

LIVING MARXISM

WHATEVER HAPPENED
TO THE HEROES?

CONFERENCE see page 15

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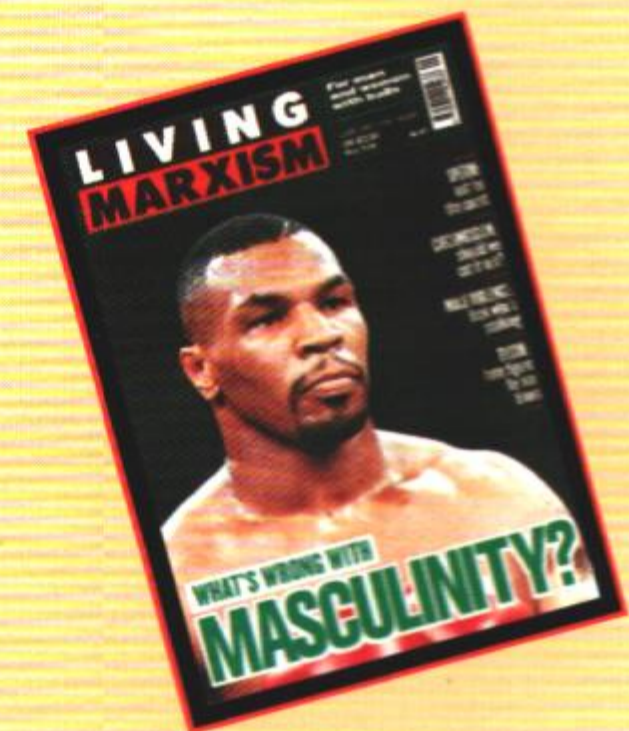
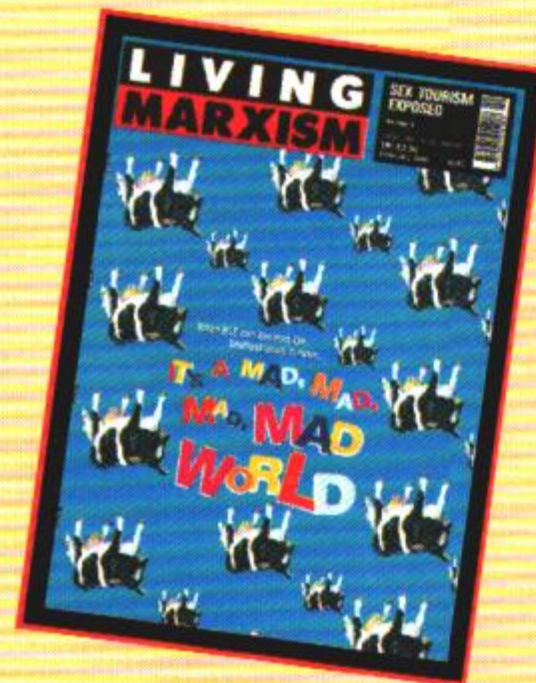
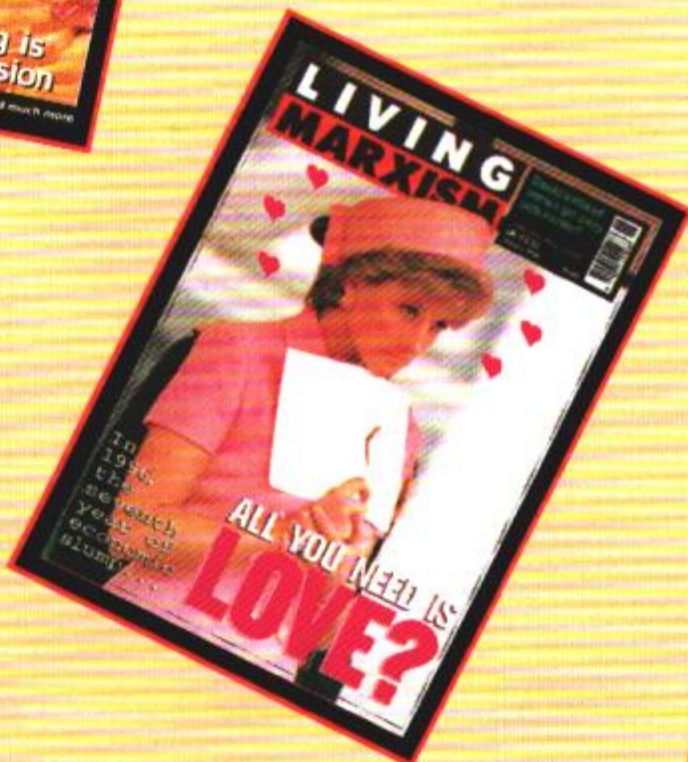
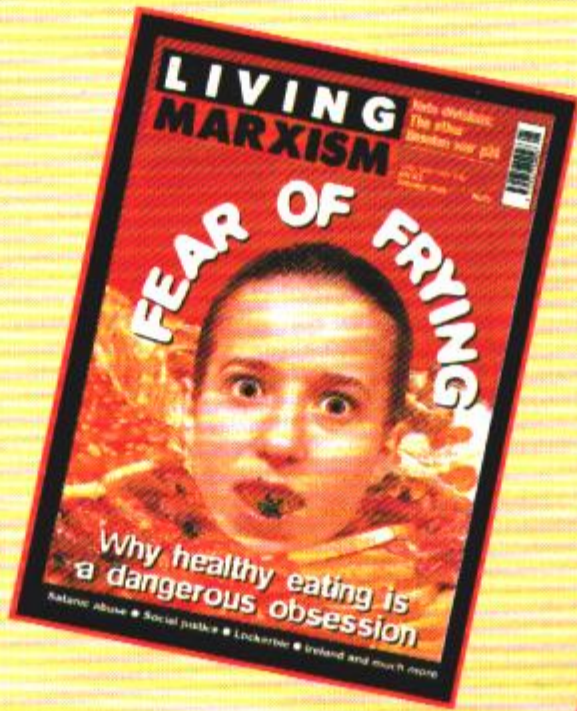
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COVER PHOTO: DAVE CHAPMAN

NEW WOMEN, NEW DANGERS

Debates about 'women's issues' seem to have been turned upside-down in recent years.

• Liberal commentators who once demanded 'a woman's right to choose' are now more likely to complain that abortion is too easy. Meanwhile, judges and police chiefs have stopped suggesting that women are 'asking for it' and started backing feminist demands for special treatment for rape victims. And after 25 years of demands for equality at work, surveys now suggest that most women would rather stay at home with their families.



What's going on? This month's *Living Marxism* attempts to make sense of some of the shifting discussions about women and society—and unearths some worrying developments in the process.

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Sara Hinchliffe sees big problems with the demand for special protection for rape victims in court

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Mick Hume

New Danger

What does it say about the state of democracy when an unelected Law Lord and a self-appointed lobby for the Dunblane parents can determine society's priorities and dictate government policy on gun control or anything else?

Nobody likes an elected politician these days. They are seen either as shysters offering slick soundbites, or cheap crooks soaked in sleaze. The Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrat conferences confirmed the exhaustion of the old politics.

All of the political trends which *Living Marxism* has identified over the past couple of years were graphically displayed during the party conference season: the convergence of left and right; the lack of any clash of principles; a preoccupation with trivial issues (so teenage drinkers are responsible for the decay of British cities), and with the penny rate of income tax. (For a full exposition of these trends, see chapter three of our new manifesto, *The Point is to Change It.*)

The star of all the party conferences was TINA—There Is No Alternative. Every discussion began from the assumption that it really is not possible to change or to achieve anything very much. Indeed the main concern of the party leaders seemed to be to avoid saying that they would do anything at all. John Major's intervention in the Tory Euro-row—'wait and see'—captured the whatever-you-say-say-nothing spirit of the conference season; a month during which the most exciting thing the media could report was that Major took his jacket off one afternoon.

Against this background, everybody appears to be criticising the discredited political system. That might seem like a good thing. The problem is, however, that many of the leading critics of the status quo are endorsing something even worse.

The sleaze scandals and other crises have helped to create a cynical mood of *anti-politics*. It is not just individual MPs or their particular parties which are held in low public esteem. The very idea of political activity, of people taking purposeful action in an effort to change their lives for the better, is now widely seen as a waste of time.

The irony is that most radical critics of the political system are under the sway of TINA just as much as the MPs they profess to despise. Instead of seeing the failure of the old parties as evidence of the need to create a political alternative, they interpret it as confirmation of their own cynical fatalism about politics and people.

There are some very undemocratic assumptions underpinning this mood of anti-politics. It is often implied that politicians must be untrustworthy because they are exposed to public pressure, either through the inducements offered by 'special interests' or through the prejudiced demands made by the voting public—the mob's baying howl' as one radical manifesto put it recently (*Wired*, October 1996).

The obvious conclusion is that the system of government would be cleaner and better if it could be insulated from public pressure. Which is presumably why every demand for an anti-sleaze purge or some other reform today seems to end up proposing that more powers be granted to judges, parliamentary commissioners and other unelected officials, at the expense of parliament.

This drive to undermine elective democracy is far more dangerous than the possibility that an MP might have accepted a few quid or a bit of furniture from a lobbyist. The problem with the parliamentary system has always been that it does not give real

influence to the people, acting instead as a democratic facade behind which the ruling elite has pulled the levers of power. The current moves to reform the system, however, will all make the authorities even less accountable to the public.

If we are to create what the *Living Marxism* manifesto calls 'a world fit for people', we are going to need the power to bend society to the popular will. But in the age of anti-politics, every new development threatens to move power further away from the people. It now appears that it is up to the editor of the *Guardian* and a parliamentary commissioner to declare a Tory like Neil Hamilton 'unfit to be an MP', rather than that being a decision for Hamilton's constituents. And a little lobby group like the post-Dunblane 'Snowdrop' campaign for gun control now seems able, with the help of the press, to declare itself 'the voice of the nation' and determine government policy.

Law Lords, commissioners, European courts and all of the non-governmental organisations are entirely insulated from popular pressure. Anything which empowers them further—no matter how worthy the cause might seem—can only undermine the principle of democratic accountability. We need a lot more power to be invested in the hands of the majority in society, not less.

That is why I will take a crooked MP who is said to be out for himself any day rather than a judge or an ombudsman who claims to know what is good for the rest of us. Because at least we stand a chance of getting shot of the elected sleaze-bag; the appointees of the Great and the Good are beyond our reach.

The anti-democratic response to the crisis of the political system is typical of the authoritarian dynamic at work across

society today. On many fronts, the degree of control we have over our own lives, our right to live as independent adults, is being encroached upon by the authorities. Yet in the current climate of anti-politics, the danger is rarely recognised.

After enduring the mind-numbing banality of the political conferences, many people turned their back on the whole business with the commonsense complaint that the parties don't appear to have any policies. In one sense this is true; there is no compelling vision of society on offer. But it also misses the worrying way in which politics is now being redefined.

In the age of TINA, any notion of social change has been ruled out. If society is off the agenda for debate, it follows that the only remaining arena for action and change is that of individual behaviour and interpersonal relations. Which is why, insofar as any policy proposals were put forward at the party conferences, they were about imposing new regulations and controls on what we can and cannot do or say, and granting the authorities new powers to intervene in people's public and private affairs.

The list of measures discussed at the Tory and (especially) Labour conferences included: new bans on handguns, controls on the internet, anti-stalking laws, a crack-down on disruptive pupils, paedophile registers, child curfews, measures against noisy neighbours, reform of the trial system for rape cases, privacy legislation, more bans on tobacco, making it a crime to deny the Holocaust, and many more.

Some of these measures may seem reasonable in their own right (although all of them are opposed here at *Living Marxism*, for reasons we hope to explain in future issues). But taken together, it should be clear that they represent a pattern for a new politics of social control based on the policing of personal behaviour; what we have called the new authoritarianism. This, rather than broad debates about how the

A little lobby group like 'Snowdrop' can now declare itself 'the voice of the nation'

world is run, is what politics has been reduced to in the 1990s.

At a time when the old social solidarities have broken down, so that more of us tend to look at the world from the standpoint of vulnerable individuals, there is a lot of support for the new authoritarian premise about the need to control other people's behaviour. Many who are contemptuous of the old elitist political system will go along with these kinds of measures as being more responsive to people's needs. Yet the outcome of the new authoritarianism is to strengthen the ability of the authorities to control our affairs in unprecedented ways.

The new proposals for policing personal behaviour tend to have two things in common. They all exacerbate the fragmentation of society, encouraging everybody to look with suspicious eyes at what their neighbours are up to. And they seek to create new points of contact between the individual citizen and the forces of law and order, by playing up the need for decent society to rally against evil. That is why there has been such a disproportionate emphasis on measures to combat extreme (and extremely rare) examples of anti-social behaviour, such as the Dunblane massacre or paedophile rings.

The net result is the creation of an atmosphere of anxiety and suspicion in which people are likely to be further alienated from one another, but more beholden to the state which they look to for protection. That is a recipe for being dominated and having your life controlled without even knowing it.

In every sphere from reforming parliament to regulating personal behaviour, the new politics is driven by an authoritarian dynamic which would reduce the majority of people to the role of powerless individuals, increasingly denied any right to decide how we are governed or how we live. This is the most dangerous trend in contemporary society. It cannot be challenged by the cynicism of anti-politics, but only by actively engaging with the new issues and forthrightly putting the case for political democracy and personal autonomy.

The first thing we need to do is to know our enemy. With its proposals to police parliament, outlaw Holocaust denial, regulate the Net, impose child curfews and the rest, New Labour is at the cutting edge of the new authoritarianism—much more in tune with the changing political tempo than the Tories, who have been left limping along behind Tony Blair in the law 'n' order stakes. Yet still there are some who harbour illusions in Blair's promised 'decent society'.

The left-liberal writer John Mortimer recently pointed out how, under the Tories, the fear of crime had become 'a convenient excuse for curtailing traditional freedoms' (*Sunday Times*, 1 September 1996). He concluded that 'it will be up to a Labour government' to preserve 'the freedoms that matter to us most'.

If New Labour is elected, the likes of Mortimer will not know what hit them. The rest of us still have time to get ready for a Blair government set to be even worse than the present shower. ●

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

Ireland's victim cult

One of the least attractive features of the Northern Ireland peace process has been the tendency for nationalist and Unionist communities to present themselves as victims and to score points off each other on the question of who has suffered the most. In an increasingly sterile political climate, suffering brings compensation and points make prizes at the peace talks.

A growing number of murals depicting the iniquities of the Penal Laws and the helpless victims of famine, reflect this morbid tendency within the nationalist community. Likewise the Protestant community is presenting itself as an endangered species—the victim of cultural and religious intolerance.

A depressing trend, predictable perhaps, but one which has lately reached new depths. Could you ever liken the 'sufferings' of the Orange Order, the RUC and HM government to those of the victims of the Nazi genocide? In an article in the *Irish News* (26 August 1996), Roy Garland makes the analogy.

RUC 'no go' notices are a familiar sight on many nationalist estates. They depict an armed RUC man with Orange colarette, struck out with a red 'no entry' sign. Garland finds them offensive to the Protestant tradition, 'reminiscent of the Star of David which Jews had to wear during the Nazi period'. The 'loyal orders', he cautions, with their 'appearance of power', can 'like the Jews under Hitler' be formed into 'ideal scapegoats'. In the same edition a letter likens the Irish tricolour to the *swastika* and warns those who would 'pin all the blame on the British government' to 'pause and ask themselves how it would sound if they said it was all the fault of the Jews'.

The cult of suffering clearly represents a retreat from reality.

P Hunter Belfast

Peace process: the movie

I never thought I would find myself agreeing with the *Daily Telegraph*, but these are strange times. The *Telegraph* described Neil Jordan's Irish epic *Michael Collins* as 'selective amnesia in pursuit of an unbending political agenda'. I saw the film in Dublin, and they are right. It is infused with contemporary prejudice about the conflict in Ireland, and Jordan has told the story of Michael Collins from the point of view of today's peace process.

The aim seems to be to exhume 'Ireland's traitor' and to hold him up as a hero for the 1990s. Forget the fact that Collins helped to negotiate Partition with the British government and fought a war against the rebellious factions

of the IRA on behalf of the British Empire. For Jordan, Collins represents 'what modern Ireland aspires to be—pragmatic and realistic'. By the same token, Jordan presents Eamon de Valera as the villain of the piece. De Valera's opposition to Partition (there is no hint of his own treacherous compromise with Britain a few years later) is depicted as fanaticism. In Jordan's rewriting of Irish history, those who ditch their principles are the heroes while those who stick to their guns are cast as villains.

In 'The peace process rules' (September) Mark Ryan described how the old political traditions in Ireland have been exhausted. Now it would seem that the old traditions are being re-invented to mean something else entirely. In *Michael Collins*, ditching your principles in the name of reconciliation is interpreted as the authentic expression of true Irish nationalism. Jordan's film is an attack on the single-mindedness which made the struggle for Irish freedom such an inspiration over the years. The film makes a virtue out of the pragmatism and willingness to compromise which have seen that struggle end in defeat every time.

Agreeing with the *Daily Telegraph*, defending Eamon de Valera...these are strange times indeed.

Brendan O'Neill Edgware

Shanty town planning

Jodie (letters, October) claims that the occupation of the Guinness site in Wandsworth was a 'worthwhile attempt to highlight the squandering of resources by landlords, property developers and speculators'. George Monbiot, the leading light of the Guinness 'The Land Is Ours' protest has warned that 'the construction industry will never regain respect and sympathy from the public until it starts to propose less and listen more'. For Monbiot, the objective of the protest was to show that we should build 'as resources allow...like the people of shanty towns in Africa or Latin America'.

While shanty-dwellers in the Third World are desperately struggling to get out, people like George and Jodie seem to be romanticising the grim reality of temporary dwellings and unsanitary conditions. Their protestations against the arrogance of modern capitalism sound progressive enough. But Monbiot's idea of a sustainable construction industry requires us all to make do with less. What's more, if property developers would only adopt his narrow horizons, in his opinion they would then deserve our thanks, sympathy and respect.

Shit in a bucket? No thanks.

Austin Williams Newcastle

The 'right' to catch cholera

K Aisthorpe says (letters, October) that the 1991 cholera outbreak in Peru spread because 'the climatic conditions were right for growth'. I understood that the authorities in Lima stopped adding anti-cholera vaccine to the capital's water supply on the spurious grounds that this was a breach of the 'right' to consume pure water (thereby saving money, of course).

Andy Clarkson London

Handgun diplomacy

The idea of international arms control, usually presented as respectable Western nations curbing the powers of irresponsible and dangerous Third World 'dictatorships', is now being extended to include the carrying of small arms in the Third World, in a conscious mirroring of the discussion of gun control within Western societies.

When the talk was of nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands, or of the 'scandal' of the conventional arms trade, discussion focused clearly on Western powers and the Eastern bloc or the threat of rogue states. Today things are more diffuse. Organisations like the Human Rights Watch Arms Project are helping to encourage more interference in Third World countries under the banner of campaigning against landmines, 'inhumane weapons', and now small arms.

Today's conflicts are often presented as the work of local gangsters and rabble-rousers using basic rifles and handguns. An African dispute can be reduced to the level of a shooting in South Central LA. The picture is one of irrational and ever-increasing violence fuelled by small arms 'trafficking', which David C. Morrison, in the *National Journal*, explicitly likens to 'the equally blooming global trade in narcotics'.

The idea is commonplace that the more guns there are in the world, the more potential there is for violence, to the point where guns themselves are fetishised as the cause of it. We are living in an age when Third World politics are treated as the equivalent of crack addicts high on violence.

T Banks London

PS Thanks to those who have enquired about my 'retirement'. The roses are coming on nicely, but I have had a few problems with the runner beans.

Vote for free gifts

The other day I received a junk mail leaflet. On the front were photographs of sunbathers on a beach, album covers, and a young man

playing squash, over which was written: how to win a family holiday, 10 top CDs, £100 worth of sports clothing. I turned the page expecting to find an invitation to buy encyclopedias, or subscribe to the *Reader's Digest*, but was surprised to find the following instructions: 'complete the electoral registration form, sign it, return it to us by October 10th and you will automatically be entered for the prize draw.'

The message was unambiguous. Voting for mainstream political parties will change nothing. It will not deliver the good things in life, but if you fill in our forms you might win a few CDs. I would like to congratulate Lewisham council for presenting a biting critique in such a concise and poignant way, and for delivering this revolutionary message to every house in the borough. I filled in the forms, but I will not be voting.

David Wainwright London SE4

Liberty and license

Leslie Andrews (letters, October) claims that, in my opposition to any form of censorship, I cannot tell the difference between liberty and license. He says I ought to realise that Hollywood has abused artistic freedom and treated it as a license to make films which are 'brutal and boring simultaneously'.

I am not quite as indiscriminating as Andrews makes out. Indeed I have noticed that the argument for artistic freedom, once the primary case against censorship, is now used as an argument in favour of restraint and responsibility. In the sixties it was said that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a work of art, and, as such, it should not be subject to censorship. This line of argument was subsequently used to defend films such as *Last Tango in Paris*, magazines such as *Oz*, and various other *causes célèbres*. But in the nineties we are more likely to be told that most violent videos are entirely bereft of artistic merit, and that the world would be a better place without them.

Artistic merit is not a sufficient argument either for or against censorship. The issue is not the quality of the work, but my freedom to judge for myself how good or bad it is. This freedom is indivisible: either I have it, or I do not. While the British Board of Film Classification or anybody else continues to make judgements on

our behalf, we are all denied that freedom. And all the videos in Soho—no matter how brutal or banal they may be—will not persuade me to join in the calls for further restrictions and restraint.

Andrew Calcutt London E17

People are plumpy

It seems to have escaped Kate Simmonds' attention, but a representative sample of humanity is actually 'lumpy, bumpy, and plumpy' ('Model behaviour', October). There is something peculiarly self-limiting about stressing the desirability of 'thinness'. Concern for the 'ideal body' is anti-Marxist. We should throw off the obsession for dieting and 'healthy eating'. Then we will be free to direct all our efforts towards building a real future for humanity, whether 'lumpy' or otherwise.

Chris Murphy (110kg) Shenfield, Essex

Look who's talking

Re: 'Tongue-tied' (March, recently reprinted as 'One Man Talking' in the American magazine *Utne Reader*), I only wish the world would let the 'English' language die first so 'romantics' like myself would not be able to read crap written by people like Kenan Malik. Better yet, why not publish an article on letting rare political theories die, like Marxism? Perhaps your article is a metaphor for Marxism without you even realising it!

Dan Greifenberger Baltimore, USA

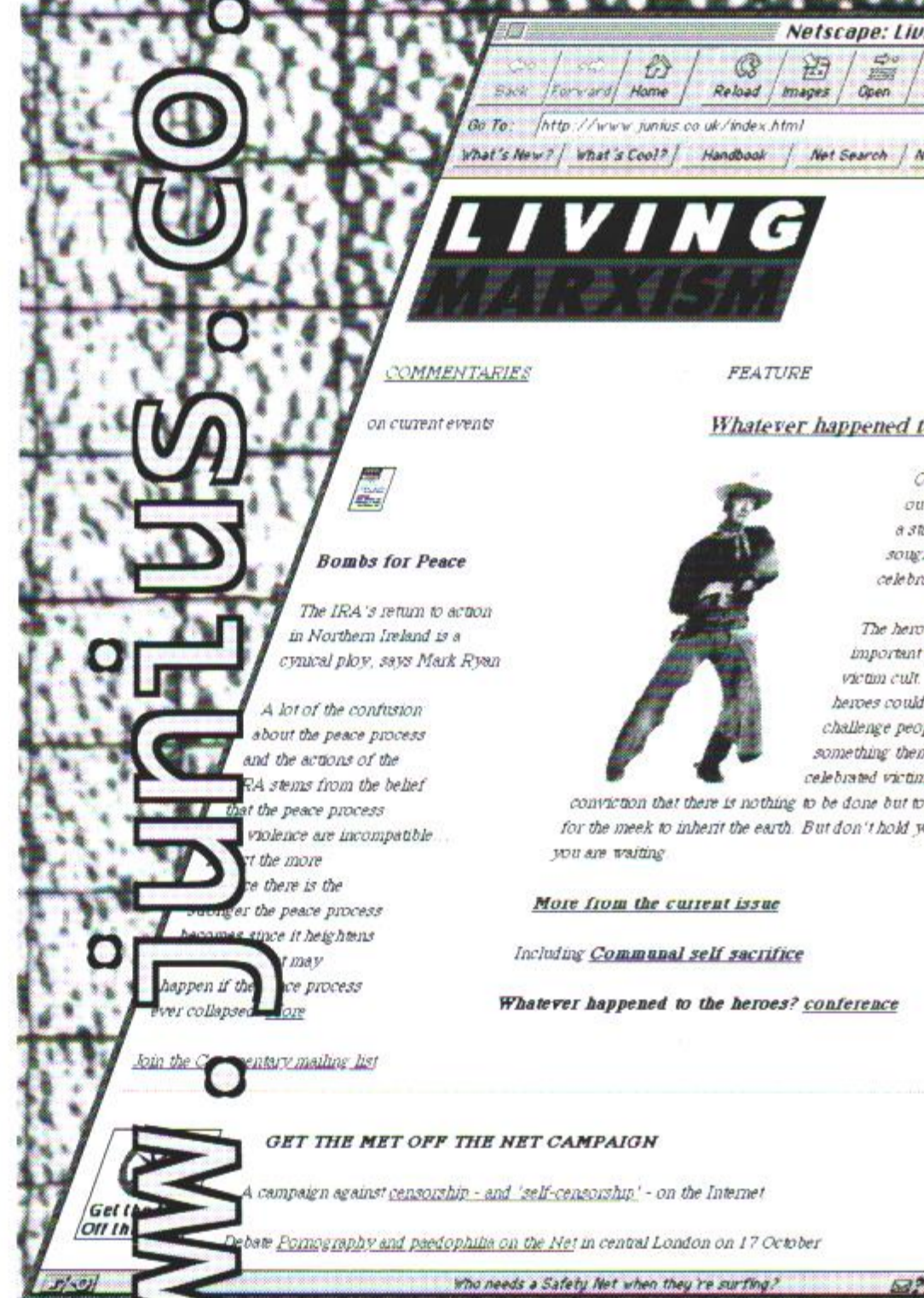
Biking is real, sport

Come on, Alan Harding. It's a good article ('Only the best will do', September), however it falls flat on the mountain biking. Perhaps the UK is a bit 'altitude challenged' for this sport to have had much of an airing. I'm not biased—my bike is rusting in the shed. However, I have seen some scary downhill and cross-country action on Sky—this is definitely a demanding, world-class sport. If you want to take the piss out of non-sports, how about synchronised swimming?! This is stupid!

Andy Christchurch, New Zealand

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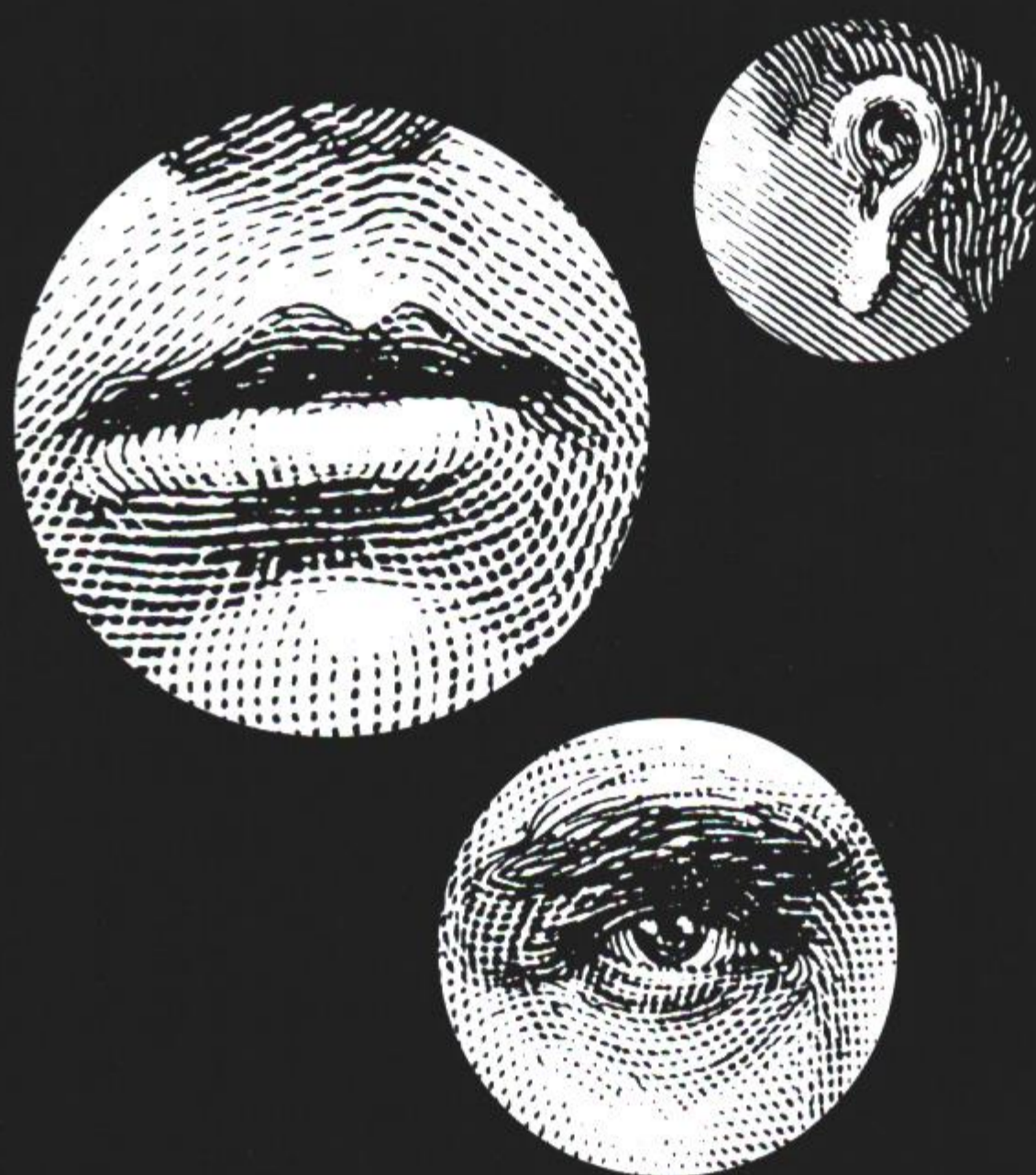


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The real abortion scandal



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

TABOOS

The issue of abortion has hardly been out of the news for months. There have been controversies over the ethics and legality of the 'selective reduction' of twin pregnancies—a procedure where one fetus is killed while the other is left alive. There have been parliamentary bills seeking to outlaw abortions performed because the fetus has Down's syndrome, and attempts to ban a particular method of late abortion. Most recently we have witnessed a debate about whether fetuses feel pain, with the inevitable calls for access to late abortions to be more tightly restricted (see *Living Marxism* September 1996).

All of these discussions and debates have been exploited by the anti-abortion lobby, who have attempted to use the 'yuk' factor to maximum potential. The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children is currently hawking around a video which shows a late abortion in lurid detail, just so we all appreciate exactly what it involves.

It is predictable, indeed inevitable, that the self-styled 'pro-life' lobby will use any opportunity to voice its outright opposition to abortion. Veterans of the campaigns against abortion, such as Jack Scarisbrick and Phylis Bowman, have been banging on about the immorality of ending life in the womb since the 1967 Abortion Act was passed. Their upfront anti-abortion views are as marginal now as they were then, and they are not a particularly serious cause for concern.

What is far more worrying is that many who broadly accept the need for legalised abortion are now complaining that the law is being abused by abortion-happy women. The recent debates have been marked by widespread agreement that women now have access to abortion 'on request'—something which the 1967 Abortion Act never intended—and that consequently

the law needs to be tightened. In particular voices have been raised about the incidence of 'social' abortion; that is, abortion carried out not on narrow medical grounds, but because the woman does not feel her social and economic circumstances allow her to cope with continuing the pregnancy.

The flames of debate about the abuse of the abortion law were fanned on Radio 4's *Today* programme in August, when an unnamed gynaecologist said that his unit provided abortion on request and that he would refuse to employ a doctor who insisted on counselling women about other options such as adoption. Dame Jill Knight, prominent anti-abortion MP, objected that this was a far remove from what those who voted for the 1967 Act had in mind: 'They did not intend that it should be used simply when the woman did not want the child. There had to be a good reason.'

Others who do not share Knight's hardline anti-abortion stance have been vocal in agreement with her complaints about the way in which the law is being interpreted. Professor Phillip Bennett, at the centre of the row about selective abortion, commented in the *Sunday Express* that: 'it is well known that [the law] amounts to abortion on demand in the way that some doctors interpret it. Some say the law puts doctors in the position of "playing God", in reality it is usually the woman concerned who decides whether or not to terminate a pregnancy.'

But do women really have access to abortion on request in Britain today? And if they did, would there be anything wrong with it? The answer to both questions is 'No'. Women are not in control of decisions about abortion, but they should be.

The problem with the 1967 Abortion Act is precisely the opposite of what is

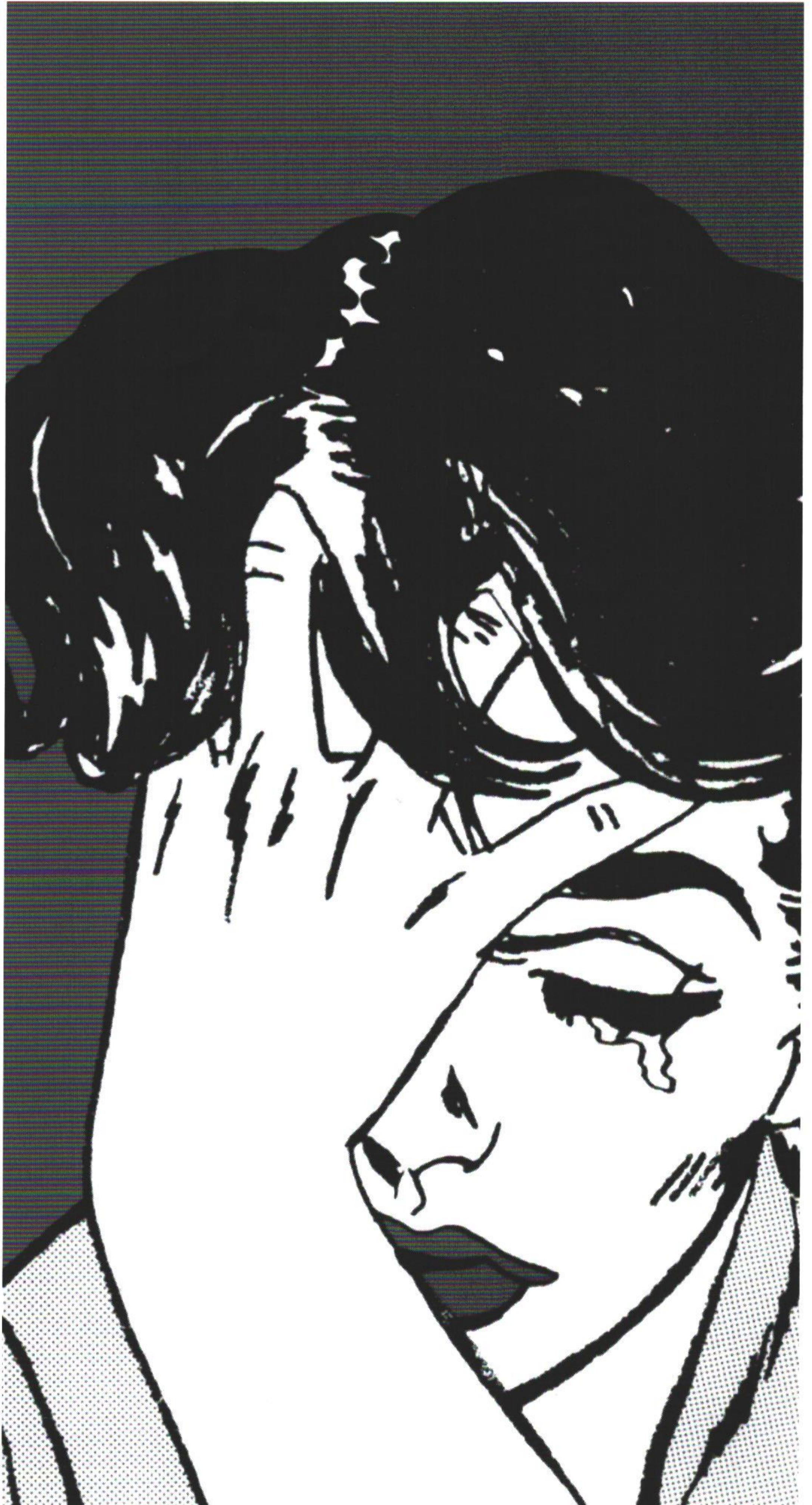
Why should women have to show that they are sick, unstable or inadequate in order to end an unwanted pregnancy, asks Ellie Lee

being argued today. It imposes restrictions on access to abortion which allow doctors and others to make decisions about women's lives. Women with unwanted pregnancies may have to jump through legal and medical hoops to get an abortion. The recent controversies have shown how the abortion law can turn decisions over what should be a private operation into a public circus involving the media, parliament and the courts.

The British law is exceptional in allowing legal abortion in clearly prescribed circumstances, while giving women no *right* to it in any stage of pregnancy. The 1967 Abortion Act states that abortion is not an offence only when two doctors agree in good faith that the procedure is necessary for one or more of the following reasons:

- a) the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated
- b) the termination is necessary to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman
- c) the pregnancy has not exceeded its 24th week and the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated
- d) the pregnancy has not exceeded its 24th week, and the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the existing child(ren) of the family of the pregnant woman greater than if the pregnancy were terminated
- e) there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

In every sense the law is framed to ensure that nothing regarding the ►



decision-making process rests in the woman's own hands. It is a medical decision taken in the interests of the woman's health as they are defined by her doctors—not one of them, but two.

Of the legal criteria for abortion given above the most commonly-used provision is c—the argument that the physical or mental health of the woman will be impaired if the pregnancy continues. More than 80 per cent of abortions presently fall under this category.



unless there is something wrong with her, unless she would be an unfit mother. The woman must be deemed medically unable to carry the pregnancy on, too psychologically unstable to do so, or unable to manage for some reason with another child in the family.

In other words, current abortion law demands that, in order to have an operation she feels she needs to live her life, a woman must convince two doctors (and possibly the world) that she is sick, unstable or inadequate in some way.

asked the courts to stop somebody else's heart transplant because they objected to the principle of blood transfusions.

Those who oppose the demands for a review of the abortion law usually counter that the 1967 Act is fine as it is. But nothing could be further from the truth. The insistence that abortion should be available only in strictly prescribed circumstances stigmatises the procedure and the women who want it, implying that abortion should only be available as a last resort for pathetic

The law is not too liberal, but too restrictive

Interpreted liberally, this clause can allow for very early abortion in a wide range of situations. The doctors can if they wish make the case that an abortion in early pregnancy is statistically less risky to a woman's health than continuing the pregnancy to full term and undergoing labour. Doctors can argue that the notion of mental health should be interpreted broadly, so as to include states of anxiety and distress, emotions experienced by every woman who has an unwanted pregnancy and is seeking abortion. Liberal doctors will argue that forcing a woman to continue an unwanted pregnancy will inevitably be damaging to her mental well-being.

It is this kind of liberal interpretation of the law that allows most women to get abortions today. It permits abortion clinics run by charities such as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and the Marie Stopes organisation to offer abortion to almost any woman who requests one. But this by no means is 'abortion on request'.

Many women requesting abortion are refused by doctors who object to abortion on principle, or who interpret the law more tightly. But more importantly, even liberal doctors have to play the game and write on a form that they have agreed to the abortion because, for whatever reason, the woman could not cope with the pregnancy.

There is nothing in the law that allows for a woman who is declared fit, healthy and of sound mind to end an unwanted pregnancy. A woman cannot have her pregnancy terminated just because she does not *want* a baby. The law presumes that any 'normal' woman who becomes pregnant should continue the pregnancy to full term,



And this is the law which we are now told panders too much to women's wishes.

Even when doctors will agree to an abortion, there is no guarantee that a woman will be able to get the procedure done on the NHS. A third of women who terminate pregnancies still pay for their abortions, funding a procedure that a doctor has deemed clinically appropriate out of their own pockets.

The law is not too liberal, but too restrictive. It was designed to stand in opposition to a woman's freedom to live her life as she sees fit. It continues to deny women with unwanted pregnancies the right to live as autonomous adults with control over their own destinies. Women are the ones who have to live with the consequences of unplanned pregnancies, they should have the right to decide their future.

It is perverse that any law should govern the availability of abortion. There should be no regulation or control imposed by any third party on a woman's decision-making capacity. Whether a woman wants to continue or terminate a pregnancy is a matter for her to decide. Beyond this, the only issue at stake is a medical matter of the procedure that will best suit the stage she is at in the pregnancy—a matter for the woman and her doctor to decide in private.

In this sense abortion should surely be viewed like any other operation. In the end it simply comes down to a woman needing access to an operation—there are no other issues involved. When anti-abortion activists tried to get a court order to interfere in a woman's abortion during the 'selective termination' row this summer, it was as grotesque as if Jehovah's Witnesses had

women who could not otherwise cope.

In reality women need abortion as a back-up to contraception if they are to enjoy sex but regulate when they have children.

In the real world accidental pregnancy is simply a risk of having sex. No contraception provides total protection against pregnancy. Studies have shown that around half of all pregnancies are unintended—a consequence of contraceptive failure or of the failure to use it. Regardless of how 'responsible' a woman might be, things can go wrong. These unwanted pregnancies are why the abortion figures are so high—in the region of 180 000 a year in Britain. Four in every 10 women will have an abortion at some time in their lives.

If we are honest we have to admit that abortion is used to regulate fertility, but we should also stress that it is right and proper that it should be. If abortion cannot be used as a backstop in the case of contraceptive failure, the future for sexually active women becomes entirely unpredictable. Sex becomes directly linked once more to having babies—a notion which might please the churches and moralist pro-family campaigns, but would surely strike fear into the hearts of most of us.

Women need free access to the procedure to end pregnancies that are unwanted. Abortion is now a relatively simple and safe procedure, especially compared to other operations on which there are no specific legal restrictions. The abortion law is bad, not because it allows women too much freedom, but because it makes them beg and act the inadequate in order to get an operation they need if they are to have some measure of control over their lives. ●



Who will disagree with the Dunblane parents?

Every time I see the 'Dunblane parents' paraded in the media I feel queasy. Not because it brings back the horror of the massacre, but because there is something disgusting in the way that the families of the victims have been elevated into 'expert' moral custodians for the rest of us.

Switch on the Labour Party conference and you see the delegates giving rapturous applause to a 'Dunblane relative' advising the conference on the need for an immediate ban on hand guns. Open the newspaper and you see a 'Dunblane parent' advising schools throughout the country on how to inspect work materials to ensure they contain no pictures of guns. It is absurd. Why should a tragic bereavement confer the right to dictate social policy? How does suffering a private tragedy qualify anybody to be a public spokesman?

Don't get me wrong. I too was shocked and distressed by Thomas Hamilton's senseless massacre of 16 infants. I remember vividly hearing the first news of the shooting when I was collecting my own infant from his nursery. As I heard the news on the car radio, I wept. The anguish of parents trying to discover if their child was among the dead and the naive bewilderment of the surviving children served to underscore the scale of the tragedy.

The fact that the parents of the Dunblane victims have retained their sanity is, to me, evidence of the toughness of people and I applaud them for that. But the fact that they have suffered does not give them the right to determine social policy—on gun law, on education, on capital punishment or on anything else.

Victims and families of victims have no claim to be experts on anything but suffering. The fact that someone has shot dead your son or daughter gives you unique insight into what it feels like to be bereaved, but that is all. It may motivate you to learn about related matters, such as gun control, but it does not confer instant 'expert status'.

It is understandable that those with links to the Dunblane school where the massacre took place feel strongly that handguns should be banned, or even that children should be kept ignorant of their existence. But the fact that they feel this way, and feel it passionately, does not make their views correct. Indeed, the views of the victims and their relatives are probably the least likely to be cool, objective or rational assessments of all the facts and the factors involved.

In October we heard that Scottish education chiefs offered an unreserved apology, after a five-year old survivor of the massacre was asked to colour in worksheets which happened to include pictures of guns. The issue arose after a massacre survivor's mother was shocked to see a gun included among 15 items on a worksheet used by her daughter. The children were supposed to colour in the pictures and fill in missing letters from the names of the objects.

Veronica Hutchinson, the mother in question, complained to the school teacher, who was 'very apologetic' and promised to check everything in future to make sure it did not happen again. The director of education for the local council condemned the offending worksheet

as 'insensitive and inappropriate'. He has written to all schools in the area to say that all teaching material must be reviewed.

It may have been insensitive to have exposed the youngsters to such a worksheet—but why inappropriate? Presumably the authors of the worksheet had chosen to include a gun because a picture of a gun is easily recognisable to young children and 'gun' is a short, easy-to-spell word. Looked at from an educational perspective it seems that it would be as appropriate to include as 'cat'. A more appropriate response to Mrs Hutchinson would have been to point out that the kids are going to be exposed to pictures of guns and stories involving guns in the big wide world outside the school gates, and the quicker they adjust to it the better.

Veronica Hutchinson, however, believes that 'gun is not a word we should be using in our children's education'. She has appealed to schools all over the country to check their teaching materials for 'this sort of thing'. One wonders if she has asked for the same reaction in respect of pictures of cars. A child is far more likely to have been injured or bereaved as a result of a car accident than as result of a gun massacre. Yet if anybody insisted that pictures of cars and stories about them were banned in case they upset these youngsters, the suggestion would be dismissed as impractical and inappropriate. (Although in an age when serious newspapers can write editorials about the demon car having committed 'genocide', it may not be long before the 'c' word, too, is deemed inappropriate by some).

Veronica Hutchinson's suggestion that teachers should vet teaching material for evidence of guns is stupid, but no one will condemn it as such because she has direct experience of the tragedy and so is above contradiction. To disagree seems almost disrespectful of the memories of those that have died. The clear implication of the discussion of gun control, for example, is that anybody who questions the Dunblane parents' point of view is dancing on their children's graves. And yet it is about time people did start disagreeing loudly with the more ludicrous suggestions that are given moral authority by being put forward in the name of the Dunblane relatives.

The biggest favour that anybody could do the classmates of those shot dead in March would be to help them to understand that their experience was unique; that hand guns are no better and no worse than the people who keep them; that pictures of guns will not hurt them, and that, rather than hiding from things that we find scary, usually it is better to face up to them.

The biggest favour anybody could do for the Dunblane parents is to say: only you know what it is to suffer in the way that you have. Your suffering makes you deserving of our compassion, but it does not make you deserving of our intellectual respect. Your views on gun control policies should carry no more weight than those of anybody else. Your views on what is and is not appropriate educational material are no more expert than mine.

And I do not want the content of my son's school lessons being dictated by the actions of a madman. ●

Victims have no claim to be experts

Rape: a special case?

Sara Hinchliffe sees big problems with the demand for special protection for rape victims in court



'Why did they let him rape me again?'
Julia Mason
(*Daily Mail*, 28 August 1996)

High-profile cases, like that of Julia Mason (the rape victim cross-examined by her attacker), have fuelled complaints about the criminal justice system failing rape victims, and led to increased demands for the courts to grant special treatment to women in rape cases. All sides in the debate accept that rape is such a traumatic crime that its victims need to be treated differently from those in other criminal cases. As some commentators have noted, the legal system and the police are now more sympathetic to rape victims than ever before:

'While once often the object of ridicule,

contempt and suspicion, rape victims are now more likely to attract understanding and compassion. The cruelty and sexism of the law and legal processes have been widely exposed and significant changes introduced.' (Jennifer Temkin, *Rape and the Criminal Justice System*, 1995, p xv)

Now more changes in the legal process seem likely, as the experts line up to put forward their pet theories about how rape trials should be handled. Victim Support is demanding screens for victims, so that they no longer have to face the defendant in court. Julie Bindel, of the International Conference on Violence, Abuse and Women's Citizenship, told the *Guardian* that 'the law needs to be changed to ensure that no other woman who has been through the ordeal of rape has

to endure further assaults upon her in the witness box. Defendants in sexual offence cases should not be allowed to defend themselves'. Professor Sue Lees of the University of North London went further, describing such cross-examinations as 'a form of torture. It's a continuation of the attack, except it's in front of an audience. It should not be allowed' (*Guardian*, 23 August 1996).

Anti-woman

In her new book Susan Edwards, consultant on violence against women to the Metropolitan Police, argues that the whole principle of criminal justice in rape cases is tainted: 'The second assault of the woman is perpetrated by the criminal justice process; this second abuse reaching its zenith in the trial where her assault becomes



Proposals to let defendants in rape trials give evidence from behind screens are modelled on the treatment of children in the courts

pornography, as defence counsel must, if they are to succeed, construct the defendant's account as a matter of consensual sex—controverting the woman's account of non-consensual violence.' (*Sex and Gender in the Legal Process*, 1996, p334)

It is not just academics and feminists that are arguing for changes in criminal procedures in the case of rape. The Labour Party has made a play for the feminist vote in its New Labour—New Law 'n' Order campaign by promising to come down hard on rapists, and to care more for victims. In an interview published in October's issue of *Marie Claire*, Tony Blair promised that a Labour Home Secretary would reform the Crown Prosecution Service to make it 'more responsive to the needs of victims', and would change a number of court procedures, introducing

a measure to prevent 'intrusive questioning about a victim's sexual history'.

The way the law operates in rape cases has already undergone important changes over the past 20 years. The definition of rape has been expanded to include acts such as marital rape and buggery, and a range of 'rape shield laws' have been introduced which limit the defence's use of evidence about the woman's sexual history in court. All of these changes—and particularly the most recent proposals for reform—are premised on the idea that rape is such a traumatic crime that women need special treatment, and that the normal principles of law cannot apply.

That, however, is a misguided assumption which can do no good either to the cause of justice or to women's interests.

The changes to legal procedures now being proposed may seem reasonable enough in response to an emotive rape case like Julia Mason's. But seen in a broader context, these reforms would set some dangerous precedents. Denying the defendant in a rape case the right to defend themselves would seriously undermine the presumption that we are all innocent until proven guilty; instead they would be treated as a rapist before the trial even began. Similarly, introducing measures to 'protect' rape victims from 'intrusive questioning' would undermine the ability of the system to establish the truth in open court through testing contrasting accounts of what happened. Instead trials would be conducted in an atmosphere of even greater secrecy, where the Crown Prosecution Service and the judge, rather than the jury, are able to decide what is and is not relevant evidence to be considered.

The assumption that in rape cases witnesses need protection from aggressive questioning, because to contradict their word is to make a further violent assault on them, undermines the possibility of a full defence. The basis of cross-examination is for the defence to demonstrate that witnesses are not telling the truth. If it is an assault, or 'pornography', to try to prove that the prosecution witnesses are mistaken or lying, then we have to accept the word of the victim uncritically. These proposals severely weaken defendants' rights to use every tool at their disposal to establish their innocence. Little wonder, then, that the prosecutors and judges have proved so willing to accommodate the feminist critics' concerns about rape trials.

Taboo

However, the contemporary discussion of rape is not just prejudicial to due legal process. It is also prejudicial to the interests of women.

No one would deny that rape trials are traumatic and distressing for the woman. However, holding up rape as a unique evil, the worst thing that can happen to a woman, can only increase the trauma. It is the fetishised discussion of rape, rather than the physical act itself, that makes it such a traumatic crime.

There is nothing in the act of rape—non-consensual penetration of the vagina by the penis—that should make it worse than any other type of assault. If you look simply at the act of violence, it is hard to argue that being raped is worse than, say, being glassed in the face or knifed in the stomach. But the sexual form of rape means that all society's taboos about sex become wrapped up in the discussion. In our society, sex is ►

A special case?

associated with our most intimate lives, and is supposed only to be experienced in a loving relationship. Sex outside the sphere of love is considered immoral, dirty; which is why sexual violation is experienced as a violation not just of the body, like any other type of assault, but of the victim's whole character and personality.

But rape has nothing to do with sex; it is a violent assault that takes a sexual form. Every study of rapists confirms that rape is about the violent degradation of women, not the sexual fulfilment of the rapist. It is important to strip the taboos that surround sex from the discussion of rape, and to treat it in the same way as any other crime of violence.

The continuing discussion of how much worse rape is than other crimes can only contribute to making it so. The moral stigmas mixed up in the ongoing debate about rape can only make women feel unnecessarily that it is worse than any other assault, and that they should somehow be ashamed of being raped—an unlikely response from the victim of any other crime.

Child-like

Declaring that rape is a uniquely evil crime which ruins the lives of its victims is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. It would be far better for rape victims if they were treated in the same way as others who have suffered violent crimes; this would provide the basis for making rape, and the legal process, less emotive and less traumatic.

Instead, the proposed legal changes will contribute to making the issue of rape even more fetishised. Worse, they promote an image of women as feeble victims: too pathetic to face their alleged attacker or be cross-examined in court, unable to tell the truth about their experience without breaking down, and generally needing to be treated like frightened children.

The argument for using screens and video links to protect witnesses in rape trials is an example of an apparently woman-friendly proposal which in fact presents a degraded portrait of what women are like. It is ironic that leading lights in the campaign for protection for rape victims have called for women to be given the same special treatment in court as children giving evidence in abuse cases. Perhaps these people need to be reminded that children are protected in this way while giving evidence because they are considered to be easily intimidated and led astray, and are incapable of taking independent responsibility for what they say or do. The argument that rape victims should be protected in court in the same way seems to suggest that women suffer the same shortcomings as children. ●

RAPING YARNS

Rape has always been the subject of unpleasant myths; however, the most worrying ones today are not of the 'she-was-asking-for-it-in-that-skirt' variety. These days, feminist scare stories about rape are peddled as good coin.

● Myth: 'There is an epidemic of rape'

Hard statistics about rape are notoriously hard to come by. However, there is an alarming trend to hype the figures. According to Catharine MacKinnon, rape 'happens to almost half of all women at least once in their lives' (quoted in Christina Hoff Sommers' excellent chapter on rape research in her book *Who Stole Feminism?*, 1994, p210). A figure of one in four has become an authoritatively quoted reference to support the idea that there is an epidemic of rape.

The figure comes from a survey of American college women conducted for *Ms* magazine by Mary Koss and reported in 1988. But, as subsequent research has shown, the survey is methodologically flawed and uses dubious definitions of rape (including one defining rape as having unwanted sex after drinking). In fact, 73 per cent of those categorised as victims by Koss did not see their experience as rape; 42 per cent of these 'victims' had sex with their 'attacker' again. According to other researchers, if you exclude those who had sex when they did not intend to because of the influence of drink or drugs, and those who did not consider that their experience was rape, the number falls from one in four to between one in 22 and one in 33 (figures from *Rape and the Criminal Justice System* and *Who Stole Feminism?*).

● Myth: 'It is harder than ever to get a rape conviction' (Marie Claire, October 1996)

It is true that the number of recorded rapes has roughly doubled since 1986 (to around 5000 in 1994), and the rate of acquittals has also risen, from 25 per cent in 1985 to 52 per cent in 1994. These figures are often cited to argue that rape is on the increase while official complacency makes it hard to get a rape conviction. Yet, ironically, the figures actually reflect the increased attention paid to rape by the police, the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service over the past decade.

In 1985 the Home Office for the first time required the police to record all allegations of rape, instead of 'no-criming' those considered unlikely to result in a prosecution. High-profile police campaigns to encourage women to report rape and the establishment of rape suites in police stations also contributed to the rising number of reported rapes. In effect, changes in recording procedures encouraged more alleged rapes to be recorded, despite the fact that the additional numbers were unlikely to result in a conviction.

As part of its new enthusiasm for the issue, the CPS has also increased the number of prosecutions for rape (up from 565 in 1985 to 936 in 1994), taking cases to court which it would previously have considered hopeless. Unsurprisingly, this has not led to any real increase in the number of convictions—there were 418 convictions in 1985 and 432 in 1994—but has meant an increase in the rate of acquittals.

The figures suggest that, despite the far greater effort which the legal system now puts into getting convictions, a similar number of convictable offences of rape are committed each year (figures from *Sex and Gender in the Legal Process*).

● Myth: 'The courts are soft on rapists'

The days when judges regularly let rapists off with probation or a fine are long gone. Nowadays such cases (like the one in 1993 where Judge John Prosser told a 15-year old rapist to pay the victim £500 for a holiday) hit the headlines because of their rarity.

When rape is successfully prosecuted, the sentences are far more severe. New sentencing guidelines (Billam) were introduced for rape in 1986. In 1985, only 26 per cent of rapists were sentenced to five years or more. In 1993, 90 per cent of rapists went to prison (with an additional two per cent detained in hospital and four per cent in youth custody). Of those imprisoned, just one per cent were sentenced to less than five years. As an example of current practice, Ralston Edwards the rapist who cross-examined Julia Mason was given two life sentences in October. (Figures from *Sex and Gender in the Legal Process*)

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Keeping the home fires burning

Do women really want to go out to work, or are they happier at home? Ann Bradley meets some 'professional mums'



The ideal might be a society which is divided into women who are career-minded, want to work and don't have children, and women who are happy in the home and have large families of six or seven children', argued sociologist Catherine Hakim during a discussion at the London School of Economics earlier this year.

Hakim was debating the points raised in her book *Key Issues in Women's Work*, a study which has aggravated feminists by questioning the extent to which women really want

to be integrated into the workforce. Hakim's argument is that gender differentials in the European workforce are nowadays as much due to choice as to discrimination. It is wrong, she says, to argue that responsibility for families in general and lack of childcare in particular hamper women's participation in the world of work. Instead, many women choose to stay home to care for their families of their own free will.

Hakim has attracted considerable publicity for 'championing the housewife' and, unless she is lying—

and there is no reason to believe she needs to—her stance has struck a chord with a significant proportion of women. She claims to have received 'a huge mail-bag' of letters from 'full-time home makers' thanking her for standing up for 'the silent majority of housewives' who have felt devalued by the rise of career women and feminists.

Furthermore, Hakim's arguments seem to be supported by a comparative European survey of women's attitudes to work and home life, carried out by the Whirlpool Foundation in Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Spain.



Between two-thirds and four-fifths of women of working age identified some combination of work and family as the ideal lifestyle for women. Few said they wanted to work full time, and less than 10 per cent accepted as ideal a situation where both parents worked full time.

The Whirlpool study suggests that most women see their waged work as of secondary importance in their lives. Across the five countries taken together, just 14 per cent of women saw themselves as having a career rather than a job. By contrast, 94 per cent of women agreed that the family was the most important part of their lives. Britain ranked higher than average at 96 per cent, while 84 per cent of British women felt it was their responsibility to take care

Despite the fact that women now make up almost half of the workforce, and are now out-performing boys in education and entering professions like accountancy and law on an equal basis with men, the implication of Hakim's work is that really we crave to be changing nappies and baking home-made bread.

The respondents—and the survey was conducted by Mori, so we can assume an appropriately representative sample—were not even resentful of the pressures of family life; 82 per cent of women insisted that they get plenty of support from family and friends. And amazingly, a third of women claimed not to feel under pressure or stress from their family. Just eight per cent of British women claimed their

ask if someone's family is 'emotionally demanding', as the Whirlpool survey did, it is likely that respondents will answer in the negative (unless you happen to catch them in the middle of a full-scale family row). To admit that your family is emotionally demanding implies either a criticism of them or an admission that you are finding the job a strain. For many women these are still hard admissions to make, especially to a stranger with a clipboard who seems to be putting their family on the spot.

However, even casting this doubt on the new evaluation of women's attitudes, it has to be said that Hakim and her colleagues have a point. Although women return to work after having a child much



of people in their family. When asked whether they wished to give up some of their responsibilities, 54 per cent were emphatic that they did not. Other surveys have shown that about half of all women and men in Britain still accept the traditional division of labour in the family, where the husband's primary role is to go out and earn money while the wife's main responsibility is to keep the home fires burning.

So much for the new age of equality, where women are perceived to be shattering the glass ceiling and making their own mark in a man's world.

families were tiring and created work for them. Are these women for real?

Attitudinal surveys are always fraught with difficulties, and there is no doubt that the Whirlpool survey and Hakim's work fail to take into account the fact that answers are always influenced by people's expectations of what are socially acceptable opinions. Even in a confidential interview, it is difficult for women to admit that their families are a pain. Besides, such is the nature of family life that the stresses and tensions are offset by affection and love. So if you

earlier than previously, it is still common for women to stay at home for the first five years of a child's life—or to switch to part-time work. And it is clear that the reluctance which some women have about returning is not totally reducible to lack of childcare facilities or other material factors. Many women, of course, have no choice about their position—they cannot obtain suitable work to allow them to combine work and family life—but others do, and choose to stay at home.

However, when examining the choices women make it is important ►

MONTAGE: DAVE CHAPMAN



to remember a point that Hakim seems to forget. Choices are made in specific contexts. A woman who chooses to identify herself as a mother and housewife rather than as a worker or career woman does so, not as the consequence of an abstract dilemma, but in response to a particular set of circumstances.

For example, for many young working class women in badly-paying jobs, family life is an escape from the tedium of the shop floor or cafe counter.

for the BBC. When she left work she fully intended to return, but four years and another child later she has no plans to go back to 'that hideous world of back-stabbing, hustling and bullshit'. Becky feels that in the time that she worked in TV her job changed from a highly-paid and creative career, to an insecure position dependent on getting one-up on other people. She explains the reason for this as the growth in 'contract culture', whereby everyone is forced into competition for slots and programmes and temporary contracts. Becky sees herself as fortunate to be out of it. Her marriage to a university lecturer allows the family to live comfortably without her going to work.

Lynn, although not as affluent, has made a similar 'choice'. She worked as a manager for a chain of shoe retailers before giving up work when she had her first son, who is now eight. Lynn says her family of three boys are more than a full-time job and she is resentful when friends imply that she does not work. It is easy to understand why; she marshals the troupe with an organisational expertise that would shame many office managers. She describes herself as a 'professional mum' and claims that her current job is more 'varied, challenging and exciting' than anything she has done for money. Lynn believes that only a small number of women are fortunate enough to be employed in waged-work which is as creative and challenging as 'shaping new human beings'.

Sue, a former family planning doctor, has given up work because she found working motherhood an 'impossible and frustrating compromise': 'Even though my daughter was in a nursery, I still had to take account of her needs throughout the day. I was constantly juggling time-schedules to make sure I could get out of work in time to pick her up. Early morning sessions were a problem because the nursery didn't open until 8am and I was often late picking her up because invariably it's the last patient who needs to talk.'

'Evening functions and weekend conferences were the biggest problem. I realised that they are so popular with male colleagues because they are a way to escape from the family. For them it's simply a matter of leaving "the wife" to cope. For me it meant arranging pre-prepared food, my mother coming to stay and worried phone calls home every few hours. I was no longer doing my job well and I wasn't being a good mother either.'

For Sue, something had to go. And it is not possible to take a career break from motherhood or resign from your family.

All of these women might be seen as examples of the new stay-at-home

professionals, putting their families first by choice as Hakim says.

Only Sue expresses serious regret about leaving her paid work. But the decisions they all made were not 'free' choices. They were influenced by the limitations of social support available to working mothers, and the pressures of work—whether that meant unacceptably intensive professional practices, or tedious underpaid shop work. Of course, these pressures do not bear down exclusively on women. Men suffer many of the same difficulties at work. But a society which continues to define women's social role as predominantly caring and men's as predominantly breadwinning allows women an avenue of retreat which is not open to men.

Family haven

So does this mean that women who can 'escape' to the family home are better off than men? No, it definitely does not. Regardless of how individuals feel about their job, waged work confers indisputable advantages for those who do it.

First, a full time job brings with it an independent income. Stay-at-home mothers trade the hassles of employment for dependence on either the state or their partner. Both sources of support are potentially unreliable and demeaning.

Second, a retreat into home life—however cosy—inevitably isolates women from having any significant social influence. Raising a family undoubtedly develops complex skills and puts you in a position of enormous influence over a small number of people—but at the expense of severing contact with and influence in the outside world. The one-o'clock club for stay-at-home mothers may possibly provide an arena for discussion about the problems of humanity, but it is not a forum in which they can be solved.

Life today is tough—and family life, for all its stresses and strains, can seem like a welcome retreat. Not for nothing did Trotsky refer to it as a 'haven in a heartless world'—as life gets tougher it seems like even more of a haven.

It is understandable why some women should opt for full-time family life. It is easier to make bread than to make an impact in the world of work or influence changes in society. The choice between one or the other may seem like a choice that has to be made. But Hakim's vision of a polarised society where full-time mothers raise children and professional women fulfil their ambitions free of the tensions of family life is nothing short of a nightmare. The fulfilment of women's potential demands a social structure where women can enjoy both a career and a family. Why shouldn't we have it all?

A retreat into home life— however cosy—inevitably isolates

This is one of the reasons why teenage pregnancy rates remain high in many of the poorer inner-city areas, despite the prevalence of family planning and sex education programmes. It is also why such young working class women are often less likely to have an abortion than the middle class girls who see a baby as an obstacle to their university course or career.

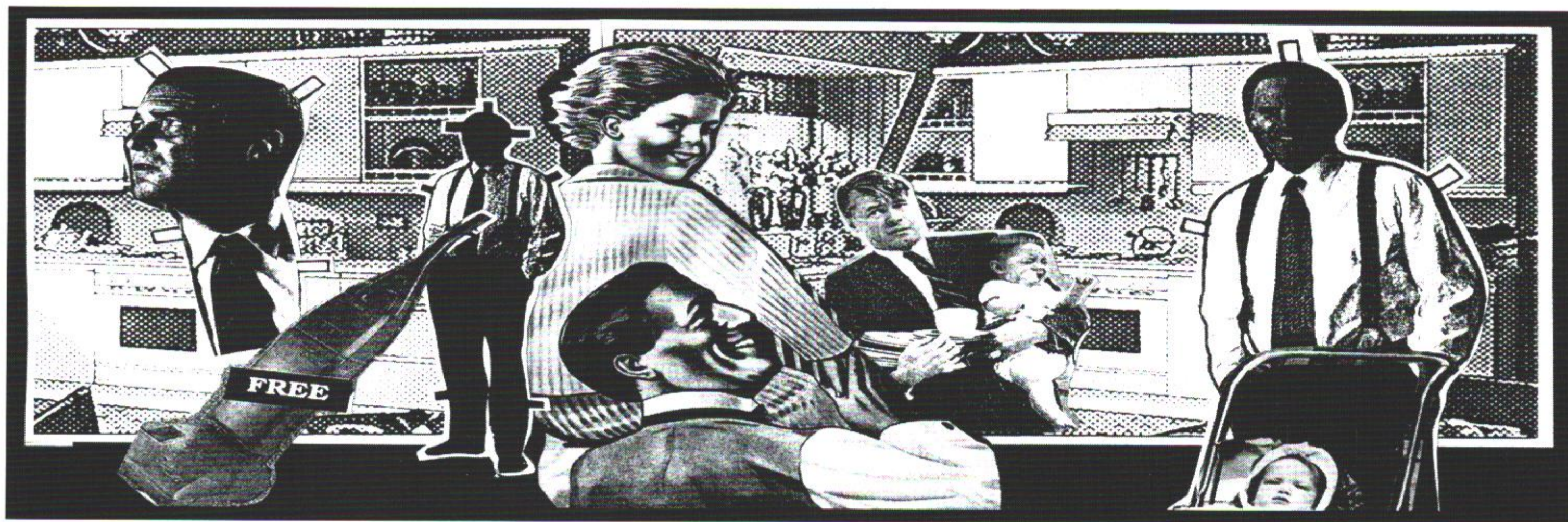
Sexual health professionals often have misplaced assumptions about the aspirations of young women, insisting that pregnancies to single women—especially teenagers—are unplanned and unwanted and could be prevented by better sex education and access to contraception. For many young women, however, motherhood is understandably preferable to working in McDonalds—it is more interesting and confers more status. For many older women too, when wages are no higher than benefits, what is the advantage of working? The argument that waged work offers a chance to get out of the home and exchange the tedium of your own four walls for the company of colleagues, does not seem so attractive when unemployment remains high, wages and working conditions are poor, and the mother and toddler group provides more chance for a chat.

'Professional mum'

Interviews with professional women indicate why home life can now hold attractions for them, too. Becky seems the most unlikely 'stay-at-home mum'. Before having her first child at 31 she was a producer of TV documentaries

Mother's little helpers

Linda Murdoch on moves to get men to take unpaid paternity leave



MONTAGE: DAVE CHAPMAN

Shortly after his daughter was born, John, a City accountant, discovered that the two weeks he had taken as paternity allowance had been docked as holiday leave. When he queried the error he was told that the error was his: the firm did not have paternity pay. John was surprised. His wife was not. As she put it, 'Women have always cared for kids for free. What's so different about men?'

The UK is one of the worst countries in Europe in which to be a working father, offering no statutory right to paternity leave. Germany allows men up to 36 months with varying rates of pay or benefits, while Italy offers six months leave on 30 per cent of your salary. The Tories have used Britain's opt-out clause to block European directives on statutory paternity leave. Here, any leave a new father gets at the birth of his child is entirely at the discretion of his employer and usually amounts to a few hours at the birth and a few days after.

Time off for fathers is now a live issue, but with a new twist. In the past, there were calls for paid paternity leave so that fathers—as the main family breadwinners—should not lose earnings at this critical time. Today there is no campaign for paid leave for new fathers. Instead, paternity leave has disappeared into the powerful lobby for 'parental leave', a proposal that new parents—usually fathers—be allowed three months or more unpaid leave.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report *Men and Their Children* (April 1996) proposes a battery of measures to ensure that men spend time with their children. The one with the best chance of becoming government policy is a proposal for up to three months unpaid parental leave, aimed at fathers. The IPPR wants this proposal backed up by a tripartite relationship between government, employers and trade unions, to create an atmosphere that heavily encourages men to take parental leave.

The campaign for 'parental leave' is a thinly disguised attempt to set men up as the unpaid nannies of the nineties. The Labour Party's

new *Strategy for Women* notes that British workers 'are alone in having no rights to paternity leave', but concludes only that 'Labour will help working parents share the responsibilities at home and work by giving them the opportunity to take parental leave'. With no mention of pay, of course.

In the past a proposal that men should sacrifice their pay and prospects to look after children, in the way that women have always done, would have been met with derision. Economist Heather Joshi estimates that a mother loses more than half of her potential lifetime earnings compared to a woman who has no children—thanks to the impact of unpaid maternity leave, time out of the labour market and dependence on low-paid part-time work while her children are young ('Combining work and family', *EOC Briefing*, 1996). Now, with the workforce almost 50 per cent female, the expectation is that as women are doing more of what men do—paid work—then men should do more of what women do—unpaid childcare. This argument is not the preserve of feminists. Sir Norman Fowler, former Tory secretary of State for Employment, declared that men 'should play a bigger role at home, to free their wives to go to work. This means a change of attitude—namely that bringing up children is a shared responsibility. It is not just the responsibility of women'.

'Parental leave' or 'family leave' is posed as good for women and their families—and good for the men concerned, too. Getting men back into the home is presented as a positive step in reshaping their values, by countering their career-minded acquisitiveness and imbuing them with a more 'feminised' sense of responsibility.

Agony aunt Claire Rayner and *Guardian* journalist Maureen Freely have both recently argued that men are deeply deprived because they cannot be at home looking after their children. In an article entitled 'Men who choose to get a life', a high flying civil servant who gave it all up for a part-time job so that he could be with his kids waxes lyrical:

'Now I get in [to work] late because I take the children to school and sometimes I leave early to pick them up. I'm responsible for getting them dressed in the morning, bathing them in the evening and all the little domestic things. I have rediscovered what it means to just sit and play. My friends both male and female think it's great—they say I gave up a career and got a life.' (*Independent*, 22 March 1996)

The message today is that men are to be pitied because they are not in a position to be doing what really matters—looking after children. In the past, the lack of social recognition afforded women, their inferior status, was denoted by their role as babysitters and bottlewashers. Even today women's main job is often seen as caring for the family, with paid work something to be fitted around domestic responsibilities or given up altogether (see p16). The moves to get men to take unpaid leave to look after their children signifies the redefinition of men's role nearer to that of women.

The push to get men to take unpaid parental leave reflects the expectations about what men should value and prioritise today. Men are now expected to withdraw into a socially inferior role, one that was once derided by many women keen to escape the trappings of domesticity. In the past, good childcare facilities and good jobs were seen as the vehicle for women to win equality with men. Today, Britain has the worst childcare facilities in Europe. Less than five per cent of under-threes have access to publicly funded childcare facilities, compared to 50 per cent in Denmark. For those aged three-to-school age, 35 per cent have access to publicly funded childcare in the UK compared to over 90 per cent in Belgium and France. But instead of a campaign to improve the provision of childcare, we have one to encourage men to fill the gap.

The promotion of unpaid parental leave signifies the decline of men's status from bread-winning provider to domestic worker and dependant. ●

Is putting a bar through your penis a blow for personal freedom? Jennie Bristow looks into the rise of body piercing

Navel

Ears, nose, navel, lip, tongue, scrotum—if you have it, you can pierce it: legally, healthily and above all respectably. Body piercing is in vogue, and the only limit to what piece of metal you can put where is your own squeamishness.

The image of body piercing has been transformed. Not so long ago piercing, especially of the nipples and genitals, was seen as something done by perverts getting a kick out of SM sex, and associated with violence, pain and wilful self-mutilation. Now, it is quite respectable for anyone to have his or her body pierced without being labelled a pervert. Far from being associated with masochism, piercing is now widely seen as an expression of sensitivity and creativeness.

So why are so many people getting into body piercing today?

My investigation into what I had imagined to be the seedy underworld of genital piercing took me to The Wildcat Collection in Brighton, one of the best-known body piercing shops in the country and little different from any high street fashion jewellery store: clean, brightly lit, with a vast array of multi-coloured jewellery in big glass showcases. Apart from a few disturbing posters on the wall of people hanging from trees by flesh-hooks attached to their chests, the only remarkable thing about Wildcat was the range of jewellery on offer, from discreet studs and rings to spiked nipple collars and 'princess wands': long metal tubes with spiky balls on the end which 'adventurous and ambitious' men can wear inside the penis if they have a certain type of piercing.

Downstairs in Perforations, the body piercing studio, the same air of on-the-edge respectability persists. The studio in which Warren, the piercer, does his business is cleaner and more hygienic than many a doctor's surgery.

According to the manager Rose, Perforations has been established for about three years, 'a long time in the piercing world'. High standards are something that Perforations takes very seriously, priding itself on providing a professional service at affordable prices, ranging from £15 for a facial piercing to £30 for an 'ampallang' (a metal bar through the head of the penis). One of the big problems



in the body piercing industry at the moment, Rose explains, is that more and more unprofessional piercers are getting into it to make money, charging exorbitant rates for non-sterile, badly-performed piercings. 'There are no controls on body piercing at the moment, and there should be', she argues. 'Any bona fide studio would want legislation to protect people from the consequences of a bad piercing.'

Provided you avoid the cowboys, to get yourself pierced is now safer and more acceptable than it has ever been. The professionalisation of the body piercing industry reflects the fact that an increasingly diverse range of people want it done. According to Rose, 'all sorts', from policemen and judges to travellers and junkies, come to Perforations to have all kinds of things pierced. The most

common piercing they do is the navel, and the most unusual is the anal sphincter (use your imagination). Rose has noticed major changes in the kind of people that come for body piercing today, compared to a few years ago. 'Body piercing is more accepted, so we tend to see more "normal" people, like students, now.'

Modern primitives

The new respectability of body piercing has not just come about at the level of professionalism, but has also involved a re-evaluation of assumptions about piercing. In *Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment and Ritual*, editors V Vale and Andrea Juno have compiled a large number of interviews with the 'big names' in the worlds of piercing, tattooing and scarification. What all the interviews have in common is their

gazing



emphasis on the spiritual, transcendental experiences of self-adornment, which have little or nothing to do with the physiological responses of pain or sexual enhancement.

Set up in conscious opposition to SM, violence and aggression, piercing today is presented instead as being about creativity, sensitivity and self-awareness. So for example, Jim Ward, editor of *Piercing Fans International Quarterly*, states that 'the most fundamental reason for being pierced is aesthetic: it looks nice. The second reason is magical or medicinal'. Sexual reasons for piercing are secondary, and Ward is clearly opposed to the notion that it is acceptable to pierce someone for the gratification of their partner: 'to me that's a violation; a subtle form of rape, and I won't be party to that.' (Quoted in *Modern Primitives*, 1989, p161)

The presentation of piercing as a mystical means of self-creation, lies at the core of the new ethos of piercing. It is based on the notion that experimentation with one's body is the way to achieve true freedom and self-fulfilment. In this sense, the culture surrounding body piercing can appear exciting and even liberating, as Vale and Juno's introduction spells out:

'All sensual experience functions to free us from "normal" social restraints, to awaken our deadened bodies to life.... Our most inestimable resource, the unfettered imagination, continues to be grounded in the only truly precious possession we can ever have and know, which is *ours* to do with what we will: *the human body*.' (*Modern Primitives*, p5)

The excitement that surrounds body piercing is based on the assumption

that it is a gentle subversion of moral and social norms, creating the space in which an individual can have freedom and control. The mainstreaming of body piercing takes place in a context where traditional norms, morals and identities are increasingly open to question. As homosexuality, bisexuality, transexuality and transvestism become more accepted, many of the practices and cultural forms associated with them are far less taboo than in previous times. The notion that it is valid to 'create one's own identity' is accepted pretty much across the board.

Body piercing fits very much into this framework. Once sexual norms have been questioned and challenged, the notion of what is and is not 'perverted' changes. If you can change your gender, either through the way you dress or through drugs and operations, then what can be wrong with piercing your nipples? The old lines defining what is right and wrong in personal matters have become blurred. Even if the thought of a stud through your tongue or a collection of labia-rings makes you wince, you can stop at your nose—whatever personal preferences you may have do not easily form the basis of a moral judgement upon somebody else's particular lifestyle choice.

Self-expression

Body piercing, much more than similar forms of self-adornment such as tattooing, scarification or branding, is a clear expression of the contemporary belief in shifting, non-permanent identities. A tattoo or a scar will stay with you for life, whereas a small piercing, wherever it is, will grow out if desired. Although many of those who are into piercing also have tattoos, they draw a very clear distinction between them. Tattoos and other permanent markings are described as representative of something that happened previously: a 'diary' painted on the body, and a visual way of expressing something to the people around you. Piercings, on the other hand, are more intimate and personal, and are seen as an expression of how you feel now.

To the extent to which moral norms have relaxed enough for people to pierce themselves wherever they like without fear of ridicule or condemnation, it is possible to understand why piercing fans celebrate their rings and barbells as an expression of a more free and easy climate. But the question then has to be, so what? What kind of freedom does sticking a piece of metal through your skin bring?

Not so long ago, the notion that piercing yourself could give you some kind of identity would simply not ►

have been considered. Individuals defined themselves not through anything they did to themselves, but through the impact they made on wider society. Whether you defined yourself as a teacher or a lawyer, a Tory or a trade unionist, or even as a lesbian or gay man, your identity related to something that you did and its consequences for the world around you.

As Rose explained it 'Your flesh is the only thing you've got'.

The quest for self-definition that lies at the root of body piercing is the opposite impulse to one through which individuals define themselves by their actions. The very fact that people feel the need to 'define themselves' in relation to themselves is indicative of a deeper belief that it is impossible for individuals fundamentally to affect and change anything other than themselves. By choosing the body as the site for this self-definition, piercing fans indicate just how narrow the sphere for potential change has become. The 'freedom' which an individual experiences through piercing is simply his ability to do what he likes with his own body within the confines of every other constraint placed upon him by society.

Tongue-tied

Despite the radical, liberatory rhetoric that surrounds body piercing, what becomes apparent is that piercing represents no more than a retreat into yourself as the last refuge in what is perceived as a selfish, grasping world. Even the most personal relationships or the most basic features of everyday life are seen as oppressive and immutable, impossible to transform.

As Rose explained it, 'Everything is taken away from us. You get on the bus, go to work, get exploited, go home again. All the time you are giving to people. Your flesh is the only thing you've got'. She added that many people were not even free to do what they wanted with their own bodies, trapped in office jobs where they were forced to look normal. A tongue or genital piercing became their way of expressing themselves, a form of invisible—and silent—defiance. Meanwhile, the problems people experience in their everyday lives—the very reasons why they chose to have a piercing—continue unchallenged.

In a climate of diminished expectations of what it is possible to achieve, it is not surprising that great importance is attached to the most superficial changes made to an individual's lifestyle. Rose's rather depressing explanation of the need to act on the body as 'the only thing you've got' is followed on by her view of the immense possibilities of body piercing as a way of transforming an individual's life. She used the example of getting her own tongue pierced to explain how the process of emancipation-through-piercing worked:

'I used to have a real problem with authority. I was getting seriously exploited in a job, working long hours for very little money, but I was too scared to stand up for myself. Having my tongue pierced was the thing I was most frightened of doing, but in the end I had it done, and two weeks later I quit my job. My tongue piercing has made me much more confident and outspoken.'

You could argue that a change of job can make all the difference to somebody's life, whereas having their tongue pierced would simply give them problems eating for a week. However, the strange twist in all of this is that

attitude to her piercings. 'I had already pierced my nose and left nipple because I thought it looked good. A few months later I wanted to get something else done, but I wasn't sure what. I went along to Perforations and talked to Warren, who did a lucky dip of all the different piercings I could get. The first one I pulled out was the navel, which I didn't want. Then I pulled out a clitoral hood piercing, and thought, why not? The next time I went back to get my tongue pierced, and had my navel done at the same time.'

Andrea believes that many people today get their navel pierced because it is fashionable, 'like getting your first earrings'. However, she does admit that there is something compelling about the experience of having a piercing, particularly a more unusual one:

'There's a sense of achievement about the whole thing, which gives you extra confidence. Once you've got a part of you pierced you become more aware of it—you've made a change to yourself and you have control of it.'

That is hardly surprising. People who pierce their bodies are likely to experience the same sensation as people who take part in a sport or any other activity they have never done

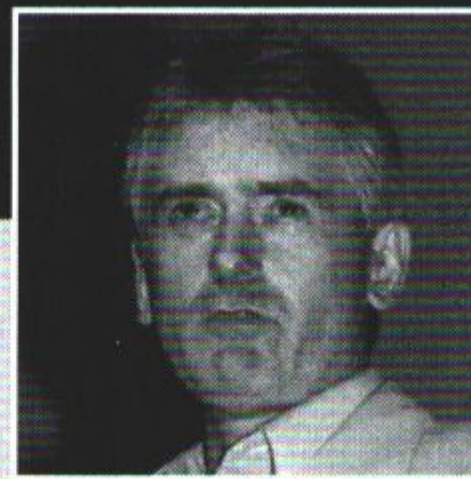


actions which really do transform individuals' lives, such as getting a new job or dumping an unwanted partner, can now be put down as a side-effect of piercing; what you do to yourself is elevated onto a higher plane than anything you do in relation to other people. In a context of low expectations about what can be done, the most utterly trivial act can be elevated to a pseudo-political status.

Luckily, not everyone invests body piercing with the same amount of importance as the hard-core piercing fans do. Andrea, 23 and a final-year humanities student at the University of Brighton, has a more pragmatic

before—you do it because you are scared of it, and because of that you feel a sense of achievement. If you did not like the sport, you do not do it again; and if you do not like the piercing, you take it out and let it heal over. But the buzz that you experience from doing something new is a far cry from claiming that ear-studs, nipple-barbells or labia-rings make a qualitative difference to somebody's life.

At the end of the day, body piercing is a matter of individual taste—and that is all it is. And as Andrea said about her clit piercing, 'I guess it's something to talk about at parties'.



Dr Michael Fitzpatrick

Only two years ago Clive Froggatt was struck off the medical register following his conviction (and 12-month suspended sentence) for obtaining heroin by forging prescriptions. During his trial it was revealed that this successful doctor, a top advisor to Tory health ministers and a leading advocate of health service reforms such as GP fundholding, had a long record of drug abuse. This stretched from taking amphetamines as a junior doctor at St Bartholomew's Hospital, through cocaine to heroin, culminating in an attempt at suicide with a massive overdose when his habit was exposed. It seemed a grim end to a flourishing career.

Yet, after a period of residential therapy at a private clinic favoured by celebrity addicts, Froggatt is back. In September he was the star speaker at a conference at St George's Medical School in London on the theme 'Doctors and their health: who heals the healers?'. His speech was published in full in the weekly magazine *Doctor* distributed free to all GPs, and he was all over the media. Froggatt appears to be planning a new career as representative of suffering doctors and campaigner for their needs.

The key theme in Froggatt's rehabilitation is his claim that he resorted to illicit drugs because he was *ill*. In other words, he should not be held responsible for his past behaviour because he was in the grip of a physical and psychological dependency, for which he needed expert help, not criminal prosecution. It is striking that, in his account to the conference, Froggatt blamed everybody—his former colleagues, the psychiatrists, even his long-suffering wife—rather than himself. It is equally striking that his audience, largely made up of doctors presumably familiar with evasions of responsibility by alcoholics and junkies, should take such pathetic attempts at self-justification as legitimate.

The medicalisation of drug abuse is a quite recent development. I well recall 20 years ago a fellow medical student whose flair in the biochemistry lab extended to the synthesis on a grand scale of LSD. He ended up serving a substantial prison sentence. His problem was that he was interested in illicit drugs, like many of his colleagues then (and no doubt today), because he liked to spend his weekends getting 'out of his head' (as the expression went). If only he had waited a few years and discovered the Froggatt defence—'I was ill, m'lud'—he could have served his time in group therapy rather than high security confinement.

Froggatt is adept at exploiting every aspect of the prevailing victim culture. In a two-page feature in the *Guardian*—'My journey back from heroin hell'—he elaborated further on the 'inner despair' that drove him to drugs (24 September 1996). He was sexually abused at public school (wasn't everybody?), exhausted by work as a junior hospital doctor and stressed by life as a GP (particularly by his association with the government's unpopular reforms).

Poor Clive! When reading of his torment it is easy to forget that, during his years of hell on cocaine and heroin, he lived in a £300 000 house in Cheltenham, with a private tennis court and two children at public schools. He had regular meetings with Margaret Thatcher, Virginia Bottomley, John Major and others, and enjoyed rising social prestige. A more richly deserving candidate for the 'short, sharp, shock' treatment once recommended by the Conservative government for young offenders would be difficult to imagine.

It is perhaps not surprising that Froggatt should try to dodge the blame for his grossly self-indulgent and irresponsible behaviour by claiming to be ill. What is truly shocking is the implication of his rehabilitation—that the medical profession and the public should accept this self-justification.

But then the medical profession is wallowing in self-pity and morbidly preoccupied with its own members' physical and mental health. A much-quoted British Medical Association survey of 800 doctors reported in April that 69 per cent had experienced 'stress-related' health problems and 20 per cent had contemplated suicide. The survey claimed to reveal 'the terrible toll stress has taken on doctors' professional and personal lives'. Staffed by trained counsellors, the BMA's new stress helpline claims to have been receiving 300 calls a month from doctors on the edge.

An objective observer of Britain's medical profession might well find all this *angst* rather puzzling. Doctors are well paid (average GP income £40 000+ a year), and have much more interesting, secure, prestigious and rewarding jobs than most of their patients. Yet they continually complain that 'unreasonable patient demands' are making their working lives a misery.

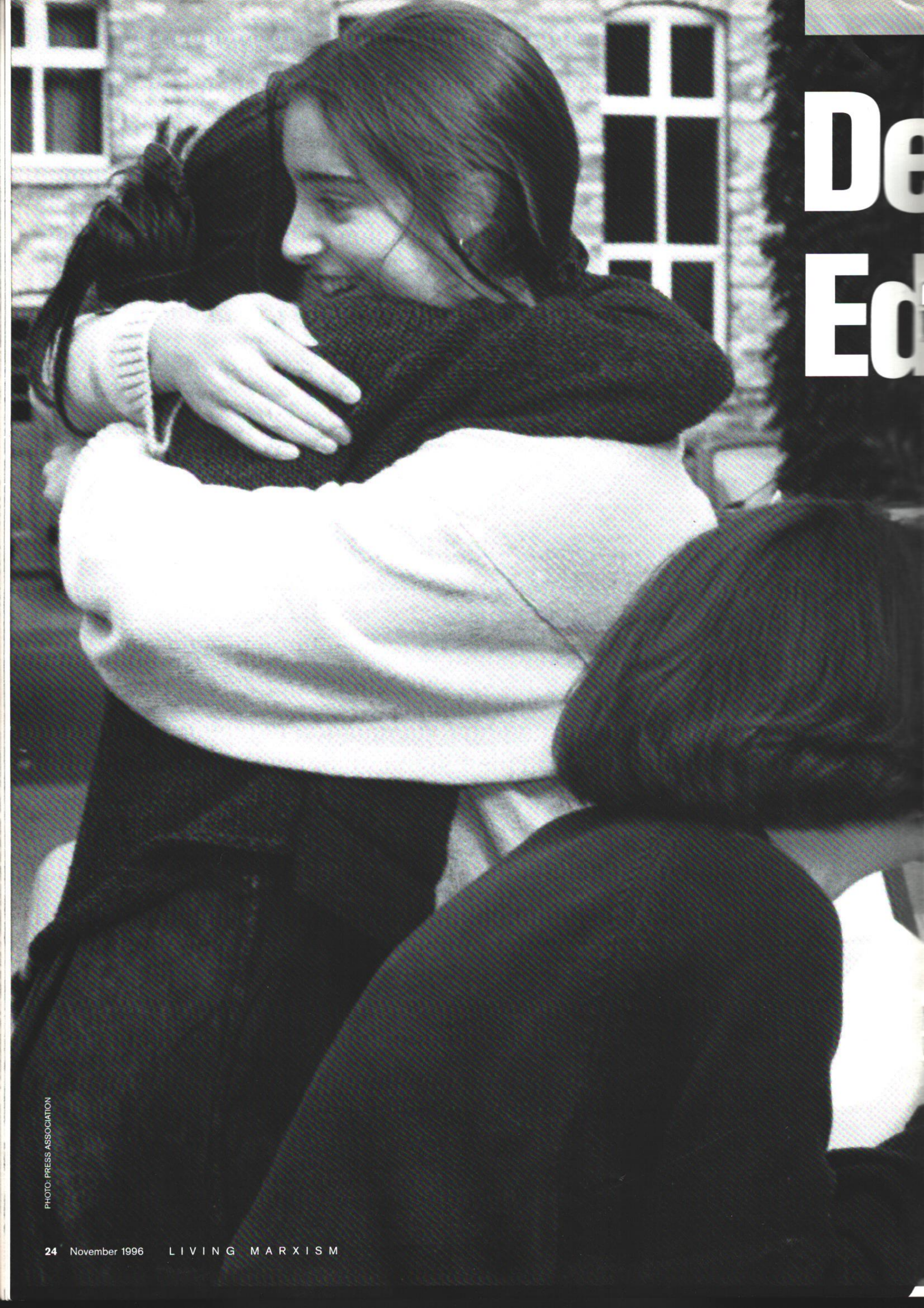
Doctors of an older generation occasionally write to the medical press expressing bemusement at the moans of today's doctors. Junior hospital doctors now enjoy much easier rotas and more restrictions on working hours. Old GPs recall the harsh realities of full 24-hour availability, without deputising services, mobile phones and all the benefits of modern group practice and team-working. If it is true that workloads have increased, doctors have largely themselves to blame for trying to extend medical control over all areas of life from the kitchen to

the bedroom, through the fashionable practice of 'health promotion'.

So what's up doc? Stress is not new to medical work—indeed, as the proliferation of medical television dramas confirms, it is part of what makes it a fascinating and exciting field in which to work. Nor are alcohol and drugs new hazards of medical life: the proximity of drugs in particular has always tempted a few. What is new is the abject self-abasement of the medical profession to the victim culture it has helped to foster. The increasing tendency to ascribe people's problems to psychological syndromes—from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children to post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic fatigue syndrome in adults—is one illustration of this trend. The expansion of the category of addiction from alcohol to opiates to other drugs, then to tobacco, and on to gambling, sex, shopping, etc, is another.

It seems that, having prepared a bed for the entire nation to lie in, doctors are now taking to it themselves. When in the past the medical profession felt threatened by outside forces—whether by the Labour government in the late 1940s or the Conservatives in the early 1960s—it mobilised forcefully and effectively to defend its position. Today it offers the infantile Clive Froggatt as a symbol of its despair and sets up a helpline for its members. ●

The medical profession is now wallowing in self-pity



De Ed

PHOTO: PRESS ASSOCIATION

Regrading Education

If nobody fails, is an A-level or a university degree worth the paper it is printed on? And what does the apparent ease with which many qualifications are gained really say about our expectations of young people today? Claire Fox, a further education lecturer, investigates ►



More people are taking and passing exams than ever before. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A to C at GCSE (theoretically the equivalent of the old O-level pass), has gone up from 39.8 per cent in 1987 (the last year of O-levels) to 53.7 per cent this year. Many have celebrated this sign of educational success. Yet Tory reactionary Rhodes Boyson's complaint, that it seems unbelievable 'that over the past 30 years there has been such a vast increase in the brain power of the nation', rings true.

We should be wary of the assertion that, because the numbers receiving qualifications have increased, more people must be getting a good education that develops and tests their intellectual skills. These days qualifications are gained by very different routes than when they were used to select the educational elite. Over the last two decades there have been far-reaching changes in how educationalists define what constitutes knowledge, and how they assess it. The greatest shift has been a move away from the traditional end of course examination.

How do young people acquire qualifications in the 1990s? It is no longer simply a matter of sitting an exam at the end of a course. Under the Conservative administration, the idea of a 100 per cent examination has practically disappeared. The Tories introduced the idea of course work into GCSE and A-levels in 1987. In practice, this has made the new 'exams' much more passable.

In the GCSE English Language syllabus which I teach, the course work component is 40 per cent, with 20 per cent an oral unit. Teachers are encouraged to mark positively. The remaining 60 per cent is assessed by two exams. One is a comprehension exam in which only reading and understanding skills are assessed; students cannot be marked down on spelling or grammar. The other exam involves writing two essays on a pre-release document which students have studied for a whole term in class and which they take into the examination room.

The more recent modular A-levels break courses up into manageable units and make no apologies for allowing students to resit bits of the course until they pass. The fastest growing government sponsored qualification—the GNVQ—has no exam, instead using occasional multiple-choice tests and portfolios of evidence of competence as assessment techniques. Boyson has a point when he speaks of an examination system that 'no longer [has] any rigour...the system has gone soft' (*Guardian*, 15 August 1996).

Even at degree level, only a minority of students in the best universities rely on that three hour ordeal to pass their degree. In fact, 'open book' exams (in which you take the textbooks in with you instead of trying to write the answers on your shirt sleeve) are now routine, and exam questions are regularly issued in advance to help students prepare.

Continuous assessment by course work and seminar performance is a much more common experience than exams for students today. I recently overheard a conversation

between a history student at Kings College, London, and a student from a new university. The Kings man was explaining that his final exams were at the end of three years. This seemed unfathomable to the listener: 'But how can you remember all those dates?'. Any sense of intellectual development, or the testing of a historian's grasp of degree level teaching has been replaced by a babyfication of assessment: multiple choice questions, tests set immediately at the end of a teaching period and an incomprehension that anyone could cope with the rigour of the exam room.

The University of Northumbria has even set up a special unit to experiment with different types of assessment, arguing that exams only assess a limited range of students' knowledge and ability. My favourite wacky

work is returned again and again to be redone according to discreet tutorial 'advice'. Meanwhile parents understandably correct spellings and grammar—all permissible and/or undetectable in the new assessment regime. And all parties concerned have a pragmatic interest in turning a blind eye. Schools, keen to do well in league tables, look for the easiest routes to achieve good results and shop around for the exam board with the most accessible courses. Teachers, now judged on their pupils' results, would rather steer their charges through course work, which can be redone to fit the required grades, than rely on their pupils performing in exams. The government is keen to show an unhappy electorate that things are improving. Parents are desperate for their children to pass.



alternative to conventional examinations was quoted in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*. Instead of exam question papers, students would be presented with 'in tray exercises where students receive a dossier of papers and a variety of tasks to work on in the exam room. They can work on sorting out what is really important and potential red herrings, and to cope with the unexpected in a way that simulates real practice' (9 May 1996). Here the routine and banal tasks of selection—skills usually rehearsed in primary classrooms (remember different coloured and shaped building blocks?) are being seriously proposed as the equivalent of an undergraduate coherently arguing a case in an essay. Of course, with assessments like these, getting a degree ought to be child's play.

In defence of the new assessment methods, many will argue that if more young people gain qualifications they will have greater opportunities. Others will sympathise with the idea that the old exam system was unfair and never did justice to students. However, there is more at stake here than a discussion about the best forms of assessing knowledge. The changes in education reflect the fact that what we expect of young people is being levelled down to match a climate of low horizons and limited aspirations in society.

Let us be honest, modern methods of assessment are a recipe for institutionalised cheating. Every teacher knows that course

believing qualifications are a ticket to a better life. And pupils—never averse to an easier option—fear failure will lead to the dole queue.

The link between employment prospects and educational attainment haunts the debate, but this is a new thing. The idea that failing exams means being excluded from jobs and opportunities has become a modern apology for unemployment. How different from the past. In the post-war period, the majority of young people scrambled to get out of education so they could earn their living, often with minimal or no qualifications. My Dad often reflects bitterly on leaving school at 13; he would have liked to have had my chances. But it never affected his job prospects; he has never passed an exam, but has always worked.

The function of exams has changed. End of school exams were not designed as a rubber stamp for all young people to receive on their way out of school and into low-paid McJobs. Exams were created to select the minority of high-fliers who would enter the professions or go to university. Differentiation was the key and the emphasis was on getting the best to jump ever-higher hurdles to earn their place in the sun. When the A-level system began in 1951, only one in 20 young people sat the exam—and it was decided in advance that only 70 per cent of them would pass. The intention was to pick out the exceptional members of that generation. Now A-level examinations are no longer restricted: the

number of entries has risen sevenfold, over 30 per cent of 18-year olds take them, and the pass rate has reached a new peak of 86 per cent. The government—through its National Training and Education Targets—wants to go further in this direction, so that 60 per cent of young people have two A-levels or their vocational equivalent by the end of the century. Today, qualifications are held up as the only chance of survival in the jobs market, and millions enter higher education just so that they can compete to get the kind of jobs which 20 years ago needed no qualifications. It is easy to see that the pressure to make exams more passable is intense.

Some commentators have noted one consequence of everybody passing exams: the qualifications become worthless. A *Daily Telegraph* editorial following this summer's record-breaking exam results argued that 'Nothing is gained and much is lost when examiners distribute grades with the abandon of wedding guests flinging confetti: If everybody gets a prize, prizes are worthless...More importantly, if everyone passes their exams, nothing is being examined—and a nation which still talks about a gold-standard in education will become incapable of assaying its young talent' (22 August 1996).

Alan Smithers, assessing the new situation where everyone passes exams, used the topical analogy of the Olympic games. It is, he said, as if the Olympic Committee had decided that gold medals would no longer be given just to those who came first, but to all those who achieved a certain standard:

'Perhaps a gold would go to all those who broke 10 seconds for the 100 metres, a silver to all those below 10.5 seconds and a medal to all those who qualified to take part. Over time probably fewer world records would be broken but the general level of performance would improve. However, previous medal winners would protest that now everyone got a medal they were not worth the metal they were embossed on.' (*Times Education Supplement*, 6 September 1996)

It is not just that A-levels and degrees are becoming worthless paper qualifications. Something else has been lost. Rewarding everyone, removing a sharp sense of competition and differentiation, decreeing that nobody loses: all of this degrades what it is to achieve and lowers horizons. Young people are being sold short and their aspirations reduced.

The most corrosive aspect of the new all-passing qualifications is the educational justification for the changes. Nobody admits that it is just pragmatism. Instead a politically correct gloss has been added. The old methods of assessment are

now rejected as elitist because they labelled people as failures. These sentiments are not confined to trendy educationalists. They informed the Tories' decision to replace the streamed exams of CSEs and O-levels with the one-level GCSE qualification which expanded pass grades downwards from C to F. And you cannot fail the government's pet GNVQs. Effectively failure has been abolished.

One expression of this is the growth of Records of Achievement and student profiles in schools and colleges. The Tories launched Records of Achievement for all secondary school children in the eighties, and they are now compulsory. The then education secretary Kenneth Baker summed up the spirit that accompanied their launch in a speech at

The premise that failure should not be admitted now has widespread support

Manchester University in September 1987: 'Rather than label children failures, they should give them pride in their achievements'. As ever these days, Labour went one step further in its *Charter for Pupils and Parents*:

'We want all pupils at the age of 16 to be awarded a profile of achievement...[I]n the longer term, we expect the continuous element of the profile of achievement to be seen of greater value as "educational" currency than the more traditional examinations'.

It is worth remembering that Records of Achievement originate from special needs teaching, and were designed to reward children who could not achieve anything of substance. They were a recognition of real intellectual barriers to success; the idea was to praise, for example, those with Downs Syndrome for being able to tie up their shoe laces, or count to 10, precisely because they were incapable of competing with their peers in academic exams. They were about making handicapped children feel good about themselves. Now similarly patronising arguments are being applied to all young people.

While teachers will know what a joke these Records of Achievement are—we have all spent hours in the staff room trying to find positive things to say about Johnny or Samantha—the premise that failure should not be admitted now has widespread support. During my teacher training I was attacked by

everybody in my seminar for suggesting that grading was a useful way to create aspirations towards excellence. My colleagues asserted that I would doom the working class to permanent failure and exclusion. Instead my tutor urged me to write words of encouragement on students' work and put aside my red pen. It was argued that I was simply using my power to judge by standards which were externally imposed, and I would destroy my pupils' confidence by telling them that they were wrong or had failed. But this simply treats young people as wimps, who cannot deal with or learn from failure.

So, should we oppose traditional exams as elitist or unfair, and what are the consequences of doing so? Consider what traditional examinations are intended to do. They are supposedly about assessing whether a student has assimilated a body of knowledge and methods and can articulate these in a coherent fashion without external aids. By their nature, exams are about selecting the best, grading both hard work and intelligence and labelling some a success and others a failure.

It is worth reprinting the definition given in a 1911 Consultative Committee Report on examinations in secondary schools. It gives a clear flavour of the intentions behind examinations which held until recently:

'The good effects of examinations on the pupil are (a) that they make him work up to time by requiring him to reach a stated degree of knowledge by a fixed date; (b) that they incite him to get his knowledge into a reproducible form and to lessen the risk of vagueness; (c) that they make him work at the parts of a study which, though important, may be uninteresting or repugnant to him personally... (f) that they enable the pupil to measure his real attainment (i) by the standard required by outside examiners, (ii) by comparison with the attainments of his fellow pupils, and (iii) by comparison with attainments of his contemporaries in other schools.' (Cited in J MacLure (ed), *Educational Documents*, 1986, p164)

There are three aspects here worth dwelling on. First, examinations were part of standardising intellectual achievement into a universal measure. Second, they were about striving to compete with your peers in the pursuit of intellectual excellence. Third, examinations were seen as both a test—and a strenuous test—and a discipline which would stretch pupils. If society rejects these ideas, we leave young people with little to judge themselves against, we relativise success and failure until both become meaningless and finally we risk softening young people up, depriving them of the opportunity to struggle to be the ►

◀ best that they can and to overcome their own limitations. If educationalists abolish failure on paper the effect is to reconcile students to it in practice.

What is rejected as 'elitist' by the anti-exams lobby is the idea of judging everybody against the same standard. Yet the modern examination system represented an important step forward for equality, precisely because it enshrined the notion that everybody could be compared equally.

Exams as we know them date from the end of the last century, when universal examinations replaced patronage to allow a wider base of recruitment into the civil service. Until then bright working class children depended on being hand-picked by headteachers for scholarships. It was not until 1926 that the Hadow Committee recommended the eleven plus as a competitive entrance exam, open to all as a route into secondary education, allowing the possibility of free universal education. This was greeted positively by the likes of the Fabian Webbs and RH Tawney, who saw exams as the apotheosis of socialist meritocracy—opening up opportunities to all on the basis of ability rather than parental wealth and status.

Working class people wanted access to examinations with external, universal standards, as RA Manzer noted (in relation to the CSE debate of the seventies):

'The demand for external examination was a "mass movement" which developed outside the official governing institutions of the educational system, arising from the classroom level and persisting in spite of official disapproval.' (R Bell *et al* (ed), *Education in Great Britain and Ireland*, 1973, p61)

Today, the postmodern influence on education theory suggests that no universal standards can apply. Feminist educationalists argue that knowledge itself—rationality and objectivity—is no more than male opinion. Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah suggest that male experts have only recognised 'educational knowledge' so that they can judge what does and does not count, who passes and who fails. Instead of putting 'educational knowledge' on a pedestal, these influential critics call for the recognition of 'personal knowledge':

'Everyone has a personal knowledge which is valid and there is no way of classifying this. There would be no means of determining failure...personal knowledge and experience does not readily accommodate failure and does not promote stratifications.' (*Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education*, 1992, p42)

But what exactly is personal knowledge? It is what we know already, and have accumulated from our personal experience. For my 16-year old students, personal knowledge is limited to that of any teenager in Watford—beyond bands, family, TV soaps and adolescent love *angst*, there is little else. But does knowing who shot Ian in *EastEnders* really equate with understanding how electricity works?

To make 'personal knowledge' equivalent to 'educational knowledge' puts my students' rows with their parents on a par with studying Shakespeare's masterpiece of father-child relationships in *King Lear*. The function of education—more specifically literature in this instance—is to take students into other worlds than their own immediate one, to widen their horizons beyond what they can immediately

Working class people wanted access to examinations with external, universal standards

experience. It allows a sense of the universal rather than wallowing in the particular, narrow and banal. Otherwise we are saying that education is no more than an assessment of what students already think and are now. This would mean accepting that the parochial outlook of any individual is adequate. But what kind of 'knowledge' is it that consigns young people to being stuck where they are, rather than being a means of improvement, of thinking greater things, of considering the world outside your bedroom?

Yet support for recognising 'personal knowledge' is not confined to feminist theorists. Spender and Sarah's book is on most teacher-trainer reading lists. The government, exam boards and universities now all accept accreditation of prior knowledge as a useful assessment tool—where personal experience is given academic credence and housewives are accepted on courses because their life experience of budget planning, organisational skills and communicating are their personal equivalent of a Communication Studies A-level. One friend of mine got a place on an Irish studies degree course on the basis of his personal knowledge. He had no formal qualifications—but he was Irish. His first essay was a study of the experience of Irish immigrants in London. He talked to his friends and got a 2.1.

The recent hysterical reaction to Melanie Phillips' (mostly) intelligent book, ironically titled *All Must Have Prizes*, indicates

a widespread acceptance of what she correctly notes as the influence of 'personal knowledge' on primary educational theory. This theory is now centred on children's spontaneous creativity and experience and rejects as suspicious 'facts passed down generations' and 'other people's experiences'. Writing in the *Observer*, Phillips anticipates the reaction to her argument, while showing how this rejection of objective facts has redefined learning 'into a wholly subjective process':

'The imposition of such facts upon a child became viewed with intense suspicion for somehow holding back or fettering that child's creativity. Such an imposition became, therefore, a form of child abuse, and anyone rash enough to advocate it was treated accordingly within educational circles as a pariah.'
(8 September 1996)

The concept of personal knowledge, by its very nature, rules out the use of objective, universal standards as a measure.

Standard exams are often ridiculed today because they allegedly do not take into consideration individual intellectual development. Hence the calls for different but equal types of assessment—a system which rewards everyone, recognises everything as of worth and equalises all differences through the notion of parity of esteem. Sally Brown, educational development adviser at the University of Northumbria (née Newcastle Poly) ended an article in the *Independent* with this shocking anecdote:

'I brought back a cartoon from New Zealand that sums up my argument. It shows an elephant, a penguin, a monkey, a goldfish, a seal and a dog standing before an examiner who is saying "for a fair selection, everybody has to take the same exam; please climb that tree".'
(9 May 1996)

The analogy suggests that as individuals we are incomparable, different breeds. So we cannot be judged by a common standard. But we are not goldfish nor monkeys; we are, to remind Ms Brown, human, the same, superior species.

Behind the reassessment of examinations, what has changed for the worse is society's expectations of what humanity is capable of. So the argument is put forward that exams 'are norm referenced and tell us little more than where pupils stand in relation to their peers. They are global rather than diagnostic in nature' (G Hall, *Records of Achievement: Issues and Practice*, 1989, p17). Instead of encouraging pupils to strive to reach universal standards by which they can judge their abilities and compete against their peers for excellence, today's examination critics seek to relativise standards so that nobody is judged

against anything except their own limitations. In this way, aspirations are levelled down.

The final objection to the old examination system is that it was too testing. The 1911 definition quoted above makes it clear that to pass, you needed to struggle; revision, hard work, discipline and diligence were required. For modern critics, this is a problem. According to Harrison Jennings, general secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists, 'Asking most children to sit still for three hours and write is like asking somebody used to walking down the street to run a marathon' (TES, 16 June 1996). The idea that you might dare to ask somebody to attempt something hard that they have never done before—and get them, like a would-be marathon runner, to train for months beforehand—is an anathema

I had to learn it was because I had not worked hard enough. It was a lesson in growing up. I realized that if I sweated enough, suffered and struggled, I could achieve more. As a teacher I make my students fight for every intellectual point. I want them to strive beyond where they are, and no doubt that can be a painful and harrowing experience, but it gives them the chance to soar above the ordinary.

Putting people under pressure to perform is a creative experience. It gives them the chance to rise to the occasion. When my students know their work is to be assessed, they struggle to achieve; with exams on the horizon they panic and get in a state, but they also start to take themselves seriously and study hard. That is when I really see the creativity to which the anti-exams lobby only

pay lip-service. The rigours of assessment, deadlines and examinations are what actually force the learning curve upwards, as students sweat to understand the concepts, assimilate facts and ideas and learn to think independently, in the knowledge that they are on their own in that exam room.

We should have no truck with attempts at making educational assessments easier. Young people need standards to aspire to and attain. They need to learn the difference between success and failure if they are to make judgments in life about what is good, bad and shoddy, and if their educational achievements are to mean more than medals handed out merely for existing. Or, as Plato put it, 'the life without examination is a life that can hardly be lived at all'. ●



to educational theorists who believe young people are incapable of sitting, never mind thinking, for more than a few minutes.

The critics of examinations argue that today's educational assessments are more student/pupil-centred than the past. Inasmuch as they now accommodate every student's dream—easier exams—they are right. Stressed out students are often quoted in support of the anti-exams argument: 'I haven't slept for weeks, I feel sick at the prospect of messing up.' The rare examples of pupils who commit suicide because they are frightened they will fail are given banner headlines.

Now we all know that people sitting exams hate the ordeal. One of the great bar-room moans of my student days was the unfairness of exams. All that work over three years, assessed in a fateful three hours. I had a particular complaint; as a bad hay-fever sufferer I always had to enter summer exam rooms with nose streaming, eucalyptus oil and a box of kleenex. These days I would be considered to have special exam needs and be given a room to myself and extra time to complete the paper. Little did we guess that those drunken undergraduate discussions would become the basis of educational assessment methods within the decade. But this is indeed what has happened. The prejudices of those fearful of being put to the test now are accepted as good practice.

What kind of lesson is it for young people to tell them in advance that they cannot cope with stress and hard work? When I failed an exam,

BTec GNVQ Advanced - Health and social care

4. John's teacher says, "John is such a tough little lad, a real boy". This is an example of stereotyping based on :

- A. Class
- B. Race
- C. Gender
- D. Religion

27. Large sums of money are spent on health promotion campaigns. Decide whether each of these statements is true or false

- i. Most campaigns are aimed at increasing the demand for new and sophisticated methods of treatment.
- ii. The fundamental purpose of health promotion is to enable people to have more control over their own health.

Which of the answers below is correct?

- A. i is true and ii is true
- B. i is true and ii is false
- C. i is false and ii is true
- D. i is false and ii is false

12. Migraine is thought to be stress-related. It is characterised by:

- A. Backache
- B. Violent headache
- C. Poor circulatory system
- D. Heart condition

Questions 28-30 share answer options A to D

Different types of abuse can threaten identity.

Some examples are:

- A. Sexual abuse
- B. Physical abuse
- C. Emotional abuse
- D. Financial abuse

Which types of abuse occur in the following situations?

- 28. A child whose parents do not show love
- 29. An older person who is hit by a carer
- 30. Inappropriately touching a young child

Slipping standards: undemanding questions from a recent exam paper for 16-18 year olds. A BTec GNVQ Advanced is the equivalent of two A-levels.

Dave Chandler, who went to Bosnia in September as an election monitor, reports on the fraud perpetrated by the Western organisers of the poll

Who fixed Bosnia's elections?

At a training day in Vienna for electoral observers, Eduard van Thijn, the coordinator of Bosnia's elections, spoke to us in high moral tones about democracy. Van Thijn, from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said that the yardstick of any democratic process was the degree to which the will of the people served as the basis of government. Yet the OSCE officials presiding over the election and the majority of my fellow observers—representatives of human rights groups, non-governmental organisations, academia, local and central governments and the military—seemed to have little respect for the will of the people of Bosnia, whose preference for nationalist parties they held in contempt.

Van Thijn was nominally responsible for certifying whether the elections were fair or not. But the real fixer behind the election was America's Robert Frowick, the head of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia. Frowick's role was to make sure that the election results continued the fiction of the existence of the 'multi-ethnic' state of Bosnia, created by international diktat in April 1992 and upheld by international diktat at Dayton in November 1995, upon which Washington has staked its moral claim to international leadership.

The Dayton accord recognised the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina as consisting of two separate entities, the Muslim/Croat Federation founded

by the Washington Agreement of March 1994 and the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska, the Bosnian Serb entity. The elections of 14 September were held at state level for the tripartite presidency (with designated seats for a Muslim, a Serb and a Croat) and for the House of Representatives of the parliament (two thirds of seats reserved for representatives of the Federation and one third for representatives of RS), and at entity level for the separate governments.

The OSCE was given *carte blanche* by the USA to ensure that the elections gave the political institutions established under the Dayton accord a veneer of democratic approval. This was no easy task, considering that the majority of the new state's population have no wish to live within it. Both the Croatian and Serbian communities would rather be under governments linked to their own respective states.

After a four-year war which has divided the communities of Bosnia and created millions of refugees it is hardly surprising that the majority of the population have little time for the rhetoric of multiculturalism and have no wish to redivide their communities in accordance with past arrangements. But the fact that people are more concerned with defending what they have now, rather than living according to the romantic 'multi-ethnic' vision of Western liberals, was an anathema to many in the West.

The main thrust of media comment before and after the polls was that

democracy has been undermined because the three nationalist parties representing the Muslims, Croats and Serbs achieved strong majorities in their respective areas. Writing in the *Guardian* Julian Borger argued that a 'benign colonial regime' or an 'international protectorate' would be necessary to bring democracy to Bosnia (7 September, 1996). His colleague Martin Woollacott declared that 'an open-ended occupation, with no specific time for elections' would have been better than what came to pass (14 September, 1996).

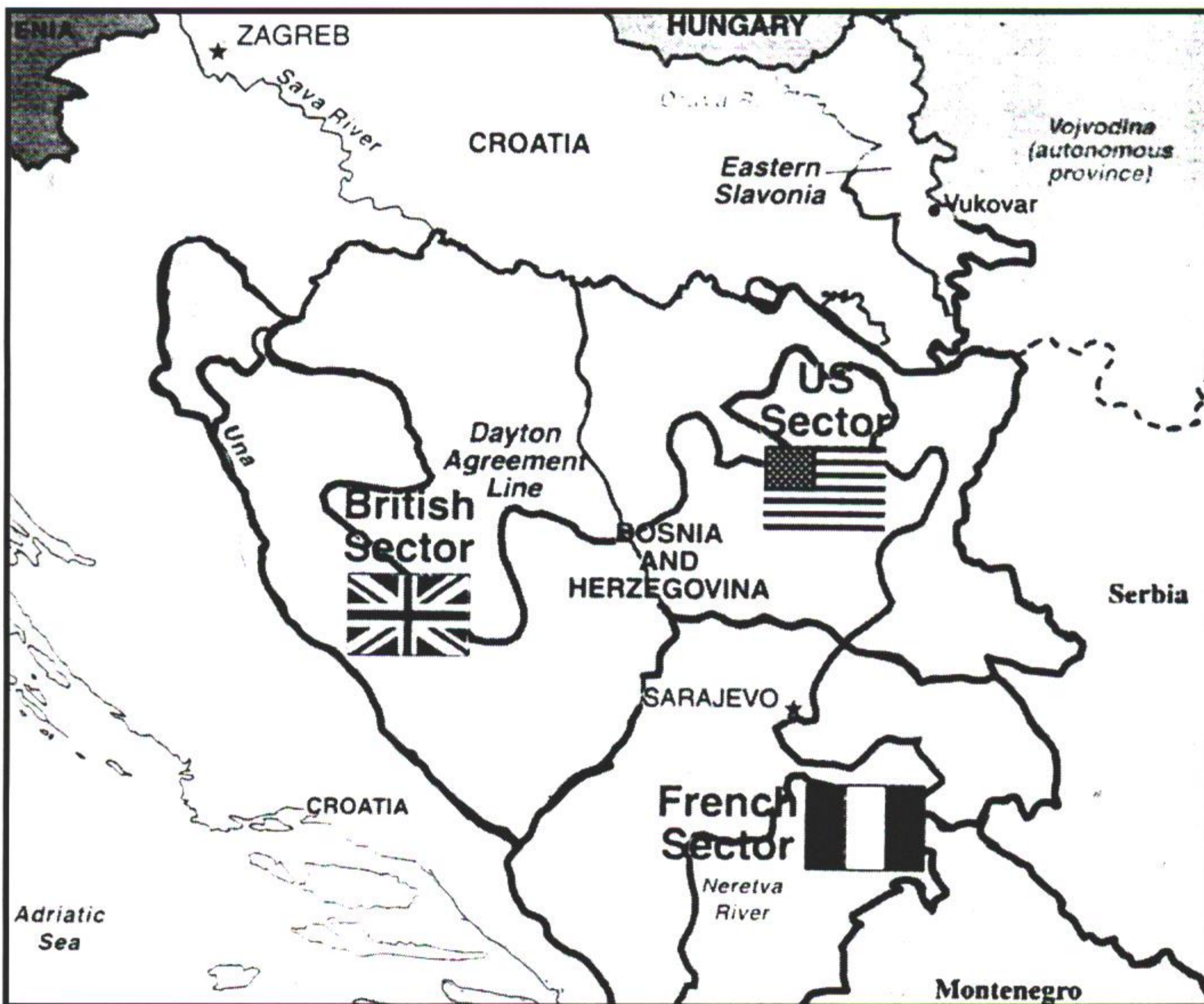
These views were repeated by election observers attending the Vienna induction day, for whom the elections were already tainted by the prospect of the three nationalist parties achieving substantial majorities. There was a feeling that it would be better if the elections were not held at all, and a great deal of cynicism about US pressure on the OSCE to give the polls a clean bill of health regardless of what happened on election day.

Because the people of Bosnia were not willing to vote freely for the Dayton set-up, with many wanting to vote instead for separation, the OSCE had to impose its will on the political process. The one policy supported by almost all the Serbian parties was that Republika Srpska should be independent. This policy was deemed to be in breach of the election regulations. As Judge Finn Lynghjem of the OSCE announced in the run-up to the polls, 'public statements that undermine or deny the sovereignty and territorial integrity of...Bosnia-Herzegovina constitute serious violations of the [Dayton] agreement'. This policy made the British government's censorship of Sinn Fein during the Irish War seem benign. The OSCE not only banned the elected Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, from standing in the elections, it prohibited the mention of his name at election rallies or the use of his photo on election posters.

Vote now, pay later

Placed with a monitoring team in Prijedor, north of Banja Luka in Republika Srpska, it was clear that any problems with the election had more to do with the prejudiced approach of the election monitors than with the people of Bosnia.

Many of my fellow observers felt that people were being intimidated into voting for the nationalist parties. In Banja Luka the British Army briefed us that the communist mentality still prevailed and that people might vote out of fear. In fact, voters felt intimidated by the Western observers rather than the SDS. When one observer tried to take a photo of a Serbian soldier, the soldier covered up his identity number and said he was



besieged by angry people wanting to know why this error had happened. One woman told me, 'We could have organised this better. What are you doing in our country? We are not in your country'.

The basis for being able to vote was being a resident of Bosnia in 1991. You could vote where you lived then or where you lived now or intended to live if you had the relevant forms signed and stamped. In the media there were many complaints about refugees from Serbia coming across the border on buses to vote. But this was their right as much as it was the right of Bosnian Muslim refugees to come back to Bosnia to vote. Many other Serbs now living in Prijedor, refugees from areas outside Bosnia, such as the Croatian Krajina, were denied the right to vote. Even less democratic from the point of view of local residents was the fact that people who had homes in the Prijedor area in 1991 but were economic migrants working outside Bosnia, in Slovenia or Croatia or Western Europe, also lost their right to vote.

Phantom votes

Kris Janowski, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Sarajevo, said the lack of Muslims crossing the inter-entity divide to vote was due to intimidation. There was no more intimidation in this regard than there was to prevent the Serbian refugees crossing the divide in the opposite direction. In fact the elections were designed in such a way as to discourage crossings of the inter-entity divide, as the ballot papers and parties were completely different. At one absentee polling station about 50 Serbs turned up believing they could vote for Serbian candidates in the areas they once lived. When they discovered there were only Muslim and Croatian candidates in their area, they refused to vote.

After the elections there were reports that widespread fraud in the Federation had led to an estimated 600 000 phantom votes being cast for the Muslim leader, Alija Izetbegovic, making his presidential victory over the Serb candidate, Momcilo Krajisnik, by a margin of 41 000 votes questionable. Whether or not there was ballot-rigging of this sort is largely irrelevant. The real fraud had already occurred. Western election-rigging had already denied the people of Bosnia the right to decide their own future. Immediately after the elections the real power-brokers of the International Contact Group (USA, Germany, France, Britain, Russia) were on the scene to determine what would happen next. The new Bosnian president, Izetbegovic, was summoned to the UN assembly in New York to be given his orders.

Voting under foreign occupation

scared that his picture would end up on a wanted poster issued by the international war crimes tribunal at the Hague. In Prijedor people were suspicious of the motives of the observers, especially as it was an open secret that the OSCE would press for the local mayor and police chief to be indicted for war crimes after the election. The fact that the real power in Bosnia is wielded by outsiders was demonstrated two days before the elections, when the OSCE threatened to cancel the election unless all Serbian flags were removed from outside the polling stations. One man said he was not going to vote on principle because at the end of the day the Americans would decide what happened to him.

In our region every polling station reported problems, but none of these were to do with ballot fixing by local officials. As a result of a 'technical error' the OSCE had managed to omit at least 10 per cent of the eligible voters from the electoral list. Two months before the elections a provisional electoral list had been circulated. Anyone not on the list then had the opportunity to get it amended. When the final list was published many people had been missed off and were not allowed to vote on election day until they had obtained a stamped certificate from a special election station. This technical error disenfranchised many people who did not have the means or the time to brave the long, angry queues that developed at these stations. We were

ИЗБОРИ '96
14. СЕПТЕМБАР
БИРАЧКА МЈЕСТА ОТВОРЕНА ОД
07:00 - 19:00

ПРОЦЕС ГЛАСАЊА

- 1** Када дођете на бирачко место, до контролора реда који ће ставити Вама управљиву светлу како би били сигурни да можете раније гласати.
- 2** Затим, ићи ћете службенику за идентификацију који ће наћи Ваше име у Бирачком списку, показати лични документ и своју адресу, обрасца ако сте пријављивали пребивалиште.
- 3** Потом идете до лица које наноси тинту. Тинта ће бити обележен невидљивом тинтом. Тинта не треба да Вас брине. Она неће бити видљива само под ултравиолетним светлом након седам дана.
- 4** Затим идете до лица које издаје гласачке листиће. Он/она ће Вам дати гласачки листић за сваки члан избора.
- 5** Онда идете до паравана за гласање. Ставите само једну ознаку (X) на сваки гласачки листић и пресавијте једанпут сваки гласачки листић. Гласачки параван обезбеђује тајност гласања.
- 6** Затим идете до контролора гласачких кутија и стављате по један гласачки листић у сваку гласачку кутију која му одговара по боји.

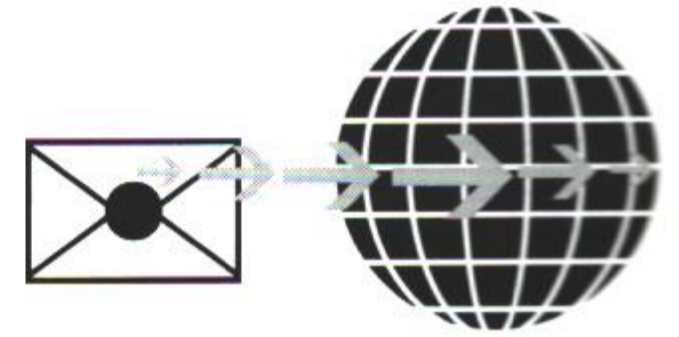
ОКРЕНИ

У складу са Датоном споразумом, ОЕБС надгледа припрему и спровођење избора. OSCE

e-mail from America

+++ Dr Stuart Derbyshire peers into the sordid minds of the US education authorities

Sender: Dr Stuart Derbyshire, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Recipient: *Living Marxism*, London (lm@junius.co.uk)
Date: November 1996
Subject: Six-year old in sex crime scandal



Back in the UK, my partner was a teacher at a typical inner-London primary school, not a pretty place and the children were hardly angels. Tales of five-year olds beating each other up and throwing chairs were not unusual. Showing each other their genitals and simulating sex were also fairly common occurrences. Story time on the carpet was occasionally disrupted by little Ann (not her real name) showing her underwear, or more, to little Adrian (ditto). While rather irritating, this behaviour hardly constituted a call for police action.

Over here in the United States of America these days, things are a little different. Judging by what has just happened to one six-year old boy, expelled from school for a day for pecking a girl on the cheek, little Ann would be facing the electric chair.

Jonathan Prevette attends Southwest School, a primary school (first grade) in Lexington, North Carolina. He wears coke-bottle glasses, has a crooked smile and displays a fondness for proper football (good lad). Not unlike the little boy next door; except that last week he went home to tell his mommy that he was being disciplined under the school's sexual harassment code. Mom scoffed, but Jonathan clutched in his hand proof of his misdemeanour. Not mincing words, his 'discipline referral' form coldly stated the awful truth: 'Jonathan kissed a little girl on the cheek.'

Mrs Prevette reports that when she pursued the incident with the school's principal, Lisa Horne, she was informed that Jonathan had violated the sexual harassment code of the school and that 'if he was caught again kissing, hugging or hand holding, he would be suspended'. Amid a blaze of publicity, the school officials released a statement explaining their action: Jonathan had broken a rule prohibiting 'unwarranted and unwelcome touching of one student by another', and had to be punished accordingly.

Stolen kisses on the school playground are as much a part of childhood as biscuits and ice-cream. Giving a child a hug is the most obvious way of showing affection and giving reward. It does not, of course, appeal to all children. Sarah, a first-grader in Dallas thinks boys are disgusting and warns that if any boy tries to kiss her she will 'slap 'em with my lunch box and make their nose bleed'.

Well, fair enough; and while she has her lunch box handy, Sarah might like to apply it to those disgusting adults who came up with Southwest school's policy on 'student-to-student sexual harassment'. What kind of mind does it require to think that children's games are a form of sexual assault which will presumably lead straight to playground rape?

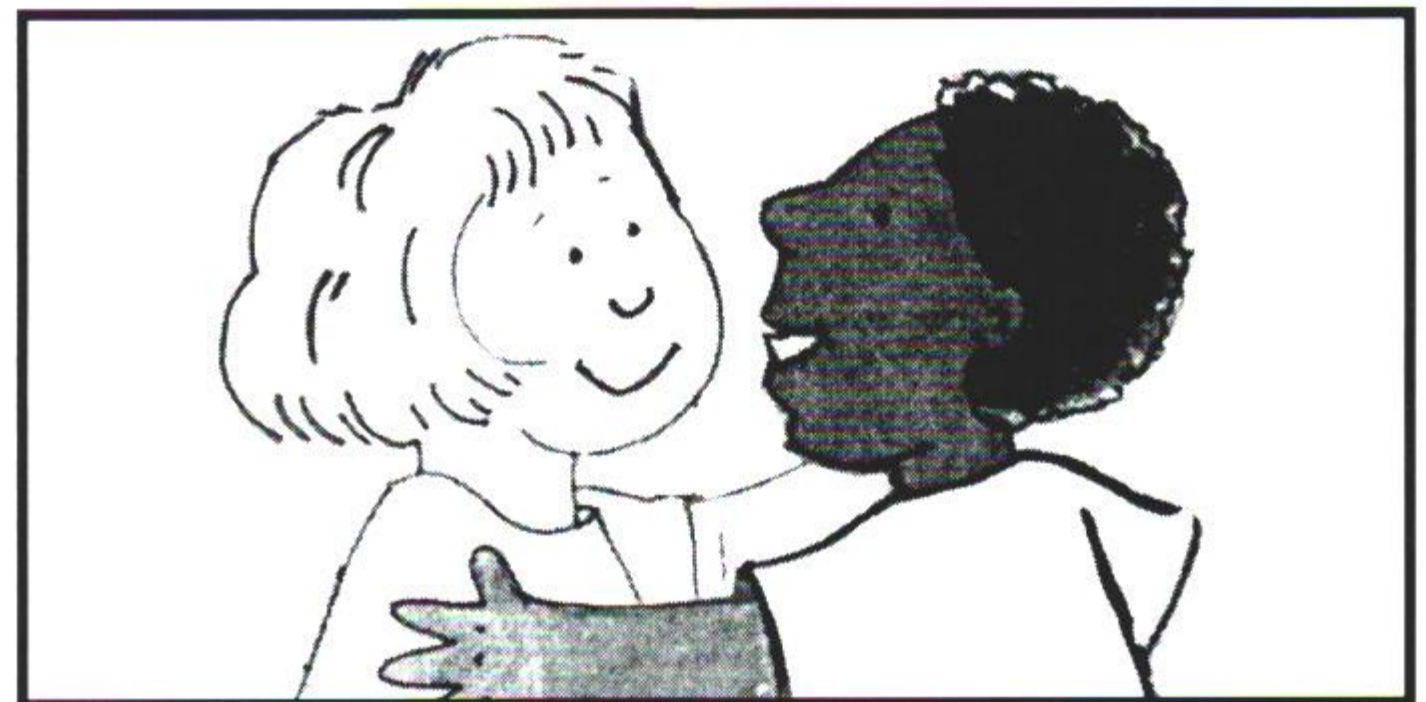
The fact that children are more concerned with riding their bikes, staying inside the lines in the colouring book and learning the days of the week seems lost on US officialdom. Even when faced with children flashing their genitals, there is little call to jump to conclusions. If you consider such activity to be sexual then you have never been there or you have a dirty mind.

Six-year old boys and girls have far more important things on their mind than sex: there are classrooms to disrupt, teachers to annoy and other boys or girls that need teasing and distracting and impressing. If a boy can make the teacher stop reading and make the girls go 'eugh' by showing his gonads, then gonads will be displayed. Learning anatomy, maybe, a small victory against the tyranny

of boring adults, possibly, but an exercise in asserting sexuality? Certainly not.

Where did this lunatic policy come from? Not, as you might suspect, from some insane PC think-tank busying itself in North Carolina. The school's policy comes straight from the US government's official definition of what constitutes sexual harassment. Under Federal education law, schools at all levels are required to have policies for dealing with sexual harassment—which includes pressure for sex, flirting, propositions, and 'patting, pinching or constant brushing against another's body'.

Many have expressed outrage that a policy aimed at adults should be used against children younger than ten. Dr Berry Brazelton, pediatrician, said 'I think it's crazy going so far'. But the good Doctor should surely not be surprised that a sexual harassment policy which treats adults like children in need of protection should end up being applied to those at kindergarten.



American society increasingly sees grown men and women as incapable of brushing off even the mildest of sexual advances, like being asked out on a date ('propositions'), without the assistance of a code of conduct and the courts. In a prurient/puritanical atmosphere where the 'experts' are likely to interpret any human contact as a form of sexual abuse or harassment, it is little wonder that parents and the authorities become concerned that their children seem more sexually mature than they are.

What impact will this sordid obsession with sexual harassment have on the children whose games are put under the moral microscope? Children such as Marina who is waiting until she is 17 to kiss a boy. But if she is caught by surprise by a boy before then, 'I would tell a teacher because sometimes I don't like boys because they're ugly. But if they're cute, I'd kiss him and not tell and keep it a secret, because the moms might not let you be friends'. And the Federal education board might not let you be children. I wish they would grow up.

Anybody back in the UK who thinks this is just another sad case of American excess should learn the lesson of the past 20 years: that every aspect of US social policy is coming soon to a government office, education authority or school near you. And if Tony Blair follows his mentor Bill Clinton to electoral victory, it will be coming sooner still.

Carlton Brick on how footballers became the latest heroes to be turned into losers



Kick the victim habit

Today's footballers think it's good to talk. First Arsenal captain Tony Adams hits the headlines by declaring that he is an alcoholic. Then his team mate and reforming alcoholic, cocaine and gambling 'addict' Paul Merson reclaims the front-page confessional to explain how fighting his habits has wrecked his marriage. In between times Paul Gascoigne of Glasgow Rangers and England stars in a TV documentary, and admits that 'the lads' and the lager caused him to miss the birth of his child, despite his promise to reform after confessing that he beat up his partner during previous drinking bouts.

Adams, Merson and Gascoigne head a growing list of professional footballers who have recently 'come clean' on how they failed to cope with the pressures and temptations of the game. For the most part their confessions have been received sympathetically. 'Many footballers are young, uneducated lads', observed Ivan Waddington, director of the Leicester Centre for Research into Sport and Society. 'There must be a lot of temptations.' Waddington is right: they are young, the majority not on the bright side, and they certainly are wealthy by comparison with their peers. But so what? Not having a PhD in psychology has never stopped the rest of us enjoying a drink.

Asked if the pressures of the game ever got to him, Pat Nevin (Tranmere Rovers, president of the players' union) had some sober words for his fellow footballers: 'If you're strong enough, you should be able to deal with it. It's the same in many professions.' In other words grow up and get on with your life like everybody else.

The modern footballer's ability to consume copious amounts of alcohol is well known. In 1990, Adams was jailed for four months after driving into a brick wall while three times over the legal limit. In 1993, he needed 29 stitches in a head wound after a night on the razzle, and on Cup Final day 1994 he was caught on an all-day session (it may have been a problem if Arsenal were playing, but they were not). None of this

has had any discernible influence on Adams' ability (such as it is) on the pitch.

For the past three years the Football Association has been carrying out random breath tests in order to stamp out football's so-called drink problem. But as yet, they have been unable to find, let alone charge, any player with being drunk in charge of a football. It is a far cry from the players of yesteryear. Compared to the drinking habits of George Best, Jimmy Greaves, Stan Bowles, Frank Worthington or Mickey Thomas, Tony Adams looks like a shandy-tipping saint.

What is all the fuss about? Pressure and booze are as much a part of football as goalposts and corner flags. But when Greaves and Best hit the sauce in the sixties and seventies, their fall from grace was seen for what it was: personal weakness. Their vices brought them little sympathy at the time. But today's society has turned weakness into a virtue. The more people say that they cannot cope, the more we worship them. The greater their weakness, the more we admire them. Football has become the latest big player in society's perverse obsession with the victim.

Paul Merson, football's answer to Princess Di, now seems to find his true self more often than the back of the net. The recent autobiography of Kenny Dalglish has been acclaimed not for telling the success story of one of the most talented players and managers of the modern era, but for Dalglish's insights into his own vulnerability. He claims that leading Liverpool and then Blackburn Rovers to the championship put so much pressure on his family that he was forced to walk out on both clubs. When the going gets tough, just give in: that is football's new ethos.

On the pitch as well as off it, the modern footballer is required to play the victim, or face disciplinary charges. Last season the FA charged Manchester City captain Keith Curle with bringing the game into disrepute: he had taken to the field in an aggressive manner. Aston Villa goalkeeper Mark Bosnich got himself in hot water in October by giving a joke 'Nazi salute'

(in the style of Basil Fawlty or Freddie Starr rather than Adolf Hitler) to Spurs fans taunting him over a previous clash with the German player Jürgen Klinsmann. Bosnich should know by now that the correct way to respond to such 'provocation' is to burst into tears, not have a go back; but he soon picked up the thread, claiming that his family, too, had been victims of fascism.

The new bias against aggressive football and footballers was demonstrated during this summer's European Championship, with its emphasis on fair play and shaking hands before kick-off. Yellow cards and bans for the slightest physical contact made for some of the most uninspiring football I have ever seen. Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids took his boots home in a huff because he did not like the way his national coach spoke to him. 'The Rock' Desailly (France and AC Milan) complained to UEFA that opponents were verbally intimidating him. And of course there was our own Gareth Southgate, who won the nation's heart when he missed a penalty and lost the game against Germany. On the eve of the new season Southgate revealed that the trauma of Euro 96 had left him physically and mentally exhausted. Was I the only person who wanted to give him a good slap?

It seems that we want our football stars to be just like us, to have the same hang-ups and the same sense of helplessness. But what's the point of having heroes who fail? What I want from them is success, and an over-the-top lifestyle to match. In the field of sport or any other walk of life, heroes are heroes because they do the things we cannot and inspire others to try to emulate them. The attempt to reduce them to the level of the weak and the vulnerable says more about the dominant values of our society than it does about how much they drink, snort or bet.

Football now looks like a game for social workers and counsellors where the half-time team talk may soon be replaced by a group therapy session. That is enough to drive anybody to drink. ●



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

FUTURES

Virologist Professor Peter Duesberg and journalist Neville Hodgkinson are the pariahs of their professions because they object to the hypothesis that HIV causes Aids. Dr Stuart Derbyshire crossed himself and spoke to them about it

When Robert Gallo declared in 1984 that he had discovered HIV, the virus which was the 'probable cause of Aids', a cure or vaccine was expected within two years. It did not happen. Twelve years later, some of the basic mechanisms of Aids are still not understood, and an effective treatment is a long way off. At the same time, the impact of the disease has turned out quite differently than predicted. Claims that Aids would devastate the heterosexual population of the Western world were used to give an urgency to research, and to lecture people on their sexual behaviour. But the mass epidemic has not happened either.

More than a decade after the discovery of HIV, with many billions spent on research in the USA alone, there is no vaccine, only the possible beginnings of a cure, and a limited heterosexual spread confined largely to the Third World. As the highly exaggerated fears and hopes surrounding Aids give way to a more sober assessment of the failures and successes, it has become easier to place the moderate gains of Aids science into perspective. Part of this must involve a reassessment of the so-called Aids 'dissenters', chief among them Professor Peter Duesberg who has long claimed that HIV is not the cause of Aids.

Duesberg believes that HIV is a 'harmless passenger virus' and that Aids is a consequence of immune system suppression caused by extreme amounts of pathogenic substances. These pathogenic substances arise, he argues, from long-term drug abuse, or anal sex with multiple partners, or exposure to unpurified blood plasma among haemophiliacs. Duesberg rejects all the epidemiological associations between HIV and Aids as coincidence. 'Epidemiology cannot prove that a suspected microbe causes a disease', he impatiently informed me. 'A hundred years ago Koch laid down the standards required to prove that. The first is a perfect correlation, the third and most critical is functional evidence

that an injected microbe causes disease. Epidemiology is only relevant to Koch's first postulate.'

Duesberg's point is that until science demonstrates how something works, correlation should not be used to prove a causal link: 'the fact that everybody who eats a tomato dies, does not prove that tomatoes are "ultimately deadly".' True, but if only a few people ate tomatoes, and they all died before reaching 40, you might be wise to avoid tomatoes. While Duesberg is formally correct—correlation does not prove causation—his argument is ultimately pedantic. Once all other possible causes have been ruled out, correlation must imply causation.

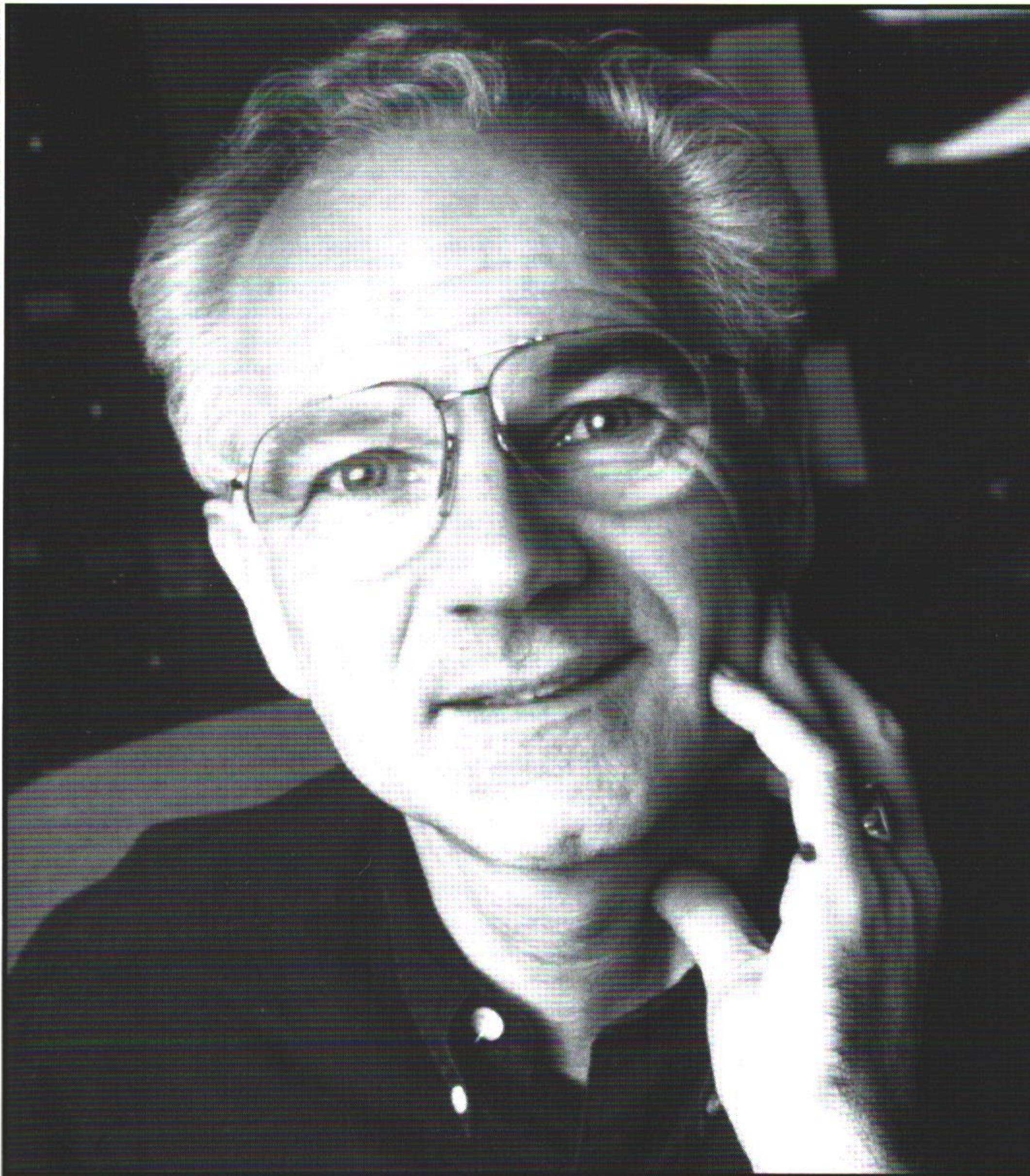
The evidence shows that Duesberg is wrong. However, he has raised some awkward questions about simplistic causal models of HIV-Aids used by mainstream scientists: engaging with these difficulties could have provided insights into the real mechanisms at work. The failure to engage with Duesberg's arguments, instead branding him a 'dissenter', has introduced dogma on a religious scale into the workings of science.

This point was recognised by Richard Horton, editor of the *Lancet*, who recently went against the tide with a sympathetic review of Duesberg's most recent work ('Truth and heresy about Aids', *New York Review of Books*, 23 May 1996). Horton outlined the objections to the HIV-Aids hypothesis in Duesberg's book, *Infectious Aids: Have We Been Misled?* By far the most important was the observation that HIV did not appear to be infecting the CD4+ (T-helper) cells. This was puzzling, as the clinical prognosis of Aids is predicated upon the loss of CD4+ cells with concomitant collapse of immune function. How were the CD4+ cells being killed by HIV in the absence of inter-cellular infection?

The answer to this paradox was provided in January 1995. Two reports in *Nature* demonstrated that the infected

The HIV-Aids heretics

PHOTO: MARK GELLER/REGNERY PUBLISHING INC.



CD4+ cells were being destroyed as quickly as they were infected, so the measured CD4+ population in the blood of an HIV sufferer at any one time was always free of infection (see *Living Marxism*, December 1995). In an accompanying editorial John Maddox conceded that Duesberg

**Professor
Peter Duesberg**

was 'right to have argued all along that the usually slow decline of CD4+ cells is not consistent with what one would expect from a specific cytotoxic viral mechanism' (*Nature*, 373: 189, 1995).

Maddox was gloating at Duesberg's ultimate failure, but he was also making a stark admission: in 1987 Duesberg had

pointed to a paradox in the HIV literature which was to remain largely ignored and unresolved for a further seven years. Irritated by Duesberg's outlandish claim that HIV did not cause Aids, researchers failed to recognise that real discrepancies existed between their expectations of HIV and reality. But it is just such an understanding of the exceptional character of HIV and Aids which currently offers the best hope of a treatment. An earlier engagement with the peculiarities of HIV highlighted by Duesberg could have speeded up research in the field. Furthermore, Duesberg's focus on the use of amyl-nitrites ('poppers') as a predisposing factor for Aids has yet to be investigated. His proposed research protocol which would 'feed poppers to mice' was rejected in December 1993, despite being supported by Robert Gallo and *Science* editor Daniel Koshland.

Although opposed to Duesberg's overall negative stance, Richard Horton concluded his *NYRB* piece on an important point: 'At a time when fresh ideas and new paths of investigation are so desperately being sought, how can the Aids community afford *not* to fund Duesberg's research?'

A decade ago Duesberg was a top researcher who had discovered and described the properties of the Rous chicken sarcoma virus and helped pioneer the whole of retrovirological research into cancer. He had won an Outstanding Investigator Award from the American National Institute of Health. Today his research is at a halt, all his funding has been withdrawn, and renewal of his Outstanding Investigator Award has been refused. He has been largely reduced to crawling over the carcasses of other researchers' work in the letters pages of medical journals. As he told me, he is one of only two members of the National Academy of Sciences USA to have his papers refused publication—usually the Academy ►

does not even peer-review its members' publications.

What happened? Duesberg was not questioning Rous chicken sarcoma, he was questioning HIV's causal role in the development of Aids. And this is the problem, for the debate about HIV and Aids has become polarised and emotional. A moral agenda has always overshadowed scientific discussion of this disease. The bogus notion that HIV

Hodgkinson's immediate cause for 'dissent' was the non-appearance of the predicted heterosexual epidemic

infection would rapidly spread Aids throughout the whole population took hold because it connected with what Susan Sontag called a wider 'sense of cultural distress or failure' in Western societies. The spectre of HIV-Aids devastating the West was actively promoted by the authorities in order to reinforce a moralistic message against homosexuality in particular and sexual promiscuity in general.

Uniquely, as a result of this climate, it suddenly became 'irresponsible' to put forward an alternative scientific viewpoint. In January 1988, the *New York Times* took up the issue and described Duesberg as a 'solitary dissenter' whose 'paper sank without a ripple in the scientific world, winning few if any converts'. The use of the phrases 'dissenter' and 'converts' betrayed the feeling that to go against orthodoxy on Aids was akin to becoming a religious heretic. Health officials, governments, activist groups and researchers were on a crusade against Aids. Criticism could only come from the devil.

A similar reaction occurred in the UK. As journalist and author Neville Hodgkinson told me, 'a storm of protest' followed the publication of his article 'Aids: can we be positive?' in the *Sunday Times* in 1992. Chief Medical Officer Kenneth Calman condemned the *Sunday Times* for not being 'responsible' and rival newspaper the *Observer* asked the Press Complaints Commission to investigate the 'irresponsible reporting'. The *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Lancet* and *New Scientist* joined in the condemnation. An editorial in *Nature* even urged all its readers not to buy the *Sunday Times* ('New style abuse of press freedom', *Nature*, 366: 493-494, 1993).

When *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil backed his man (as he continues to do), it was put down to his reluctance to give up his promiscuous heterosexual sex-life.

Hodgkinson told me that '*Nature*, the London School of Hygiene, and no doubt leading Aids doctors became very concerned to shut the *Sunday Times* up and they were having meetings to discuss how they could do this. They were responsible for sending letters to people I had quoted saying my articles have created a lot of distress, did they stand by what I quoted them as saying? You could call it a dirty tricks campaign really. It was very abusive, misleading and distorting of the position'.

Sadly, both Hodgkinson and Duesberg have responded by digging in and adopting a dogmatic perspective themselves. Duesberg remains convinced that he is totally right. 'Initially I thought I might have overlooked something, or that HIV might break dozens of scientific rules to cause Aids. But now 12 years, over 100 000 papers and over \$42 billion from the US taxpayer alone later, there is no proof that HIV causes Aids. The HIV hypothesis proved to be unprovable! Accordingly, the HIV-Aids hypothesis has been a complete failure in terms of public health benefits: there is no vaccine, no effective drug, not a single Aids patient cured—these are the hallmarks of a flawed hypothesis.'

But there is proof. The 1995 *Nature* papers answered some of Duesberg's earlier objections. Further papers published since have established a causal role for HIV beyond reasonable doubt. One paper reported that HIV accounted for 85 per cent of the deaths in a sample of 1020 HIV-positive haemophiliac patients (Sarah Darby, 'Mortality before and after HIV infection in the complete UK population of haemophiliacs', *Nature*, 377: 79-82, 1995); another showed that 53 per cent of a smaller sample of HIV positive patients with haemophilia developed Aids (Caroline Sabin, 'Comparison of immunodeficiency and Aids defining conditions in HIV-negative and HIV-positive men with haemophilia A', *British Medical Journal*, 312: 207-210, 1996). Sabin's study clearly demonstrated that even when HIV positive patients are matched for age and lifetime exposure to important co-factors, they still die more quickly than the HIV-negative patients, and from diseases which are uniquely associated with the opportunistic infections of Aids. Regardless of Duesberg's pertinent questioning of exactly how HIV causes Aids, that HIV has a pathogenic role in the development of Aids can no longer be reasonably questioned.

A more extreme dogmatism has overcome Neville Hodgkinson, who shares many of Duesberg's views. Hodgkinson's immediate cause for 'dissent' was more the non-appearance of the predicted heterosexual epidemic than experience in the science of retroviruses. Importantly, on the issue of epidemiology, he was on firmer ground in his dissent than was Duesberg in his study of HIV and Aids. As long ago as 1987, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick challenged the consensus view that the Western world faced a heterosexual epidemic in *The Truth About the Aids Panic*. This year, Jamie Taylor of Gay Men Fighting Aids confessed to what Fitzpatrick knew back then. Taylor admitted that gay organisations had deliberately played-up the risk of heterosexual transmission to ensure that the virus was taken more seriously and to secure more funding for a high-risk minority that some might otherwise consider expendable (*Guardian*, 18 July 1996).

Hodgkinson admits that, when he began reporting on Aids in 1985, he swallowed whole the warnings about heterosexual spread and never raised an eyebrow to the actual figures which demonstrated that Aids was confined to high-risk groups. 'I think I remember feeling a little distaste for the way the story was being turned into a media event. The big expensive advertising agencies, the dramatic horror film ads on TV. But I went along with it because I believed that we really did face this huge threat.'

Hodgkinson's new book *Aids: the Failure of Contemporary Science* questions the whole basis of Aids research, from the predicted spread of Aids, to the mechanism of HIV, finally concluding that HIV does not even exist. Sadly, Hodgkinson displays the same lack of critical rigour he used in 1985, only now he is running the other way. In response to his ostracisation he has moved beyond epidemiological doubts about the mainstream story, beyond even Duesberg, and seems to have lost the thread altogether.

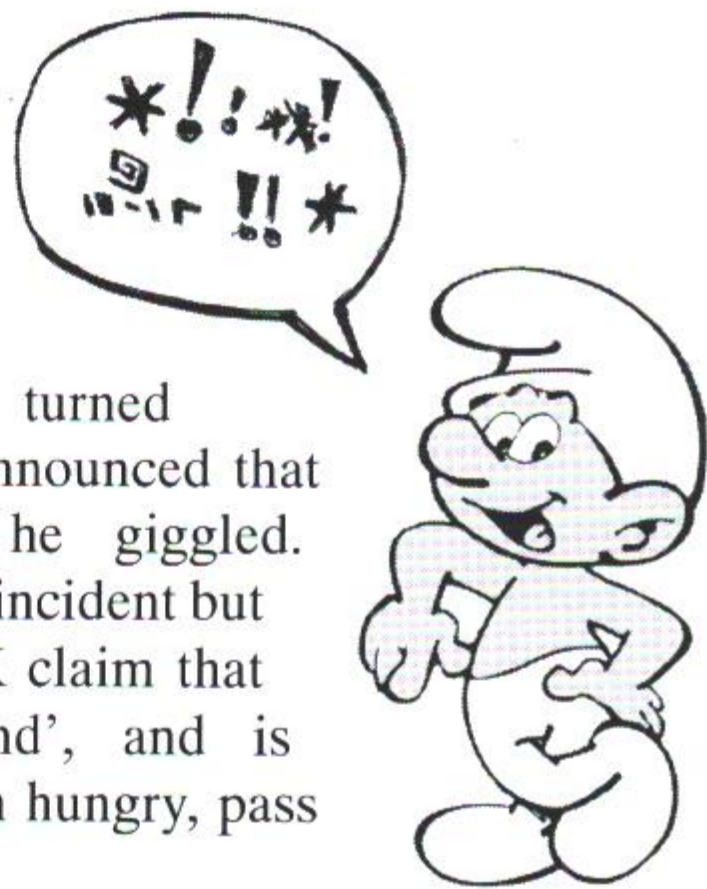
Duesberg's own bitterness over his treatment has now prompted him to lash out against the whole of Aids science, denouncing every attempt to attack the HIV virus as an 'iatrogenic fiasco'. But that is no reason to suppress his work. And, 10 years after the cure was supposed to appear, there is certainly no reason to feel happy with the achievements of Aids science. Duesberg's criticisms of the mainstream have always been more interesting than his own disproven theories. He continues to raise doubts about the latest ideas for a cure. As Horton said, if we are concerned about science, 'how can the Aids community afford *not* to fund Duesberg's work?' ●

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

In 1879 at Rorke's Drift, 100 men from the Welsh Borderers fought against wave upon wave of Zulus, as immortalised in the famous Michael Caine film. But today, Zulus and Welsh soldiers from the same regiment are working—and singing—side by side to build a 'Zulu community centre' at the scene of the siege. Southampton University Officer Training Corps raised £50 000 to fund this laudable project.

The esteemed works of Enid Blyton are scheduled for republication, after years in the wilderness, although we are apparently unlikely to see that old favourite *The Gay Story Book* back in the shops. Tales such as *Dame Poke-Around* and *The Three Sailors* are actually disappointingly innocent, but in today's climate, you cannot be too careful. In the latter story, Daddy announces 'I'm not going to wet my nice white trousers', although he is only referring to the pleas of the three sailors to rescue them from drowning. However, in *Pippity's Joke* a pixie is smacked so hard that 'he cried a whole bucket of tears'. And in another tale a bear shouts 'Look at my worm everybody, it's a good wriggler'. Meanwhile a duck is threatened with the words 'I'll press your quack till it breaks'. Child abuse, flashing and cruelty to animals, yet there are also some positive role models of different sexualities and lifestyles: the aforementioned *Dame Poke-Around's* house burns down and she embarks upon an alternative living arrangement with *Dame Flip-Flap*. As my old friend Bernard Right-on (the comic with the PC punch-lines) would say: nothing wrong with that, they're both over 21.

A talking Smurf doll was returned in disgrace to Woolworths when it allegedly said 'I need a fuck' to three-year old Courtney Barnes. The air turned blue after the little man announced that he was hungry. Then he giggled. Eye-witnesses confirm the incident but distributors Ideal Toys UK claim that it 'isn't meant to offend', and is supposed to be saying 'I'm hungry, pass me the fork'.



Manchester's Library Theatre has commendably led the way in catering to the needs of the blind community. Commentary facilities have been set up to describe sex scenes to visually impaired members of the audience.

In the officially non-existent contest between Cherie Booth and Norma Major to be the most 'normal' party leader's wife, Norma seems to be roaring ahead. Her strong views on privacy did not prevent her from revealing that she reuses teabags, and freezes leftover bits of cheese. What could be more normal than that?

CARELESS TALK

'I, too, wanted to scream my fear and rage, just like the elephants, all across Africa, who were screaming their rage, and their fear of dying for the sake of a bracelet or garish ornament'

Paula Hamilton, the self-styled 'multi-talented' model and recovering alcoholic, whose autobiography describes her heroic fight against the pressure of being both the star of one old Volkswagen advert and a leading light in the Tusk Force elephant charity. Like Paula, no elephant would dream of dying for any jewellery or ornament that wasn't in the best possible taste.

'Fish have aspirations beyond dying with a hook in their mouth'

Anti-angling campaigner on ITV's *Agenda*, who also pointed to the traumatic effect of angling on the family life of the fish

'Imagine the scenario—you enter the interview room and the panel which greets you is under 12 years old. This would be the case at Highfield Junior School in Plymouth, where children have an active role in interviewing and

selecting new teachers. They question candidates and discuss decisions with staff. To date their decisions have coincided with staff.'

From *Home and School*, the magazine of the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations

'I looked at myself in the mirror'

'What did you see, Tony?' 'It's private...'

If only it had been private. Tony Adams 'faces up' to his drink problem in the company of a few friends from the papers. Mr Adams is a leader of men in the Terry Butcher 'captain courageous' mould, allegedly.

'It took a lot of bottle for Tony to own up'

Ian Wright. As Adams says, the lads are all 'there for me'.

'Fuck off!'

Chelsea footballer Roberto Di Matteo's 'signature' on a young supporter's Sky Sports hat

How are the villagers coping with their grief 30 years on?

The *Radio Times* joins the victim society, reporting a documentary on the 1966 Aberfan disaster

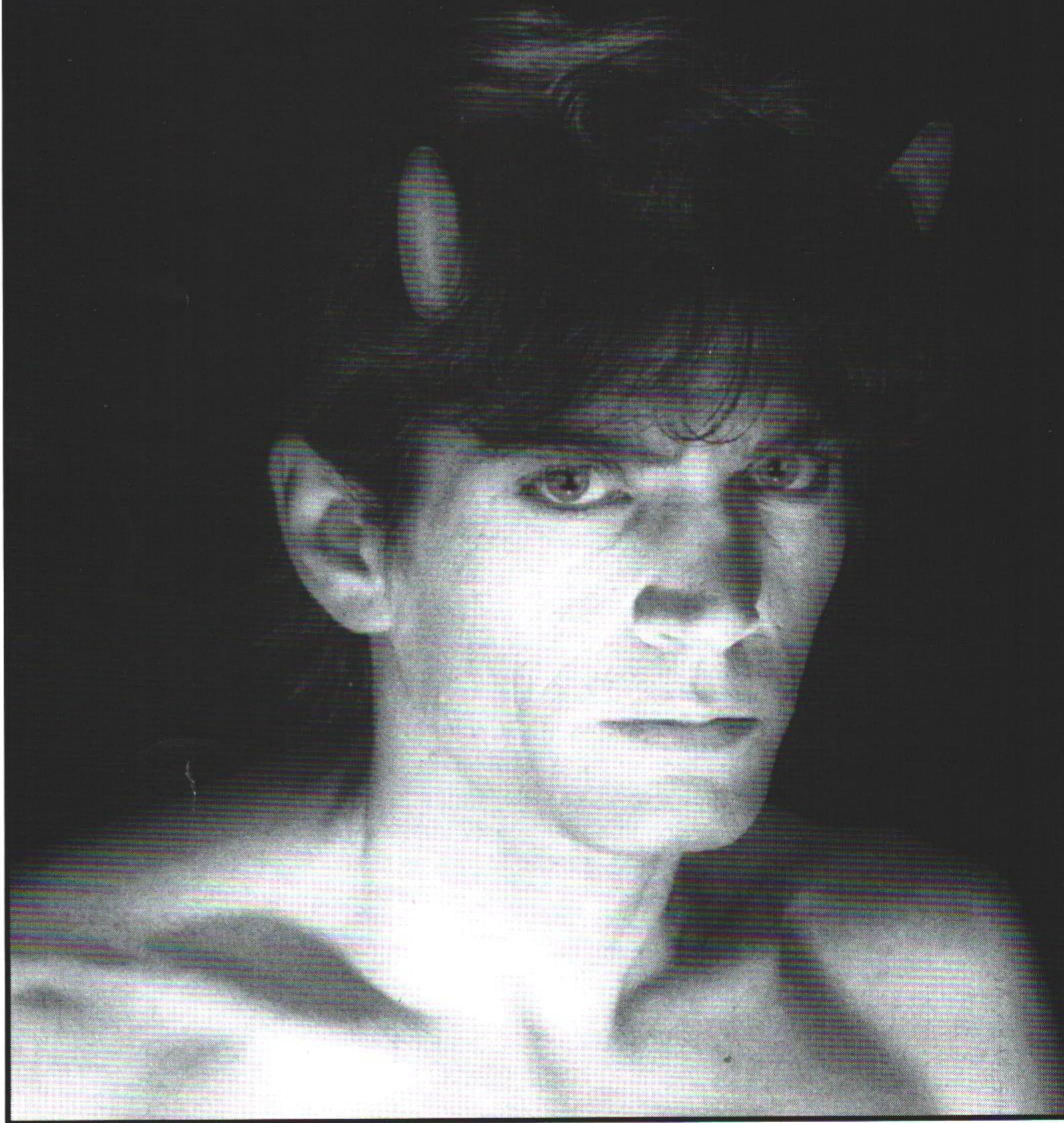
'What we are trying to do is give people a certain amount of power and control over their lives. You might think that is something quite ridiculous to say about underwear...'

No, of course not. An *agent provocateur* spokesperson, on the philosophy of empowerment through lingerie

Art

for narcissism's sake

Mapplethorpe's photographs are all self-portraits of the artist and his cock, says Alka Singh

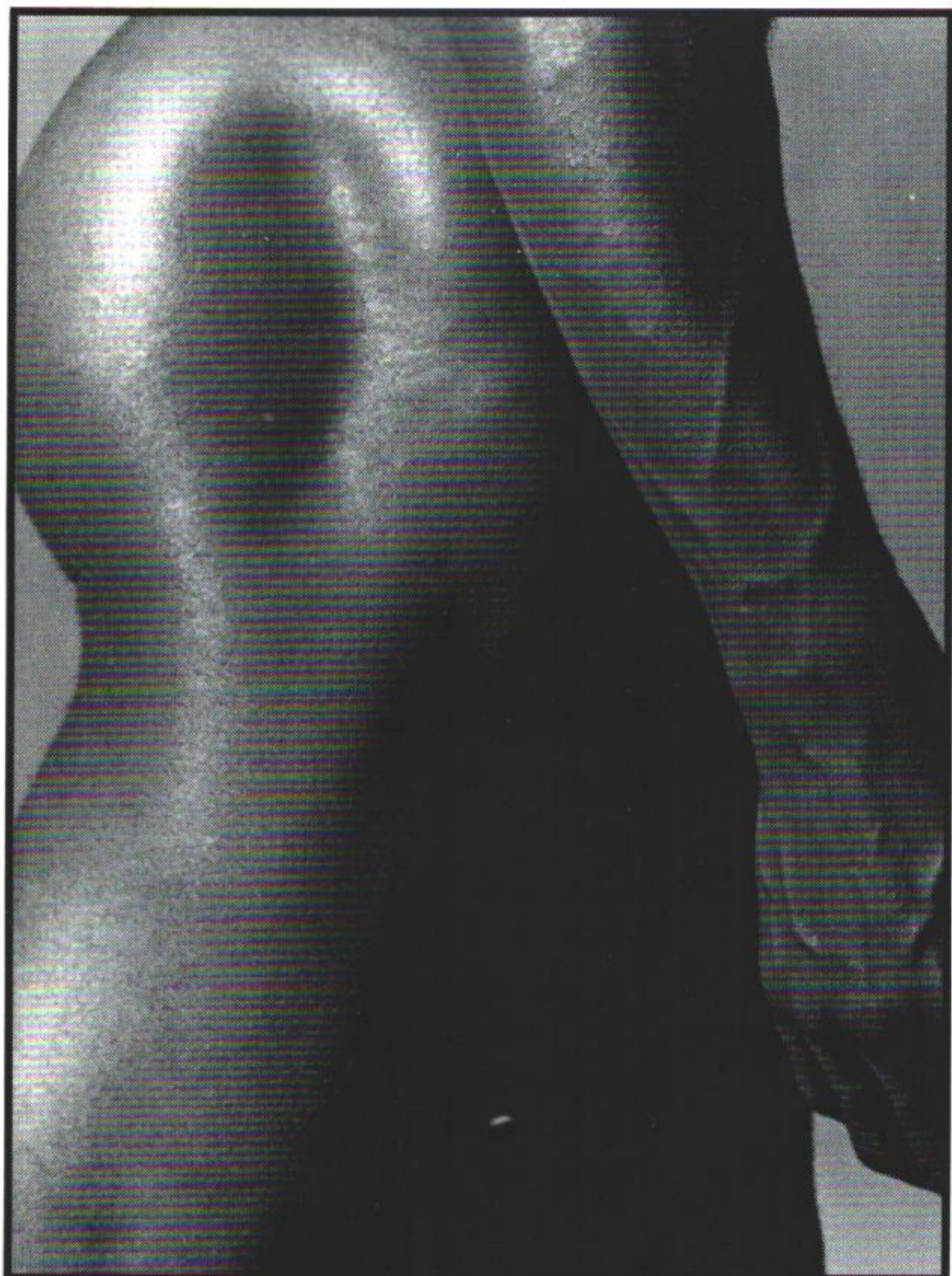


Art or pornography? Predictably, the Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective at London's Hayward Gallery has prompted a further round in the controversy.

On one side, curator Germano Celant has maintained that Mapplethorpe's sexually explicit photographs 'glorify the power and proliferation of Eros'. Celant praised Mapplethorpe, a gay man who died of Aids in 1989, as a revolutionary of the art world whose 'transcending of a prohibition flaunts and favours a repressed pleasure'.

For the 'pornography' camp, meanwhile, vitriolic columnist Julie Burchill berated Mapplethorpe for treating 'black men like animals'. Childline's hysteric-in-chief Esther Rantzen described the portrait of a semi-clothed three-year-old girl as an 'utterly horrific' example of 'child pornography'. Despite the protests of the original model Rosie Bowdrey (now 22 years of age and running a cafe in trendy Notting Hill), the Hayward Gallery chose not to show the picture, along with a portrait of two men having sex. The gallery also took the unprecedented step of banning unaccompanied under-18s from the exhibition.

Most of those who get obsessive about Mapplethorpe's sexual subject matter are merely expressing the conservative and panic-stricken attitudes of today, especially regarding children (just ask Julia Somerville). The fact that the question 'art or pornography?' is raised in the first place, says a lot about the lack



of vision and confidence among the art establishment. This failure of nerve becomes even more explicit when a leading gallery like the Hayward allows its exhibitions to be vetted by the police and then de-selects portraits in accordance with the advice received from the aesthetes of Scotland Yard.

The row over Mapplethorpe is in keeping with the censorious times in which we live. Liberals who opposed the attempts of the American New Right to ban Mapplethorpe in the eighties are often the first to censor him in the nineties, for the sake of the children you understand. The flipside of this, the elevation of Mapplethorpe into an icon, is in line with the narcissism of contemporary culture. Despite the sound and fury surrounding him, Mapplethorpe's work exhibits a level of self-obsession which makes for banality rather than true controversy.

Visiting the Mapplethorpe retrospective, I was struck by how the photographs all looked the same. From flowers to bullwhips up the anus, they had a remarkable similarity about them which was ultimately boring.

Technically, Mapplethorpe makes excellent use of bare studio settings and dramatic lighting to create strong tonal differences. These are beautiful objects, but they stand alone, disconnected from any of the usual surroundings or trappings which might reveal something of their own character. Instead everything, from the human body to inanimate objects, is isolated and represented only according

far left: Self-portrait, 1985

left: Ken & Tyler, 1985

above: Untitled, 1980

above right: Tulips, 1988

to Mapplethorpe's own personal desire. He objectifies his subjects to the point where they are drained of any life or interest in their own right.

The photographs of Ajito (1981) turn his lovely, muscular body into a frozen sculpture, not dissimilar to 'Upright Hyacinth' (1986). In both cases Mapplethorpe subordinates the integrity and vitality of his subject to the prism of his own sexual desire. I suspect that the more you share the photographer's sexual proclivities (and not just his homosexuality), the more you will enjoy this show.

A few exhibits make a passing nod to Surrealism, such as 'Man In A Polyester Suit' (1980), where a figure in a three-piece suit has his penis hanging out; or the triptych in which the left and right panels show a man masturbating, while the middle panel is a mirror. Witty, but hardly groundbreaking.

In fact these pieces could have been produced at almost any time during the last 50 years.

What irks most is the lack of development in Mapplethorpe's work. Instead the viewer is confronted with the constant repetition of the artist's preoccupation with himself. In his commentary on the exhibition, the curator praises Mapplethorpe's work for its 'plurality of expression, its diverse and irregular movements...a continuous surging of sexual pluralities'. On the contrary, Mapplethorpe's work strikes me as extremely predictable. To the exclusion of almost every other consideration,

it returns again and again to a single subject: me and my cock.

Some critics have suggested that Mapplethorpe's photographs cannot stand the test of time because they look too much like advertisements made in the yuppified eighties. In the *Observer* (29 September 1996) William Feather wrote that 'black-framed Mapplethorpes are as characteristic of the eighties as the matt black personal stereo'. Perhaps, but the spirit of Mapplethorpe's output is very much in keeping with the art world of the nineties, which asks nothing more of artists than that they should repeatedly express their obsession with the pettiest aspects of their lives. This narrow expectation is also on display in the work of another artist whose latest show can be seen at the Hayward, right next to the Mapplethorpe retrospective. Writing in the *Evening Standard* (3 October 1996), caustic art critic Brian Sewell was dead-on when he castigated 'superficial' sculptor Antony Gormley for making his name by 'taking casts from his own body'.

Surrounded by Mapplethorpe's narcissism, how I longed for the revelation of photographic subjects in their own right, which was the hallmark of the Eve Arnold retrospective at the Barbican earlier this year. Now there was a woman of an earlier generation who dared to look beyond her own anus, and who realised herself by doing so. ●

The Mapplethorpe retrospective is at the Hayward Gallery until 17 November.

Alka Singh teaches media studies.

Un-Victorian

Museum charges are mean-spirited, says

Louis Ryan

values

Until recently the entrance hall to the Victoria and Albert Museum presented a curious spectacle to the visitor. Access had to be gained through a kind of barricade, comprising desks marked 'information' to the left and right, and in the middle another long desk with narrow passages on either side. Hung above each passage was a banner indicating 'suggested donations' (adults £4.50, students and OAPs £1). In case you still had not got the message, there was a third banner in the middle proclaiming 'admission to the Museum is by voluntary donation which can be made at either donations desk'. If however you were impervious to these requests, there was nothing to stop you walking through one of the narrow passages without paying—with, if necessary, a 'sod you' look at disapproving members of staff.

Since 1 October, however, exhortation has given way to compulsion. The V&A has introduced a mandatory £5 entrance charge for adults (£3 concessions, free to students, the unwaged, disabled and under-18s). Following similar moves at the National Maritime Museum and the Science Museum, this marks a further erosion of the principle that access to permanent collections should be free of charge.

The growth of museums and galleries open without charge to the general public dates back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the time the British establishment felt under threat from the new urban masses. It sought to inculcate 'civilised values' into a population uprooted from the old rural ways of life. Access to high culture through museums was an important element in this strategy. To restrict entry to those prepared to pay a fee would have been self-defeating. As the director of the British Museum explained to a Royal Commission in 1929, 'the educational advantages offered to the public' were of far greater importance than 'a trivial taking of cash at the turnstiles'.

Most critics of entrance charges complain that today's society is



preoccupied with just such 'a trivial taking of cash'. They blame the usual suspects: Thatcherite philistinism and the greed associated with the eighties. Yet this explanation merely begs the question why the broader project that originally inspired the growth of free museums should have been supplanted by such narrow concerns.

The answer lies in the way that today's ruling elite has lost faith in its own historic role. In the past the growth of museum culture was driven by fear of the masses. But it was also informed by the belief that 'civilised values' and the values of the British elite were identical, so that the promotion of the one would necessarily strengthen and nurture the other. Today few people, either inside or outside the elite, would hold such a belief. So why subsidise high culture when it can no longer serve an elitist agenda? In a relativistic world, where one set of values is deemed as good as another, there is no reason why you should not have to pay for your own cultural choices.

The breakdown and fragmentation in the outlook of the establishment is mirrored in the way that museum visitors

are now treated. One of the most positive features of free entrance was its universal character, with no distinction drawn between tourist and local, young and old, well-off and disadvantaged. With entrance charges, by contrast, all sorts of distinctions are forced upon the public. In order to gain free admission, the student must fish out his card, the disabled person must point to his carer, and the 'unwaged' must produce his UB40 before curious onlookers. As for children under 18, one wonders whether they will be asked to establish their date of birth. Perhaps the V&A will take a lead from London Underground and demand that teenagers should carry identity cards.

The new arrangements leave you with the choice of paying exorbitant charges or pleading special status. What was previously a right for everyone becomes either a commercial purchase or a favour bestowed by the authorities. Which is why it is worth defending the easy, urbane and universalistic culture of the free museum in the few places where it still exists.

Louis Ryan is a library cardholder at the V&A.

Not just swanning about

In the AMP production of *Swan Lake*, the swans are played by men. But they are not doing it for laughs, says Timandra Harkness

Last time I saw the young dance company AMP (formerly known as Adventures in Motion Pictures), they performed a witty send-up of masculinity based on men's underwear adverts. When I heard that AMP were doing a version of the classical ballet *Swan Lake* with the swans danced by men, I assumed that casting males in a ballerina's role was intended as further ironic comment on contemporary masculinity. I was wrong.

Granted, AMP have not lost the ability to share a joke with the audience, as shown by their mock-Royal Ballet performed in overblown Victorian style. But there is nothing funny about the first appearance of the swans. These are not insubstantial creatures of fragile grace, but wild and dangerous animals.

'You can't just keep sending things up and being ironical about everything', says artistic director Matthew Bourne. 'At some point, you have to get serious and attack some serious emotion and real people. I know that humour is something we can do, but as I've got older, I think I want to get more serious about what I'm doing, and move people, and make them feel something as well.'

So why, if not to send up men, did Bourne cast them as swans? 'It was just instinct', he replied. 'I felt that the way a swan is, its wingspan and everything, is much more similar to a male musculature. They are so strong, and I think the [traditional] ballet only represents the beautiful, gliding-along-the-water kind of swan. The film we watched was of swans flying and attacking fishermen, and they are very frightening.'

'The problem was that I really didn't want it to be a send-up. I wanted them to be completely masculine, but graceful and have the qualities that are required for the music. Everyone assumed, maybe

because of what we've done before, that it was going to be one big send-up—men in tutus or something. But I can't think of anything more tedious.'

In Bourne's production, the Prince is attracted to the swans because they are wild. At the start of the show, everything in his life is strictly regulated, from his mother's morning kiss to the girl set up by the major-domo to satisfy his sexual needs. Suddenly he is confronted by creatures of instinct, who follow their desires without social constraint. Theirs is an existence driven by pure physicality.

If Bourne's intention is to equate freedom with the subordination of mind to the body, I think he is sadly mistaken. But it is good to see him breaking out of the ironic condition which besets so many of his contemporaries. After making his name with quirky pieces from outside the mainstream, he has gone back to the classics for 'serious' inspiration.

'I like having a structure that's already set up for you.'

I think it's part of growing up—as performers, as a choreographer or whatever—tackling something major that has very simple and universal themes.'

Bourne also appreciates that it is better to remain true to the original music, rather than changing it around to fit your own preoccupations. 'Maybe you come up with something you wouldn't have thought of, [because] you had to struggle to get it. I find it liberating, strangely.' His new work shows that true creativity often depends on classically-inspired discipline. It is an appropriate rejoinder to 'alternative' theatre (now commonplace) in which self-expression is often indistinguishable from self-indulgence.

The universal themes of loneliness and sexual jealousy are powerfully re-presented in the AMP production of *Swan Lake*. The gender-bending swans prompted a few titters and created some valuable publicity for the show. As Bourne intended, however, AMP's *Swan Lake* is memorable not just for the gimmick of unconventional casting, but for tackling classic emotions head-on. ●

Swan Lake is playing at the Piccadilly Theatre in London's West End. It is also due to be shown on Channel 4 over Christmas.

Timandra Harkness works in physical theatre.

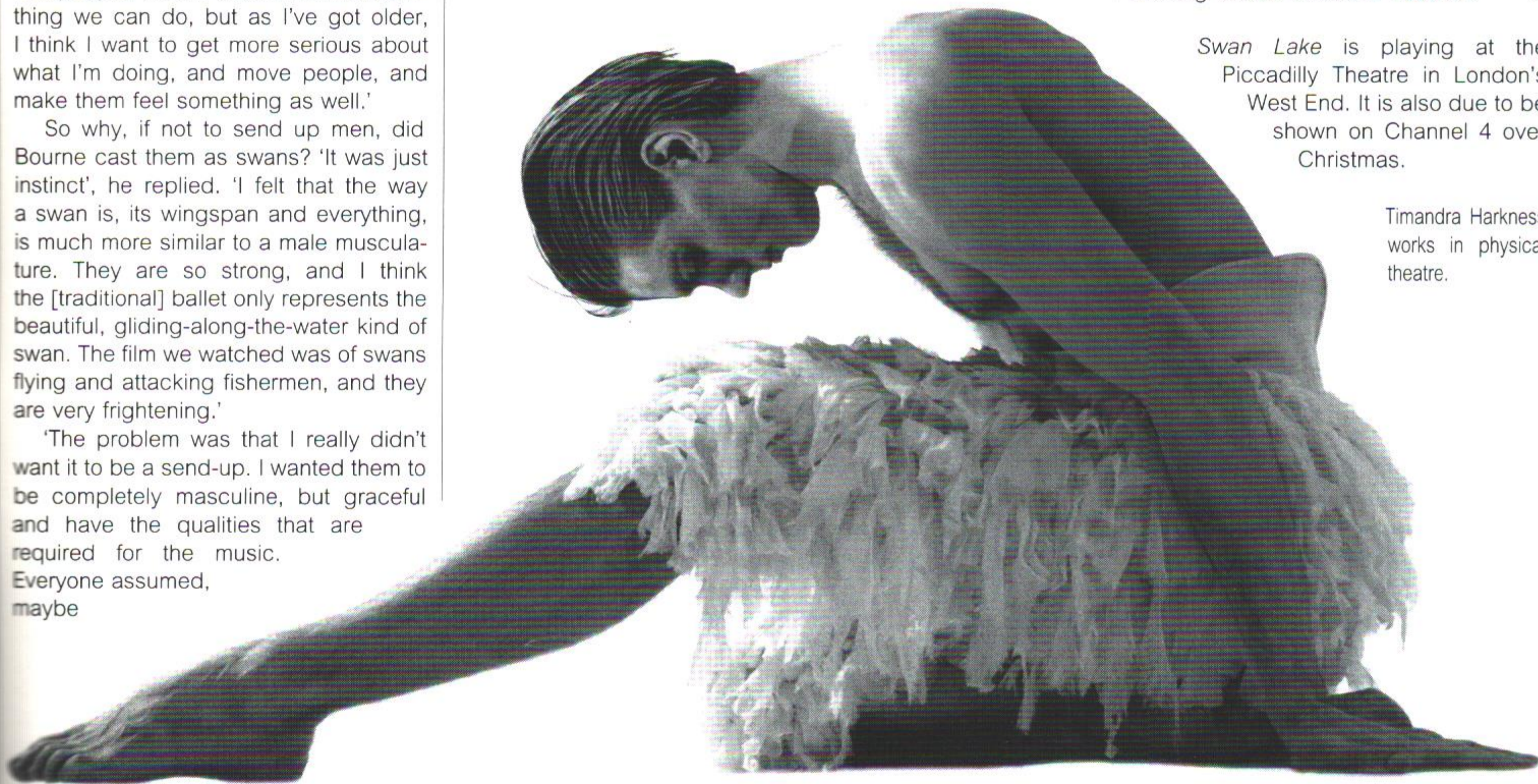
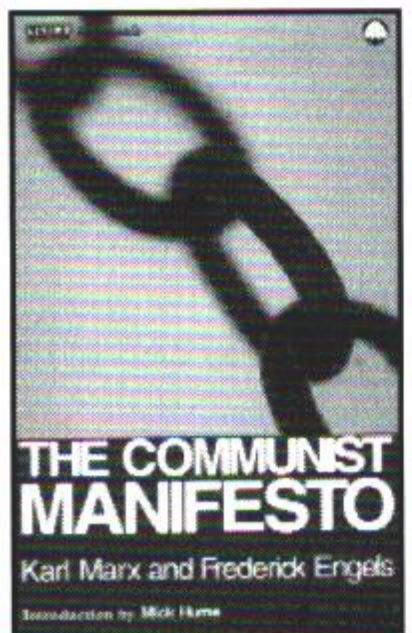


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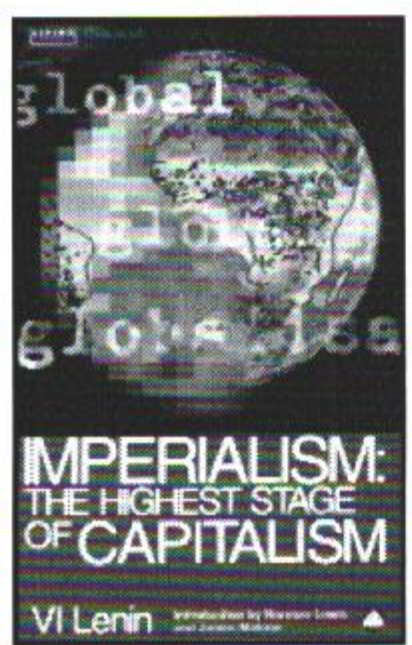


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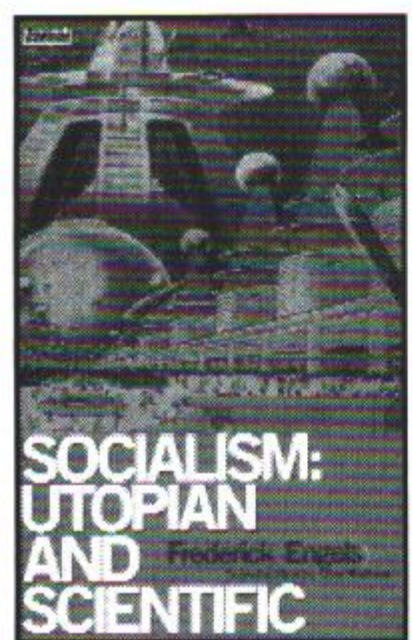


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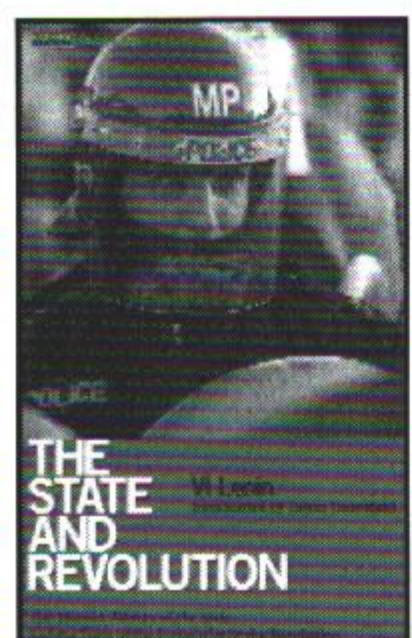


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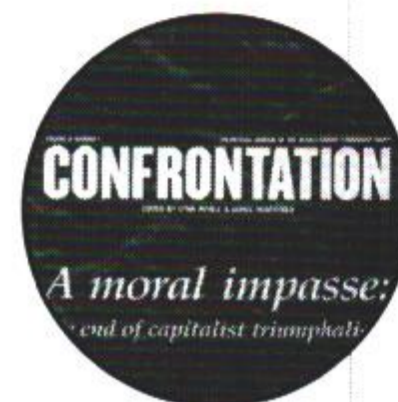


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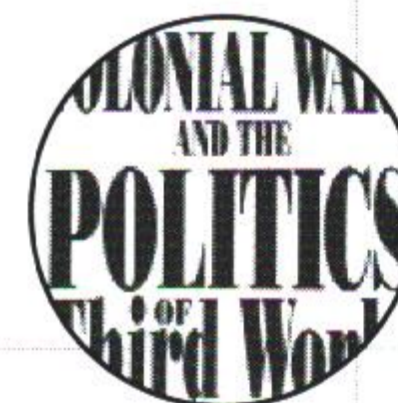


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MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Peter Ray looks at what happens when even gay is considered too straight

Nowt so queer as folk

Time for Bed, David Baddiel, Little, Brown & Company, £14.99 hbk

Anti-Gay, Mark Simpson (ed), Cassell, £9.99 hbk

The Material Queer, Donald Morton (ed), Westview Press, £16.95 pbk

Time For Bed by David (*Fantasy Football League*) Baddiel is a very funny novel—or a very funny script for a contemporary sitcom with a plot, written as if it were a novel. I laughed out loud. What makes it funny is the stock in trade of contemporary stand-up comedy, the confession. Baddiel's central character Gabriel Jacoby (uncannily, a Jewish smart Alec slacker with a 'sixth-former's brain' and a weekly humorous football column) confesses to his self-indulgent insomnia, his less than hygienic lifestyle, his love for his brother's wife and much more, but above all he confesses to his new laddish sexual predilections, from pornography and some heavy wanking to anal sex—which proved to be unforgivable for the *Guardian*.

Anal sex, as Baddiel puts it, 'represents for many people the top of the sexual peculiarities tree', which is precisely what makes it so pleasurable. 'Anal sex', he writes, 'more than any other, is the sex of ideas: the eroticism lies in knowing what it is you are doing'; and what you are doing is transgressing the norm, clambering high up that 'sexual peculiarities tree'.

Which is enough to offend *Guardian* journalists and Mary Whitehouse. But for the rest of us *Time for Bed* is funny precisely because Jacoby's confessions are less transgressive than they are familiar, so like many people we know or even like ourselves. The ironical frankness of Gabriel Jacoby's account of the most intimate aspects of his life is one expression of the definite opening up of private lives in recent years. Confessing all, which is to say owning up to desires that were formerly regarded as obscene or perverted (or indeed just confessing to common everyday behaviour that is absurd and pathetic), has become one of the conventions of our culture.

This urge to confess is what Donald Morton describes in his introduction to the gay studies anthology *The Material Queer* as 'the postmodern erasure of the distinction between the public and the private, the outside and the inside'. The otiose style of lesbian and gay politics is a long way from stand-up, but the content is

the same, the postmodern confessional in which 'nothing is any longer hidden; the outside is the inside and vice versa. In this perspective, the human subject no longer has any "interiority".' (p21) The trouble with a subject who is all on the outside is that he might be fun for a while but how can he reflect on his experience? Where does he go to find depth, subtlety, ambiguity, or indeed individuality?

The gay scene has always held undermining the public/private distinction as its creed, expressed in a ritual known as 'coming out', a self-conscious avowal of a marginalised sexuality. But, as far as Mark Simpson and the authors of *Anti-Gay* are concerned, coming out is not enough. Despite the provocative packaging, *Anti-Gay* is not a homophobic rant, but an inside job, a very upfront stab in the back. Just when you thought it was safe to reveal the true essence of your being to the world, to refuse the oppressive demands of heterosexual masculinity, to 'come out', up pops Mark Simpson. He offers us a 'collection of malodorous essays by various disgruntled non-heterosexuals' put together with the express intention of raining all over the gay parade. As far as these writers are concerned gay liberation has had its day. The shock value of coming out has been blunted by the respectability and banal conformity of the gay scene.

The contributors to *Anti-Gay* certainly seem to have a bit of a downer on all the cheery gay openness about sexuality. One of the sharper pieces in a spiky compilation is called 'A case for the closet'. Written by film-maker Bruce LaBruce and 'drag queen terrorist' Glenn Belverio, it is a script for a TV show broadcast in 1995 in New York, starring two drag queens Glenda Orgasm and Judy LaBruce who have had enough of being gay since so many big stars 'coming out' has 'taken the mystique out of homosexuality'.

At one point Glenda and Judy are trying, and failing, to get into a meeting of a homophobic foundation in order to be cured of their homosexuality. Frustrated, they start to accost passers-by and explain ►

their predicament. One 'Ordinary Man' is bemused when they tell him that they want to go back in the closet. 'But you're beautiful', he protests, 'you wouldn't want to hide in there'. The 'Ordinary Man' thinks it tragic that after 'all the progress that's been made...people feel that they want to go back in'. But Judy and Glenda retort that the 'progress' of the gay community has 'watered down' homosexuality:

Glenda: We're very concerned with the mediocrity of gay culture.

Ordinary Man: (*trying to keep up*) So it's sort of become a mass movement? It's not an elite thing anymore? Is that what you mean by "mediocre"?

This might be played for laughs, but it is the message of *Anti-Gay*: the gay identity used to be challenging, but now that everyone is into it, it is just common. *Anti-Gay's* criticisms of the gay identity are witty and well-aimed, particularly the contributions from Simpson (on the gay underwear cult), Paul Burston (on the philistinism of gay film criticism) and New York-based journalist John Weir. But in the end, as Glenda and Judy suggest, the real complaint of these 'disgruntled non-heterosexuals' is that gay has become too ordinary, too normal.

**'I'm sick of gay men,' writes Weir.
'The next time I see a bunch of dudes from
Jersey beating on a faggot from Greenwich
Village, I'm going to cheer them on!'**

John Weir spells this out in his vitriolic 'Going in'. Weir lays into the superficial character of the gay identity and of the political movement based upon it: 'there is currently no more recognisable type than the politically active, sexually predatory gay American man, the kind of guy who wants, not equality for everyone, but entitlement for himself. And big pecs. If gay men ruled America, there would be tax credits for joining a gym.' (p30) He rightly concludes that, as a force for change, 'the gay rights movement, from radicals to conservatives, is crippled by a sense of entitlement' (p34). Weir's disillusionment with the political vacuity of the gay movement leads to a bitter conclusion:

'I'm sick of gay men. The next time I see a bunch of dudes from Jersey beating on a faggot from Greenwich Village, I'm going to cheer them on. Being gay used to feel like an expression of difference, but I lost my otherness, and now I want it back. I'm not gay anymore. I'm not even queer. I'd almost rather be mistaken for a registered Republican.' (p34)

Radical. From the uniform pack of conventional and superficial gays, Weir wants his 'otherness', his 'difference' back. The trouble with this kind of 'difference' is that it turns out to be even more trivial than the gay identity that he criticises. Indeed Weir's 'anti-gay' strategy distils everything mundane from gay politics—the attention-seeking shock tactics—and leaves out the liberating side. Gay-bashing—how camp.

Although both Simpson and Weir explicitly distance

themselves from it, the criticisms in *Anti-Gay* are in substance those of 'queer', a disparate movement which has flourished in gender and cultural studies since the early nineties. The pomo homos of queer celebrate not simply same-sex relations but transexuality, bisexuality, drag, S&M, punk—in fact whatever is marginal. In one of its founding texts, *Fear of A Queer Planet*, Michael Warner wrote that "'queer" gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual' (quoted in *The Material Queer*, p289).

The Material Queer is an anthology which provides a fine introduction to postmodern ideas about sexuality and a significant contribution to a critique of them. Editor Morton lays bare the intellectual history of queer with a well-edited selection of influential twentieth-century theorists (such as Sigmund Freud, Herbert Marcuse, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault), contemporary 'queer theorists' and their critics (including a contribution republished from *Living Marxism* by one Peter Ray). His introduction clarifies some of the dangers of the queers' attack on identity politics.

The perverse heart of queer theory can be found in the writings of the lesbian feminist Judith Butler, represented here by 'Imitation and gender insubordination'. Talking about drag, Butler argues that gender and sexual identity, like any identities, are merely a mirage of the operations of discourses.

Donald Morton refers to Judith Butler's ideas as 'ludic', from the Latin word for playful. They are ludic because of the insistence that all social reality is a question of meanings constructed by representations, by culture, by film, literature, law, science, dress codes, speech codes, ultimately by language. In this outlook, desire is 'that excess produced at the moment of the human subject's entry into the codes and conventions of culture' (p4). Desire endlessly disrupts the production of meaning through language or signification. This process of disruption of signs is one in which the 'signified' (the conceptual, meaningful aspect of language) is destabilised by the play or slippage of the signifier (the sensory, meaningless, sound-image aspect of language). Butler's argument about drag exemplifies this outlook.

**In Butler's view a woman is only
a woman so long as she continues to
perform the role of woman.**

If identity is merely an unstable effect of a language game, then, rather than sexuality or gender giving expression to some inner drive, the individual homosexual or heterosexual, or for that matter man or woman, is merely an effect of people acting out the different scripts provided for them by the discourses of sexuality. In Butler's view a woman is only a woman as long as she continues to perform the role of woman. Identity is a performance; both gender and sexuality are an act.

In this context, drag 'is not an imitation or a copy of some prior and true gender', rather 'drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which *any gender* is assumed' (in *The Material Queer*, p185).

And Butler continues:

'If this is true...there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself.' (p185)

For Butler, gender is a copy without an original. Homophobes, she says, make the mistake of thinking of the butches and femmes of lesbian drag as imitations, derivatives of the real (heterosexual) thing. But, if man and woman are copies without an original in the first place, who is to say which is the parody (heterosexuals or lesbian butches and femmes), which is the original and which the derivation?

Baddiel's arse-shagging, porn-consuming, football-loving, sexist hero is a self-conscious parody of a feminist caricature of a straight man.

In other words, the 'otherness' of homosexuality should be seen not so much as a copy of heterosexuality as an exposé of it. Butler argues that homosexuality reveals the truth about heterosexuality, that it is not natural and original, but a fragile cultural construction, an effect of language that is 'perpetually at risk...of becoming undone' (p186). On Butler's queer planet the endless play of difference means it is not possible to assign 'normality' to anything; the sincere can never be disentangled from the ironic, nor the true from the false.

This is why, if queers have found it difficult to agree on what they are, they are all agreed on what they are not, and that is gay. For queers, like Butler, gay has no more grounded reality than straight; neither identity is secure. Moreover the restriction of homosexuality to the minority identity of gay only serves to reinforce the supposed normality of heterosexuality. If 'gay' is a poor imitation of straight, the queer analysis appears to be liberating. For if gender and sexuality are performances, there is little to prevent us from rewriting the script and constantly transgressing the supposed norm. On the other hand, queer might seem like infuriating mumbo jumbo—more ludicrous than ludic. In fact queer theory for all its opaque language is describing significant and unwelcome developments in our sexual culture.

For all the apparently liberating aspects of transgressing identity, what is actually being expressed is the opposite, a downright hostility to human freedom and individuality. The moral agent who is author of his or her own destiny is being downgraded. Instead we are all mere effects of discourses. For as Butler writes:

'coherent gender, achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as its effect the illusion of a prior and volitional subject...gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express.' (p187)

In other words, the 'volitional subject', the human

individual, male or female, has no prior existence, no 'inside' from which to make what he or she will of the 'outside' experience of culture. In the queer version there is no interior, the individual is just a more or less arbitrary illusion constituted by the repetition of the gender performance.

David Baddiel, perhaps because he is a performer, has an acute grasp of what Butler is on about. His anti-hero Gabriel Jacoby, the arse-shagging, porn-consuming, football-loving, sexist intellectual, is indeed a self-conscious parody of a feminist caricature of a straight man. Overwhelmed by this self-consciousness of the script he is performing, Gabriel also has a severe problem getting anything much done. The queer disdain for human purpose gains expression even in 'new lad' David Baddiel's larking about. The difference is that Baddiel knows he is a comedian, while Butler's 'ludic' investigations are painfully serious.

Donald Morton's introduction to *The Material Queer* gets in close to queer's language and kills off its pretensions to radicalism. Morton exposes queer as an outstanding example of the contemporary degradation of politics and denial of humanity's capacity to change the world. The postmodern assumption that desire is autonomous, unrestricted by the dreary old world of material need, makes the queer planet a virtual reality, in keeping with the cyberspace fad. In virtual reality, the ludic postmodernist can play with identity while the tedious adult world of work may be safely evaded. And since it is impossible to tell true from false, taking a political position is ruled out. The trouble with all this sexual play acting is that it is so empty. The world of play crowds out the world of work, where the real drama of production and change takes place.

Queer is criticism of the uncritical variety. It manages to be both trivial and destructive at the same time.

Morton poses the question of whether 'cyberqueerity', with its critical stance on the normal, and its radical depreciation of identity, while appearing to be opposed to morality, is not in fact 'playing a pivotal role in the transition to a new bourgeois morality and state of consciousness'. Sexual transgression is a new religion. The consumer is constantly admonished to violate an imagined sexual norm in performance (to be open, to 'shock', to bear witness to his sexuality), on the assumption that nothing can be done to transcend the real normality of capitalist society in practice (since there is literally no one to do that). Queer is criticism of the uncritical variety. Morton aptly compares queer's understanding of human subjectivity to the capitalist triumphalism of 'the end of history' thesis put forward by Francis Fukuyama.

The queer rebellion manages to be both trivial and destructive at the same time. The queers will put up with anything except a label. In *The Material Queer* Morton leaves it to the former Trotskyist turned right winger David Horowitz to paraphrase Lenin and spell out the queers' problem: they are suffering from 'an infantile disorder'.

READ ON

John Wayne: American, Randy Roberts and James Olson, Free Press, £17.99 hbk

In the 1969 film, *True Grit*, a teenage girl in search of a hero to avenge her father's death does not have to look far: 'They tell me you're a man with true grit', she says hopefully to John Wayne's rough and ready Marshall Rooster Cogburn. Sure enough the Duke takes the situation in hand and, after a little gun play (two guns blazing on horseback, with the reins clenched between his teeth), justice is served.

Also in search of a hero are Randy Roberts and James Olson, authors of this biography of the great man published by the conservative Free Press. Roberts and Olson see in John Wayne all the virtues that made America: individualism, determination, grit. In a self-consciously rearguard action, Roberts and Olson want their hero to rout the politically correct injuns who have made a joke of their virtues, and of the archetypal American male.

But today it is impossible to take the man seriously. You cannot hear the name John Wayne without thinking of John Wayne Bobbitt, whose wife severed his penis, and who has come to epitomise the hopeless male desperately trying to regain his dignity. Now that traditional American values are in decline, heading the feminists off at the pass just does not seem to work any more.

John Wayne was the hero who bought his own myth; he was America, and he took on the world. Looking back with the benefit of nineties wisdom, it is clear that John Wayne was a poor deluded big kid who just did not understand that things are more complicated than that. Traditionalists like Roberts and Olson who look back to this fictional hero for inspiration are frankly on to a loser. They are suffering a version of what military doctors call John Wayne syndrome—a term for soldiers who believe that they too can take on the world and who end up in wheelchairs.

The spirit of contemporary America is better expressed in Bill Clinton's new book *Between Hope and History: Meeting America's Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, which conspicuously fails to live up to its title. Clinton stresses 'the responsibility of young women not to get pregnant, the responsibility of men not to get them pregnant...the responsibility of parents to provide their children with a safe home and teach them responsible sexual behaviour and encourage abstinence'. The Wild West is definitely out of fashion.

I prefer the famous speech by John Wayne's Davy Crockett in *The Alamo*: 'Republic. I like the sound of word. It means people can live free, talk free, go or come, buy or sell, be drunk or sober, however they choose. Some words give you a feeling. Republic is one of those words.'

The America of John Wayne has been eclipsed not by an enlightened society that objects to his conservatism, but by a tired and cynical society that no longer believes in much but self-restraint. So shut up about freedom, Crockett. And while you're at it you might want to see someone about that drink problem.

Dolan Cummings

Screen Violence, Karl French (ed), Bloomsbury, £9.99 pbk

A skim read of the contents page of *Screen Violence* will guarantee sales. With essays from Oliver Stone, Camille Paglia, Martin Amis, Will Self, Tom Dewe-Mathews, Tony Parsons and Mary Whitehouse. For anyone interested in film or journalism or indeed violence, French's anthology is a must. For the lazy it will provide numerous quotes from those in the 'business' that will go down a treat in Islington.

The timely publication of this anthology illustrates the obsession we have with both violence in real life and its representation on screen. While the theme is far from new (the charge that the moving image has a causal effect on the actions of individuals has stood since the invention of the end-of-pier kinoscope in 1896), it does suggest that what was perhaps once a periodic moral panic has entered mainstream thinking and association. Every high-profile murder these days is reported within the framework of what movie influenced the perpetrator to commit the act—from James Bulger and *Child's Play 3* to the murders 'surrounding' the release of Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. In the popular imagination of the past, the clues left at the scene of a murder would lead to the cause of death, motive and suspects. Today, however, before we have even visited the scene of the crime, the suspect is named and charged: screen violence.

Karl French's introduction sets the parameters for the debate about the effects of screen violence. One end of the spectrum would contend that, while there may not be absolute proof of a causal link between screen image and real-life acts, there is enough circumstantial evidence to convince us that it is better to be safe than sorry and that legislation should be drawn up to reflect this proposition. The other end of the spectrum argues that society cannot legislate against the majority on the basis of the actions of homicidal individuals.

John Grisham and Oliver Stone lock horns towards the end of the book. '*Natural Born Killers*...is a repulsive story of two mindless young lovers, Mickey and Mallory, who blaze their way across the south-west, killing everything in their path', says Grisham, top-selling author and influential lawyer. Apparently a good friend of Grisham's was gunned down in his office by, as it was later written, two 'mindless young lovers' who had just seen *Natural Born Killers*. It was one of many such stories that followed the release of the film. Stone's reply is more a defence of integrity than an argument against censorship, but issues a useful warning to us all: 'it is only a small step from silencing art to silencing artists, and then to silencing those who support them and so on until, while we may one day live in a lawyers paradise, we will surely find ourselves in a human hell.'

I felt the anti-censorship side unprepared and reliant on anecdote, while the others at least backed up their arguments with some facts and a lot of passion. The tide of anti-censorship has turned requiring a re-enforcement of our case. *Screen Violence* while useful, is not it.

Alec Campbell

BAN NOTHING

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Everybody now seems to agree that there is no alternative. **This is it.**

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.'



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