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LM 110

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DISCUSSING THE PAEDOPHILE PANIC: is fear itself the greatest danger?

Ghoul Britannia

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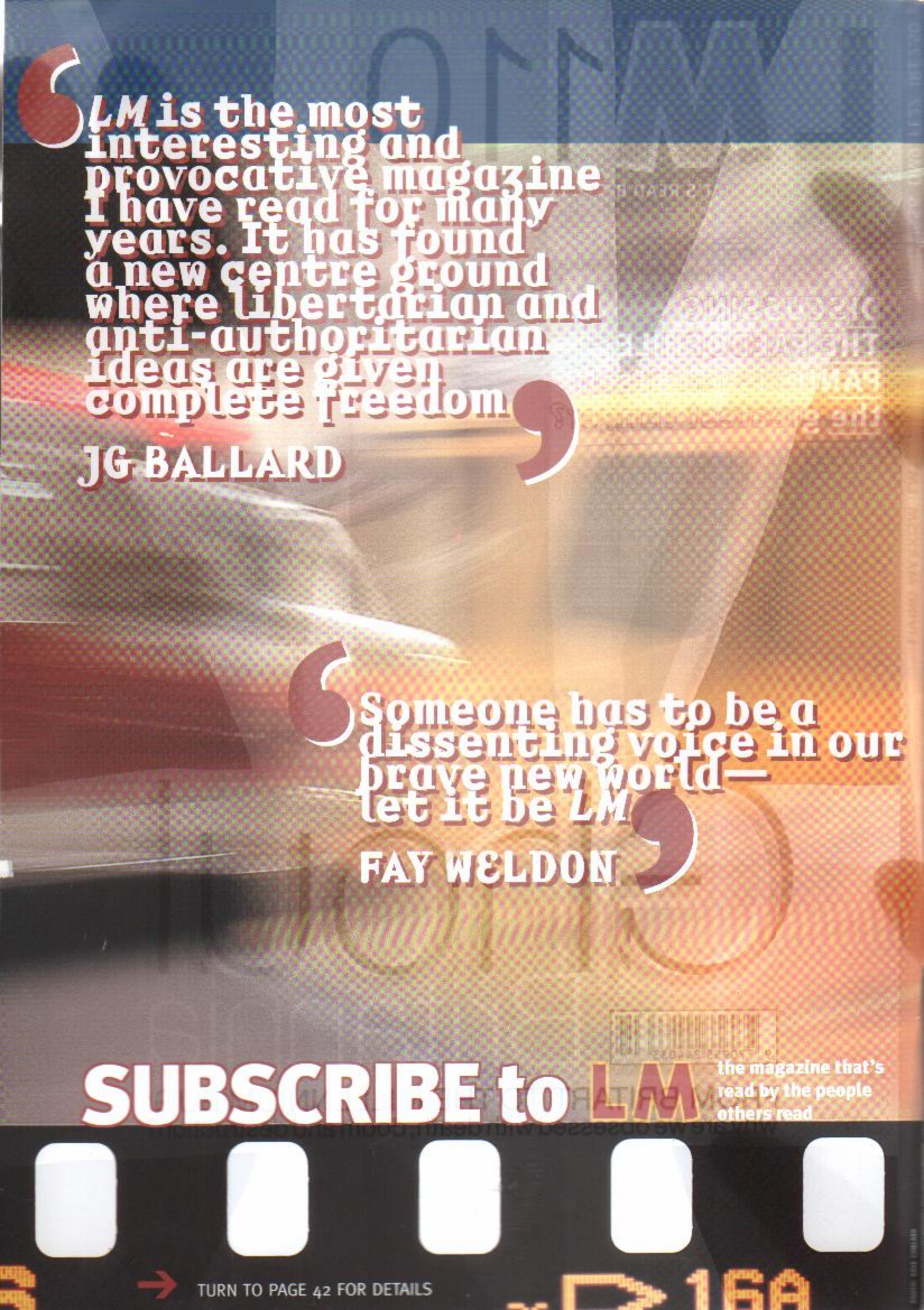
FROM BRITART TO THE MILLENNIUM BUG:
why are we obsessed with death, doom and destruction?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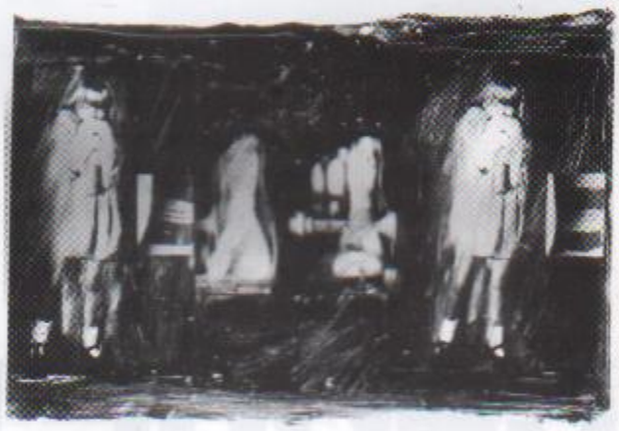

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MANAGING EDITOR: Helen Searls
ALT.CULTURE: Andrew Calcutt
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MICK HUME

GHOUL BRITANNIA

TONY BLAIR IS ALWAYS SAYING THAT HIS New Britain/Cool Britannia is a country that is young, energetic, alive, forward-looking. In which case, why is there now such a ghoulish cultural obsession with death, decay, doom and destruction?

The new stars of television drama are criminal pathologists (*McCallum*, ITV, *Silent Witness*, BBC), competing to see who can carve up more grisly cadavers in search of 'the truth' and a bigger slice of the viewing figures.

The ultra-cool 'Britart' (as seen in the Royal Academy's controversial *Sensation* exhibition last year) revels in images of rotting or mutilated flesh, whether it be Damien Hirst's pickled carcasses, the Chapman brothers' 3D version of Goya's 'Great deeds against the dead', or Jenny Saville's gross paintings of the female (de)form. Anthony-Noel Kelly, recently sentenced to jail for stealing body-parts from the Royal College of Surgeons to make moulds for his silver-gilded sculptures, is the first martyr of the abattoir school of art.

No arthouse cinema would be seen dead these days without at least one film about the darker sides of life; recent jolly themes include alcoholism and abuse (*Nil by Mouth*), necrophilia (*Kissed*), and now, the tale of a misshapen teenager who kills cats and sells the corpses so he can buy glue to sniff and bribe a girl with Downs syndrome to have sex with him (*Gummo*).

Sensitive souls to whom such cinematic crassitude does not appeal can go instead to the theatre and see hot playwright Sarah Kane's new work, *Cleansed*, which begins with a character getting a shot of heroin in the eyeball, and includes among its assorted depictions of abuse and torture the novel dramatic device of rats running around the stage gnawing lumps of human flesh. It is of course, the author says, 'a love story' for our times.

In the world of modern music, serious listeners can enjoy the highly acclaimed compositions of Mark-Anthony Turnage (like the uplifting 'Blood on the floor', about the death of his heroin addict brother). Meanwhile those looking for some lighter relief can tap their toes to Radiohead, whose tunes of trauma, disease, despair and automobile accidents ('Paranoid android', 'My iron lung', 'Airbag') won them two slots in the top 10 of the recent 'Music for the Millennium' album poll. If that has you reaching for the pill jar or the bottle to escape, just remember that, as 'recovering' heroin addict Richard Ashcroft of The Verve has it, 'the drugs don't work/they just make you worse'—which, given the grim state the stars seem to inhabit, is quite an achievement.

If all of this culture of suffering proves too much, you can of course stay home and curl up with a good book. But if you are one of the many who like autobiographies, be prepared for your toes to do most of the curling as you choose from the recent flood of books by those whom the late Ruth Picardie dubbed 'the ill-literati' writing 'autopathography' about their many illnesses, addictions, syndromes and depressions.

'The endless, awful pleuritic pains and endoscopies of disease appear to be the new rock'n'roll', wrote Picardie when she herself was terminally ill. The two years since have done nothing to prove her wrong. Indeed the epidemic of sickness-inspired prose has since spread from paperbacks to the press; it now seems every newspaper needs a columnist to regale their long-suffering readers with tales of the writer's own disorder, like the award-winning John Diamond of *The Times* magazine and his celebrity cancer.

Do not think for a moment, either, that you can find refuge from the literary gore-fest by going back to the classics. They too are now being reinvented as the work of diseased (or at least disease-fixated) minds. In May, no lesser a venue than the Royal Festival Hall is hosting a day of talks entitled 'Sick notes', in which some Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature is due to lead a discussion 'exploring the link between disease and the literary imagination' from Plato to Plath. The highlight will surely be 'Shakespeare and the diseased body-politic', introduced by the King Alfred Professor of English Literature at the University of Liverpool. Even the Bard, it seems, can now be considered a basket-case (well, he did have those buckets of pig's blood thrown around on stage, after all).

It appears that, in order to be taken seriously in Cool Britannia, cultural work has to chime in with the misanthropic, miserabilist mood of the time. This morbid obsession with death and decay is about much more than the latest fads in music or television. It is symptomatic of a society which has lost faith in itself, one which sees humanity drowning in a bloody gut-bucket of its own making.

THIS MORBID OF A SOCIETY WHICH GUT-BUCKET

Perhaps the fashionable view of the human experience is most starkly posed in Damien Hirst's 'A thousand years', a living/dying artwork in which flies feed off a rotting cow's head until they are suddenly picked off by an electronic bug-zapper. Life is shit and then you fry.

As the millennium approaches, the new consensus seems to be that the twentieth century, which has been marked by the most astounding scientific and social advances in human history, has actually been a man-made disaster: that modernity has failed, people have ruined the planet, humanity has proved that it cannot be trusted to do anything much without tragic consequences.

Where once culture could reflect the view of man as the active, self-assured, nature-conquering agent of history, now it can only show humanity as the passive, self-obsessed, fearful victim of forces beyond its control. Five hundred years ago Leonardo da Vinci dissected dead bodies with the precision of a surgeon in order to further our understanding of the human condition, and drew the perfect and beautiful 'Universal Man' (the one in a circle and square) as a result. Now artists hack up human and animal corpses like amateur butchers, to create monstrosities intended to depict—and even to revel in—the ugly, degraded state of our existence.

The morbid message of Ghoul Britannia is that in one way or another we are all damaged goods who should not expect too much of ourselves or other people; that as Gary Oldman, director of *Nil By Mouth* puts it, 'everybody needs therapy'. Deirdre of *Coronation Street*, the hapless, helpless hysterical victim, is a fittingly pathetic object of public sympathy today.

Presumably this is why we also have to put up with an unprecedented daily diet of celebrity kiss-and-tell stories in the media, with everybody from Anthea Turner to Jill Dando feeling the need to 'open their hearts to *Sun*/*Mirror*/*Mail* readers'. The sorry display of exhibitionism is a running advert for the widespread belief that people—even apparently successful people—are fundamentally emotional cripples, careering from one life-crisis to another, unable to cope with everyday realities and relationships and forced to wallow in their inadequacies on the public counselling-couch provided by the popular press.

So low has our self-image sunk that nobody seems to believe in a human-centred morality anymore. Indeed anything 'man-made', 'manufactured', or 'genetically engineered' is immediately considered suspect and morally inferior to the 'natural'. The cry is four legs good, two legs bad, favouring elephants over people in parts of Africa, and foxes over people at home. Instead of being a source of pride and inspiration, science has become a fearful spectre haunting humanity, as people gripped by the 'Frankenstein factor' seek to hold back experimentation in the name of creating a risk-free world.

Human society now mistrusts itself to the point where it is afraid of its own creations, from the motor car to the genetically modified soya bean. This preoccupation with risk is not simply an irrational response from 'the mob'. It is an outlook that has been institutionalised from the top of society downwards, as demonstrated by the New Labour government's role in the public doom-mongering over the Millennium Bug.

'Ticking away inside many of our computers is a potential technical time-bomb.' Despite the tabloid language, these words appeared in an article under the byline of prime minister Blair himself in the *Independent* on 30 March. Blair's government has declared that the Millennium Bug—the fact that existing computer software will not be able to cope with the clocks clicking around to 1 January 2000—is one of the most serious problems facing not just Britain but the world economy, with all kinds of disasters likely to happen unless we take precautions.

There is indeed a technical problem with many computers and the advent of the year 2000. But it is far from being the apocalyptic prospect which the government's warnings suggest. For big companies which have in-house programmers or are supplied by the large software houses, it should pose no more serious a problem than producing a new release of their software, which they do every couple of years anyway. The same goes for well-resourced government departments and utilities. Smaller companies using standard software may need to upgrade to handle the millennium, but that simply involves investing in products that are now cheaper than ever and contain new features that could benefit their business.

In short, dealing with the Millennium Bug could have been approached as an outstanding opportunity to overhaul and update Britain's computer systems for the next century. Instead it has been talked about as a time-bomb threatening destruction. The warnings of doom have little to do with the real scale of the problem, and a lot to do with a predisposition to panic in a society that lives in fear of its own creations and nature ganging up to take revenge. And that fear is one which leaders like Blair have done much to instil.

It is often assumed that the role of those who want to change society is to complain about the way things are. But what good would that do when society is already gripped by a maudlin pessimism about the present and the future? These days at *LM*, we feel it is time to give a platform to those who want to advise everybody to lighten up a little and look on the bright side. By any objective criteria, people now live longer, healthier and wealthier lives than ever before. The tremendous technological and social progress made during this century needs to be defended and pushed further on, if we are to build a world fit for people to live in during the next century—and the sooner the better.

Meanwhile, back in Ghoul Britannia, those who are supposed to be at the cutting edge of contemporary culture disengage from the real world, the better to contemplate their own pierced navels and disappear up the arses of their mutilated exhibits. 'Controversial' Britartist Tracey Emin even says she now considers her own life to be a work of art. Each to their own. ●

OBSESSION WITH DEATH AND DECAY IS SYMPTOMATIC SEES HUMANITY DROWNING IN A BLOODY OF ITS OWN MAKING

THE DANGER OF GM FOODS

The attempts by Tony Gilland ('Genes, greens and soya beans', February) and Roger Bate ('A risk-free environment is bad for our health', February) to convince us that genetically modified (GM) crops will 'produce cheaper and higher quality new food products' and that 'GM foods in general pose no special risks' are highly misleading.

GM foods have not enjoyed 'many years of trouble-free [use]'. The genetic alteration of bacteria used to produce the food supplement Trytophan may have caused up to 37 deaths and 1500 serious disabilities in the USA since 1989. Commercial development of a soya bean containing brazil nut protein was stopped when it was found that the bean caused a reaction in people allergic to nuts. And because of the nature of GM organisms, it is almost impossible to trace back such side effects once the food stuff has been commercially released.

Once GM crops are widespread, multinational agrochemical companies will have control of every aspect of the foods we eat, from plough to plate. Far from altruistically working to provide better, cheaper foodstuffs for a hungry world, the agrochemical companies see GM organisms as a way to boost their already vast profits.

Finally, I must take issue with Gilland's assertion that 'most crops, genetically modified or not, do not survive in the wild', implying that the release of GM crops into the eco-system is therefore harmless. In the late nineteenth century, gardeners introduced rhododendrons, Japanese knot-weed and bracken from the Orient. The proliferation of these plants has since caused untold problems in gardens and estates. If even a few 'mega-weeds' such as GM oil seed rape escape into the countryside, it may require a whole new generation of pesticides to bring them under control. I am sure Monsanto and their friends will be more than happy to provide them.

CHRIS BROWN
Newcastle

PROFESSIONAL RESTRAINT

In 'Who's afraid of a five-year old?' (April), Brendan O'Neill quotes women at the bus-stop as saying, 'It's a bit odd that a teacher can't cope with a little boy'. Yes, it is a bit odd, not to say pathetic that the teacher is so traumatised that she cannot return to school, but it is not odd that she could not restrain him.

In these days of increasing legal regulation of public institutions and decreasing trust in professionals, any teacher who tries to restrain a child with serious behavioural problems runs the risk of litigation and the almost certainty of losing their job. No longer is the teacher respected as a professional with genuine authority. Any deviation from the accepted 'code of conduct' relating to matters concerned with child protection will more likely result in the teacher being sued than her being applauded for using professional judgement in the restraint of a violent child.

JENNY PAYNE
London E8

THEATRE OF REVULSION

Frank Furedi ('Wear your heart on your sleeve and a ribbon on your lapel', April) cited the mass displays of moral revulsion which took place in Spain against the ETA assassination of Miguel Angel Blanco in July last year, comparing these with similar events in Belgium or the UK. Although I would be wary of interpreting responses in Spain in exactly the same way, there are certain emotional characteristics typical to all. At demonstrations held in Spain since that fateful day, including those called in response to subsequent ETA excesses, there have been shouts of '*ETA no, vascos si*' (no to ETA, yes to the Basques), but more disturbing still has been the exaggerated symbolism of a show of white-painted hands held aloft (a touch invented by a Madrid student). What is of course lacking from this mass theatre is any sign of politics.

GARETH KING
Zaragoza, Spain

RE-BRANDING MARX

Recent interest in Marx ('The return of Marx (& Spencer)', March), heightened by the anniversary of the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, is not surprising and indeed already predicted:

'During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the "consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarising it...They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie.'

Lenin (for that is who it was) goes on to explain the importance of re-establishing the substance of Marx. The fact that Mick Hume explains this again in 1998 is a testament to the continuing relevance of these words and the need for a magazine such as *LM*.

DAVID O'TOOLE
Gateshead

CHILDISH ADULTS

The real danger in advertising youthful images for grown-ups (Andrew Calcutt, 'Pop goes adulthood', April) is not the increasingly childish behaviour of adults but the presentation of childish adults as role models for the younger generation. The 'I don't give a shit and just want to live life dumb and happy' attitude displayed in daft ads is rather appealing to youngsters and especially common in my generation (born '78). Adults will most likely remain such, despite stupid adverts, but a generation who see infantile behaviour praised as the way to be, will find themselves rather lost once they have to take some responsibility.

A word about Tony Wilson's reply to the question of why music nowadays sounds so boring. For somebody who grew up to the tunes of Led Zeppelin, the Doors and Pink Floyd, modern pop cannot but appear otherwise. They simply beat the pants off (nearly) every current band.

MATTHIAS
Edinburgh

TALK IS CHEAP?

Much as I agree with your campaign for free speech ('Why the right to say, write, listen to, read and watch what we want should be the big cause of '98', February), to claim that it is the big issue of 1998 is going too far. I appreciate that your editorial staff are in danger of losing their livelihoods and the journal may be forced to fold but I am afraid that you are losing perspective on what constitutes the really crucial issues of the moment. Did you all support the right of the neo-Nazis to free speech? And the editorial's objectionable final sentences, 'The legal process has demonstrated that free speech can be an expensive business. But I trust you to put your money where our mouth is', was not so much an appeal for funds as an attempt to let us know what you consider our duty to be.

PETER MOLE
Oxford

KOSOVO AND THE SERBS

John Wright (LM-Mail, April) is right to suggest that the loss of Kosovo might cause Serbia to fall apart. If that were to happen, the reason would be as much psychological as political or economic.

The Serbs have been under enormous pressure since the break-up of Yugoslavia. Hostile propaganda has vilified them in the eyes of the world. They have lost their ancestral lands in Krajina, Slavonia and parts of western Bosnia. Through the Drayton accords they have lost their areas of Sarajevo too.

Since the end of the Second World War more and more Albanians have flooded over the border into

Kosovo until they have become the larger ethnic group. Now they claim the territory as their own and have much international sympathy.

Kosovo has special historic and religious significance for the Serbs. It is the seat of the Serbian Orthodox church and the site of its most holy shrine. To take Kosovo from Serbia would be to tear the heart out of the nation.

MSJ THOMPSON
Peterborough

THE DUMBING DOWN OF STUDENT POLITICS

In the recent NUS elections at my university the candidates formed into slates of 'like-minded' people, rather than the familiar ritual of independent campaigns. Essentially all their agendas were identical: Student Choice, Students First and Above and Beyond, promised to oppose tuition fees etc and make the union more 'student-centred'. Not exactly ambitious.

When I asked a presidential candidate (who also happens to be the editor of *Shout*, the students' union magazine) what he thought about the dumbing down of higher education, he replied that I was the only person to have raised the issue with him. But most students I know resent the condescending quality of the service we get. The problem is the lack of any credible forum in which our concerns can be addressed. I suggested that it was the responsibility of 'go-getters' like himself to force the issue. His response was that it would be arrogant to impose an agenda on the electorate. So, a rhetorical commitment to the idea of bottom-up democracy justifies the trivialisation of politics and points the finger at an 'apathetic' student body.

A ORGILL *Liverpool*

WEIGHTLESS

What a shame that so much of Sara Hinchliffe's recent weight loss ('Less is more', April) was from the brain. I hope she has eaten lots of Easter eggs and will be writing intelligent articles again soon.

PHIL HAYWARD
Morecambe

The what's NOT on guide

UNBEARABLE: Michael Bond, the 72-year old author of the Paddington books, has been battling against censorship during the making of a Canadian TV series featuring his marmalade-loving bear. Bond reported that 'they've been saying you can't say this and you can't say that because you might offend someone'. He 'drew the line' at the producers' insistence that a bank manager should be portrayed as a Hindu woman and that a building-site foreman should also be a woman. **BARRED:** The Millennium Dome will not have room for a traditional British pub, although there will be space for a wine bar, a fast-food outlet and two restaurants. 'We don't want gangs of lads sitting around getting beered-up all day', said an official. They have hardly started building it, but some people have been barred already. **HOUSE OF CORRECTION:** MPs are no longer allowed to smoke in the loos at the House. On 20 April the Commons Administration Committee extended the ban on smoking in public sessions and committees to include nearly all the House, nearly all the time. Committee chair Marion Roe said that MPs would be relied on to police themselves. **VETTED:** Under the new regime at the British Board of Film Classification, a panel of experts in child welfare, probably including psychologists and charity representatives, will vet films and videos before release. This is in addition to the board's own panel of classifiers. Recently appointed president Andreas Whittam-Smith explained that the new panel would balance the interests of children with those of distributors, who can appeal against the board's instruction to cut or ban movies. Home secretary Jack Straw has said that children should have greater protection against screen violence. He did not say anything about protecting adult audiences from the overwhelming tendency to treat them like children. **REVERSED:** Adrian Lyne's film of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (see review, p39) has still not found a distributor in the USA. The fact that US distributors are running scared of child-protection legislation has given rise to an exceedingly rare instance of a film being passed for public exhibition in Britain while remaining unseen in America. No doubt Whittam-Smith and Straw will ensure that there is no repetition of such an outrage. **GILLED OFF?:** A group calling itself Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse has called for the removal from Westminster Cathedral plaques by the Catholic artist Eric Gill depicting the route to Calvary taken by Jesus. The objection to Gill's Stations of the Cross is that he had sexual relationships with two of his sisters and two of his daughters. After a furore in the letters columns of the *Catholic Herald*, a spokesman at the Catholic Media Office replied: 'I do understand the difficulty and the sensitivity of this subject given all the awful associations of child abuse for a victim and the implication of the Catholic church. But if you remove Gill, where do you stop? Do you remove Caravaggio too?' And close down the Sistine Chapel while you are at it. **HITCHED:** *Express* columnist Peter Hitchens was forcibly ejected from Blackpool's Winter Gardens by officials of the National Union of Students (NUS), after he spoke in a debate about the legalisation of cannabis. The NUS officials who had him 'hurried out of the hall amid a flying wegde of security men' could not tell him exactly what he said that was so offensive, but Hitchens deduced that the following words must have prompted his removal: 'According to your categories, I am a reactionary sexist homophobic, and an ex-Trotskyist to add to the inflammatory mixture. What is even worse, I am proud of it. If there is anyone out there who agrees with me, I would advise you to keep very quiet about it. You are unfashionable, the worst crime you can commit these days.' While half-joking about contemporary conformism, he became the butt of it himself. **COVER-ALL CENSORSHIP:** Writing in the 'Space' supplement of the *Guardian*, Jonathan Glancey mooted the extension of the definition of pornography in need of censorship to include 'out-of-town superstores', 'executive ranges of office furniture' and 'the liveries and logos of privatised railways' rather than erotic prints or lewd engravings. He concluded that 'censorship, like beauty, is in the eye and mind of the beholder and the light of one man's life is another woman's X-rating'. In other words, you can never be sure that something that seems all right to you is not offensive to somebody else, so everything should be the subject of self-censorship. It's a pity Glancey did not take his own advice before writing this offensive tosh. ●

Compiled by Andrew Calcutt

WE WELCOME READERS' VIEWS AND CRITICISMS

Write to The Editor, LM, BM Informinc, London WC1N 3XX; fax (0171) 278 9844.
Letters may be edited for clarity and length

TABOOS

Teenagers find sex too much fun to stop having it, most schoolgirls who have babies wanted to get pregnant—and until the government faces up to these facts, says Ann Furedi, it has little chance of reducing the teenage conception rate

THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT TEENAGE MOTHERS

New Labour has launched another campaign to cut teenage pregnancies, after recent revelations that almost 9000 girls aged 15 and younger became pregnant in 1996. Public health minister Tessa Jowell paraded before the media pack with teen magazine agony aunts, to announce that she had recruited *Sugar*, *Just Seventeen* and the rest to help spread the moral message about sex.

Not so long ago, these same teen magazines were slammed by the old Tory government and its allies for encouraging teen sex by publishing irresponsible articles about 'blow jobs', 'wanking' and 'fingering'. The magazines protested, with some justification, that their articles carried an implicitly responsible message—always reminding readers of the age of consent and encouraging girls not to rush into sex. Faced with parliamentary motions calling for their censorship, teen-mag editors countered that they were better placed to influence their readers than worthy 'experts'. Now it seems that the New Labour government has taken their point.

Unfortunately for ministers the recruitment of a few photogenic agony aunts is likely to make no impact on the rate of teenage pregnancy, and particularly not on the rate of teenage motherhood which, from the politicians' point of view, is a more serious headache. The widely reported plans to make sex education more relevant to the needs of modern youth are equally unlikely to curb the numbers significantly, nor is the extension of family-planning services targeted at young people —although of all the government's plans, this is the one with the most merit.

It is almost as though sexual health strategists have wilfully decided to focus their efforts on the ephemeral issues and ignore anything that could make a real difference. Perhaps this is because the measures required to tackle the problem are regarded either as too controversial or too 'difficult'.

To address the problem of teenage pregnancy you first have to face up to the fact that young people are having sex at a younger age, that they are enjoying it and are unlikely to stop. Today most teenagers have had sex by the time they are 18, at least a third by the time they are 16. They have sex because it is fun and it feels 'grown up'. Sex outside marriage is no longer stigmatised but seen as normal. Opinion has shifted even over the last 15 years. A study by demographer Kathleen Kiernan found that in 1983, 28 per cent of the public felt that pre-marital sex was always or almost always wrong. By 1991, Kiernan found this number had dropped to 19 per cent. If we do not expect people to wait until they are married what are we expecting them to wait for?

To dent the teenage pregnancy numbers, the government would have to accept that teenage sex is a normal and acceptable fact of life and address how to allow young people to enjoy sex without what family planning professionals refer to as 'negative consequences' or 'adverse outcomes'.

One way to do this would be to promote the most effective methods of contraception to young people, and in particular to encourage use of 'emergency after-sex contraception', a method ideally suited to teenage flings because it does not rely on pre-planning. These are two issues that neither ministers nor their minions want to confront. The government could also usefully advertise that when teenagers unintentionally become pregnant, if they want an abortion, they should be able to get one 'confidentially'.

But while the government has been dreaming up touchy-feely ways to relate to young people, nothing has been done to address these straightforward practical measures.

Little, if anything, has been done by governments to restore confidence in the contraceptive pill following several scares which have undermined young women's confidence in its safety. The most significant pill panic, almost three years ago, which linked certain pill brands to blood clots, was actually whipped up by the last government.

Brook Advisory Centres, Britain's largest network of young people's sexual health clinics, report that the proportion of their clients requesting the pill has been steadily falling for four years and has recently plummeted. The proportion of 16-19 year old women requesting the pill from Brook clinics in the year up to March 1997 dropped by 25 per cent compared with the previous year. Among younger clients the fall was even greater. Tessa Jowell could probably persuade more young girls to protect themselves against pregnancy by stating unequivocally that the pill is safe and beneficial to the health of most of them, than she will by a photo opportunity with agony aunts. Yet the government has, it is rumoured, shifted resources away from emergency contraception campaigns and continues to stigmatise abortion as a problem rather than the solution to a problem.

Most crucially, the government seems incapable of facing up to the

PHOTO: LM ARCHIVES

simple truth that most teenage girls who become pregnant are not ignorant of what used to be called the 'facts of life'. Nor are they incapable of getting hold of contraceptives. Kilroy may be able to find the odd teenager who thought it would be alright if she 'did it standing up'. Editors of teenage mags can wave letters which illustrate the pathetic naivety of some of their readers. But most teenagers understand that sex can lead to pregnancy. They know what a condom is and where it goes. And many of them will know of a place where they can go to get the pill.

So why does Britain have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe? It is not because British teenagers are more ignorant about sex than the French, the Dutch, the Swedish or the Germans. Britain has a higher teenage conception rate because many of its teenagers are less motivated to avoid becoming pregnant. When girls are determined that they don't want a baby, they generally don't have one. The issue is, then, why do so many girls in Britain seem indifferent to whether they get pregnant or not?

A recent report by the Policy Studies Institute confirms that socioeconomic factors are the key determinants of whether a teenager will get pregnant. One Scottish study has shown that teenage conceptions are six times as likely in the most deprived areas as in the more affluent areas. The same pattern was evident in a report on London. The discrepancy is even more marked when it comes to the issue of how a teenage pregnancy ends. A girl from a middle class background is far more likely to request and obtain an abortion than a girl from a deprived area.

Teenage girls who grow up in economically secure and comfortable circumstances are more likely to develop ideals and aspirations similar to their parents. Their peers are likely to come from the same kind of families. Unplanned pregnancy is simply not part of their vision. They dream of university, gap years abroad, cars and careers—not nursing a baby. Motherhood is something distant, if it figures at all. When these girls have sex, they are highly motivated to avoid pregnancy and if they become pregnant they want to become unpregnant as soon as possible.

For girls who live in economically deprived circumstances, babies are often part of the life-plan from the start. Unplanned pregnancy does not seem such a disaster because it interrupts nothing they greatly value. They may have mothers, sisters or aunts who became pregnant in their teens and who see having a baby as one of their most rewarding experiences—certainly better than working in McDonalds. For some girls having a child becomes a way of achieving status as an adult, creating somebody to love them, making people take notice of them and their lives. In such circumstances teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood is not stigmatised but seen as normal.

The more enlightened sex education programmes take account of this 'bigger' picture and focus their efforts on trying to illustrate to young working class girls how a baby will take away their social life, stop them from going out with their mates. But when you are 15 and you live on a sink estate in the middle of nowhere, you have not got any freedom, and there is nowhere for you to go. It is not difficult to imagine why changing nappies might seem satisfying by comparison. Sex educators talk about boosting 'self-esteem', but self-esteem cannot be boosted in isolation from the rest of a young girl's life.

The low teenage pregnancy rate in the Netherlands is often favourably compared with that in the UK, and the difference is put down to liberal Dutch sex education and youth contraception services. But, as one Dutch speaker explained at a recent international conference on abortion, his country's low teenage pregnancy rate has more to do with other factors: its greater overall affluence (in poor areas the unplanned pregnancy rate is equivalent to ours); a culture where young women are encouraged to use the pill to treat acne and period pains even before they start having sex; one where teenage sex is regarded as normal, teenage pregnancy is frowned upon and abortion regarded as the acceptable solution.

If government was honest it would admit that it is not anxious about the 17-year old A-level student whose mother makes an appointment with a BPAS abortion clinic the week after she misses her period. Rather its concern is about welfare-dependent teenage mothers breeding potential criminals on estates where social stability is fragile. To tackle these teenage pregnancies requires not a family planning or sex education policy but social and economic policies which allow working class girls to have aspirations beyond motherhood. But that is far more difficult than arranging a photocall with a couple of trendy journalists. ●

Ann Furedi is director of the Birth Control Trust

A SORRY

World leaders now make emotional public apologies more often than guests on Oprah. *Mark Ryan makes no apologies for asking why?*

The public apology has become one of the great rituals of our time. Everybody it seems wants to apologise for some misdemeanour of the past, whether great or small, noticed or unnoticed.

World leaders have been the most prominent observants of the new ritual. The Vatican has apologised (not very successfully) for its failure to speak out against the Holocaust. It is rumoured that the Pope is also preparing apologies to women, Protestants and Muslims in the run-up to the millennium. Bill Clinton has apologised to America's blacks for slavery. While touring Africa in March, he apologised again for slavery, and for failing to stop the massacres in Rwanda in 1994.

Tony Blair has apologised to the Irish for the Famine of the 1840s, and looks set to apologise for the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry in 1972. Blair's favourite think-tank, Demos, has suggested that the misfortunate Queen be sent around all the former colonies on a tour of apology.

Australia and New Zealand are in a state of almost perpetual repentance for the crimes they now acknowledge to have committed against their indigenous peoples. In an attempt to spread the blame (or 'reach out and hear as many voices as possible' to use the argot), the Australian government has declared a National Sorry Day for May. Modelled on the Diana condolence show, Sorry Books will be available to citizens who wish to express their own personal feelings on the aboriginal question. No doubt the messages will be accompanied by all the usual paraphernalia of the abject—teddy bears, children's drawings and doggerel.

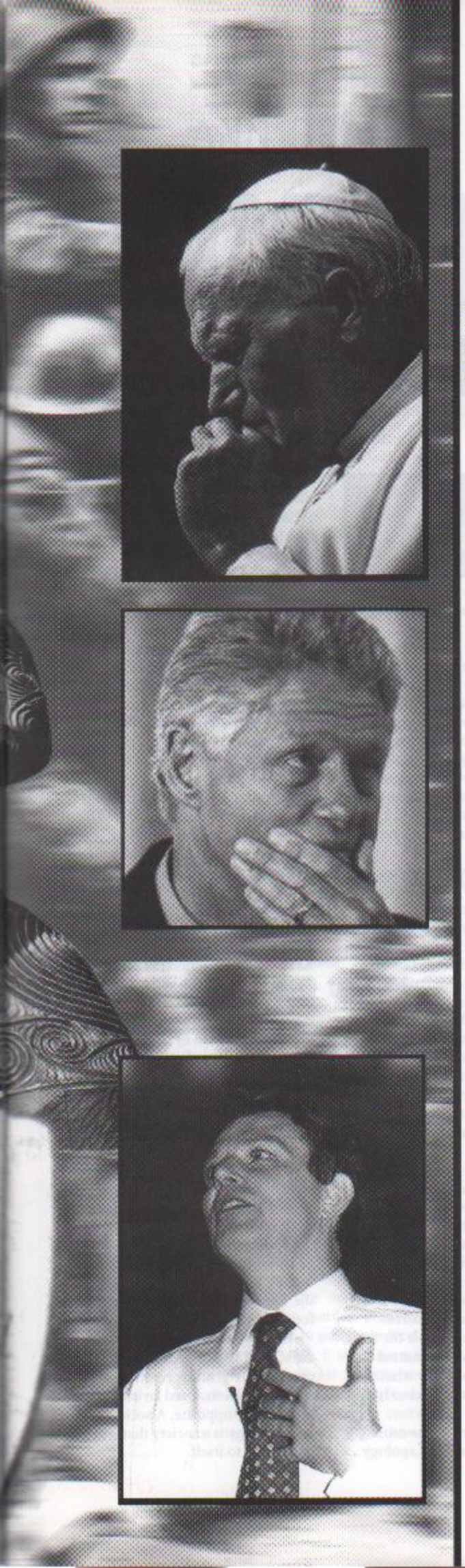
Back in Europe, the French government last July apologised for the collaboration of the wartime Vichy regime in the Holocaust, while the French Catholic church apologised for its support for Vichy. The Spanish church followed suit and apologised for its support for the Franco regime. The Spanish government is rumoured to be preparing an apology for the actions of the Conquistadors in sixteenth-century Latin America.

In South Africa, the ANC government has instituted a permanent reign of apology in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC is a curious hotch-potch, reflecting the political past of its architects. Part showtrial, part therapy session, those arraigned can come, confess their crimes, apologise, cry a little with their victims and go home. The TRC is increasingly held up as a model for other countries trying to overcome the legacy of a bloody past.

In embracing the cult of apology, world leaders have adapted a form of popular entertainment for their own purposes. Apologising, confessing in public for some misdemeanour, blubbering in front of the cameras, all have become important motifs of our culture. Oprah Winfrey has made herself the fifth richest woman in the USA with this kind of squalid entertainment. Political and religious leaders are emulating the evident willingness of millions of ordinary people to put their emotions on display, something most memorably evident in the week which followed the death of Princess Diana.

Like all rituals, the public apology conforms to certain strict guidelines. There is a right way and a wrong way of doing it. The more closely an apology approximates to the TV-show formula, the greater the chances of success. The ideal is the full emotional surge. Under the influence of a surge, the subject appears to break down completely, recovering his composure only to splutter the word 'sorry'. The intensity of the performance should cathect the audience, leaving them truly wowed.

While this sort of behaviour comes naturally to an emotional derelict on a TV show, it is extremely difficult for a middle-aged politician to carry off convincingly, especially if what he is apologising for happened hundreds of



MONTAGE: DASTTO

RITUAL

years ago and he has known of it all his life. A good substitute is some variation on the immortal line 'I just wanna say sorry for all the hurt and pain I caused ye'. Any good apology will follow this kind of formula, because it will be obvious that there is little by way of a thinking process taking place. Body language is also very important. A catch in the voice, a quiver of the lip, the hint of a moist eye, or Blair's favourite, the brow knitted in concern—all these will compensate for a poor choice of words.

A qualified apology always runs the risk of backfiring. Qualification suggests an over-engaged mind and, *mutatis mutandis*, under-engaged emotions. Any apology which is tainted with rational enquiry will fail to satisfy. This is because where the apologetic spirit is concerned, the work of the mind can only act as a form of pollution in the warm currents of feeling.

The Vatican's recent inquiry into its role during the Holocaust is an example of a bad apology. The Curia was absurdly scrupulous in trying to establish who was and who was not to blame. While apologising for the failure of so many Christians to stop the annihilation of the Jews, the inquiry cleared the name of Pope Pius XII. Jewish groups protested at what they saw as a whitewash of the Vatican's wartime record. Perhaps they were right. However, the Vatican would not have run into the same trouble if officials had just pretended that the whole period of history upset them terribly and they wanted to say sorry for any part others felt the church might have played in the Holocaust. By shifting the apology away from the facts and on to feelings, both their own and others', the church could have spared itself a lot of trouble, appeared fully contrite, and no doubt, won praise for its 'courage in reaching out to build bridges'.

In contrast to the Vatican's Holocaust apology, Blair's apology for the Irish Famine was an unqualified success. For a start it was not actually an apology, in the sense that Blair did not accept that the policies of the British government of the time were responsible for the Famine. What he said was that the British government of the time 'failed the Irish people'. In this sense, the Japanese Mikado and the Russian Tsar also failed the Irish people by not sending any aid. As Blair might say himself, the government of Lord Russell was 'insufficiently proactive'. However it was the style rather than the substance which turned Blair's statement into an apology. In a format which rivalled Oprah herself, Blair delivered a speech full of heartfelt contrition by video link-up to a pop festival in county Cork.

The other key to a successful apology is that it should be volunteered, not extracted. An extracted apology is worse than useless, because it is quite obvious that the remorse is not truly felt. When Winnie Mandela appeared before the TRC late last year, one of the persistent demands from TRC chair Bishop Desmond Tutu was that she should show remorse and say sorry (even though she was denying the allegations levelled against her!). When she did finally cave in to the demands, the universal response was one of disappointment that the apology had to be forced out of her. A similar response greets the perennial apologies from the Japanese government for its wartime behaviour.

The ideal is to apologise before anybody has even thought you should do so. This shows the world that not only do you feel bad about some particular misdemeanour, but that you are in an apologetic, abject state of mind. One of the most successful apologies was the ceasefire statement of Northern Ireland's loyalist groups in October 1994. In contrast to the IRA ceasefire statement six weeks earlier, loyalist leaders offered 'the loved ones of all innocent victims over the last 25 years abject and true remorse'. In the months leading up to the statement loyalist groups had excelled ▶

While the CRAZE FOR APOLOGY appears as a sense of contrition and willingness to face up to an unsavoury past, it is more often a clever means of AVOIDING BLAME IN THE PRESENT

◀ themselves in butchery, committing some of the worst atrocities of the Troubles. Since then it has seemed at times as if the loyalist ceasefire was not worth the paper it was written on. But because the apology was so much in excess of what was expected, these irredeemably sordid people were transfigured into apostles of reconciliation.

It would be easy to see the craze for apology as an extension of the compensation culture which has become such a feature of life on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years. It is true that demands for apology often come with a price tag. Many American blacks are demanding reparations from their government for the effects of slavery. While in opposition Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern demanded that the British government compensate Ireland for the Famine. However, compensation culture is only part of the picture. The fact is that the urge to

apologise seems greater than the demand for it.

The apology today is a declaration of 'emotional literacy'. It is a type of initiation rite into the New Caring Order. An apology is a demonstration of compassionate power. If you can empathise and reach out even to those whom you were trying to kill only yesterday, that is proof that you want to explore more fully your own emotional universe. And if you have this soft caring side, then, by extension, you too can be vulnerable.

Which gives pause for thought. If it has become so easy to apologise for barbarous actions, then those actions themselves must lose much of their meaning. To give an example: in March it was revealed that US troops massacred over 1000 Somali men, women and children in one single operation in Mogadishu, while on the UN Operation Restore Hope in 1993. Now that the massacre is public knowledge, it does not seem too fanciful to imagine that this or a future American government will apologise for this atrocity. What would such an apology mean?

An apology for the massacre in Mogadishu would be an assurance to the world that, despite its occasional lapses into savagery, the USA remains committed to an emotionally interactive foreign policy, that behind the steel and lead lies a heart of the softest compassion. But it would also be a way of saying that the US armed forces should not be held responsible for their actions. They may have committed an atrocity, but that is not really what they are like, because now they feel so bad about it.

In these circumstances, the more archaic meaning of the word apology comes through—as a vindication or defence, put forward by apologists. It becomes possible to defend the indefensible by distancing your emotional self from your actions. One of the paradoxes of the craze for apology is that while it appears as a new-found sense of contrition and willingness to face up to an unsavoury past, it is more often in reality a clever means of avoiding blame in the present.

When former South African president PW Botha refused to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and go through the ritual of apology he was attacked from all sides and threatened with imprisonment. PW Botha may have been one of the most brutal leaders of the apartheid regime, yet there was something courageous and honourable in his refusal to grovel before the TRC. Unlike the assassins and torturers who have apologised for their crimes, wept with their victims, then strolled back to their police stations, Botha insisted that he stood by his actions as president. It would have been easy for him to partake in the sickly lie that he too, like everybody else who has appeared before the TRC, is a man of multiple identities; that yesterday he was Butcher Botha, but that today he is Squidgy Botha. Instead he affirmed that he was the one, indivisible PW Botha, who is prepared to live with the consequences of his actions until the day he dies.

In his refusal to apologise, there was an echo of Martin Luther, 'Here I stand, I can do no other'. Against this rugged stoicism we have the weasel words of the apologetic changeling, 'I know I did bad yesterday, but I feel differently today'. Which can only leave you with the uneasy question, 'and how will you feel tomorrow?'

Apologies can always mean two different things. Used reluctantly, they can indicate genuine resolve not to repeat an action. Used lavishly, they indicate the opposite. A society at ease with apology is a society that will happily lie to itself. ●

ANN BRADLEY

Breast source of advice

When it comes to the issue of how to feed your new-born baby, there is no rational discussion to be had. Breast is unquestionably best. Your doctor will tell you so. Your midwife will tell you so. Every guide to baby care and 'parenting' manual will tell you so. Antenatal clinics have their walls plastered with posters about how to breast-feed, where to breast-feed and who to contact if you need help with breast-feeding. You will not see one poster or leaflet putting the case for bottle-feeding because they are not allowed.

Health promotion agencies seem to concur that, because breast-feeding confers certain health benefits on the baby and mother (which it does), and because almost all new mothers can successfully breast-feed (which they can) if they try hard enough, they should be denied any information on the convenient alternative in case they are swayed from the healthy natural choice.

This attitude, in effect, leaves women with no real choice at all. Opt to breast-feed your new-born and you have teams of midwives falling over themselves to offer instruction. Opt to bottle-feed (or even to mix the two) and the support system falls away. If you are lucky, your midwife or health visitor will supply some information on the dangers of failing to sterilise your bottles properly and guidance on how to avoid over-feeding or starving your child. It might be a touch too cynical to suggest that the tone of much of this suggests you might want to think again, but the barely concealed question seems to be: if you love your baby and respect yourself, how could you knowingly choose less than the best?

Yet bottle-feeding can be a rational, sensible choice and it is one which many women want to make. Eighty per cent of mothers in Britain use infant formula at some time in the first year of their child's life. The overwhelming majority of breast-feeders switch to bottle-feeding when they return to work—yet while I have seen dozens of leaflets that advise women on how to continue breast-feeding, I have never seen one that advises women on how to successfully switch from breast to bottle.

The paucity of information on bottle-feeding drives women in search of information straight to the companies that manufacture the baby milk. If your health visitor looks blankly when you quiz her about the benefits of Gold Cap as opposed to White Cap SMA it makes sense to quiz the medical department of the manufacturers, Wyeth. Infant formula manufacturers claim they receive thousands of queries every year from parents hungry for information about their products.

Now, even this source of information is to be dammed. Soon to be released Department of Health guidelines will ban baby-milk manufacturers from replying to any customer's letter requesting information about their infant formula brands. It has been alleged that the information ban is due to concerns that companies will inevitably take the opportunity to push their own products and encourage mothers to consider formula instead of breast-feeding. Dr Lindsay Smith, chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners' Clinical Network, reportedly told the *Mail on Sunday* that it was right that women should rely on health professionals rather than the industry.

In one sense this is uncontentious. Women should be able to rely on health professionals to provide the accurate information they need. But they cannot because of their anti-bottle bias. Furthermore, some women do not want to rely on health professionals. Some women may feel that they are in a better position to judge what is best for themselves and their family than a health visitor who is paid to regurgitate whatever happens to be the favoured 'line' of the moment. Many women—even those who choose to breast-feed—feel that they should be able to make their decision after assessing the pros and cons of breast versus bottle for themselves. They do not want dumbed-down, pre-interpreted health promotion propaganda.

Concern that manufacturers will take advantage of women's ignorance and seek to bend their minds in favour of their products should be taken as given. The companies that manufacture infant formula obviously want to increase sales, but women are not so mindless and vulnerable that they need to be protected from this. They are as capable of making a judgement about the worth of Wyeth's information on baby milk as they are on any of the company's other products.

If the minister for public health wishes to serve the interests of new mothers she will throw out the guidance she is currently considering on the restriction of baby-milk manufacturers' advertising and promotional activities. She will start treating new mothers as capable beings who can be trusted to make sensible, rational decisions. She might even suggest that the HEA, Maternity Alliance and the like produce some literature that would really meet women's needs. 'Handy tips for breast-feeding quitters' would fill a gap in the literature line. Finally, she would do well to remember: many new mothers would like to have a nanny to take care of their baby; few want a nanny state to take care of their decisions. ●

Bottle-feeding can be a rational, sensible choice and one which many women want to make

new Labour new Laws

Evidence of a woman's previous sexual history must not be excluded from rape trials, says Helen Reece

THE LESSONS OF SEXUAL HISTORY

Jack Straw's announcement that the new Crime and Disorder Bill would remove the right of defendants in rape trials to cross-examine in person was widely welcomed by feminist campaigners and victim support groups. But no sooner had the news broken than lobbyists were arguing that the changes did not go far enough. Julie Bindel of the Leeds Metropolitan University Violence and Gender Unit, told BBC *News 24* that the reform that was really needed was to prevent defence barristers cross-examining the complainant on her previous sexual history. 'Sexual history evidence is never relevant', said Ms Bindel.

Nobody would want to have their sexual behaviour held up to scrutiny in the courtroom. Most of us have sexual secrets which we would be reluctant to reveal to our closest friends, let alone judge and jury. A woman who has been raped, and is then asked questions about her previous sexual experiences, will understandably feel that the cross-examination literally adds insult to injury.

But it is absurd to suggest that sexual history evidence is never relevant in rape cases. Take a couple of examples.

If a woman alleges that she has been raped, evidence of bruising on her body is often pretty damning. But it would be less damning if the defence were to produce evidence that the woman has a history of engaging in consensual sado-masochistic sex. If a woman alleges that she was raped by a mini-cab driver in his cab, we might be inclined to believe her: most women do not usually consent to sexual intercourse with mini-cab drivers in cabs. But the cab-driver's testimony that she did indeed consent might be more plausible if he produces evidence that this woman regularly consents to sex in the back of mini-cabs.

In both these examples the previous sexual history evidence is relevant to the issue of consent. Such evidence may, however, also be relevant to the defendant's belief in the woman's consent. A man who mistakenly believes that a woman is consenting to sexual intercourse is not guilty of rape. If, for example, a defendant being tried for a gang rape claims that he thought (he may accept now, mistakenly) that the woman was consenting, we might initially be disinclined to believe him, but if we are told that he knew that this woman had previously consented to group sex then it makes his claim more plausible.

One of the main arguments put forward for the exclusion of all previous sexual history evidence is that a woman has the right to say no, whether or not she has had sexual intercourse with the same man before, whether or not she is promiscuous or a prostitute, whether or not she has led the man on.

This is incontrovertible: a woman is entitled to have sex with a man every night for ten years, have sex with all his friends, wear a short skirt, invite him in for coffee and have oral sex; if she then refuses to have sexual intercourse, and if the man continues, knowing that she does not consent, then it is rape.

However, those who use this to argue for the exclusion of previous sexual history evidence make a simple but crucial logical error. They conflate the woman's consent with evidence of her consent. The fact that she had oral sex with the man does not constitute her consent to sexual intercourse, but from the jury's point of view it does constitute evidence of whether she did consent to sexual intercourse.

If we abstract the fallacy from a sexual context for a moment it becomes obvious. John accuses Jane of stealing his car; Jane says that John lent it to her. John has lent Jane his car several times before. He says that this is irrelevant, that he is entitled to change his mind and decide not to lend it to her any more. Of course he is right: it's his car. But if we do not know who is telling the truth, John or Jane, then the evidence that John lent Jane his car in the past is relevant to help us decide whether he did lend it to her on this occasion.

Another argument commonly heard is that sexual history evidence places the woman 'on trial'. This turns reality on its head. The woman is not on trial—the defendant is. It is easy to work this one out because he is the one who sits in the dock and (if found guilty) goes to prison for a very long time at the end. Of course cross-examination on previous sexual history will be embarrassing and intrusive, but it is shameful to compare the embarrassment suffered by the woman in revealing relevant

JOHN HENRY FUSELI, THE KISS, CIRCA 1816

Previous
BEHAVIOUR
is more usually relevant in
RAPE TRIALS
as the dispute is often
at the level of the mind

evidence with the injustice suffered by the defendant if he is wrongly convicted of rape as a result of relevant evidence being excluded.

But, campaigners continue, it is only in rape trials that these intimate details are revealed. A complainant of a burglary would never be asked questions about her sexual past; therefore, they conclude, there is a double standard. This again turns the world upside down. In fact, evidence of a witness's previous behaviour is uniquely restricted in rape trials. Section 2 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 prevents any evidence being presented or question being asked about the complainant's previous sexual experience with anybody other than the defendant, without the prior permission of the trial judge. The judge is allowed to give permission only if he is satisfied that it would be unfair to the defendant not to.

Of course the reason that questions are not generally put about a woman's history in a burglary trial is that her history is irrelevant. Generally in a trial for burglary the accused's defence is one of mistaken identity. It would be pretty difficult to run this defence at the same time as arguing that the victim consented. But where relevant, evidence of the complainant's previous behaviour would definitely be given in other trials. To return to the hypothetical example above, evidence of John's previous generosity would be admissible.

The reason that evidence of previous behaviour is more usually relevant in rape trials is that the dispute between the defendant and the complainant is often entirely at the level of the mind. Often there is little dispute between the man and the woman about what happened: they agree that they spent the evening together, and that they had sexual intercourse. What they disagree about is what was inside their heads: the woman says that she did not consent, the man says that she did; the man says that he believed that the woman was consenting, the woman says that he knew she was not.

This is the most difficult sort of case to find out the truth about; how can we know what was going on in somebody's mind? In this sort of case it is crucial that we have all the evidence we can get which might cast any light on what was going on at the mental level. Normally in non-sexual cases, the disagreement is more straightforward because the two sides dispute what actually happened rather than what they thought about it. But there is no necessity for evidence of previous behaviour to be restricted to sexual cases. For example, if Fred is accused of grievous bodily harm and he claims that he acted in self-defence because Mike attacked him, then evidence of Mike's aggressive behaviour and tendency to get into fights would be relevant and admissible, and rightly so.

The final argument used by proponents of excluding sexual history evidence is that such evidence will sway the jury too much—the jury will condemn the woman for her promiscuity and see her as unworthy of protection. This seems an unduly negative assessment of people's attitudes these days. Everybody except the dyed-in-the-wool backwoodsman accepts that women do not go around 'asking for it'. But even if some people do still have reactionary attitudes to women with a sexual past, ironically the law, by excluding evidence of sexual history, is encouraging these attitudes.

Excluding sexual history evidence in effect gives legitimacy to the idea that there is something shameful about sexual behaviour, to such an extent that women should not have to reveal it. It then leaves those on the jury who are so inclined to draw their own conclusions about whether the woman is 'dirty' or not, according to how she dresses or acts in court. Do we really want rape complainants to have to present themselves as nuns in order to prove that they are worthy of being taken seriously by the law? Surely it is better to put our cards face up on the table, look the backwoodsman straight in the eye, and hold our heads up high. ●

Helen Reece is a lecturer in Laws at University College London

Tony Blair and Mo Mowlam look weary for the cameras at Stormont on 'long Good Friday'

The only thing 'historic' about the Northern Ireland settlement was the length of time it took Blair and Clinton to get the exhausted parties to sign it, says Brendan O'Neill

A PEACE OF NOTHING

'I believe today courage has triumphed. I said when I arrived here on Wednesday night that I felt the hand of history upon us. Today I hope that the burden of history can be lifted from our shoulders.'

Standing on the steps of Stormont castle after a 'long Good Friday', Tony Blair had all the airs and graces of an historic peacemaker. After days and nights of non-stop negotiation the political parties had finally agreed to a peace deal that 'pointed the way to a better future'. Monica McWilliams, leader of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, emerged from Stormont to throw a pile of press releases in the air. 'I can't believe it's all over', she said in exuberance.

Across the world Blair's peace deal was hailed as a breakthrough of historic importance. 'Northern Ireland has the promise of a springtime of peace', said US President Bill Clinton. 'This success is for Europe, and for the whole world, a message of hope in the future', said French President Jacques Chirac. The sense of history was captured in a cartoon in the *Sunday Mirror* showing a little boy sitting on his father's knee, asking 'What did you do in the Great Peace Process, daddy?'.

But is this new deal really the stuff of history? It is worth noting that there is little which is new in 'The Agreement', copies of which have been sent to every household in Northern Ireland. The idea of having an assembly in

PHOTO: JOHN GLESON

Northern Ireland, which would represent nationalist and minority interests alongside those of Unionists, was first floated in the Downing Street declaration of 1993. And the plans for a North/South Ministerial Council and a British/Irish Council of the Isles seem to have been lifted straight from the Framework Document of 1995.

Indeed many of these proposals bore more than a passing resemblance to those which have cropped up in every proposed political solution in Ireland since the short-lived Sunningdale agreement of 1973. The difference is that, in the past such initiatives were widely dismissed as 'talking shops' and 'hollow gestures'; today they are 'groundbreaking' and 'historic'.

Why has the new peace deal been hailed as 'history in the making'? In the *Guardian*, Mark Lawson put it down to media management and pliable journalism: 'Daily this week, the newspapers publicised without dissent the optimistic predictions of Blairite whisperers of the prospects for a peace deal.' (11 April) No doubt there is some truth in that; weeks before the peace deal was agreed a leaked document revealed that Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam planned to create an inner circle of journalists who would be fed exclusives in return for presenting the peace deal in a positive light. Clearly many journalists relish their role in the spindoctoring of history.

But there is more to this than proactive journalism. 'The Agreement' has been accepted as 'historic', as the only way forward, because the people and the parties of Northern Ireland now have such low expectations.

A journalist friend of mine in Belfast tells me she saw both nationalists and Unionists weeping openly when they heard about the peace deal. But what is there to get so excited about? Nationalists have not got any closer to their traditional aim of a united Ireland, and Unionists have not come out of this with a strengthened Union with Britain. Rather both communities have ended up with the promise of a politically correct police force, some affirmative action and an assembly, the constitution of which will give the people even less power than the Scottish parliament. Yet expectations in Northern Ireland have been degraded to such an extent that this deal is being talked about in the same breath as Easter 1916 and partition in 1921.

What was most striking about the run-up to the peace deal was the morbid fixation on the physical and mental exhaustion of the parties. Politicians who worked into the early hours of the morning were praised by the media for exhausting themselves 'in the name of peace'. Photographers vied for pictures of Unionist and nationalist delegates with their shirt-sleeves rolled up and their hair in a mess to give the impression of a determined and exhaustive process. 'Brave Mo' was even spotted lecturing some of the delegates without her wig, such was her commitment to finding an agreement. It seemed that the more dishevelled, unkempt and weary-eyed the politician, the more committed he or she was to peace in Ireland.

This physical and mental exhaustion reflected the deeper political exhaustion of both the Unionist and the nationalist parties. As has been argued in this magazine before, the political traditions in Ireland are shadows of their former selves. The end of the war between the British government and the IRA has finally removed the political rationale of Unionism and nationalism alike. What could Irish nationalism or republicanism mean once the national question was off the agenda? What role was there for 'No surrender' Unionism, when there was no longer any threat to the Union?

Through the long, drawn-out peace process, the British, Irish and American governments have brow-beaten the Northern Ireland parties into lowering their horizons further and further. The Unionist and nationalist parties have been transformed from political movements fighting over sovereignty and power into 'cultural interest groups', more likely to fight for the right to march down a particular road and to have their street signs in a particular language than for political and democratic rights.

The image of the major players almost sleepwalking around Stormont castle in the long hours before the peace deal was agreed was a fitting symbol of the whole affair. This was a peace process by sloth, a two-year long round of talks about talks about talks, which finally wore the parties down to the point where they would have put their names to just about anything Blair stuck in front of them. At the end of the process, the parties were put under duress by the British and Irish prime ministers and, in a last-minute transatlantic telephone call, by the most powerful man in the world, to agree to something that could be presented to the people of Northern Ireland. The fact that the banal document could be hailed as 'historic' is testament to how low their sights had sunk.

It was not Blair's 'Mandela-like skills' (as one journalist referred to it) that made this deal possible. On the contrary, Blair's role was to exploit the low horizons and political degeneration of the parties to enforce an anti-democratic, anti-people settlement. President Clinton's role in this spectacle is also instructive. When he heard that the peace deal was faltering Clinton got on the phone to the party leaders and 'encouraged' them to put aside their differences and reach an agreement. With Blair breathing down their necks and Clinton whispering in their ears, the worn-out politicians finally agreed to do as they were told by the men from Whitehall and Washington.

But the worst was yet to come. When this charade came to an end Blair and Clinton had the gall to present it as a settlement 'of the people, for the people'. A copy of 'The Agreement' was sent to every household in Northern Ireland with the words: 'This decision is about YOUR future. Please read it carefully: it's YOUR decision.' 'This was achieved by the people of Ireland', said Clinton. Nothing could be further from the truth.

'The Agreement' may be going to a referendum for the people to vote on, but this is likely to be little more than a formality. Already it is suggested that those planning to vote 'No' must be terrorists of some sort, and Clinton has blackmailed people into voting 'Yes' by offering millions of dollars of investment if 'The Agreement' is passed.

The overriding consideration of the peace talks was to keep as far away from the people as possible. Some could not get far enough away: as the negotiations were coming to a conclusion SDLP leaders and others suggested moving the process away from Northern Ireland altogether, to a neutral country like Finland or Norway. The people played no part in this at all—none of those told to celebrate the 'historic' deal on the Shankill or Falls Roads even knew what their leaders had signed up to. One of the most telling post-peace deal interviews outside Stormont was with David Ervine, leader of the Progressive Unionist Party. Asked what he was going to do now, Ervine said, 'I'm off to the pub', and then, wryly, 'after all, I must keep in touch with my constituents'. The assembled media pack and his fellow politicians all laughed as if it was some kind of in-joke: political deals done in Stormont's smokeless rooms, chatting with constituents in pubs.

The new peace deal is a disgrace. It is the result not of genuine political and democratic discussion but of duress and forced agreements. The biggest losers in all this are the republican movement. Some prisoners will eventually be released, Sinn Fein leaders will get seats in the new assembly, Gerry Adams will get a post on the executive and a bit of praise from the international community. But what exactly will the republican communities gain at the end of their 25-year struggle? Sinn Fein and the IRA have not just agreed to down arms. They have effectively signed away everything they once stood for, accepting that there will not be a united Ireland, in return for a handshake from Clinton, a backslap from Blair, and a seat opposite Ian Paisley and David Trimble in a local assembly. Republicanism, rest in peace. ●

Liz Malone and Jennie Bristow tested the air at the big London demonstration demanding that cannabis be decriminalised

FREE THE WEED... BUT AT A PRICE

Cannabis, it seems, is cool again. The demand for the legalisation of the drug is growing, attracting the support of numerous celebrities, at least one national newspaper (*Independent/Independent on Sunday*) and, until she was pulled into line, the interest of at least one member of the New Labour cabinet (Clare Short). On Saturday 28 March an estimated 15 000 people marched through London calling on the government to 'Free the Weed' and allow them to buy and smoke cannabis without fear of arrest or prosecution.

The fact that supporters of decriminalising cannabis are prepared to make a stand in support of a personal freedom looks like a welcome change from the pattern of our times, when the public demand is more usually for bans and further restrictions on what we can and cannot do. Yet the kind of freedom which the 'Free the Weed' lobby supports often seems qualified.

In the run-up to the London march, we heard supporters of decriminalisation adopting a rather self-righteous tone, talking about the drug as a special case for freedom: unlike cigarettes, they would say, smoking cannabis has medical benefits; or unlike getting drunk on alcohol, some suggested, getting high on Weed makes people less aggressive, not more.

Where do these arguments leave the case for personal freedom on other issues that cannot be posed in such a virtuous, medically correct kind of way? Following the fashion for mini-surveys, we interviewed 100 of the London marchers to find out how those campaigning to 'Free the Weed' felt about the wider issue of personal liberties in our increasingly unfree age.

When we asked why they felt so strongly about decriminalising cannabis, 33 per cent plumped for 'freedom of choice'—a good start. Yet when we probed a little further, freedom of choice appeared to apply more to cannabis than it did to many other things we might choose to do. Whereas smoking cannabis was OK because it was said to be 'safe', other choices were viewed more ambiguously, again on safety grounds.

For instance, take other recent controversies over the need for government regulation—alcopops, smoking and beef on the bone. An overwhelming 90 per cent of respondents drank alcohol themselves, but that did not stop 52 per cent of them raising concerns with the marketing of alcopops as a health threat to children. Although 67 per cent of the respondents were smokers, 45 per cent thought the government should do more to prevent passive smoking and the harm this might cause other people. Forty per cent of respondents supported the government ban on beef on the bone, generally in the interests of public safety.

The question of whether 'hard' drugs should be legalised brought a split response. Those respondents who thought certain Class A drugs should be legalised argued this on the basis of freedom of choice and more effective regulation of the drugs; those who thought the drugs should remain illegal argued that Class A drugs were different to cannabis because they were both addictive and chemical-based. The fact that cannabis is a natural, rather than a chemical, drug was considered very important in distinguishing it from other drugs.

Freedom of choice was popular when it came to pornography, with only 10 per cent of respondents arguing that pornography should be banned. But freedom to choose to hunt foxes was seen as a no-no, with no less than 80 per cent supporting a government ban on fox hunting.

So what does all this mean? Our random selection of 100 demonstrators believed in freedom of choice when it came to their own lifestyles, but a significant number also believed that the government had a role to play in protecting its citizens from making choices that could harm them. For many, freedom of choice seems to apply fully only to those lifestyle choices that are seen as safe. Particularly when other people were seen to be affected by somebody else's choice—for example, on the questions of passive smoking or alcopops—there was more support for regulation.

Freedom of choice also seems to apply only to those lifestyle choices which an individual personally finds acceptable. All our interviewees were demonstrating for the freedom to smoke cannabis, but many were quite willing to argue that the freedom of others to smoke tobacco in public places, to eat beef on the bone or to hunt foxes should be curtailed by the government.

There was no generalised libertarian sentiment among the majority of respondents: the view seemed to be that you could pick and choose those freedoms which you supported. Those respondents who argued that they supported the ban on beef on the bone because they were vegetarian, or that they had no opinion on this question because they were vegetarian, indicated to what little extent 'freedom to choose' was seen as a principle rather than just another lifestyle choice.

A powerful response to our question of 'why cannabis?' seemed to be that it was a good drug, imbued with certain qualities that set it apart from sinful habits. So interviewees argued that cannabis should be legal because it is less harmful than other 'legal drugs', such as alcohol and tobacco. Others said that cannabis should be used to alleviate medical problems (the march was led by disabled people).

One marcher, 24-year old Alistair, gave us a fairly typical argument about the close relationship between personal freedom and safety. 'For me it's an issue of freedom. I think it does a lot less harm than alcohol. I come from a family with an alcoholic father, so I know the damage it can do. Cannabis doesn't cause people to hit their wives and children.'

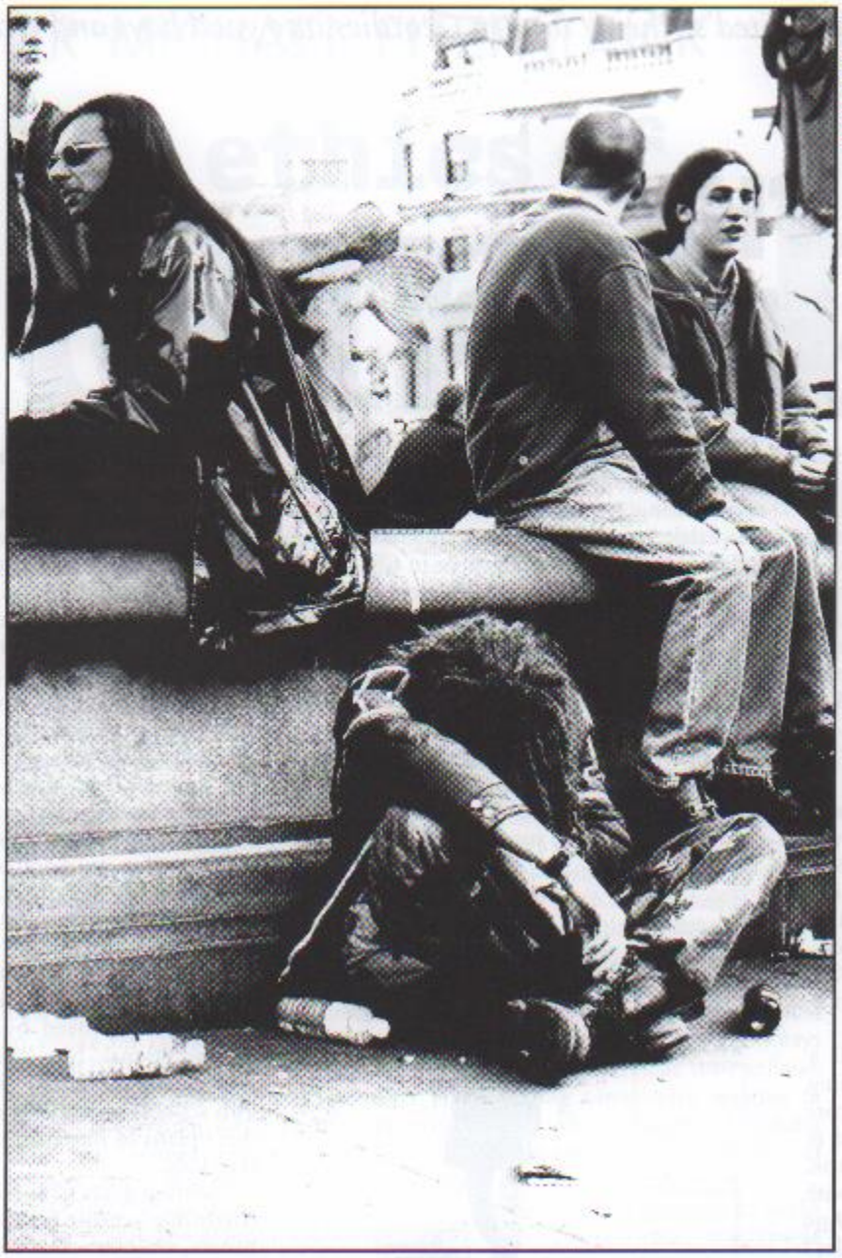


PHOTO: DAVID COMLARD

Demonstrating for legalised dope, London, 28 March

What is the main reason why you think cannabis should be legalised?

Freedom to choose	33%
Less harmful than other legal drugs	27%
Medical reasons	17%
It's natural	7%
It's fun	5%
To get rid of dealers	4%
To stop wasting police time	3%
It works in Holland	1%
Don't know	3%

Do you think the use of any of the following drugs should be permitted by law?

	YES	NO
Amphetamines (speed)	48%	47%
Ecstasy	54%	41%
Cocaine	43%	52%
Heroin	33%	62%

Perhaps it is not surprising these days that people should go down this road in arguing for the decriminalisation of cannabis. In an age when many are obsessed with avoiding risk everywhere from the car to the kitchen, it makes sense that, if you can argue cannabis is not only harmless but health-improving, then your argument will be much easier to win.

But—and this is a big but—the problem is that those who put themselves on the moral high ground often end up looking down on the rest of us. When the 'cannabis good' argument leads to the 'other things bad' argument, calling for restrictions on other substances which are not so nice and user-friendly, true freedom of choice goes out of the window. We are all for people having the freedom to smoke dope: but if this means having less freedom to drink, smoke, hunt and eat meat, forget it. ●

See Second Opinion by Dr Michael Fitzpatrick, p21

Do you support the government ban on beef on the bone?

YES—40%. Why?

1 Not enough information on the dangers of BSE
2 Just in case
3 There is a cover-up
4 I am a vegetarian

NO—50%. Why?

1 We should have the freedom to choose
2 It's too late—BSE is already in the food chain

Do you think the marketing of alcopops is irresponsible?

YES—52%. Why?

1 It encourages underage drinking
2 It is misleading, because children think alcopops are lemonade
3 Alcopops carry no health warning
4 Alcopops are responsible for more violence in schools

NO—40%. Why?

1 We should have the freedom to choose
2 Kids have always drunk cider anyway

Do you think pornography should be banned?

YES—10%. Why?

1 It is harmful to children
2 It degrades women

NO—85%. Why?

1 Adults should have the freedom to choose
2 It's fun
3 Bans don't work—where do you draw the line?

45% of respondents said the government should do more to prevent passive smoking. When asked what the government should do, the most common response was that there should be more designated smoking and non-smoking areas
55% of respondents said the government should not do more

80% of respondents said fox hunting should be banned
19% said it should not be banned

Brendan O'Neill on Newcastle United's scheme to turn Geordies into good boys and girls

HA'WAY THE (WELL-BEHAVED) LADS

'For the first time in the world a football club has devised a programme to support pupils' achievements in school as well as on the pitch.' Mick Ferguson, Football and Community Officer at Newcastle United, is excited about the club's latest initiative. Launched in March, 'Scoring goals to success' aims to improve young people's attendance and behaviour at school by offering professional football training to those who stick to the straight and narrow, and showing the yellow card to those who do not.

'Children involved in the scheme get their own "Scoring goals" booklet', explains Ferguson. 'Inside the booklet there are three goals for each day: one for attendance, one for punctuality and one for behaviour. If the child attends school they score a goal and the teacher stamps their booklet; if they are punctual for lessons they score another goal, and if they behave to the school's standards and code of conduct they score a third goal.'

Pupils have to score at least ten goals a week to take part in the professional coaching sessions. 'Kids who stick to the rules and score the right amount of goals will be involved in a six-week coaching course', explains Ferguson, 'culminating in a tour of St James's Park with a presentation of certificates and prizes'. And what about kids who do not 'stick to the rules'? 'They will be given a second chance. If a child is going off track they will be shown a yellow card and given the opportunity to get involved again. So there is some flexibility, but ultimately it's about improving behaviour.'

Since when has a football club been in the business of telling young people how to behave? For many young people, particularly in a 'football city' like Newcastle, football offers a respite from the tedium of everyday life; they rush home from school for a kickaround or for training with the local under-11s, relieved to be away from the stuffy atmosphere of school. Now Newcastle United has bound the two together: those who play by the rules at school get to play serious football, as long as they have enough stamps of approval in their 'Scoring goals' booklet.

But Mick Ferguson denies that 'Scoring goals to success' is a 'good citizen scheme'. 'It has nothing to do with turning out the right kind of citizen or being moral', he told me. 'It's about teaching children the importance of good behaviour in achieving what they want at school. Children who pay attention and behave are most likely to be successful at achieving what they want.'

Some of the 'toon army', however, remains unconvinced. 'It's a bit insidious, isn't it?' says lifelong Newcastle fan Paulie. 'Kids in Newcastle now walk around clutching these little booklets like young people in Chairman Mao's China did with their "little red books".' Flicking through the 'Scoring goals' booklet does bring to mind the kind of 'standard of citizenship' expected by Mao, and more recently by Chairman Blair. Alongside the ominous empty goals of 'Attendance', 'Punctuality' and 'Code of Conduct' (awaiting that all-important stamp), the booklet has pictures of Newcastle players offering words of encouragement to the young participants.

'Lead by example, and always try to score the maximum', orders Gary Speed. 'Make sure you achieve your goals target...and then some!' intones Alan Shearer, apparently not convinced that attendance, punctuality and brown-nosing quite covers everything on the road to good citizenship.

Another fan, John, likes the idea of young people training with Newcastle coaches, but thinks it should be open to everybody, 'not just swots and girls'. 'Some of the best footballers have been bad boys', he points out, 'who admit they took up football because they were crap at everything else. In this scheme those kind of people would be stuck in the park on their own while their mates trained with the professionals'.

In recent years we have all become used to the footballer's message to the kids: 'stay in school, don't do drugs, be good to your parents.' Newcastle United appear to have taken this moralising a step further by launching a campaign which aims not only to 'advise the kids', but to reward good behaviour and punish bad. In an age when young people see politicians as irrelevant, but know every detail about David Beckham's love life and worship the ground that Michael Owen walks on, sportsmen and women are being recruited to help get the moral message across.

According to Football and Community Officer Mick Ferguson, 'Scoring goals to success' has already started to achieve its aims: 'We piloted the scheme in a special school where we knew there would be some problem pupils, and attendance, punctuality and behaviour improved by 35 per cent, which was exceptional.' Now 'Scoring goals to success' is spreading from Newcastle's 'special schools' into schools in working class areas, and from there plans to move on to schools for middle class kids.

'Scoring goals to success' is the ideal good citizenship scheme for Blair's football-friendly Britain, where it seems the majority of children are seen as 'problem pupils' in need of some special counselling. New Labour education ministers want to launch lessons in citizenship, to fill the gap left by the decline of religion and whip the nation's faithless youth into shape. So perhaps the kind of churchy 'football in the community' scheme pioneered by Newcastle United could soon find its way on to the national curriculum.

Some might think Newcastle an inappropriate club to start giving moral lectures to children, given the recent disclosures about the attitudes and behaviour of some of the club's directors. In fact, the disgraced Douglas Hall and Freddie Shepherd are great adverts for the scheme, having given an exhibition of the kind of brash Geordie machismo that 'Scoring goals to success' is designed to wean the next generation away from. And whatever else the pair might have said to the undercover reporter from the *News of the World* in that Spanish brothel, their description of Newcastle and England captain Alan Shearer, 'boring...Mary Poppins', brilliantly invoked the role model which the good citizen brigade would like young Geordies to emulate. ●

DR MICHAEL FITZPATRICK

The ethics of cannabis

Many years ago, before I became a medical student, I visited a friend who had been admitted to hospital with glandular fever. He directed me discreetly to his bedside cupboard where he had hidden a little stash of his favourite Lebanese Red cannabis resin. Feeling rather feeble, and fearing the surveillance of the ward staff, he insisted that I roll him a couple of joints for his customary nocturnal recreation. Impressed at this triumph of the spirit of hedonism over both physical debility and medical authority, I duly complied.

I recalled this long-forgotten episode last month when I came across a major feature in the *British Medical Journal*, subtitled 'ethical debate', which focused on the case of a man suffering from multiple sclerosis, who had been forbidden to smoke his customary spliff while in hospital (21 March). Vigilant nursing staff suspected that the cake his mother brought in every day, which he 'ate with relish', 'might contain cannabis'. The ethical problem, which was thrashed out by a psychiatrist, a neurologist, a clinical ethicist, a professor of health law, nurses and other authorities over several pages, was, given the staff's suspicions of criminal activity in the ward, 'should they investigate further?'.

Perhaps the most useful response would be for these experts to eat a slice of dope-cake each, sit in a circle and listen to some old Grateful Dead albums. Though it should be said that the ethical consensus was in favour of allowing the patient his illegal indulgence, this inflation of a commonsensical judgement reveals both the emptiness of much of what currently passes for ethical debate in medicine and the trend for pleading exemption for cannabis from the intensifying war on drugs—on medical grounds.

Last year the British Medical Association published an authoritative report on 'The therapeutic uses of cannabis' and the recent national demonstration in London calling for the legalisation of cannabis was led off by sufferers from multiple sclerosis, some in wheelchairs, who have been prominent in proclaiming the benefits of the Weed. People with Aids and others with terminal illnesses have found cannabis helpful and there are claims of its potential value in conditions from asthma to glaucoma.

The underlying problem here results from the indiscriminate character of the national—indeed international—moral panic about drugs and the increasingly repressive measures, well symbolised by the appointment of a 'drugs tsar' in Britain, proposed to deal with the problem. An anti-drugs crusade which began in response to a perceived increase in the (largely self-destructive) use of heroin by marginalised youth has widened to include the (largely recreational) use of cannabis among much wider layers of society. In response, a number of respectable professionals who have been smoking the occasional joint since their student days—and now discover that their children are doing the same—have resorted to claiming the medical benefits of cannabis to justify an end to the criminalisation of its use.

One defect of this campaign is, as the BMA report makes clear, the limited evidence of the therapeutic value of cannabis. Only a few of the 60-plus 'cannabinoids' derived from cannabis have been studied. Some appear to be of some benefit in relieving the nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy for cancer, whereas others are not: the report indicates useful directions for further research in this area and in the treatment of people with Aids. Despite individual claims of dramatic benefit in multiple sclerosis, objective studies suggest only moderate improvement.

While such research is no doubt worth pursuing, it is quite irrelevant to the wider debate about legalisation, for two reasons. Firstly, it is conducted using some extracted active ingredient of cannabis, administered in pure form, generally by mouth. It does not consider smoking, the standard mode of recreational consumption. As a recent *BMJ* editorial points out, 'cannabis smoke is as rich in toxic gases and particulates as tobacco smoke, so regular heavy smokers probably face an increased risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases' (4 April). Secondly, it is concerned with relieving the symptoms of the sick, not with enhancing the mental state of the healthy dope-smoker.

The drive to medicalise cannabis as a way of avoiding the current trend to proscribe its use and criminalise its users is the latest manifestation of a long-standing tension between doctors and the state over the issue of drugs. Defining drug addiction and abuse in physiological and psychological terms, doctors have sought to extend medical influence over the prevention and treatment of problems of drug abuse and over the rehabilitation of casualties. The courts and the police have enforced legislation defining the legitimate and illegitimate use of various drugs, generally in the context of concerns about individual morality and social order.

The curious feature of the past decade is that measures of increasing state repression have evolved in tandem with measures of increasing medicalisation. Thus New Labour home secretary Jack Straw proposes, on the one hand, harsher sentencing and confiscation of drug dealers' assets, and on the other, more resources for drug education in schools, and for treatment and rehabilitation programmes. The attempt to medicalise cannabis simply offers an alternative 'medical' means of regulating illicit drug use. Making various active ingredients of cannabis available on prescription might enhance medical authority, but it would do nothing to enable people to smoke it free from state interference. The government may, or more likely, may not, take up the offer. But the fact that the main body of resistance to the prohibitionist and repressive drive of government policy merely suggests another way of containing drug use can only strengthen its hand.

For my old friend, in those simpler times, there was only one reason for smoking cannabis: to get stoned. I certainly never heard him argue that it was good for his glandular fever. ●

I WAS AN ETON TEENAGE BULLY

...and it never did me any harm, says Hugh Peto

I was an Eton teenage bully. I was also a physical weakling. I, or rather we, would instigate 'hate campaigns' against the more feeble boys in our year. The reasons? Croome, we decreed, was common. Gent, we decided, was gay. Penfold...well, Penfold was just a freak with a high voice. And Harmsworth? He was timid and inoffensive, but due some spite. Of course these were not reasons at all, merely pretexts upon which to lay into people we didn't like. Why didn't we like them? No reason. But kids don't need reasons to do things, they just do them for the hell of it. Why destroy Croome's bicycle by throwing it off the balcony? Because it was bright yellow, but mainly to see if it would 'look cool' when mangled. Why go into Penfold's room and interrogate him about his sexual preferences until he cried, before knocking over his pot-plant? Because he deserved it, obviously.

The boys in the year above scolded us: 'Why do you make Croome's life a misery? You're so immature.' Which seemed rich coming from the mouths that had been persecuting Nick 'Stick Insect' van de Llobregat less than a year before. The most saintly person goes through a period in their life when giving somebody grief for no reason seems the most normal thing in the world. Ten years on, it seems astonishing how barbaric we were. But I feel that this has more to do with growing up than an enhanced sense of ethics.

Growing up involves distinguishing between those things that are worth fighting over and those that are not. I now see that somebody's principles are more important than whether or not they have a silly haircut. I have also learnt that it is generally more constructive to cooperate with people than to fight with them. Bullying is part of this learning process. Croome and Harmsworth later became good friends of mine, and although neither remembers those days of torment with affection, their suffering has surely hardened them against obstacles they will encounter in the future. They have not been traumatised. They are normal. I should know, I was bullied myself.

At Ludgrove, my preparatory school, Croker-Lammie and Pombal frequently beat on me. To them, I was the clever weirdo who was asking for it; to me, I was younger, smarter and more popular than them and they were just jealous. The low point came one day after tea when I tried to assert myself by not giving them my mini-Mars Bars. They took me to a disused coal shed, hit me with farm wire and peed on me. Being meek and a snitch, I did not fight back but instead told the nearest prefect, who informed the headmaster. They got six of the best. Within a couple of years Croker-Lammie and Pombal had become two of my best friends. When we did our dastardly deeds as 12-year olds, we were on the same side.

Since I consider myself to be a well-rounded individual rather than an emotional cripple, I am curious to know why such a fuss is being made about bullying these days. Perhaps the concern about bullying stems from a desire to make schools into nicer, kinder places, and is therefore a good thing. I have my doubts.

The concern about bullying is so widespread that even on the playing fields of Eton, once so tough that the Battle of Waterloo was won there, boys are being taught restraint and respect. What used to consist of the odd, coyly titled 'health lecture' has now been institutionalised in weekly Personal and Social Education (PSE) tutorials for younger boys. A small army of staff is expected to act in a counselling capacity as part of the job:

'If a boy needs advice or wants to talk over a problem, he has ready access to three adults: his house master, his dame (the house matron), and his tutor. He may also consult in confidence one of the two school doctors, any of the five chaplains, and the part-time school counsellor. In practice, since virtually all masters live within walking distance, boys can go at almost any time to talk to any master.' ('Care and discipline', *Eton College Prospectus 1997/8*)

Etonians are encouraged to disclose their feelings in a way that would have been derided as 'girlish' not so long ago. I have to say I dread to think what would have happened had I turned up on my Greek master's doorstep at four in the morning to ask 'does my bum look big in this?'.

Eton was one of the first independent schools to phase out corporal punishment and one of the first to introduce PSE as a formal subject. As yet, there is no written syllabus, but a 'general approach' has been developed over the last few years under the guidance of the new headmaster and a senior chaplain. All tutors, many of whom are notoriously crusty, are expected to include at least one session on bullying. This does not come easily to them, sex and drugs being relatively clear-cut compared to the complexities of interpersonal relationships. So the tutors are reskilled by attending twice-termly workshops given by a nurse-cum-counsellor.

To imagine some of my old tutors involved in role-play games exceeds my current brain capacity. Nevertheless Tom Brown's schooldays are long gone and resistance is futile. Part of me doubts that this new approach will work: since when have adults ever been able to impose their will on children without instilling the fear of God (or a beating) into them? As far as I remember, the appeal of an activity had a perfect correlation with its supposed vice quotient. Children's quarrels rarely have a rational basis, so it is hard to understand how 'talking it through' could make much impact.

This iron law may be breaking down and it may be that bullying levels decrease, making schools into kinder places. But I can't help feeling that if children are cosseted they will probably be less able to deal with the conflicts encountered in adulthood. Younger generations will grow up less able to settle disputes at a one-to-one level and more dependent upon third parties to provide resolution to their problems.

Children's experimentation, for better or for worse, often includes the systematic torment of others. That's life. My house master used to be fond of saying that sorting things out for ourselves was in everybody's interests. I always took this to be a sinister threat regarding the perils that led to the slipper—used only sparingly and with parents' consent by the late 1980s. Perhaps he was right after all. ●

Names have been changed to avoid embarrassment

THE SECRET OF MR BLAIR'S SUCCESS

...is the opposition's failure, argues Jennie Bristow

Tony Blair rides into Ireland on a white charger to broker a peace deal on Good Friday and the press swoons. By Easter Monday, Blair is on holiday in Spain and so is the media, filming him in his all-too-familiar smart casuals, beaming and waving on the TV news, almost as flawless as one of those adolescents in advertisements for spot cream.

As Blair approached the 1 May anniversary of his election, he appeared to be going from strength to strength. Where his predecessor as prime minister, John Major, could do no right, it seems Blair can do no serious wrong. Honeymoons usually last a fortnight if you are lucky; his has been going for a year and shows no immediate signs of coming to an end.

The biggest criticism made of Blair in recent months came from the *New Musical Express* (*NME*) in March, when various lesser-known pop stars complained about the government's Welfare to Work schemes. So surprised were the rest of the press by such a rare display of blasphemy that the *NME* got blanket coverage. But Tony carried blithely on. A blackhead maybe, but certainly not an acne attack.

So how does he do it? As any teenager knows, if you are surrounded by ugly/spotty/socially awkward contemporaries, you can always look more attractive than you really are. Tony Blair's success derives mainly from the fact that everybody opposing him is a loser.

Blair's success cannot be put down to his own policies, which have often been more about spin and PR puff than political substance. His great strength is that, more than at any time in living memory, there is no alternative, no meaningful opposition to the government. Even in her 1980s pomp, Margaret Thatcher's one-party regime had to contend with serious critics among the Tory 'wets'. Blair has nobody to worry about at all.

The Tories on the opposition benches hang around like gawky nerds desperately trying to look like they are part of the in-crowd. Rather than opposing the government, the Opposition's principal aim seems to be to mimic it: witness the pathetic attempts to modernise the Tories along New Labour lines, not least by having a 'young' leader like William Hague, who is capable of raising his embarrassment threshold high enough to wear a baseball cap and 'chill out' at the Notting Hill carnival. The Tories' desperation to appear cool rather than out in the cold means that they are willing to rewrite any policy. So, for example, Scottish devolution was supposed to be a mortal threat to the UK until the government went ahead and introduced it—at which point the Conservatives announced that they, of course, wanted to be a part of it.

Even when they try to have a go at Blair, the best the Opposition can come up with is a tatty caricature of New Labour's own obsession with sleaze. Their glee over Blair's Formula One fiasco ('ha ha ha, now we can call you corrupt too') was reminiscent more of playground teasing than political criticism. And so, of course, it did not work.

If Blair has had to withstand no serious criticism from the Opposition, he has had even less trouble from within New Labour's own ranks. No doubt the spindoctors and apparatchiks have exerted considerable pressure to keep Labour backbenchers in line. But the fact that not one of the new intake among New Labour's 417 MPs has emerged as a dissenting voice suggests that Blair's boys and babes are more than happy just to follow the leader.

Meanwhile, the media occasionally pretends that there really is a debate within New Labour by wheeling out the predictable old lefties, the Dennis Skinners and Ken Livingstones, to grumble about modernisation or cuts. But far from posing a threat to the Blair line, as internal dissenters once did to party leaders, the rump of the old left only serves to maintain New Labour's sense of mission. There is nothing like a grumpy old man to make a youthful pioneer seem like he has got something going for him.

Over the past year, Blair's biggest success has been in insulating himself from any political pressure. He has separated himself from his own party, rising president-like above the political fray so that even when members of his government get into trouble, it does not seem to leave a mark on him. And he has put an insulating wall between himself and the electorate.

For a self-styled champion of 'the People', Blair has put a lot of energy into keeping the people as far away from power as possible. Like a clear-skinned smoothie teenager standing aloof from his spotty classmates, he is to be admired from afar but never touched.

Blair's disdain for the formalities of democratic accountability is demonstrated by his administration's dismissive attitude to parliament. The government benches were barely warm before Blair's people started talking about the need for reform: shortening and sanitising prime minister's question time, reviewing parliamentary privilege and reforming the House of Lords. Fewer and fewer members even deign to turn up in the House of Commons, as various committees discuss how to reform existing procedures to make it easier for the government to get its way and Blair appoints unelected lords to police the behaviour of MPs. Meanwhile, 'the People' are allowed to relate to a marginal Scottish or Welsh parliament, a London mayor, a local council or an obscure focus group, to keep the public's fingers well out of the real business of running the country.

'Yes, I watch *Carrie* too'—Blair meets 'the People'

PHOTO: DAVID COMMON

In April, speaker of the House of Commons Betty Boothroyd felt obliged to have a go at government ministers about their fondness for using press conferences, leaks and interviews to make policy announcements, rather than first telling the MPs who are supposed to run the country on the people's behalf. Parliament has long been derided as a powerless talking shop; now it seems those with the real power don't even bother going there to talk much any more.

Blair's true attitude towards 'the People' combines populist fawning with private contempt. His office even issued a statement at the end of March demanding that Deirdre (off *Coronation Street*) be freed from jail. He no doubt thought that this would show his credentials as 'one of us'—and William Hague, in echoing the statement, clearly agreed. But all it really showed was how little regard the popular Mr Blair has for his electorate: that he considers us incapable even of distinguishing between fiction and real life, let alone making important political choices. ●

DISCUSSING THE P

There are uncomfortable questions which need to be asked about the growing furore over child sex offenders, says James Heartfield

IS FEAR ITSELF THE GREATEST DANGER?

The news that paedophile killers like Sidney Cooke are being released touches our deepest fears. Fear turns parents' love of their own children into a hatred for the predatory outsider. Such deep, atavistic fears can easily spin out of control, leading to attacks and hate campaigns against both suspected and convicted paedophiles.

Not surprisingly the families motivated to such actions are unmoved by qualms over mob-rule and taking the law into their own hands. The very idea of a balance between the rights of children to live in safety and the supposed rights of the paedophile strikes people as grotesque.

But fear itself is a destructive factor, and one that is destroying communities and families. Already one teenage girl has been burnt to death in an arson attack on a supposed paedophile. Scores of people have been attacked—some of them convicted and released child sex offenders, and others wholly innocent victims of mistaken identities. In Brighton, the parents of one offender have been targeted. In Glasgow a single man with a reputation as a loner was presumed to be a 'beast', and harassed.

These attacks can be spontaneous, but as often they are the work of loosely organised groups. In Stirling Maggs Haney, matriarch of a family of small-time villains, launched People Against Child Abuse with a round-the-clock vigil outside one ex-offender's home. Similar groups have sprung up around the country, especially among working class mothers. These campaigners are marked by their hostility to the caring professionals whom they say have let them down, and a defensive and aggressive need to prove that they are the people who really care about kids. The culture of the anti-paedophile campaigns echoes the prison morality that singles out the 'nonces' (nonsensical offences) for special vitriol. It is a defensive posture that says 'whatever problems we may have, we're not scum like them'.

What does it say about a society that it is preoccupied with the danger posed by strangers? The motif of the predatory stranger is deeply embedded in our culture. The paedophile is only the latest in a long line of folk devils from the Jewish child-killer to the Gypsy child-abductor and the white slave-trafficker. But today's fears are especially ▶

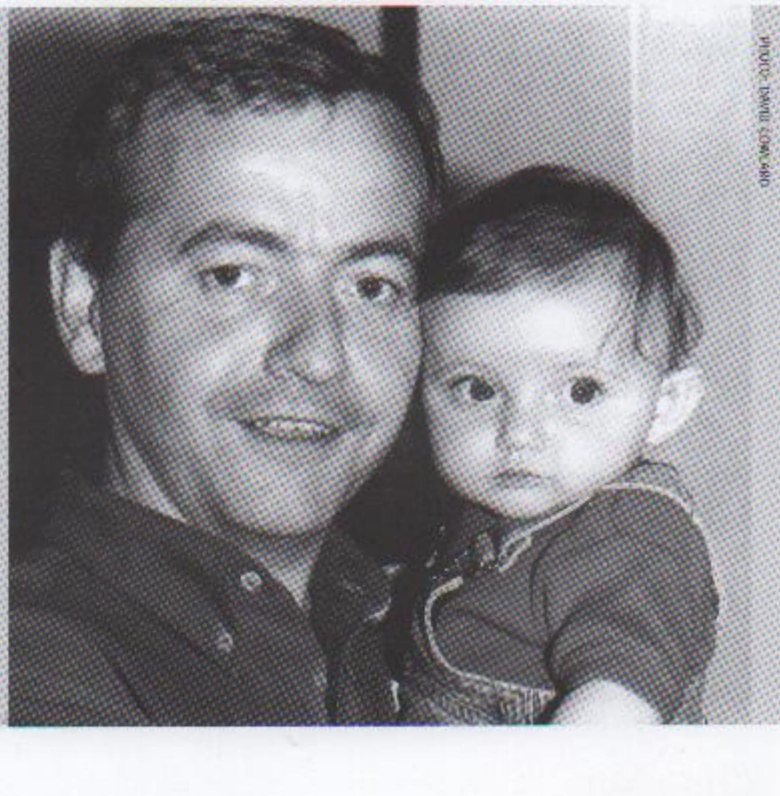
THE LIBERTARIAN PARENT'S DILEMMA

As a father, I do not much care what happens to those individuals who are guilty of violent sex offences against children. Throw away the key, throw them down the stairs, whatever; I won't lose any sleep over one less Sidney Cooke in the world.

But as a father with libertarian principles, I do care about the implications of the national panic about paedophiles that is now gripping Britain (and, it seems, Belgium, Italy, the USA etc).

Of course I want my daughter to grow up in safety. But what is 'safe' or secure about living in an atmosphere of general hysteria, fear and witch-hunts? What will her future hold in a society which can turn hounding a handful of sexual deviants into both the big political issue of the day and a national sport? Read the papers, and you will see that paedophiles are not the only ones developing an unhealthy obsession.

Yes, I want to think of myself and be thought of as a good parent. But I object to the demand that I should have to prove to the general public that I am a decent father by joining a conscript lynching party; it is as if we were living under the law of the jailhouse, where the only 'community' we can all



PAEDOPHILE PANIC

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH CHAPMAN

belong to is a brotherhood of nonce-bashers.

Predatory child sex offenders are not stalking every schoolyard. The number of children killed by strangers in Britain remains as low as ever, at about five a year. So what is all of this hysteria really about?

To me, the paedophile panic looks like the latest outburst of one of the most destructive sentiments of our age: 'stranger danger', the fear and mistrust of other people that has grown stronger as the old communal ties and collective solidarities weaken.

Stranger danger has helped to create a climate of insecurity where, recent surveys show, British children spend more time than ever before alone with their own TVs, CDs and PCs in the gilded cages of their bedrooms, worrying about what might happen to them to the point where some are already on Prozac. And worse is to come if we continue to fill our children with a fear of life.

You do not have to be an advocate of 'pervert's rights' to see that there are also worrying legal implications in the paedophile panic. On 5 April, I read a *Sunday Times* report headlined 'Straw plans to lock up child sex offenders indefinitely'. Everybody nodded in agreement. How many noticed the brief aside that home secretary Jack Straw's plans for indefinite detention 'would also apply to other categories of offenders who show no remorse for their crimes and are likely to reoffend'?

These changes risk undermining the entire criminal justice system, allowing the Home Office to keep various prisoners locked up not because of what they have done, but because they have the wrong attitude, or because victims' campaigns demand it, or because the authorities say they might commit an offence at some time in the future. It all sounds like an unsavoury cross between a medieval-style system of retribution, and Stalin's 'mental hospitals'. But under cover of the paedophile panic, it seems such measures can pass without criticism in Britain today.

The fact that you are not allowed to question any aspect of the anti-paedophile crusade is itself surely reason enough to protest. 'Paedophile', like 'Nazi', has become a word with the power to silence debate; one mention of it is enough to end any discussion and make dissent unacceptable. That kind of moralistic censorship should always be challenged. Apart from anything else, how are we going to deal with what we hate and fear if we cannot even have an honest discussion of the facts?

Nobody can remain immune to an intense panic such as that we are witnessing about child sex offenders. Like every other parent, I worry about my daughter's safety today. But I also know that her future as a free individual will be at risk if she grows up in a world of fear and mistrust where it is assumed that every adult is a potential paedophile in need of constant surveillance, and that every child is a potential victim in need of lifelong supervision. ●

Mick Hume

DISCUSSING THE P

◀ heightened, not because there are any more sex offences against children but because of the greater sense of fragmentation and distrust in communities.

Those anxieties are increased by the bizarre cat-and-mouse game that the authorities have played with high-profile killers like Sidney Cooke and Robert Oliver. First they are released into the community, then the police tell everybody they are there so that they have to be taken back into protective custody. The Home Office says that they can go, but then tells everybody that they are a danger to society. This kind of indecision might as well be designed to provoke the greatest anxiety among parents and communities.

Solidarity in the face of the predatory stranger empowers a community for a moment. But very quickly that solidarity turns into a panic, as activists are tempted to spread ever-more lurid tales of abductions, hidden graves, and paedophile rings to shore up their case. The panic breeds a generalised fear, whose effects are even more destructive. Children are kept in instead of being allowed out to play. Children who ten years ago would have walked to school are now driven. We are building a wall of protection around children that risks damaging them, by holding them back just when they need to try out their independence.

At the same time families become distrustful of one another, watching out for signs of abuse. Parents distrust teachers and doctors. These professionals in turn spy on parents. Fear of child sex abuse is one of the most acute problems of a society that is dissolving in mistrust and panic, where our most basic social bond, the love of a child, can be turned inside out into a fear and hatred of others.

Fear of the predatory abuser fixes upon a potential danger. Of course parents should take any reasonable precautions, but at a certain point, the fear itself can become the most destructive thing in life.

It is precisely because these fears are so instinctive that they need to be reconsidered and understood. The belief that paedophilia is an endemic problem is difficult to justify from the evidence. Child sex offences remain a fairly rare kind of crime, according to statistics, with around two thousand convictions every year. Nonetheless, many studies challenge the statistics, claiming that the problem of child abuse is massively under-reported, because of the difficulties that children have in reporting offences and in being believed when they do.

Among childcare professionals there is now a bias towards an assumption of guilt until innocence is proven. Social services operate an 'at-risk' policy, monitoring families wherever there are signs that they decide might indicate abuse. This approach yields a much higher estimate of abuse than conviction figures. But in fact this approach is severely flawed.

In the first instance, the assumption that there is no smoke without fire reflects a morbid view of family life, where everybody is a potential abuser. Second, the presumption that abuse is widespread rests on an unrealistically broad definition of abuse, embracing 'emotional abuse' and even 'pushy parenting' alongside much more serious problems like battering and sexual abuse. Doubtless this approach arises from a genuine concern for young children, but its effect is to blur the distinction between what might simply be an old-fashioned approach to parenting and actually abusive relationships.

The presumption that child abuse is endemic has led to some extraordinary miscarriages of justice. In America the trial of the family that ran the McMartin Preschool led to convictions of three generations of the same family, all imprisoned on the uncorroborated and wildly manipulated evidence of very young children. Years later the convictions were overturned. In the Orkneys, children were taken into care on the basis of social workers' suspicions and later the children were bullied at length into denouncing their parents, only for all but one of the charges to be dropped later on.

What's more, the presumption that abuse is widespread blurs another distinction, between child sexual offences and

THE VIGILANTE'S TALE

Tony Sheppard was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for an attack on a convicted paedophile. A slight man, he is a carpenter who had been a soldier for 12 years. He is proud of the attack and says that he will do it again.

'I got two years, but he only got six months', says Sheppard. What about those who say the law should deal with the problem? 'The law isn't dealing with the problem, so we're taking it into our own hands. The group I'm a part of, we're organised to do it. Yes you could say I'm a revolutionary, but it's a different kind of revolution—a revolution for personal safety.'

Is there a danger that innocent people will be hurt? 'It's a war. Innocent people get hurt in a war.' What about those innocent people who were attacked? 'You should talk to those that did it. We're careful about what we do. We organise it like a military campaign. That's my background, I get everything planned right.' At the same time Sheppard has no qualms about killing 'proven' paedophiles in his campaign.

Sheppard justifies what he does by blaming 'probation officers and social workers', for failing to protect children. While some of his tales of organised vigilantism are a little hard to believe, proponents of vigilantism like him have had an impact —in helping to spread panic and heightening public fears over predatory paedophiles. Listening to Sheppard, he clearly relishes the role of stalwart soldier of justice, which has given an ex-squaddie something to believe in.

THE ACCUSED

Frank Revill and his daughter Kelly Bradshaw are by no means child abusers—but they did, though no fault of their own, come under suspicion by neighbours. When a woman in Folkestone, where they live, heard that her husband was about to be released after serving a sentence for sex offences against children, she posted details of his former address. At the time Frank was moving Kelly and her children into a new flat near to the address, and seeing an older man moving furniture in people 'put two and two together and made five' says Frank.

Rumours that Frank was the paedophile spread, though he was initially unaware of what was happening. As he moved his furniture in children taunted Frank 'are you the nasty man?', and innocently he joked 'Yes, sometimes I'm bloody horrible', unintentionally fuelling the rumours. Children were warned by their parents to stay away from Frank. Kelly had to put up with 'kids spitting on the floor and looking at you funny'.

As things got worse the house was attacked, the front door vandalised and people tried to break into the back. Then the police received a call from someone claiming that they had broken in and killed the pervert—a hoax, but one that made Kelly fear for her life.

Frank prides himself on his local connections and was hurt that some people he had

PAEDOPHILE PANIC

Such sexual abuse that does occur generally occurs IN THE FAMILY, but it is still extremely rare

child abuse. 'Child abuse' is a term often used as if it were synonymous with child sexual abuse. In fact the two are distinct. Parents who batter their children are thankfully rare. But parents who sexually abuse their children are even rarer. Professionals in the field see both species of abuse as equally harmful and so equivalent in moral terms. But it is a mistake to think that there is no such distinction in the minds of offenders.

Dr Bill Thompson is one of the foremost experts in the field, but he despairs of the tendency among professionals to blur the distinctions: 'All abuse becomes sexual abuse' he complains. And according to the false theory that offences against children are necessarily part of a continuum, 'if anyone flashes at someone today, it is assumed that they are going to kill tomorrow'.

In fact the stereotype of the predatory career paedophile featured in the press stories does not match the facts. Sexual offences against children are thankfully very rare, but of those offences, the vast majority are committed not by strangers, but by family members or close friends. 'Paedophile' is a stereotype that does not describe the acts of incest that characterise most sex offences against children.

Many professionals working with abused children and with abusers will object that the current concerns in the newspapers are misplaced. The spectre of the schoolground pervert preying on young girls is the exception. The rule is that where child molestation does occur it occurs in the home. Of the ninety or so child sex offenders who are released each year, the vast bulk will have offended against family members.

Unfortunately that fact is often misunderstood to mean that the home is a place of great danger. For professionals, whose own anxieties about missing the signs leads them to approach families with mistrust, it seems all too believable that every parent is a potential abuser. But that should be put in perspective. Virtually every person in the country was brought up in a family, and virtually every one of them brought up with love and care. Such sexual abuse that does occur generally occurs in the family, but it is still extremely rare.

Childcare professionals are preoccupied with abuse in the family. But for most other people, the characteristic fear is fear of the predatory 'career paedophile', an exotic demon that accounts for a tiny minority of the most extraordinary cases. How is it that our fears alight on the least likely threat?

To answer that question it helps to understand the way that the child abuse panic has developed over time. The first abuse panics were not about sex offences at all but 'baby battering' like the death of Jasmine Beckford at the hands of her stepfather in 1985. Then blame fell on the professionals, the social workers who had failed to take the child into care, despite the warnings. Social workers protested that they were the victims of a 'moral panic', but that did not stop them in turn starting a moral panic of their own. ▶

SEXUAL OFFENCES: THE FACTS

There were 6500 convictions for sexual offences last year. Of those, 894 were convictions specific to offences against children (intercourse with a child under 16, intercourse with a child under thirteen, or abduction of a child for sexual purposes).

However, the Home Office cautions that many more of the 6500 sexual offences will have been offences against children, such as rape or indecent assault, that are tried under the broader offence. Despite the public interest in this issue, no figures are collated of specific offences, but the Home Office guestimate is that a third of all sexual offences are offences against children, ie just over 2000.

All Home Office research on reconviction rates indicates that sex offenders as a whole are less likely to reoffend than other kinds of offenders, and that reconviction of sex offenders aged over 30 is 'exceptionally low' (Home Office, 1994). No figures exist specific to offences against children, but one independent study suggests that between ten and 15 per cent of those charged with offences against children will be charged again.

Press reports to the effect that 150 sex offenders are to be released unsupervised into the community in the next two years have been wildly exaggerated. Over the next six years 150 people will be released who have a sex offence on their record, though not all 150 are currently in prison for sex offences. Only 50 will be released in the next six years who are specifically in prison for sex offences against children but who, because they were convicted before the law changed, do not fall under the terms of the sex offenders' register ('unsupervised').

Of those, 'half a dozen' are the sort of predatory paedophiles that the press have taken as characteristic, according to the Home Office.

known for years seemed to have doubts when the rumours started flying. 'It's a close-knit community and it's very supportive if you are on the inside. But it's different if you are on the outside.' Once he found out what was going on, he talked to as many people as he could to clear his name. Neighbours rallied and people started crossing the street to apologise to Kelly instead of avoiding her.

Frank understands why people reacted the way they did. 'It's such a contentious issue. If it was my child, I would have been in the same category' as those who were spreading the alarm. 'They thought they were doing right' he adds, but 'If I hadn't been so well known, if I'd been an outsider, it might all have ended very differently'.

DISCUSSING THE P

◀ continued from page 27

Put on the defensive by press attacks on them, social work professionals were tempted to deflect the blame on to families. Social work conferences heard of the 'vastly under-reported' problem of child abuse, and, indicating the growing distrust of the family, of widespread sexual abuse. Social work practitioners drew on ideas supplied by feminists about the repressive character of the patriarchal family, and upon Christian fundamentalist ideas about the spread of 'satanic' child abuse. According to Bill Thompson, 'Mum-blaming' became 'the social workers' excuse for not spotting abuse where it did exist', as caring professionals 'armed with the latest silly rote-learned theory' went in search of signs that ordinary parents were abusing their children. It was hardly surprising that children were rounded-up in witch-hunts in the Orkneys and Cleveland and taken into care, usually on the flimsiest of evidence.

After more than a decade of the demonisation of families, those families in turn have now started to point the finger of blame elsewhere: at the predatory 'career paedophile'. Many liberal commentators have been shocked by the violent language of the working class families who have turned on released sex offenders, seemingly having forgotten the venom that they heaped upon working class families in Cleveland. Outraged parents who are fed up with being blamed themselves, have turned the tables on the professionals, the social workers and probation officers for putting their children at risk by being soft on paedophiles.

Social workers and probation officers may not like the finger of blame pointing at them, but the irony is that the stronger the climate of fear over child sex offenders, the greater the demand for regulation and control by those same professionals. Ray Wyre, who first developed the model of psychological treatment of child sex offenders, was widely criticised for being soft on the 'beasts', but with the impending release of Sidney Cooke, Wyre joined in the witch-hunt atmosphere in the *Sun* ('They're as evil as the Moors Murderers—but could be living in your street soon', 10 March).

The trouble is that where released paedophiles are identified by the police, papers or councils they are very unlikely to be the kind of career sex offender that is the subject of popular anxieties. These names are notified to the police under the register of sexual offenders—or leaked by the press in the case of those who were convicted before the register was made law. The vast majority of child sex offenders appearing on the list are not career paedophiles, but disgraced parents, step-parents and uncles. These might not be the kind of people that you would invite round for tea, but the likelihood of their offending again is lower than that of most other kinds of offenders. Discovered and dislodged from the site of the offence there is little chance for them to reoffend.

The idea that every person convicted of a child sexual offence is a potential Sidney Cooke is a mistake. Most child sex offenders will never offend again. Indeed, according to the Home Office 'reconviction rates for sexual offenders' overall 'are low compared to other kinds of offenders' (Research Findings No. 55). In inflating fears about people who are more often pathetic than dangerous, the professionals are doing parents a great disservice. Fear over the threat of child sexual abuse is also a destructive thing—and the fact is that fear is far more widespread than the threat itself. ●

Why would a mother want to broadcast the views of paedophiles? Claire Fox spoke to Dea Birkett, maker of the controversial Channel 4 documentary The Devil Amongst Us

AND THE DEVIL SPAKE UNTO HER

Watching the news in January 1997, journalist Dea Birkett saw convicted child molester Alan Christie being hounded from his home in Stirling for the second time. 'The image I saw on television was one of a man with a jacket over his head so you couldn't see him at all and a group of screaming women

SECRETS OF THE CONFESSIONAL

The paedophile panic is sweeping Italy too. Dominic Standish and Laura Ceccato report from Venice

Denunciations and confessionals are as Italian as pasta. But since the abduction, abuse and murder of a nine-year old boy last year, these religious practices have been spirited out of the church into the political system, and their targets have become a very particular kind of sinner: the paedophile.

In November 1997, nine-year old Silvestro was abducted by three men, abused and killed. This horrific murder became the first in a stream of paedophile stories to hit the headlines, involving accusations of sexual abuse against salesmen and baby-sitters, priests and football coaches. The authorities have been swift to respond. Milan led the way in setting up Italy's first police unit and team of lawyers specialising in fighting violence against children, plus centres for abused children.

Paedophilia is not a new problem in Italy; the Roman Emperors were, after all, as famous for their favourite boys as for their harems of women. What has changed is the public reaction to it. In particular, unpopular politicians desperate to make links with their electorate are preying on popular fears

PAEDOPHILE PANIC

shouting "beast out, beast out". I wanted to go and confront him and pull the jacket from his head.' Over the next year, the idea of pulling that jacket away turned into a practical project. The result was Force 10 Production's documentary *The Devil Amongst Us*, screened amid much controversy on Channel 4 in January this year.

In the film, Dea Birkett tackled the taboo topic of paedophilia by interviewing men who admitted they are sexually attracted to children. 'I went to talk to these people to break down this hidden, hazy image we had of the devil.' And what were they like, these devils amongst us, these paedophiles? Dea Birkett was anxious to clarify a point about terminology. 'Paedophile' has become a catch-all word, but actually describes somebody who has sexual feelings towards children. They need not have acted on or intend to act on them. This is distinct from child sex offenders who are convicted of abuse. To conflate the two, she says, means criminalising people for 'illegal fantasies'. In the film, Dea Birkett interviews both categories.

PHOTO: DAVID COWLARD

'I felt very differently about different men. There's not a composite paedophile; you can't say someone's a paedophile, therefore you do ABC to them. There's a huge number of other factors from whether those thoughts become practice etc, which aren't taken into account now. There's no degree of response any more. It's all "hound 'em out", "lock 'em up" and it's just not appropriate. People are different levels of threat, pose different problems.' This idea of a composite paedophile is one of the gripes Birkett has with her critics, who did not like her film because it showed that the stereotypical man in the shadow waiting to snatch children, is not the full picture. She objects that the only paedophiles they want us to see on TV are those 'who confess to abusing, say they're sorry and repent; but that's not what they are like'.

Another composite figure which informed Dea Birkett's decision to make the film was the image of the women trying to hound out the local paedophile, the frightened and angry mothers protecting their children: 'People would presume I as a woman would be naturally standing with those mothers. And I felt I couldn't stand next to them. This was no solution to this complex issue.' Many people assume Dea Birkett is not a parent, because 'if I'm a parent I have to be standing with those women'. When they find out she is a mother, says Birkett, they say 'but you have a child' almost as an accusation: 'It is as if I am betraying my own child.'

Dea Birkett is keen not to blame the women who, in 'an atmosphere of hysteria and national obsession' may well believe 'that every second house houses someone coming to snatch their children'. But she sees a danger that, in the absence of rational discussion, this fear is greatly exaggerated and very destructive. 'What is terrifying is the effect it has on the children. A lot of children are being brought up in this atmosphere of fear and distrust. I think that is not good for a child. I think that that is actually a far greater risk to a child than any possible threat from being snatched in a park.

'The people leading these campaigns are often working class women. The only person they can have power over is the paedophile. They can hound that man out of his home. It makes them feel powerful. But actually fear is not empowering. All you are doing is making things worse. The whole thing about having a sex offenders' register and ▶

about paedophiles in a bid to win new authority.

Italy's politicians were initially slow to respond to Silvestro's death, and came under fire when TV showed only 14 deputies present during a parliamentary debate on paedophilia. But the Italian elite quickly moved to engage with the public mood. The 'Olive Tree' coalition government, led by the Refounded Communist Party and the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), prioritised the enactment of a new Code to Protect Children. This mainly addresses sex and violence on television, restricting violent scenes—even on the news—and banning alcohol, condom and sex-related advertising (except in relation to Aids) between 7am and 10.30pm. The PDS Minister for the Arts, Walter Veltroni, highlighted restrictions on sex telephone line advertising as a first step against paedophilia. Even the Vatican has indicated that it will consider making paedophilia a crime against humanity.

At the local level, the PDS Mayor of Naples, Antonio Bassolino, unable to do much about the chronic unemployment and crime in the city, has spearheaded policies against paedophilia. He has supported a task force of teachers and doctors to take sex education into the schools, in order to teach children how to protect themselves from abuse at an earlier age. Writing for the liberal-left *L'Espresso*, Cristina Marlotti called for the state to provide after-school protection for children whose parents cannot collect them from school at home time. The council in Naples has now hired grandparents as 'Guardian Angels' to ensure children leaving school reach their transport safely.

The PDS' anti-paedophile campaign is an example of the new politics taking shape in Italy's uncertain post-Cold War climate. The ramifications of the collapse of the old parties of both right and left went far beyond voting. The established patterns of Italian life associated with voting Christian Democrat or Communist have also crumbled. The anti-paedophile campaign, rather like the anti-Mafia crusade before it, is an attempt by the reformed political elite to gain some new public legitimacy.

However, far from unifying the Italian people, the constant concern about paedophilia can ultimately only exaggerate people's mutual distrust. A trend has been unleashed whereby anybody acting in an unfamiliar way risks being denounced—like the man in Rome recently reported as a suspected paedophile because he was seen taking a photograph of his niece outside a school. At the time of going to press Mario Bianco, a 67-year old Guardian Angel from Naples, has been arrested on suspicion of sexual abuse. The blue telephones in public places for children to call a help line are spreading, as are the pink ones for women. The telephones are supposed to symbolise a new state-sponsored security, but all they really show is Italian society's heightened sense of fear.

Few commentators have considered what will happen as paedophilia within the priesthood is increasingly exposed. Despite the declining authority of the Catholic Church, priests still play a pivotal role in social cohesion, especially in villages and small towns. The endless chain of denunciations can only further undermine the fabric of Italian society. ●

DISCUSSING THE F

◀ community identification doesn't make us feel safe. It makes us feel less safe, far less safe, far more afraid. It's not empowering, it's disempowering and we're disempowering our children by giving them this fear.'

'The point is', says the film's producer Kevin Toolis, 'things are far more complicated than is painted in this atmosphere of hysteria, and the role of sections of the media in all this is disgraceful'. If the media in general has played a less than creditable role, Dea Birkett is keen to give credit where credit is due. 'Whatever people say about Channel 4, they did broadcast *The Devil Amongst Us*. That was a very brave thing to do. It was very controversial. We didn't know how controversial it was going to be.'

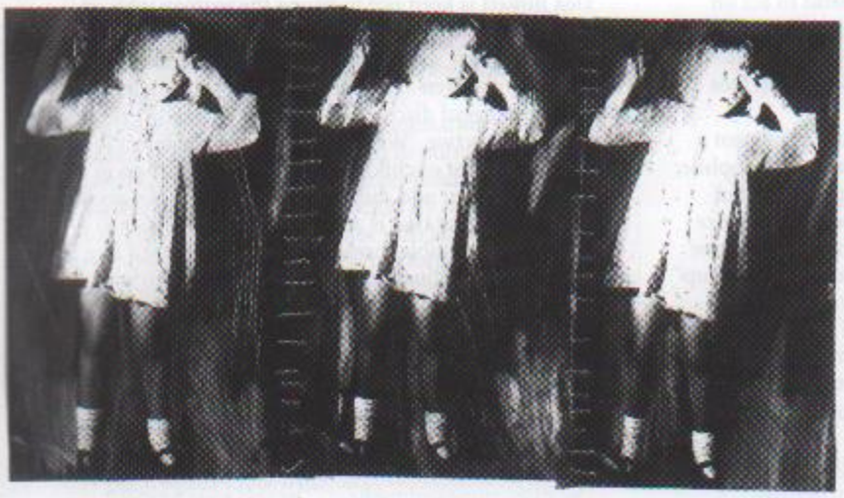


ILLUSTRATION: SARAH CHAPMAN

The film was met with a flood of abusive letters and opinion pieces in the press. The NSPCC called the programme 'chilling' and 'unbalanced' and called on the film-makers to hand over evidence to the police. Michelle Elliott, director of Kidscape, who has made a career of scaremongering about children, joined groups like Childline in demanding that the film be withdrawn before she had even seen it. For Dea Birkett this only showed that 'the objections were to the programme in principle, not to anything in particular. All you were allowed to do was to stand outside someone's house and scream. That was approved. Any other action was disapproved and I just thought this is absurd. We can't even have a documentary on the television about it. They wanted to silence us'. Dea Birkett objects to the notion that 'if I don't like an opinion I'm supposed to pretend it doesn't exist'.

One of the major accusations from people like Michelle Elliot was that the film could encourage people to be paedophiles. This astounded Dea Birkett, since she felt she had presented the life of a paedophile as utterly miserable. 'Consider how sad and pathetic were the lives of those interviewed. Here we have a group of miserable, thwarted, threatened men, a sadder, more unattractive way of living could not have been presented and the suggestion is that everyone's sitting there thinking "Oh, that looks an attractive lifestyle". Even the men themselves said "This is a curse. I would love to be otherwise".

'I mean, the idea of someone sitting in their front room and someone on the telly saying "I'm a paedophile" and so he thinks "Oh, I hadn't thought about that before. I think I'll go and have sex with a four year old". It's so absurd. Do they really think people are like that?

'I respect people. You know, I am an intelligent, rational human being like 99 per cent of the population. If someone tells me something that is horrific, I know that and you have to trust me. The critics of the film didn't trust people, the viewers. Experts, so-called experts, don't trust us, the British public, to make our own minds up. Therefore they are not going to let us hear things that they think are going to warp us. Well I'm sorry, but we all have a right to access to that information, however difficult it is, however unpleasant.'

I invited both Dea Birkett and Kevin Toolis to speak at the *LM*/ICA festival, Free Speech Wars, because I thought the discussion around their film raised important issues in the free speech debate. When Birkett insists that paedophiles and sex offenders—'the people who are at the heart of this debate'—must be given the chance to speak, I am not convinced. But I am convinced that attempts to stifle public debate on this issue will seriously damage the cause of free speech. Dea Birkett agrees that this is an important emphasis: 'The criticism of the film wasn't that these men were allowed to talk, the criticism was that we were allowed to hear them. That was what was said. You mustn't hear them. It's not right you listen.' She suggests we turn the whole argument around: 'It is not about giving free speech to paedophiles, it's about allowing access to every kind of view. That's about trusting people to make up their own minds and that's something we must defend.'

Kevin Toolis thinks that just because there isn't a formal ban to be broken, 'it doesn't mean to say that there is not a real boundary—what one is allowed to say, what one is allowed to hear, what one is silenced by, given the interlocking consensus. Channel 4 broadcasting that programme is pushing the boundaries on free speech'.

Dea Birkett feels it has been easier for her to argue her case as a woman, because 'any man who speaks out is open to being accused of being a paedophile'. But for her too, 'it is a very difficult position. You are so much out on a limb'. Kevin Toolis says that the most common response from 'everyone, friends of ours, people you talk to' is one of rage, '"you're talking about someone abusing my kids". That's what always comes back at you'. He understands this; after all their children are their most precious possessions. 'They see all this as a threat, so that seems to close all discussion down. But when people conclude "Who cares about rationality?", that's the scary bit.'

Dea Birkett thinks another reason she receives a lot of abuse on this issue is 'because victims feel as though you are personally attacking them. I think the victims themselves become victims of this hysteria, which is no help to them. When you have Michelle Elliot on television with a victim sitting next to her I think that means being twice victimised—once by the abuse that she has suffered and twice by this parading of her victimisation. I get very cross when I watch those debate shows where the victim of abuse responds "I've been abused 135 times". As if that was an argument. As if I'm going to say "no you weren't abused" or "that's good" rather than "that's bad". I didn't say child abuse doesn't exist; don't parade a victim in front of me as an argument against me. I'm not talking about that. I am talking about our attitude towards offenders. But when the victim speaks, that's it; it's like a statement "There's no debate now"'.

Dea Birkett hopes that as a result of her film 'the debate has been nudged on. But I think we have to nudge it further'. ●

Helene Guldberg reports on the strange case of Robert Mapplethorpe, the chemist, the policeman, and the university vice-chancellor

OBSCENE ALLEGATIONS

When West Midlands Police confiscated a book from the library stock of the University of Central England (UCE) in Birmingham, it raised anew fears about the state encroaching on publishing and academic freedoms. *Mapplethorpe*, a book containing photographs by the late Robert Mapplethorpe, has been referred to the Crown Prosecution Service for a decision on whether it should be destroyed under the terms of the Obscene Publications Act.

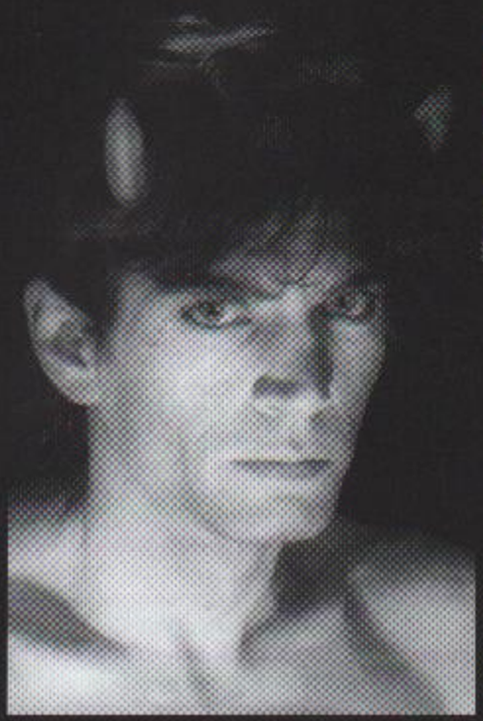
But who is the CPS to decide whether the images contained in a book are too 'obscene' for other adults to see? 'The problem with the term 'obscene' is that it is so malleable and open to subjective interpretation; one person's filth is another's erotica and yet another's subject of ridicule. Yet the authorities have decided that there is a higher arbiter on this matter. By law a publication can be deemed 'obscene' if the police and courts say that it will have the effect of tending 'to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it'.

Dr Peter Knight, vice-chancellor of the UCE, does not feel too comfortable discussing his views on the law in question. He told me he 'may be constrained by legal considerations from commenting too deeply on this issue!' But he will state 'the obvious fact that it would be surprising if a law formulated in 1959 still serves society well in 1998. If we think only of sexual issues it is interesting that a photograph of a sexual act may be illegal even when the act itself is legal'.

Mapplethorpe's work, with its focus on homoerotic imagery, has always been controversial. But the book in question has been in the public domain in this country since 1992. It can be found in libraries and book shops around the country. So how could it now suddenly be deemed in danger of 'depraving and corrupting' the minds of young adults at one university?

It started last year when a student at the university, in the course of preparing a piece of work entitled 'Fine Art versus Pornography', took a film containing photographs of images in the book to a local chemist to be developed. Putting questions of copyright to one side, the only charge the student expected to arise was the bill for the prints. But as Bernard Naylor, a university librarian, points out, 'Julia Somerville could have told [the student] about the unwisdom of sending camera shots depicting certain areas of naked human flesh (however juvenile) for developing'.

The chemist took responsibility for much more than developing the photographs.



ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE, SELF PORTRAIT, 1980

He appointed himself censor, scrutinising the content and then forwarding the negatives to the police. The UCE library was raided and the book confiscated. The publishing company, Random House, was also invited to excise the two photographs deemed to be 'obscene' from the book, or alternatively, remove the entire book from publication.

Dr Peter Knight has vowed to 'resist the destruction of the Mapplethorpe publication'. As he says, 'access to a wide range of visual images is an important and integral part of the curriculum for students studying Art and Design and it is our view that any attempt to restrict that curriculum should be stopped'. The University Senate, believing that 'principles are priceless', backed the vice-chancellor. Gail Rebuck, the chief executive of Random House, refused to withdraw the 'obscene' photographs from the public domain. She has said she hopes that 'sense will ultimately prevail', since she is 'astonished that a scholarly work of such acknowledged artistic and literary merit should be at risk of prosecution'.

The attitude of the UCE and Random House is heartening—as was reading the messages of support on the UCE website (www.uce.ac.uk/mapplethorpe/comment/you.htm). Typical comments slam 'this attempt at censorship, by an organisation which has no right to act as moral guardians for this or any other generation', and praise the UCE for its 'sanity' in 'standing up for civil liberty and human rights'.

The attempt to destroy the Mapplethorpe book is contemptible and insulting. But was it a one-off, or does it mark a new assault on publishing and academic freedom? Certain other publishers have found themselves on the wrong end of the Obscene Publications Act recently. Yet the heavy-handed police measures against a respected institution like the UCE were highly unusual. Dr Peter Knight said that he had 'never known anything like this in 30 years of academic life'. 'I have not detected any other comparable problems', Dr Knight told me, 'but, who knows, perhaps they will now start'.

Or perhaps they have already started? It would be a mistake to think that the blunt instrument which the authorities used in Birmingham is the only threat to freedom of expression. The thinking behind the action of the chemist and the police—that there are certain things too offensive to be seen or read, even in broad-minded academic institutions—is a commonly held idea these days. As a consequence, there are now more subtle and insidious attacks on ideas and books deemed beyond the pale—attacks which provoke far less opposition than a police raid to grab a Mapplethorpe book, often because they are justified in the name of defending the 'vulnerable'.

I became acutely aware of this a couple of years ago when I found myself having to defend the right of a former lecturer of mine, Chris Brand, to publish and express his views—however objectionable they may be. Brand was somebody I was happy to see the back of when I left the University of Edinburgh. Yet in 1996, when a publisher withdrew a book of Brand's and a campaign started to have him sacked, because of his reactionary views on race and intelligence, I publicly supported his right to publish and to teach. As Brand himself said, students attending university 'are not children that can't listen to the other point of view' (*Independent on Sunday*, 21 April 1996). Just as we insist that university students are mature enough to look at Mapplethorpe pictures without being corrupted, so they should certainly be treated as adults in the sphere of ideas.

While remaining ever-watchful for the tread of the policeman's boot, I fear that we need to be far more wary of the threat to academic freedom and debate now posed by the politically correct guardians of bland consensus. ●

Helene Guldberg is co-publisher of *LM*

The conflict in the Serbian province of Kosovo is the final act of the tragic Yugoslav drama—and exposes the danger of yet more outside intervention, argues Linda Ryan

KOSOVO: THE FINAL ACT

The Serbian police offensive against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in Drenica in March resulted in the death of scores of ethnic Albanians and led to intense Western pressure on Belgrade to cease its repressive actions and negotiate a political agreement with the ethnic Albanian leadership in Kosovo. However, the lesson of the past decade is that Western diplomatic and political meddling is more likely to exacerbate than resolve local conflicts.

Armed attacks by the KLA on Serbian police, ethnic Albanian 'collaborators' and Serbian civilians provided the immediate backdrop to the police crackdown in March. However, the latest events need to be seen in the overall context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia over the past decade and the internationalisation of the region's conflicts since 1989. The polarisation of the Serb and ethnic Albanian communities in Kosovo has been a slow, drawn-out process (see p34), but one that gathered momentum following the unravelling of the former communist system in Yugoslavia and the escalating involvement of outside powers.

Following several years of strife between the republics that made up the Yugoslav federation, the end of the communist regime in Yugoslavia came in 1990 with the collapse of the federal Communist Party. Two republics, Slovenia and Croatia, soon declared their right to national independence. On 2 July 1990, the same day that the Slovene Assembly issued its declaration of sovereignty, ethnic Albanian delegates to the provincial Kosovo Assembly adopted a declaration proclaiming Kosovo a republic, having equal status with Serbia and other republics and including the right to secede from the federation. The declaration expressed the growing self-assertion of the ethnic Albanian population, in response to the rise of nationalism elsewhere in the Yugoslav federation, the repression meted out by the Serbian authorities, and the increasing involvement of the USA in the Kosovo dispute.

By this time Western policy towards Yugoslavia was changing in response to the winding down of the Cold War. For 40 years Yugoslavia had had a special relationship with the USA, including special access to Western credits in exchange for Yugoslav neutrality, which made the country's territorial integrity a matter of strategic concern to the West. However, Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union and the progress of arms reduction talks between the two Cold War blocs made Yugoslavia's role in Nato policy largely redundant. Yugoslavia was becoming less of a security concern for the USA, and its special category status in the US state department was revoked in early 1989.

The changes in the international order brought about by the end of the Cold War, particularly the reunification of Germany, also had an impact. In an attempt to demonstrate their authority in the unstable post-Cold War world, the Western powers adopted a more interventionist foreign policy. Western governments' new foreign policy has since been pursued under the banners of a moral mission to save the world, using the rhetoric of political correctness (protecting ethnic minorities, human rights, environmentalism etc) to justify what is, in reality, a display of great power diplomacy. In the process, the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of sovereign states, on which the postwar international order was founded, has gone out the window. In the New World Order the Western powers, and the USA in particular, have given themselves the right to reorder the world as they see fit, whether in Eastern Europe, the Middle East or Africa.

It was in this context that Warren Zimmerman, the new US ambassador to Yugoslavia, arrived in April 1989, with a brief to pay attention to human rights issues. Zimmerman came straight from a post as US ambassador to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) where the USA was pushing 'Basket Three' issues (human rights), which were fast becoming a surrogate for the loss of anti-communism as a cohering theme in US policy. The repression of Albanian civil rights in Kosovo quickly became the focus of US policy in Yugoslavia. Together with members of the US Congress and its Helsinki Committee, Zimmerman castigated the government of Serbia for its violation of human rights in Kosovo. He was so outspoken that Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, refused to meet him for nine months after he arrived in Belgrade. Congressional outrage over human

PHOTO: MICHAEL WALTER

Serb police on patrol in Pristina

rights abuses, led by Senator Robert Dole, resulted in several US fact-finding missions in mid-1990 and, by November 1990, in an amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act offered by Senator Don Nickles that threatened the withdrawal of US economic assistance if improvements in Kosovo did not occur within six months (by 5 May 1991).

By the end of the 1980s the issues of democracy, human rights and territorial jurisdiction had become inextricably intertwined. The US intervention in Kosovo, which emphasised the issue of human rights and presented the problem there as one wholly of Serbia's making, gave encouragement not only to the secessionists among the Kosovo Albanians but also to Slovene and Croat nationalists, reinforcing their anti-Serb outbursts. They also had the effect of strengthening Milosevic's claim to be the protector of Serbian national interests, in Kosovo and elsewhere, and helping him to be elected as president of Serbia by popular referendum in December 1989. Thus at the same time as US policy still formally favoured the continuing integrity of Yugoslavia, Washington's actions served to hasten the end of the country.

Almost a decade later, the international position on Kosovo continues to reject the ethnic Albanian goal of independence but demands of Serbia the restoration of significant autonomy for the province. The Western powers argue that they have always insisted on the inviolability of the various republics' borders, and that on this basis Kosovo does not qualify for independence. However, professing support for the integrity of borders is rendered meaningless by the destructive effect of outside intervention in Kosovo. It recalls the way in which various powers expressed verbal support for the integrity of Yugoslavia while they undermined it.

The very fact of outside involvement is succour for those seeking international sponsorship for their independence claims. The struggle to create new states out of the former Yugoslav federation was essentially a struggle to get international recognition. Germany's sponsorship of Croatia's independence in 1991 and America's backing of Bosnian independence in 1992 were key moments in the descent into civil war in Yugoslavia. Once that war began, the struggle for international backing became even more important than the fight on the ground. The potentially destructive dynamic unleashed ▶

◀ by the post-communist rise of nationalism in Yugoslavia was made deadly by the interference of foreign powers.

Today the primary motive of outside intervention in Kosovo is a desire to impose Western diktat. The Western powers are telling Serbia that it WILL grant Kosovo autonomy, or else face the 'severest consequences': a euphemism for bombing in the words of the US secretary of state, Madelaine Albright. This can only antagonise the Serbs and encourage the Kosovo Albanians to press for more. As long as outsiders are dictating to the locals, the likely result is more polarisation.

One of the lessons that should have been learned from more than three years of war in Bosnia is that foreign meddling invariably reduces the possibility of compromise. Western involvement in Bosnia led to dashed peace deals, broken ceasefires, intensified fighting and a rising body count. Since 1989 intervention by outside powers in Kosovo has scuppered the possibility of a local solution by encouraging ethnic Albanian secessionists and feeding Serbian nationalism. It is worth pointing out that the only reason why the Kosovo Albanians can be so brazen in their claim for independence, compared with the Hungarians in Slovakia or Transylvania for example, is because it has become acceptable internationally. It is part of the post-Yugoslav agenda, thanks to the disintegrative dynamic unleashed by Western intervention.

As long as OUTSIDERS are dictating to the locals, the likely result is more polarisation

It is ironic that the most conducive circumstances for the preservation of the very substantial autonomy enjoyed by the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo in the 1970s-1980s would have been the continuation of a united, federal Yugoslavia. Even now, however, there is still a chance of a compromise solution. But that can come only if those who have to live with the result are allowed to decide their own future free from outside interference. The terms of a solution in Kosovo are not the business of outsiders. ●

HOW KOSOVO BECAME A POWDER KEG

Yugoslavia was founded in 1943, under the leadership of Marshal Tito's communists, with six republics: Bosnia-Hercegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. In September 1945 two autonomous provinces of Serbia—Vojvodina in the north and Kosovo in the south—were constituted. In 1974 the status of Kosovo and Vojvodina was enhanced under a new constitution, defining their position as federal units within Yugoslavia, rather than just in relation to Serbia. The special status of these two provinces was opposed by many Serbs, and their reintegration into Serbia became a major focus for Serbian nationalists in the late 1980s.

From the 1960s onwards there was a gradual strengthening of nationalism in the republics which laid the seeds for the eventual destruction of Yugoslavia. In 1968 significant concessions were granted to Kosovo by the federal authorities. These rights, which gave Kosovo de facto autonomous republic status, were later enshrined in the new Yugoslav constitution of 1974. The equality of all languages, the right to be taught in the mother tongue and the right to their own educational institutions (including a university) were guaranteed. Ethnic Albanians made up the leadership of the local League of Communists and the provincial administration, including the police force, was predominantly Albanian. The demand for separation by Kosovo Albanians acquired political momentum during the period when the province enjoyed its most enhanced status in the federation (1968-1989).

Within a year of Tito's death there was a nationalist uprising in Pristina, in March-April 1981, demanding that Kosovo be made formally a republic. This was brutally repressed after a state of emergency was declared. Following the 1981 events the communist authorities introduced a policy of 'differentiation', which involved the purging of any party member or official who did not denounce the campaign for a republic. Between 1981 and 1990, according to Amnesty International, more than 7000 ethnic Albanians were arrested and imprisoned in Kosovo for nationalist activities.

In 1985 a group of Serbian intellectuals at the Serbian Academy of Sciences prepared a document known as the Memorandum. The document alleged that Serbia had been weakened greatly by the granting of autonomy to Vojvodina and Kosovo. The Memorandum paved the way for the emergence of Milosevic, who became leader of the Serbian League of Communists in 1986. In 1987 he denounced his former mentor, Ivan Stambolic, for having allowed Kosovo to remain self-governing.

That same year, in response to claims that the small Serbian population of Kosovo was being terrorised by the Albanian population, Milosevic whipped up Serbian popular indignation and promised to protect the local Serbs. In February 1989 an Albanian general strike was suppressed by Serbian police backed by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), with the loss of 24 lives. In March 1989 Azem Vlasi and other Albanian leaders were arrested and charged with 'counter-revolutionary activities'. In 1990, as fears of secessionist movements mounted throughout Yugoslavia, Serbia assumed direct control of the Kosovo police force, causing the resignation of every ethnic Albanian member of the provincial government. The new Serbian constitution of 1990 removed the last vestiges of autonomy from Kosovo. On 5 July 1990 the Serbian authorities dissolved the provincial assembly and the government. The Kosovo presidency resigned in protest and Serbia introduced a special administration. By September 1990, 15 000 ethnic Albanian officials had been dismissed.

On 7 September 1990 members of the former Kosovo assembly declared the assembly to have been reconvened and, six days later, proclaimed a basic law of the 'Republic of Kosovo'. As the Kosovo assembly in exile, based in Zagreb, it organised a referendum on independence from Serbia in September 1991. This registered overwhelming support among ethnic Albanians for Kosovo becoming a sovereign republic. Ethnic Albanian elections to the shadow assembly, declared illegal by the Serbian authorities, were held in the province in May 1992. Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) secured the most seats and Rugova was elected president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo.

Throughout the 1990s the Kosovo Albanians pursued a policy of passive resistance, refusing to participate in the life of the Serbian state, not only abstaining from elections but also running their own parallel administration, health and education systems. They have rejected the goal of greater autonomy within Serbia and have continued to run their own affairs in a manner tantamount to a de facto secession. The escalation of the KLA's campaign over the past year is symptomatic of growing conflicts within the Albanian leadership over what course to pursue in the struggle for independence. The militants have raised the stakes by resorting to violence in an attempt to internationalise the conflict and provoke Western intervention to impose a settlement. ●

While the UN, business and government goes green, reports Roger Bate, more scientists are questioning eco-dogma on global warming

SCIENTISTS COOL ON GLOBAL WARMING

We are used to phrases like Big Government and Big Business, but what about Big Environment? The bearded sandal-wearing environmentalist of the past is being replaced by the clean-shaven smooth-talking sound-biting environmentalist of today. The environmental movement has big budgets, employing public relations giants like US-based Fenton Communications to coordinate glossy green press conferences and media stunts.

Not only have environmental pressure groups substantial financial clout of their own, but their lobbying has helped persuade governmental and international bureaucracies to squeeze vast sums from taxpayers to pursue green agendas. The global warming issue clearly demonstrates this spending largesse.

I recently returned from holidaying in Trinidad which, coincidentally, was the venue chosen by scientists from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to discuss 'Aviation and the global atmosphere'. The scientists' spokesman, Sir John Houghton, has been demanding a tax on aviation to reduce the demand for international travel, which is adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. The fact that there are no climate researchers based in the Caribbean, or that more fuel would have been used getting to Trinidad than to London or the east coast of America (where most of the researchers are based) seemed to have escaped the organisers of this meeting. What obviously didn't was that the weather was a lot nicer in Trinidad than in Boston.

The hypocrisy of UN bureaucrats demanding policies which will make people pay even more for their own holidays and the green elite's trips is simply astounding. For example, gasoline and heating-fuel tax rises in the UK in the name of the environment have already harmed the poor and pensioners, who now use less fuel in winter for fear of the bills. Aviation tax hikes will just be the next elitist policy to come from the greens.

What is perhaps most ironic is that the UN climate dogma is now coming under attack from scientists. Last December world leaders received a letter signed by over 500 scientists who argued against limiting energy use to control greenhouse gas emissions. The signatures, which now number over 900, were collected by two not-for-profits groups—the Advancement

for Sound Science Coalition (based in Washington DC), and the European Science and Environment Forum (based in England, which I direct).

Specifically, the signatories, who come from 20 countries, urge world leaders not to support the Kyoto accord agreed in principle at December's UN climate conference. They recommend that 'the world's governments defer taking action on a climate change protocol until the science shows limiting greenhouse gas emissions will benefit, not harm, the global environment and public health'.

But of course the media regularly refers to the famous UN-backed 1995 statement that 'the balance of the evidence suggests that man has had an impact on climate'. This statement came from a chapter written by Ben Santer in a UN report, which was heavily criticised by Frederick Seitz for containing 'the worst corruption of the peer review process' that he had seen in 60 years. Seitz, a former president of the American Academy of Sciences, was incensed that conclusions should be drawn from a report subject to what he saw as methodological trickery. Nevertheless, Santer's conclusions were widely reported. They were based on climate models, one of which was designed by Joyce Penner, then of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in the USA. Penner was also co-author with Santer of the key paper referred to by the UN report. The paper concluded that 'our results suggest that the similarities between observed and model-predicted change....are unlikely to have resulted from natural internally generated variability of the climate system'.

Penner's new work at the University of Michigan shows that some human emissions cool the planet and others warm it. Her recent press release from a paper she gave in December to the American Geophysical Union, states that 'contrary to conventional wisdom, new computer modelling....suggests that global warming might not be the product of human activity'.

Nearly two years ago Tim Wirth, then US under-secretary of state, told the UN that 'the science is settled'; yet now that the green movement has the protocol it wanted, it turns out that this century's warming is probably just due to natural variability.

A further irony is playing out in the business community, for just as scientists are expressing serious doubts over the proclaimed dangers of global warming, multinationals, including some oil companies, are clamouring to show their concern and take action to curb greenhouse gas emissions. The first step for them was to change their rhetoric and for that they turned to environmentalists.

Leaked internal memoranda from the Washington-based eco-pressure group National Environmental Trust (NET) claim credit for opinion articles on climate change apparently written by Enron Corporation's CEO, Ken Lay. From Houston, Enron spokesperson Carol Hensley confirmed NET's involvement in the Lay story, which was placed in several newspapers by Knight-Ridder. But industry is not alone in calling on NET to write or edit its speeches in order to appease the green movement. UK environment minister Michael Meacher readily acknowledges NET's help, as did his Conservative predecessor, John Gummer, whose article attacking US business, in the *Washington Post* of 2 December, was among NET's claimed 'successes'.

Inherent dangers arise from these collaborations. With the debate all but extinguished, regulations and taxes, proposed with the aim of helping the environment (whether or not they have a hope of succeeding) will inevitably be biased towards protecting the large business and political interests involved in the collaborative process, at the expense of smaller, newer companies, the poor and consumers—groups that are inevitably less well-organised at placing news stories and at lobbying. ●

Roger Bate is director of the European Science and Environment Forum and editor of *Global Warming: The Continuing Debate* published by ESEF (see web site—www.esef.org)

FUTURES

If Microsoft sets monopoly standards that aid innovation on the Internet, then more power to it says Mark Beachill

BILL GATES RULES CYBERSPACE, OK?

A battle is going on for control of the Internet. Not content with our computer desktops it seems that billionaire Bill Gates and his corporation, Microsoft, are out to colonise cyberspace by setting the standards for the information used for Net communication. In response, it seems that everybody from the US government to Net techies is out to get Gates.

Only three years ago Microsoft seemed to have missed the Internet take-off. But after refocusing its 20 000 employees—starting with Gates' memo 'The Internet tidal wave'—the company has turned things around. The key to this has been the 'browser', the software that links people's machines to the Internet. To capture the browser market Microsoft has been giving its software away free of charge and tightly integrating the browser with its Windows software.

By giving away its browser and e-mail software—an idea Gates resisted at first, calling the originator a communist—the company hopes to establish an 'embrace and extend' system of control over existing Internet standards; as more developers create web pages that use the corporation's new 'extended' standards, so Microsoft will be the one to set the rules. Rivals say Gates wants to embrace and extend like an anaconda.

The US Department of Justice is now engaged in a wide-ranging investigation of Microsoft. Last December the authorities started fining Gates' company $1 million a day until it stopped integrating its browser software with Windows 95. Microsoft complied via a slight technical modification, but the row will continue over the forthcoming Windows 98 and over other Internet-related technologies.

Within the IT community, Microsoft is seen to go against the 'counter-cultural' origins of the technology. The personal computer and related software industries partly grew out of the counterculture of the 1970s. The Home Brew computer club, a hobbyist organisation for techies based in California and linked to the DIY hippie culture, was the hotbed around which the PC revolution started. These young men were dropouts, nerds and hippies. Gates, himself a college dropout, was one of those pioneers, producing programming software for an early home computer. However, he was noted even then for his insistence that people must pay for the software he wrote.

Today, the old scene cannot stand Gates the big businessman. Howard Rheingold, author of the seminal *Virtual Communities*, complains that 'the Net these players are building doesn't seem to be the same Net the grassroots pioneers predicted back in the "good old days" on the electronic frontier'. On the Internet itself there are hundreds of sites dedicated to Bill-bashing, most of which show a rather insane hatred for the software company and its CEO.

Leading academic and business figures too condemn Microsoft's Will To Power. For example, the court-appointed 'special master' Larry Lessig—a Harvard law professor who is expected to report his legal and technical findings on the Microsoft case in May—was found to have sent an e-mail to a friend at Microsoft's rival Netscape, in which he likened installing Microsoft Internet software on his Apple computer to selling his 'soul'. In an interview with *Time* magazine, Scott McNeally, CEO of Sun Microsystems (a computer outfit with over $1 billion turnover), argued that 'there are two camps, those in Redmond [Microsoft's HQ] who live on the Death Star, and the rest of us, the rebel forces'.

The accusations that Microsoft is too interested in profits and market share, too keen to eliminate and dominate its rivals—in short, too obsessed with power—have a purchase on the popular imagination; a *Fortune* poll of US households online revealed that only 17 per cent disagreed with the statement that Microsoft has too much power in the marketplace. Even Microsoft seems to have some sympathy for the critics of Microsoft. Unsure of how to defend itself, it weakly asserts that it has no monopoly, painting itself as a relatively small player in a ferociously competitive market.

But is there a problem? Might it not in fact be a great thing if Microsoft, or somebody else, went even further and really did come to dominate the market?

A green activist like Ralph Nader might present himself as the defender of the consumer in his attacks on

Microsoft, and many consumers do say they are uneasy about the company's influence. But in the marketplace, the bottom line is that consumers seem to like the products. Nearly 80 per cent of those asked thought the products good or great. In this case it seems that big is better. Perhaps more Microsoft might be in order, not less.

The US government's attack on Microsoft's monopoly position does not make sense. It was not Gates who determined that there would be a monopoly; it was the market, in the shape of software developers and consumers. Despite hundreds of competitors, systems software of the sort Microsoft makes is a natural monopoly. Having one supplier makes perfect sense.

When good application software (the programs that actually do things, like accounts, production control, educational tutoring etc) is available for an operating system such as Windows, more people buy Windows. When a lot of people use Windows more developers make application programs that work with Windows. And the virtuous circle continues. Software suppliers create most for the biggest market and use economies of scale to sell their products more cheaply. Companies that use software standardise with the default system in order to reduce training and running costs, to get good, cheap software, and to ensure that their suppliers remain in business.

Microsoft is beneficiary and prisoner of the monopoly it has created. Because of the popularity of its earlier standards, Microsoft has to build compatibility with three generations of software into its new technologies. So the latest versions of Windows have to run software created for the earlier versions, and the original early-1980s DOS software. Having established a Windows programming environment that thousands of companies use to create software, Gates must stick with that standard. Windows can be extended, to include for example a computer-telephone interface, but it cannot be scrapped.

The slower evolutionary changes to system software might be a brake on innovation at one level, but the big plus is that Microsoft's standards have built up a stable base of users and applications, leading to faster innovation at every other level.

Now that Microsoft has established standards at the level of the desktop, extending the monopoly to the Internet is a logical progression. By standardising communications on the Internet, and having standard tools for developers to link their programs with the Net, the company can make it easier for others to innovate using what communication on the Net does best—from home banking to research. Even if Microsoft's software does not provide the right tools, another company can fill the gap, and most likely Microsoft will continue to buy up the new technology.

Like the railways, many elements of the computer software market form a natural monopoly. So why the bother?

The reaction against Microsoft's monopoly reflects an underlying fear of power in the 1990s. Once the US government organised the computer industry. Through the Cold War, IBM's key contracts were with the defence department, and the standards to make the Internet work came out of a military project. In our uncertain post-Cold War decade, however, those at the top appear to have lost their decisive grip on events. At a time when an inability to make decisions and set standards has permeated everywhere from the cabinet office to the corporate boardroom, many seem uncomfortable with a private company stepping in to fill the leadership vacuum and show how it should be done.

The Gates success story is undoubtedly built around dodgy competitive practices, reminiscent of the leverage that IBM salesmen used in the past. And Microsoft software has many flaws. But rather than criticise Microsoft for having too much power, I would say the problem is that they are not using their muscle enough, are not going for it in a way that could really give us the basic infrastructure we need in software appliances.

Gates' business has much in common with the rest of corporate America in the nervous late 1990s: a big cash mountain that it cannot, actually dare not, invest in new technologies. There is a brake on investment because the hostile US government might block the further expansion of Microsoft. However, by setting up a separate enterprise Gates could take on the fragmented big-business IT market and establish the basis for faster innovation in a market that makes the sales of Windows look tiny.

If anything, the world could do with a bigger, badder Bill Gates. ●

Signs of the times

FROM MADCHESTER TO DADCHESTER

These days the bars and clubs of Manchester seem full of 'middle youth' taking refuge from real life, says local music writer Neil Davenport

'She's very childish. She loves animals, because loving animals is very easy, but emotionally I think she has a big problem–I think that if you are involved as much as she is with animals, then there is something strange about your dealings with the human race' Catherine Deneuve on her compatriot Brigitte Bardot

Those caring people at Marks and Spencer will in future be attaching the following safety label to all their children's clothes: 'In the interest of safety, it is advisable to keep your child away from naked flames'

'We didn't have one [a school motto] but my own motto was: "I will do sport and PE and nothing else"' Arsenal captain Tony Adams, who continues, cryptically: 'I didn't really like being indoors, maybe because I was lanky and had long greasy hair'

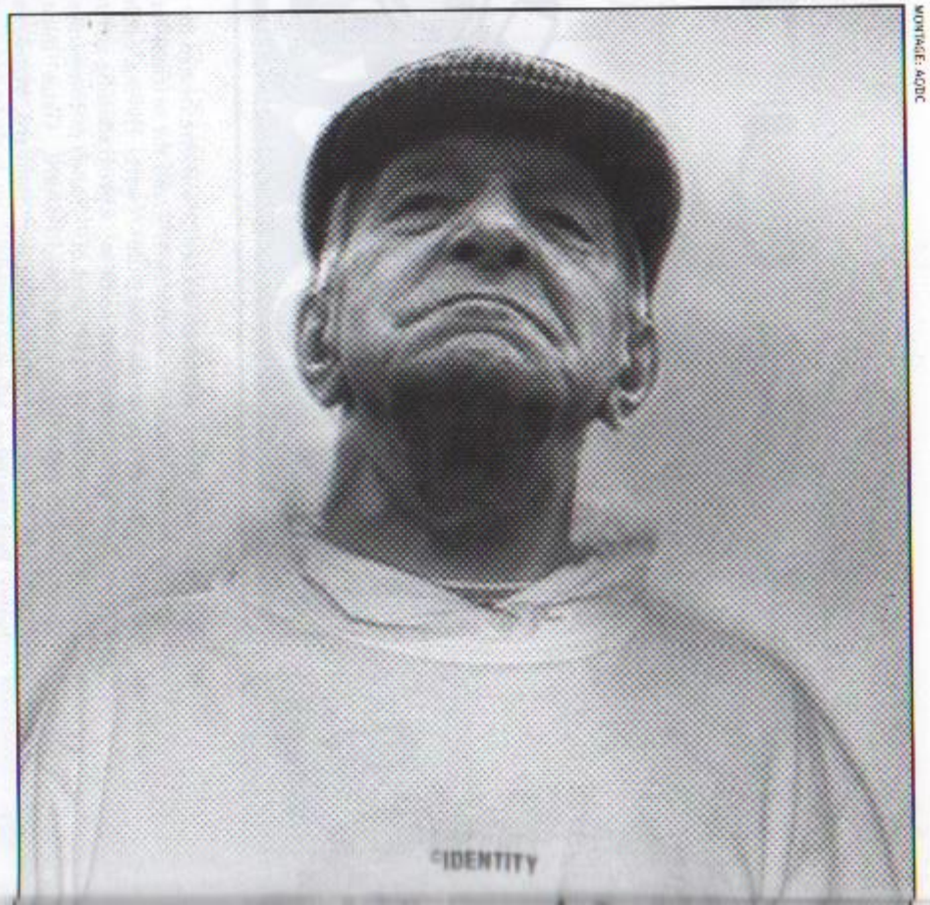
It is nearly a decade since Manchester became 'Madchester' and a byword for youth culture: flares were brought back, acid house came up, and funked-up indie thundered across Ecstasy-fuelled parties. As an international pop phenomenon, Madchester was all over within a year. But for many locals who revelled in it as teenagers, the party is not over yet. Madchester has put on weight and lost some hair, but still feels pretty good in a new Arc jacket and a pair of Vans. Raves have given way to designer bars, which have replaced suburban armchairs as the place for thirtysomethings to sit in; and for the new artisan with a flexible portfolio of employment, there is always a new club or band to try out later on. Welcome to middle youth Manchester: Dadchester (without the kids).

Manchester council has marketed the city as a 'yoof capital'. But this is no 24-hour city for the restlessly young; more like a laidback lifestyle-bar for the over-25s. The kind of skinny Manc scally that would have dominated Madchester has got more chance of appearing in a Channel 4 documentary about wasted youth than making it in Dadchester. Even the skateboarders in Albert Square have been banned.

Manchester's student population is still the largest of any city in Europe, but students too have been marginalised by the new emphasis on over-25s. At hip club nights like Electric

'Ten years ago, it would have been unheard of that people in their late twenties and early thirties would still be going to clubs. It would be seen as really sad, because by that age you'd be expected to be married and having kids. At *Jockey Slut* we like to think that our coverage has 18-year olds in mind, and Bugged Out! is populated with people in their early twenties. I say all that, but I'm choosing to ignore the fact that most people I know who go clubbing are in their late twenties! I don't necessarily think it's a bad thing, though the idea of clubs solely populated by people in their thirties is alarming. But I am concerned that growing up or settling down is frowned upon. There would be nothing worse than a 30-year old stuck in a club because he thought it was expected of him, but secretly hating every minute of it.'

Manchester continues to produce good bands, such as Lionrock, Lamb, Audioweb and Wireless. But not many of the musicians in these bands are under 25; and the few bands that are young may find themselves being ridiculed for it. Benney recalled, 'when Heavenly signed up Northern Uproar, they were excited by these kids making music for kids. But as soon as they were interviewed by the press, usually by 35-year old journalists, they were slagged off for being young and naive, and ridiculed as being stupid'.



MONTAGE: ACDC

'I was sorely provoked. I just could not take any more—I blew my top'
Referee Melvyn Sylvester, who 'blew his top' and repeatedly punched a player while officiating at a football match between the Southampton Arms and Hurstbourne Tarrant British Legion in the Andover and District Sunday League. After being dragged off Richard Curd—whom he believed to have pushed him—Mr Sylvester produced his red card and sent himself off. He has subsequently given up refereeing

'I will be delighted to see my husband's horn for the first time'
Jeannie Frost, widow of Major-General 'Johnnie' Frost, the man played by Anthony Hopkins in *A Bridge Too Far*. She is of course referring to the hunting horn blown by Frost during battle, but lost when he was a POW

Chair, Steppers' Delite or Il Gatto (the kind of must-go places that would have attracted undergraduates to Manchester a decade ago), there are hardly any students to be seen. The dancefloor is dominated by Manchester's middle youth, letting their hair down before any more of it falls out.

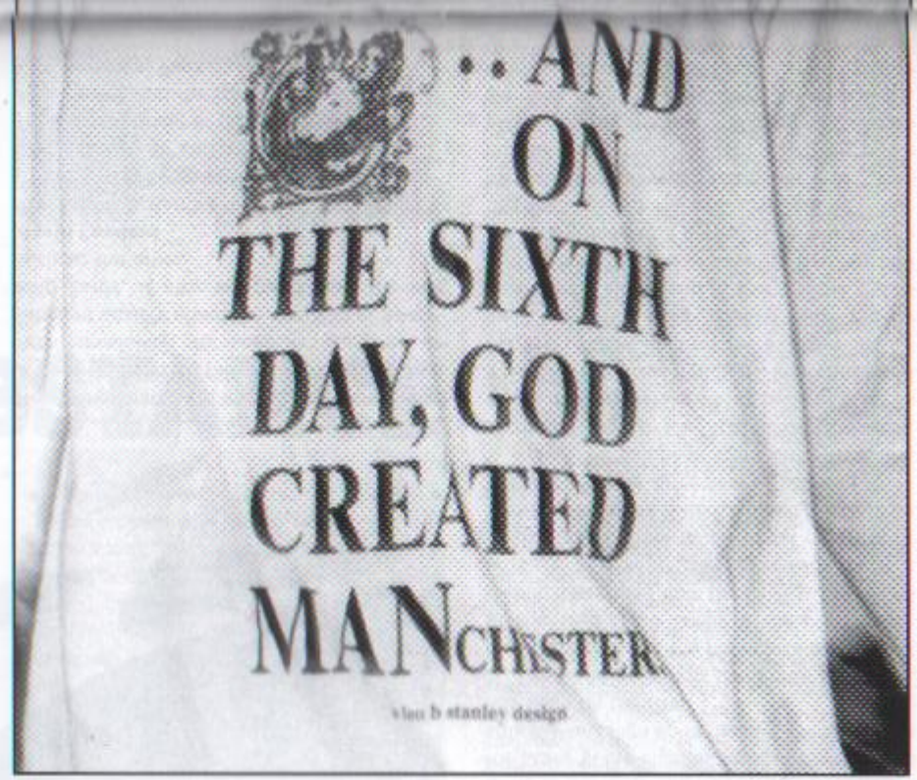
'Music is not defined by age anymore', explains John Robb, Manchester-based music writer and frontman for cabaret punks Gold Blade. 'In the fifties and sixties it used to be called youth culture and now it's called pop culture. Loads of people after their teenage years were buying pop music then, but were probably embarrassed about it. Now, no one's bothered. But why should you stay in on a Saturday night and watch *Match of the Day*?'

Paul Benney, co-editor of Manchester dance magazine *Jockey Slut* and promoter of a weekly club night called Bugged Out!, puts a slightly different gloss on the middle youth monopoly: 'In some ways it has to do with the impact of acid house and club culture. For many people it did change their lives and some are refusing to let go completely. It doesn't dominate their life in the way it used to, it's just become one of a number of options.

John Robb agreed that 'it's getting a lot harder for teenage bands to get a hearing. If you've got 17-year olds talking to 30-year old journalists, there's going to be no common ground. Young bands tend to irritate older journalists because they spoil their pseudo-intellectual claims on pop music. But the flipside is, why should 17-year olds be seen as somehow unique when they haven't really developed their opinions?'.

While the faux-young 'adultescent' occupies centre stage, the real young are left standing on the sidelines. Some are too scared to come out to play (Manchester students live an increasingly cosseted existence, travelling on 'safety buses' and sleeping in CCTV-monitored halls of residence). Meanwhile middle youth are too scared to grow up. They lack confidence in their ability to hold down a job and bring up kids. For them, the easiest option is to move on to the next designer bar and hope that closing time never comes. ●

Neil Davenport is a Manchester music journalist now entering middle youth. John Robb is author of *The Stone Roses and the Resurrection of British Pop* (Ebury Press, £9.99)



LOLITA: THE AGE QUESTION

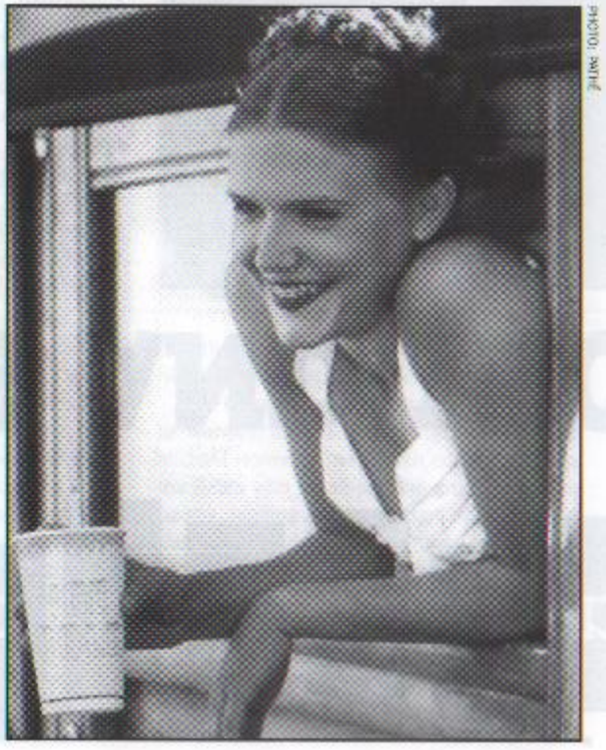


PHOTO: AMF

Adrian Lyne's *Lolita* is an artfully scandalous film. Based on the infamous novel by Vladimir Nabokov (1955), the story of Humbert Humbert's (Jeremy Irons) seduction of an under-age girl, Lolita (Dominique Swain) is presented as a delicious piece of eye-candy. Grown men with healthy sexual appetites will find themselves aroused, only to be appalled by their own arousal. Likewise, Humbert is a grotesque mixture of lover and father-figure, yet his character remains attractively louche until the moment when he sees his own perversity reflected in somebody else.

If Lyne is setting out to confuse and unnerve the audience, his film is itself an intelligent reading of contemporary confusions about childhood and adulthood. By raising Lolita's age to 14 (she is only 12 in Nabokov's book), and having her played by a 15-year old actress with a 19-year old body double, he is able to present us with a female whose sex organs are fully developed, and then ask us to work out whether she is just a child, or nearly-a-woman pretending, coquettishly, to be a child, or both. Lyne encapsulates the confusions of a society which is obsessed about protecting children, while simultaneously promoting the 'kinderwhore' (child-tart) look in fashion shows and videos. Likewise, when the film turns into something like a road movie and Lolita starts introducing Humbert to American culture, their roles are reversed and it is she who is acting *in loco parentis*. This is in tune with the insecurity about adulthood which is currently experienced even by the middle-aged.

Lyne's film is both clever and uncomfortable. While explaining his reasons for certificating it for cinemas, the new frontman for British film censorship Andreas Whittam-Smith (recently appointed chairman of the British Board of Film Classification; the retirement of long-standing director James Ferman was announced shortly afterwards) seemed to hint that a video certificate may not be forthcoming. Though new to the job, Whittam-Smith is continuing in the time-honoured tradition of assuming that the mass audience, unlike those who go to the arthouse cinemas where *Lolita* is most likely to be exhibited, is not capable of reading such a sophisticated film in a sufficiently intelligent manner. ●

Krysia Rozanska

alt.culture.architecture

Signs of the times

'I won't. I don't even know you. And besides I'm going out and I am busy getting ready'
Violet Hook, 86, in response to demands by the 30 armed policemen surrounding her Kent cottage that she throw down her weapon and come out with her hands in the air. Mrs Hook emerged carrying the small cap gun which she uses to frighten birds off her roof. Police were called when the gun was fired from a window, but for some time Mrs Hook, who is a bit deaf, did not hear the 'negotiator' shouting through a loud hailer, and carried on making a pot of tea inside

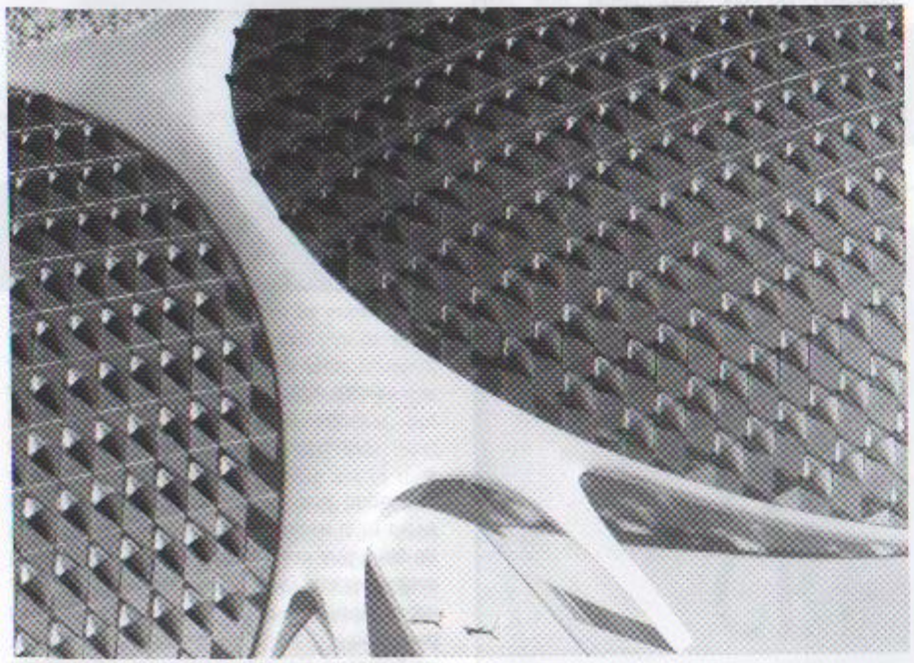
The Queen Charlotte debutantes' ball faces an uncertain future. Even Tatler's consultant Peter Townend believes that 'women have better things to do than bow to a cake'. Like baking them, perhaps, Peter?

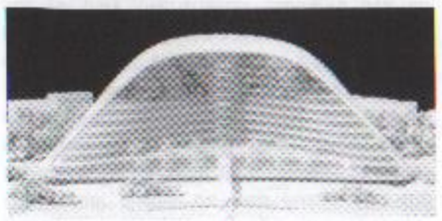
ARKS AND ECO-TECH

The architectural practice Future Systems is now so fashionable that when an exhibition of its work opened at the ICA in March, you had to queue to get into the private show. Formed in 1979 by Czech-born architect Jan Kaplicky, and now co-partnered by Amanda Levete, Future Systems is currently engaged in a number of major projects, two of which are featured in the exhibition: the Natwest media centre at Lord's cricket ground; and the Ark, the centrepiece for Doncaster's Earth Centre. Both projects are examples of 'eco-tech', the combination of high technology and green concerns which has become the hallmark of Future Systems.

After working on shell-like structures for 20 years, Kaplicky has made good use of his experience in the design of the Lord's media centre. Constructed like an aircraft, the semi-monocoque structure is made from aluminium, with its skin and internal ribs providing lightness and strength. The plan of the Ark looks like a cross between an insect's eyes and a pair of Ray-Bans. The building employs photovoltaic cells alongside a vast system of scoops to trap and direct sunlight. Together they provide power and 'natural' light. As implied by the biblical reference in its name, the Ark is meant to be more than a building. It is billed as a showcase for a sustainable future, 'translating ideas, research and world events into a language that will reach the hearts and minds of many'.

Some of the projects on display are still at the model stage. The idea for a habitable bridge across the Thames is certainly imaginative, and the proposals for Hallfield School seem to offer a new type of prefabricated





building which would be cheaper and more flexible than almost anything we have seen before. The imagination which is highly visible in many of Future Systems' ideas does indeed 'reach the hearts and minds'. But there is also a deep tension in this work. A playful 'Pop Arch' sensibility sits uneasily alongside an inherent anxiety about the direction of 'spaceship Earth'. If only we could have the one without the other. ●

David Cowlard

The Future Systems exhibition is showing at the ICA, London, until 24 May 1998, and will then go on tour to the Centre for Understanding of the Built Environment, Manchester, and the Institut Francais d'Architecture, Paris

alt.culture.music

ACCORDION TIMES

No longer an oldie instrument relegated to Jimmy Shand and his Band, an accordion is now as fashionable as a 'synth' used to be. Ever since The Pogues came on the scene in the eighties with James Fearnley's squeeze-box high up in the mix, the accordion has been on the rise.

The piano accordion, the button accordion, the concertina and the harmonica are all part of the reed-organ family of musical instruments, descended from the Chinese Sheng. All produce musical pitches by means of thin reeds, set vibrating by air under pressure or suction. The name is derived from the German *akkord*, meaning agreement or harmony.

Waves of European immigrants took the accordion across the Atlantic to the USA, where different versions took pride of place in a host of folk music traditions. Irish showband players usually perform on a piano instrument, which is also popular with zydeco musicians. Cajuns tend to use a 1-row 4-stop button machine. These have no tremolo and are often tuned to a natural scale which adds dissonance and fattens the sound. Tex-Mex/conjunto players often prefer 2 or 3-row button instruments. Eastern European polka players opt for a 2-row, and frequently use an alarming amount of tremolo. Tango players, following Astor Piazzola, use everything from

'It is not even worth talking about. That's cricket. I expect that sort of thing. I cannot be a lip reader. If they started throwing punches then I would have to do something'
Australian match referee Barry Jarman on (then) England captain Mike Atherton's two-word, two-fingered farewell to West Indies batsman Philo Wallace

'My space is harmogeneous [sic]. That too has a spiritual level of an interaction of where you're staying with a peaceful person who is my guest and is graceful'
Anouska Hempel, of minimalist Hempel hotel fame. 'I think I'm doing something useful for the world', she adds. She used to be so much nicer on that old murder quiz with John Pertwee

Top: The Ark, 1995
Above: Umweltbehorde, Hamburg, 1991
Left: Project Zed, London, 1995
Right: Bibliothèque de France, 1989

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LACHLAN IN SUBSTANCE

You might have heard Murray Lachlan Young's latest poem, the one that goes, 'Multidigipsychosensomaxopleasureonomy/ Is the feeling you get and just happens to rhyme with Virgin Atlantic Economy'. Or maybe you heard his business class poem: 'So for tranquilizing bonhomie/ Cool your jets in Premium Economy.' Even if you have not seen the Virgin adverts, you might have noticed Lachlan Young on the London Underground as the man in Liberty store's latest poster campaign. Or perhaps you heard about the £1 million contract he signed with record company EMI. All this exposure has prompted the question 'if poets are obscure people who starve in garrets, what the hell is Lachlan Young doing with all this money and fame?'.

In the eternal search for the new rock'n'roll, poetry's turn has finally come. Lachlan Young is part of a new generation of poets who are said to be reinventing the art form. Performance poetry nights have been popping up at some of the hippest clubs in Britain and the USA. In March, London's 100 Club staged Litpop 98, 'a three-day festival of poetry you can dance to', which included Atomic Lip, who describe themselves as 'poetry's first pop group', a Japanese 'poet' working herself up into a wordless love-frenzy with a cabbage, and the aforementioned Lachlan Young. Described by one critic as 'Shakespeare on Acid', and compared by others to Lord Byron and Oscar Wilde, Lachlan Young developed a flair for self-promotion while studying at Manchester University for the world's first media performance degree. He also wrote a dissertation on fame. When he was picked up by EMI in 1996, the marketing department considered promoting him as a comic or a singer, but decided that the best way to sell Murray was to make him the first poet superstar.

PHOTO: GAVIN EVANS

But is there enough substance in his material to warrant all the packaging? Veteran poet Michael Horovitz, the British contemporary of the Beats who organised the ground-breaking poetry reading in the Albert Hall in 1965, thinks not: 'Murray Lachlan Young has a certain technique as a ham actor which he uses quite well, but the distressing thing is that there's absolutely nothing inside it.'

For Horovitz, the defining characteristic of poetry 'is that there's something being said that you really want to remember because it's profound, because it makes you think'. He cites Linton Kwesi Johnson's 'Inglan is a bitch' as a poem with 'lots of levels', whereas Lachlan Young 'just repeats refrains like "Simply everyone's taking cocaine" and "I'm being followed by the Rolling Stones" which don't bear thinking about for one moment'.

Horovitz caused a stir recently on Radio Four's *Today* programme and in the London *Evening Standard* by railing against 'dumbed-down doggerel [that] glops on the name and nature of poetry'. Not that he thinks Lachlan Young is the only one to blame. Horovitz sees the degradation of verse as the almost inevitable consequence of the 'culture of selling', and he regards eighties poets such as Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison as precursors of today's 'doggerel'.

Lachlan Young counters that 'poetry has always been part of the entertainment industry and I don't know where people get off thinking that it isn't'. While I too think that blaming the market is too easy (Shakespeare's plays were among the first to be written for the marketplace, after all), I think Horovitz may have a point when he says that easy-listening poetry is part of a superficial, non-critical culture in which we are advised 'to be realistic' and 'to accept everything from Thatcher to Tony Blair to Murray Lachlan Young'. Perhaps the executives of EMI agree with Horovitz. I have just heard that they have not renewed Lachlan Young's contract. ●

Gregor Claude

Murray Lachlan Young's latest book is *Casual Sex* (Transworld, £5.99). Michael Horovitz is the co-editor of the *POW!* anthology, available at £7.99 (including p&p) from New Departures, PO Box 9819, London W11 2GQ

a piano accordion to the button concertina.

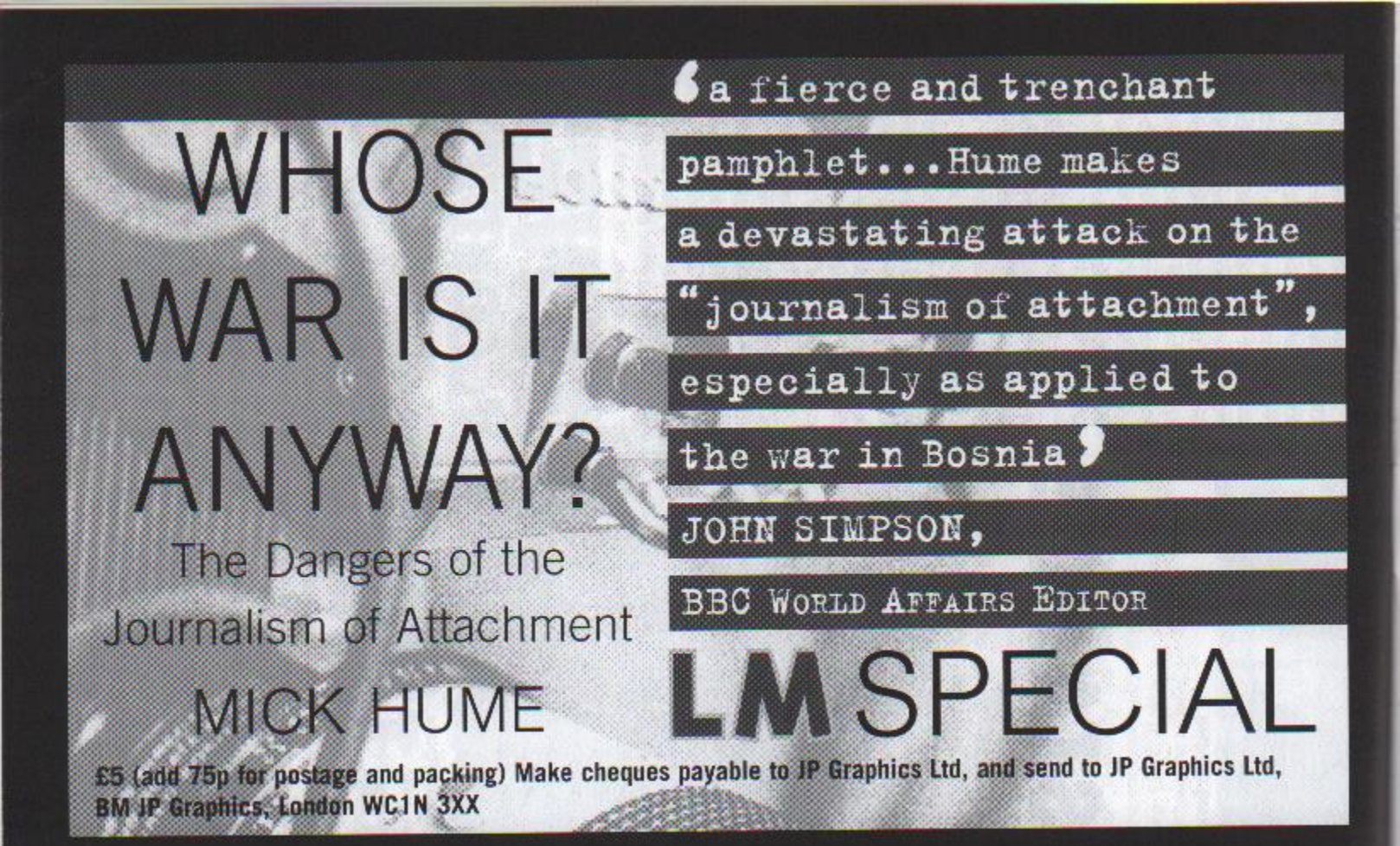
The roster of players past and present includes novelists Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens, Mahatma Gandhi and film star James Stewart. Also on the list are Richard Nixon, Ross Perot and Valery Giscard d'Estaing, whose failure to become prime minister of France in 1996 prompted newspaper front pages featuring an accordionist and the caption: 'Giscard squeezed out.' Last but not least is Ed Gein, the real-life serial killer who was the inspiration for *Psycho* and *Silence of the Lambs*.

Why has the accordion regained its popularity? It is certainly not an easy instrument to master, as any struggling beginner can testify. Perhaps the fact that the instrument underpins so many different types of music means that it is impossible to ignore. Or maybe the rediscovery of the accordion is symptomatic of the quest for authenticity in a culture that seems increasingly disposable and derivative.

For many years the accordion was despised because, as E. Annie Proulx explains in *Accordion Crimes*, her Pulitzer prize-winning documentary novel of the immigrant experience, 'it stood for the old folk and their old ways. Younger generations could funnel their feelings into hatred of the accordion, a joke instrument'. Whereas the demand for the modern was characteristic of the early part of the twentieth century, the second half has been marked by a retreat into searching for ethnic roots and celebrating difference and tradition. In this context, the parochial connotations of the old folks' accordion are also its main attraction. This would explain why modernist-turned-primitive David Byrne (ex-Talking Heads) is a charter member of the Dallas chapter of the Texas Accordionists' Association.

Who cares? From the Louisiana bayou to the Buenos Aires brothel, the concert hall to the ceilidh, the accordion has always made a big sound that sets your foot tapping and your soul soaring. Playing an accordion is almost a sexual experience: you can run your fingers over its buttons, put your arms around it and squeeze away. Groucho Marx, no mean musician himself, had this to say on the subject: 'There's nothing I like better than the sound of an accordion, unless of course it's the sound of a chicken caught in a vacuum cleaner.' ●

Armand Thompson plans to spend more time with his squeeze-box



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READING BETWEEN THE LINES

JAMES HEARTFIELD looks at the latest trends in the politics of ecology

THE LIMITS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

THE REINVENTION OF POLITICS: RETHINKING MODERNITY IN THE GLOBAL SOCIAL ORDER
Ulrich Beck,
Polity, £12.95 pbk

CONTESTED NATURES
Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, Sage, £15.99 pbk

FACTOR FOUR: DOUBLING WEALTH, HALVING RESOURCE USE; THE NEW REPORT TO THE CLUB OF ROME
Ernst von Weizsäcker, Amory B Lovins and L Hunter Lovins, Earthscan Publications, £15.99 hbk

BACK IN 1972 THE ELITE BUSINESS INSTITUTION, the Club of Rome, published a book called *Limits to Growth*, predicting massive shortages as resources were depleted, and counselling a programme of austerity and population control. *Limits to Growth* captured the imagination, especially when the oil shortages of the seventies, that led to rising prices and helped bring on a global recession, seemed to confirm the book's gloomy prognostications.

Today oil prices are falling and the predicted cataclysm never came to pass. The Club of Rome's new report, *Factor Four: Doubling Wealth, Halving Resource Use*, explains that oil producers revised their estimates of existing reserves upwards once prices rose again in the seventies, because that meant that it was now profitable to drill them. It turns out that the industry estimates that *Limits to Growth* had used as the basis for its warning of shortages to come were not estimates of the absolute amount of oil in the ground, but the amount that it was economic to drill.

The mistake of the original *Limits to Growth* report was that it set aside the question of productivity, and assumed that natural resources existed in simple and constant magnitudes. But what is and what is not a natural resource is something that changes over time.

What is a 'resource' is not simply a matter for the natural sciences, but depends also on society, and on the level of economic development. In China, Rhino horn is a resource, but not in Britain. Above all it is changes in productivity that transform useless things into useful ones, as shipbuilding turned oceans from barriers into waterways.

As environmental sociologists Phil Macnaghten and John Urry point out in *Contested Natures*, 'there are no simple natural limits as such. They are not fixed and eternal but depend on particular historical and geographical determinations' (p15). In fact the common error of all economic and social theories that assume a fixed level of resources, is to ignore the way that new technologies can make new natural resources available, and use existing resources more efficiently.

Factor Four: Doubling Wealth, Halving Resource Use, revisits the problems originally set out by *Limits to Growth* in 1972. The authors are aware that the original report made some wrong conclusions, but they do think that the general approach was right. In particular they are happy that the general concern over resource depletion has been put back on the agenda by the growing concern over the depletion of the ozone layer, as a consequence of CO^2 emissions. ▶

THE COMMON ERROR OF ALL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL THEORIES THAT ASSUME A FIXED LEVEL OF RESOURCES, IS TO IGNORE THE WAY THAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES CAN MAKE NEW NATURAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

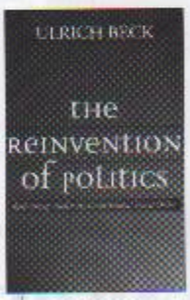
◀ At the same time, the authors know that some modification of the basic argument has to be made, in acknowledgement of the errors in *Limits to Growth*. But their account of the flaws in *Limits to Growth* is begrudging. They think that it is a sleight of hand that oil producers drilled more oil; the basic approach of *Limits to Growth* was right, it is just that the limits were drawn in the wrong place. Where they are more concerned to make the case differently is that they do not want to be seen as doom-mongers, but as people arguing a positive case for reform of the productive economy. Principally they do not want to be seen to be arguing for a reduction in living standards, which they think is too unattractive an argument.

The new thesis is that a consciousness of limits need not lead to reduced living standards, because savings can be made by 'resource efficiency', which will lead not only to halving resource consumption, but also to doubling output: hence 'Factor four', as in resource efficiency increased by a factor of four. The book puts a variety of examples before the reader, from the 'hypercar' (very light, and so light on petrol use) to energy-saving houses and offices, underground irrigation systems and so on. In part the book draws on some very real advances in 'resource productivity', such as the 'paperless office' idea of electronic communications.

THE IDEA OF RESOURCE PRODUCTIVITY SOUNDS plausible enough, except that the authors counterpose it to labour productivity. They argue that labour productivity, saving labour in favour of high throughput of resources, is bad for the environment and bad for workers as well. It is a powerful case that links environmentalism to concern over the negative social effects of industrial development, especially unemployment. The authors are scathing about traditional economics, for its bias towards an idea of 'growth' that is indifferent to whether growth is good or bad for people—a mother breastfeeding does not show up on normal estimates of GNP, they say, but the sale of powdered baby-milk does. At the same time argues *Factor Four*, the solutions can be met by the market, if only prices reflect real social goods. That means that the price of petrol should reflect the social costs, including a tariff for pollution and accident treatment (as happens in Italy), but that incentives to save could be introduced by paying premiums for energy savings to domestic and industrial users (as some US utility companies have done).

Urry and Macnaghten say that this combination of the 'emerging critique of a globally planned society' with its roots in the counterculture on the one hand, and 'links to the "enterprise culture" of the eighties' on the other is all characteristic of environmentalism. But does it add up?

Factor Four seems to be optimistic in its celebration of new technologies, trying to marry the emotional cache of environmentalism with the can-do spirit of the techie. But in fact the counterposition of resource productivity and labour productivity is mistaken. The most plausible examples, like micro-electronics, show how resource productivity goes hand in hand with labour productivity. In fact capitalists' motives in using resources more efficiently are entirely bound up with their desire to reduce costs related to labour, whether in their own firms or other people's, by reducing orders for those products.



IN ITSELF, THERE IS NO REASON WHY INCREASED labour productivity ought to lead to lost jobs, rather than reduced hours. But for as long as production is undertaken for the purpose of private profit, then it must. What is so perverse about *Factor Four* is that it proposes that more people should be working less efficiently, so as to curb unemployment—rather like the government's make-work schemes—instead of just reducing hours for everybody.

Factor Four assumes that prices can be jigged to reflect any social good, whether environmental protection or the homely virtues of breastfeeding. The book proposes that savings could be marketed alongside resources, as if they were commodities. In that way companies could contract-out savings to third parties, such as insulation firms. Clearly where there is a straightforward incentive to reduce costs this can happen and does. But *Factor Four* goes further, proposing, on the model of the US electricity companies' rebates for savings, that negawatts, that's savings in electricity, could be marketed alongside megawatts. In time, say the authors, getting carried away with themselves, negawatts could become a greater source of energy than megawatts! Of course it is an old-fashioned businessman's excuse that capital is just another word for savings, and the capitalist's profits are just the result of his deferred gratification. The modern environmental twist to this tale is that a dwindling base of production can become a source of additional profits.

AS IT HAPPENS, THAT IS SOMETIMES TRUE. Breaking up businesses and 'downsizing' was profitable for corporate raiders in the eighties, but after a while endless cutbacks undermine the very basis on which profits are made—production. The rational argument in *Factor Four* is that the broad consensus that environmentalism is a good thing, means that there are profits to be made by meeting that demand. As a strategy for individual firms, getting into energy-saving products might make sense. But overall the approach of *Factor Four* reflects a downscaling of production that cannot be the basis of new wealth, or a strategy to secure the profits of the capitalist economy.

MACNAGHTEN AND URRY CANNOT HELP ASKING WHAT IS THIS ENVIRONMENT THAT WE SHOULD ALL PROTECT, ANYWAY, AND WHILE WE ARE ABOUT IT, WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY NATURE?

On closer inspection, *Factor Four's* strategies for resource efficiency are generally fairly desperate cost-cutting measures. It is suspicious that so many of them are directed at domestic usage, where no doubt there is a lot of irrational energy wastage, if only because people's homes and private lives tend not to be planned on ergonomic lines. But a strategy for saving by installing efficient fridges and long-life bulbs is not going to change the world, even if you could dragoon workers in their homes as if they were in the army barracks.

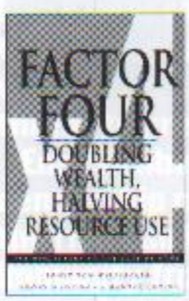
It is fascinating that an economic treatise that takes as its starting point the natural limits on resources can lead to such an artificial attempt to rejig society. Price-fixing based on the government monopoly of utility companies, or taxation strategies, similar to those used by the Chancellor to punish big car owners—these are all strategies deployed in the name of restoring an imaginary natural balance between production and consumption. And yet these very strategies are the most forced and unnatural distorting of social organisation.

This is the kind of paradox that is exercising the minds of Ulrich Beck, John Urry and Phil Macnaghten. As curious and lively thinkers, they are all fascinated by the movement of modern environmentalism, which they see as among the more dynamic and interesting movements in society. At the same time, as sociologists, they are all a bit uncomfortable with the elevation of nature and the natural sciences over society and the social sciences.

MACNAGHTEN AND URRY DO THE CLASSICAL sociologists' job on the environmental movement—they set about deconstructing its core value, nature. Often this method of deconstructing received wisdom is a fairly mediocre procedure. It is reserved by and large for those institutions and movements that are in any event on the slide out of favour. As the Conservative Party, or the Catholic church, or the nuclear family starts to break up, the sociologists pop up and start talking about all of the negative aspects of these institutions—a bit like small boys making faces at the teacher's back as he leaves the class.

But in this case it is modern environmentalism, in the main, that is being held up to scrutiny and the consequences are fascinating. Environmentalism is not after all a passing movement, but a rising one. Its arguments are not tired and easily dismantled, but fast becoming the new orthodoxy. It's not that Macnaghten and Urry don't like environmentalists: instinctively they do. It is just that their critical faculties keep ticking over, and they cannot help asking what is this environment that we should all protect, anyway, and while we are about it, what do you mean by nature?

Their conclusion is that there are many 'natures', according to who you are talking to. The nature of natural science is of course quite different to the nature of the earth mother Gaia, or that of rural conservatism. The great insight in Urry and Macnaghten's book is that they see the discourse of nature as essentially a disguised debate about how social life should be organised. As Ulrich Beck argues in *The Reinvention of Politics*, the emergence of environmental critiques does not mark the end of politics, but the emergence of a new style of politics, that he calls 'sub-politics'. In this way it can be seen that the intervention by *Factor Four* is not necessarily what it appears to be, a disinterested proposal to save resources, so much as a particular argument about how society should be organised; in this case on the basis of reduced economic activity.



IN THEIR EXAMINATION OF THE DIFFERENT ways that nature has been invented Macnaghten and Urry do a valuable service. They show that environmentalism is a social movement with a history, and particular values. In looking at the development of environmental ideas they show how the farmers lost their historic moral standing as custodians of the countryside as a consequence of alienation from their money-making activities: a loss that was echoed in the recent Countryside Alliance demonstration. The emergence of modern environmentalism, they illustrate, has as much to do with the loss of legitimacy of traditional government and business, and a perceived loss of agency of individuals, as it has to do with specific environmental problems. The interview-based research on popular understanding of environmental programmes in chapter eight is particularly illuminating.

By contrast, Ulrich Beck's often witty and convoluted arguments in *Reinventing Politics* are something of a disappointment. Beck is a great innovator and coiner of new ideas, but his points here are all too arch. It seems too opportunistic to argue for environmental activism as he does, while so clearly disagreeing with its programme and policies. At one point he argues that ecology is good because it moralises questions of production, introducing 'the dramatic roles of heroes and villains': 'In the environmental issue, a postmodern, jaded, saturated, meaningless and fatalistic pâté de foie gras culture creates a Herculean task for itself, which acts as a stimulus everywhere and splits business into "villains" and "Robin Hoods".' (p159-60) Beck's point that the old politics of left and right has lost its meaning, is well observed and argued. It is surely true that environmentalism is, for good or ill, the form through which many debates are being had out today, whether about industrial growth, living arrangements or incomes. But is the choice really between post-modern cynicism and childish naivety? It is hard to imagine a more cynical surrender to naivety. ●

FALSE DAWN: THE DELUSION OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM
John Gray, Granta, £17.99 hbk

IF *FALSE DAWN* IS AN ACCURATE GUIDE THERE are two things that John Gray, professor of European thought at the London School of Economics (LSE), hates above all others. He loathes the free market for the economic uncertainty it creates. And he detests the ideas of the Enlightenment, the intellectual movement that came to the fore in eighteenth-century Europe, for ignoring cultural difference. When these two elements are combined, as Gray believes they increasingly are in the modern world, the result is a nightmare vision of contemporary society.

If this was Gray's private nightmare it would not need to detain readers for long. But *False Dawn* is particularly important as it gives intellectual rigour to some of the key assumptions which underlie New Labour's politics. It is a kind of bible for the angst-ridden middle class of the 1990s. Gray sees the free market as a corrosive agent. It breaks down traditional institutions such as the family and destabilises employment patterns. The consequences of this development, in his view, include the growth of crime, the creation of an underclass and the erosion of the respectable middle classes.

Gray is obsessed with the impact of the growth of job insecurity and particularly its impact on professionals. 'The result is a re-proletarianization of much of the industrial working class and the de-bourgeoisification of what remains of the former middle classes. The free market seems set to achieve what socialism was never able to accomplish—a euthanasia of bourgeois life.' (p72)

He reserves a particular distaste for the growth of a skilled population in the third world which is able to do highly skilled work for relatively low pay, maybe even teaching at the LSE!

In Gray's mind the free market view represents a particular version of Enlightenment thought. With the demise of the Soviet Union, which represented a failed example of the Enlightenment project, the USA is the modern bearer of rationalism and universalism. 'A global free market is the Enlightenment project of a universal civilisation, sponsored by the world's last great Enlightenment regime. The United States is alone in the late modern world in the militancy of its commitment to the Enlightenment project.' (p100-1)

The problem with the USA, in this view, is that it is trying to impose a universal free market model on to other types of societies. He gives examples such as Russia and Japan, which have a different culture to that of the USA.

The fundamental assumption which underlies Gray's critique is that of the importance of cultural difference. Essential differences between nations mean that any attempt to impose a universal model across the globe can only cause moral and social disintegration. He gives the re-emergence of conflicts over ethnicity, territory and religion as examples of this trend.

To be fair to Gray he rejects the notion of 'the clash of civilisations' put forward by Samuel Huntingdon. But his objections to this theory are instructive. He believes that it is wrong to generalise as broadly as Huntingdon by, for example, talking of a European or Islamic civilisation. Gray believes it is possible to generalise about societies at the national level at most. And he rejects any distinction between civilisation and barbarism. Gray's is a non-judgemental notion of cultural difference where, at least on the face of it, one culture is as valid as any other.

Many readers might assume that a contributor to this magazine would at least be sympathetic to Gray's critique of the free market if not his attack on the Enlightenment. The experience of the past two decades of free market ascendancy is that workers have had to work harder and with less security.

But Gray's attack on the free market centres on the progressive characteristics of capitalism—its universalising tendency. Whereas before the triumph of capitalism the world was divided into parochial communities, often with little contact between them, the free market is international in scope. By the start of the twentieth century a world market was established which was linked by trade and investment flows.

The real problem with the free market is the opposite to the one Gray identifies. It is not dynamic enough to break down the national boundaries that still divide the world. While some economies grow, others tend to stagnate.

Gray is wrong to see cultural difference as a barrier to the development of a universalising free market. It is, rather, that the inability of the free market to overcome political divisions is a sign of its economic weakness. The market cannot fully transcend borders. Although the market exists all over the world it cannot survive without the support of the nation state.

Indeed if Gray had delved into the material realities of contemporary capitalism he would discover that the free market is a myth. The states of the world's leading economic powers are spending more than ever before to keep the 'free' market going.

Even the rhetoric of the free market has dimmed since its high point in the days of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the late 1970s and 1980s. Instead the orthodoxy is that espoused by Gray and supported by New Labour and the Clinton administration: capitalism is the best possible system but it must be controlled by an extensive system of regulation. They do not even have enough confidence in their own system to let it operate unfettered.

Daniel Nassim

The OFF THE FENCE fund

ITN

is suing *LM* magazine for libel, over a story about its award-winning pictures of a Bosnian camp published in the February 1997 issue. It is a case that threatens to bankrupt *LM* and raises wider issues about the threat to press freedom.

English libel law is a censorship charter that the rich can hire to buy immunity from criticism through the courts; an American court recently called it 'repugnant' to human rights and the principle of free speech.

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