued domination by the major capitalist powers.

The focus on human rights is often more about the conservation of the Third World and its 'curious' peoples than it is about making it a better place to live in. We are currently in the UN International Decade of the Indigenous Peoples of the World—a cause championed by modern human rights activists. ►

But look at what they say and it is clear that the fascination for indigenous people is more about Western idolising of primitivism than it is about any real concern for their fate.

One UN publication explained that Western policy-makers 'should recognise [indigenous people's] values,

this is enough to make their work worthwhile. But is this really all that we should expect? Frankly the fixation on the individual is a hopeless starting point. Individual behaviour patterns are not the problem in the Third World. On the contrary, unless the big issues like poverty and the inequality between North and South are addressed then little will change in people's everyday lives.

Such a conservative agenda suits Western elites. In the past, Third World poverty acted as a powerful illustration of the bankruptcy of global capitalism. Today this charge is stood on its head. It is accepted that nothing much can be done to develop Third World economies and societies. Instead, the peoples of these societies must learn to live within limits. The problem is redefined as one of modifying their behaviour—with the assistance and direction, of course, of various Western agencies, from feminist NGOs to UN intervention forces. In such a climate, capitalism is let off the hook. Little wonder that the Western elites have been so keen to embrace this agenda.

### Playing God

Imperialism has been rehabilitated by the new humanitarianism. Today, everybody looks to the Western powers to 'save the Third World' from itself. No longer is the world seen to be divided between the exploited and the exploiters. Today's world is divided between nations that are civilised and those that are deemed uncivilised; between those which always have right on their side and those that are inherently evil. It is not simply that the South is morally condemned; now the West can claim the moral high-ground.

The American, British and other governments use the new moral authority they enjoy on the global stage to offset the low esteem in which they are held at home. In this respect, they are acting in much the same way as the pop singer Michael Jackson did when he patronised the street children of Brazil recently. Finding himself out of favour with the US and European

media after accusations of child abuse, Jackson visited Brazil to clean up his tarnished image. 'In Brazil', he said, 'I can do what I want, and these kids here worship me. They don't see me as an evil person like people do in the States'. British and American politicians are trying to pull the same trick. By being seen to 'do good' on the cheap in the Third World, they can adopt a posture of moral superiority. They may be useless and corrupt back home, but in the Third World they can show that they are virtuous authority figures.

### Radical imperialism

The worst aspect of the new humanitarianism is the wholesale support that radicals and intellectuals now give to it. Rather than opposing Western intervention in the affairs of the South, they act as the champions of intervention. It is the Western intellectual and radical who today demands that the UN Security Council carries out retribution against those branded war criminals in Bosnia or Rwanda. The USA and Britain no longer stand in the dock. Rather they sit on the bench and pass judgement on other peoples, while radical journalists call for the heads of the accused.

The new humanitarianism has thoroughly confused the old opponents of imperialism. Where once they called for Third World development and transformation, they now argue for the active conservation of primitivism and backwardness. Where once they spoke out for the powerless and the weak, they now align themselves with the most powerful nations on Earth. And, where once they championed anti-imperialist movements, they now applaud Western intervention and plead for Western bodies to do more.

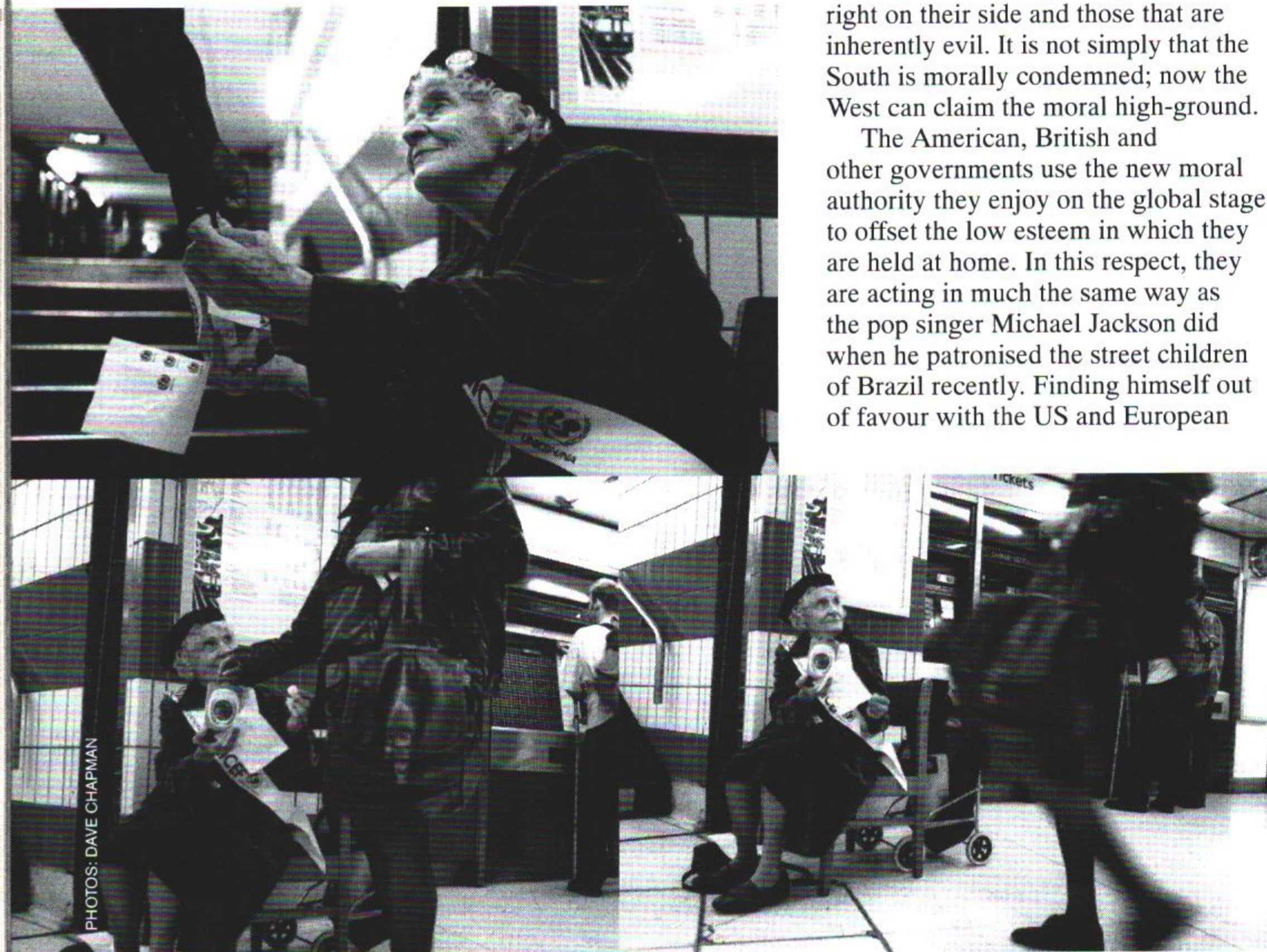
Such a turnaround has thoroughly weakened those struggling for freedom and liberation in the South. Oppositional movements from Burma to China now assume that the West is a potential ally in their struggles. Their efforts focus on winning Western approval rather than seeing the West as an enemy. In the short term, such a strategy may win a bit of air time on CNN, but, in the long term, it means the people of the South are no longer fighting for their own freedom as they see fit. Too often, such campaigns end up as little more than pawns in the political games of the great powers, becoming part of the West's effort to rehabilitate itself as the rightful source of authority on Earth. The inversion of the old realities means that it is time for a new approach from the opponents of imperialism. We need a new kind of politics to meet the challenge of a world where the rules of the game have been turned upside down.

## Conservation of the Third World not its transformation is at the top of the human rights agenda

traditional knowledge and resource management practices, and their dependence on renewable resources and ecosystems' (*The UN Sustainable Development Plan*). Conservation of the Third World, rather than its transformation, is one powerful motive behind much of the new-found concern for human rights.

The focus on human rights is conservative in other ways as well. It puts the spotlight on the individual behaviour of people in the South, especially men. Many NGO campaigners will admit that they cannot change the big picture. But they can do something for this one child or this one woman, and that

**A penny for the little black babies**



PHOTOS: DAVE CHAPMAN

# Ballot-rigging in Bosnia

In the name of human rights, the Western powers are rigging the elections in Bosnia, accuses Linda Ryan

**C**harges levelled by the international war crimes tribunal in the Hague against the Bosnian Serb leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are being used to justify extraordinary transgressions of political rights.

Under the cover of the war crimes tribunal, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is rigging the Bosnian elections scheduled for 14 September. The OSCE decided when the elections were going to be held, who could stand and how the parties organised their campaigns. This intrusion into the political affairs of the people of Bosnia has been executed without any questions being asked, because it is being done in the name of defending human rights.

Various human rights organisations declared their opposition to elections being held in Bosnia at all because they would allow the 'war lords' to stay in power. The US lobby organisation, Human Rights Watch, objected that 'if elections are conducted under current conditions... they will only consolidate the power of the extremists'. Doris Pack, the president of the European parliament's committee overseeing the election process in Bosnia complained that 'the elections will legitimise the existing leaders'. Morris B Abram, the chair of UN Watch, argued that the prosecution of high-ranking offenders would remove them from public office and allow 'decent people' to come forward and implement the 'legitimate aims and aspirations of their fellow citizens' (*Wall Street Journal Europe*, 20 February 1996).

If the people of Bosnia decide to vote for their existing leaders, as they have done already by voting for the nationalist parties in Mostar, surely that is their prerogative. Those who may seem 'decent' to Mrs Pack and Mr Abram may not be 'decent' to the Bosnian Muslims, Serbs or Croats. It is up to them to decide what they want and who should represent them. That is democracy.

In the case of Bosnia, however, the democratic rights of the people, and of the Bosnian Serbs in particular, have been thwarted by the meddling of outsiders. The OSCE refused to allow the elections to go ahead until Karadzic, the president of Republika Srpska and the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), had stood down from office. The Dayton accords ban indicted war criminals from holding public office or standing in elections. This means that anybody *accused* of a crime is automatically disqualified from political activity. Such a restriction would not be tolerated in the USA or Britain, but it seems that anything goes when the accused are over there and the accusers are in the West.

**Robert Frowick, the** OSCE official in charge of supervising the elections, threatened to disqualify the SDS from standing altogether unless it dumped its leader. It seems that Western diplomats have now assumed the power to pick and choose party leaders and presidents in somebody else's country—and not by back-door coups and assassinations, as they did in the old days, but by public ultimatum.

After Karadzic had been put in purdah, OSCE officials continued to complain about the behind-the-scenes role being played by the Bosnian Serb leader. Frowick told the new SDS leader, Aleksa Buha, that the frequent references to Karadzic by SDS speakers at rallies, and Karadzic's appearances in party adverts and posters were unacceptable. It was a wonder that the OSCE did not demand to write the speeches of the SDS candidates. They went one better and provided aid for Karadzic's political rivals, opening an aid office in Banja Luka, where the USA has sought to cultivate opposition to the domination of the SDS in Pale.

Who gave the OSCE a mandate to decide what happens in Bosnia? It was not the people who live there. The OSCE got its mandate from the US authorities, which brokered the peace



Karadzic: the Serbs choice, deposed by the West

agreement for Bosnia. Under the Dayton accords signed in Ohio last November, the OSCE was given the job of organising elections in Bosnia. Staffed by unelected diplomats and operatives of the CIA, the OSCE has imposed the will of the mightiest nation on one of the most powerless states in the world.

Compared with this bunch of unaccountable bureaucrats, the SDS is a paragon of democracy. Karadzic might not be the Western liberal's cup of tea, but he has more of a mandate to make decisions for his people than the OSCE. It does not seem to have occurred to anybody at the OSCE, an organisation which claims to be expanding democracy, that interfering in other people's elections is the antithesis of democracy. The OSCE has accused all sides in Bosnia of 'electoral engineering', but its own officers could teach them a trick or two about ballot-rigging. The most remarkable thing of all is that nobody in the West has questioned any of this. Much of the credit for this coup must go to the radical human rights organisations, which have legitimised the West's interference in Bosnia by demanding action against those whom they deem to be unfit for office. Quangos whose members could all fit in a lift can now decide the fate of millions in Bosnia.

Behind the high and mighty principles proclaimed by the OSCE stand the sordid and ruthless politics of interest pursued by the great powers. The battle fought among the various Western powers over who should head the OSCE mission in Bosnia revealed that power politics not democratic principles is what is at stake here. The USA made sure that it was in charge of the OSCE operation because it wanted all the glory of winning the peace in Bosnia. Sensitive to the charge that it is allowing the *de facto* partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Washington wants to be seen to deliver 'peace with justice' by taking a hard line on alleged war crimes. It seems that all you have to do is invoke the magic words 'human rights', to justify taking liberties. ●

# Introducing the new, improved, fairer, sharing **CARING CAPITALISM**

In the eighties they told us that 'Greed is good'. But in the nineties, World Bank officials, Wall Street consultants and other pillars of the establishment seem to have swallowed an old left-wing phrase book, as they join in criticising inequality and condemning corporate 'fat cats'.

Phil Murphy investigates the rise of the new reasonable, caring capitalism, and asks what's in it for them—and the rest of us

**Nowadays everybody, it** seems, is attacking greed and espousing the virtues of a more caring, friendlier form of capitalism. Even such bastions of capitalism as the World Bank and the OECD have recently issued reports condemning inequality. A few years ago, in the days of Reagan and Thatcher, they would have talked about the gap between rich and poor in terms of 'incentives' and 'enterprise', and argued that the wealth which those at the top piled up would 'trickle down' to the those at the bottom. Now Michael Bruno, chief economist of the World Bank, argues the opposite: 'Reducing inequality not only benefits the poor immediately, but will benefit all through higher growth.' (*Independent on Sunday*, 21 July 1996)

Respected publications, previously unknown for their radical leanings, now regularly accuse leading capitalists of avarice and inhumanity. *Newsweek* magazine has labelled the US heads of AT&T and IBM 'corporate killers'. *Business Week* has loudly denounced boardroom 'fat cat' greed. And this newly critical attitude to the evils of modern capitalism has quickly crossed the Atlantic to Britain, where shareholders,

newspapers and politicians of all parties have joined in criticising the greed of corporate bosses.

Evidence of this new mood abounds at all levels of society. Within academia, Adam Smith, the eighteenth-century founder of modern economics, is being reassessed. In the 1970s and 1980s, Smith, the author of *The Wealth of Nations*, was hailed as the first and greatest free market guru, the true ancestor of FA von Hayek and Milton Friedman. Right-wing think-tanks were named after him. In the intellectual circles of the nineties, however, Smith has been reborn as a moral philosopher, the author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and the guardian angel of responsible, caring capitalism.

In the more practical world of economic policy, 'fairness' seems to have superseded efficiency as the goal to be aimed at. Take the discussion of unemployment at the OECD summit in May. A few years ago, such a debate would have focused on whether it was relatively more important to regulate labour markets in order to protect the weak, or to maximise flexibility in the workforce so as to increase business efficiency. Through the ►



Unison pussies lampoon 'fat cat' pay-offs for utility bosses





...es in a lobby of North West Water shareholders

◀eighties and into the nineties, the right-wing case for flexible labour markets held the upper hand. This time, however, economists advising the OECD summiteers argued for flexibility on very different grounds—as the best means to secure a fair society. Even Angela Knight, economic secretary to the Tory government, talked about the need to tackle the ‘social exclusion’ of the unemployed—previously a left-wing concept derided by the Tories—through creating jobs in a flexible market. Fairness through flexibility is the 1990s message from hardnosed capitalist economists.

Politicians are singing the same tune. In the lead-up to the American presidential elections later this year, Democratic President Bill Clinton is praising the virtues of the ‘responsible corporation’. And, on the other side of the spectrum, right-wing Republican Pat Buchanan made the attack on the evils of fat cat corporate greed, and the need for higher business standards, a central component of his populist campaigning.

Out in the business world everything seems to be changing too. Personifying this new mood is Aaron Feuerstein, owner of a Massachusetts textile company. Dubbed the ‘caring tycoon’, he has been lauded by President Clinton and his labour secretary, Robert Reich, as the model of modern corporate responsibility.

Feuerstein has always been seen as ecologically sound and community minded, but he really took the title as champion of the stakeholder economy by refusing to lay off his 2500 workers when his factory burned down just before Christmas last year. Instead he called his employees together in the local high school gym and promised to keep paying them at a cost of £1m a week. He even gave them their Christmas bonus. After receiving a standing ovation from his workers, Feuerstein has appeared on all the chat shows and become something of an election mascot for Clinton.

**The Feuerstein story** is symptomatic of a broader business mood. It is widely argued that the ‘slash-and-burn’ corporate strategy of the late 1980s and early 1990s—with its emphasis on downsizing, delayering, business process re-engineering, restructuring, and all the other euphemisms for sacking people and cutting costs—is now out of date. Instead we are moving into the age where the successful company will be the caring corporation, whose priority is to develop loyalty and trust among employees, customers, and all the other stakeholders—including, but in no privileged position, the shareholders. Such companies, it is claimed, do much better for everyone in the long run. The motto for success today is that ‘being good in business is good for business’. And management is constantly being told to make sure that the pat phrase ‘People are our greatest asset’ is really put into practice.

These are not the touchy-feely views of a few liberals, or of politicians seeking votes. This is what big business is saying. Nor is it just soft soap from their public relations departments. It is serious mainstream thinking,

what the capitalists themselves are saying to themselves. When the two biggest telephone companies on the US east coast, Bell Atlantic and Nynex, announced that they were merging in April, the new chairman was quick to emphasise that, unlike previous mergers, the link-up would not slash jobs: ‘We’re going to take care of our employees.’

Among top management consultants, some of the most staunch advocates of the old slash-and-burn strategy are now calling for more caring corporate practice. Stephen Roach, influential chief economist at Morgan Stanley, preached the merits of downsizing and cost-cutting for more than a decade. This year, however, he underwent a road to Damascus-type conversion, and now reckons downsizing is bad for the economy. In a memo to his corporate clients, Roach confessed to having second thoughts: ‘Tactics of open-ended downsizing and real wage

compression are ultimately recipes for industrial extinction....If all you do is cut, then you will eventually be left with nothing, with no market share.’

Or take Fred Reichheld, a director of Bain & Co, a US management consultancy closely linked with the cold blooded cost-cutting culture of corporate America in the 1980s. Now Reichheld has produced a book for the Harvard Business School Press, called *The Loyalty Effect: The Hidden Force Behind Growth, Profits and Lasting Value*. It advises businesses to put loyalty above short-term profit. Under his guidance, Bain & Co have pioneered the management school of Loyalty Practice and have copyrighted the term ‘loyalty-based management’.

In Britain the current guidebook for responsible business is *Tomorrow's Company: The Role of Business in a Changing World*, a report produced by the Royal Society for the



Virgin on the ridiculous—Richard Branson and Tony Blair

Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA). Published last year, the report is based on an inquiry involving senior representatives from around half of Britain's top 100 companies, chaired by the IBM chairman, Anthony Cleaver. Its message to British capitalism was blunt—adopt the 'inclusive' approach to business, or fail:

'companies which will sustain competitive success in the future are those which focus less exclusively on shareholders and on financial measures of success—and instead include all their stakeholder relationships, and a broader range of measurements, in the way they think and talk about their purpose and performance.'

All of this will come as something of a surprise to those who had grown used to criticising capitalists as ruthless beasts scavenging in the jungle of the market. When the World Bank and Wall Street consultants start using the kind of language which would recently have been the preserve of the left, it is time to take another look at how capitalism is operating today. What is this caring, responsible capitalism all about?

Although the language of responsible capitalism has been around for 70 years, the issue of business ethics has become increasingly prominent over the past decade. Since the early 1980s, the proportion of US companies with a formal ethics statement has risen from about one third to 95 per cent. Many also have dedicated ethical officers or ethical boards. In Britain, too, the subject of corporate governance has been moving up the agenda for a decade. There has been a new Insolvency Act, the Cadbury Code on corporate governance, and the Greenbury Code on executive remuneration. The Institute of Business Ethics reports that today almost half of Britain's largest businesses have adopted or are preparing to adopt a code of ethics. This compares to less than a fifth when the institute carried out its first survey in 1987.

**The idea of** 'responsible capitalism' has gradually gained ground over a decade before really coming to public prominence only in the past couple of years. So why now? There are two main factors at work, each connected to the impact of economic stagnation. First, within the corporate world itself, the new emphasis on responsible behaviour represents a search for a fresh business strategy. Second, within the wider world of capitalist affairs, it corresponds to the desire for a new set of firm moral values to counter the pervasive sense of uncertainty in society today.

Let us take the business world first. The advocates of a more moral type of capitalism have certainly not abandoned the basic drive for competitiveness and profit in the marketplace. In the RSA report noted above, for example, the need to adopt responsible

business practice is proposed as the answer to Britain's poor competitive position. The report argues that paying more attention to people and relationships rather than physical assets and financial criteria is the means to succeed, not just to be nice. It suggests a 'strong correlation between issues concerning people, including relationships, and sustainable business success'.

**Making profits is** as important as ever in the new caring business, even if they do not figure in the first paragraph of the company's high-profile mission statement. Reichheld, for example, emphasises that 'loyalty to practical humanistic principles is not a substitute for profit. On the contrary, it is a vital component of the strategies these firms have used to achieve their extraordinary levels of growth and profitability' (*The Loyalty Effect*, p29).

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## Making companies thinner does not necessarily make them fitter

So sound profitability remains the end businessmen still seek if they want to be successful, or simply to survive. The difference is, however, that caring capitalism is now considered a more likely profit-making business strategy than the raw free market approach championed in the eighties. As Robert Waterman argues in *Frontiers of Excellence*, 'companies that set profits as their No1 goal are actually less profitable in the longer run than people-centred ones'. Profits are still of utmost concern. What has changed is the recognition that simply demanding profit is not the same as being profitable.

The ascendancy of the new caring business strategy is partly a straight reaction to the failure of the slash-and-burn approach of the recent past. It is driven by a genuine management concern that the old ways are no longer appropriate or effective.

In his apology for having recommended downsizing over a decade, Stephen Roach admits that the appearance of a productivity-led recovery in the US economy has proved deceptive: 'The miracles of the great productivity revolution of the 1990s are starting to ring hollow.' (*Financial Times*, 14 May 1996) Roach explains that financial indices might show 'spectacular improvements in business efficiency. But it is increasingly apparent to me that these are the result of plant closures, job cuts, and other forms of downsizing that are not recipes for lasting productivity enhancement'. Over the past 15 years, this kind of 'hollowing-out' has cut costs and boosted bottom-line profits, but it does not mean business is stronger. As Roach

warns, 'with the tactics of restructuring having focused more on downsizing than on rebuilding, corporate America may now be too lean'.

A crude cost-cutting drive is not the same as the thorough restructuring of industry required to create the basis for sustained profitable growth into the future. The RSA report expresses a similar frustration, noting that despite British industry securing a 46 per cent growth in productivity during the 1980s it still lags behind in the international competitiveness league. The leading management theorists Gary Hamel and CK Prahalad had already made the distinction between cutting back to save and building up to expand in their 1994 book *Competing for the Future*. As they noted, 'the United States and Britain have produced an entire generation of denominator managers. They can downsize, declutter, delayer and divest better than any managers in the world'. But this could not guarantee growth for their businesses in the longer term. Making companies thinner does not necessarily make them fitter.

This reaction to the inadequacies of the business survival strategies of the 1980s and early 1990s has prompted the search for a new approach. The easy option is to blame what went before. Downsizing and the use of slash-and-burn strategies are not just regarded as ineffective, but have become the scapegoat for today's problems. The new attempted solution makes a virtue of blaming what went before—speculative excess and a brutal shake-out—and simply argues for the opposite—a moral, considerate, responsible approach. 'Greed-is-good' capitalism is seen to have failed, so flip the record and give a spin to its opposite: caring capitalism.

**The highlighting of** 'people-centred' business strategies is another reaction to the problems of capitalism today. The slowdown in the pace of economic growth has been rationalised through a lowering of expectations of what is possible. Most importantly, capital investment—the key to any genuine economic restructuring—is now disparaged. Current growth theories play down the role of technological change and instead emphasise the role of 'investment in human resources' (people) over physical ones (modern, advanced plant and machinery).

The long-term fall in capital investment, highlighted in the *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin* earlier this year, is the most significant element in the continuing stagnation of the British and American economies. Yet there has been relatively little fuss made about it because the argument expounded by most apologists for capitalism is that investment does not matter so much any more. Unable or unwilling to sustain the levels of capital investment required to restructure the economy, they have defensively decided that it is not all that important anyway. Hence the fashionable cliché about people rather ►

◀ than capital being 'our greatest asset' and the obsession with education and training as a panacea.

The greater significance attached to issues of trust and loyalty also reflects the extent to which companies are now driven by a defensive survival strategy. Unable to expand much, they become dedicated to holding on to what they have. Hence the preoccupation with not staining your public image and endangering your market share. This motivates the desire to institutionalise customer loyalty. The humiliating announcement by Sainsbury (Britain's once top, but now ailing, super-market retailer) of the launch of a loyalty card to emulate its competitors Tesco and Safeway is evidence of how seriously customer loyalty is taken these days.

In one sense, then, caring capitalism is a business strategy designed to ride out difficult economic circumstances. But it is more than that. Beyond the marketplace, the ubiquity of the idea of responsible capitalism is part of the wider search for a new morality, a set of values through which the capitalist elite can legitimise its position in wider society today.

The dominant mindset of the capitalist elite these days, especially in Britain and America, is uncertainty. Nothing seems to work as it used to. The exhaustion of past economic and political solutions to its difficulties has fostered a nervous and often exaggerated sense of being out of control. This comes at time when, unlike the last economic slump in the 1930s, nobody is seriously questioning the market principle. Capitalism seems to have seen off all opponents. Both the Soviet model and Western welfare socialism have been discredited, and China is introducing market relations as fast as it can.

The widespread recognition that society is in trouble today goes alongside the general acceptance that 'There is no alternative' to the market. This unprecedented situation has created both the necessity and the possibility for those who run capitalist society to experiment with a different approach.

Despite the lack of focused opposition, the authorities still need to cohere their own forces and legitimise their position in society around a clear set of values. However, in the depressed nineties, a system based upon money-making cannot be justified in the strident style of the eighties. Instead, the capitalists need to indicate that what they are doing is important and worthwhile by linking it to something more than cash. The image of caring capitalism and the inclusive stakeholder society fits the bill.

**The absence of** any serious questioning of the market today allows the elites themselves the scope to criticise the more extreme consequences of market economics—such as the huge gap between the richest and the poorest—without putting the money-making system at risk. It is not a social criticism of capitalism, but a moral criticism of the wrong

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## The idea of responsible capitalism is part of the wider search for a new morality

type of capitalist. The problems of society are reduced to a question of capitalist culture, and the new brand of responsible capitalism is put forward as the solution.

Out of the uncertainty of the ruling elite, then, comes the demand for a new ethics and the fashionable preoccupation with issues like trust, social capital, loyalty and cultural values. The authorities yearn for a new set of rules or morals to regulate society under their control. The discussion about corporate culture, and the need for a socially responsible capitalism, is part of the attempt to fill the vacuum.

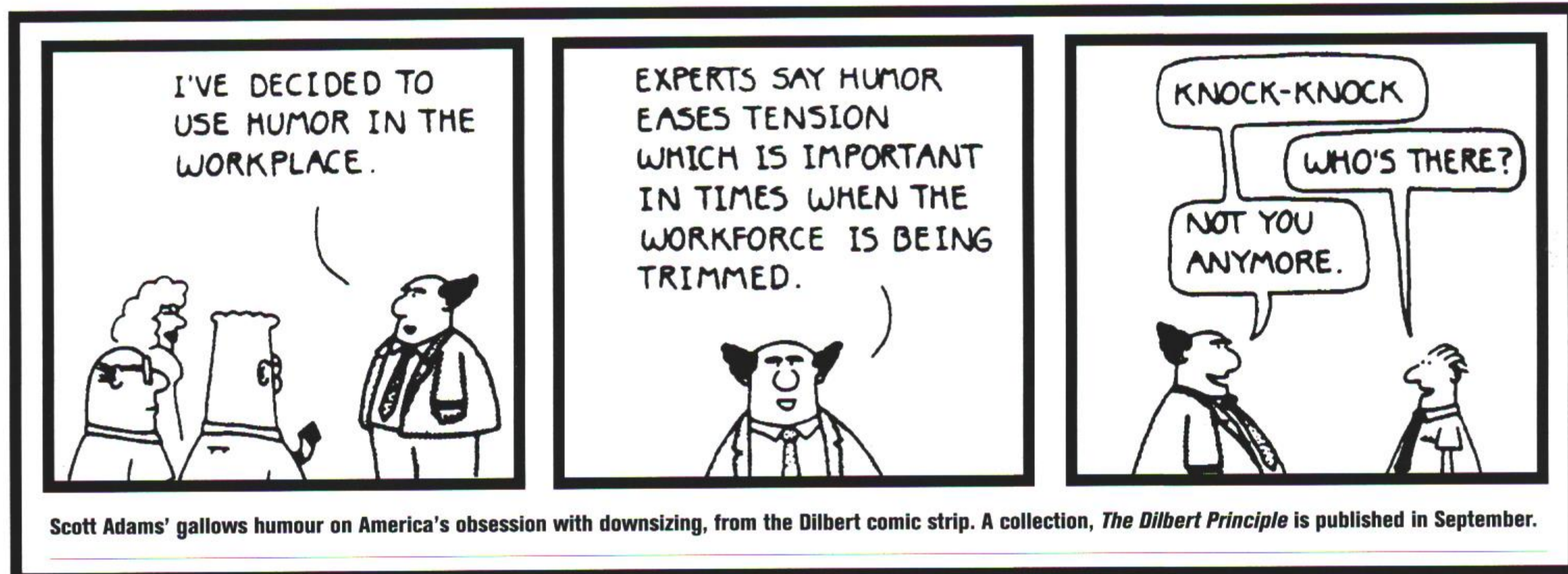
But does responsible capitalism work? What can it really do to improve things for the capitalists—and for the rest of us?

At first glance ethical business can appear good for business. Various companies noted for exhibiting the features of caring capitalism are successful, profitable concerns. For example, a survey conducted by the Shell corporation of the world's longest surviving companies—those in business for over 100 years—shows that they tend to be adaptable and tolerant, to share purpose and values with employees, and exhibit a sense of cohesion—all characteristics of the model caring capitalist.

Or take the role of public image—what the RSA calls the 'license to operate'. There does seem to be a correlation between socially responsible behaviour, a high public standing and the bottom line of making profits. This correlation is most obvious in the negative. If a company makes a big mistake—brings out a faulty product, is responsible for dishonestly sold pension policies, grants huge pay rises to directors, or is blamed for an environmental disaster—it can lose custom. Shell lost sales over the Brent Spar affair, when it was perceived as a polluter.

Not surprisingly given that recent bad corporate experience, a survey carried out this year showed that 70 per cent of Britain's biggest companies attach more importance to environmental issues than they did a year ago. Despite the fact that 52 per cent said that they were unaware of the 'business benefits of environmental investment', some 90 per cent said it was important to be seen as green, reflecting awareness of the customer relations benefits of appearing environmentally sound (*Financial Times*, 23 May 1996).

**It is not** simply that supposedly irresponsible, uncaring corporate behaviour can hurt profits. Companies with positive images, which have secured the 'license to operate', can be very profitable. Marks & Spencer, for example, has one of the best corporate reputations among the British public. It also had profits approaching £1 billion last year.



Some companies have built their success largely on their image as ethical outfits. The commercial success of Anita Roddick's Body Shop can be understood as a form of effective niche marketing; where other companies might sell their products by association with sex or sport, Roddick's pitch is as a friend of the Earth and Earth Mother. Richard Branson's Virgin empire has managed to pile up money while promoting itself almost as a non-profit-making community organisation. Branson has even managed to move into the eighties-style territory of selling financial services without tarnishing his reputation. Surveys of ethical unit trust funds also show that they tend to give above average performance—further evidence that green and ethical companies are among the more successful. (However, the green pitch does not work in every case. The National Consumer Council reported recently that many consumers thought environmentally friendly products were a con, more expensive and less effective than standard products.)

**Bain & Co's** loyalty-based management approach can also appear to work. The main objective is to reduce customer defection rates, otherwise known as churn rates. Reichheld shows that many big companies lose, and have to spend money replacing, up to half their customers every five years. He illustrates how cutting a customer churn rate by only five per cent can double your profits within a few years. Take two companies of the same size, both with a 10 per cent growth in customer base each year. If one company retains 95 per cent of its existing customers, its customer base grows by a net five per cent each year. This doubles the customer base over 14 years. The other company, with a 90 per cent retention rate—only five per cent less—has zero net growth, and struggles to survive.

On top of this, each loyal, longer-lasting customer is more profitable than searching for new customers all the time. Loyal customers do not need special introductory offers. They tend to get richer and spend more as the years pass. And because loyal customers make positive recommendations to their friends and colleagues they operate as a free sales team to win new customers. One successful US computer software company, Intuit, explained how it operated with a sales force of only two: 'Really, we have hundreds of thousands of salespeople. They're our customers.' (*The Loyalty Effect*, p49)

There is indisputable evidence that many successful companies are examples of caring and responsible capitalism. But it would be wrong to conclude that this ethical image explains their success. Evidence of a correlation does not establish a cause-effect relation. Proponents of responsible capitalism tend to confuse symptoms with causes. An 'inclusive culture' does not itself create a profitable company. However, a company which is profitable will, as a consequence, tend to exhibit certain characteristics which fall into the caring, inclusive, responsible category.

A successful company will tend to hold on to its employees and not need to engage in ►

# Moral mission statements

**I used to** work for a pub landlord who at closing time told his customers, 'I've had your money, now bugger off!'. Amstrad's Alan Sugar once declared that he was only interested in making money. Things are different now. When the Digital Equipment Company surveyed 500 managers, 'short-term profit' came bottom of their list of priorities. Today's managers see themselves not as money-grubbers, but as moral missionaries, guided by the ethical code in the company 'mission statement'.

The Body Shop mission statement exemplifies the new ethos. It proclaims that the company's 'reason for being' is not to make money for its owners, but 'to dedicate our business to the pursuit of social and environmental change'. And not small change either: one partner just sold a fraction of his Body Shop shares for £12m.

But never mind all that money talk. Whatever they earn, Body Shop managers and staff are bound by a common creed: 'to *creatively* balance the financial and human needs of our stakeholders...to *courageously* ensure that our business is ecologically sustainable... to *meaningfully* contribute to local, national and international communities...to *passionately* campaign for the protection of the environment...to *tirelessly* work to narrow the gap between principle and practice, whilst making fun, passion and care part of our daily lives.' Judging by the split infinitives, the author must have been inspired by Captain Kirk's mission statement at the start of *Star Trek*.

The Body Shop was among the first to compose a moral mission statement. Nowadays my Internet search engine offers more than two million Web sites on 'corporate mission statements', and most of them exhibit the high moral tone associated with caring capitalism.

British Airways and the British Airports Authority both aim to be 'a good neighbour', although this may come as a surprise to those living under the flight path to Heathrow. The John Menzies Group is pledged to 'contribute wherever possible to the welfare and quality of life of the community'. Tesco sees itself 'supporting the well-being of the community' (Tesco heiress Lady Shirley Porter, disgraced former leader of Westminster council, may have overlooked this clause).

Many mission statements incorporate notions of global citizenship and environmental concern. Toshiba aims to 'promote the cultural values of the local

community'. Coca-Cola aims to be both multicultural and 'internationalist'. The German company Bayer AG aims to 'minimise the impact [of our operations] on the environment, while efficiently utilising natural resources'. It sounds as if this world leader in chemicals is about to convert to herbal medicine.

Those laid off by Jaguar might be unimpressed by the company's promise 'to provide competitive, secure, long-term employment in an environment of mutual trust, courtesy and respect'. McDonald's commitment 'to the welfare and development of our staff' looks a bit tasteless in the light of the company's burger-all-money pay policies and opposition to unionisation.

But today's mission statements make going to work sound like the sort of personal development programme which many people are now prepared to pay a lot of money for. DHL Worldwide Express offers 'superior opportunities for personal development and growth'. GKN promises 'the opportunity for personal development'. The woman at the checkout in Safeway, half-mad with boredom, is apparently part of 'an atmosphere in which our people can develop their talents'. Words like 'creativity', 'fun', 'individuality' occur frequently. Toyota's reference to 'changing values and lifestyles' is one of many nods in the direction of the counter-culture. McKinsey & Company feel an 'obligation to dissent'. Apple Computer aims to 'extend the bounds of human potential', while Bayer AG is apparently only in business 'to benefit mankind, and to play our part in solving the major problems of our time'.

**If it is** mentioned at all in the mission statement, profit is usually defined as the necessary precondition for 'sustaining growth' (Safeway Stores). It is rarely referred to as an end in itself. Amid the jargon of altruism, it is doubly hard to discern the reality of capitalist enterprise, whereby the provision of goods, services and jobs is a mere by-product of the bottom line.

The mission statement came into existence so that managers could feel good about themselves, despite the slump. Underneath the high moral tone, the real purpose of mission statements is to improve morale among a managerial elite which is deeply ashamed of its track record and which lacks any real sense of mission.

**Andrew Calcutt**

◀ bouts of redundancies. It will have loyal customers because its products are good quality and competitive. It will hold on to its investors because they can see the benefits of sticking with a strong, profitable company. A profitable company will also be better able to introduce good environmental practice and provide services for the community.

Meanwhile companies in financial difficulty will tend to exhibit many of the features frowned upon today: short-termist, adversarial, conflictual, explicitly profit-centred, telling different things to different stakeholders—workers are regarded as costs to be reduced when addressing investors, and as assets to be nurtured when motivating the workforce to give more effort. All these are symptoms of a company's desperate attempts to keep afloat. But they are not the cause of the firm failing.

All we can conclude is that profitable companies will tend to be responsible, and unprofitable ones will breach many of the

example, fall into at least one of the stakeholder categories—as workers—whose interests business is now supposed to serve. But it would be unwise to hold your breath while waiting to feel the benefits.

No code of ethics or consultative practice can transform capitalism into a system which provides us all with a decent life. The new moral outlook might be held very sincerely by industrialists and politicians, but the essential dynamic of making more money—the lifeblood of capitalism—has not changed. Successful companies succeed because they are effective in exploiting their workforce. Today's doubters about downsizing do not doubt this fact for a moment. They know their wealth comes from their employees' labour; which is why they claim to want to care for them more. Without workers, and without workers who are to some extent motivated, they cannot make profits.

Ultimately profits come from paying workers less than the new value which

Since 1973 the real wages of non-supervisory US workers have fallen by around 15 per cent. Only the changes in contribution levels for benefits like pensions and health insurance, and the rise in the number of double-income families, as more women work, has prevented the living standards of most American families from plunging.

As with most transatlantic trends this is now the trajectory in Britain, and in many of the weaker parts of the European economy. In Britain, despite the feelings of a more caring management, making profits relies increasingly on eating into our living standards. Over the nineties, at the same time that responsible capitalism has been gaining adherents, profits have been growing at the direct expense of workers for the first time in decades. Many have experienced a shift towards slower wages growth, longer hours, more temporary or part-time jobs, fewer perks and harsher working conditions. Employers might care more, but that changes nothing about the fundamentals of a market-based society. Over the caring nineties in Britain the profit share of national income has risen from 12 to 15 per cent, while the share going to income from employment has fallen from 67 to 62 per cent.

At the same time, the political climate of which caring capitalism is a part is one where workers are less well equipped to do anything about defending living standards. The ruling elite's loss of faith in its own institutions—which drives its search for a new moral agenda—parallels and interacts with the collapse of the old working class identity and the collective institutions which sustained it. We tend to live these days as isolated, atomised and vulnerable individuals, feeling less in control of our lives than ever. Workers have always lacked real power under capitalism, but in today's conditions our sense of powerlessness is enhanced. We respond as individuals rather than as part of a class.

**At a time** when we are encouraged not to trust our neighbours or our workmates, the irony is that the ideology of caring capitalism endorses the notion that the boss may be more of a friend than our fellow workers. Through the new emphasis upon issues like harassment and abuse at work, the caring managers with their codes of conduct are increasingly able to take on the role of arbiter and policeman among the warring workforce. Safety at work, for example, is being redefined today, from a problem caused by cost-cutting bosses which employees organised together to challenge, to a problem seen to be caused by other workers who smoke or crack dirty jokes, and against whom individuals ask the enlightened management for protection. The result is that the caring capitalists extend their influence over more areas of our lives inside and outside work, while our autonomy is further undermined, and our freedom restricted.

The process of capitalist exploitation has always tended, of course, to mess up our lives, especially at times of economic crisis. What is new is that, in the age of caring capitalism, we find ourselves less in control than ever in coping with the consequences of exploitation 1990s-style. ●



Anita Roddick's Body Shop has cornered a niche market in salving consciences

criteria of caring business behaviour. Outside a few niche markets, simply declaring yourself 'responsible' cannot ensure business success.

Today's experts might claim that 'relationships are the underlying source of competitiveness'. A more accurate picture is that profitable companies are better able to maintain a range of ongoing relationships. But the profitability tends to be a precondition for the caring image, not a consequence of it. Any idea that the strategy of responsible capitalism is a means to survive the slump is fundamentally flawed. Its popularity is much more to do with the peculiar search for new moral codes than with its practical benefits.

Finally, can the new responsible capitalism do any good for the rest of us? Many of us, for

their labour creates for their employers. This is bog-standard, everyday exploitation. However benevolent—or, for that matter, mean-minded and vicious—an individual employer is, this is where the profits originate. Capitalists do not make their money out of thin air, but by exploiting those of us who have to work for a living. And all the usual underlying problems arising from capitalist exploitation are still around in the caring nineties.

But there are ways in which things are worse for us under 'caring capitalism'. As noted above, the new ethos is a response to the stagnation of the economic system. Capitalism is reaching the limits of the sort of growth where most people can benefit a bit. In America they are probably already there.

# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

**G**one are the days when the Sherriff of Nottingham would get a posse together and hunt down do-gooders like Robin Hood. But in a modest way, the recent incumbent kept the bad-guy image going. He has now resigned after slapping a 10-year old boy at a school sports day. Rather than cursing his luck and pledging revenge in the traditional manner, the only response has been a statement issued via a council official: 'The Sheriff has a drink problem and it has got worse. He also suffers from diabetes, and it is a great strain being Sheriff.' How times change.

At least eight MPs are receiving artificial testosterone—in the same class as anabolic steroids used by athletes. Some have six months' supply in buttock implants.

National Condom Week not only offered free supplies of curry-flavoured varieties, but also a special phonenumber featuring Bob Hoskins giving advice about safe sex. Maybe it is not always good to talk, after all.

Japanese condom manufacturer Okamoto has discontinued its 'Super Military Assault' brand, after protests from women's groups. The firm sold them to the Japanese army during the war for use in conjunction with the 'comfort women' system. Somehow they never got round to changing the name.

Looking for that special holiday? Why not take up the Earth-watch expeditions brochure's offer of a trip to Kakari, north-west of Kampala, where you can 'help Ugandan public health workers conduct interviews of [sic] HIV-infected parents'?

Maybe the jackboots won't be marching across Europe just yet. German troops are complaining that they have to wear 'olive drab underwear' while women are allowed to wear 'something fancier in white'. Stalingrad could have been so different....

Meanwhile, the British army has posted 11 military personnel and 10 civilian assistants to the St Kilda islands to protect a rare, exceptionally large species of field mouse.

## BODY OF CHRIST

Miniature communion cartons or 'celebration cups' containing a hermetically sealed portion of bread and wine have become *de rigueur* in American churches. Health-conscious church-goers can now rest assured that they will not catch diseases via the communal chalice. 'The Eucharist is not a slick fast-food operation', complained the Bishop of Portsmouth. 'It is about fellowship and offering ourselves to each other and to God. The symbolism in this package is highly individualistic.' But Corpak Corporation president Jim Johnson takes the traditional approach of citing the Bible: 'I think it is more reverent than ordinary means, since the Bible endorses cleanliness.' Another victory for scientific progress.

Argyll and Bute council has banned Hare Krishna monks from street collecting because they 'intimidate' passers-by.

Neighbourhood Watch officials have objected to John and Stella Haycock's 'Stalag 9' home-protection measures, which include barbed-wire fences to deter nosey neighbours. The Neighbourhood Watch leaders (not themselves nosey, of course) claim that the fences hamper their activities by obscuring the view up and down the cul-de-sac.

Australian psychic Carmen Lomax is suing her boss after he made indecent advances towards her—in a vision.

## BRISTOL

## CAR E S S T A L K

**'He may be an idiot, but he's an idiot savant'**  
Germaine Greer, on Gazza.

**'How can we reduce fear of crime? How can we stop them coming into our living rooms and our lives?'**

Martyn Lewis, introducing yet another primetime crime show. Turning the TV off would be a start.

**'The referee's a wanker'**

An entire under-12s football team, when said ref Gerry Cullen walked into their changing room. All 11 boys were red-carded—the first time an entire team has been dismissed.

**'It is the fulfilment of a dream to visit Bristol'**  
Nelson Mandela, addressing the crowds in Brixton.

**'Police say the victim would have had no way of knowing that it was the Royal Train'**  
Sky News report on man hit by Royal Train.

# Raging

Is 'road rage' really driving us all mad?  
David Nolan indicates otherwise

# bullshit



PHOTO: DAVE CHAPMAN

**R**oad rage' is apparently all the rage. One survey suggests that there are almost two million incidents a year. Another claims that 90 per cent of drivers have had some experience of 'road rage'.

So what exactly is this new threat to the nation's motorists? Nobody seems too sure. The definition of road rage expands all the time, covering everything from gesticulating and swearing to a punch-up and even murder. People on motorways, dual carriageways, country lanes and even in car parks have reported 'incidents'.

One thing everybody seems sure about, however, is that 'road rage' is a real and growing problem, and Something Must Be Done. After a few recent, highly publicised incidents of 'road rage', the Automobile Association, in association with the police, drew up a code of conduct, a list of 10 do's and don'ts to enable drivers to avoid any potentially dangerous situations.

The AA's campaign seeks to promote courtesy and good manners on the road, advising drivers to keep calm, be patient, show restraint and refrain from pushing in. The message from the AA's behavioural analyst, Matthew Joint, is that if people showed more tolerance to one another driving would be safer.

But how dangerous is driving anyway? The AA code was published two weeks after the Department of Transport released figures which showed that road deaths are at their lowest since records began in 1926. And this despite the massive increase in the numbers of cars on Britain's roads over the past 70 years (from 1.7m to 25.2m), and of their potential speeds. The department's figures show 3621 deaths in 1995 in personal injury road accidents. Of these 1749 were



car users. Fatalities are now 35 per cent below the base line of 1981-85, and serious injuries are 39 per cent below it, despite a 47 per cent increase in traffic over the same period.

The truth is that the roads are now safer than ever before. Yet the belief persists that road rage not only exists, but is booming. That belief is aided by the fact that the police do not collect statistics for a specific category of 'road rage' offences. This means that almost any figure can be publicised as the 'hidden truth' about road rage.

The only available 'evidence' of road rage comes from surveys taken by motoring organisations. The most recent, a poll carried out by NOP for the AA in June 1996, reported that there is a one-in-four chance of becoming a 'road rage' victim. The word *chance* was carefully chosen. Only five per cent of motorists polled had actually experienced road rage, but one in four said that they had on occasion 'felt like resorting to physical violence'. The AA's shock-horror figures for the high chance of road rage are based on the assumption that feeling like doing something to somebody is the same thing as doing it.

Of the five per cent of people who told the AA that they had actually experienced 'road rage', only four in 10 indicated that they felt like responding in kind. Given that the study was of 476 people, this gives a grand total of nine motorists who 'felt' like resorting to physical or threatening behaviour during an alleged road rage incident. It seems a rather small number to be responsible for what is allegedly a major public health risk and crime epidemic. The press release accompanying the poll results grudgingly admitted that the 'problem' is comparatively rare; but in the best tradition of crime panics, it quickly went on to stress that the 'potential' exists for a much higher degree of violence.

### Flashing lights

An earlier AA survey of 526 motorists in January 1995 found that almost 90 per cent of drivers had 'experienced frightening "road rage" incidents during the previous 12 months' at the hands of 'boorish road hogs'. Yet only five of the drivers claimed to have been physically assaulted. The 'road rage' experienced by the rest included having lights flashed at them, rude gestures and verbal abuse. Given that 45 per cent of the drivers polled also admitted flashing their own lights at other drivers on a regular basis, the high figures for the alleged incidence of road rage are hardly surprising. What is far more telling is that 96 per cent of drivers had no less confidence in driving after the incident. This major epidemic clearly does not intimidate anybody very much.

Another survey, by the *Lex Report on Motoring* found that an amazing 1.8m drivers were forced either to pull over or off the road last year in 'road rage' incidents. This survey, of 1229 drivers (and 717 non-drivers as a control group), examined the driving habits of the British motorist. The 1.8m figure was achieved by extrapolating from the regional percentages of drivers who had been forced either to pull off the road or pull over by another driver. However, given that 60 per cent of the drivers found lane hogging and slow driving on motorways to be the most seriously annoying offences, it is hardly surprising that so many had been 'forced' to pull over into another lane by drivers flashing their lights behind.

### Chariot rage

As in many instances of the modern syndrome, the headlines fail to match the facts. 'Road rage' looks less like a new epidemic than an invented label for an old and unexceptional form of human behaviour. It may be that drivers are gesticulating at each other and flashing their lights in annoyance, but they have been doing that ever since they had hands and headlights were invented. The former roads minister, Stephen Norris, recently claimed that road rage was simply a new way of describing something that had existed since the invention of the wheel. Oedipus killed a chariot driver who insulted him only to discover that the dead man was his father; Lord Byron once punched somebody and threatened to mend the road with the man's 'immediate remains'; and a number of incidents involving starting handles were documented in the 1920s.

The concept of 'road rage' turns an everyday occurrence into a major crime caused by a syndrome or condition. A banal fact of everyday life has become shocking news. Everybody from the broadsheets to the radical press accepts that it is a big problem. Events that might otherwise have attracted little national attention are reinterpreted as major scare stories once viewed through the prism of the road rage panic.

One such example is the case of a war veteran in Portsmouth. Ronald Francis, 73, hit the nation's front pages after he claimed that three youths had pulled him from his car and threatened to burn him alive. He became the media's most celebrated victim of the growing menace of 'road rage'. Yet the police quietly ended their investigation because they could find no independent evidence that the attack had taken place. Mr Francis turned out to have a history of telling dramatic tales, having reportedly claimed to

have been wounded and decorated in Second World War battles which it later transpired he had not been involved in.

The biggest road rage scare to date erupted in May this year when Stephen Cameron, 21, was killed on the M25. According to his girlfriend, who had been driving, Cameron had 'shaken his head in disbelief' at another driver, who then forced him off the road and stabbed him to death. The case was reported as the ultimate proof that 'road rage' was a threat to all motorists, and other drivers stopped to lay flowers on the spot where Cameron was killed.

After the initial furore had died down, however, other aspects of the story surfaced. It transpired that the police should be looking for a badly beaten man, as Cameron had given his fair share of stick to the other driver. It became an open secret that police were looking for Kenneth Noye, a man who served eight years for his part in the Brink's-Mat bullion robbery, was once acquitted of murdering a police officer on the grounds of self-defence, and had left the country soon after the M25 killing. It was also rumoured that Cameron knew Noye and even owed him money—a story denied by Cameron's friends and family. What had really been a fight with tragic consequences, possibly involving a well-known violent criminal, became yet another incident in the juggernaut of publicity about how 'road rage' was turning normal motorists into irrational maniacs.

### Etiquette

The sensationalist treatment of these cases reflects the widespread conviction that we live in an increasingly violent society. The massaging of the crime statistics to the point where thinking bad thoughts is now considered on a par with assault is ignored in the rush to believe the worst. It seems that any form of behaviour that would not be acceptable at a dinner party can now be inflated into a major social problem requiring more controls and more regulation. What really is new is that many people today seem unable to stand up to a bit of mild aggression and abuse. Yet this is ignored. Instead rare cases are used as an excuse to demand more controls and dictate what is and is not acceptable.

The road rage panic is a symptom of a state of mind in which every human act is regarded as risky, every other human being seen as threatening. In such a climate the demands for codes of conduct, even if they are as innocuous as a call for more politeness on the roads, should be challenged. The last thing we need is yet another etiquette dictating how we should behave and relate to each other.

# The diseases of modern civilisation

Experts warn that we are under fresh threat from drug-resistant bugs, old plagues and new viruses. Dr Michael Fitzpatrick provides an alternative diagnosis

**In a recent** account of a slight increase in the number of cases of tuberculosis in Britain after a century of decline, the following sentence appears:

‘Surrounded, then, by a maelstrom of disease, and veined internally with the rot of poverty, Britain increasing resembles a population under seige.’ (D Newnham, ‘The politics of consumption’, *Guardian Weekend*, 27 April 1996)

This melange of fervid metaphors is characteristic of current popular—and indeed much academic—discussion about infectious disease. In one sentence David Newnham conjures up images of chaos and disintegration, of decay and degeneration, of military-style attack and defence.

Our first response to Mr Newnham might be to suggest that he chill out for a while in one of those rooms thoughtfully provided at clubs for casualties of hallucinogens. Yet the perception that we live in imminent danger of diverse infectious pathogens is widespread, contributing to the beleaguered mentality that pervades modern society.

Three themes recur in the burgeoning literature of microbial Armageddon. One is the emergence of strains of bacteria which are resistant to familiar antibiotics, even when these drugs are used in combination. Another is the recognition of new diseases, such as Ebola, that we are warned threaten devastating outbreaks. The third is the apparent reappearance on an epidemic scale of old diseases—cholera, diphtheria, even the plague itself. Let us take these in turn.

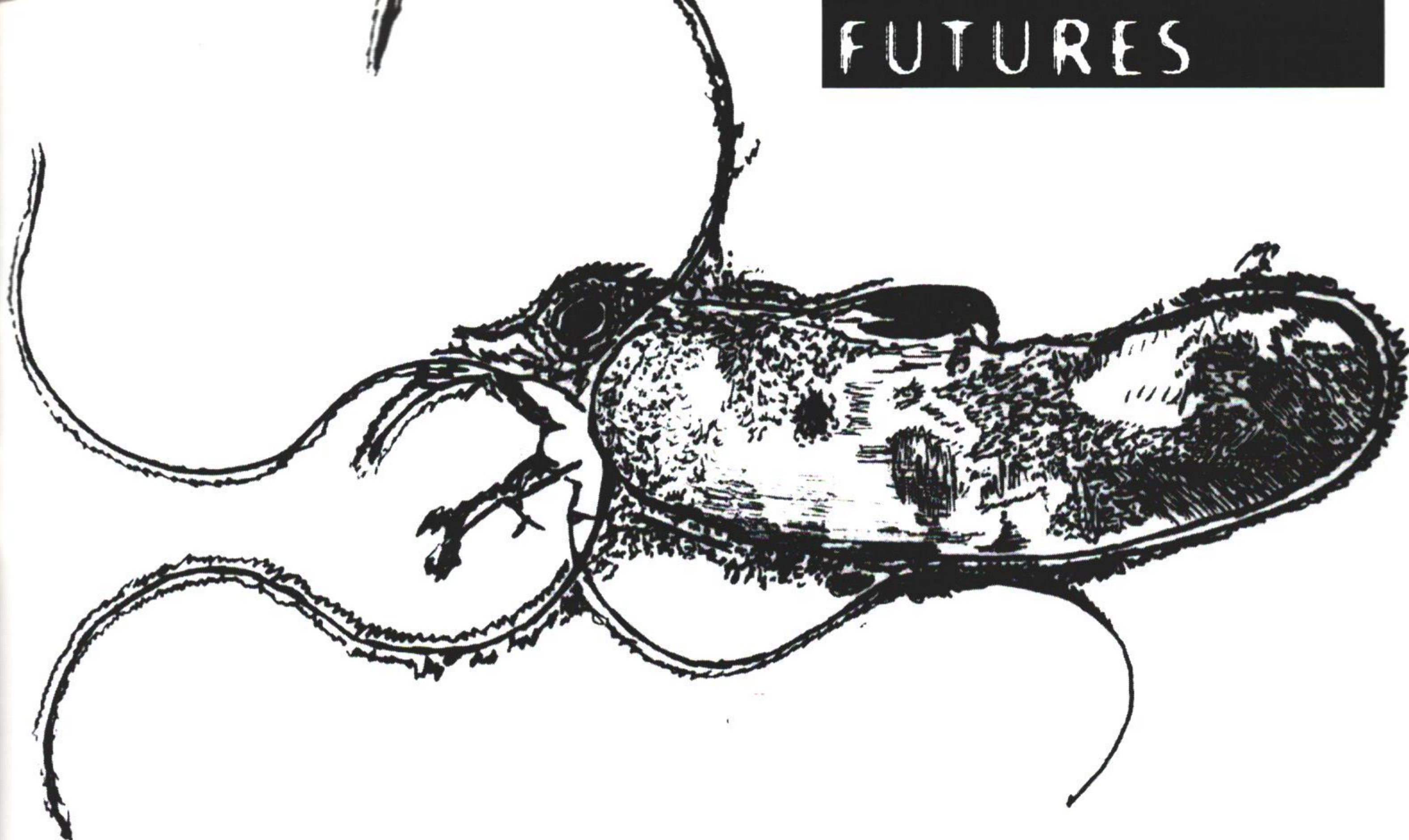
The issue of ‘multi-drug resistant’ strains has particularly arisen in relation to tuberculosis and malaria. But resistance has been recorded to almost every antibiotic, and strains of particular bacteria that are untreatable by any currently available antibiotics have also been recognised.

It is necessary, however, to put the problem of drug-resistant strains in perspective. Antibiotics have made a relatively small contribution to the declining mortality from infectious disease in the West over the past century. In a celebrated study published 20 years ago, Professor Thomas McKeown illustrated the declining curves of death rates from tuberculosis, whooping cough, measles, scarlet fever and other diseases, showing that the decline often began before the causative organism was identified, and certainly long before either effective immunisations or antibiotic treatments were available (T McKeown, *The Modern Rise in Population*, 1976). While McKeown attributed the decline to improved diet and living standards, others have emphasised sanitation and public health. Nobody disputes the fact that antibiotics played a relatively minor role.

The problem of resistant strains is a real problem, but it is as old as antibiotics. Bacteria replicate at such a rapid rate that it is possible for mutations to appear which confer enhanced survival prospects on a particular strain when confronted with a particular antibiotic, and these strains can flourish at the expense of strains sensitive to the antibiotic. Bacteria have evolved various mechanisms for transmitting genetic

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

## FUTURES



material which can potentially pass on drug-resistance to future generations of bacteria. The specialities of microbiology and therapeutics have also evolved over the past half century, developing greater understanding of the dynamics of infectious disease and increasingly sophisticated antibiotics (and antibiotic combinations) to deal with resistant strains.

**So what's new** about 'multi-drug resistance' to cause the current furor? A closer look at one of the focal points of this debate—the problem of tuberculosis in New York City—reveals that the novelty lies less in the bacillus, which remains much as it was when it was first identified by Robert Koch in 1882, and more in the problems of modern society. In the early 1990s there was a sharp increase in the incidence of tuberculosis in New York, particularly among the homeless, immigrants and people with HIV/AIDS. The problem of resistance emerged when it became clear that less than half the patients who started treatment finished the course (which has always required taking a combination of expensive antibiotics for a minimum of six months). It is well recognised that inadequate treatment for tuberculosis is more likely to encourage resistant strains than it is to effect a cure. According to Dale Morse, director of the division of epidemiology at the New York State Department of Health, the problem underlying the poor compliance of tuberculosis patients with treatment was 'years of neglect, a fragmented healthcare system, and collapse of the public health infrastructure' (*British Medical Journal*, 23 March). The resulting outbreaks of multiple

drug-resistant tuberculosis 'made an emergency response necessary'. Fortunately, the incidence of tuberculosis in New York has declined in the past two years.

The problem of drug-resistant tuberculosis is, in other words, a problem of poverty and poor standards of public health, rather than the emergence of a rampant superbug.

Expert microbiologists and epidemiologists attending a symposium on antibiotic resistance in London in July recognised the importance of 'societal factors' and the 'breakdown in public health' (ML Cohen, 'Epidemiological factors influencing the emergence of antibiotic resistance', CIBA Foundation Symposium No207, July 1996). At the same conference, representatives of some of the large pharmaceutical companies were gloomy about the prospects of discovering new antibiotics to deal with vancomycin-resistant enterococci which are becoming a clinical problem in some Western hospitals. In response to the drug companies (whose enormous postwar profits were heavily dependent on antibiotics) it should be noted that their promotion of the excessive use of antibiotics in the past, in both humans and animals, has contributed to the problem of antibiotic resistance. However, large-scale research and development projects are under way to find new naturally occurring antibiotics, to modify existing antibiotics and to devise new antibiotics through using genetic engineering techniques.

Pessimism about the prospects of new antibiotics is by no means universal. For example, the American biologist Christopher Wills sees

'rays of hope' in the relatively limited mechanisms of developing resistance available to the tuberculosis bacillus (by comparison with the bugs that cause cholera or typhoid). He concludes that he has 'no doubt that effective defences against even drug-resistant pathogens can continue to be generated, since our knowledge of these pathogens will continue to grow' (C Wills, *Plagues: Their Origin, History and Future*, 1996, p251).

So much for drug-resistant superbugs. What of the 'new plagues' that are said to be threatening us today?

**According to the** World Health Organisation some 30 new diseases have been identified over the past 20 years. Of these AIDS is the most familiar and Ebola (as featured in Richard Preston's novel *The Hot Zone* and in the film *Outbreak*) the most menacing. While AIDS remains a significant health problem in the West and a bigger one in the Third World, and the quest for effective immunisation or treatment has so far been unsuccessful, there are signs that it has peaked in the West, and even in parts of Africa. Ebola is more typical of the new viruses. Though it appears to be highly virulent, it has so far resulted in only limited outbreaks, leading to a few hundred deaths, in regions of Africa where annual mortality from infectious disease is measured in hundreds of thousands. Many of the Ebola infections in Zaire in 1995 were the result of appalling standards of hygiene at the local mission hospital.

The hantavirus outbreak in the south-western USA in 1993 suggests a more optimistic view of the new infectious diseases. This obscure virus

ILLUSTRATION: HELICOBACTER PYLORI BACTERIUM, DASTCO.

resulted in 55 cases of acute respiratory distress and 32 deaths. Within a few months, using modern genetic techniques, both the virus responsible and the field mice transmitting it were identified and effective preventive measures instituted. Even Laurie Garrett, the doyenne of the doomsday scenario, had to admit that 'the hantavirus investigation of 1993 proved

## Tuberculosis, the single biggest killer, is above all a disease of poverty

that things could be done right, that humanity could comprehend and control the microbes, if there was the political and scientific will' (L. Garrett, *The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance*, 1995, p548). Christopher Wills too dismisses the spectre of a new plague 'that slaughters us by the billion'. As he points out, 'if the people of fourteenth-century Europe had known what we know now, they could have halted the Black Death in short order' (p252). Indeed the problem is not in the realm of the microbes, but in the realm of politics and social investment.

What then about new epidemics of old diseases? It is true that there have been serious outbreaks of cholera and some of the other great epidemic diseases of the past. Yet again, however, these epidemics need to be put into perspective. The cholera epidemic that began in Peru in 1991 and spread through South America led to 400 000 cases and around 4000 deaths. No doubt this was a serious epidemic, but the death rate of 10 per cent is a vast improvement on the devastation wrought by successive waves of cholera in the industrialising cities of Europe in the middle years of the nineteenth century. This improvement in outcome was largely achieved not by antibiotics, but by the simple expedient of oral rehydration therapy—the replacement of fluid loss by a dilute solution of sugar and salts.

**The discussion of** old epidemics brings us closer to the real problem of infectious disease in the world today, which is not so much the return of old diseases or the appearance of new ones, but the persistence of diseases which are easily preventable or treatable, and yet still cause vast numbers of deaths and an even greater amount of suffering.

Tuberculosis is the single biggest killer, with eight million cases leading

to three million deaths in 1995. The problem here is not drug-resistant strains—that is largely a problem for the West, and 97 per cent of tuberculosis deaths are in the Third World. The problem is the sheer scale of the disease, when some 30 years ago there was serious discussion of the possibility of eradicating it in the same way as smallpox was eradicated.

Tuberculosis is above all a disease of poverty. The bacillus thrives in malnourished individuals (especially in those whose immune system is damaged by HIV) and spreads in conditions of squalor and overcrowding. According to the WHO around one fifth of the world's population (more than a billion people) live in 'extreme poverty', lacking even requirements for basic subsistence (*World Health Report*, 1995). Furthermore, according to the Save the Children Fund, one sixth of the world's population have no access to basic healthcare, including immunisations

(*Guardian*, 27 April 1996). Rates of infection are particularly high among the casualties of war, migrants and refugees, who are to be found in great numbers in the most impoverished regions of the world.

As we have seen, tuberculosis declined in the West with improvements in living standards and public health. It is striking that, to the limited extent that it has increased again in the West, this is largely attributable to the deteriorating conditions that now prevail for those at the bottom of society. It is immediately obvious that the solution to the persistent destruction wrought by tuberculosis in the world today lies in tackling the problems of poverty.

Another major cause of disease and death is acute respiratory infection. This accounted for 4.4m deaths in 1995, four million of them in children. These infections are particularly lethal to malnourished children: according to the WHO, malnutrition was a factor in 30 per cent of child deaths, as well as leading to growth retardation in

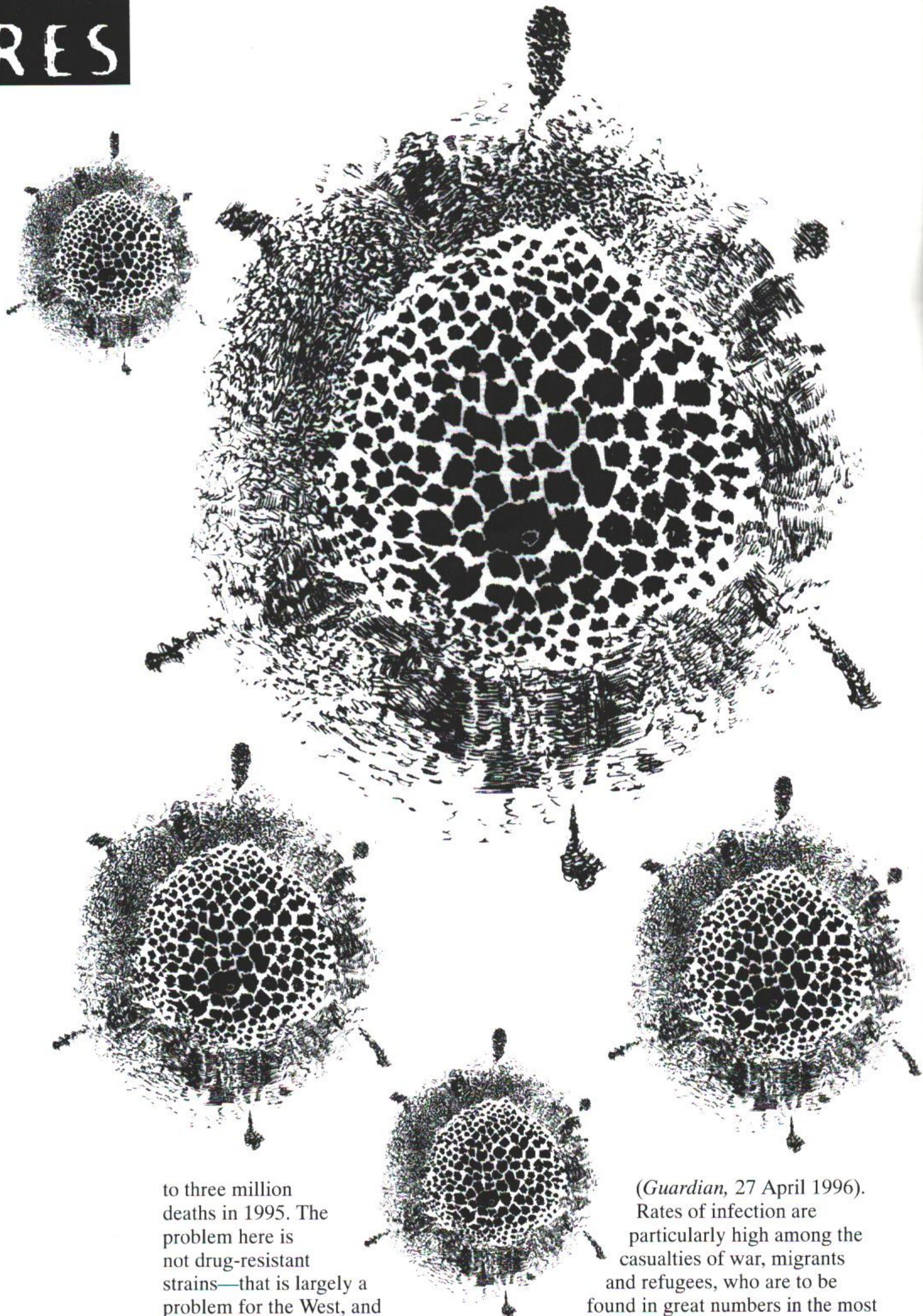


ILLUSTRATION: COMMON COLD VIRUS (BIOZENTRUM), DASTCO.

230m children and 'severe wasting' in another 50m. Diarrhoeal illnesses (including cholera, typhoid, dysentery) caused 3.1m deaths in 1995, three million in children. The key factor here is access to clean water, which demands effective systems of water supply and sewage disposal. Malaria, resulting more from the breakdown of measures to control the mosquitos that transmit the disease than from problems of drug-resistance killed 2.1m people in 1995.

These long familiar diseases, with long-established methods of prevention and treatment, account for the vast majority of the 17m annual death toll from infectious disease. The fact that scarcely more than a handful of these deaths occurred in the West simply underlines the fact that the real problem lies in the organisation of global society, not in the humble bacteria that take advantage of its deficiencies.

**The experience of** infectious disease in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe provides a poignant confirmation of this thesis. Jo Asvall, the WHO's European director, recently commented that Europe had experienced in 1989-90 a 'very happy event—the collapse of the communist system and the emergence of many new countries': 'Unfortunately at the very same time we had a fantastic economic collapse of those countries.' This was indeed a most unfortunate coincidence, leading to the breakdown of public health provision, immunisation programmes, disease surveillance, even water and sewage systems.

The restoration of capitalism to the Eastern bloc has brought with it epidemics of cholera, diphtheria, syphilis, tuberculosis, malaria, even influenza and polio. As a result, male life-expectancy declined from 65 years in 1987 to 57 in 1994 (though it increased to 58 in 1995). One cold winter's night last year killed 25 people in Moscow, many of them homeless vagrants. According to one authority, the return of the market system may have cost as many as two million lives over the past five years (L Kekic, 'Assessing and measuring progress in the transition', *Economist Intelligence Unit, Economies in Transition*, Q2, 1996, p17). The most recent reports show some signs of improvement in death rates from infectious disease over the past 12 months.

Louis Pasteur, the French microbiologist who propounded the 'germ theory' of disease, once observed that 'the microbe is nothing, the terrain everything'. If Mr Newnham ever succeeds in escaping his seige in the maelstrom of disease, he might find closer attention to the social terrain on which today's infections flourish more rewarding.

# Living Marxism ONLINE

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**Who Needs the World Service?**

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# Only the b

Taking part is nothing, says Alan Harding

The Atlanta Olympics provided most of the normal themes. There was British failure, even more pronounced this year than most (I suppose we should be thankful that Jonathan Edwards' failure to win a gold at least spared us from a campaign to elevate the hop, skip and jump into the major Olympic event). And following failure, there was the traditional adoption of a foreigner as an honorary Brit—in this case Ireland's Michelle Smith, who won three times as many gold medals as the entire British Olympic team. Smith also helped to provide the summer's mandatory spurious drug allegations (her main crime was that she had the audacity to consign into oblivion an American swimmer with millions of dollars of sponsorship riding on her).

But if many of the old themes were present in Atlanta, this year's Olympics were significant for the introduction of a new note—objection to the very idea of competition. The spirit of Atlanta was a questioning of competition as a manifestation of the 'perfection complex', and a wondering aloud as to whether more feminine values should not replace the testosterone-loaded atmosphere of the Games.

Sport in general, and the Olympics in particular, has always had a political agenda which reflected the spirit of the time. In the past, the Olympics were politicised by turning athletic competition into a metaphor for national rivalry.

Results in the Olympic arena were regarded as expressions of political power and prestige—especially during the Cold War when American and Soviet athletes were transformed into gladiators for the Free World and Actually Existing Socialism respectively.

Of course the old national rivalries were still there this year. But what the Atlanta Games showed was how criticism of competition can also express a political agenda. According to many commentators, the very idea of striving to achieve excellence is ill-conceived. It generates aggression and discord rather than friendship and peaceful equanimity. Competition is therefore alien not only to the Olympic spirit of taking part, but also to a broader sense of human brotherhood and sisterhood which is challenged only by fanatics of various hues. Indeed, Polly Toynbee, writing in the *Independent*, even compared competitive games with the spirit of fascism. 'The very

idea of producing a human *ôbestö*', she suggested, 'leads to a perverse and eugenic view of mankind'.

It is easy to see why British commentators may wish to decry competition in response to the nation's sporting humiliation. But the attack on the competitive spirit is also a measure of our age. We live in a time in which the pursuit of excellence is decried and the will power, aggression and spirit required to be a winner dismissed as a 'masculine fantasy'.

The absurdity of the Atlanta spirit is that the whole point of athletics is to run faster, jump further or throw longer. And to come first. 'Once you are out there, nobody can help you', Linford Christie said prior to the 100 metres final. 'You should never believe that it is not the winning but the taking part that matters—it's always the winning.' The irony in Christie's case was that he was not even

# Best will do

allowed to take part, being disqualified for two false starts in the final. Christie was widely criticised for not accepting the disqualification with good grace. But what did people expect him to do? For four years, since he won Olympic gold in Barcelona, he had sacrificed the rest of his life for another 10-second shot at glory. Yet he found himself dumped out of the race in the space of 0.014 seconds. Little wonder he was livid. Any great competitor would have been.

The idea that any human being, let alone one as talented as Christie, a man whose talents have often been stifled by small-minded bureaucrats and a racist society, should simply want to take part is nonsense. For an athlete like Christie, every fibre of his being is devoted to victory—and that is why a race such as the Olympics 100 metre final is so compelling to watch. It is not the spirit of friendship or the act of taking part which makes billions of people watch such

a race, but the sight of superb athletes reaching beyond themselves.

And try telling athletes like Merlene Ottey, Gail Devers or Marie-Jose Percec that the desire to win is a nasty masculine trait. For the remarkable Ottey, at 36 the same age as Christie, Atlanta was her fifth attempt to win an Olympic gold. Once again she failed—this time by the narrowest of margins—but no doubt if her body was capable, she would put herself through the same punishing test in Sydney in four years time. Such determination not to give in is not a masculine vice—it is the embodiment of what makes us human.

So strong, however, is today's anti-competitive spirit that the Olympics themselves have become infected with it. The introduction of leisure activities such as mountain biking and beach volleyball as competitive sports is one indication of the promiscuous relativism of the times. So is the introduction into swimming events of

'B finals' for those who fail to make the real final. In ancient Greece there were no prizes for coming second. The idea of silver and bronze medals would have seemed bizarre. In Atlanta even losers got a final of their own.

The highlight of the interminable Atlanta opening ceremony was a media dream: Muhammad Ali lighting the Olympic flame. When Ali stood there in front of untold millions desperately trying to steady hands trembling with Parkinson's disease, one part of me was screaming, 'You bastards' at those preying on him. At the same time another part of me was swelling with pride and emotion at the bravery and dignity of the greatest athlete I have ever seen. Ali stood between Olympics past and present, a man who at the height of his powers had been stripped of his world heavyweight title and jailed for refusing to fight in Vietnam—by the very authorities who, now that he was but a sad shadow of his former self, were willing to use him as a publicity stunt.

Ali understood the joy of competition and victory and much, much more. He was a man who had proudly worn both his Olympic gold medal and the American flag in Rome in 1960 but who had tossed the one literally and the other metaphorically into the Ohio River when he discovered that a gold medal did not change the fact that he was 'a nigger' back home. Ali was a man whose beauty, athleticism, will power and pursuit of excellence showed what the Olympics are really all about. The greatest. ●

# A measure of modern man

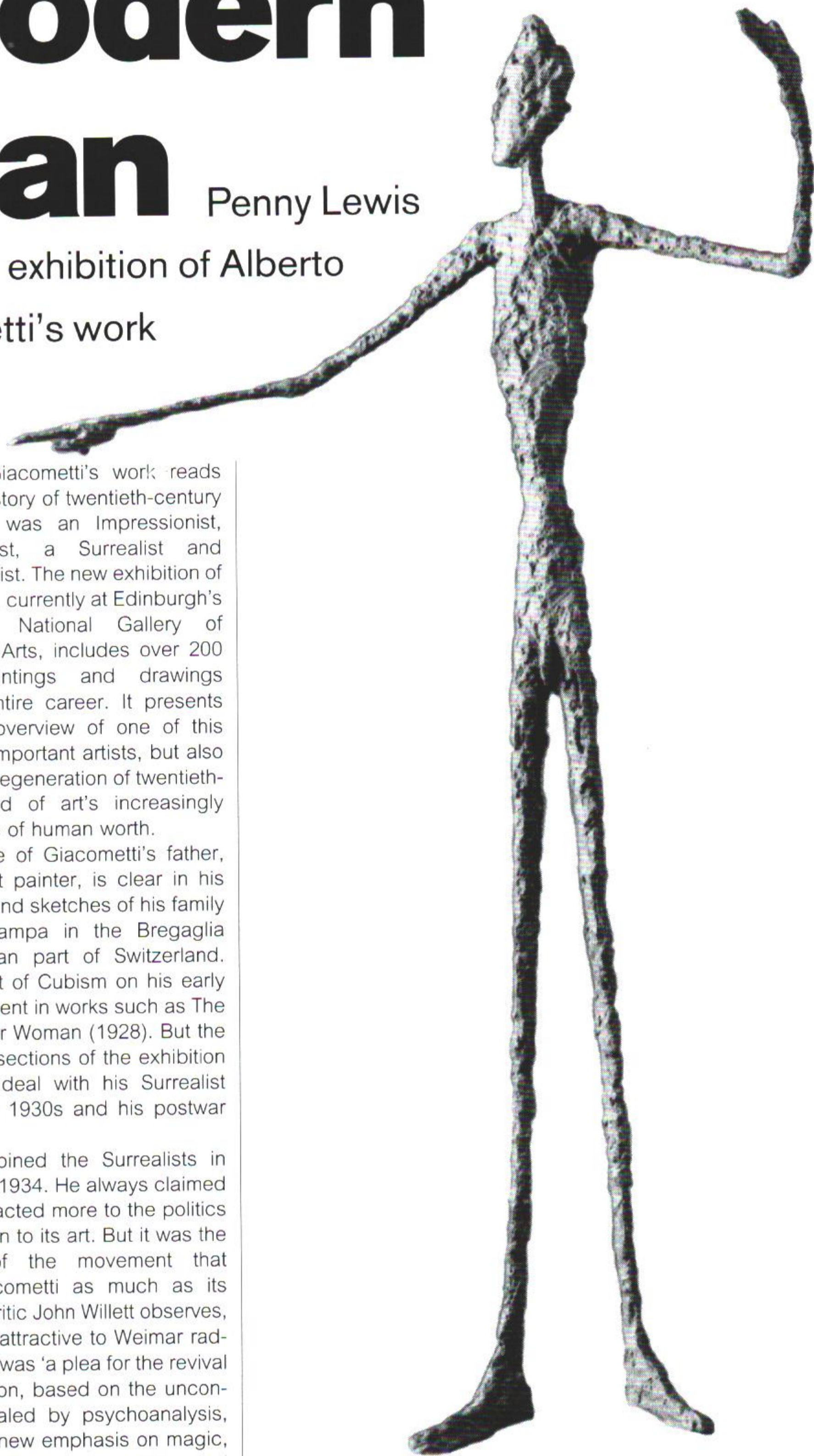
Penny Lewis

on a new exhibition of Alberto Giacometti's work

Alberto Giacometti's work reads like a history of twentieth-century art. He was an Impressionist, a Cubist, a Surrealist and a naturalist. The new exhibition of his work, currently at Edinburgh's Scottish National Gallery of Modern Arts, includes over 200 sculptures, paintings and drawings spanning his entire career. It presents not simply an overview of one of this century's most important artists, but also a record of the degeneration of twentieth-century art, and of art's increasingly degraded sense of human worth.

The influence of Giacometti's father, an Impressionist painter, is clear in his early paintings and sketches of his family at home at Stampa in the Bregaglia valley, the Italian part of Switzerland. The brief impact of Cubism on his early sculpture is evident in works such as *The Couple* (1926) or *Woman* (1928). But the most important sections of the exhibition are those that deal with his Surrealist period from the 1930s and his postwar works.

Giacometti joined the Surrealists in 1929 and left in 1934. He always claimed that he was attracted more to the politics of the group than to its art. But it was the Romanticism of the movement that influenced Giacometti as much as its radicalism. As critic John Willett observes, Surrealism was attractive to Weimar radicals because it was 'a plea for the revival of the imagination, based on the unconscious as revealed by psychoanalysis, together with a new emphasis on magic, accident, irrationality, symbols and dreams'. Rarely seen Surrealist pieces such as *Disagreeable Object*, *To Be Thrown Away* (1931) and *Man and Woman* (1928) reveal Giacometti's attachment to scandal and absurdity as much as to social revolution or artistic innovation.



Two of Giacometti's works produced in 1932 show the conservatism of his Surrealist outlook. The first is a set of drawings to be used in journals produced by La Ligue Anti-impérialiste. One sketch shows a new-born child, symbolising the twentieth century, spiked

and stabbed in the head with a nationalist flag and a cross, and guarded by a dog in military uniform. The Massacre of the Workers expressed similar anti-clerical and anti-military sentiments. Giacometti clearly identified with the struggle against fascism. But his art already expresses a sense of fatalism. It is not a celebration of struggle, but a meditation on exploitation and corruption. The other work is a brutal sculpture called *Woman with her Throat Cut*. It marks the transition of an art that is born out of a period of revolutionary change to a period of reaction. Giacometti, like many of his contemporaries, no longer strove to capture our humanity, but simply to illuminate barbarism.

The highlight of the exhibition is the sculptures that Giacometti produced after the Second World War. These intense, long, thin figures, some single, some in groups, were adopted by Sartre and the existentialists as symbols of the isolated and alienated individual. In 1946, Giacometti was commissioned to produce a sculpture to commemorate Gabriel Péri, a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party. By the time the plans were completed the Communists had been expelled from government and the commission was refused because 'Giacometti's man made people think of Auschwitz'.

Giacometti wrote to his mother in 1936: 'I believe that the best way for an artist to be a revolutionary is to do his work to the best of his ability.' This retreat from the idea of art as an aid to social transformation and the turn towards the individual artist striving for perfection was expressed by many artists of the time. It is striking that Giacometti's most productive period was in the forties and fifties, at a time when the most creative movements of this century had passed.

If you stand in a room among Giacometti's work you can begin to understand why he touched the postwar imagination. His work is tied to the space that surrounds it. You cannot get up close to it, you are not tempted to touch it. It is clear that the work should be seen at a distance. It is an expression of the changing view of Man himself. From da Vinci to Rodin, sculpture represented man as being at the centre of things, the maker of the world around him. Giacometti's figures, however, present man as alienated being, as a victim of forces beyond his control. The irony is that the power of his work lies in the way it captures the diminished sense of human agency.

The exhibition of Giacometti's work is currently showing at the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. It will be exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in London from 9 October.



Kenan Malik on Hollywood's changing vision of nature

# A twist in the tale



PHOTO: UNIVERSAL PICTURES

By chance or design, on the night that *Twister* opened in Britain, Channel Four was showing John Ford's 1937 classic *The Hurricane*. Set in a Polynesian island ruled by a corrupt and racist governor, the theme of Ford's film is not natural turmoil, but social chaos. The hurricane is a metaphor for the coming storm of fascism. Indeed, not only does Ford present the natural tempest as less evil than the social hurricane, but he uses the real storm to help blow away the forces of evil.

In the thirties, Hollywood directors were more interested in exploring social disorder than natural chaos. In films such as *The Rains Came* or *San Francisco*, nature was simply an adjunct to the plot and natural disaster always a metaphor for social chaos. Not so today. 'When you said you spent your life chasing tornadoes, I thought it was some deep-seated metaphor', Melissa tells her fiance Bill in *Twister*, after a close shave with a double tornado. But it wasn't, and neither is it for *Twister's* dream team of director Jan de Bont, producer Stephen Spielberg and scriptwriter Michael Crichton.

In *Twister* nature is chaos—an inexplicable, uncontrollable force that shapes our lives and determines our fate. Nature dominates the film, almost to the exclusion of any human plot. The villains of the piece are the corporate-sponsored scientists, with their fleet of jet-black vans and hi-tech, satellite-linked equipment, who are determined to be the first to understand what really happens inside a tornado. They get their inevitable comeuppance as a twister gobbles them up.

In contrast, the heroes of the film are a bunch of New Age tornado-chasers (albeit with lap tops and mobile phones) who look like they are redundant roadies for Nirvana. They are led by Bill (Bill Paxton), a weatherman with an instinctive feel for tornadoes, who can guess

a twister's speed and direction by sniffing the air.

But this is not simply a film with an aversion for Big Science. Rather, *Twister* presents nature as unknowable because it presents nature as the supernatural.

This is nature with a mind or a will of its own. There is a moment in the final climactic scene in which the tornado parts to allow Bill and his estranged wife Jo (Helen Hunt) to see up 'the finger of God' to the heavens above. It is a scene that could have come straight out of *Stargate*. And just to make sure we do not miss the supernatural connection, the penultimate tornado strikes a drive-in cinema which is

showing *The Shining*. Just as Jack Nicholson comes through the door, so the twister arrives. Very subtle.

In a sense what Crichton, Spielberg and de Bont have done is meld together an old-fashioned disaster movie with an old-fashioned horror film, to create a new genre. And they are not alone. Upcoming films such as *Volcano* and *Dante's Peak*, also present the new twist in Hollywood's vision of nature. At least seventies disaster movies such as *Tidal Wave* and *Avalanche* had their tongues firmly in their cheeks and were played out as high camp. This time Hollywood is serious. ●

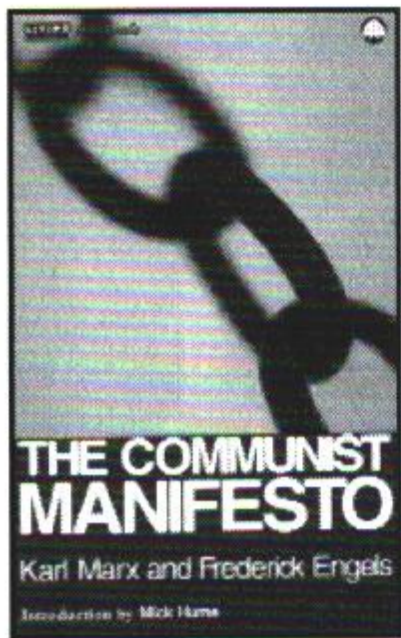
**Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt hang on for dear life**



PHOTO: RON BAIZDORFF

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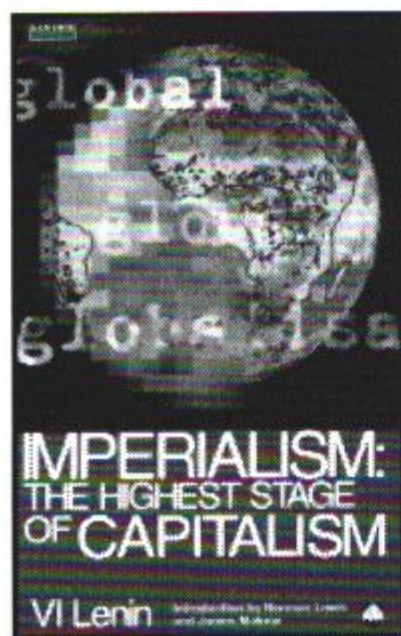


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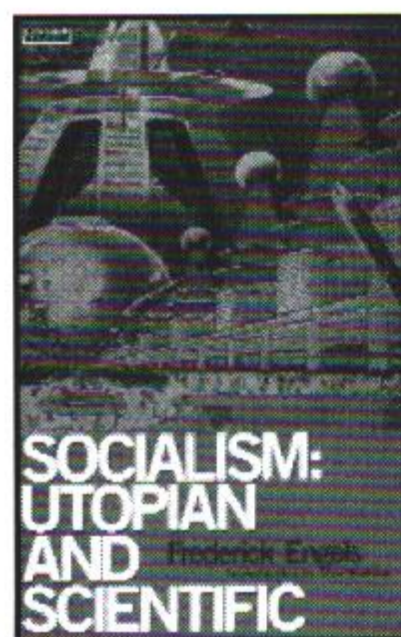


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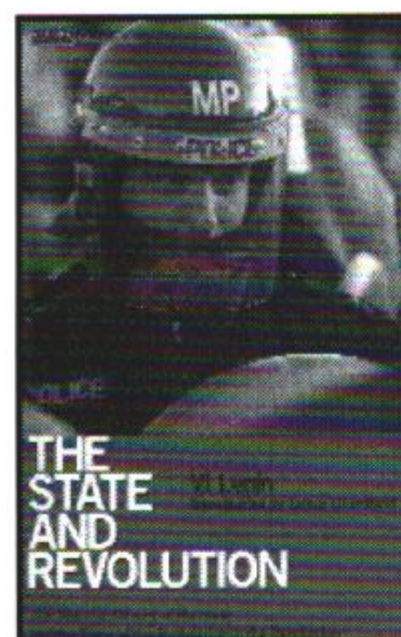


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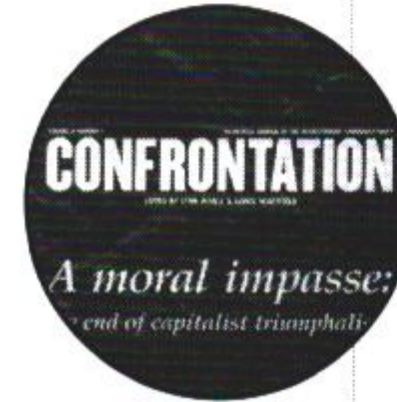


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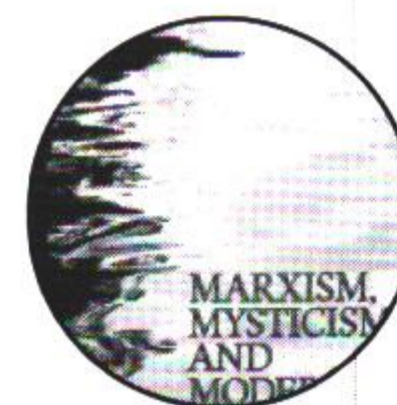
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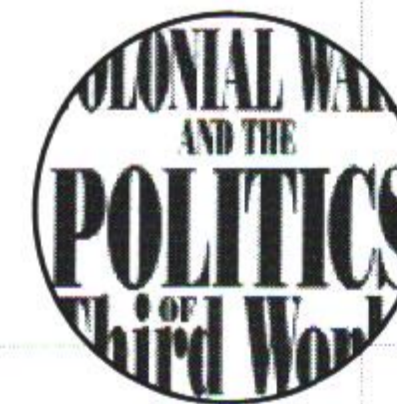


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THE

# MARXIST

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

When academics are sowing illusions in the global market, half-hearted criticism will not do, says Norman Lewis

### Capitalism's modern mystics

**Globalisation in Question**, Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, Polity Press, £45 hbk, £12.95 pbk

**Sociology of the Global System**, Leslie Sklair, Harvester Wheatsheaf, £11.95 pbk

**The Logic of International Restructuring**, Winfried Ruigrok and Ron van Tulder, Routledge,

£45 hbk, £13.99 pbk

Since the end of the Cold War, the theory of 'globalisation' has grown in influence in academic and public policy circles. According to this emerging orthodoxy, long-standing conditions of time, space and territoriality have been transformed by worldwide trends. With new communications technologies facilitating 24-hour round-the-world financial transactions, ecological damage taking on global proportions, and rising world-scale unemployment, starvation and mass migratory pressures, nations and their states are supposed to have lost much of their capacity to maintain control. Globalisation theory conjures up a picture of society which is rudderless and anchorless, a lifeboat tossed on a sea of turbulence and threats with little chance of controlling the forces below the waves.

The metaphor of the global lifeboat sums up the consciousness of uncertainty and risk underlying much of the contemporary obsession with the theory of globalisation. For this reason alone, *Globalisation in Question* and *The Logic of International Restructuring* are welcome antidotes to the existing literature. In these well-researched studies, focusing on the economic side of the question, the authors conclude that most of the globalisation theorists' claims are myths.

Hirst and Thompson's main criticism of the globalisation theory is the absence of any support for the claim that unstoppable global competitive forces today represent a new development in global relations. In the best sections of the book, they convincingly argue that there is nothing particularly new about high levels of international trade and investment. As they show, the pre-1914 world economy was, in certain aspects, more open and more internationalised than that of today. Moreover, they provide empirical evidence to show how rare the 'transnational company' really is: most major companies remain nationally rooted, conducting about two-thirds of their trade and holding the same amount of their assets within their home bases.

In a similar section of their book, Ruigrok and van Tulder use data from *Fortune's* Global 500 to confirm the point. They conclude that of the largest 100 core firms in the world, not one is truly 'global', 'footloose' or 'borderless'. Indeed, the opposite is the case: only around 40 firms generate at least half their assets abroad, and less than 20 maintain as much as half of their production facilities abroad. With very few exceptions, executive boards, management styles and, crucially, ownership, remain solidly national. And with even fewer exceptions, research and development remains firmly under domestic control (*The Logic of International Restructuring*, p159).

Hirst and Thompson also demystify the notion of the open, globalised international economy—the idea that the world is one large interlinked network of producers and consumers plugged into an efficiently operating 'level playing field'. Their evidence points to a strict hierarchy in the world economy, oligopolistically organised and constituted by the intensive competitive struggle between international corporations, backed by their respective national states. Deadly competition not friendly cooperation characterises the global world according to Hirst and Thompson (*Globalisation in Question*, p59).

The 'flows' that determine the architecture of this dog-eat-dog world are not evenly spread, but concentrated in North America, Japan and Western Europe. Around 75 per cent of the total accumulated stock, 60 per cent of the flow of foreign direct investment and 70 per cent of trade are concentrated in this 'Triad' according to Hirst and Thompson. Put another way, 14 per cent of the world's population conducts 70 per cent of trade and receives 75 per cent of foreign direct investment (FDI), ensuring that almost two-thirds of the world's population are outside the main circuits of trade. Hirst and Thompson rightly suggest that this expresses the relative lack of integration in the world. Moreover, after ►

examining the channels through which international flows take place, particularly FDI, they argue that a growing regionalisation is taking place, where flows are between one or other of the Triad powers and its clustered 'client' states, rather than between these clients themselves (p66).

The implications of this evidence fly in the face of the orthodoxy of globalisation: the suggestion is that the 'level playing field' is in fact a new redivision of the world into 'spheres of influence' driven by national competition rather than global cooperation.

Globalisation theories claim to deal with important changes at the global level, yet their focus is almost exclusively upon the superficial changes in the forms of international interactions, with little reference to their real content. In other words, the underlying causes of international change are never discussed and there is no distinction made between important changes and trivial ones. Instead we have endless descriptions. Globalisation theories wallow in a proliferation of levels, 'scapes' or meanings. As a result, the relationships between cause and effect, significant change and trivia, remain shrouded in the wonderful world of information technologies or the frightening nether world of global environmental risk and chaos.

### **Globalisation theories are a kind of millennial mysticism, a chaos theory for the social sciences**

The privileging of form above content leads to an over-technical and one-dimensional account of global change. Because globalisation theories concentrate upon form, and because they have no theory of change itself, they obscure the critical question of the power relations underlying the features they describe. As a result, these theories mystify the processes at work and inevitably the interests at stake. Fierce competition between capitalists backed by nation-states lies behind the appearance of a homogenised global system—and that means winners and losers.

The gap between rich and poor within and across nations has widened dramatically. Thirty years ago, the income of the richest fifth of the world's population combined was 30 times greater than that of the poorest fifth. Today, the income gap is more than 60 times greater. Over this period, the income of the richest 20 per cent grew from 70 to 85 per cent of the total world income, while the global share of the poorest 20 per cent fell from 2.3 to 1.4 per cent.

Obscuring the processes producing these figures, globalisation theories act as an apology for, rather than an explanation of the market system at the end of the twentieth century. They are a kind of millennial mysticism, a chaos theory for the social sciences. In this theory causation may exist, but since it may consist of so many elements, conscious and unconscious, the outcomes are likely to be unintentional. In this way, 'globalisation' becomes all things to all men; it can be seen as a threat, a problem or an opportunity, depending upon the particular subjective predilection of the theorist concerned.

But if globalisation theories are so easily debunked, why are they so readily supported? The answer lies in the common acceptance of the market as the only way in

which to organise modern-day society. Without the critical perspective of an alternative to the market, it is difficult not to be swept up in all the superficial evidence of global change. Unfortunately, Hirst and Thompson, Ruigrok and van Tulder, as well as Leslie Sklair, have this one prejudice in common with the globalisation theorists, that 'There is no alternative' to the market. The main debate between these authors and the mainstream globalisation theorists is not about capitalism, but about whether there is still a role for the capitalist state. Hirst and Thompson, for example, see that the widespread acceptance of globalisation theories today is rooted in the failures of the market and ironically, the simultaneous acceptance that there is no alternative:

'The notion of an ungovernable world economy is a response to the collapse of expectations schooled by Keynesianism and sobered by the failure of monetarism to provide an alternative route to broad-based prosperity and stable growth. "Globalisation" is a myth suitable for a world without illusions, but it also robs us of all hope. Global markets are dominant, and they face no threat from any viable contrary political project....One can only call the political impact of "globalisation" the pathology of over-diminished expectations.' (p6)

This much is incontrovertible. Society today has no illusions, no alternatives, little hope and is dominated by low expectations. The problem with Hirst and Thompson is that they share this view: 'if economic relations are more governable (at both national and international level) than many...contemporary analysts suppose, then we should explore the possible scale and scope of that governance' (p6). In other words, by holding out the possibility of discovering areas in which some forms of control could be reasserted, the vicious cycle can be broken, but only within market relations.

Speculating about how things could be better if the market was regulated is a way of avoiding the conclusion that the market itself has become a barrier to development. In Ruigrok and van Tulder's case, despite investigating in great detail the national differences behind internationalisation strategies of the world's largest corporations, they never ask what is the internal dynamic behind internationalisation in the first place. Their study reveals the intimate relationship between these huge corporations and their states, indeed, their dependency upon this relationship (contrary to today's orthodoxy of the 'stateless corporation'). But Ruigrok and van Tulder see this as the outcome of local policy decision-making.

The more important question—why is it that despite different national conditions all these corporations universally internationalise their operations?—is not posed at all. The key to explaining global forces and changes remains shrouded in mystery. But the answer is staring these authors in the face, out of their own material: in every case there is evidence of the stagnation of capital accumulation on a national scale. This national economic stagnation and its relationship to the drive to expand externally—what Hirst and Thompson called the 'deadly competitive game'—is what ought to be investigated. But as long as the authors fail to question the primary source of this dynamic, the market itself, there is little chance of

a serious investigation into capitalist stagnation.

Sklair's *Sociology of the Global System* suffers from a similar problem despite its emphasis being quite different. Sklair is not theorising globalisation. His intention is to establish the concept of the 'global system' as a scientifically valid and legitimate object of knowledge. His correct criticism of the limits of state-centric international relations theories provides the impulse behind his sociological project of advancing our understanding of how the global capitalist system works. For Sklair, the way to advance this knowledge is through a conception of the global system based on what he calls 'transnational practices'.

To Sklair's credit, he argues that transnational practices are driven by the interests of what he calls the 'transnational capitalist class'. These are the people who see their interests (and the interests of their countries of citizenship) as best served by an identification with the interests of the transnational corporations. This establishes, at the very least, that there are interests involved in the processes under investigation. The problem, however, is that it locates the actions of the players at the level of their subjectivity alone. Sklair, argues, for example, that the 'culture-ideology of consumerism' is the fuel that powers the motor of global capitalism: the 'driver' is the transnational capitalist class (p49). The project is to persuade people to consume.

**Sklair thinks that the problem lies in what kind of policies are pursued, not in market relations themselves**

By locating his analysis at the level of individual capitalist subjectivity, Sklair mistakes the outcomes of individual survival with the dynamic driving the entire system. The international market is not fuelled by consumption, but the need to make profit and the accumulation of capital. The global chaos, uncertainty and inequality which Sklair (and Hirst and Thompson) discuss are not the result of capitalist will or subjectivity, but the inevitable result of the objective imperatives of the global capitalist system itself. By locating the problem at the level of subjectivity, Sklair holds out the possibility of the international market producing other outcomes. Like Hirst and Thompson, Ruigrok and van Tulder, Sklair thinks that the problem lies in what kind of policies are pursued, not in market relations themselves.

By failing to question what needs to be explained in the first place—the relationship between the market and the new forms thrown up by its internal dynamics—the critics of globalisation mystify the world as much as the theories they attack. Hirst and Thompson claim their aim is to break the spell of globalisation myths which exaggerate 'the degree of our helplessness in the face of contemporary economic forces' (p6). But they paint a picture in which people are subordinate to the dictates of the market, as if it were a force of nature itself that can only be partially regulated by the state. These books certainly reveal just how irrational the globalisation debate really is and how mythical globalisation is. Their empirically rich studies need to be rescued from the fruitless task of rationalising and compensating for the failings of the international market.

**Popcorn**, Ben Elton, Simon & Schuster, £12.99 hbk

Take the storyline of Martin Scorsese's *King of Comedy* (star kidnapped by fans), mix it with Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (violence, media and media violence), add a pinch of satire and a 'little bit a politics', and you have *Popcorn*, a surprisingly readable novel (his fourth) by alternative comedian turned serious commentator, Ben Elton.

*Popcorn* is a life in the day of Oscar-winning director Bruce Delamitri, a sort of Stone/Tarantino hybrid, whose stylish, ironic displays of celluloid gore have made him the Golden Boy of a morally bankrupt Hollywood. Enter Wayne and Scout (echoes here of *Natural Born Killers*' Mickey and Mallory), a white trash duo whose killing spree reaches the home of their favourite director, Delamitri. In the ensuing mayhem, death imitates art. The body count is almost as high as in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*; and Delamitri, damned as a socially irresponsible film-maker, gets his comeuppance.

Elton has left behind the shambolic formlessness of earlier novels such as *Gridlock* and *Stark*. The events in *Popcorn* are compressed into 24 hours, and the result is suitably explosive. Elton's characterisation, however, remains as profound as Jeffrey Archer's. His cartoon-style protagonists give stereotyping a bad name. The resulting combination of short scenes, fast-shooting, and next-to-no character development makes *Popcorn* an ideal script for Oliver Stone. If the latter escapes the quagmire of litigation (victim alleges director's film prompted real-life attack) which now threatens to engulf him, he might like to give it the once-over.

Chances are that Elton would refuse to sell Stone the rights. Nowadays he takes a high moral tone—always discernible in his stand-up routines but blurred until recently by his 'motormouth' delivery—of the sort which is often used to express concern about Stone *et al* exploiting the alleged weaknesses of their audience. *Popcorn* was written with these concerns in mind. It is a comic novel with a message, in which good gags are less important than the moral of the story, namely that film-makers should gag themselves in the interests of 'social responsibility'. *Popcorn* starts promisingly. Elton casts a satirical eye on what critic Robert Hughes has described as America's 'culture of complaint', in which large numbers of people label themselves as victims and so avoid taking responsibility for their actions. While disowning the Andrea Dworkin theory of on-screen porn and its Pavlovian effects (men are mad dogs waiting for someone to ring their bell), when it comes to the alleged relationship between screen violence and people's behaviour, Elton subscribes to the now-fashionable precautionary principle. 'I don't think there is an absolute Pavlovian effect between screen violence and real violence', he told the *Daily Telegraph*:

'I am not even sure there is a remote Pavlovian effect. Nevertheless, all artists seek to move their audiences, and if an artist can move an audience to love or bravery, it is possible they could be moved to more unpleasant emotions...I don't think balanced people can be driven to be different from what they are. The suggestion is that

those who are *open* to anti-social behaviour *may* be seduced into believing it is the norm.' (29 July 1996)

This amounts to the denial of the idea that people can make up their own minds, because we cannot be sure what causes human behaviour. On top of that, Elton advocates caution, to be on the safe side. And lastly there is a reformulation of old-fashioned elitism. Elton's distinction between those who are 'balanced' and those who are vulnerable is reminiscent of the infamous question concerning *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: would you want your wife or your servants to read this book?

Elton's conservatism is born out of confusion, which he is happy to compound. 'I feel slightly exposed here', he added, 'because I am putting a point I don't entirely believe'. But it is the fashionable, morally correct point of the times, and so sensitive Ben will put it all the same.

He may not 'entirely believe' his point, but Elton wants everyone to abide by it. Not content with the usual round of pre-publication interviews, Elton penned a double-page spread in the *Sunday Times* calling for self-censorship on the part of artists (28 July 1996). Again, he castigated victim culture and the absurdity of defendants indicting film-makers for manipulating and victimising them. Noting that cars, alcohol and guns seem to have a closer relationship with violent incidents, he wondered out loud whether movies really move people into action. 'Thorny social issues, like movies, are rarely black and white', he wrote. 'Perhaps Stone is right, the messenger is being blamed, and artists are being made scapegoats for a far wider social malaise.' But despite these doubts, Elton was adamant that we should all be very afraid:

'Movie-makers and artists in general cannot ignore the issue of copycat behaviour. People believe that society is becoming more brutalised and there is a real fear that violent entertainment is playing a significant part in this brutalisation. I fear it myself.'

Elton recognises that the alleged relationship between screen images and behaviour remains unproven. But instead of challenging the unfounded fear of violent videos, he insists that the anxiety surrounding them is 'real', and exhorts 'movie-makers and artists' to succumb to it if they have not already done so. In future they must 'think hard about their output and question their own motives'. Not only professional film-makers, but 'anyone given to creative self-expression' should get into the habit of checking themselves 'rigorously'. This is how we 'must rediscover where artistic liberty ends and social responsibility begins'. Failure to stick to a personal regime of self-censorship will invite the imposition of politically motivated censorship from above; it would be 'terrible' if draconian measures were prompted by the abuse of artistic freedom.

Elton is suffering from the effects, not of screen violence, but of risk-awareness. This is a state of mind brought on by the lack of self-confidence on the part of today's society, leading to debilitating anxiety, a gross exaggeration of social problems, and an equally gross underestimation of humanity. Sufferers can display moments of lucidity, when they seem to suggest that life may not be as risky as it is cracked up to be. But despite

the relative absence of real danger, they continually modify their behaviour according to a worst-case scenario. Failure to perform such modifications is perceived by sufferers as an irresponsible lack of awareness. Many of them believe that they have chosen a life of risk-awareness entirely of their own free will, not realising that 'safety first' has already been institutionalised and is fast becoming the defining principle of the new political order. Elton is one among many former left wingers who have recently become carriers of risk-awareness syndrome. There can surely be only one job for an up-to-date fear-monger like Ben Elton: scriptwriter for Tony Blair.

*Andrew Calcutt*

### **Blair's Gurus: An Examination of Labour's**

**Rhetoric**, David Willetts MP, Centre for Policy Studies, £7.50 pbk; **What Needs to Change: New Visions for Britain**, Giles Radice (ed), with an introduction by Tony Blair, Harper Collins, £14.99 hbk

*Blair's Gurus* is the upmarket version of the Tories' attempt to challenge New Labour. Willetts' patient analysis of Labour's intellectual supporters and fellow-travellers, John Gray, Will Hutton, John Kay, Frank Field, Simon Jenkins, Andrew Marr, Peter Mandelson and David Marquand signals a desire to tackle New Labour's ideas head-on. But a literate man in the Conservative Party is about as much use as an admiral in the Czech navy. The Tories just do not have the ability to stir up a scare about New Labour in the way that they used to be able to scare people about the trade unions and the economy.

Willetts thinks he can see some holes in New Labour's ideology, but he cannot take advantage of them because he is constrained by the need to defend the Conservatives' record. So, answering Simon Jenkins' charge that the Tories centralised power, he bleats defensively that there was nothing the Tories could do but take power away from local councils if people voted for Militant in Liverpool. Not surprisingly his later denunciations of Labour's 'corporatism' ring a little hollow. He attacks Frank Field's inconsistency in aiming to extend means-testing for contributory benefits. But does that mean that the Conservatives are against means-testing? Obviously not. Willetts writes as if he is polemicising, but the actual differences between the two parties are so small that there is no room for polemic. Indeed a book on Blair's gurus would be incomplete without a chapter on Willetts' own books, *Civic Conservatism* and *Happy Families*.

The absence of a substantial criticism of the Blair agenda is the reason why the many authors in *What Needs to Change* can get away with the reactionary ideas to be found there. Frank Field wants to run down welfare even more by forcing people to take out their own pensions and insurance schemes; Geoff Mulgan thinks it is a good idea to take more power away from elected authorities and give it to quangos; Patricia Hewitt welcomes part-time working as a positive solution to redundancies. As long as these views stand unchallenged, the only problem that anyone is likely to see in New Labour is that its language is so anodyne as to be boring.

*James Heartfield*

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