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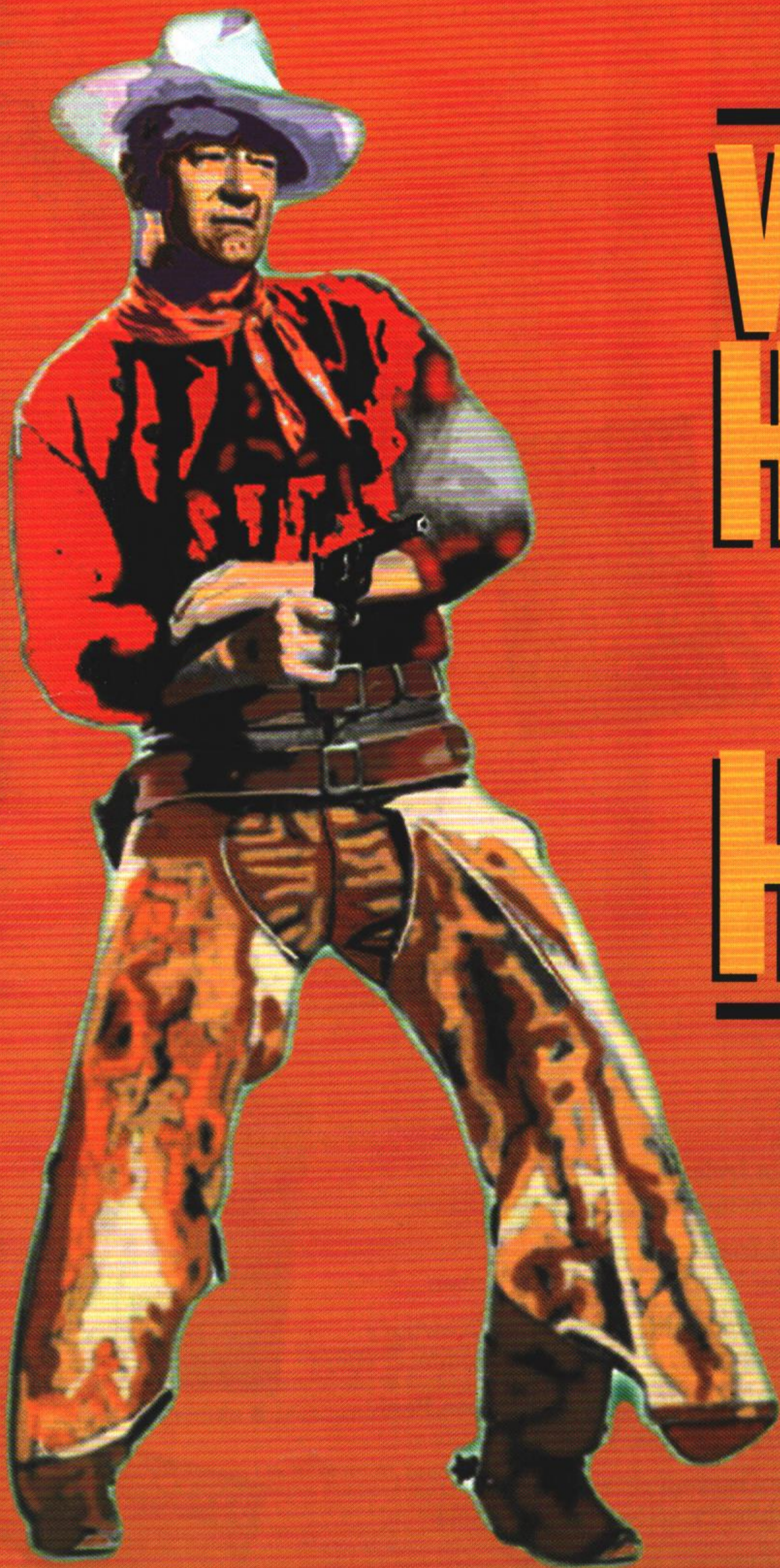
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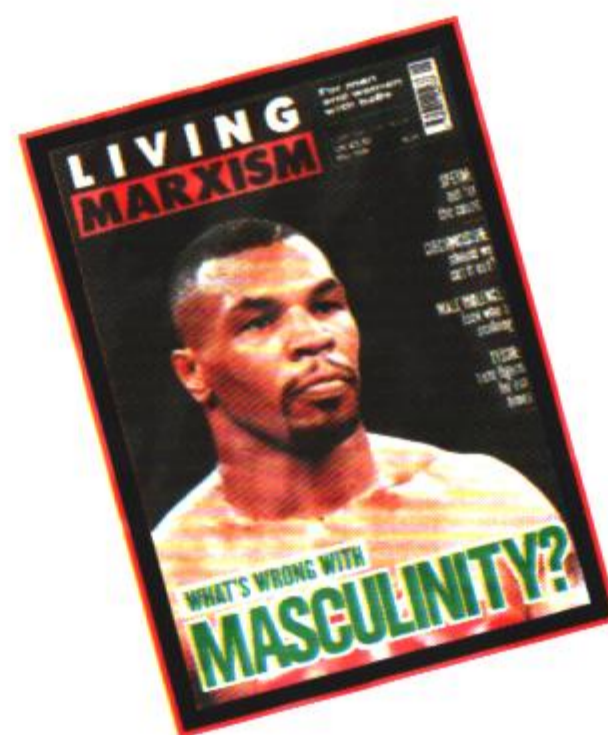
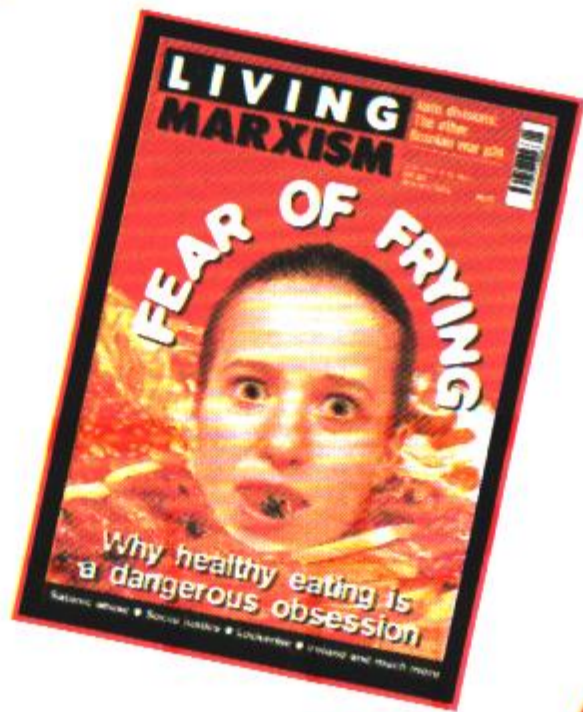
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HEROES?

What's wrong with the strong individual? ♦ The dangers of anti-smoking crusades ♦ Why are we bingeing on anorexia?
Carry on the motor car ♦ The army: why men don't wanna wear uniform ♦ The case against victims' rights



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COMMUNAL SELF-SACRIFICE

centre pages

The greatest claim of the market system has always been the premium it placed on the freedom of the individual. Yet society today seems uniquely hostile to assertive individualism.

James Heartfield looks into who killed the capitalist spirit of the aggressive, self-assured individual—and why that demise is a problem for those of us who want to change society.

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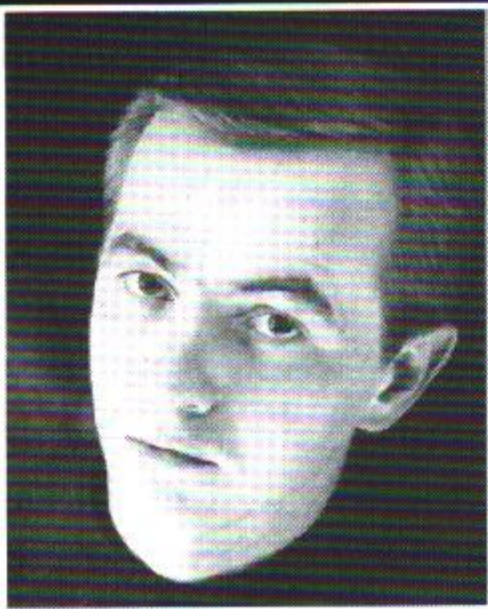
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Mick Hume

Whatever happened to the heroes?

Ours is an age in which heroism is out of fashion, while victimhood is a status widely admired and much sought after. And that is nothing to celebrate.

The British government has announced plans for the Queen to unveil a new memorial in Westminster Abbey. It is to be dedicated to the Unknown Victim, and will stand alongside the tomb of the Unknown Soldier which honours those who have fallen in Britain's wars. The new memorial is reportedly to commemorate all victims everywhere, whether they died in something as extraordinary as the Dunblane massacre or something as banal as a car crash.

The suggestion that the royals should be dragged out to put an Unknown Victim on an equal footing with the Unknown Soldier is a sign of the changed mood of the times. In the past, soldiers have been celebrated because they died fighting for a cause. By contrast, what exactly did the tragic victims of violence at Dunblane or in Cromwell Street die for? The harsh fact is that they died for nothing at all.

Where the soldiers struggled, the victims simply suffered. Yet now they too are to be officially commemorated and respected; not because of anything they have done, but because of what has been done to them. The deliberate act of a military hero is to be put on a par with the arbitrary fate of a victim.

It is often said that you can judge a society by the way it treats those at the bottom. But it is also possible to tell a lot by looking

at who is put on a pedestal at any time. A society's choice of heroes helps to reveal how it feels about itself, the values it holds dear. A forward-looking, confident age will tend to throw up similarly thrusting heroes; it is no coincidence that the lantern-jawed all-American hero, the John Wayne figure, was produced by the most dynamic capitalist nation of the twentieth century.

Measured by these standards, it appears that Western societies like Britain and America must now be feeling pretty grim about things. Because in classical terms, there are no heroes anymore, no supermen that seem capable of triumphing in the face of adversity and winning the day for truth and justice.

Ask yourself, who are the heroes of today? In the fields of politics and public life, we are often told that the current crop of leaders on all sides are pigmies compared to the giants of the past like Winston Churchill and Dwight D Eisenhower, or Nye Bevan and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The public figure who perhaps best symbolises the age is the pathetic Princess Diana, patron saint of victims, who won much sympathy for confessing to suffering eating disorders and depression on national television.

The only politician on earth who appears to be widely admired and hero-worshipped today is Nelson Mandela, victim of apartheid. During his recent trip to Britain, Mandela was loudly applauded even by hardline

Thatcherites like Norman Tebbit, who had condemned him as a terrorist when he was in jail. Why the change of heart? Because, alongside his elevation from prisoner to president, Mandela has been transformed from a symbol of militant resistance into a symbol of dignified suffering, preaching not rebellion or even revenge but forgiveness and reconciliation.

The military, stronghold of old-fashioned heroism, is not immune to the changed mood. What were once celebrated as the daring deeds of rugged army men are now more likely to be criticised as the macho violence of uniformed thugs. Even the previously untouchable reputation of a British hero like Colonel 'H' Jones, who died on the battlefield at Goose Green in the Falklands, was recently called into question by other military commanders in a tv documentary. As Tessa Mayes reports elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the top brass are trying to recast the army's image to fit in with the new times, by showing that soldiers can be caring and vulnerable too. The recent warnings that British troops were at risk of male rape in Croatia were an attempt to convey the message that even military hard men can be victims of abuse.

In the USA, one top analyst has argued for a 'post-heroic military policy' built around missiles and small, armoured forces (Edward Luttwak, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996), on the grounds that Americans are no longer prepared to tolerate their troops being killed in foreign wars.



We are now being told to revel in our suffering and alienation, and to proclaim that we are all victims

Even General Colin Powell, hero of the Gulf War and star of the recent Republican Party convention, published an article called 'Why Generals get nervous', arguing against any US military intervention in Bosnia because he feared casualties. It seems the notion that fighting and possibly dying for the flag might be what soldiers are supposed to do is no longer deemed acceptable even within the military hierarchy. Meanwhile the other top Gulf commander, General 'Stormin'" Norman Schwarzkopf, earlier this year appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine again; only this time not as a military hero in dress uniform, but as a casually dressed victim of prostate cancer.

In popular culture, too, it seems that the old-time hero has been replaced by the loser and the martyr. Many critics have noted how today's television soaps and dramas are filled with worthy, long-suffering women and weak, stupid or downright despicable men. Hollywood is also turning its back on traditional heroes. There are critics of this trend in America, but the best alternative they can offer so far is a hyped-up John Wayne revival—clearly a nostalgic hankering over a lost myth-laden

past 'when men were men', rather than a real attempt to forge relevant heroes for today.

In education, many heroic figures are now all but erased from the history books, while the works of Dead White European Males like Shakespeare are often frowned upon. And despite John Major's recent commitment to sponsor sporting excellence because 'national sporting heroes give a lift to the whole country', uplifting heroic champions are noticeable by their absence. It used to be said that nobody remembers the losers. Yet the most written-about sportsmen in Britain this year have surely been Gareth Southgate, the Man Who Missed That Penalty, and Frank Bruno, professional loser. While Britain's athletes were being humiliated in the Atlanta Olympics, the quality press published articles criticising the very idea of competitive sport or striving for athletic perfection.

The end result of all this is a society where nobody can agree on whose statue should fill the empty pedestal in Trafalgar Square, and where the young people who responded to our survey at the Reading Festival show little respect for traditional heroic types (see page 14). This change

in the climate is often seen as something radical and challenging, welcomed by the left as a shift in emphasis away from the deeds of 'Great Men' towards the experience of 'ordinary people'. After all, why would we want to defend imperial warriors like Colonel 'H', or the use of international sport as proxy warfare?

In fact, for those of us who want to change society, the anti-heroic spirit of the times is a highly conservative and worrying trend. At root it represents a criticism of strength and an antagonism towards anybody attempting to take control of affairs. The flipside, the modern cult of the victim, reflects the mood of low expectations and fatalism which infects our stagnant society. This shift in values does not simply do down yesterday's heroes; it affects all of our lives for the worse today.

A society which elevates victimhood over heroism is one that is likely to reward suffering rather than struggling. Yet in itself, suffering has no meaning. People have always got on and improved their lives through a struggle—often by struggling against the very conditions which force us to suffer. By contrast, we are now being told to revel in our suffering and alienation, to proclaim that we are victims, and to demand respect on the strength of what we have endured rather than what we have achieved.

Our anti-heroic age is one in which striving to get what you want is widely condemned as selfishness and greed, as just another example of 'man's arrogance'. Those who are driven to be the best that they can, who try to take control of their life, now run the risk of being diagnosed as suffering from a 'perfection complex'.

Through the elevation of suffering, passivity becomes sanctified, even celebrated. People are cast in the role of *objects* to whom things are done, rather than *subjects* capable of doing the business themselves. This can only reinforce the general lowering of horizons and expectations in society—a downbeat mood ►

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◀ which conveniently coincides with the fact that capitalism has little to offer us today in the way of prospects for improvement.

The message behind the hero-baiting, victim-loving climate is that we should not attempt to excel or lead by example, that we cannot really expect to achieve very much. Instead the best we can hope for is to be applauded (and possibly sponsored) as 'a survivor', a victim who suffers and copes. Simply coping has become an end in itself, and taking part in life is now considered enough of a lifetime's achievement

opening ceremony of the summer Olympics, lighting the Olympic flame with hands shaking from the effects of Parkinson's Disease, brought tears and tributes from the assembled world leaders and media. Yet when the young Ali was a real hero, the greatest sportsman on Earth in the ring and a fighter for justice outside it, those same authorities condemned him, stripped him of his title and jailed him for refusing to join the US army and fight a colonial war in Vietnam. Now that 'the Louisville lip' has

abuse they might have suffered as a child, or even of some trauma they supposedly experienced while still in the womb. From this perspective, nobody is really responsible for anything because ultimately everybody is a victim; even convicted mass murderer Rosemary West sought to mitigate her crimes on the basis that she, too, was abused.

In the post-heroic world it is not considered possible for people to grow up into independent adults capable of acting on their own behalf. Instead we are suffering an infectious outbreak of infantilism, in which people are treated like children, and often respond in kind. For example, most of us are now assumed to be incapable of something as basic as caring for a child without the assistance of parenting classes and counsellors. And we are deemed to need more protection from seductive cigarette advertising and jazzy 'alcopop' bottle labels, as if we were all naive infants bedazzled by the coloured candy in ye olde corner sweetshop. This is a recipe for social paralysis, which risks creating a world full of neutered individuals who really cannot cope with anything very much. That is a prospect which should alarm anybody who hopes to move people to take action for social change.

The disabled should be treated with dignity, but not with reverence

(that is, taking part in the minimal sense of breathing, rather than engaging with a wider reality).

It should be clear by now that today's criticisms of strength and leadership are not merely directed at a handful of ex-heroes. At the heart of the new mood is a degraded view of humanity as a whole. The almost reverential attitude displayed towards disability and illness at recent major events is indicative of this trend.

Until he was tragically crippled in a riding accident, Christopher Reeve was a pretty unexceptional actor, known only for playing Superman in films where the special effects were always the real stars. Since being confined to a wheelchair, however, Reeve has been surprised to find himself transformed into a highly-respected international figure, invited to make special appearances as a speaker at both the Oscars ceremony and the Democratic Party convention. This change of status is not about anything that Reeve has achieved (nor any of the quite sensible things that he has said about his condition). It is entirely about how others have chosen to interpret the fate that accidentally befell him. As James Heartfield notes in his feature on the demise of assertive individualism, Reeve has been wheeled on to the world stage as a symbol of the way in which society has altered its image of a superman; from one who flies off to do battle against the forces of evil, to one who sits and suffers.

The former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali has undergone a similar fate. His appearance at the

been reduced by illness to a broken, disabled man who poses no threat to anybody, they feel comfortable putting Ali on a pedestal as a symbol of quiet suffering.

Of course, the disabled ought always to be treated with dignity. But to treat them with reverence is a very different matter. That looks like a symptom of a sick society; one which imagines the human essence to be captured by the plight of those whose quality of life is impaired by forces beyond their control. Those who would put the disabled on a pedestal as the victim/heroes of the age are diminishing the human potential. The underlying moral which they want to preach is that we are all really helpless victims of fate, all crippled in one way or another by what has happened to us. That attitude is not only patronising in the extreme to the truly disabled, it also denies the rest of us the opportunity to change the world we live in for the better.

The victim cult does more than simply remove the grandly heroic from the human stage. Its ultimate consequence is to deny 'ordinary people' the opportunity to act as autonomous adults in their everyday lives.

We are no longer expected to stand up for ourselves, struggle for success and take responsibility for our actions. Our fate is expected to be determined not by what we do, but by what is done to us. Being a victim is no longer considered a momentary experience, but one which will shape the rest of our lives. So we are continually told that this or that person's actions are an unavoidable consequence of some sort of

Of course, there is little to be celebrated in the old capitalist culture of ruling class heroes. But it would be a big mistake to imagine that the current elevation of victims and losers, which the left has done much to encourage, is a positive challenge to the powers that be. Indeed the cult of the victim has a considerable pay-off for today's troubled elite. By reinforcing the outlook of low expectations, it can help persuade public opinion to settle for the limited opportunities on offer in contemporary society. And it lets capitalism off the hook for the problems people face. After all, if we are all victims, and nobody is really responsible for anything, then the society we live in and those who run it will never seriously be put to question.

The hero worship of the past had an important advantage over today's victim cult. The history-making heroes could at least inspire and challenge people to go out and do something themselves. They could make us feel that 'I want to be like HIM', and so provide a positive impulse to action. By contrast, today's celebrated victims are more likely to elicit the comfortable response that 'He's a loser, just like me'. They help confirm the conviction that there is nothing to be done but to suffer and wait for the meek to inherit the earth. But don't hold your breath while you are waiting. ●

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HEROES?

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Proud to be 'speciesist'

Rob Crilly (letters, September) accuses Dr Jennifer Cunningham ('Planet of the apes', June) of 'speciesism' since she, in his words, argues that 'membership of an arbitrary club entitles humans to disregard the interests of the excluded'. An exclusive club, yes, but most certainly not an arbitrary one.

Humanity occupies a unique position in nature. It alone can shape nature to its advantage. The only purpose or meaning which nature has is that which humanity accords it. Human society is both different from nature, and also the means through which humanity imposes its will on nature. In short, since humans can gain knowledge of cause and effect in nature through science, and because there is no God-given plan to nature's workings, humanity can gain mastery over nature through social organisation.

The possibility of humanity achieving freedom rests on this uniqueness. It is only humanity that has progressively struggled to free itself of dependency on the blind laws of nature. For *amoebae* and gorillas alike, however, life today is exactly what it was 1000 years ago. On the basis of the uniqueness of humanity, I make no moral distinction, Rob, between a bacon butty and a baboon burger; only one of palatability. If you can oblige, though, I am always willing to experiment.

Angus Kennedy *Edinburgh*

Germ warfare

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick's article ('The diseases of modern civilisation', September) described Laurie Garrett, author of *The Coming Plague*, as 'the doyenne of the doomsday scenario'. Her book is a compelling insight into the microbiological world, and in it, she points out that most epidemics are caused by poverty and/or social instability. She also champions the cause of field scientists fighting against the odds to prevent such epidemics.

The cholera outbreak in Peru in 1991 was caused by algae living in bilge water in a Chinese freighter. Once it had been released in coastal areas of Peru the climatic conditions were right for growth. Previously Rita Colwell had discovered that the cholera bacteria could reside in algae, but the authorities dismissed her findings. The book is merely a warning of what we could face if we do not take stock of the situation and continue with our complacency in the war against the microbes.

K Aisthorpe *Beckenham, Kent*

Bombs for human rights

America's air-strikes on Iraq confirmed the danger of human rights crusades, as highlighted

by Helen Searls ('Saving the Third World from itself', September). The only reason Clinton got away with pulling such a stunt was because everyone agreed that Iraq deserved it. Why did they think this? Because human rights campaigners have spent the five years since the Gulf War calling for action against the injustices of the Iraqi regime.

B-52s may appear to have little to do with human rights. When we see bombs drop it is tempting to think that this is a war, something altogether different from campaigning for human rights. But, if it was not for the success of campaigns that demonise the Third World and call for more intervention by Western governments and institutions, Clinton would not have got away with using missile attacks on Iraq as a means of bolstering his election prospects at home. The way in which the Kurds have, yet again, been reduced to propaganda fodder by outside powers is the pay-off from the human rights crusade.

It is all very well for the *Guardian* and other liberal outlets to criticise the form of America's intervention in Iraq. What they fail to recognise is that they themselves paved the way for these attacks, and those that will doubtless happen in the future around the world. The first danger for the Third World lies not in the weapons of the US Air Force, but in the emotive leaflets and propaganda of the people who say they care.

Becky Connor *London*

Caring capitalism

Working for a medium-sized company which lost over £20m last year, and which can only afford to pay lip-service to the new gospel of customer service and caring for the community, I understand Phil Murphy's point that 'profitability tends to be a precondition for the caring image, not a consequence of it' ('Caring capitalism', September). However, while caring capitalism will not rescue an unprofitable company, it is a profitable investment in that it allows industrialists to tell themselves that serving the community is the same as the pursuit of their own selfish interests.

As Murphy explains, the task of any decent capitalist is to pay workers 'less than the new value which their labour creates'. This essential task of business has been reformulated by Thomas Nyberg in the magazine *Companies of the Future* as 'to create a working environment based on integrity, an environment where people do not have to compromise their beliefs of what they consider fair and just'. Such formulations enable capitalists to reconcile themselves to the inequities of their system without compromising the principle of profitability.

Paul Jameson *Southend-on-Sea*

Somewhere between Phil Murphy's two main factors determining the rise of ethical business practice, was a third element that was not entirely spelled out: the erosion of democracy.

If ethics have become a principle for management then the workforce is finally shown to be out of the picture in any decision-making capacity, since even the crude defence of justice that informed the old politics of 'a fair day's pay' is left up to the elite. So the present ethical focus consolidates the death of popular democracy. From beneath, it is like the peasant's view that, since he cannot be opposed, it would be nice to think that the King is a good man.

Steve Black *London*

Teachers are frontline troops

Are teachers to blame? ('Disruptive pupils: teachers give the wrong answer', June) Is it possible that the quality of teacher personnel has dropped to a stage that the new brand simply cannot handle the pressures of the job, and have to hide behind excuses based on lack of funding and social decay?

I hope the reader finds this as outrageous an assumption as I do. Of course not all teachers are dedicated and brilliant at their job, but I cannot stand by and let their name be dragged through the mud. Teachers are frontline troops, like nurses and social services. Teachers have an intimate insight into the life of the next generation. They see the pressures which children have to cope with and cannot help but empathise. Teachers, like all social services, have been required to provide a better service while funding has tailed off.

Any action taken concerning disruptive pupils was done to get this genuine problem looked at by a dismissive government and general public. Both would love to palm off responsibility and do nothing themselves. But we *all* have a responsibility to our children. Just because we send them to school five days a week does not mean we can abdicate. Teachers care, teachers try to make a genuine contribution. Can you say the same?

Stuart Lowrie *Welwyn, Herts*

In criticising Claire Fox, Rodney Kay-Kreizman welcomes teachers' strikes against disruptive pupils because such action is a refreshing departure from the otherwise low level of 'involvement' by members of the teaching unions. His reverence for strike action, regardless of what purpose it is pursuing, is absurd. Did he support the virulently sectarian Ulster Workers' Council in the seventies, or the anti-immigrant strikes by dockers who wanted 'Enoch Powell for prime minister' in the sixties? Would he be in sympathy with

'rights for whites' marches in somewhere like Bethnal Green?

The left have often been criticised for believing that the end justifies the means. Kay-Kreizman has reversed this with the ludicrous suggestion that the means justify the end.

A Latham Manchester

Pressure on the roads

Perhaps David Nolan ('Raging bullshit', September) is right to say that road rage is being sensationalised. But it is possible that there is something to be concerned about nevertheless. With the gradual breakdown of the transport infrastructure, commuting into London these days feels like lowering yourself into a pressure cooker. People are facing more pressure and longer hours at work. Surely this has some consequence in how we relate to each other, on the roads and off?

In times like these, it is important to remind people that everyone's well-being depends on us all observing standards of behaviour. Nolan's claim that we do not need regulations or codes of conduct on the road is irresponsible. The reason, as even he admits, there are less road deaths than ever previously recorded is because of formal and informal regulations and codes of conduct developed over the years.

However, I do agree with Nolan that responses to concerns about safety which have not been thought out properly can be more dangerous than the original danger. Earlier this year, following the brutal rape of a woman dragged from her car at traffic lights, the Automobile Association advised all drivers to lock their doors from the inside. This went against all commonsense advice from previous years which said that doing this would hinder you getting out or the emergency services getting in if you had an accident. Perhaps we will soon be advised not to wear seatbelts so as to allow a quick exit when someone jumps into the car to nick the stereo.

Else Novak Wembley

Valued occupation

Is Dave Cowlard moonlighting from a job on *Estates Gazette*? (Megacities or megaproblems?, July/August) Contrary to his cheap

criticism, the occupation of the Guinness site in Wandsworth was a worthwhile attempt to highlight the squandering of resources by landlords, property developers and speculators. I can only assume that Cowlard has some sort of stake in the continued ownership of land and property by a privileged elite.

Jodie Chester

The war is still on

Mark Ryan's article ('The peace process rules', September) describes a nation in collective self-denial. The mass psychosis of not-believing-in-anything, Ryan argues, leads to the autonomous peace process controlling everything.

The idea that this ephemeral thing runs the North of Ireland is an insult to the people who live there. The continued existence of the sectarian state, prettified with some token anti-discrimination measures, and the continual presence of the British armed forces, continue to be the cause of conflict in the North. The current strength of 'culture' may be a sign of weakness by various protagonists but the Union Jack and its propaganda machine is still waging war on the nationalist community.

Noel Whelan Birmingham

Twisted

Kenan Malik's review of *Twister* ('A twist in the tale', September) seems a little twisted. Malik insists that whereas in the liberal heyday of Hollywood the movies treated natural disaster as a metaphor for social conflict, nature is now depicted as a force in its own right. But his own description of *Twister* undermines this view.

In *Twister* the destructive force of nature remains the stage on which the social struggles of the day are played out—the one between corrupt corporate America and the heroic hi-tech frontiersmen who refuse to play the game by the rules. Much the same plot as *Outbreak*, *Terminator 2* and many other contemporary disaster and sci-fi movies, in fact.

The illegitimacy of human powers is indeed an important theme here, but nature's role is still metaphorical—as a challenge to the protagonists to seek a new moral purity through a refusal of the demands and methods of the old. Instead of introducing the idea of nature in its

own right, as Malik claims, *Twister* continues the well-worn Hollywood tradition of using man v nature as a metaphor to depict the social conflict of man against himself.

Malcolm Finn London W6

Taking part

With his winner takes all attitude, Alan Harding ('Only the best will do', September) sounds like a leftover yuppie from the eighties. I bet he still wears double-breasted suits and red braces. Also he does not seem to recognise that 'taking part' has always been an important part of the ethos of sport.

When the Olympic Games were re-established a century ago, the founding principle was that taking part was more important than winning. At that time, participation in sport was celebrated in the name of international diplomacy, and as an aspect of 'character-building' among the next generation of the elite. It was also a way of teaching the upper and lower classes to get along together, while maintaining an appropriate hierarchy, of course.

In the public schools of the time, taking part in sport was essential training for running the British Empire. In working class districts, participation was linked to the formation of communities and the development of union solidarity among young, manual workers. Taking part, not just winning, has long been encouraged by different sections of society for different reasons. The only section of society which says there's no such thing as second place is the military. Maybe they are the people Alan Harding feels at home with.

Sandy Maclean London

Liberty and license

Andrew Calcutt (Read on, September) is straining to make the case that Ben Elton is against freedom and rights. He should re-read *The Rights Of Man* by Thomas Paine, where it is pointed out that liberty is by no means the same as license. In Hollywood and elsewhere, there is now a licence to be brutal and boring simultaneously, and Elton has made a valuable contribution by speaking out. As a magazine which says it is against the degradation of humanity, you ought to have worked this out for yourselves.

Leslie Andrews Bristol

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

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

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Bingeing on anorexia

Why should a rare eating disorder which afflicts a few teenagers become a major issue of our times? Jennie Bristow sees the obsession with anorexia as a symptom of something sick

The other week in Brighton, I saw an anorexic for the first time. She was drifting along the beach like a skeleton, her bones covered by translucent skin and fine, downy hair. Like everyone else on the beach, I stopped and stared: you get a lot of freaks in Brighton, but this was a new one.

Having grown up on a diet of young women's magazines, in which eating disorders fill the features sections and problem pages every week, I had begun to think anorexia must be as commonplace among my contemporaries as vegetarianism. From the amount of discussion about eating disorders, you could be forgiven for thinking they afflict everybody from Diana, Princess of Wales to Katie, girl next door. The shock came from seeing an anorexic in the flesh—or rather, in the bones—and realising just how abnormal an anorexic looks, and how rare this illness really is.

So why the obsession with the problem of anorexia today? Anorexia is a peculiarly disgusting and unnecessary illness, during which a healthy young woman slowly and deliberately starves herself. Despite being surrounded by food and people begging her to eat, she rejects all nourishment, believing herself to be fat. If she does eat, she binges on huge quantities of food and gets rid of it immediately—forcing herself to vomit or using laxatives or diuretics. Her bodyweight can drop until she is little more than a skeleton covered in

dry skin covered by fine hair or 'languo', which grows to protect her from the cold. She stops menstruating and, if she has not yet reached puberty, her physical development is retarded. The more hideous she looks, the better she feels. In an extreme case, she will eventually starve herself to death.

Fortunately, anorexia remains a rare disorder affecting only a small section of the population. Although figures vary, it is estimated that about one per cent of young women between the ages of 15 and 30 suffer from the disorder to some degree, which means a substantially smaller proportion of women overall (J Buckroyd, *Anorexia and Bulimia: Your Questions Answered*, p6). Although some recent studies suggest cases of anorexia in men, the consensus is that middle class girls remain the main group of sufferers. As psychotherapist Julia Buckroyd, admits, keen as she is to stress the threat of eating disorders, the increase in the scale and scope of eating disorders may be 'merely the result of a greater awareness of the illness and consequently wider reporting of it' (*Anorexia and Bulimia*, p6).

Despite the recognition that anorexia nervosa is a rare condition, there is a widespread belief that it is on the increase. But there is no conclusive proof of this. Changes in diagnostic methods, greater sensitivity to the existence of eating disorders and greater reporting of the disorders mean that it

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

TABOOS

is actually very difficult to prove an increase in the number of cases over the past 15 years. As Eric Fombonne of the Institute of Psychiatry at the University of London concludes in his recent in-depth study of eating disorders, 'The review of available data has left us without any definite conclusion as to whether or not the incidence of eating disorders has increased over time' ('Eating disorders' in M Rutter and D Smith (eds), *Psychosocial Disorders in Young People*, 1995, p671).

So anorexia is hardly an epidemic, or likely to become one. You would think that those concerned about the illness would be pleased. Yet literature on the subject is noticeable by its attempts to play up the figures, rather than to celebrate the persistent rarity of anorexia. So, for example, Buckroyd stresses that her figures are 'conservative' estimates, while the *Guardian* qualifies its statement that two per cent of women suffer from eating disorders with the rider that 'it is believed that the true figure is much higher' (10 May 1994).

Stating that 'about 100 young people die from anorexia every year', former *Just Seventeen* agony aunt Maroushka Monro argues that 'you may not think this is a very high number, but remember that we're talking about a *young* normally healthy age-group in which 100 deaths of people under 25 is a significant number' (*Talking about Anorexia: How to Cope with Life without Starving*, 1996, p12). In fact 100 deaths out of the 7.5m people aged 15-25 in Britain is not a significant trend. The real issue is, why do those concerned with such a 'young, normally healthy age-group' seem so preoccupied with extremely rare illnesses and even rarer deaths?

It is not that more young women are suffering from anorexia, but that more experts and pundits are becoming obsessed with it. To understand why, it is necessary to look not at the medical condition itself, but at the wider context in which it is being discussed.

It has become fashionable to hold anorexia up as a symbol of modern times—'The anorectic's struggle as a metaphor for our age', as feminist Susie Orbach subtitled her influential book *Hunger Strike* a decade ago. At first, there seems something strange about using an eating disorder affecting a handful of self-obsessed middle class girls as a symbol of our times. But a closer look at current explanations for anorexia reveals that they accurately reflect the doom-laden prejudices of social commentators today.

Of all the various theories about the causes of anorexia, the one which carries most weight today is the notion that anorexia is a result of over-ambition. Focusing on the nature of the target

group—white middle class girls who are generally considered bright and ambitious—theorists argue that the desire to be thinner, more self-disciplined, and harder working than anyone else forms the backbone of anorexics' motivation. Unable to fulfil their ambitions in any other walk of life, anorexics turn their ambitions inwards, focusing on the body as the site of self-control.

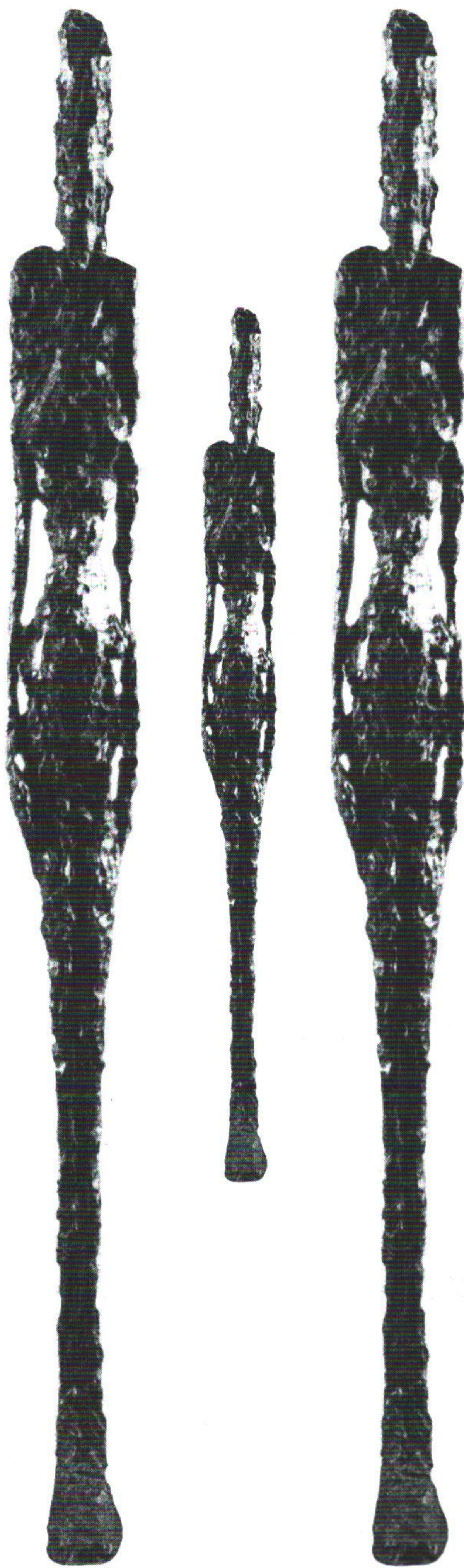
American psychologist Richard Gordon sets the rise in eating disorders in the context of the changing expectations of women. He argues that the 'orientation towards achievement, competitiveness, and independence' among young women today 'conflicts sharply' with traditional ideas of femininity (*Anorexia and Bulimia: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic*, 1990, p52). Buckroyd aims her fire at families who expect too much from their children, while Michael Rutter and David Smith point to anorexia as a result of increased competitiveness, consumerism and individualism in society as a whole.

The irony is that the notion that anorexia is a result of heightened expectations of adolescents and teenagers comes about at a time when less is expected of young people than ever before.

A look at some of the other articles in this month's *Living Marxism* gives an indication of the expectations society has of young people today, and the expectations they have of themselves. While students are deemed incapable of coping with failing their exams, many young people's own aspirations reveal a striking lack of ambition. The discussion about the increase in anorexia as a result of high expectations comes at the very time when young women's magazines are also screaming about the need for more pictures of 'normal looking' models rather than beautiful superwaifs, and when a maxim of the 1990s is 'get people to accept you as you are'.

The insistence that young people are increasingly prone to eating disorders is in fact symptomatic of the extraordinarily *low* expectations society holds of young people. The idea that you cannot expect the youth of today to eat their dinner properly, but that you have to expect that they might start to starve themselves, and that this is a 'normal response' to the pressures of life, just shows how little the anti-anorexia brigade expects from young women.

Underneath all the concern about anorexia is an attack on ambition, self-improvement and high standards. Its effect is positively to encourage young people and their parents to lower their sights so that any hint of ambition is treated as a 'psychosocial disorder'. For example, the Eating Disorders Association, in its advice for parents and teachers on 'tell-tale' signs to ►



watch for, flags up the idea that anorexics reveal 'a definite tendency to perfectionism', have high standards, work hard and are energetic. It advises parents to 'understand' the dilemmas of their anorexic and bulimic child,

Not so long ago teenagers would have been told to pull themselves together and grow up

and advises teachers to 'lower standards' when dealing with pupils with eating disorders.

By making out that young girls who go on diets or get 'A's in their homework are on the slippery slope

to starvation, the anorexia crusaders are simply encouraging young people to fail at everything. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the reported cases of anorexia have risen while the number of actual cases remains static. Young people jump on the eating disorders bandwagon as an innovative way of getting out of school and of reducing pressure on themselves.

The reality of anorexia seems boringly straightforward. Just as children might hold their breath in temper tantrums to frighten their parents into giving them what they want, some teenage girls will inflict pain on themselves to get attention. Not so long ago, teenagers would have been told to pull themselves together and grow up. Today, the temper tantrum is positively encouraged, as women old enough to get married have their food intake carefully monitored by worried parents and are given an increasing

number of advance get-out clauses for failing exams. The most frightening thing about the modern obsession with anorexia is not the condition, horrendous as it is, but the apparent desire among psychotherapists and sociologists to brand all under-18s as losers and potential nutcases.

Maroushka Monro sums up the view of young women as born losers in her advice about 'coping with stress without starving':

'The point is that as human beings none of us are perfect and anyone who expects or tries to be is setting very unrealistic goals which are bound to cause disappointment. Also, stop to think how tedious it would be to have constantly to live up to being perfect... never being allowed to feel or be vulnerable.' (*Talking about Anorexia*, p98)

Excuse me while I throw up.

Model behaviour



Kate Simmonds, model and sociology student, asks what's wrong with wanting to look good

When Omega watches made its much-publicised decision to stop advertising in *Vogue* magazine, I just laughed. The problem with *Vogue*, argued Omega's UK brand director Giles Rees, was that the models it used were 'too thin', and that it was 'irresponsible for a leading magazine, which should be setting an example, to select models of anorexic proportions' (*Daily Telegraph*, 31 May 1996).

Excuse me? Since when did models have a 'responsibility' to do anything but promote and sell fashionable clothes? When did you last see anyone—including Omega—choosing to advertise its products with fat models? When Omega reversed its decision the following day on the convenient grounds of freedom of the press, it confirmed to me how ludicrous the discussion about 'irresponsible' skinny models is.

As the preoccupation with anorexia increases, the spotlight has turned on models as both the alleged sufferers and perpetrators of the condition. As models we are supposed to be anorexic if thin, and at risk of anorexia if we are even slim enough to get on an agency's books. Worse, the fact that slim models cover the pages of fashion magazines is said to encourage anorexia among young women who want to look like us.

This is a strange thing. Obviously, most people who want to emulate their favourite beautiful super-model cannot do so. Models themselves have difficulty creating that fairy tale image that appears in glossy magazines. I know that sometimes even the prettiest models get pinned and taped up and have to hold bizarre poses to create that look. Being thin, like having a clear complexion, is a basic

requirement of the job. You have to look good enough to show the clothes off and make the look sell.

What is the alternative to skinny models? Magazines full of lumpy, bumpy, plumpy people? Sorry, but it just does not look as good, however pretty they may be. The catwalk would instantly lose that floating elegant touch and look more like a shopping centre on a Saturday. Is this really a better image for young women to aspire to?

At least the old 'blonde bimbo, cute-but-vacant' caricature of models came from people trying to say they were better than us, even if not so attractive. Now our critics do the opposite—having a go at us for making them feel inadequate and unattractive. How sad can you get? This idea is not only patronising to models, claiming that if we try to look good and lose weight we are mentally ill, it also pretends that young *Vogue* readers are so pathetic that they might fall apart if they see these images of thinness. What chance do women have of taking serious control of our lives if we cannot take something so mundane as our looks and those of others in our stride?

I think the recovered anorexic who wrote into *Vogue* (September 1996) expressed the 'relationship' between skinny models and anorexia really well. She wrote that 'the causes of anorexia are far more complex and deep rooted than people seeing thin models and wishing to be like them....I believe the main cause of anorexia is low self-esteem'. And what could be more crushing to young women's self-esteem than the notion that they cannot handle a few pretty pictures?





Cheers

How predictable of the Labour Party to call for an independent inquiry into the marketing of 'alcopops' following the brouhaha about Carlsberg-Tetley's new brew, Thickhead. Labour and the media are apparently concerned that the nation's children are being lured towards 'alcohol abuse' by the aggressive marketing of alcoholic fruit drinks—especially those with gimmicks.

Thickhead provoked particular wrath because not only does it taste of tangerines, but it is the consistency of liquid hair gel and carries a label with a picture of a bloke pulling a strange face. This, the do-gooders imagine, will cause impressionable youth to flock to off-licences having saved up their pocket money to buy demon drink.

I suspect that they can all relax. If alcopops serve as a tasty way for kids to get smashed they will simply be replacing all the other vile brews that we had to concoct when we were young.

Young people do not need to be lured to drink alcohol with fruity flavours, strange textures and pictures of prats pulling faces. If I remember rightly, when I was in my teens the most important qualities that a drink could possess were a high percentage of alcohol and a low price. What it looked and tasted like was incidental. When a mate who was good at arithmetic calculated that drinking barley wine was the way to consume the most amount of alcohol while spending the least amount of money, the information was duly circulated around the sixth form. The following weekend every pub in Havant sold out of it.

A vox pop among some of the people I work with shows that similar calculations were made throughout the country. Snakebite—a mix of strong lager and stronger cider—seems to have been a particularly functional choice, along with 'poor man's Black Velvet'—strong cider and Guinness.

For a time, in my teenage years, Martini wasn't drunk by beautiful people but by spotty youths, who would arrive at parties clutching bottles of the stuff, because it was stronger than wine or beer but cheaper than spirits.

Real ale festivals offered limitless opportunities for experimentation, particularly as they served beer all day and you were actually encouraged to drink a lot. Here too it was the ales with the highest

alcohol content that drew us teen drinkers. The more Xs on a barrel the more likely you were to try it.

We drank because it was a good laugh and, being young, we never suffered too much for it the next day. In your teens heavy nights are followed by a long lie-in and a pint at lunch time. The NUS student guide to the dangers of drink, *The Big Blue Book of Booze*, opens with the warning 'Alcohol is a very strong drug!'. Quite. If it wasn't you would not be able to get out of your head on it, and then where would the fun be?

Did we worry about the damage we were doing to our bodies? No we did not. Did our parents worry? Probably not that much. My father insisted that 'learning to drink' was a vital life skill. He thought that it was particularly important for girls because, if a girl knew how to handle her alcohol, no boy would be able to get her drunk and 'take advantage'.

We drank because it made us feel older. Being able to buy your round was a rite of passage. Being able to meet your mates in the Old House at Home (which with teenage wit was known as the Old Louse) was one step beyond the bike sheds. When you were on nodding terms with the landlord, respect was due. When he lent you the house darts, you had really made it. We wanted to be like

adults, and a glass and a cigarette made us feel more that way.

I knew I had really grown up when I started drinking things because I liked the taste of them, when I started to buy Chianti instead of Concorde, and when I started to refuse one more drink because I knew I would suffer if I had it. I'm now at an age when hangovers last for days and you tend to have things to do in the morning. But I don't regret one minute of teenage recklessness.

My objection to alcopops is that they do not taste very nice. They are a bit like alcohol-free wine—the stuff that is neither good wine nor like good grape juice. I am more uneasy about the growing trend for aspirations to adulthood to be turned on their head—so that many adults now seem to prefer to mimic children, and opt for lemonade or drink liquidised jelly. But I suppose that is only to be expected in a society where more and more students live at home with their parents, and the student unions see their role as that of *in loco parentis*, creating safe learning environments. ●

It was the alcohol content that drew us teenage drinkers

The view from Reading Festival

Who are the heroes of the 'Y-generation', the young rave tribes and festival-goers who have been put under the microscope by the media throughout the summer of 1996? *Living Marxism* went to the Reading Festival in August to find out



Emily: 15, at school

Hero: 'I don't regard anyone as a hero but I admire people like the Levellers who fought against the Criminal Justice Act, and Bob Geldof who stood up to Margaret Thatcher.'

Ambitions: 'Not to go along with the crowd, to be remembered.'

Becca: 16, student

Hero: 'Courtney Love because she is so wild and the way she copes with things.'

Ambition: 'I want to be happy, to lead a good life and do exciting things and have a baby and be an artist and a poet and get really good on the guitar.'

Clare-Jane: 21, student

Hero: 'I have not got one, it would be a combination of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Quentin Tarantino and Katharine Hepburn....'

Ambitions: 'I'm going to university to study film, so hopefully to win an Oscar.'

Dave: 18, student

Hero: 'My dad. When I was seven he chased off a load of boys trying to beat me up.'

Ambitions: 'To see the world and be happy, and not to have to worry about getting kicked shitless every time I go out.'

Adam: 21, student

Hero: 'Kenneth Williams. He got loads of shit from his dad for being gay and carried on with his lifestyle.'

Ambitions: 'I want to have a small cottage by the sea and a Raleigh Chopper so I can cycle in the village on Sundays.'

David: 21, working

Hero: 'Gonzo and Animal from the Muppets. Gonzo 'cos he doesn't care what people think and he'll do things for the fun of it and Animal just because he is wild.'

Ambition: 'I'd like to be respected for what I do and make some damn good music.'

James: 18, student

Hero: 'I don't really have many heroes, except Henry Rollins. I admire the fact that he doesn't take drugs despite the fact that that is predominant in culture.'

Ambitions: 'To do something worthwhile but I'm not sure what. To be happy.'

Ben: 17, student

Hero: 'Stephen Redgrave. He is at the peak of rowing.'

Ambition: 'To be world champion rower, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, to have a nice wife, a nice family, nice kids. I am not interested in material goods and the rat race.'



Michael: 17, student

Hero: 'Paul Gascoigne. He plays the game well and keeps his sense of humour even though he is being hounded by the press.'

Ambition: 'To enjoy life as much as I can and see if I can help anyone, hopefully.'

Who out of the following do you consider to be heroic or admirable? Percentage of people that voted for them

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Nelson Mandela | 85 | Gareth Southgate | 28 |
| Mother Teresa | 77 | Frank Bruno | 26 |
| Gandhi | 75 | Noel and Liam Gallagher | 26 |
| Dunblane parents | 65 | Madonna | 23 |
| Bob Geldof | 60 | Bravo Two Zero | 22 |
| Neil Armstrong | 55 | Che Guevara | 21 |
| Kurt Cobain | 49 | Princess Di | 20 |
| Winston Churchill | 45 | Paul Gascoigne | 19 |
| Richard Branson | 43 | Margaret Thatcher | 18 |
| Kate Adie | 41 | Anita Roddick | 17 |
| Stephen Hawking | 39 | Mike Tyson | 13 |
| Dalai Lama | 35 | Tony Blair | 11 |
| Eric Cantona | 28 | Colin Powell | 6 |

Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Gandhi and the Dunblane parents came top of our 'Who are your heroes?' poll of 15-21 year olds at the Reading Festival. Respect for the martyr-like qualities of these figures was reflected elsewhere in the survey, where compassion for others was the characteristic most commonly looked for and 'helping people' was repeatedly cited as the biggest personal ambition.

Our survey asked over 100 young people to select those figures that they regarded as heroic from a list of 26, and to pick those qualities that best befit a hero. They were also asked to name their own heroes and describe their personal ambitions.

While the top three heroes might be said to be those who have left their mark on the twentieth century, it is interesting that the Dunblane parents were ranked so high up the poll with them. What all four choices have in common is an identification with suffering.

Mandela's imprisonment, Mother Teresa's self-denial, Gandhi's non-violence are bracketed together with the tragedy of the Dunblane

parents. Respondents who named figures like Mandela or Gandhi as their heroes often said they admired how these people had 'suffered' or 'sacrificed themselves' in the face of hardship.

That the most popular heroic quality was compassion, and that one of the more common ambitions was to help people, suggests that what might have been regarded as heroic qualities of strong and aggressive leadership in the past are out of fashion in the 1990s. The fact that Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, only just beat Kurt Cobain, the latest rock star to commit suicide, tells its own story.

The survey suggests this is a generation that has truly rejected what are seen as the eighties values of material success. Very few people expressed a desire to make a lot of money, most were content to be wealthy enough to have a family. Less than one per cent said that they had an ambition to own their own business, and of those few whose ambition was to get a job (13 per cent) only a handful actually named a profession.

The most common aspiration was simply to

'be happy' (25 per cent), while 14 per cent said they wanted to help people or do something worthwhile, compared with four per cent who wanted to make money or be a millionaire.

That 21 per cent expressed an aspiration to make it in a band is probably not surprising at a festival. What is new, however, is that the teenage dream of being a pop star can now be expressed by people in their early twenties, for whom the traditional 'year out' of generally mucking about has become a way of life.

Of course, a lot of respondents did express a positive aspiration to make a mark and be remembered for something. What is different today is that such aspirations are expressed within a framework which puts compassion ahead of success, and where the modest ambition to help others has replaced big plans for changing the world. ●

Most respondents (76 per cent) were students or at school, with only 14 per cent working and eight per cent unemployed; 88 per cent were living with their parents; 61 per cent were male, 39 per cent female.



Isabelle: 18, student

Hero: 'David Bowie, one of the last great artists. He manages to give people help and charity.'

Ambition: 'To become a good artist, to become a mother of two children and adopt one from India. If I had enough money, I would donate to charity.'

Amy: 17, student

Hero: 'Richard Branson for the way success has not gone to his head and he still helps small business.'

James: 18, student

Hero: 'Jackie Pullinger, an aid worker in Hong Kong, she sacrifices her own comfort for other people, for a cause.'

Ambition: 'To find my niche where I can help other people.'

Terry: 19, student

Hero: 'Damn tricky question, a hero is like a spokesperson, I suppose

people like Nelson Mandela.'

Ambition: 'I want to be able to help people, it doesn't really matter whether I am famous, that's why I am doing psychology.'

Rosie: 20, student

Ambition: 'To be happy, I'm not really concerned about being successful.'

Matt: 18, student

Hero: 'The Jedi Knights from *Star Wars* because they have respect for every other living being and fight the dark side of the force.'

Ambition: 'To be a writer, star in films, be famous and influence people and to change the world.'

Helen: 16, at school

Hero: 'Nelson Mandela because he stood up for his beliefs and sacrificed his life.'

Ambition: 'To make a difference. To be remembered for something worthwhile and to be happy.'

Esther: 17, at school

Ambition: 'As long as I am happy and help others and do what I can, I shouldn't have to have a proper ambition.'

Catherine: 18, student

Hero: 'Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Gandhi, because they had the courage to stand up for what they believe in and suffer the consequences.'

Ambition: 'To be good at something that will make a difference to somebody or something.'

Lucy: 19, student

Hero: 'My best friends because of their honesty, acceptance and they don't judge anything I do.'

Ambition: 'I don't like having ambitions because you can be disappointed.'

James: 19, student

Hero: 'Roger Moore because he stands for the British way of life.'

Ambition: 'To have a worthwhile job like in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and help things.'



**What qualities do you look for in a hero?
Percentage of people that voted for them**

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| compassion | 84 |
| standing up for what they believe in | 83 |
| ambition | 82 |
| self-confidence | 82 |
| overcoming personal problems | 66 |
| intelligence | 63 |
| being successful within their field | 58 |
| leadership | 56 |
| single-mindedness | 45 |
| spirituality | 45 |
| physical appearance | 28 |
| arrogance | 12 |
| wealth | 9 |

Whether or not the anti-tobacco measures proposed by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair would succeed in reducing smoking remains uncertain. The dangers of the moral crusade against tobacco are, however, already apparent, writes Dr Michael Fitzpatrick



13mg TAR 0.9mg NICOTINE

Smoking is set to become an election issue on both sides of the Atlantic. In August, Bill Clinton declared his intention to label tobacco a 'drug of addiction' and to subject the industry to stricter regulation through the Food and Drug Administration. After saying that he was not convinced that nicotine was addictive, Bob Dole, Clinton's Republican opponent in the forthcoming presidential contest, was harassed by anti-smoking campaigners at every rally, led by the provocatively costumed 'Buttman'.

In June, the call for a ban on cigarette advertising was one of the few specific policy proposals in Tony Blair's five-point draft manifesto plan for the health service. Though John Major has so far kept out

of the smoking wars, it is well known that his predecessor Margaret Thatcher received a handsome consultancy fee for services rendered to tobacco giant Philip Morris. However, before rushing to take sides in this familiar left-right pre-election ding-dong, it is worth asking what has given rise to the sudden clamour for a clampdown on the tobacco industry?

The link between smoking and lung cancer and other diseases is not a new discovery. It was first clearly demonstrated in the early 1950s and became widely known to the public in the 1960s. Indeed overall smoking rates have fallen by about 40 per cent over the past 20 years, largely as a result of the recognition of the health dangers. Medical authorities have been demanding stricter controls on

the tobacco industry for more than 30 years. In 1962, for example, the Royal College of Physicians proposed restrictions on advertising, the printing of information on tar and nicotine content on packs, and a publicity campaign to discourage smoking: the government agreed to only a watered down public information campaign (see *British Medical Journal*, 16 January 1993). For the past decade, the British Medical Association has been campaigning for the sort of measures now endorsed by Clinton and Blair.

They made me

Yet smoking did not become an issue in the last two elections. It is particularly striking that Clinton and Blair, two politicians well known for their

Warning: Anti-tobacco cru

pragmatism in adjusting their policies in accordance with the popular mood, should now take what might appear to be a high-risk stand against tobacco. After all, around a quarter of the US electorate still smoke and among supporters of the Democratic Party the proportion is even higher. A similar

A recent high-profile court case in Florida reveals the changing climate of opinion around smoking. Grady Carter, a 66-year old retired air traffic controller, who developed lung cancer after smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes for 44 years, won \$750 000 in compensation from Brown & Williamson, a subsidiary

are incapable of deciding for themselves what is good or bad for them, and that some external public agency has a greater responsibility for an individual's behaviour than the individual himself, simply degrades the individual in relation to society. The instinct to blame somebody else for misfortunes resulting from your own decisions or actions is characteristic of young children: indeed this judgement implicitly reduces the citizen to the status of a child in the eyes of the law.

The campaign against cigarette advertising is based on the presumption of a gullible public being manipulated by the fiendish tobacco barons and their slick publicity agents. In fact, so great are the restrictions on cigarette advertising already that an advanced grasp of semiotics is required to interpret many current adverts. A visitor from Mars would certainly be at low risk of being lured into cigarette smoking by the latest Silk Cut posters.

Lady killers

It is striking that the anti-advertising campaign began by emphasising the danger to children and to women, and has now expanded to include the entire population, implicitly reducing everybody to the level of children. Back in the eighties, one of Esther Rantzen's first television campaigns was against the promotion of cigarettes to children. Feminists took up the menace of cigarettes to women focusing particularly on the marketing of Virginia Slims (see B Jacobson, *The Ladykillers: Why Cigarette Smoking is a Feminist Issue*, 1981 and *Beating the Ladykillers: Women and Smoking*, 1986). Emphasising the peculiar vulnerability of women to advertising which suggested that smoking was cool and sophisticated or which linked cigarettes with slimness and beauty, the feminists persuaded women's magazines to restrict cigarette adverts. It is remarkable that so few feminists objected to a campaign which implicitly reinforced the conventional patriarchal prejudice that women are ►



MONTAGE: DAVE CHAPMAN

trend is apparent in Britain, where the overall level of smoking is slightly higher. The anti-tobacco campaign also obviously antagonises a powerful industry with considerable political clout employing thousands of workers, especially in the USA.

So why tobacco and why now? The political significance of the anti-tobacco crusade is that it resonates with some of the most influential themes in Western society today. It projects an image of the general public as helpless dupes of tobacco propaganda and as pathetic victims of chemical dependency on nicotine. The campaign against tobacco assumes a society of feeble individuals who need to be protected against cigarette adverts and against their own addictive personalities.

of the British tobacco firm BAT. In past cases the tobacco companies had successfully argued that an individual's free choice to smoke implied acceptance of the known risk to health. This time, however, the jury upheld the view that the company rather than the individual was responsible for the consequences of the decision to smoke. While the tobacco company lawyers immediately lodged an appeal, US medical authorities and anti-smoking lobbies celebrated a historic victory—and many more litigants prepared their cases.

No doubt the Florida judgement was a blow to the tobacco industry. But, though it might have brought some comfort to Grady Carter and his family, the award was no victory for the people. The implication that people

addictives can damage your life



feckless creatures easily swayed by a flatterer's guile and, in the terms used by one campaigner, 'seduced into smoking' (see L Doyal, *What Makes Women Sick: Gender and the Political Economy of Health*, 1995, p191).

For the crusaders against the tobacco industry, the fact that it spends millions every year on promoting its seductive images is

of addiction that is symptomatic of our times. Until recently the concept of addiction was limited to alcohol and heroin; now it has been widened to include other forms of behaviour of a compulsive, self-destructive, character, including gambling, shopping, sex—and smoking. The self-help model of Alcoholics Anonymous and other therapeutic procedures have been extended to cover this ever-widening range of behaviour. The common theme is the damaged individual, the helpless victim of uncontrollable urges. Whether these compulsions originate in genes, or hormones, or in deep-rooted psychic trauma is controversial; what is certain is that they are beyond individual control and can only be contained through external intervention (in the form of state regulations and professional therapy).

A key link in the development of the anti-smoking crusade was the construction of the category of 'passive smoking' in the early 1980s. Whereas the early campaigns declared that smoking was a threat to the smoker's own health, the emphasis has now shifted to the argument that the smoker is a threat to the health of others. By branding smoking as an anti-social as well as a self-destructive activity, this shift effectively raised the moral stakes and legitimised more repressive measures, such as bans on smoking in workplaces and in public spaces.

According to a recent *Guardian* editorial, 'mention of "passive smoking" now attracts groans and ridicule only from a small minority of those refusing to believe the overwhelming weight of opinion' (11 April 1996). It proceeds to invoke a consensus that embraces 'everyone else from the Department of Health to independent researchers' who accept that passive smoking damages health. Such a smug and rhetorical statement, typical of much public health propaganda, should immediately raise suspicion.

In fact, much of the case against passive smoking is based on a statistical fallacy: the confusion of relative and absolute risk. For example, a survey may be reported as revealing a 33 per cent increase in the incidence (relative risk) of some disease among the non-smoking spouses of smokers compared with spouses of non-smokers. This sounds dramatic and impressive evidence of the dangers of smoking to others. Yet closer inspection reveals that the actual increase in the incidence (absolute risk) of the (relatively rare) disease in question was from 10 cases per 100 000 to 13 cases per 100 000, a 33 per cent increase all right, but one of dubious statistical significance. (For a rigorous critique see JR Johnstone, 'Scientific fact or scientific self-delusion: passive

smoking, exercise and the new puritanism' in *Health, Lifestyle and the Environment: countering the Panic*, Social Affairs Unit/Manhattan Institute, 1991.)

But the 'passive smoker' has become such an emblematic figure of our times that nobody questions her scientific credentials. The January 1993 award of £15 000 damages by Stockport Council to Veronica Bland, who claimed that her chronic bronchitis resulted from 11 years of exposure to smoking workmates, marked the public affirmation of the status of the passive smoker. Many commentators wondered why the council agreed to this out-of-court settlement rather than contest a case in which there appeared to be an impossible burden of proof on the litigant. A cynic might argue that £15 000 was a cheap price to pay for a decision which enabled employers throughout the country to tighten the regulation of their workforces through bans or restrictions on smoking at work. Whatever the motivations in this particular case, the passive smoker was ready to take her place in the pantheon of victims of the 1990s.

Pie in the sky

The proposed curbs on cigarette advertising, sports sponsorship, promotion and sales may succeed in reducing smoking. There is some evidence that such measures in the past and in other countries—particularly increases in price—may curtail demand. On the other hand, there is a clear danger that Prohibition will encourage illicit tobacco consumption and indeed that the puritanical proscription of smoking may provoke a backlash, particularly among the young, who tend to savour indulgence in activities deemed sinful by their elders.

While reducing smoking may prolong some lives in the distant future, the measures introduced to achieve this objective diminish the quality of all our lives now. One fact that emerges from all the smoking surveys receives remarkably little attention in the great anti-smoking debate. This is that the highest levels of smoking are to be found among the most disadvantaged in modern society—the unemployed, low income families, single mothers, the widowed, divorced and separated (see J Townsend, 'The burden of smoking' in *Tackling Inequalities in Health: An Agenda for Action*, Kings Fund, 1995). The greatest danger of the crusade against tobacco is that by reinforcing fatalism and notions of individual inadequacy it undermines the possibility of collective action against the social circumstances in which cigarette smoking induces its greatest damage to health.

A crusade proclaiming a commitment to better public health ends up inducing a life-denying fatalism

proof enough of their effectiveness in selling cigarettes. But, if manufacturers of cigarettes can so easily connect with the people's desires and aspirations, then banning the adverts is unlikely to have much effect on overall levels of smoking, though it might affect sales of particular brands.

More importantly, the message that emerges from this crusade is that our society is made up of people who are so susceptible to advertising that it is necessary for the state to step in to protect them from it. If that is true then any project of collective political activity that goes against the conventional tide must be a non-starter. The mirror image of the omnipotent manipulator of public behaviour is the impotent individual destined to obey the dictates of the media, even if they result in self-destruction. A crusade proclaiming a commitment to better public health ends up inducing a life-denying fatalism.

Therapeutic

The new emphasis on nicotine as an addictive drug, a key theme in the current US controversy, reinforces the notion of the vulnerable individual and further undermines the idea of individual responsibility for behaviour. It is a commonplace observation that it is difficult to quit smoking.

Yet, it is equally apparent that over recent decades millions have managed to give up, the vast majority without admission to specialist detoxification units, or being subjected to behaviour modification programmes or other therapeutic regimes designed to redeem the hapless addict from the ravages of drug dependency.

The drive to relabel smoking as a form of drug dependency is part of a wider expansion of the category

Why is the British army, erstwhile builder of empires, advertising itself as some sort of peace-loving relief organisation? Tessa Mayes investigates a recruitment crisis



15,000
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REQUIRED


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New Moral Army?

'Fifteen thousand caretakers required', say the latest recruitment posters. So what kind of people join the army today? Down at an Army Recruitment Office in central London, the first potential recruit I met was Bradley, a blonde, 15-year old, half-British, half-South African who has ambitions of pursuing a career in the forces. He comes from an army family and his friends think he is mad. 'I've got a friend at school who's like a hippie and she says, "how can you go out there and kill people?". I say, "to defend your country". And she says she doesn't want her friends to know that one day I might be killing people.'

Bradley is a traditionalist and the kind of person you might expect to find joining up to fight Johnny Foreigner. But there are not too many people like Bradley around today and the army is facing something of a recruitment crisis as a result. Military chiefs claim that without a successful change in recruitment policy the

army would be more than 20 000 men short by the year 2000, and the 1996 Defence Estimates state baldly that the army needs 4000 young men and women now. Concern over a shortage of Bradleys has led the army to make recruitment a military priority.

The army's sense of a recruitment crisis might seem to have come at an odd time. After all, the Ministry of Defence itself has made massive personnel cuts since the end of the Cold War, causing total armed forces levels to drop from 312 000 in 1989 to 233 000 in 1995. You would expect that this would mean more competition to get in—but no. While thousands of older soldiers have been told to fade away, there appears to be a marked shortage of the young recruits, on whom any army depends, lining up to replenish the ranks.

So why is it that the army seems to hold so little attraction for young people today? 'The wrong message has got through—that we're not

recruiting', explains Lieutenant-Colonel Harbour at the Army Recruitment Office. Harbour and the army top brass are keen to present the problem of getting people to join simply as one of adverse gossip and public image. If that is the case, then all that should be required to put things right is better publicity. That is one reason why the army has invested so heavily in new advertising. Two years ago the top advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi was paid £1m to devise a new recruitment strategy, and last year the Ministry of Defence almost doubled its advertising budget from £9m to £17m.

But it is clear that the trouble the army is experiencing in recruitment betrays a far deeper problem than a lack of billboard space. The problem which the top brass are grappling with is that the traditional core values of the armed forces, as a disciplined killing machine dedicated to defending Queen and Country, hold little appeal to young people today.

The British army was built in the age of Empire, and reforged through two world wars and the long decades of the Cold War. The current era bears little resemblance to any of that. The military requirements of the armed forces themselves have changed, away from a cumbersome infantry-based army designed to occupy Africa or Germany, and towards a leaner, more hi-tech, rapid reaction force. But the attitudes of the new generation they are trying to recruit ►

◀ have changed even more profoundly. The notion of fighting (and possibly dying) to keep the Union flag flying over the globe no longer appeals in the old way.

The days when many young men saw military service as a worthwhile and even heroic way to contribute to society are long gone. The caricatured, thick-necked, khaki-clad squaddie who gets a kick out of killing is an anathema to the sensitive nineties man who is held up as a model today. The continuing debate about whether homosexuals should be allowed into the army is an indication of how ill at ease society

Finding ways to key into the aspirations of youth today involves a much more complex procedure than simply relying on allegiance to the Union Jack. This is a problem of which the army has become acutely aware. In the past 10 years, four studies—*Options for Change*, *Front Line First*, the *Hart Study* and the *Bett Report*—have questioned everything about army procedures, from equal opportunities to training and recruitment. There have been intense debates within parliament, the Ministry of Defence and among military commanders themselves as to how far the army can be modernised without undermining its basic role as defender of the nation state and protector of the global interests of British capitalism.

The army's new Standards and Discipline Code sums up the problem which it is attempting to deal with: 'the army cannot remain wholly immune from the changes in the society it serves, and from which it recruits, but neither must it allow

itself to follow trends which tend to undermine the traditional values essential to its unique responsibilities and operational role.'

The advertising images through which the army has attempted to deal with its recruitment problem reflect its broader concerns and confusions. Take for example the Action Man ads of 1992-93, which portrayed robust soldiers doing adventure sports, interspersed with bored looking youths in pubs. The ads were an attempt to rely less on the patriotic imperative than on the adventurous, fun aspects of army life. Labelled the 'Frank' campaign, you might remember the funky, high-energy music with the beep-beep-beep sounds as an arrow picked out new recruit Frank skiing, Frank running beneath helicopters. 'I don't know why he did it', laments Frank's mate in a grey cafe, to the sounds of a slow ticking clock. 'I suppose someone's got to do it.' Beep-beep-beep! The arrow picks out Frank, arm-in-arm with a girl on an exotic beach.

The ads were attractive enough. However, as a spokesman for Saatchi & Saatchi explained to me, the trouble with the campaign was that people joined up and just as quickly got out, on realising that the army was not after all an 18-30 holiday. Faced with the unromantic reality of life in the barracks, new recruits had no reason to stay.

Another way in which the army has tried to make itself more accessible to people is to blur the distinction between military and civilian life, by placing greater emphasis on the role of reservists. These are part-time soldiers who do normal jobs, but join army exercises at weekends and during holidays. The army has sought to develop better relations with employers to enable the forces to call upon their staff when necessary.

The Territorial Army has been the traditional way of recruiting civilians

to become soldiers in their spare time. In an article in the journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, Major General George Kennedy and Brigadier Richard Holmes argue that the role of the TA should be strengthened today, 'in what is a peculiarly demilitarised society'. They propose that the TA demonstrates to 'the men and women who we defend and from whom we draw our strength, that we are them—and they are us: the nation's mirror, indeed' (February 1995).

Promoting the army as 'just another job' is another tactic intended to blur the distinction between army and civilian life. There are proposals to close two-thirds of the 126 Armed Forces Recruitment Offices, while 1100 Jobcentres would be used to attract people who have never considered the army. The Saatchis' ads play up this notion that the army is simply made up of ordinary people doing a job—but ordinary people having a more exciting life. And no civilian job (or civilian) seems to be ignored. One poster shows a paratrooper with the caption, 'Traffic wardens, ever thought of throwing yourself out of a plane?'. Another strategically placed newspaper ad continues the ordinary-life-is-boring theme: 'Face it, you wouldn't be looking in the job pages if you didn't fancy a change', and adding, in case the army is not quite the job you were looking for, 'If you've changed your mind, have a nice predictable life'.

However, all of these recruitment campaigns have suffered from similar problems. Presenting the army as just another job, or as a bit of action and fun, is simply not enough to persuade young

Out of 20 000 recent applicants, 9000 were rejected because they could not pass simple fitness tests

is with the traditional image of our brave boys in uniform.

The army's problems are exacerbated by the fact that even those who do want to join are often not up to it. The changing character of education, work and social life in deindustrialised nineties Britain means that the army's working class constituency tends to be considerably softer than the sons of miners, dockers and factory workers who might have joined up in yesteryear. Out of 20 000 recent applicants, 9000 were rejected because they could not pass simple fitness tests (*Daily Telegraph*, 16 May 1996). The army has been forced to accommodate to the new situation and lower its standards on physical fitness, for example by extending training periods, in order to attract recruits from the 'couch potato generation'.

More importantly, the army has had to look again at the values which it is seen to stand for. Today's potential 18-year old recruits were barely at school during Britain's Falklands War in 1982, perhaps the last hurrah of old-fashioned jingoistic militarism. These young people are likely to associate the idea of foreign intervention not with traditional gunboat diplomacy, but with 'peacekeeping' missions and other supposedly humanitarian operations in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East or Bosnia. And they are likely to see the most appropriate agencies for such missions not as traditional invasion forces, but as the charities and other non-governmental organisations which are often at the cutting edge of British and Western intervention today.

Colonel John Blashford-Snell, speaking on *Channel 4 News*, summed up the problem as the army sees it: 'Young people want to be warriors without the war. They're concerned about global issues...[but] armies are now in competition with other agencies to, for example, clear mines. You don't have to be in the army to do that.' (3 July 1996)



people to enlist. In the past, a job in the army may have meant a secure life for some, and at the very least the ability to learn a trade. Today, when many of the skills taught by the army are increasingly irrelevant to civilian jobs, and when redundancy notices are issued across the board (for example, to 7000 troops in 1994, some of them while on active duty in Bosnia) 'a nice predictable life' can seem like a better option.

In the end, the army has to be able to justify to its recruits why it continues to train them as killers, and why it has to prepare them for war. For that it needs a moral mission, something that will compel young people to fight on behalf of Britain. The reworking of this moral mission forms the basis of the army's latest attempt to connect with potential recruits.

The message of the most recent army recruitment ads represents a quite breathtaking departure. We are asked to forget all that stuff about the army and its multi-billion pound armoury being there to kill people around the globe. Instead, it seems, the mission of British soldiers is to save and protect the wounded and vulnerable of the world.

A TV ad from the latest campaign shows an African soldier shouting aggressively and incomprehensibly at the camera (representing the British person's viewpoint). 'How do you get this man to let you use his water supply?', asks the narrative: 'Shout at him? Shoot him?' No, it seems the answer is that 'eye contact is crucial in gaining trust'. So the Briton takes off his sunglasses and makes friends with the natives. Meanwhile, billboards carry advertisements for '15 000 caretakers', with a photograph of an elderly, distressed East European woman who has collapsed on the ground, crying. Only the small print alongside the Union Jack shows that this is an advert for the army rather than a charity appeal.

Beyond the adverts, the public face of the army has been transformed. At the forefront are military figures who are media-friendly and personify the new ethic of caring and sensitivity. For example, Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Rose, ex-commander of the UN forces in Bosnia, became

a regular interviewee on TV news explaining the role of 12 000 British blue berets in administering aid to refugees. Having commanded the SAS between 1979 and 1982, and having introduced peacekeeping studies at the Army Staff College in Surrey, he personifies the mix of modern-day military style with the traditional army skills. Rose was made Adjutant General in February, responsible for manning in the army, and now leads the recruitment campaign from the front.

The desire to emphasise the 'human face' of the army above its military purpose means it is sometimes possible to dispense with the military work altogether. The new 'Mills & Boon' image the army occasionally chooses to promote is exemplified by the well-publicised love affair between Colonel Mark Cook and a Croatian doctor as the colonel worked on rebuilding an orphanage. Adultery, frowned upon by military traditionalists, was in Cook's case never publicly attacked by army officials. In the end, he returned to his wife, built the orphanage, and published a personal account of his soldier-as-charity-worker experiences in a book entitled *A Promise of Hope*. It was all a far cry from the recent conviction of three lowly British soldiers for the rape and murder of a Danish tour guide in Cyprus—a case which prompted a flood of complaints about outdated, 'macho' militarism.

By presenting itself as an organisation geared to saving lives rather than taking them away, the army has sought to create for itself a new 'moral mission' in the world. The army, we are told, is full of people who are 'just like us', who fall in love, have families and get upset by the bloodshed

they cause. It is no longer a surprise to see soldiers cry on television, or to hear calls for counselling after they have been in battle.

Outside the recruitment office, a 15-year old cadet called Haidar tells me he wants to serve as an officer with the Army Air Corps. His family is Bangladeshi and has a long history of fighting world wars for the British army in Asia. I ask him what he would do if he found himself fighting fellow Bangladeshis. 'I'd have to do it. I ain't got no choice. It's a job.' But it's a job that involves killing. Haidar's answer shows how the new rhetoric has reached even

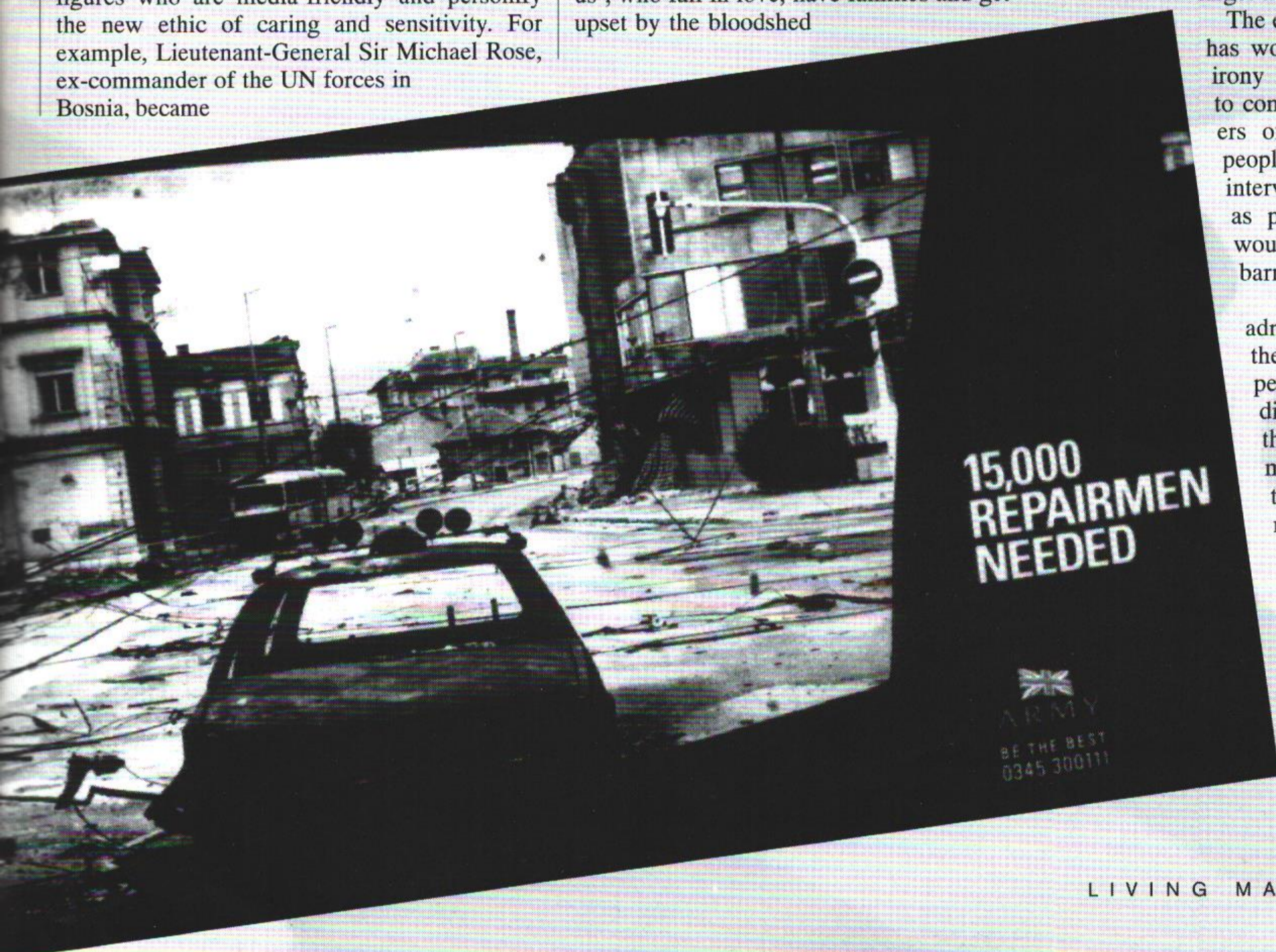
It is no longer a surprise to see soldiers cry on television, or to hear calls for counselling after they have been in battle

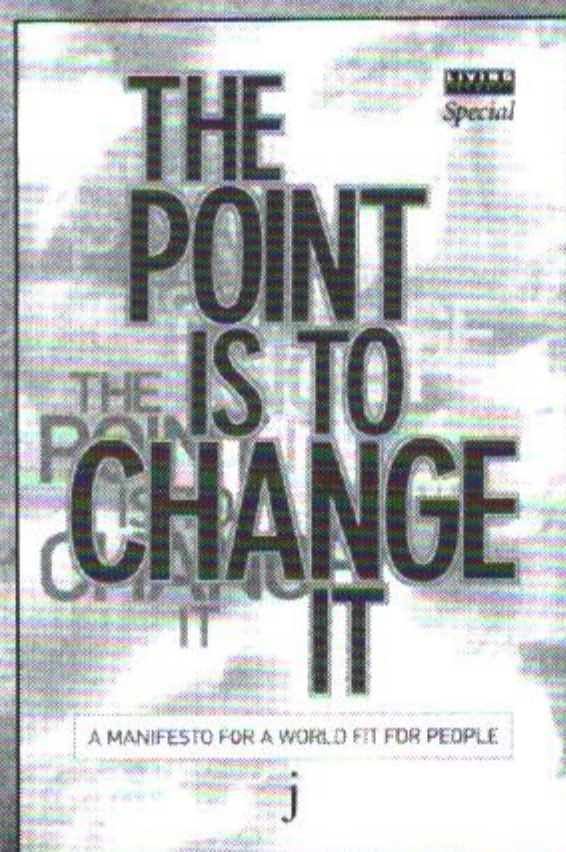
army traditionalists: 'Wars are not all about killing. We don't just kill, we're there to bring peace also.'

The army's attempts to recast itself as a sensitive, humanitarian organisation have not been without problems. Whatever incentive the army gives people to join up, whether as a full-timer or as a reservist, the bottom line is that they have to be prepared to fight for the flag. And the armed forces have yet to find a moral mission that can really connect with the working class youth which they need to recruit in larger numbers.

The ethos of the New Moral Army has won considerable support. The irony is that this support tends to come from the writers and readers of liberal newspapers. These people enthusiastically back foreign interventions which are dressed up as peacekeeping operations, but would never go anywhere near the barrel of a gun themselves.

As General Sir Michael Rose admitted to the *Daily Telegraph*, the trouble with 'too much' peacekeeping is that it tends to distract from the understanding that armies are really about making war: 'There are likely to be more peacekeeping missions and soldiers will find them rewarding and fulfilling, but we must not lose sight of the skill we need for general war.' (9 February 1996) It seems safe to assume that the 'skill' he has in mind is not skiing with Frank or taking care of old women. ●





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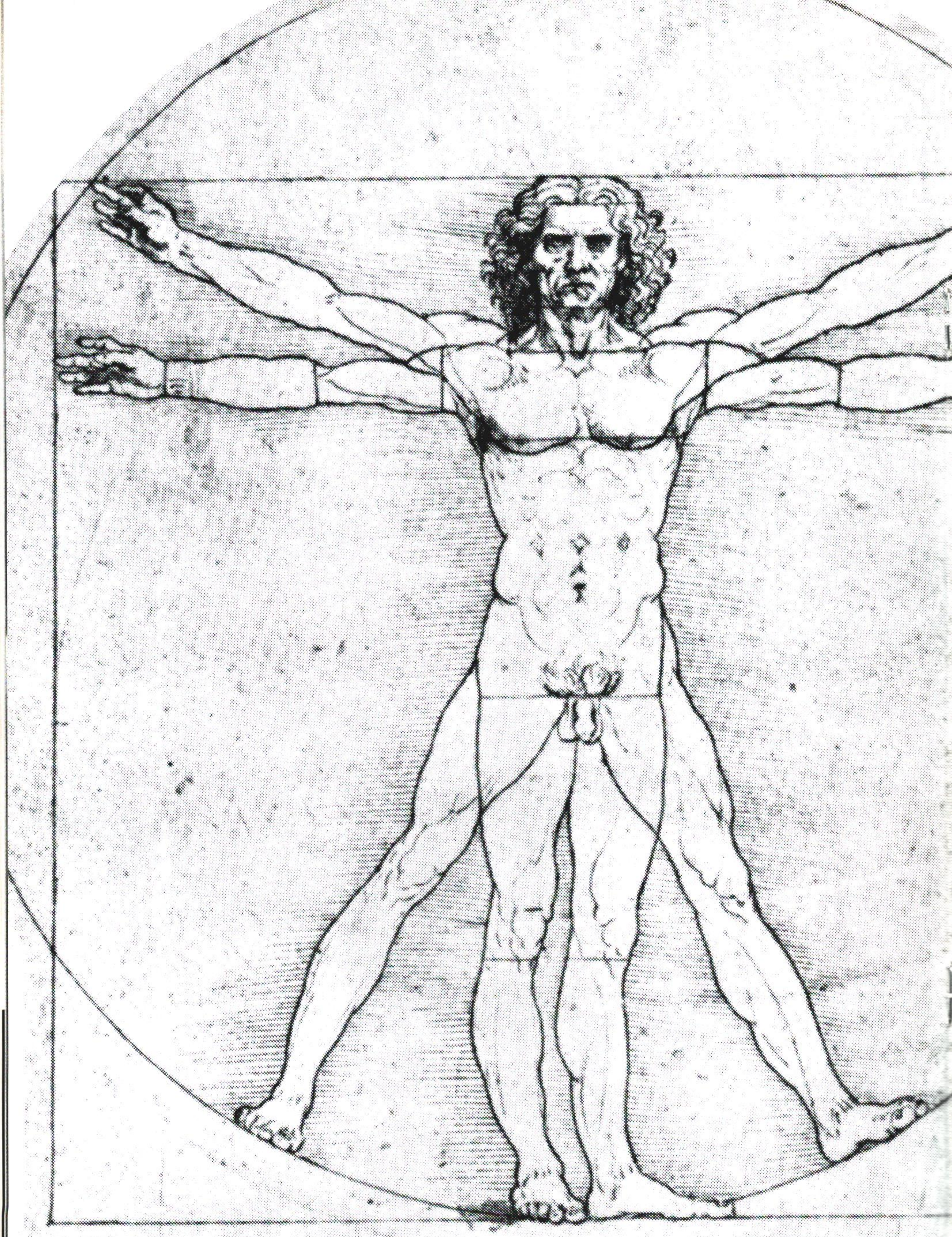
As the general election campaign begins, *Living Marxism* has launched *A Manifesto for a World Fit for People*. Our aim is to set a new agenda for now, by putting aside the politics of the past and tackling the biggest barrier to changing society today—what the *Manifesto* describes as ‘the culture of limits’.

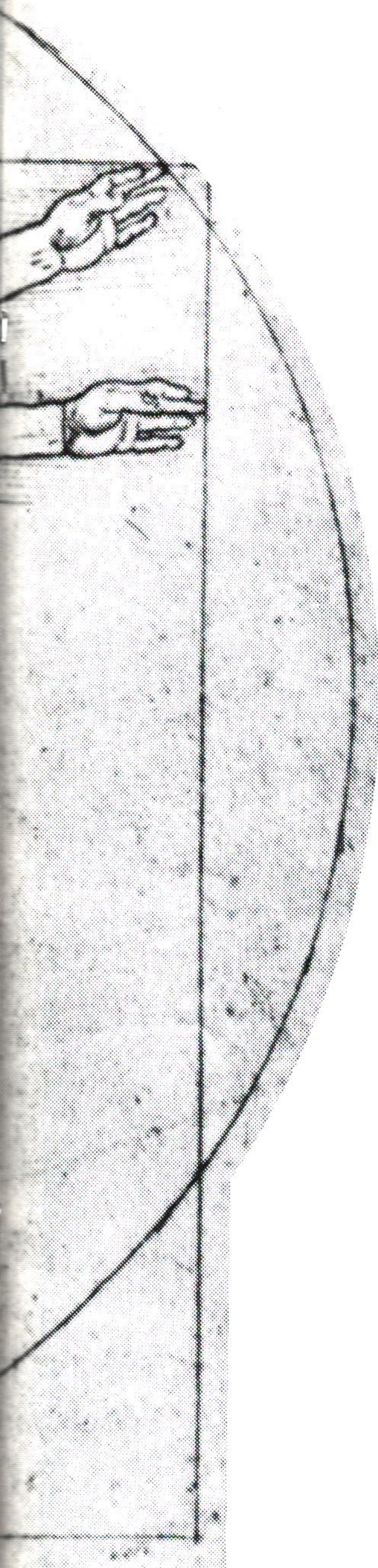
Today there is no great clash of competing visions of the future for humanity. Instead, the culture of limits and low expectations frames the outlook of left and right alike. Whether the discussion is about the economy, the environment, science or social policy, there is a common assumption that there are strict limits to what we can or should do; that we are no longer capable of making much progress, of improving the human condition.

There is a constant inflation of the dangers and problems which people face today, coupled with a diminished sense of humanity having the ability to develop society and tackle difficulties. People are now more likely to be viewed as problems than as potential problem-solvers. When we are not being patronised as fragile victims in need of protection from life, we are being warned of ‘the beast within us all’ that needs to be caged and repressed.

The diminished sense of the human potential for changing the world and improving life has become the most important issue of our age. Yet in a sense it is not at issue at all, since nobody is contesting it. Putting that to rights is the precondition for tackling any social problem. That is why we have made the culture of limits the central focus of *The Point is to Change It*, the *Living Marxism* manifesto for our times.

‘Our reply to all of the pleas for caution and restraint is that until now humanity has only learned to crawl. We still live in a world that is not 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.’





Communal Self sacrifice

The greatest claim of the market system has always been the premium it placed on the freedom of the individual. Yet society today seems uniquely hostile to assertive individualism.

James Heartfield looks into who killed the capitalist spirit of the aggressive, self-assured individual—and why that demise is a problem for those of us who want to change society

Individualism today is in bad odour. Self-interest, self-assertion and self-reliance were once the official values of the 'free world'. Today, any expression of such values is more likely to be denounced as mere selfishness. Once, rich capitalists were the object of envy and emulation. Today they are likely to be denounced as greedy fat cats taking insensitive pay rises. There is without doubt a marked shift in the mood not just in Britain, but throughout the West.

You can judge a society's values by the kind of heroes it embraces. In the eighties the mood of triumphal individualism was caught by the revival of the forties comic book hero Superman. When Joe Shuster and Jerry Seigel first drew Superman comics he was a nerdy

guy with glasses called Clark Kent. But once he stepped into a phone booth he tore open his shirt and pulled off his glasses to reveal the man of steel. In retrospect, it is difficult not to see the transformation as one from Jewish immigrant to all-American hero, as if Woody Allen had turned himself into Charles Atlas. His name translates into German as *übermensch* but, unlike the Nazi fantasy, this was a hero who stood up against injustice to defend the weak. When the Superman films were made, the choice of the strapping, chisel-jawed Christopher Reeve to play the part suited the American mood of standing tall in the world.

In recent months Christopher Reeve has once again become a symbol for his ►

◀ times. This time, however, he presents a very different kind of transformation than that from Clark Kent to Superman. Tragically, Reeve was paralysed from the neck down in a riding accident that snapped his vertebrae and damaged his spinal chord. He speaks with the aid of a microphone and a tracheotomy. He is strapped into a wheelchair. But still, remarkably, he has become a new kind of hero, for a different kind of age. Reeve was the star speaker at the opening of the Democratic Party Convention in the United States, before the president of the world's most powerful nation opened his re-election campaign. Thousands of party delegates cheered Reeve in an extraordinary outpouring of feeling for the wheelchair-bound star.

You do not have to be a cynic to ask why were they cheering? Of course, Reeve's decision to campaign for healthcare for people in his position is laudable, but it is hardly at the centre of the Democratic Party's policy agenda. Indeed, this is a party that has just committed itself to cutting back welfare benefits for single mothers. How does that sit with Reeve's crowd-pleasing claim that America does not turn its back on its needy? The truth is that the convention was cheering Reeve the symbol, not Reeve the man.

Christopher Reeve is a symbol of the values of our age. He represents the disaster that can strike us all. He represents the transformation of a Superman into a wheelchair-bound survivor. What the delegates cheered was somebody who had learned the hard way about his own limitations and his own fragility. He is a hero in reverse, of the kind that is all too characteristic of our times. Christopher Reeve has made the transition from the hero-worship of Ronald Reagan's America to the victim-cult of Bill Clinton's USA. Hollywood too reflects the cult of the victim as protagonist. Films of recent years feature lead characters who are autistic (*Rain Man*), retarded (*Forrest Gump*), feral (*Nell*) or disabled (*Edward Scissorhands*). Even traditional heroes are presented ironically, like Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Last Action Hero*.

The values that are expressed in Christopher Reeve's reception at the Democratic Party Convention are quite different from the values of self-reliance and assertive individual freedom that were, until quite recently, the official ideology. Today, standing on your own two feet and insisting that you do not need to be protected or counselled is not likely to be celebrated. That is more likely to be seen as a sign of emotional illiteracy and an unwillingness to expose your weaknesses to others.

With the elevation of suffering and victim status comes a denigration of individualistic values in favour of something called 'the community'. Self-centred individualism is decried as something that belongs in the past, as a disease of the eighties. Amitai Etzioni, champion of the community and one-time speech-writer for president Clinton, puts it like this:

'The eighties was a decade in which "I" was writ large, in which the celebration of the self became a virtue. Now is the time to push back the pendulum. The times call for a reconstruction, in which we put a new emphasis on "we", on the values we share, on the spirit of community.' (*The Spirit of Community*, 1993, p25)

Public service is an exemplar of the spirit of community that Etzioni is hoping to rekindle. Early in his presidency Clinton delivered a speech, written by Etzioni, in which he set out his appeal to America's students to do voluntary work—as 'teachers, law enforcement officers, healthcare workers or peer counsellors'—in exchange for loans to go to college.

'There are those among us who do not believe that young Americans will answer the call to action, who believe that our young people now measure their success merely in the accumulation of material things. They believe this call to service will be unanswered but I believe they are dead wrong. The American Dream will be kept alive if you will answer the call to service.' (3 March 1993)

In fact the nay-sayers appear to have been correct. Not many people did respond to Clinton's call to service. But, as it happens, that was never really the point. The speech is a revision of the values of the American Dream. Once that meant that everyone could make it by their own efforts—by the 'accumulation of



NAUM GABO, 'HEAD NO2', 1916

material things', in fact. Instead, today the values that politicians and commentators look for are not acquisitiveness, pride, individualism and looking after your own so much as care, duty, selflessness, diligence and modesty.

The backdrop to this kind of appeal is the premise that people have become too selfish. This has become the stock-in-trade of today's gloom-mongers. The terrible inheritance of the greedy eighties, they say, continues to haunt us. It appears that people are pursuing their self-interest at the expense of every other value in society. Love of family, care for the community, neighbourliness and civic duty all appear to have been sacrificed to selfish concerns.

Every event, from juvenile crime to board-room pay-outs, is taken as confirmation of the same interpretation—that love of self takes precedence over any wider loyalty or altruistic concern. But, like a reflected image in a mirror, this picture is the reverse of the real movement.

What looks to many like an elevation of the individual over the interests of the community today is really something quite different. It is not that individualism has come to the fore, but that all forms of basic social solidarity have been diminished. It is not that people have turned their backs on society in wilful pursuit of their selfish concerns, only that the old collective organisations and institutions hold so little appeal that they cannot garner support and loyalty. What looks like individual self-assertiveness is in reality a disillusionment with collective organisation and a withdrawal from contemporary forms of public life.

There is a real problem here, but it is quite different from the one that is bemoaned by commentators. People have been squeezed out of public life—the diminishing numbers of people participating in political parties, trade unions, churches and all kinds of cultural organisations demonstrates as much. People's lives have as a consequence become much more individuated and privatised. But that does not mean that individuals' sense of themselves has been strengthened. Rather, individuals have become less assertive about their own interests, and have retreated defensively into private life. It would be more accurate to say that today's individualism is a weakened sense of self that is more cautious, vulnerable and self-effacing than before. But that is not the way things are generally seen today.

In Britain, as in America, the changed attitude towards individualism is expressed above all in a retrospective criticism of the excesses of the eighties. Commentators elevate the concerns of community against the foil of the 'greedy eighties', when, it is claimed, Thatcherism and Reaganism swung

the pendulum too far in the direction of individual avarice. This caricature of the eighties is so enduring that it is worth briefly looking back to ask whether this really was a time when individualism was let off the leash.

In the eighties, the Conservative government's stated aim was to set the individual free from the constraints of collectivism. They saw collectivist institutions as the great plague of modern society. Trade unions, the welfare state and comprehensive schools were all bodies that were found guilty of putting the collective above the individual. Higher taxes to pay for welfare, and higher wages won by unions were all supposed to be barriers to individual entrepreneurialism. Welfare provision only led to a dependency culture,

The Conservatives' mistake was to imagine that collectivities were on the opposite end of the scale from self-reliance

undermining individual self-reliance, they said. Collectivism, according to the Tories was choking individual freedom. The obvious remedy was to roll back the welfare state and to smash the trade unions. If that was done then the individual would be set free. At any rate that was the theory. The practice proved to be rather different.

Under Margaret Thatcher the Conservative government did attack the trade unions and their supporters. They cut state subsidies to the docks and to the steel, motor and coal industries leading to massive redundancies. They held down benefit entitlements and cut back on local authority spending. They deregulated the City of London and sold off council houses and public utilities in a programme that came to be known as popular capitalism. On the face of things they did everything they could to reduce people's dependency on the state and persuade them to stand on their own feet.

But what was the consequence of these reforms? Instead of liberating people from state regulation, the Conservatives oversaw the greatest extension of state power since 1945. State expenditure rose in real terms from £217 billion in 1979, when Margaret Thatcher was elected, to £289 billion in 1994 (adjusted to 1994 money). Regulation of industry has not decreased with privatisation, but has, if anything, increased, as once-public utilities have come under new regulatory bodies like Ofwat and Ofgas.

Subsidies to local industry were not suspended, but merely redirected, as money was channelled through unelected quangos and Urban Development Corporations instead of local councils. Clientelism, rather than free enterprise, is the driving force of industry today.

The numbers of individuals dependent on state benefits rose, with millions of people in receipt of welfare payments to supplement their wages. Some five million families are currently dependent on welfare for part of their income. On top of the official unemployed figure of just over 2m must be counted a considerable proportion of the 1.5m in receipt of invalidity benefit, and the thousands studying at colleges and new universities who would have been competing for jobs but for the exponential expansion of higher education.

Any objective assessment of the 17 years of Conservative rule would have to note that the effects of the Thatcherite revolution were seriously at odds with its claims. The Tories have not liberated individuals from the constraints of welfare dependency and state regulation. On the contrary, they have comprehensively undermined people's capacity to organise their own lives and further their own interests. How could this be?

It was always an absurdity to think that it would be possible just to 'roll back' the state and reveal millions of go-getting entrepreneurs underneath. The opportunities for making something of yourself are dependent on a society that is going forward. The great advantage that capitalism used to have over its rivals was its ability to repackage the goals of amassing profits as the goals of individuals seeking their own betterment. But that strategy can only work in a dynamic society with a growing economy. A slump economy has the opposite effect, putting many people's interests more clearly at odds with the market system. Mass unemployment, degrading rates of benefit and conditions of entitlement, and shabby services are hardly the basis of a muscular individualism. More profoundly, tearing up people's collective organisations, their trade unions, their mass political parties and forcing them out of the public sphere of political engagement was a recipe for disillusionment and despair, rather than a growth of the entrepreneurial spirit. The humiliation of the working class movement in the eighties was bound to be a degrading experience that would undermine personal self-reliance instead of building it up.

The Conservatives' mistake was to imagine that collectivities were at the opposite end of the scale from self-reliance. They imagined, like a see-saw, that you only had to lower one end to raise the other: you only had to restrain collectivism to set the ►

◀ individual free. The left's view, and the view of the critics of the greedy eighties, is the mirror image of the same Tory prejudice. They too think that community and individual freedom are at odds, only they want to curtail the latter in favour of the former. In fact, the two things are much more directly related. Self-reliance, independence of purpose and organisation are not the opposite of collective organisation, but its complement. The impact of the Conservative revolution was to undermine the basic social solidarities of neighbourhood, workplace and industry. Without these simple elements of collectivity, it is inconceivable that people will be able to stand on their own two feet. Collective experience and purpose is part and parcel of self-reliance and self-assertion, not its opposite.

This is the real story of the eighties. The defeat of collective organisation and the disaggregation of basic social solidarities did not give rise to a new individualism: it was at the same time the defeat of individual self-assertion and independent organisation. In the absence of the basics of social organisation, real individuality could never flourish. Individualism and collectivism were not alternatives in the way that things are usually seen. Rather, individual initiative and self-reliance could only hope to take off in the context of a widespread sense that some sort of social solidarities were in place.

In practice the Conservatives have promoted the market at the expense of the freedom of the individual. The association of markets and freedom that is so central to Conservative ideology is false. Karl Marx made this point 150 years ago:

'Gentlemen! Do not allow yourselves to be deluded by the abstract word *freedom*. Whose freedom? It is not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but the freedom of capital to crush the worker.' ('Speech on the question of free trade', 1848, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol6, p463)

The only freedom that the Conservatives have truly supported is the freedom of capital to crush the worker. From that standpoint, it made perfect sense to smash working class organisation and put millions out of work. The Tory champions of the capitalist class could not be expected to tell the difference between freedom and the market. In their minds the two things are synonymous. More problematic is the fact that their opponents took this propagandistic account at face value. The critics have read the eighties as a period in which there was too much freedom granted, rather than one in which freedom was aggressively curtailed in the name of the market.

The lessons of the Thatcher experiment ought to have been that the market is hostile

to real freedom. The obvious conclusion would be that it is the market that we should get rid of, the better to realise true self-government. Instead the conclusion drawn today is that individuality is suspect and that freedom itself is dangerous. In these circumstances, it seems that it is the goal of individual freedom that we are being told must be sacrificed to the greater good of society and of the community. But what society and whose community are they talking about? Why should anybody subordinate the aspiration to take charge of their own destiny to the interests of a capitalist society?

Once seen in this light, the current unease over 'excessive individualism' becomes clearer. It is less the 'individual' half of the

Academics propose we 'de-centre the self', so that we all become 'the Other'

couplet 'individual freedom' that offends nineties sensibilities, but the aspiration to freedom itself. All of the denunciations of excessive individualism are not directed at people's disengagement from society, so much as at their recalcitrant belief that they have the right to decide things for themselves.

This orientation explains one of the more absurd misreadings of contemporary society—that there are too many assertive individuals around. This is far from being the case. In fact the sense of individual self-assertiveness is more precarious today than it has been for 60 years. Today's culture celebrates caution and lowered expectations rather than a brash acquisitiveness. It would be true to say that people are more individuated today, but not that they are acting more as self-confident individuals. This is not a strong sense of individuality, but rather a weak one, through which people are encouraged to see themselves as frail and in need of protection from wider society. The difference turns on the role of subjectivity envisaged.

What is meant by subjectivity is the active sense of self-government, the idea that people should aspire to decide their own fates and control their own circumstances. At the heart of the current anti-individualistic mood is a decline in the idea that subjectivity is a virtue. It is noticeable that self-obsession is seen as laudable today, so long as it is inward-looking and 'sensitive' rather than outward looking and assertive. Healthy

individuals are taken to be those who invest time and energy in self-discovery, tending to their physical and psychic well-being. That individuated outlook is celebrated whereas a more aggressive expression of individual interest is frowned upon.

It should be clear that the real debate is not about the relative merits of the individual as against those of the community at all. The 'individual' is just a fall-guy. The real target is subjectivity—the aspiration to take control of affairs and try to determine your own destiny. As it happens, the 'freedom of the individual' was always a peculiarly limited concept of freedom. We were granted a moderate degree of freedom in our private lives on the basis that we foreswore any collective interest in the way that capitalist society was organised. But the present mood of anti-individualism is aimed at disparaging even that modest degree of individual autonomy.

The current climate is not a reversal of the Thatcherite project, but its extension. In the eighties collective forms of organisation were attacked for over-aggressive assertion of people's selfish interests; trade unionists were attacked for their 'I'm all-right Jack' attitude. The trade-off was supposed to be that in return for abandoning trade unions and welfare provision, people would get greater control over their personal lives, through greater property-ownership, like home-ownership and share investments. But now even that deal, one-sided as it proved to be, is being reneged upon.

Basic civil liberties, like the right to raise your family as you see fit or to drive your car where you want, are now seen as dangerously individualistic. Core conservative ideas like 'an Englishman's home is his castle' now strike prying welfare agencies as an unwarranted degree of freedom and a license for abuse within the home. Having been chased off the streets we are now being hunted down in the home as well. The individual is a target because of the lingering belief that his private life is his own, even if autonomous collective organisation is off the agenda.

Today's popular causes, like environmental protection or the anti-roads campaign, make a virtue of austerity and self-limitation. Their message is directed less against the powers that be, than against other people. Their demands are not for more resources from the authorities, but for a restriction of people's excessive consumption habits. Challenged to show where anti-roads protests had succeeded one campaigner boasted that the government's road programme had been radically slashed. This kind of protest the government can live with. They must be wishing that campaigners would lobby to reduce other areas of public expenditure as well. Why not a campaign to reduce

family sizes, taking the strain off Child Benefit payments, or for that matter, another against high wages? But, then again, a demand for us all to settle for less is the logical conclusion of the protests against fat cat salaries.

More sophisticated champions of the anti-roads and anti-car protests claim that their target is not any one particular stretch of motorway, but the 'car-culture' itself. Instead of favouring the self-contained bubble of the car we should embrace public transport. The car culture, according to this argument is inherently aggressive and individualistic, while buses and trains are communal and cooperative, as well as being friendlier to the environment. The advantage of this argument is that it makes it clear that the real target of

the anti-roads protests is not roads or cars as such, but a way of living, the 'car culture'. And what is offensive about this way of life is that it is, within the confines of the road network, relatively free. There is a point of view that prefers timetables and queues to cruising. The idea that somebody should just go out for a drive is inconceivable to this kind of austerity politics.

The principal intellectual expression of the climate of self-effacement and limitation is the cult of 'the Other' in academic life. In literature, sociology and even law the project of 'de-centring the self' is at the top of the agenda. According to this theory the traditional Western viewpoint privileges the self over 'the Other'—no

longer a *Carry On* film euphemism for sex, but a catch-all term for any excluded section of society, whether it be women or people of colour, or those in the post-colonial world. The very promiscuity with which the term 'Other' is applied indicates that it is not a particular grievance that is being aired. Instead, any standpoint which offers a critical vantage-point on the despised 'self' of Western discourse recommends itself in the cult of the Other.

It is pointed that these theorists do not aim to grant the excluded Other the status of equality with 'the self', but to knock the individual off of his privileged position in the dominant ideology. The goal of mutual recognition of other people as persons in their own right is an anathema to the cult of 'the Other' because that would only reproduce the centrality of the self. These theorists aim instead to 'de-centre the self', so that we all become 'the Other'. This is the project that literary critic Paul Ricoeur announces in his book *Oneself as Another*. Last year the late Emmanuel Levinas published his rewrite of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, as 'The Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Other' (see *Outside the Subject*, 1995). The compelling thing about these various attempts to rationalise the climate of self-effacement is their implicitly religious message: that we should subordinate ourselves to an essentially unknowable force outside of us, the Other. You could not ask for a more perfect expression of the alienated condition of modern society than that we are now all to think of ourselves as 'Others' instead of people in our own right, with our own concerns and interests.

The real tragedy of the climate of self-effacement is that it is the principle barrier to building any kind of collective solution to our problems today. For all the talk of community, nothing could be better designed to frustrate collective solutions than the prejudice that we should hold self-interest in such low esteem. It is not possible to make a community out of people without a sense of self and self-respect. Acquisitiveness, ambition and combativity will prove to be preconditions of any forceful assertion of collective interests in the future.

Any movement for social change will not come through self-effacement, but through self-assertion. It is futile to think that you could make a collective force out of individuals who were not prepared to stand on their own two feet and stick up for what they believe in. Before we can talk about the New Jerusalem to come, we need aggressive individuals in the here and now. Modesty in aspiration does not make for social harmony, but for a withdrawal from society and an increasingly privatised outlook. Agency, not self-effacement, is the basis of an association of equals. Rejecting the anti-individualism of today's moralising critics in favour of a confident sense of self is the precondition for an enduring fraternity. ●



MARK GERTLER, 'MERRY-GO-ROUND', 1916

Those campaigning for victims' rights are doing the cause of justice no favours, argues Andrew Calcutt

The case against victims' rights

In August, Ralston Edwards was found guilty of raping Julia Mason. Edwards conducted his own defence, including a prolonged cross-examination of his victim. At the end of the trial, many commentators suggested that Mason had been violated a second time by Edwards' questioning, and there were calls to change the law so that rape victims were never again subjected to such an ordeal. Prominent among these lobbyists was Victim Support, the national charity which claims to speak for the victims of crime.

Victim Support is now one of the key organisations in British society. The highest echelons attend its training programmes. As chief lobbyist for what it calls victims' rights, it has the ear of the Tory government and New Labour; and, in its expression of an unprecedented sense of people being permanently at risk, Victim Support reflects the wider public mood.

What began as a local support scheme in Bristol, 22 years ago, has mushroomed into a nationwide federation with 800 paid staff, 17 000 volunteers, and a Home Office grant of approximately £12m a year. According to its adherents, this is money well spent. They claim that Victim Support is answering a call for 'respect, recognition and support' which, as in the case of Julia Mason, the criminal justice process has failed to meet. They also maintain that there are thousands of victims like Mason who suffer a 'double indignity', once at the hands of the criminal and once more in the uncaring hands of the criminal justice process.

Victim Support is pledged to redress what it sees as an imbalance in favour of the defendant. Its recent successes include winning the right for victims to state how they have been affected by the crimes committed against

them, and for this victim statement to be introduced into the deliberations of the courts.

Cases like that of Julia Mason understandably elicit a lot of public sympathy, and the aims of Victim Support are widely endorsed: after all, who wants to be seen to be on the side of rapists or muggers? Yet, behind the emotive appeals for justice, the campaign for victims' rights raises some dangerous proposals which we should all be concerned about.

In its statement of victims' rights, which influenced the revised version of the Tory government's *Victim's Charter* issued this year, Victim Support argues for various measures which would seriously alter legal procedures.

Secret accusers

'Victims should have the right to withhold their identity from the accused during the investigations.' This means that, during the preparation of his case the defendant may not be allowed to know by whom he stands accused. Such secrecy and anonymous accusations—which in other societies British commentators might condemn as the practices of a police state—are inimical to justice.

'Vulnerable witnesses should have the right to an alternative to giving evidence in open court.' This is an apparently benign demand for the protection of people like Julia Mason. But the move away from open court sets a dangerous precedent, creating new scope for intrigue and double-dealing. Protecting the anonymity of 'vulnerable witnesses', a proposal which also features prominently in New Labour's criminal justice policy, could lead to a situation in which professional witnesses elaborate and potentially fabricate evidence against the accused

without effective redress.

'The questioning of victims and other witnesses should be carried out with respect for the dignity of the individual.' Again this might seem like an innocuous request for the civilised treatment of victims. In fact it calls into question the entire basis upon which defendants may refute allegations made against them. The only chance the accused has of establishing his innocence is by demolishing the prosecution case, often through aggressive cross-questioning in an adversarial setting. This proposal would deny the defence that opportunity by imposing a new etiquette, one which gives precedence to the feelings of the alleged victim.

There is more at stake here than a trade-off between supposed victim and alleged offender. Defendants' rights do more than protect the individual interests of the defendant. They are a central part of the procedure for arriving at the facts of the case. Downgrading defendants' rights means undermining the capacity of the criminal justice system for methodical investigation and objective judgement.

The merit of the traditional, adversarial trial lies in its function as a contest between opposing versions of events. Until these contrasting accounts have been tried and tested, they are granted little weight. Hence, in theory at least, the alleged offender is 'innocent until proven guilty'. But Victim Support insists that there is a prior duty to 'respect' the untested account of victims and prosecution witnesses. This goes against the legal basis of criminal justice, which requires that respect for any testimony must

be earned by public verification in open court.

The dangers of collapsing legal norms into emotionalism were clearly visible in a presentation to the Victim Support conference held in July 1995 at Warwick University Arts Centre. A sanctimonious hush came over the hall as Frances LeRoy of the NSPCC child witness support project started

to speak about child sexual abuse 'through the words of a 12-year old child'. She introduced herself by saying 'My name is Mary', and

the play-acting continued as she went on to describe how 'she' was abused by her 'Uncle Bob'.

LeRoy broke off to explain that the names had been changed and the story we were hearing was an amalgam of various reported incidents.

Delegates were then called upon to accept this melodrama as proof that children's needs should be paramount, eg, the courts handling of children must be 'extra-sensitive',

recognising that the video-link rooms (only recently provided so that minors do not have to face their alleged abusers) are 'claustrophobic' and unfortunately do not 'protect children from hostile cross-questioning'.

Baby-talk

LeRoy's contribution derived its dramatic effect from her claim to represent the authentic voice of abused children. But this claim was disingenuous. Conference delegates were listening to an interpretation of the reported experiences of abused children as relayed to them through the medium of a middle class professional.

The suggestion was that intermediaries such as LeRoy should speak on behalf of children and other victims, in order to save them from further trauma.

The basic assumption behind the idea of victims' rights is that those against whom crimes are said to have been committed are so enfeebled by the experience that they need someone else to speak and act for them. A victim, by definition, is in no position to exercise a right themselves. So somebody in authority must intervene on

their behalf—say a professional spokesperson from the NSPCC or Victim Support, backed up by the power of the police and courts. The end result of a campaign for victims' rights is the extension of the powers of these professionals, and ultimately the expansion of the legal powers of the state.

The extension of state control can only mean the degradation of our rights. The counterposition of victims' rights to defendants' rights (increasingly seen as 'privileges'), leaves the state in an increasingly privileged position as the final arbiter between the two. In fact, what are called defendants' rights are the legal expression of universal, democratic rights which provide us with a measure of protection from the state. By contrast, the notion of victims' rights is characteristic of the current redefinition of what rights mean. Instead of protection *from* the state, the term 'rights' has been twisted to mean protection *by* the state. The extension of state control and removal of established freedoms like the accused's right to silence is a form of 'protection' which we could well do without.

Uncontested prosecution

In empowering a clique of professionals and the courts, at the expense of basic rights, the Victim Support ethos is profoundly anti-democratic. Yet it often wins acceptance because it is articulated in a radical language of pseudo-rights. This was heard to great effect during the mock trial of the British criminal justice system at last year's Victim Support conference.

Prosecution witnesses (a black man, two women and a *faux* child in the form of Frances LeRoy) indicted the British justice system for its criminal irresponsibility towards the victims of abuse. They were followed on to the witness stand by a trio of white, middle-aged, male defence witnesses (two senior lawyers and a police chief). But these junior ranking members of the establishment made little attempt to defend the criminal justice system. They came as penitents, humbly confessing that they had sinned, and pledging to take up the cause of victims' rights.

The rights talk of the prosecution witnesses was derived from the left-wing tradition of fighting for equality. But it was a perversion of that tradition: a distortion which now provides the vocabulary for the subjugation of basic democratic rights in favour of professional discretion and state regulation. Hence the willingness of the men in suits to sponsor Victim Support as the chief lobbyist for a new mode of state control.



For this relief, no thanks

Why have hard-nosed bankers adopted a new 'debt forgiveness' programme for the Third World?
John Pender of Africa Direct reports

The debt crisis of the world's poorest countries is back at the centre of international affairs, but with a difference. This time the international financiers are being portrayed as the friends of the poor, as they adopt a new strategy of 'debt forgiveness'.

Proposals for 'debt forgiveness' featured prominently at the G7 World

Economic Summit in June, and were high on the agenda for September's World Bank/International Monetary Fund annual meeting. The World Bank, often criticised for victimising poor nations, now finds itself applauded as defender of the weak. Even its more vociferous critics have changed their tune. The Debt Crisis Network welcomed the proposals as 'an historic

landmark in the Fund and Bank's thinking'. Oxfam International celebrated the Bank's 'bold new vision' which 'could mark the beginning of the end of the debt crisis in the world's poorest countries'.

But the apparent outbreak of charitable feeling among government ministers and major bankers is not all that it seems. The 'debt forgiveness' policy is really a hard-headed business decision that will benefit the Western-run financial institutions far more than the poor of the Third World.

Secret Plans

Africa's economy has been devastated by a combination of global recession and IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes, which have enforced huge public spending cuts and wholesale privatisation. Since the adjustment programmes began in 1980, consumption per head in Sub-Saharan Africa has decreased by 1.8 per cent a year, a cumulative deterioration of about 24 per cent.

Against this background, African governments cannot pay the debt due to international creditors. This is, as the *Financial Times* says, 'unpayable deadweight debt'. Between 1990 and 1994, the poorest countries in

Sub-Saharan Africa repaid on average about 30 per cent of scheduled debt repayments. The other 70 per cent in arrears was simply added to the debt mountain. Even the small amount of debt which is repaid is largely funded by the West, through new loans from the international financial institutions, or through bilateral (country-to-country) aid from the industrialised nations.

The positive publicity which the 'debt forgiveness' proposals have received masks a debt rationalisation plan which will ensure that the World Bank and IMF get more of their money back, and increase their control over the economies of the Third World. Two leaked reports—one from the World Bank Task Force (*The Multilateral Debt Facility*, 21 July 1995), the other a joint World Bank/IMF report (*Proposed Action to Resolve the Debt Problem of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries*, 6 March 1996)—highlight the real motives behind the policy switch.

Punishing non-compliance

'There is no proposal to write off (or down) multilateral debts.' These are the blunt words of the joint World Bank/IMF secret report. Instead, the aim is to achieve 'debt sustainability'. A good proportion of the 'unpayable' bilateral debt may be written off or rescheduled for payment over a longer period. But in return, the World Bank and IMF will use the huge residue of multilateral debt to put the screws on the Third World.

The debt forgiveness plan will only be available to 'good performers'—those with a proven track record of doing what they are told. A country could only become eligible for 'debt forgiveness' after several years of structural adjustment. The World Bank and IMF would then pay off a proportion of its bilateral debt over a 20-year period. These payments would be conditional on good performance, allowing unprecedented IMF/World Bank control over the economies concerned well into the next century.

A pile of non-recoverable debt is being rationalised into a more effective lever for exerting Western influence over the poorest societies in the world. Debt forgiveness, says the World Bank, 'would be an essential spur to further adjustment in these countries by providing explicit rewards for policy reform'.

It is telling that Somalia, Zaire, Sudan and Liberia—four of Africa's poorest societies—are identified by the World Bank as least likely to qualify for debt relief, Uganda as most likely. The only thing which sets Uganda apart is not poverty but a record of compliance with Western initiatives. As a Ugandan official told a recent Oxfam seminar in London, 'the

conditionality will ensure that only good performers are rewarded. As an exemplary performer itself, Uganda welcomes this'.

From the point of view of the World Bank, IMF, and British and other Western governments, this kind of debt relief makes sound business sense. Yet campaigning aid agencies like Oxfam have embraced it as a 'bold new vision' for alleviating debt-related poverty, and helped to sell it to the world.

Oxfam has become campaigner-in-chief for the World Bank's debt relief plan. A position paper in support of the scheme, which the charity submitted to the October 1995 World Bank/IMF annual meeting, proved central to shaping a positive media response.

The role non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played in selling the scheme is very much to the World Bank's game plan, as one of the leaked reports makes clear. 'A significant effort has to be invested up-front to bring [NGOs] along', it says. 'If contacted early on, and if their buy-in is successfully secured, they could provide a significant impetus to international public opinion about the plan, and help restore the Bank's image in this regard.' It is unlikely that anybody in the West would have noticed the World Bank's 'bold new vision', had it not been for the concerted efforts of Oxfam and other NGOs.

How can these organisations welcome an initiative which will actually make things worse for many in the Third World? The starting point is the collapse of any political alternative to imperialism. Since the capitalist market and the right of the West to intervene around the world are no longer questioned, initiatives like debt forgiveness can not only go unchallenged, but can be positively welcomed.

'Recolonisation'

Today, everybody accepts that debt relief should be conditional on market-based reform. This is in sharp contrast to the past. In the 1980s, *New Internationalist*, a magazine set up by Oxfam and Christian Aid, was highly critical of market-based reform. It associated structural adjustment programmes with a process of 'recolonisation' and argued that, 'in the devastation of the Third World we can see, yet again, the uncivilised hand of Western economics'.

Yet today, for Oxfam, market-based reform is a positive step towards Africa's economic recovery. As the *Oxfam Poverty Report* argues, 'the depth of the crisis lends weight to the IMF/World Bank claim that macro-economic adjustment is unavoidable'. The message from every actor is—there is no alternative

to market forces. And whereas in the 1980s debt relief tended to be seen as a way of asserting Third World independence, today Oxfam argues for debt relief on the grounds that the debt burden 'is undermining market reforms' which the Western-run financial institutions want to impose.

Having accepted the need for structural adjustment, the campaigning aid agencies and NGOs have limited their aspirations to influencing World Bank and IMF policy. The 50 Years is Enough campaign, the 'anti-World Bank' campaign involving 200 NGOs, is now oriented towards 'making the World Bank more accountable'—accountable to the NGOs.

NGOfers

Oxfam now appears to have a better working relationship with the World Bank than most African governments. Oxfam directors meet with the president and senior management of the World Bank before its half-yearly meetings, and Oxfam holds educational seminars for World Bank staff. Now the President of the World Bank has announced a year-long review of structural adjustment programmes to be jointly funded and carried out by the World Bank and non-governmental organisations, among which Oxfam is central.

While the World Bank makes 'debt forgiveness' conditional on signing up for new debt repayment schemes and structural adjustment programmes, Oxfam urges the Bank to go beyond these conditions and impose 'new forms of conditionality'. Its highly prescriptive list of conditions for African governments includes demands that they change the structure of agricultural production, change the structure of employment, reduce military spending, redirect government spending and change political structures. 'Almost all Third World governments', Oxfam arrogantly asserts, 'need to undertake a fundamental review of their social spending allocations'. And it laments the 'bias in public spending towards higher education and urban hospitals'. What was once attacked as 'recolonisation' and right-wing market dogma is now confidently prescribed as the cure for Africa.

The campaigning aid agencies, in their rush to work with the IMF and World Bank, are reshaping public perceptions of these institutions. Not once have they questioned the right of the World Bank and IMF to run the Third World in return for 'forgiving' its debt. Rather they have enhanced the capacity of the IMF and World Bank to present themselves as beneficent and humanitarian. The net result has been to lend a new legitimacy to Western domination of Third World debtors.

After the World Bank/IMF have taken their cut Khartoum, Sudan

Carry on the car

The humble motor car is now treated as a modern demon, the cause of ill-health, cramped lives and childhood death.

John Gillott thinks it deserves a better press

August was a bad month for the car. There was the hundredth anniversary of the first death on the roads, marked by the wreath-laying ceremonies that are now a familiar ritual in our morbid society and by an outpouring of anti-car invective in the press. One writer compared motoring accidents to pestilence and murder, and asked the nation's motorists, 'Will you kill a child today?' (*Guardian*, 17 August 1996), while an editorial casually observed that 'genocide does not adequately describe' the death toll from the century of the car (*Scotland on Sunday*, 18 August 1996).

As if that was not enough, August also brought the publication of *The United Kingdom National Air Quality Strategy* by the Department of the Environment. In the report itself and the media debate which followed, the car was blamed for a host of pollution related illnesses. Friends of the Earth reiterated its call for legislation to control the number of cars on the road.

It is hard to remember when the car last got a good press. It is no longer the child-safety campaigners or the Greens who are seen as the special interest groups. So strong is the consensus that increased car use is a problem today that it is car manufacturers who find their interventions in debates dismissed on the grounds that they have no concern for the wider interests of society. Even the Tories cannot be relied upon to support the car: despite grumblings from Greens about not going far enough, the latest report on air quality, following as it did the Department of Transport's announcement of a national cycling initiative, marked another retreat by the Conservative government from

Margaret Thatcher's championing of the 'great car economy'.

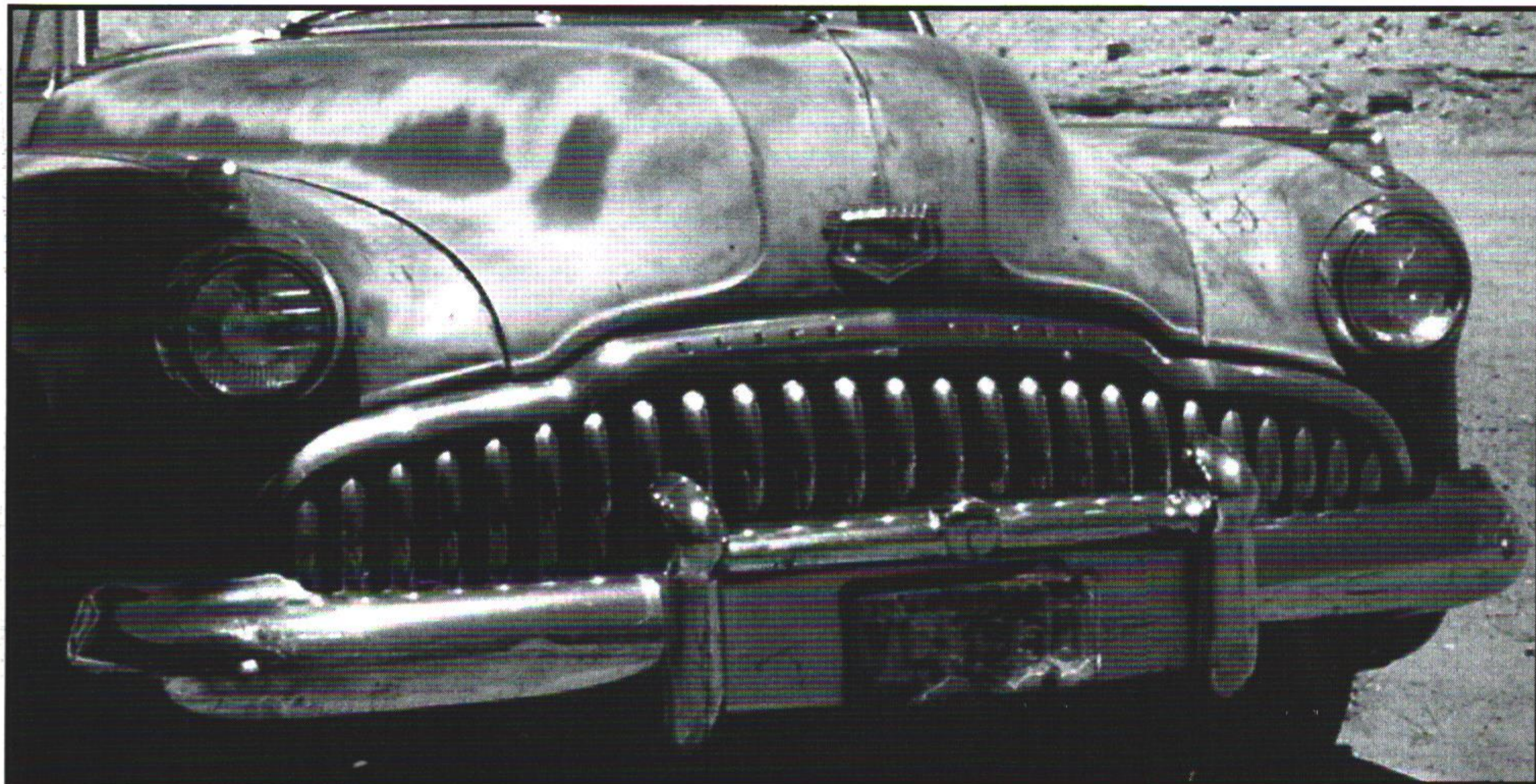
The peculiar thing is that antipathy to the car is rising in spite of the facts on road deaths and pollution. In last month's *Living Marxism*, David Nolan pointed out that, notwithstanding massively increased car use, deaths on the roads are now at their lowest levels since records began in 1926, and are considerably lower than the average figures of even a decade ago. The facts on pollution show a similar heartening pattern.

Current concern regarding pollution is focused on two substances. Nitrogen oxides are a source of worry because of their toxic effects and their role in ozone production, which in turn is thought to be linked to asthma and other respiratory problems. Particulates smaller than 10 micro-meters in diameter (PM10s) are also causing concern, since they are thought to raise some people's risk of having a heart attack as well as exacerbating breathing difficulties and asthma.

Green critics of the car claim that concentrations of these pollutants will continue to rise in the atmosphere unless the growth in car use is curbed. It is a simple idea: more cars, more pollution, more illness. Simple, seductive, but wrong. Until the mid-1980s, increased car use did lead to increased production of pollutants. But over the past decade, new technologies have reduced the output of pollutants despite increased car use. As figures one and two show, this pattern is set to continue, with dramatic results: the aggregate output of nitrogen oxides and PM₁₀s is set to

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

FUTURES



halve over the next 10 years.

The idea that pollution is set to increase with increased car use is a myth. And there is a further reason to be sceptical of the claimed link between cars and ill-health: despite the widespread prejudice that car exhaust fumes cause asthma, all the evidence indicates that levels of ozone and other car-related substances are not responsible for the rise in the incidence of asthma.

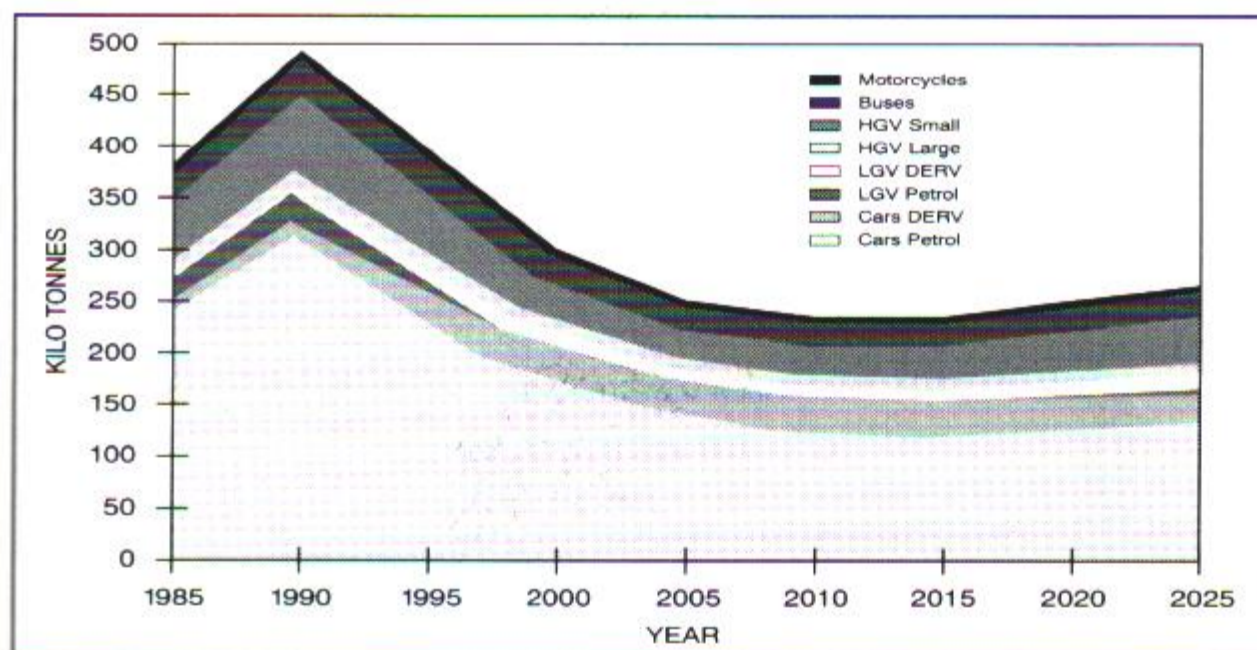


Fig1 Urban UK road transport emissions of NO_x (current policies, diesel car sales @ 20% total car sales). Source: The United Kingdom National Air Quality Strategy Consultation Draft, Department of the Environment, 1996.

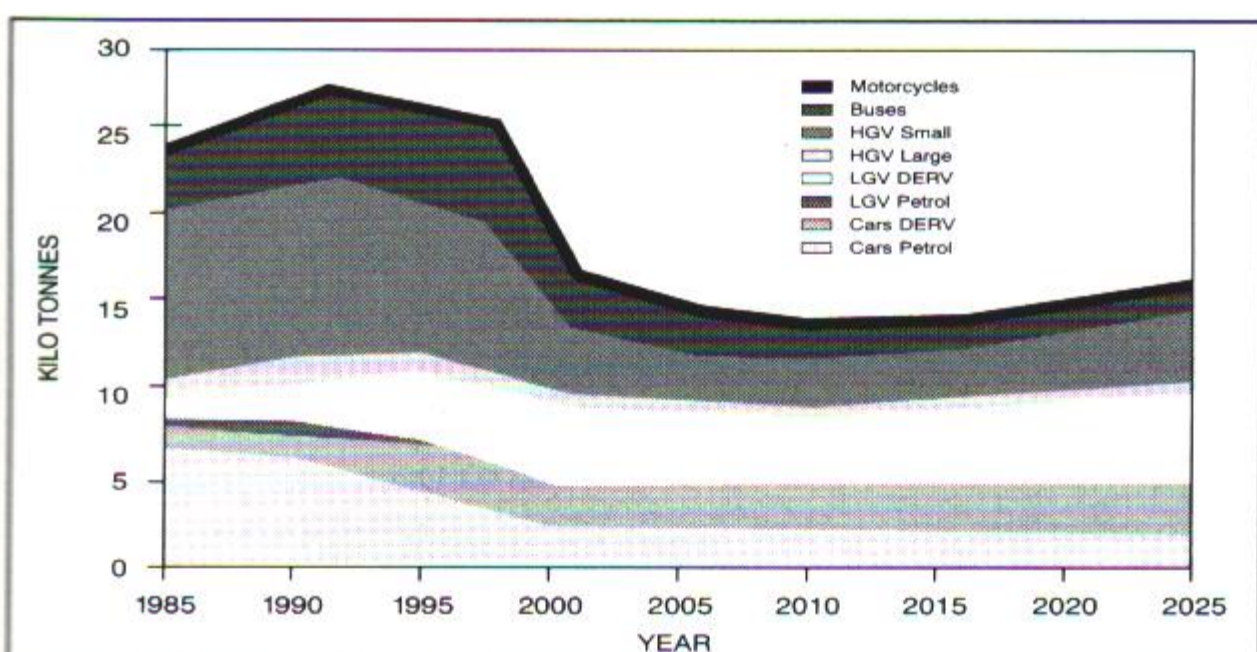


Fig2 Road transport emissions of PM₁₀ (current policies, diesel car sales @ 20% total car sales). Source: as above.

It is widely acknowledged that the causes of asthma are many and complex (see *Lancet*, 27 July 1996). But what is becoming increasingly clear is that pollution is not a significant factor. A range of comparisons have cast doubt on the link between levels of pollution and the incidence of asthma: the fact that asthma is more common in the relatively clean West Germany than in the more polluted old East Germany; the fact that it is no more common in car-choked Los Angeles than it is in other parts of America; and the fact that it is as common in the Inner Hebrides as it is in inner-city areas of Britain.

Where pollution is thought to play a role is in exacerbating problems for people who already have the condition. However, even this link is not certain. A recent survey, published in the *British Medical Journal*, argued that epidemics of asthma in recent times did *not* coincide with episodes of higher than average air pollution. The survey compared daily admissions to hospital for asthma with atmospheric levels of nitrogen dioxide and ozone. The results, summarised in figures three and four (overleaf), indicate a striking lack of correlation—indeed, quite the opposite: peaks of pollution were accompanied by no rise in hospital admissions, and vice-versa.

It is of course possible that for some people with an acute respiratory condition high concentrations of ozone and nitrogen dioxide can make things worse. There is also evidence that people who are already acutely ill can be adversely affected by current levels of PM₁₀s in the atmosphere. But everything we know about all these substances suggests that the problem, in so far as it exists, affects only

a relatively small number of already seriously ill people, not the population as a whole. Furthermore, it is a problem that will be alleviated by improvements in engine design and exhaust systems which are already in use.

While critics bemoan the 'car culture' which is said to dominate our lives, the reality is that we suffer from a 'culture of limits'—and the public image of the car is one of its chief victims. It is a basic assumption of 1990s philosophy that unrestrained production and consumption are bad for the environment and our health. Problems in society are commonly seen to arise from a lack of restraint on human actions. This philosophy of limits now dominates all sections of society and all shades of political opinion: the retreat of the Conservatives on the issue of the car being one striking example.

Pollution due to car use is already falling and set to fall further. Air quality today, especially in cities, is also much better than it was in the past—as a result of new technologies and legislation such as the Clean Air Act. But despite these facts, society has become preoccupied with pollution because of the strength of the culture of limits. Indeed, pollution functions as a metaphor for all that is thought to be wrong in our insecure society: it captures the feeling that human action is a source of risk and is more likely to be destructive than creative, and that technology is creating unseen but pervasive risks to our health and safety.

Cars come in for so much stick because they can be seen to symbolise much that is feared today. They consume lots of resources, and are thought to ►

spew out dangerous waste products. They are accused of embodying the mindless march of industrial society—and the mindless behaviour of selfish, irresponsible individuals. Such is the strength of this feeling that the image of the car choking us has become established in the popular mind despite the facts of the matter.

Transport policy is being skewed by an anti-car bias

But surely, shout the critics, the sheer number of cars is getting out of hand. Soon there will not be any green spaces left, cities will become one big traffic jam and public transport will continue to run down if resources are not transferred from road building. What is needed, they say, is more funding for public transport and a national plan to create an integrated transport system. Some of these comments sound reasonable enough. But the fact is that, more often than not, practical discussions of transport policy are being skewed by an anti-car bias that prevents them from addressing real problems.

In the first place, the idea that Britain is about to disappear under roads is just a Green scare story. Britain is still 90 per cent green spaces. Its population is stagnant so car use cannot just go up and up indefinitely. Environment minister John Gummer might have bought the Green warning that more roads means more cars means more roads means more cars, until Britain is covered in tarmac, but it is clearly a nonsensical argument.

Yes, we need more efficient travel in cities. But that does not mean hammering the car-user. The anti-car bias which dominates the debate blinds people to innovative solutions to the problem of congestion in major cities. Consider the debate on our biggest city, London.

In spring/summer 1996, the *Evening Standard* sponsored a series of discussions on 'London in the Twenty-first Century'. The call to get rid of the car from London's streets was a common theme. Richard Rogers and Norman Foster, two of Britain's top architects, contributed to the discussion. Both favour pedestrianising parts of central London. But, for Foster at least, this need not mean punitive measures against the car. He suggested instead that large underground car parks could be created and that overground space

now taken up with car parking could be pedestrianised: 'For example, Horse Guards Parade is one of the largest surface car parks in London. By removing the cars and linking it to St James's Park, it could become one of the great civic spaces in Europe.' At the final symposium, Foster proposed that parking for coaches be constructed *underneath* Hyde Park.

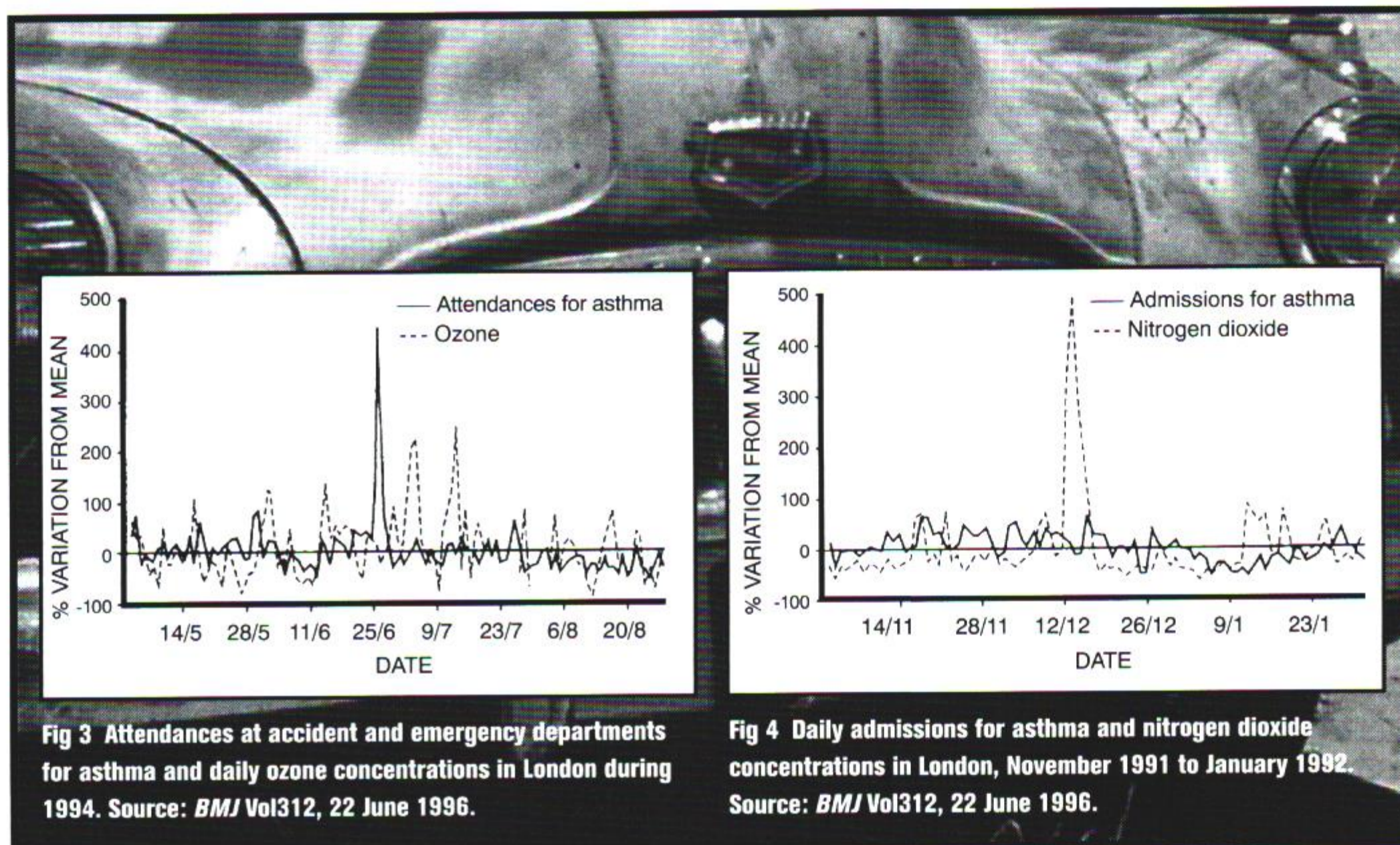
These imaginative suggestions have not sparked the public discussion they should have. Rather, attention has focused on how to penalise car-users and reduce car use in the capital. In the same series of debates, Suzanne May, chair of Transport 2000, the environmentalist transport lobby group, stated that the number of cars coming into London needs to be reduced to tackle pollution. She proposed that parking spaces should be halved and prices doubled. The whole idea is, in the words of George Monbiot, 'to force people to stop using cars'.

Of course, public transport should be better funded, and there would be nothing wrong with pedestrianising parts of city centres if accompanied by better and cheaper—or better still, free—buses and trains. But none of these measures is on the agenda.

the public element cannot replace the individualised element.

In other words, it is intrinsic to modern travel that the car could never be replaced by public transport. What is more, any attempt to do so would be as undesirable as it would be impractical. The whole point of transport for most people is to get from A to B as quickly as possible at a time of their choosing. Nothing beats the car for this in many circumstances. That is why the car has made and will continue to make a great contribution to the expansion of individual and social possibilities. That capitalism has made the car accessible to the majority of the population in Britain is one of its greatest achievements this century. The aim should not be to retreat from this, but to open up the benefits to all.

The centrality of the car to modern travel means that attacks on the car betray, on closer examination, a lack of interest in expanding mass travel options full stop. Transport 2000 make this clear: 'Strategic planning must set targets to reduce the need to travel and plan more self-contained community units and discourage car-centred development strategies.'



Instead, the urge to counterpose public transport to car use betrays an anti-car bias that will improve nothing.

The development and refinement of travel is inconceivable without the personalised element represented by the car. Integrated transport is a nice idea; but it is only an idea. Whatever it means, it cannot mean personalising public transport: attempts in Paris and elsewhere to design a public transport system to cater more to individual needs have floundered, faced with the complexity of the task. An integration of public and private transport will only function if it is recognised that

In other words, we should all be made to go back to live in villages and enjoy the idiocy of rural life. This brings us back to the culture of limits. For the environmentally minded, the hype about pollution, the attacks on the 'car culture' and praise for 'public' forms of transport often serve as a means of attacking the public in their smelly, noisy cars. They get on their high horse to look down on the motoring masses and declare that 'these idiots just don't care' about the planet, the atmosphere or future generations. The anti-car culture is a package of prejudices ideally suited to our limits-obsessed age.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Not so long ago, Barclays customers could expect important letters from a person/higher power calling him/itself 'Head of Masterloan'. Today the bank's functionaries simply sign their names above a single touchy-feely word, such as 'Fulfilment'. Barclays has a way to go before it catches up with the cuddly NatWest though. A recent letter begins: 'Dear Mr Signs-of-the-Times, As your present Relationship Manager.'



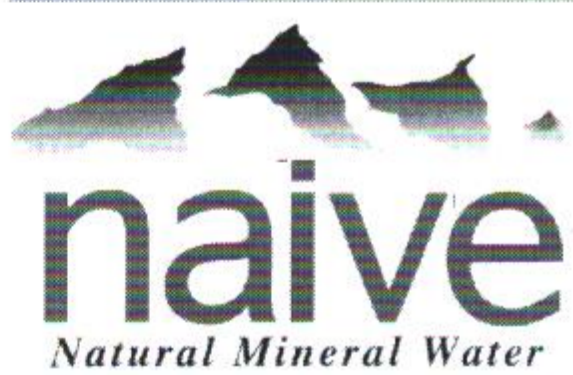
Orange, the mobile phone company ('The future's bright, the future's Orange'), is 'taking advice about actively marketing our brand in Northern Ireland', according to a spokesman. He admitted that 'we need to look to see if there is any sensitivity'.

Freak weather conditions forced organisers to cancel the annual mosquito-killing championships in Pelkosenniemi, leaving a small but vociferous bunch of Finns, Norwegians and Swedes unable to satisfy their blood lust. Pirkko Lankinen of Lapland's conservationist society said that although the killing of a few hundred mosquitoes would not make much of a dent in the overall population, he was disappointed that the environment ministry had refused a request to ban the competition: 'I'm no fan of mosquitoes [of course you're not], but killing them shouldn't be turned into a sport', he said. 'They have enough enemies as it is.'

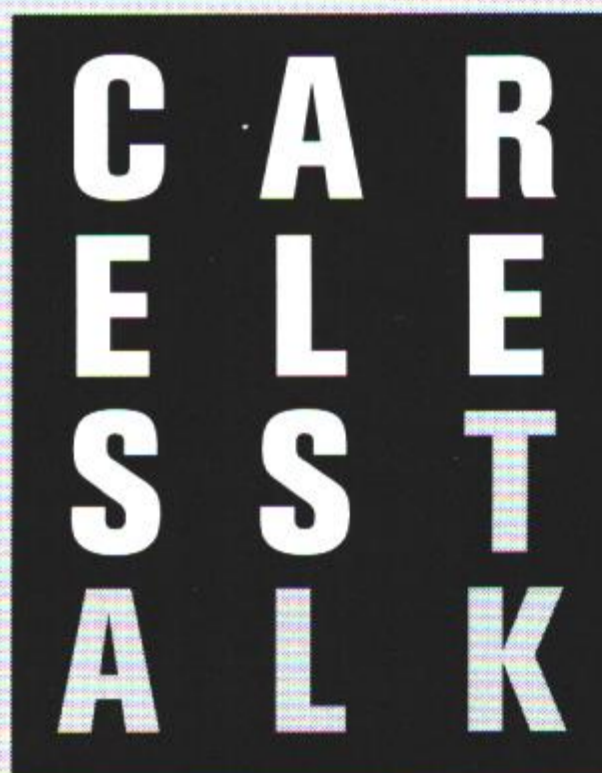
'Make big money in the sex industry from the comfort of your own home...and have a great time into the bargain'—ad in *Jobsearch* magazine, distributed to Jobcentres, following in the tradition of the DSS officer who advised a 'client' who suffered from incontinence to 'get a job in a public convenience'. Easier said than done, now the fascist Tory cutbacks have closed them all down.

The Nottinghamshire Army Cadet Force has closed down its Warsop unit after its hut was burned down and cadets were terrorised by hooligans. 'The yob culture in Warsop has sickened us all', said Major John Baty. 'There are a hardcore of youngsters who are making our people run the gauntlet of abuse and vilification. These youngsters, like all yobs, dislike the establishment. They are cowards. We just don't feel we should allow our cadets to undergo this sort of treatment, which has even included physical attacks on them.' Clearly the army cannot be expected to put up with physical attacks. One cadet said they were 'too scared to leave' on some nights, as lads aged 12 and upwards were waiting outside, some of them 'very big'. 'They called us "poofs" because we wore an army uniform', he added.

That lukewarm bottle of Evian just does not cut it these days. Joan Juliet Buck, editor of *French Vogue*, orders only mineral water cocktails—a mixture of San Pellegrino and Vittel, apparently, not that it's any of your business.



'For the first time in their lives, these young people have come up against an organisation that says no, means it and enforces it.' Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Quicke, on how the army responds to 'trainer-wearers', 'couch-potatoes' and other examples of modern youth. Clearly an organisation with no connection to the 'just say no if you don't fancy a fight' ACF.



abroad half-vomiting, half-leching demeanour. Into this is plonked the cool and committed Glenda....It must have been hell.'

Jo Brand, on Glenda Jackson's New Labour campaign trip to Spain. Hell, certainly, but not for Glenda

'Without sounding unpleasant, the girls tend to be all white shoes and handbags. They are not keen on the idea of a home built from branches and leaf mould.'

Tony Westwood, who advertised for a 'Girl Friday' to live with him in the wilds of Snowdonia

'I really can't think of anything worse than trying to persuade the Brits on their hols in Croydon-by-the-Sea to vote for Tone. It seems it was a bit of an uphill struggle as she lighted upon tattooed lobster after tattooed lobster who professed an undying love for Lady Thatcher. I went to Benidorm once for about half an hour. Union Jacks hung from numerous balconies and drunk people staggered along the front suffering either sunstroke or alcohol poisoning, and combining the two in that glorious Brit Neanderthal

'I was surprised to see enormous bouncers outside every pub, and the streets completely given over to the Neanderthal laddish behaviour that I had fondly imagined confined itself to my nightmares. I'm sure Derby is no different from most other cities on a Friday night, but it was hell on earth, consisting as it did of staggering, screeching individuals all on a one-way ticket to vomiting. Now, most of us like a wild night out now and again, but this uncontrolled vision of Bacchanalia scared the hell out of me. No wonder so many women don't go out on their own at night.'

Jo Brand

'Oasis' performance at Knebworth this weekend promises to be a nightmare for the police...'

Jo Brand, once again predicting uncontrolled Bacchanalia. In the event, there was one arrest out of a 125 000 fans.

A nightmare marriage

You may have to go to Paris to see David Cronenberg's new film, *Crash*. Ben Seymour hears the director explain why it might be worth it

Censorship is about control', says David Cronenberg, the Canadian director whose new film, *Crash*, has caused palpitations among distributors and censors in this country. 'I cannot see how one adult citizen can censor what another one watches. It's a matter of control and fear, and morality is not involved at all.'

Taking as its starting point JG Ballard's brilliantly perverse novel of sex and technology, *Crash* is an exploration of Cronenberg's enduring themes: human frailty, the body's terrifying and exciting tendency to metamorphosis, and the relationships, often illicit and inchoate, between human beings and technology. It is a return to something resembling the stripped-down sparseness of Cronenberg's early work.

Crash makes a more natural transition from page to screen than did William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, another Cronenberg project. Confrontational and provocative, the film, in Cronenberg's words, is trying to 'show the unshowable, speak the unspeakable'.

Despite Cronenberg's change in critical status over the years from gore merchant to melancholy philosopher-auteur, *Crash* has already provoked hostility from Britain's guardians of the public good. A runaway critical and commercial success in France it may be, but, in Britain, *Crash* is in danger of becoming a star vehicle without a distributor. Both the film classification board and distribution companies seem reluctant to deal with it.

The central preoccupation of both film and book is 'a nightmare marriage between sex and technology'. The novel, Ballard has written, is 'the first pornographic novel based on technology'. Both Cronenberg and Ballard view themselves as 'scientific' artists, inventors who do not offer their audience morals, only the results of their imaginative experiments, while, unlike say Burroughs, insisting on the separation between their imaginative and everyday lives. They take their work seriously though, and Ballard, never afraid of taking creative risks, saw fit to give the narrator of his shocking, perverse and pornographic

James Spader and Holly Hunter shifting up a gear in *Crash*

text his own name. It is as if to confront the reader with his real imaginative investment in, and complicity with, what might otherwise be dismissed as mere 'fantasy'.

The film tells the story of James Ballard (James Spader) and his wife Catherine (Deborah Unger) who, together with charismatic renegade scientist Vaughan (Elias Koteas) and Ballard's lover Helen Remington (Holly Hunter),

share a cold passion for automobile sex, sex in automobiles, sex, in a sense, 'with' automobiles. Brought together by their shared experience of the trauma of a car crash, only through the mediation of technology, and extreme violence, can they relate or feel some kind of emotion.

Speaking at the recent Edinburgh Film Festival, Cronenberg emphasised the technique of his movie while underlining the way his representation of the

of sex and technology



'thrills' of a car crash departed from movie convention. Commenting on one scene, Vaughan's restaging of James Dean's fatal crash, Cronenberg noted drily, 'the scene is not shot in the approved Hollywood crash style. There seems to be no slow-motion footage, and you seem not to see the same scene repeated from all five camera angles'. He pauses, savouring the irony. 'So I guess it's not actually very realistic. Real car crashes, you get to see them in slow motion.'

Again, unlike other action movies, there's no villain here, there's nobody forcing the characters to do anything. There's no surprises, there's no bomb under the seat'. For Cronenberg, the pressure is internal to the protagonists, actors in a play of their own making. As Cronenberg puts it, 'the bomb is in the people themselves'.

Discussing a carwash scene—a very classic American iconic moment...and yet, not—in which Vaughan makes out with Ballard's wife in the back of a '63 Lincoln (the model in which John F Kennedy was shot) while Ballard watches them in his rearview mirror, talk inevitably turns to sexual violence and representational politics. Cronenberg suggests humorously that we are watching an old movie. 'That scene lacks political correctness. I don't think that could have been made recently, quite frankly.'

In the scene, it is the role of Ballard's wife that our self-appointed commissars of 'appropriate' behaviour would find unsettling. 'She's enjoying it, but maybe enjoying isn't the right word. It's something more complex than that. She's participating. There's a certain violence in what Vaughan is doing. You can't tell, that's the politically incorrect part, it's too ambivalent.'

For Cronenberg, who describes himself as 'a card-carrying existential humanist', however perverse the film may appear, it is nevertheless an optimistic affirmation of the human capacity to transcend bitter experiences. 'We really are the creators of our own destiny', says Cronenberg, and however much we might prefer to take our cues from a higher authority, 'unfortunately we're stuck with ourselves'. As Cronenberg himself puts it, 'it's an endless struggle between those who are basically fearful and mistrustful of human nature and those who feel that a truly free society is possible, somewhere'.

Like many of Cronenberg's anti-heroes, mad scientists and renegade technicians, these 'wonderful big kids' at play in the 'sandbox' of the car's body have to find their own replacements for our era's crumbling affective institutions and wornout sexual mores. For Cronenberg, at least, this is a 'strangely positive' act. ●

Dinosaur science



Stephen Poliakoff's new play, *Blinded by the Sun*, keeps to tired clichés about science, says Richard Woolfenden

Sine Experientia Nihil SuffICIENTER Sciri Potest'—'Without experiment it is not possible to know anything adequately.' These uncompromising words, taken from an inscription over the entrance door to Oxford University's Daubeney Laboratory, are the inspiration for Stephen Poliakoff's new play *Blinded by the Sun*. Indeed, they are carved into a wooden panel that hangs over the stage for the play's duration. They symbolise a principle that has come to mean little to the three scientists who are the play's main protagonists.

Blinded by the Sun has been advertised as a 'scientific detective story... a tale of greed deception and jealousy'. Poliakoff sets out to explore the effects of a society that, on the one hand, puts

Frances de la Tour plays Elinor, a scientist whose research remains a secret

its scientists under extreme pressure to succeed and, on the other, has become increasingly hostile to science and experimentation. Unfortunately these themes are never really developed in the play, and Poliakoff seems content to stick to tired clichés about science and the market.

Albie (Douglas Hodge), Christopher (Duncan Bell) and Elinor (Frances de la Tour) are three scientists struggling to discover new forms of energy in a laboratory at 'a university somewhere in the North of England'. All three confront the fear of an anonymous career and choose different and conflicting escape routes. Christopher cheats, Albie gets a desk job and Elinor wallows in her laboratory.

It is a promising premise. The trouble is Poliakoff fails to pursue his investigation of the degradation of scientific

discovery. He has really produced two plays in two acts, which sit uneasily with each other and which are both inadequate to his aims.

The first act hinges on a case of scientific fraud. The audience is drawn into the intrigue surrounding why Christopher, a dedicated scientist at the university, has decided to hoodwink colleagues and journalists with a fraudulent 'sun battery' made from baking soda and bleach. However, Poliakoff denies his audience a motive for Christopher's rash act that ruins his career. We are left to presume that he became desperate and wanted a quick route to prestige. At the end of Act One Christopher is packed off to obscurity. His character and fraudulent activities are important only as a mechanism for the development of the characters of Albie and Elinor.

In Act Two it becomes clear that the essence of the play is a battle between Albie and Elinor, two failed scientists. Albie is a fast-talking, flip-charting, thirty-something, mediocre scientist, quickly promoted to the position of professor because he is a 'good administrator'. Elinor is a crotchety, 50-year old dinosaur, who smokes roll-ups, refuses to teach and is accountable to nobody.

Albie symbolises the intervention of market forces into the academy. He becomes 'a detective patrolling the *zeitgeist*' exposing the university for its aloofness from society. Elinor represents the traditional values of scientific experimentation. Yet she has never made a scientific breakthrough in her life and refuses to tell anyone what she is working on. Albie destroys her by closing down her science department: we learn that Elinor dies 18 months after the closure, clutching reams of unmarked A4 paper.

Douglas Hodge's portrayal of the increasingly manipulative Albie is at times both amusing and convincing. Frances de la Tour brings warmth to her pathetic institutionalised character. Yet there is no depth to their confrontation. In a closing scene, when Albie and Elinor are alone in her soon-to-be closed laboratory, Albie asks why she had tried to cover up for Christopher's fraudulent escapade. 'Because I was frightened of you', she replies.

In fact it is Poliakoff who generates the fraud: a drama supposedly about the relationship between science and society becomes a shallow exploration of the relationship between three social misfits. *Blinded by the Sun* reduces today's anti-science prejudice to the intervention of the market, and, in portraying Elinor as the embodiment of the traditional spirit of science, presents science as the province of losers. To rephrase the play's motto, 'Without understanding it is not possible to know anything adequately'. ●

Blinded by the Sun is currently playing at London's National Theatre

Nae tim'rous beastie

Louis Ryan wants to save Robert Burns from today's victim culture

There is nothing like a TV programme about a long-dead poet for projecting the self-image of the present on to the artistic past. The bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns, Scotland's best-loved bard, has offered more than one opportunity for such an exercise. The author of 'Auld Lang Syne', 'Tam O'Shanter', 'A Red, Red Rose', and scores of other poems and songs, was in many ways a tragic figure, but he has always been remembered as one who lived his short span to the utmost. Passionate in everything, in his love of women, in his carousing, in his hatred of religious cant and political oppression, Burns might seem an unlikely candidate for today's confraternity of victimhood. But that is to reckon without the likes of Maya Angelou, herself a poet of sorts (especially in the eyes of Bill Clinton), and one of black America's leading voices in the 'culture of complaint'.

A recent BBC2 programme, 'Angelou on Burns', took us through the Scotsman's life, starting with his childhood home in Ayrshire. 'I know something about small homes', Angelou tells us. 'I know what it is like to come through a poor upbringing. We didn't have the richest of fabrics to wear, just as Burns and his family were without those particular things....'

Striking parallels indeed. But the mention of fabrics does bring to mind some lines from one of Burns' most popular poems, 'For a' that, and a' that':

What tho' on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hodden-grey, and a' that;
Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.

Both Angelou and Burns observe that rich folks tend to wear rich clothes and poor folks tend to wear poor. Angelou responds with a moralistic whine. Burns, however, produces verse which rings through the centuries at the same clear pitch as when it was penned. His challenge to inequality stems not from impotent envy or complaint, but from the standpoint of human brotherhood. It is a consciousness of that brotherhood which accounts for the pride, defiance



and, ultimately, the optimism of the poem.

'A man's a man for a' that': such a sentiment, inspired by the Enlightenment belief in a universal humanity, is distinctly out of fashion today. There is, today, no such thing as 'man', just a collection of different cultural identities. Burns himself has been enlisted in the cause of a Scottish cultural identity—plausibly enough one might think given his pride in Scotland and his use of Scots dialect in most of his poetry. But Burns celebrated Scottishness as a way of exalting the whole man, not, as today, as a denial of him. It was the rebellious element in Scottish history that appealed to him: in his poetic imagination the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 is linked with the radical Jacobins of the French Revolution.

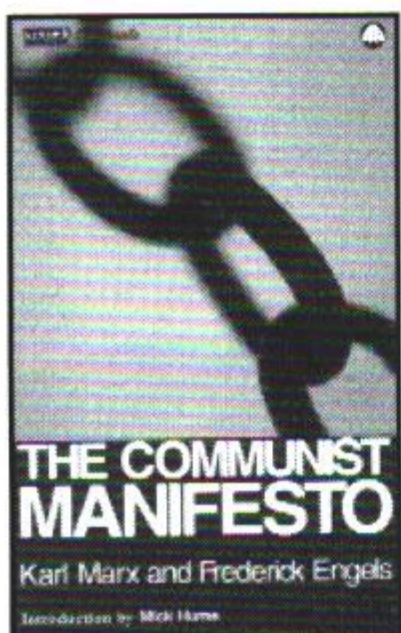
If Burns-as-victim fails to convince, and Burns-as-Scottish-nationalist is a caricature, there remains one other way of assimilating him into contemporary prejudice. A recent cheap edition of Burns' *Selected Poems* asserts in its preface that 'man's abuse of power over nature's creatures matters to him as it does to the present generation'. The editor is referring in particular to one of Burns' best-loved poems, 'To a Mouse, On Turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough, November 1785'.

Certainly the poem sympathises with the 'sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie' that his plough disturbs. But Burns' tenderness for the mouse can be understood only in the general temper of his compassion; and this temper is forged by the humanism so vibrantly expressed in a poem such as 'For a' that, and a' that'. The spontaneous overflow of feeling from man to beast has the effect of humanising the brute world of nature ('Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!') while providing, in turn, a delicate counterpoint to the precariousness of human well-being, especially in the life of the labouring classes.

Such sentiment has little in common with contemporary concerns for animal welfare, which express nothing more than contempt for man and all his works. A poem on a similar theme of mouse and plough, would today be sure to have a whining, rancorous tone about it. Burns a Green? Awa' wi ye!

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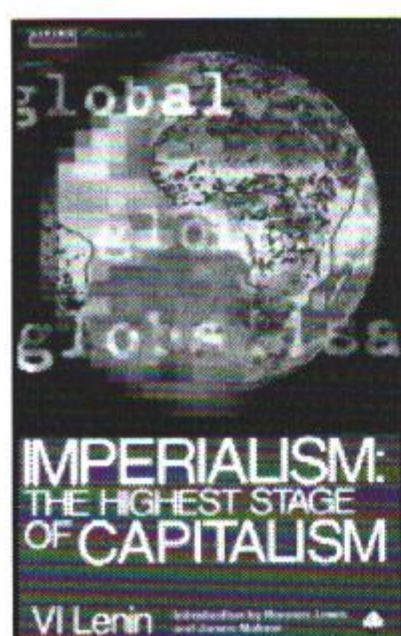


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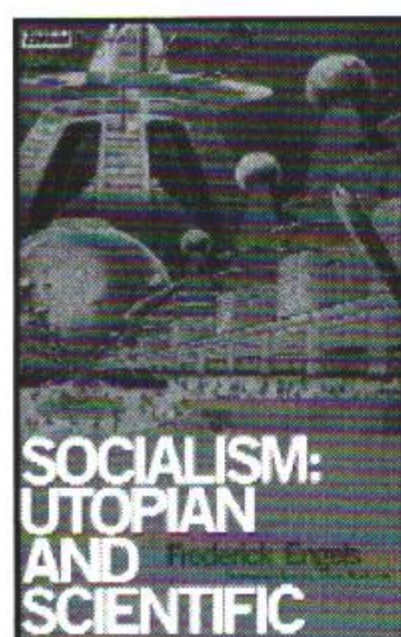


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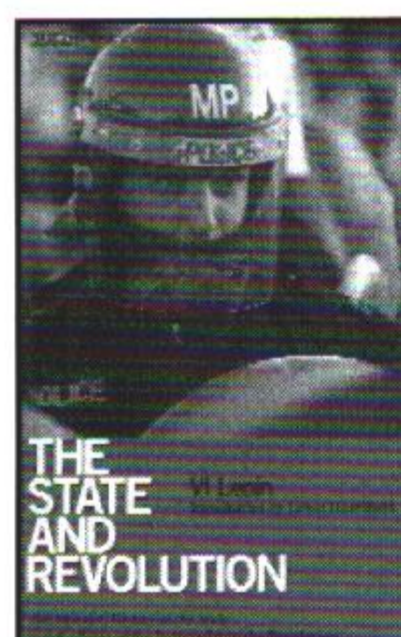


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MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Will Deighton argues that body politics is a retreat from the body politic

Skin deep

The Body and Society, second edition, Bryan S Turner, Sage, £13.99 pbk

Body and Society, Vol2 No2, Mike Featherstone and Bryan Turner (eds), Sage, £9 pbk

Marxism, Mysticism and Modern Theory, Suke Wolton (ed), Macmillan, £13.99 pbk

Body politics is of the moment. The body, it is claimed, has been transformed from a given biological fact into a site of resistance. Sexual identities have been overturned by lesbian and gay activists, like the photographer Della Grace, who recently showed off a newly grown beard. Transsexuals used to be considered pathetic figures, but now they are celebrated in many quarters as gender terrorists, overthrowing traditional sexual stereotypes. The growth of aerobics classes and jogging are just part of the cult of the body beautiful. Plastic surgery, something that once sought to hide its effects, is today striding out of the closet as celebrities show off their latest tucks and trims, and performance artists go under the knife in public. As Jennie Bristow discusses elsewhere in this issue, anorexia and bulimia are less medical conditions today, than elements in a debate over stereotyping images and skinny role models.

The central theme of the current discussion is the plasticity of the body. Where once biology was seen as inescapable destiny, today body politics celebrates the transformative potential in the body. Genders are there to be bent, windows on the soul can be tinted with coloured contact lenses, the face decorated with rings, the skin with tattoos. Disability is no longer seen as something that is unavoidably a barrier. In the argument of disability rights campaigners it is not the physical limitations that are the problem, but the attitudes of others that must be overcome. In the Paralympics, Britain's disabled athletes are said to have shown that disability can be a springboard to success by winning many more medals than their able-bodied counterparts. Even apparently debilitating diseases, it seems, can now be transformed into life-affirming experiences.

In keeping with this interest in the transformative capacity of body politics, sociologists have turned their attentions to the body. At Leeds University, Carol Smart's sociology module 'Theorising the body' aims to look at the 'developing cult of the body', to redress 'sociology's neglect' of the body, and to challenge 'ideas that the body is both natural and given' by 'retriev[ing] the body from

sociobiology'. The journal *Body and Society*, catering to the sociology of the body, is in its second year, and its co-editor Bryan Turner has brought out a new revised edition of his, well, seminal text *The Body and Society*.

What these writings celebrate is the opening up of a whole new field of struggle and self-realisation in the body. On the face of things this is a bold move, taking the struggle directly into enemy territory: the apparently natural foundation of human biology has long been the redoubt of right-wing and traditional ideas about the way society is organised. The supposedly natural foundations of the sexes have been invoked to shore up woman's role as child-bearer and man's as bread-winner. Human nature has been invoked by reactionaries to claim that contingent forms of social organisation are in fact sanctioned by biology. If acquisitiveness is a natural condition, the right-wing argument runs, then any attempt to interfere with the market is doomed to failure. By challenging this natural foundation claimed by right-wing ideologues, the sociology of the body is attacking the central plank of traditional thinking, as Turner claims in the new introduction to his *Body and Society*:

'The Body no longer functions within the crucial interplay of property, wealth and inheritance in the household economy; it is no longer so clearly a focus of marriage strategies, monarchical debates or interstate violence as symbolised by the violent conflict of heroes.' (p6)

But attractive as these iconoclastic claims for body politics might appear, there is a more mundane interpretation: that the orientation towards the body is not so much an advance as a retreat. Social struggle is reduced to the arena of the body as the opportunities for a wider area of contestation have been closed off. The goal of actively remaking the body is a poor alternative to actively remaking society.

Theories of identity politics which underpin the contemporary discussion of the body are challenged in the excellent collection of essays *Marxism, Mysticism* ►

and *Modern Theory*, edited by Suke Wolton. This collection is provocative in swimming against the tide of contemporary sociology and cultural studies. It features contributions ranging from GA Cohen on Marxism, through Channel Cyberia founder Keith Teare on the internet, to Lynn Revell on New Age religions, as well as Andrew Calcutt on the 'culture of crime' and Ellie Lee on feminism.

In her introduction Wolton charges that 'there is a confusion in cultural studies which mixes surface phenomena with changing social conditions, and so loses the distinction between the conscious intentionality of individuals and the apparently purposeful, but actually irrational, movement of society towards division and fragmentation' (pxvii).

**The advance into the realm of the body
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organisation**

In her own chapter, 'Racial identities' Wolton shows how theories of race have moved from largely biological explanations of race to a view of race in cultural terms. As she points out, this manoeuvre is not as radical as it seems. She highlights the trend to see racial division first as a social construct, imposed from the outside, and then as an active construction of racial minorities themselves. As Wolton shows, this leads to the absurd conclusion of the radical black author bell hooks, that desegregation in the United States was a step backwards because it led to the break-up of black self-support networks.

In his essay 'Determined to be different', Peter Ray analyses the growth of gay identity politics. He argues that the apparent success of gay politics is misunderstood. Where once homosexuality was a distinct challenge to the family values which upheld the family as a bedrock of stability, the contemporary ascendancy of gay identities is less radical. The success of the gay movement is premised on its orientation away from broader social change to a celebration of lifestyle politics. The confusion within gay politics is that it takes its retreat into the relative safety of private life for a victory over society.

The criticisms of the limitations of identity politics in *Marxism, Mysticism and Modern Theory* give us a useful handle on the politics of the body. In many ways, the outlook of body politics, as formulated by Turner and the contributors to *Body and Society*, is a culmination of the identity politics criticised in Wolton's collection. The advance into the realm of the body is not so much an opening-up as a retreat from the bigger question of social organisation. Consistently body politics, like all identity politics, elevates the realm of consumption, in which lifestyles are central, over the realm of production. This is not an extension of the category 'society', but its reduction to realms of personal life. In his essay 'Marxism and social construction' (in *Marxism, Mysticism and Modern Theory*) James Heartfield shows how contemporary sociology tends to reduce the concept of 'society' to mean merely intersubjective or interpersonal relations.

This trend to bypass the real realm of social organisation, the realm of production, in favour of personal life reaches its apogee in the politics of the body, as exemplified in Hwa Yol Jung's essay 'Phenomenology and body politics', where he asserts that 'to be social is first and foremost to be intercorporeal' (*Body and Society*, p5). On this estimation a herd of cows would have to be reckoned a society. The source of Jung's error is to be found further on where he suggests that 'since we are always already social, the body cannot be the "origin" but, more properly, the ambient medium of the social'.

Jung is wrong to see the body as the medium of social life. At most, the body is the medium of personal life, of seduction, intercourse and the family. It is the market that is the medium of social organisation, and the exchange of commodities, not of bodies, that regulates social, as opposed to sexual intercourse.

In an early essay, the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844', Karl Marx examined the dehumanising consequences of the alienation of social organisation in market exchange. Marx showed that for the class of workers exchange was a process that reduced their ability to work to a commodity, something to be bought and sold. By selling their labour-power to an employer, they were alienating their truly human activity, social production: 'the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It belongs to another, it is a loss of his self.' (*Early Writings*, 1981, p327) This alienation of man's productive activity is precisely what is expressed in the politics of the body. Just as our own productive activity, our truly social character, ceases to be our own activity in reality, so the politics of the body closes off that realm from investigation in theory.

Marx went on to account for the relative importance of private life that we can see expressed in identity politics. Interestingly, he anticipated the elevation of bodily functions over social relations: 'The result is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions—eating, drinking and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment—while in his human functions he is nothing more than an animal.' (*Early Writings*, p327)

**The politics of the body precisely mirrors
the cleavage in capitalist society**

Marx was of course at pains to make it clear that he was not giving a simply naturalistic explanation of human behaviour, qualifying the statement about 'animal functions' in the following way:

'It is true that eating, drinking and procreating, etc, are also genuine human functions. However, when abstracted from other aspects of human activity and turned into final exclusive ends, they are animal.'

The politics of the body precisely mirrors the cleavage in capitalist society. Our actual social life, the life of production, is a closed shop, the organisation of which is not up for discussion. But our private life, the life of our 'animal functions', is elevated to the status of a society, a realm in which our personality can find fulfilment.

The compelling aspect of this process, and its articulation in body politics, is the one flagged up in *Marxism, Mysticism and Modern Theory*. What is in fact a diminution of human subjectivity or agency appears to be its elevation. Subjectivity is properly understood as the potential ability to shape our own destiny, to be a conscious, active agent. At the level of personal life, body politics seems to be a celebration of subjective agency. Explaining that appearance, Heartfield writes 'at the level of interpersonal relations, deliberation prevails. Severally, we are all free' (p18). But society, by contrast, appears to be impervious to change, indeed any attempt to effect change at the societal level is seen to be doomed to failure. 'As a consequence of this outlook,' according to Wolton, 'human agency stands discredited and degraded.' (p176)

According to Wolton 'human agency stands discredited and degraded'

Body politics proclaims its commitment to the subjective. However, the formal commitment to human agency is difficult to sustain on the basis of making the body central. In particular, the proponents of body politics reject the 'mind-body' divide that has been the dominant model of human consciousness since it was formulated by René Descartes. In this model the mind is distinct from the body, in that the mind is free and conscious, while the body is a mere machine directed by the mind. The comic strip, the Numskulls, currently being reprinted in the *Sunday Times*, in which tiny men occupy the head of the main character, pulling levers to make him move, and popping ready made 'thoughts' into an inner suggestion box, is a popularisation of the 'mind-body' distinction.

In more recent times though, academics have criticised the 'mind-body' distinction. American pragmatist Richard Rorty, in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and the French post-structuralist Michel Foucault both challenged the idea of an 'inner life' or psychic essence that guides the outer body. The same theme is taken up by Turner and Hwa Yol Jung. As they see it, the recourse to mind as an explanation of bodily activity is just a mystification. Their arguments sound very materialistic and, after all, Marx too was critical of the way that idealistic thinkers tended to neglect the role of work and the enlargement of consumption in generating human development.

However, the contemporary attack on the mind-body distinction is indicative of an inability to defend human agency. Of course human consciousness is not a gift from above, but it is no less real for that. It is precisely by the development of production to the point where men could enjoy free time for reflection that consciousness has been developed. Without a capacity for conscious reflection we would be little more than beasts driven to pasture, moving at the command of the farmer's stick. That capacity for reflection is without doubt truncated in the ways that Marx described in 1844, but that does not mean that it is without content. Without consciousness, subjectivity means nothing.

The difficulties of developing a theory of the subject in body politics are exemplified in Nick Crossley's essay 'Body-subject/Body-power' (*Body and Society*). Draw-

ing on the works of Foucault and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Crossley tries to develop a theory of agency that is premised on the body alone. As he says, both of these writers contend 'in opposition to traditional (consciousness-centred) approaches to political philosophy, that political control and stability are achieved at [the] corporeal or intercorporeal level' (p104). In other words, they concentrated less on the ideological than on the physical controls imposed by the authorities. But this sort of approach leads to an overwhelming concern with the margins of political order, of overt repression like prisons and asylums, to the exclusion of the dull compulsion of the market, operating as it does indirectly, and its ideological underpinnings.

If this approach misunderstands social order, it more seriously misrepresents social change. Crossley talks up Merleau-Ponty's historical approach to social organisation, and the changing character of the learned habits of the body. Paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, Crossley writes 'while our habits may change, the fact that we are creatures of habit (as opposed to having fixed instincts) does not' (p104). To which one might respond, big deal, what's the difference? If the alternative is to be creatures of habit, you might as well remain creatures of instinct. Neither interpretation gives a role to agency.

Simon Williams' investigation of the mind-body distinction in the chronically ill is the best article in the journal, but it is also the clearest expression of the negative conclusions of body politics. Williams describes the feelings of disembodiment experienced by people facing chronic illness: 'thus perpetuating the very Cartesian dualism which we...had been trying to escape.' (p31) Speculating that modern medicine reinforces the Cartesian notion of body-as-machine, Williams reassures the reader that there is a body politics solution at hand:

'out of this dualism and sense of bodily betrayal, like the phoenix rising from the ashes, individuals do nonetheless struggle, sometimes heroically and against all odds to achieve something of a realignment between mind and body, self and society. Here a sort of "negotiated settlement" occurs.' (p31)

Williams describes how people try to achieve this negotiated settlement by 'their search for meaning'. 'In focusing on narratives one is able to shift the dominant cultural conception of illness away from passivity (ie, the sick person as "victim of disease") to activity, thus transforming "fate" into "experience", and joining bodies together in a shared sense of vulnerability.' (p33)

This is the sorry result of the politics of the body and its struggle to overcome Cartesian dualism. Coming to terms with illness is celebrated as a virtue, when in fact it is only a sad necessity. The fact is that there is little meaning, outside of the medical science meaning, to falling ill. The attempt to turn 'fate' into 'experience' only achieves the opposite result. When fate is elevated to the level of experience, it becomes the exemplar of experience, to the exclusion of human agency. Sharing vulnerability is only putting 'victim of disease' into the plural.

Children at Risk? Safety as a Social Value,

Helen Roberts, Susan J Smith and Carol Bryce, Open University Press, £12.99 pbk

Children at Risk plays on contemporary anxieties about the dangers that children face, insisting that 'childhood is a uniquely dangerous time of life'. But these sociologists are not talking about the extraordinary risks that captivate the headlines such as child abductions and murders. Rather, the problems that they think should concern parents and professionals are little more than mundane bruises, breaks and sprains that happen to everyone at some time in their childhood. They inflate the risks of everyday life to grotesque proportions, thereby redefining the meaning of harm. So 'the presence of an injury or other damage may be a necessary condition for a medical or legal interest in accidents' but 'it is not an inherent part of the definition of the accident phenomena'. In this version of harm even things that do not happen, but might have, can have a traumatic impact on your life.

The reasoning behind this new-found concern over the risks to the young is not a real increase in danger. The authors admit that 'the odds of a child in the UK surviving the hazards of birth and avoiding death from a major infectious disease are higher now than they have ever been'—a fact which begs the question of why growing up should be called 'survival', as if you had been born on the *Titanic*. The answer is that these horror stories are not designed to improve safety, but to instil the idea of 'safety as a social value'. In other words, a preoccupation with children's safety is to be made the basis of a moral code of behaviour. In this case, the moral code is one that persuades parents to organise their lives around avoiding an infinity of potential danger to their loved ones—in the process, stifling the development of the children they are supposed to be protecting.

Tiffany Jenkins

The Football Factory, John King, Jonathan Cape,

£9.99 pbk

The hyped-up threat of hooliganism at Euro 96 failed to materialise, despite celebrity interviews with potential troublemakers in the national press. A rather meagre response to Gareth Southgate's penalty miss meant that hooligan-watchers would have to get their thrills elsewhere. John King's first novel, *The Football Factory*, has been praised by critics and sportswriters as a tale of contemporary working class life—by which they mean that King's tales of soccer hooliganism appeal to the middle class fantasy of slumming it.

Professional hooligan Tom Johnson describes first hand his role as a Chelsea headhunter in the demolition of rival firms, from West Ham and Spurs, to Derby, though not Millwall. These 'rows' are the high point of Johnson's life, against a backdrop of dull work in a warehouse. Novelist Irvine Welsh's praise for the portrayal of working class life in *The Football Factory* does not tell the full story. Johnson's misanthropic outlook is the perfect device to pour scorn on his fellow men and women,

paraded before us as one-dimensional characters. A good beach-read, maybe, but the *Football Factory* is really just an anti-social, socialist realism for the nineties.

Graham Barnfield

Spartacus, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Redwords,

£6.99 pbk

Scottish Stalinist Lewis Grassie Gibbon was known for his grim tale of a hard life in the Highlands, *A Scots Quair*, before the re-publication of the story of the slave revolt against Rome led by the gladiator Spartacus. Karl Marx might have thought of Spartacus as a 'splendid fellow', but this book is a dour vision of revolution as the barbarian horde sweeping away a rotten civilisation. Spartacus himself appears as an intuitive dunce while all the thinking is left to a Greek eunuch and clerical slave called Kleon—a self-portrait by Gibbon? The closing scene of mass crucifixion of the slaves makes you wish they would start singing 'always look on the bright side of life'. Instead, a premature vision of the crucified Christ confirms that Gibbon is dealing in martyrology, not revolution.

Will Deighton

Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture,

Julian Stallabrass, Verso, £14.95 pbk

Stallabrass takes exception to the postmodern celebration of consumption and communication. He asks some pertinent questions: 'how is it that culture is supposed to be fragmenting and diversifying when the ownership of the producers of culture is dramatically concentrating? How is it that all "grand narratives"—accounts which seek to explain phenomena in terms of broad historical processes—are to be abandoned just at this moment of unsurpassed economic integration on a global scale?'

The chapter on cyberspace, 'Empowering technology', shows how in today's Net culture the desire to embrace the whole world by means of digital communications is reduced to a virtual solipsism, which, as Stallabrass points out, 'is merely a literal expression' of the individual in contemporary society. This chapter also demonstrates Stallabrass' over-estimation of the dangers of market domination. The market has dominated art and culture since the Renaissance, and its disciplines have been an adjunct as well as an obstacle to creative expression. But Stallabrass warns that 'dreams of a networked utopia will come up against hard commercial reality', as if the inevitable corporate takeover of cyberspace necessarily means the end of creativity.

His critique of the notion that people can create themselves anew through consumption is most welcome. How frustrating, then, that while rejecting the pseudo-subjectivity of consumer-led identity, Stallabrass reintroduces the spurious curriculum of the Frankfurt School. From them he borrows the vision in which monstrous mass culture ('the Gargantuan culture of distraction') threatens to engulf us in banality. In opposing the indeterminacy of postmodernism he leans towards cultural determinism.

Andrew Calcutt

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on current events

No to more curbs on smoking

President Bill Clinton's proposals to label tobacco a 'drug of addiction' and to subject the industry to stricter regulation have provoked a predictable uproar from cigarette manufacturers. Just as Clinton calculates that his gesture in taking what one commentator calls 'the moral high ground' against tobacco will enhance his position in the forthcoming presidential contest so we can expect that New Labour will take a firmer anti-smoking line.
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FEATURE

[A manifesto for our times](#)

The 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.

This month's issue of Living Marxism looks at how to elaborate a manifesto that is appropriate for today.

LIVING MARXISM

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