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LM 114

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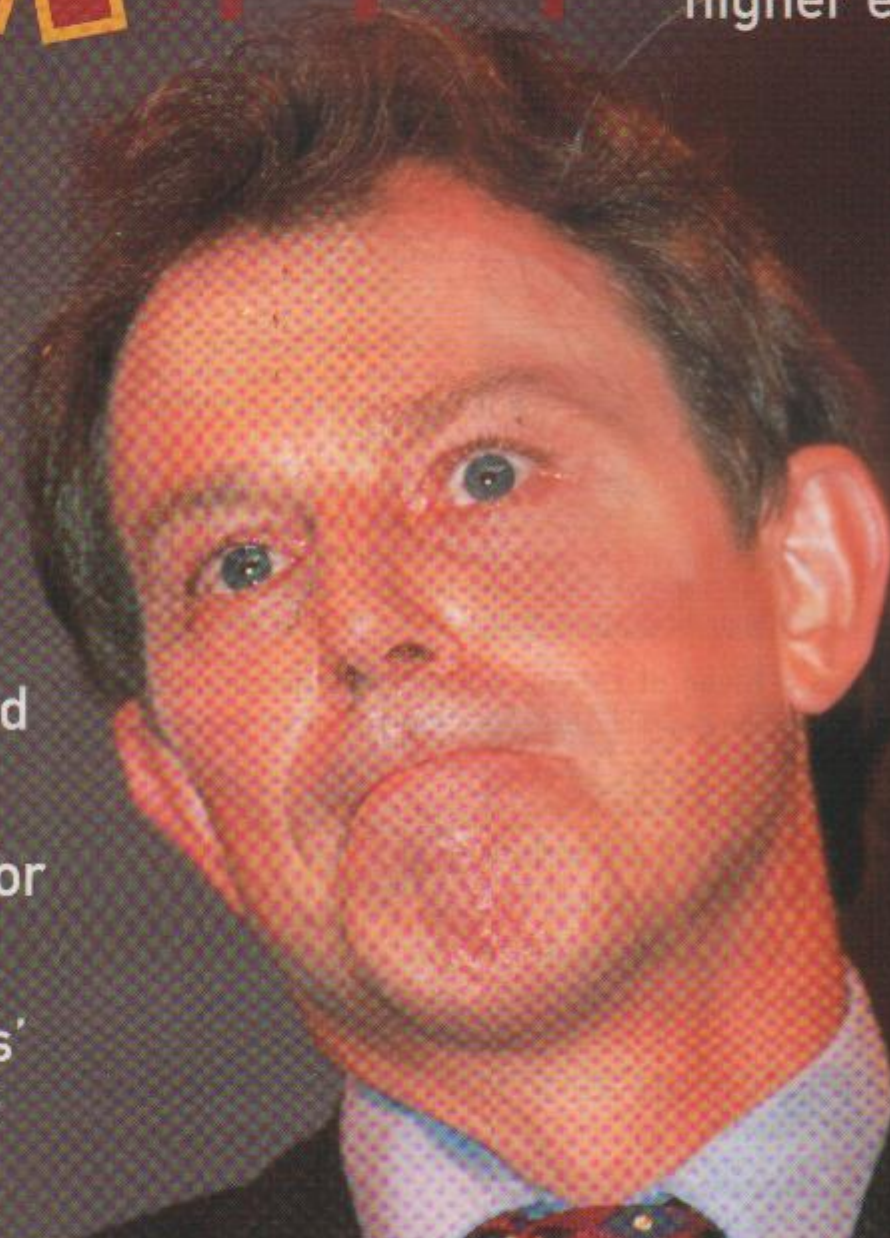
Why cult is a four-letter word

What's wrong with abortion for abnormality?

Patrick Hughes' *Perverspective*



The new emotionalism

STOP THE SOBBING

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COVER PHOTO: REX FEATURES

Mick Hume

Editor

STOP THE SOBBING

EVERY TIME I TURNED ON THE TV this summer, I seemed to be confronted by pictures of Bill Clinton crying or Tony Blair breaking up with emotion—and sometimes by the two of them getting upset together. The president and the prime minister are leading the world in the new politics of emotionalism. It is enough to make those of us who care about democracy weep.

First there was Clinton, tears streaming down his cheeks while he spoke, as the flag-draped coffins of 10 Americans killed in the Nairobi embassy bombing arrived home on 14 August. Two days later, Blair's eyes were red with tears as he broke off his French holiday to give a copycat speech, in response to the bombing in Omagh that was eventually to leave 29 dead. Three weeks later, when Clinton and Blair went back to Omagh together, the word most often used to describe the occasion was 'emotional'. Or as the *Independent* headline had it, 'Most powerful man on planet weeps as he visits Omagh' (4 September).

There is no need to be entirely cynical about these displays of emotion, by accusing our leaders of carrying onions in their pockets. After all, many people were genuinely moved by the terrible tragedies in Africa and Northern Ireland; why should we expect Blair and Clinton to be immune from such a human reaction, especially when they see the damage firsthand?

What we would once have expected, however, was for statesmen to keep their personal feelings private. It is hard to imagine Roosevelt and Churchill or even Reagan and Thatcher making such a public exhibition of themselves. But emotions are no longer a private matter—especially, it seems, for public figures. Instead, displays of emotion have become the political style of the nineties. Presidents and premiers are not just *allowed* to show their tears and trembling lips these days; they are *expected* to indulge in these grandiose displays of pain, and even admired for it. To fail to do so is to risk being branded uncaring or—worse—'emotionally illiterate'.

It is not just tears, either. The language which today's political leaders use is peppered with the new emotional psychobabble. Blair always talks about 'reaching out' to people, emphasising how much he 'feels' and 'cares', while Clinton's early message of reassurance to the American people—'I feel your pain'—could serve as a slogan for any aspiring politician.

Official reactions to Omagh exemplified the new politics of emotion. Emerging from his emergency summit with Irish premier Bertie Ahern the day after the bombing, Blair's statement was less about government policy than about the personal feelings that he, Ahern and others were experiencing. 'We are agreed first of all on our total shock, horror and outrage...We know the emotions of people are those of grief and sympathy for the bereaved and the families of the victims. We know also of the anger people will feel.' Always keen to keep up with the Blairs these days, Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams ended his own condemnation of the bombing with a Dianaspeak postscript: 'I have spoken out about the way I feel.'

And when president Clinton went to Omagh on 3 September, he 'spoke out' to the people of Northern Ireland as if he were a counsellor in session with an emotionally disturbed addict of some kind. 'The question is', he asked the communities laid out on his couch, 'how will you react to it all—to the violence? How will you deal with all your differences? Can the bad habits and brute forces of yesterday break your will for tomorrow's peace?'. I was half expecting Dr 'Frasier' Clinton to spell out a 12-Step Self-Help Programme that could free his patients from their dependence on the 'bad habits' of violence.

What is all of this about? The rise of the new emotionalism is in part a response to the demise of the old politics. Over the past decade the exhaustion of the traditional movements of both left and right, and the loss of authority experienced by established political institutions, has prompted a lot of soul-searching about how politicians can 'connect' with a new constituency.

On one hand this has led to the use of US-style 'focus groups' or the Tory Party's recent 'Listening to Britain' tour, gimmicks through which desperate politicians like William Hague ask people what they would like their party to believe in. On the other hand it has encouraged a search for a kind of emotional lowest common denominator to which the authorities can appeal in the absence of any real popular support or political programme.

In the belief that The Nation Which Weeps Together, Keeps Together, a politician like Tony Blair has sought to exploit and manipulate public feeling over a series of tragedies—from Dunblane to Diana and now Omagh—in order to secure an elusive 'shared national experience' under his leadership. In a fragmented society of isolated and rather insecure individuals, the common expression of grief has become a precious opportunity for a Blair or a Clinton to stage-manage a display of unity of sorts.

THE NEW EMOTIONALISM REFLECTS THE lowered expectations of leadership today. Not so long ago, our leaders were expected to stand at the head of society and to provide a broad political vision of a better world. Now they are only expected at best to be individuals of decent character (which helps explain the exaggerated importance attached to the Monica Lewinsky saga), who experience the same personal feelings and pain as the rest of us. The unheroic spirit of the age was captured this summer by Norway's conservative prime minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, who, at the height of his coalition government's vital budget discussions, announced that he was too stressed and was taking a week off to recuperate. What was even more striking was the sympathy which everybody else expressed for his decision to lie down in a dark room rather than run the country.

But perhaps this is all a change for the better? There are many who seem to welcome the new emotionalism as politics with a softer, more human face. They feel that today's leaders with a common touch, who can share the pain of society's victims, are far preferable to the elitist authoritarians of yesterday.

In fact the new politics of emotion is, if anything, even more coercive and undemocratic than the old order. There is an iron fist within the handkerchief that offers to dab the nation's eyes.

The outpouring of intemperate emotion—'the rampant id', as Dr Michael Fitzpatrick has previously described it in *LM*—creates a climate that is highly intolerant and tyrannical. Open debate is impossible, since no opinion can be expressed which might

offend the feelings of the victims and those who empathise with them. Without the checks provided by rational discussion and questioning, such emotionalism creates the context for authoritarian solutions to be ushered in on a wave of tears. This was clearly the case after the tragedy at Omagh. The emotional consensus which equated any criticism with sympathy for the bombers allowed the New Labour government to railroad through new anti-terror laws of a kind which, a few years ago, would have been considered the preserve of a foreign police state.

AUTHORITARIAN SOLUTIONS ARE USHERED IN ON A WAVE OF TEARS

Nowhere is this dangerous aspect of the new emotionalism more powerfully illustrated than in the media. Major newspapers and news organisations are acting as the self-appointed minders of public life, enforcing a strict code of emotional correctness on what can and cannot be broadcast. The increasing tendency for news reports to become coercively emotional sermons is discussed at length in the new *LM* Special, *Televictims* (see right). The extent to which this process degrades public debate was well illustrated by some of the coverage which followed this summer's bombings.

Take, for example, ITN's coverage of the aftermath of the horrific bomb attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. When the Americans blamed Sudan and launched 'revenge' attacks, including a rocket assault on what appears to have been an ordinary pharmaceutical factory, outraged Sudanese stormed the (empty) US embassy and stoned the (occupied) embassy of Clinton's closest ally, Britain. Typically, ITN chose to report this as a 'human interest' story, focusing on the plight of a single embassy official standing behind a broken window in the British compound. The reporter's first question to him was not 'what happened and why?', but, as it always seems to be these days, 'how do you feel?'. Not surprisingly, he felt frightened. Ignoring all of the big and complex issues involved—from Islamic fundamentalism to American imperialism—ITN had at a stroke reduced the entire story to an emotional appeal for sympathy with the poor little British victim of mad Africans.

Many people can see the dangers of the new emotionalism when it is used to justify governments riding roughshod over civil liberties at home, or over the sovereignty of small nations abroad. Yet we should also be alive to the less dramatic, more everyday ways in which the authorities are preying on our most personal fears and feelings. When education secretary David Blunkett issues new guidelines on how we should bring our children up 'safely', or the Department of Health pronounces on what we ought to eat, drink or inhale, they are exploiting the politics of emotion to legitimise more public interference in our most private affairs.

The overblown public displays of ersatz emotion which our leaders now routinely stage do not even do any good for those at whom they are supposed to be aimed—the victims of tragedy. As president Clinton won loud praise for his emotional 'healing' tour of Omagh, one or two small but sensible voices could be heard observing that this kind of wallowing in tragedy was the very last thing the town needed. 'It's terrible, isn't it, having this on top of everything else', said Father Michael Keaveny as the Clinton-Blair circus passed by. 'Just when we were getting things going again, we get this sort of interruption.'

I'm with the priest rather than the People's president or prime minister on this one. Those of us who are passionate in our commitment to freedom and life should insist that it's time to stop the sobbing. ●

TELEVICTIMS

Emotional correctness in the media AD (After Diana)

MICK HUME

LM Special

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'The coverage of Diana's death, Louise Woodward's trial and beyond raises the question, what is the role of the news media today? To report and analyse, or to emote and moralise? To act as a source of information and a forum for debate, or as a pulpit for sermons and a public confessional?'

BOMB OFF

Jeff Nuttall, like Andrew Calcutt, goes too far in fetishising the counterculture of the fifties and sixties for modern-day problems ('Bombed out', September). It is one thing to lay to rest some of the lifestyle arguments of the hippies and flowerpower generation; it is another to lay the blame for the political and social alienation of the 1990s at the door of the 'countercultural triptych of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll'.

Reading through *Bomb Culture*, Nuttall's account of that period, it is noticeable how he represents many standard features of society over the past century as being specific to that age. Alienation, the retreat from social intercourse into worthless pastimes like drugs, the resort of individuals to violence without reason, are all commonly recurring expressions of commodity society, in which people find their ability to exercise their creative passions and control over the world around them repeatedly blocked by market forces. If these characteristics are much more intense now than in the past it is not because of the sixties, but because of the successive political defeats faced by people since then, which have consistently lowered their horizons over what they can do in the world.

Of course, Nuttall does make some valid criticisms of the counterculture—but then again, if you whinge on for long enough about something you're going to hit the mark once in a while, aren't you? The trouble is that in doing so he has a go at some things more worthy of defending, like 'sex with strangers' (that is, free love) and taking risks. Aren't those the kind of things we ought to be standing up for?

Robert Lockwood Manchester

SPEAKING UP FOR SPEAKING OUT

In criticising Dianaspeak ('Parlez-vous Diana?', September) Mark Ryan draws together many of the argumentative threads that underscore writing in *LM*. His main proposition seems to be that, with regard to discourse in public life, intellect and reason should be all, and intuition and emotion nothing—and that those with the temerity to disagree and 'speak out' deserve to be mocked in public by articles such as his. In my view, the richness of human life would be drastically impoverished if such a proposition should ever hold sway.

Humans inherit a vast array of emotional responses from our evolutionary ancestors. It's the pleasure we feel from the satisfaction of our desires—for warmth, food and shelter through to visual aesthetics, mathematical beauty, and even a well-reasoned argument—that gives meaning to a life which would otherwise be dry and sterile. Conversely, it's the pain that the frustration of such desires creates which can motivate us, not only to better our own lives, but to engage in the struggle to improve the conditions of life of our fellow humans. Creating a false dichotomy of Reason v Emotion, in order to champion the former while denigrating the latter, is as pointless as it is perverse.

Certain royal parasites like Diana Windsor, or wealthy and famous egocentrics like George Michael, may indeed clothe themselves in the mantle of victimhood, if their PR advisers suggest such an angle might garner support. Such individuals, who use their wealth and influence only to ameliorate the worst excesses that capitalism produces by supporting 'good works for charidee'—while enjoying a life of luxury beyond the dreams of avarice—deserve to have their hypocrisy challenged, and especially so by champions of social justice. But to tar with the same brush ordinary people who 'speak out' against those excesses from personal experience is not only disingenuous, it is degrading for voices which deserve to be heard to be declared 'guilty by association' with such parasites and egocentrics.

Perhaps if *LM* writers could acknowledge the emotional side of their own nature, and of the human condition, they could maybe

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write with enough positive feeling to inspire in their readers a political passion to change the world for the better.
Tim D Jones *tim_d_jones@hotmail.com*

Please, please, please write something about international politics. I am getting fed up with reading 'Left-Wing Sociologists Parenthood Monthly'.
Nick Smith *email*

MORE CHIPS WITH THAT?

I fear that Roy Lidster (LM-Mail, September) is missing one important point. Is it right to concentrate all computer technology around one capitalist corporation? Will this in itself not lead to massive price increases?

Furthermore, has any system (MacOS/Windows/BeOS/Linax/BSD) developed to the point where we can decide to concentrate on it to the detriment of others? Finally, MacOS and Windows may seem similar to the casual user, but as any software developer will tell you the Motorola Power PC chipset used in Macintoshes is quite different to the Intel 80x86 series.

I am not some bizarre Mac bigot; I am simply pointing out what seem to me to be the facts.
Jason Walsh *Belfast*

WHY NOT MURDOCH UNITED?

Why such a commotion about Rupert Murdoch taking over Manchester United? Presumably the reason they floated on the stock exchange was to enable them to turn a larger profit from the club. Once in that field it is to be expected that they are open to takeover. Why the media should think that it is a moral issue I cannot understand. Is Mr Murdoch evil incarnate, as the *Mirror's* front page ('Red devil') seems to suggest?

It is amazing how those in competition with Mr Murdoch's section of the media are seizing on this recent bid like starving crocodiles. Our local ITV news programme *North West Tonight* did everything to try to organise demonstrations outside Old Trafford . Am I just being cynical in believing they have an axe to grind? Sky News is a 100 per cent better than BBC News, and 1000 times better than ITV.
David Hallsworth *Ashton under Lyne*

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The what's NOT on guide

WE HAVE WAYS OF MAKING YOU TALK: Rushed through parliament at the beginning of September, the Terrorism and Conspiracy Act removes the right to silence. Tony Blair promises that this 'draconian' legislation will allow courts to infer guilt from 'any refusal to answer any relevant questions'. His spindoctors had better warn New Labour ministers to start answering a few then. **LIGHTS OUT:** Parents who do not send their kids to bed on time will be in breach of new contracts between schools and families ordered by education secretary David Blunkett. The education secretary has not set a blanket national bedtime but he is demanding that parents sign a contract which lays down how long children should sleep for and how much homework they should do. David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: 'It is not the job of the state and it is certainly not the job of the school to tell parents when to put their children to bed. We can't keep telling parents what to do.' Oh yes they can. **FREE LOVE:** Viagra on the NHS will remain banned while ministers decide who deserves free lead in their pencil. When guidelines are eventually put in place men seeking a prescription for Viagra may be asked to prove that they are in a secure, long-term relationship. 'The dirty old man who wants to carry on with young girls will not be able to get Viagra on the NHS', said a government source. What? Not even if they go on TV to say sorry afterwards? **EDINBURGH FRIGHTS:** Former nanny Louise Woodward banned TV cameras from the debate in which she appeared at the, erm, Edinburgh Television Festival. Woodward explained that the TV cameras in the Massachusetts courtroom where she was convicted of killing baby Matthew Eappen had made her 'notorious'. But if she wants to keep out of the media and stop being notorious, why does she not just go home and keep quiet instead of appearing on *Panorama* and on platforms at major public events? **DELAYED REACTION:** Obtaining certificates for video releases is taking longer than ever, as the regulators wait to see how the film's cinema release is received ('trial by media' as some call it) and as the Home Office becomes more sensitive about films relating to issues in the news—like gun play, for example. All this uncertainty makes you long for a regime with some principles, even the wrong ones. **UNFREE SPEECH:** When Omar Bakri Mohammed, Islamic fundamentalist and Syrian-born refugee, said he supported the bombing of US embassies in August, Tory MPs declared he should be booted out of Britain. 'People who take advantage of our rights of free speech should not be tolerated', said one. So 'free speech' means what's tolerable to a Tory MP, no more no less. And what exactly are rights for if people can't take advantage of them.
Compiled by Andrew Calcutt

TABOOS

A new report reveals that young people are becoming more hostile to abortions carried out because the fetus is abnormal. Co-author Ellie Lee thinks this 'ethical' outlook needs to be challenged

What's wrong with abortions for fetal abnormality?

A MORI poll carried out in 1997 found that 64 per cent of respondents believed that abortion should be made legally available for all who want it. In 1980 just over 50 per cent gave the same answer to a similar question. It seems that these days, outside of a minority of 'pro-lifers' who continue to believe that abortion should be illegal, most people think it better that a woman can terminate an unwanted pregnancy than be compelled to carry a pregnancy to term.

But if abortion in general is now widely accepted, abortions carried out specifically because the fetus is abnormal have become increasingly controversial. In the 1980 MORI poll, 84 per cent said they approved of abortion in cases of mental disability and 81 per cent for physical disability. By 1997 these figures had dropped to 67 and 66 per cent respectively. Approval ratings for abortion on the grounds of disability among those aged 15-24 were lowest of all. In this age group only 50 per cent said they approved of abortion for mental handicap, and 47 per cent for physical handicap.

It was against this background that the Pro-Choice Forum decided to carry out some research about young people's attitudes to abortion for abnormality. The report, 'Attitudes to abortion for fetal abnormality', was published in September.

We conducted a questionnaire survey of 300 school and university students, aged 15-24, and did focus group interviews with 10 groups of students. While the small size of our sample means the results cannot be taken as definitive, the report does tell us something about changing perceptions of the abortion issue.

The results of the Pro-Choice Forum research confirmed the findings of previous research about attitudes to abortion law: 76 per cent of our sample called themselves 'pro-choice'; just over 45 per cent said they agreed with the 1967 Act (which allows legal abortion up to 24 weeks where two doctors agree that continuing the pregnancy represents a threat to the physical or mental health of the woman or to her existing family, and allows legal abortion with no time limit where there is substantial risk of serious abnormality); and more than 30 per cent said the Act is too strict. It seems that young people have no desire to see the law make women continue a pregnancy against their will. And this includes where there is abnormality detected: 76 per cent also said that abortion on this ground should be allowed.

However, while the idea of the law 'telling women what to do' has little support, the same young people see aborting an abnormal fetus as more 'ethically difficult'. 'I think that limiting what women could abort for would be impossible', said one 20-year old woman: 'It would be dodgy to ask the government to decide, but there is a moral duty to educate people. The danger becomes that choice can end up being unlimited. It would mean that people could act out their prejudices about what makes a good person, such as white children or straight children.'

The notion that abortion for abnormality is 'acting out a prejudice' on a par with discriminating against disabled people, is commonly held—especially among young people—and usually unchallenged. Yet there is no reason why having an abortion for fetal abnormality should demonstrate 'prejudice' against the disabled. There is a significant difference between a person and a fetus. As Raanan Gillon, professor of medical ethics at Imperial College, has said: 'There is no logical obligation to feel that, just because somebody decides not to have a baby because it has a disability when it is a fetus...that therefore it follows that this person will have hostile intent and hostile attitudes towards people who have got disabilities.'

To suggest that support for abortion for abnormality leads down a 'slippery slope' to treating disabled people badly is ludicrous, as would be the suggestion that support for the ⇨

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⇦ right to abortion in general leads to the ill-treatment of people in general. Today's technologies allow more detection of abnormality prenatally than ever before, and yet at the same time there is a greater desire in society to provide resources and support for disabled people.

Women who choose to end an abnormal pregnancy are motivated by a practical recognition of what life would be like bringing up a disabled child, not a general prejudice against the disabled.

There is no getting round the fact that when a woman aborts for abnormality she is making a judgement about the quality of her pregnancy and about the kind of child she wants to have. Unlike abortion where the woman simply does not want to be pregnant and have a child, where the abortion is for abnormality the woman normally wants a baby but has decided that she does not want that particular pregnancy to be carried to term.

To many young people today it seems to be unacceptable that a woman should make that judgement. To me it is completely understandable. Having a child with Down's syndrome or cystic fibrosis, or a child that is blind, is a very different prospect to having a child who does not suffer from these problems. That is why the vast majority of women who find out there is abnormality in the fetus choose to abort the pregnancy (around 90 per cent of women opt for abortion where Down's syndrome is detected). They are making the choice to avoid bearing a child with a medical condition that will mean that child cannot be the child they want to have: I support their right to do so.

It worries me that young people can be so cavalier about the importance of a woman's right to judge for herself whether or not she wants to have a disabled child. I am disturbed by the patronising notion that women who end pregnancy for abnormality need to be 'educated' or 'made more aware' about disability. For me, it represents a real problem if the next generation are not prepared to rely on the judgement of the pregnant woman herself about what should be the outcome of her pregnancy, and instead think she needs input about this decision from those who are 'more aware'.

It also worries me that we live in a climate where there seems to be a desire to encourage the notion that it is good if young people have 'ethical concerns' about abortion. In the excited media response to the Pro-Choice Forum report, there has been a real desire to emphasise and even applaud the fact that young people are morally ambiguous about abortion for abnormality. Some journalists seemed relieved to discover that young people are still anxious about abortion and are not prepared simply to support a woman's right to choose without qualification. In contrast, I would like to see such 'ethical' concerns among the young challenged through a forthright defence of a woman's right and ability to make choices for herself.

Some of my colleagues have suggested that young people are so upset about abortion for abnormality precisely because they are young. They have yet to experience the reality of having to decide whether or not to have a child, and having to think what it will mean for them if they opt to have a child with a disability. I hope my colleagues are right, and that age and experience will temper young people's views. But I am not holding my breath waiting for it to happen. The current vogue for 'disability awareness' seems to be leading to a view that stigmatises the desire to bear a healthy child, a desire that I think pregnant women deserve the right to have. ●

WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO END AN ABNORMAL PREGNANCY ARE MOTIVATED BY PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS, NOT GENERAL PREJUDICE

'Attitudes to abortion for fetal abnormality', by Ellie Lee and Jenny Davey, is published by the Pro-Choice Forum. To order copies call 01227 781920 or email ellie@easynet.co.uk
Ellie Lee is also editor of *Abortion Law and Politics Today*, published by Macmillan

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT ABORTION FOR ABNORMALITY

'I think that women should only have an abortion if there is a serious risk to them or the child, not just if it's something like Down's syndrome.'

'That's what worries me about abortion for fetal abnormality. You don't know how far it will go. Should you be allowed to have an abortion if it hasn't got a hand, say?'

'Right now I have no problem with having an abortion for any disability that we can detect before birth. However, I am concerned that as technology develops and we can detect smaller abnormalities such as congenital blindness that things may go too far.'

'Many kids with Down's syndrome are great and they can have a perfectly good life. It's not like the child is in pain all the time. If the child was in pain I think the woman should have an abortion though.'

'I think it's a problem if people say I don't want to have a Down's syndrome child, purely on the basis of its disability. It would be like saying I want to have a blonde child or I want my child to be six feet tall.'

'I don't know why people think we should have the right to choose, it's the consumer idea that you can get exactly what you want. Why should people be allowed to do that?'

'I think it's really scary that people want to change what children will look like when they are born. It'd be horrible if everyone was the same.'

'The population should be as diverse as possible because you can learn a lot from disabled people. They are probably more loving and understanding than people who are caught up in a rat race. They don't take things for granted.'

ANN BRADLEY

In-your-face sex

It is strange how the definition of socially acceptable sex has changed. This year's gay Mardi Gras festival in Manchester was reported with benign approval.

The sight of gay men dressed only in flip-flops and flesh-coloured thongs strolling along Deansgate, and displays of pierced nipples, bondage gear and sex toys, attracted affectionate rather than outraged comment in the press. A contingent of louche male nuns, including one in a camouflage habit riding a motor scooter, was described as 'idiosyncratic' rather than sick: 'Nun but the brave' read the caption under a picture of one moustachioed habit-clad participant. From the tone of the *Guardian* report it seemed that 'Sappho Square'—'a central and visible focus for dykes'—was just the place the women's page readers should head for.

A breath of fresh air, you might think, for those of us who have long been frustrated by the media's puritan attitude to sex. But not so. Curiously, on the very same day that the homosexual displays of the Manchester gay scene were described with affection, old-fashioned heterosexual displays were making outraged headlines, as the British vice-consul in Ibiza resigned in disgust at the behaviour of the 18-30 crowd who flock to the island to explore their sexuality. The very same liberal papers that were so amused by the Manchester Mardi Gras were doing a Victor Meldrew in response to the sexual antics of British youth abroad.

Condemning the 'vulgar desire for exhibitionist sex', *Independent* columnist Trevor Phillips (whom many of us remember from his days heading up the National Union of Students) described Ibiza as 'the Sodom and Gomorrah of our times, with a dash of the Roman Empire thrown in for spice'.

What Trevor describes is clearly not for the faint-hearted: 'A group of young people sitting around in the sun, laughing and drinking, throwing each other in the pool, daring each other to ever more outrageous acts. One boy dares a girl to take off all her clothes (all? we are talking about a bikini that conceals less than a postage stamp) and sit on the face of another young man. Without a moment's hesitation she obliges, in front of all and sundry...It is shocking; but it passes in a gale of laughter.' He also observes the sorry state of a young man 'with his hand under the skirt of [a] woman, whom he hardly knows; yet she can barely summon up the interest in the invasion of her own body to tell him to stop'.

Trevor—who admits to having put it around a bit himself in the pre-Aids, post-pill eighties—says that it is not the promiscuity which shocks him, but the public display, and that if he had known what it would all lead to he would have thought twice about his involvement in campaigns for sexual freedom in the 1960s.

Not being much of a party animal myself, I have some sympathy for Trevor's despair at the abandonment of sex as a private matter, best kept behind closed doors. But I cannot agree that it is a consequence of sixties sexual experimentation. Nor can I empathise with the wider media's dual standard, which says that two chaps wandering around Manchester city centre in PVC bondage suits is an interesting display of sexual diversity, while a bloke touching up a woman on a beach in San Antonio is outrageous.

In these politically correct times heterosexual sex is a no-no while queer is quaint

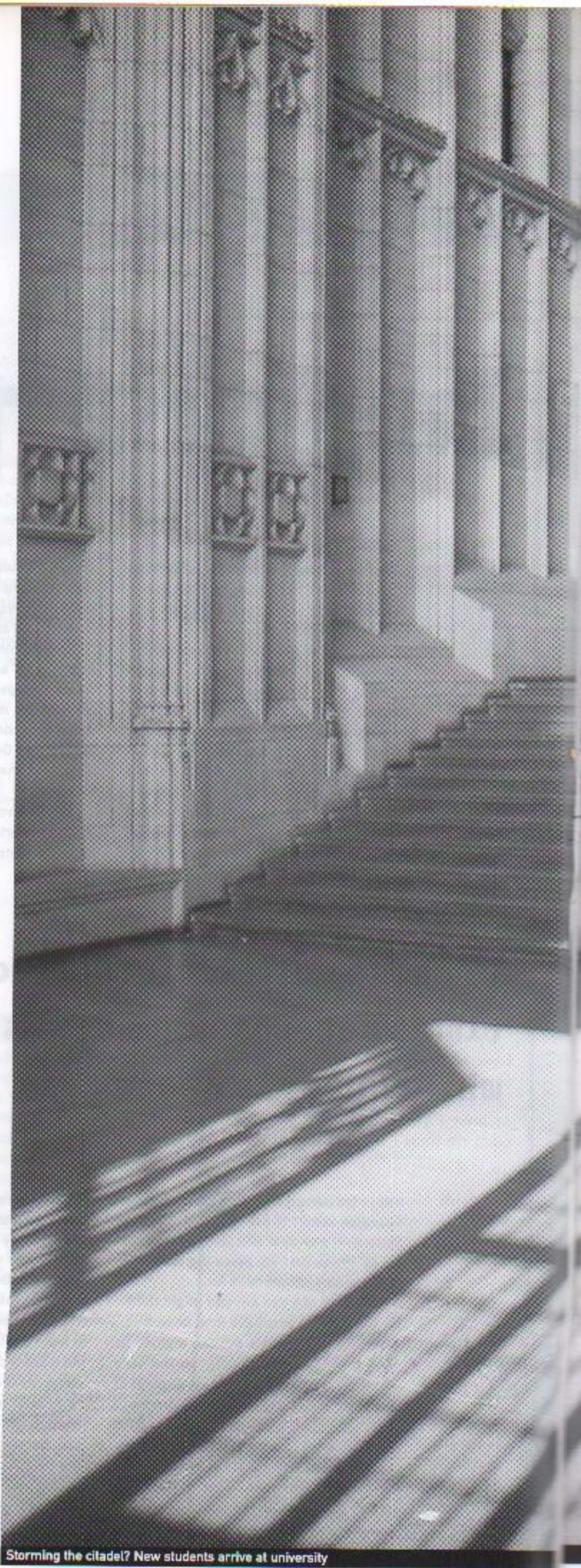
Are the young people who take a break from being bank clerks in Norwich to get out of their faces on lager or whatever, and to indulge in a two-week shag-fest, any more decadent than those who flocked to the lesbian and gay Mardi Gras? Or is it just that in these politically correct times heterosexual sex is a no-no, while queer is quaint?

Of course, I understand that there is a significant and important difference between gay and straight. There is still discrimination against gays, and coming together (in the geographical sense) for a collective event can be a way of making a statement about your right to live as you see fit. But to meet that end, a collective event must involve a protest for what we want—not just a celebration of how we enjoy sex. A bunch of queers and dykes celebrating their sexuality in Manchester is no more political than a bunch of straights having a good time in Ibiza. Whether or not it offends is simply a matter of personal taste. •

SUBSCRIBE see page 33

THE LEARN-LITTLE SOCIETY

Universities are under fire for all the wrong reasons, argue Jennie Bristow and Kirsten de la Haye. The one thing the critics ignore is the intellectual impoverishment of today's 'learning society'



Storming the citadel? New students arrive at university

'FINE IDEAS BUTTER NO PARSNIPS'

Universities have been slammed this year by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), which says that graduates suitable for jobs in business are as thin on the ground as they were a decade ago, before the number of students going through higher education doubled. According to AGR chief executive Roly Crockman, 'finding people who are both technically competent and commercially aware is difficult', even when the graduates concerned are from the 'old' universities. Employers surveyed by the AGR listed interpersonal skills and team working top of their list of required graduate skills, followed by motivation and enthusiasm.

But since when has the role of universities been simply to produce 'commercially aware' graduates with a set of technical skills that makes them employable?

At traditional universities in particular, a degree course used to be about training students' minds beyond the daily skills needed in the everyday world of work. Most school-leavers were perceived as capable of learning job skills through simply doing a job, while students in higher education were given three years to do something entirely different: thinking, learning and developing their brains. In a society that prized creative thought and academic specialisation all this made sense. But now, in the wake of last year's report by Sir Ron Dearing on 'Higher education in the learning society', the emphasis is more on practical, vocational education. As wider intellectual qualities are seen as intangible and irrelevant, the difference between the local college and the local job-club is more difficult to see.

According to the increasingly influential view of organisations like the AGR, the importance of doing a degree lies in spending three years practising for the world of work. Ideas are little more than an add-on to make your time at college a bit more interesting. In August the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) reported that students are falling into line, opting increasingly for vocational courses as opposed to academic degrees. As Justine Brian's story on page 15 indicates, these students often find that vocational courses are neither interesting nor useful, as the practical skills that should be learned through experience are made ridiculous when placed in a qualifications framework.

The emphasis on making academia 'practical' is completely in line with the recommendation in the Dearing report that the 'key skills' of numeracy and communication should be written into degree courses.

In this business-friendly environment qualifications such as the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) are to enjoy a higher status in some ways comparable with their academic-based rivals. When even the most prestigious universities find their courses reduced to this level, and gaining banal skills overtakes the development of ideas as the purpose of university, what exactly is 'higher' about higher education?

'HIGHER EDUCATION IS STILL TOO EXCLUSIVE'

Throughout the 1990s the onus has been on universities to expand and include as many people in the system as possible, but for the New Labour government of today's learning society this is not enough. In July education and employment secretary David Blunkett announced plans to create more than 80 000 new university places over the next three years, just to catch those who slip the net. By August the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) had gone even further, announcing that it would reward with extra funds universities that actively went out to recruit students from poor backgrounds. As Brendan O'Neill points out on page 14, the implication of this move is that what counts in university education is not the students' ability to develop ideas but the mere fact that they get the chance to go. A suitable criterion for nursery schools, perhaps, but for university?

An even bigger concern now is that once students have been brought into university it is difficult to keep them there. In December 1997 the HEFCE claimed that over 100 000 undergraduates were dropping out of university each year; by July a new student guide, *Push*, hit the headlines with claims that almost one in five students dropped out or failed their finals last year. If what counted was the rigour of degree courses and the calibre of graduate produced by universities, such a dropout and failure rate would surely be seen as unsurprising in a mass system. But because what counts now is 'inclusion', the discussion that kicked off was about the need to keep students in regardless of how little they want to be there and how much they get out of the experience.

Inevitably, if the primary focus of a university is simply on 'including' as many students as possible, the quality of education received and the intellectual contribution the students can make will be sidelined as an issue. Only the Oxbridge colleges can continue to justify their existence through the calibre of academics they employ and the bright, thinking graduates they produce; and even their confidence is being shaken by calls to put 'inclusiveness' first.

In November 1997, higher education minister Baroness Blackstone spoke about Labour's commitment to high quality education institutions, but threatened to reduce the extra government subsidy given to Oxbridge anyway because, as she put it, 'Oxford and Cambridge are not the only centres of excellence in this country'. Wrong: since the previous government brought down most other redbricks close to the status of polytechnics about the only place you can still get a top education is Oxbridge. But, as the master of Pembroke College, Oxford warned in March, by claiming that Labour's mean-spiritedness would turn it into a 'second division' university, even this small haven of ideas will probably not last for much longer.

'SHOCK HORROR: STANDARDS ARE FALLING!'

There are more universities than ever before, there are more students at university than ever before; yet according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, in 1996/7 41 per cent of graduates still managed to leave college with a 2:1 degree. Obviously, as 'inclusiveness' becomes the required standard to be met by universities the old standards of ⇨

⇦ academic excellence have fallen. In September 1997 the Department for Education and Employment grudgingly admitted that A-levels and GCSEs have suffered from 'grade inflation' over recent years. In December 1997 the Office for Standards in Education claimed that graduates in English, history and maths do not know enough about their subject areas even to teach them to secondary schoolchildren. In August *Sunday Times* journalists exposed falling standards by posing as failed A-level students and still being offered places on several university courses. But brow-beating aside, what solutions are being posed to the problem of plummeting standards?

The Dearing committee recommended that university lecturers be sent to a kind of teacher training college as a way of ensuring that students learned something. This year, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education announced plans to introduce a set curriculum for 41 university courses, to counter the variation in 'standards' between institutions. Both these moves to 'protect' standards are in fact entirely antithetical to the spirit of university education, and can only result in a further lowering of true academic standards.

The idea of a university is as an institution that puts its highly motivated students under the intense pressure of its most established academics and its most difficult ideas. Lecturers are not supposed to be teachers whose aim is to impart some basic, accessible bits of essential knowledge to the maximum number of people; they are supposed to be specialists working with people capable of dealing with the highest level of ideas. And degrees are not supposed to work according to a standard checklist so that institutions can get away with covering the basics. Learning your history timeline or the whereabouts of the world's great lakes may improve your performance at Trivial Pursuit, but it bears no comparison with the ability to understand and analyse your subject specialism.

The focus on basic, secondary school-level skills and knowledge does not only stultify the brains of the individual students, who have traditionally flourished under the competition and pressure encouraged by a rigorous academic course. It rules out completely the possibility of developing new ideas within universities. One year on from Dearing, the idea that university should be a nursery of creativity for academics and a funnel of wisdom from one generation to the next has been fundamentally transformed into something unworthy of all the money, expertise and young lives that go into it. Whatever this something is, it is not higher education. •

INTELLECTUAL POVERTY

Under new guidelines drawn up by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), universities will be rewarded with extra funds if they recruit more students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. At present students from wealthy backgrounds are 12 times more likely to go on to university than their working class counterparts, and the aim is to redress the balance. The HEFCE is drawing up a list of 'socially inclusive' universities, promising £30 million extra funding for those which 'successfully recruit non-traditional students'.

Brian Fender, chief executive of the HEFCE, says this new initiative will 'benefit a wide range of students by raising the profile of teaching and learning in higher education'. But to me, the new recruitment drive looks more like an insult to working class students that will drag academic standards down further still.

The HEFCE is working from the conclusion reached by Sir Ron Dearing last year: that university life is too stuffy and academic for many working class students. Universities will only be deemed 'socially inclusive' and be liable for extra funding if they break with tradition and create an open and welcoming climate for poorer students; students who are invariably less used to rigorous tests and higher learning than their wealthier counterparts.

The implication that higher education should be made more accessible to the poor by being made easier looks like an updated version of the argument that the masses are too stupid for university. But many working class students aspire to university as a means of bettering themselves and making something of their lives. Bringing university life down to 'their level' is not only patronising; it defeats the purpose of higher education as a means of self-improvement.

Today's educationalists and those who fund higher education object to the idea

COMPETITION

Here's a chance for *LM* readers to win tickets to the Cheltenham Festival of Literature in October. In association with the *Independent*, the festival will bring together prominent writers and artists, including Steven Berkoff, John Mortimer, Judi Dench, Jeremy Paxman and many others (see back cover for details).

The presiding theme of the festival is 'Revolution', the struggle for freedom and change, and its expression through literature, poetry, propaganda and drama. Prominent writers, including Tariq Ali, Tom Paulin, Michael Ignatieff and others, will discuss the thirtieth anniversary of the events of 1968.

LM is sponsoring the session on Saturday 10 October, 'From street fighting to the fall of communism', where Tariq Ali, novelist, film-maker and leader of the 1968 London anti-Vietnam demonstrations, will 'bring to life the people and events that made 1968 a milestone'. Ali will also be launching his new book, *Marching in the Streets*, written with Susan Watkins, which brings together first-hand accounts from every continent during that tumultuous year.

Lucky *LM* readers can win:

- A 'Revolution pass', allowing access to all the 'Revolution' events at the festival
- Tickets to the Tariq Ali event (Saturday 10 October)
- Hardback copies of Tariq Ali's new book *Marching in the Streets*

Just answer this simple question: In what year was the Prague Spring? Was it:

a 1928

b 1968

c 1988

Send your answers on a postcard, with your name, address and a daytime telephone number, to: Cheltenham competition, *LM*, Signet House, 49-51 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3JB by 5 October 1998.

PROFESSIONAL MOCKERY

that there is a standard of excellence to which everybody should aspire, and would rather education was more inclusive of the poor, women, ethnic minorities and the disabled. So they suggest that university should change to make room for disadvantaged students, rather than the other way round. Instead of proposing that working class students should be given a higher level of pre-university education to prepare them for university life, they want university to be brought down to the lowest common denominator to make everybody feel welcome.

In the past, some of the more 'elitist' universities avoided such a retreat from the standard of excellence by accepting only working class students who had proved their worth and their thirst for learning. But now that those who hold the purse strings in higher education are threatening to withhold extra funds from colleges which refuse to accept and accommodate the disadvantaged, no doubt this slippage will become obligatory.
Brendan O'Neill

I recently completed a City & Guilds evening course in professional cookery at a London college. It was the first time I had been in education since leaving school halfway through my A-levels in 1987. I was a little nervous but terribly excited, craving to know all there was about chopping carrots professionally, boning chickens, making stocks, wielding a big knife—just as the professionals did.

But a few weeks into the course I became frustrated. Our teacher would tell us to do something or ask for something to be completed for the following week, and yet when these things weren't done it did not matter. If something else in the rest of your life got in the way, college could easily be sacrificed. Due to pressures of work I missed four consecutive weeks—only to return, anxious that I wouldn't be able to catch up in time for my exams, to be informed that I hadn't missed anything.

All I wanted was to learn real skills and real techniques, but the lack of criticism made this very difficult. I needed to know if my soup was pallid or my roux tasteless, and if so what to do about it. This happened once, during a lesson with a stand-in teacher. I had made what I believed to be a perfect roux—good texture and sheen—but as our supply chef stuck his finger in and tasted it he cried, too loudly for my liking, 'that's disgusting'. My heart sank. I went bright pink. But I wanted to know why it was so terrible, and he explained. 'Simple, no seasoning.' He made me correct my error, pronounced a very good roux and I had learned just why salt and pepper are added to food and the consequences of not doing so. But this was the only time in a year's course.

Close to the summer's exams, I enquired what the pass mark was, and was informed that all the results would be collated and a pass mark would be set dependent on the overall standard that year. So there wasn't even an objective standard of skill I had to reach—I just had to hope that I was as good as or better than the average student. I was later informed that this is a quite normal practice, and our tutor told us that City & Guilds were revising their grading system: no longer pass, fail, credit or distinction, just pass or fail. Without exception, the aspirations of everybody in my class were to aim for a credit at least and possibly a distinction. Now we would only pass or fail. No concept of excelling could exist.

I can now cut carrots in a variety of pretty shapes, with some speed, but I still can't bone a chicken (meat was too expensive to practice on). I have a nice set of chef's whites and a set of good knives. So what?
Justine Brian

FRESHERS SCARES

Two graduates of 1998 advise the new student intake to make the most of the next three years—by ignoring all the 'safety' advice that they get

HUGH PETO UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

If you are off to uni for the first time, listen up and listen good. University is the only time in your life when you have no worries. According to the law you are now an adult. You are also independent of your parents. You have no homework; you can get on with coursework in your own time. You are free to do what you want and there are no consequences. You don't get home until six in the morning? Fine, you don't have to go to lectures and you can copy somebody's notes. You're pregnant? Fine, have an abortion and nobody need know. You have a bad trip, convinced that the whole world is out to get you? Fine, stay in bed for two days until it wears off.

Compare this to the real world, where your actions have very real consequences. You screw somebody in the office: your spouse finds out and your marriage is finished. You drink too much: your work suffers and your promotion never comes. You lose £1000 on spread-betting one evening: you can't pay the mortgage or the Child Support Agency and you soon find out who your real friends are.

At this juncture in my life, poised between the two worlds, I have a Janus-like ability to see both the past and the future. Being a fresher is a tremendous opportunity: you have won a place at university and you have your whole life in front of you, with three or four years to learn about whatever interests you, fall in love, travel abroad and dye your hair pink. Which is why it astonishes me that the time in your life when you are most free is also the time when you are encouraged to take most caution, bombarded with ⇨

⇦ information and advice about all the risks and dangers that await you at college.

At the freshers' fair the real onslaught begins. My first impression was of a big market; hundreds of stalls full of traders hawking their wares, while thousands of fresh-faced students milled around, searching for the Whisky Appreciation Society or the Canoeing Club.

But instead of shouting 'strawberries, four pound a pound', half of the stalls were selling fear. Insurance companies: 'have you insured yourself against break-ins, muggings, tornadoes, death?' The police: 'students are particularly vulnerable to crime, so watch out 'cos the townies don't like you.' Women's groups: 'women, know your limits! If your boyfriend rapes you then use this free alarm.' Lefties: 'students are so very poor, they don't have enough money to eat, so they are forced to sell their bodies.'

The scaremonger-in-residence is the students' union. Lately they have been concerned with highlighting the following list of cheery items: surviving on no money, meningitis, carbon monoxide poisoning and gas death landlords, stopping smoking, medical tests on students, curbing alcohol intake, safe housing, study skills, banning racismsexismfatcatgreed, and, of course, Aidsawarenessandsafesex. Why?

Like the case studies and agony pages that clog up girlie magazines, what passes for 'advice' and 'information' from student bodies should be treated with scepticism. Bombarding freshers with horror stories of date rape, giant cockroaches, hunger and Aids presents a skewed view of life at university. Observe the following advice given by the National Union of Students regarding meningitis:

'If you think its [sic] a bad dose of flu, a heavy hangover or drugs, don't just leave it: check out the symptoms. If you're feeling really bad, tell someone; if a mate's looking rough, stick around...one in 10 of us, at any time, are carrying the bacteria which cause meningitis! We pass them between each other by regular close contact, such as kissing! We don't know who is at risk—so get the symptoms sussed—it could save a life.'

You get the picture. And what a distorted one it is. You would never know that meningitis and meningitis blood-poisoning are extremely rare. Instead an epidemic of these conditions appears to have become an everyday problem of student life.

Most students will never have bastard landlords, meningitis or get beaten up or sexually abused, and many take little notice of the specific advice around something like the meningitis scare. But all of the scaremongering and advice-pushing does help to create a general climate in which students can take the easy option.

Haven't finished your essay on time? Why blame yourself for bad time-management when you can blame 'family problems'? Keep getting sub-standard marks? Don't blame yourself for getting pissed six nights out of seven, when your students' union is there to confirm that you must have a disease or medical syndrome you never knew existed. The problem is that such 'advice' tends to undermine your sense of self-responsibility. I'd rather learn golf course studies.

So, if you're off to uni, I have no advice to give you. Just have a great one! And, in the words of the old 2 Unlimited song...how does it go again? I must be getting old. •

BARRY CURTIS UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY

It is tempting to think that not much harm could occur at the University of Kent, situated as it is in the rolling hills of holy Canterbury. When you arrive though the first things you see will be the safety handbooks. Or the security guards. Or the CCTV. If all that fails to catch your eye you have probably been enrolled in a self-defence class, or are busy receiving the swipe cards, rape alarms and helpline directories.

There are now so many safety measures on campus I am wondering how to cope back in the University of Life. I may have been armed with an alumni card which grants me permanent sanctuary in Happy Land; but at UKC these days students seem too busy being worried to have fun.

Thinking back to the prospectus I saw three years ago, I do not recall reading that Canterbury was like downtown LA. If I thought that going to university would put me 'at risk' I would not have gone. The students' union women's officer Helen Rogers says that the real level of danger is not the point: 'There is probably a link between safety measures and preventing crime, but the main thrust for me is that they create a *safe atmosphere*.' No they don't. All this emphasis on safety just makes students feel more threatened than they would otherwise.

When you experience safety measures all around you, you begin to feel scared. When you are told 'smile! You're on CCTV!', or you see security guards walking the ladies home, your sense of security is undermined. A major part of going to university involves meeting new people, but when you are made to feel threatened by others, that process is hampered. Security guards now patrol the bars and perform random ID checks. What sense of community could all this possibly foster? Last term security guards scrapped outdoor parties even before they had begun. Everybody had to content themselves with the politically correct discotheques, complete with 'Warning! Strobe in use!'. My gosh! Flashing lights? At a disco?

Every few months there is an additional safety feature. This is strikingly odd, yet it reinforces my point. If safety campaigns really could make people feel safer shouldn't we expect to see some success? Instead anxieties are growing.

The students' union document about how to walk (yes, we are all toddlers again) tells us: 'Avoid an aggressive stance: crossed arms, hands on hips, a wagging finger or raised arm will challenge and confront. Avoid looking down or touching someone unnecessarily.' All this is far more likely to make people paranoid than it is to reassure them that Kent is the garden of England. Yet we are told to 'look confident' by 'walking

Safe drinking in the student common room

tall', and to develop the skill of 'tension control'. Tension control means, it seems, avoiding risk altogether. In a phrase remarkably similar to what mummy and daddy would say the union advises, 'Let someone know (or at least leave a note to say) where you are, where you are going and when you will be back. If your plans change, tell someone'. So if you knock on somebody's door (presuming that you are even able to get into their corridor), and discover that they are out, it is implied that they have met their doom.

The irony is that one of the most enjoyable features of campus life is surely the spontaneity. In its rare dynamic moments Canterbury would host a beer festival, or have somebody famous turn up. In such situations the freedom to break your plans was great. Students deprived of that freedom, and made to sit quivering in their hall with their finger on the panic button, may be safe from life, but they will also be very bored and dull individuals indeed. •

SUBSCRIBE see page 33

A bad summer in Omagh and Ballymoney

...but a better one for those running the Irish peace process, explains Kevin Rooney

This summer in Ireland, Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and Irish premier Bertie Ahern have turned tragedy into triumph by ensuring that the killings in Omagh and Ballymoney further consolidate their hold over the peace process.

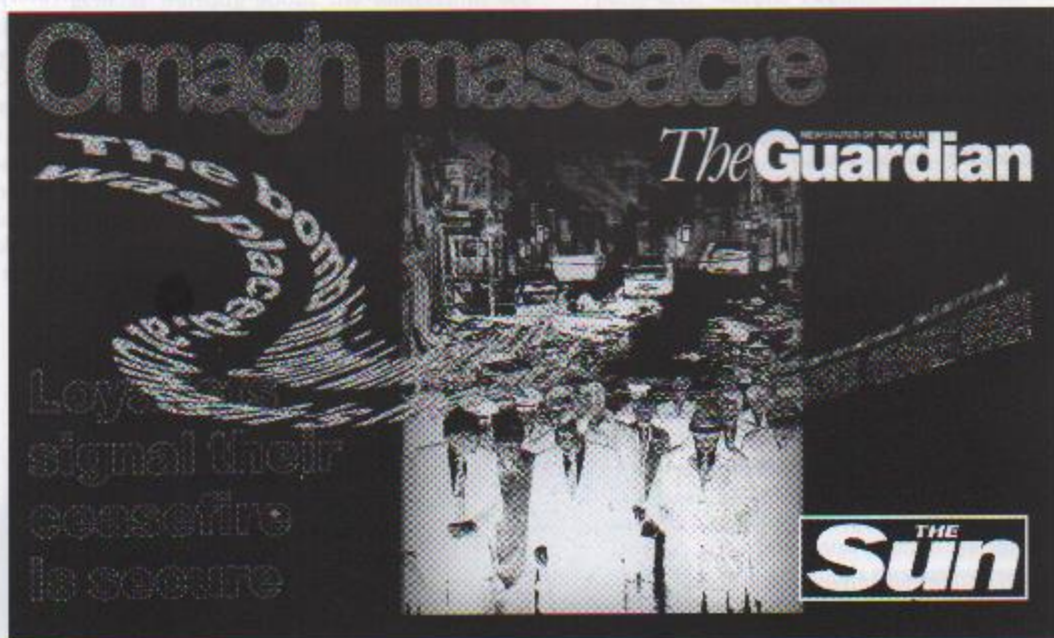
The Omagh bomb planted by the Real IRA in August killed 29 people and injured 280 more. As everybody from the Ulster Unionists to Sinn Fein moved to condemn the bombing, a new line of demarcation was drawn between the politics of peace and the politics of extremism. After Omagh, those from the nationalist community who expressed any reservations at all about the direction of the peace process could automatically be discredited by association with the bombers, effectively branded as pro-violence and anti-peace.

One month before, a similar reaction to violence had acted to isolate the critics of the peace process on the Unionist side. The deaths of three young Catholic children in Ballymoney, county Antrim, after a firebomb attack by loyalists, provoked a massive reaction against the Orange Order. A highly orchestrated campaign by the media and politicians successfully linked the murders to the anti-peace process protest at Drumcree. Within days the Drumcree protest whittled away, as thousands of bewildered Orangemen caved in to a mood labelling them the accomplices of childkillers.

In Ireland, Britain and the USA the official peace process has now become synonymous with peace itself. To question the process at all is assumed to mean casting your vote in favour of sectarian violence and terror. In fact, you do not need to have any sympathy with the Real IRA bombers or the loyalist arsonists in order to question the underlying aims and consequences of the process being orchestrated by the authorities in Washington, London and Dublin. But by recasting the peace process itself as the ultimate goal, and counterposing it to the terrible events in Omagh and Ballymoney, the brokers of the process have ensured that any thin voices of dissent which remain are immediately discredited.

The tragedy is that something like Omagh is actually linked to the peace process and the instability it creates. Under the artificial consensus imposed through the peace process, peace in Ireland is now associated with compromise and the need to forge an accommodation between the two traditions of Unionism and nationalism. Clearly any agreement between those who want a united Ireland and those who want continued British rule can only come about when they have abandoned their goals, and so both sides have had to drop their principles and play down differences.

As a result of this, Unionists or republicans who claim to uphold their traditional principles have been left isolated and powerless. Lacking a political alternative or popular support, they have lashed out against the peace process in nihilistic gestures such as Omagh. Just as bombs and shootings have become part and parcel of the seemingly endless peace processes in South Africa and the Middle East, so they are intimately bound up with the process in Ireland.



But these bombs and killings have not undermined the peace process, as many claimed Omagh would. In fact they have helped to shore up the artificial consensus. When Unionists and nationalists alike occupy the middle ground, and dissent seems to be expressed only through isolated acts of violence, all criticism of the peace process comes to be understood as at least condoning the bombings and burnings.

For example, within hours of the Omagh bomb politicians and the media had named Bernadette Sands-McKevitt and her partner Michael McKevitt as key suspects. The sister of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, Sands-McKevitt is the public face of the 32-County Sovereignty Committee, a group of dissident republicans opposed to Sinn Fein's role in the peace process. After Omagh, that was enough to make her guilty in most people's eyes. She issued a statement denying any involvement in the bombing and opposing any bombing campaign, and her accusers produced no evidence to the contrary. But on the wave of post-Omagh bitterness directed against any dissenters, Sands-McKevitt and her children were driven from their home anyway.

The process of discrediting all opposition was also evident in the debate about introducing new anti-terrorism legislation after Omagh. The far-reaching new laws, which even Tony Blair conceded were 'draconian', were not needed to convict the few individuals responsible for the bomb. Nor were they needed to wage an ongoing war against the Real IRA, which collapsed in the face of the wave of public outrage that was whipped up post-Omagh. The legislation was less a practical measure than a symbolic gesture, drawing a line that marks out all potential opponents of the peace process as dangerous outlaws who may need to be dealt with through extraordinary measures.

The conflation of all opposition to the peace process with the Omagh bombers threatens to close down the space for any genuine political debate on Ireland's future. That is another tragedy. ●

Linda Bellos spells it out in black and white

Anti-racist education is a failure

For anybody who knows my track record it may seem surprising that I should attack anti-racism in education, but I have in fact done so for many years. I do not attack it on principle, I attack the practice of it.

Anti-racism in education could mean many things. It could for example mean that history, music, literature, art and science include references to ancient African civilisation, as they do to Greek and Roman civilisation. It could mean evaluating the enslavement and colonisation of Africa and the Caribbean by Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It could mean the study of Asian culture and civilisation, pre and postcolonial. Such an approach would inform and support both European young people and ethnic minority young people. But such an approach is seen as problematic because it requires that teachers fundamentally reorient their thinking about British society and what they themselves have taken as given.

What purports to be anti-racist education involves things that can be done easily and quickly—bolt-on solutions, such as tacking on a bit of slave studies here, a bit of the Koran there. Most obviously it has focused on language, seeking to discourage or even jump on racist expressions. While I understand that the use of racist words and phrases by students should be discouraged, the means by which it is done is as important to black students as it is to white ones.

It is relatively easy to take issue with the use of the word nigger, but far harder to deal with real racial harassment which has been going on in British schools and which has largely been ignored. If anti-racism is so important why have so few teachers done anything about the rising tide of exclusions of black students? These are practical matters affecting black students, and they are within the power of education authorities, school governors and teachers. But anti-racism seems to have been largely silent about these things.

More worrying, however, is that in the name of anti-racism some teachers have argued that black students should not be expected to achieve their full potential because they are disadvantaged. For reasons best known to themselves they argue that it is not necessary for black children to learn Shakespeare or Chaucer because these writers are part of European culture.

This latter argument is the most pernicious; Shakespeare and Chaucer have become universal cultural contributors. Yes they are two white men, but that does not mean that all children, black or white, should not be familiar with their work. Young black children growing up in Britain need to be as aware of the common cultural references as white children. This does not mean that there should be no inclusion of African writers, especially good writers. But this should be for the benefit of all children, not just the black ones.

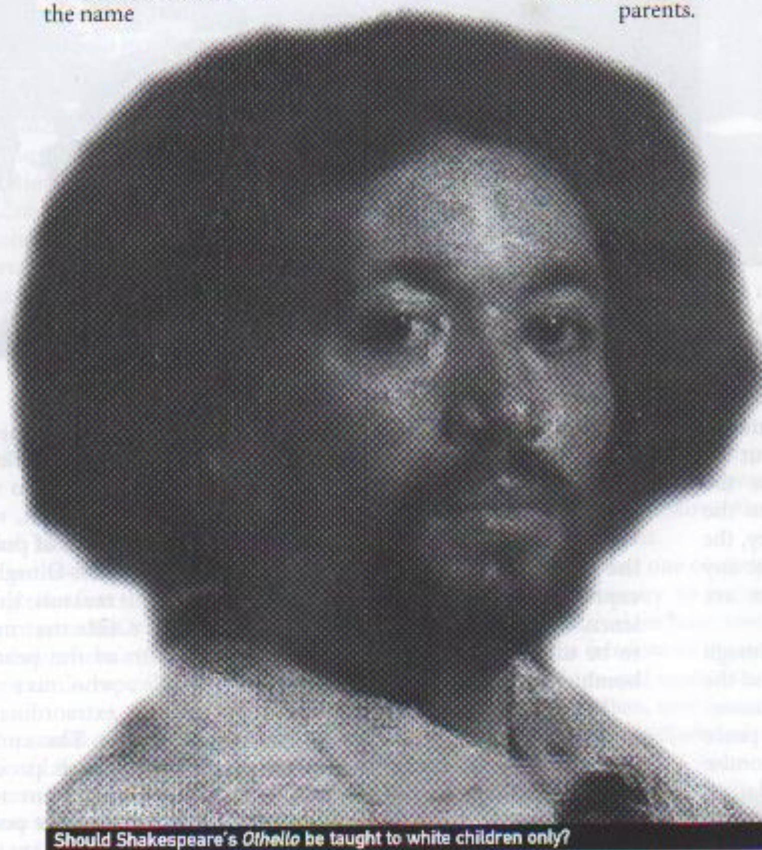
The expectations of black children, particularly those of African origin, have been limited by stereotype in the name of anti-racism. I have heard too many stories from black parents about being told by teachers that they are being over-ambitious for their children. I have heard teachers tell me that Hackney or Lambeth, as just two examples, are poor boroughs and that a high percentage of children come from single-parent households or that English is not the first language spoken within the family, as though this was a reason or excuse for low expectations. The material circumstances in which children live and grow up have significant bearing on their education, but it should not be used as a pretext to reinforce the disadvantages they already experience. Too often anti-racism has meant accepting that being black is in and of itself a disadvantage.

Why does this happen? Chiefly because the people in charge of devising and implementing anti-racist policies are not themselves black. They are no doubt well intentioned, but the effect of their practice is to patronise black children and their parents.

They do not consult or listen; if they did so they would know that the overwhelming majority of black parents have high expectations of, and aspirations for, their children. They also defer to teachers, having themselves been brought up to value and respect education and teachers. It is no coincidence that an increasing number of working class black parents are sending their children to fee-paying schools or returning them to the Caribbean to ensure that they get a good education. African and Caribbean parents expect discipline within schools and they want and expect formal learning, but because of deference may not raise these issues with an individual teacher in the state system.

There is no substitute for a good education, one that equips a young person to understand the world, relate to it and achieve their full potential. Anti-racist education has regrettably come to mean that hollow excuses are put forward to justify black children not having the opportunity to do so. There should be no either/or about this issue. It is not anti-racism v traditional class-ridden education as currently posed, or grammar schools and selection v liberal child-centred and structureless schools.

Anti-racism may not be a useful term to reflect the real changes that need to occur to the entire education system in Britain to ensure that the contribution of black (read African and African Caribbean) culture and heritage play an inclusive part in the curriculum. Bolt-on cheap and easy gestures are not what are required to ensure that a further generation of black children are not confined to under-education and underachievement. More Shakespeare and James Baldwin on the other hand might be, as would ensuring that the people who are meant to be the beneficiaries of these policies actually played the leading role in devising and implementing them. ●



Should Shakespeare's *Othello* be taught to white children only?

Linda Bellos is a writer and political activist

Sun, sea and...sue

Rain or rude waiters take the shine off your holiday? Join the queue outside the compensation courts, says Charlotte Reynolds

By the time this article goes to press I will be enjoying the 'seemingly endless expanses of the softest, finest sands and clear, warm azure waters of the Mediterranean'. Jealous? Well don't be too hasty—going on holiday is a hazardous business these days.

Or so you would think, if the number of travel agents, tour operators and even car-hire companies being taken to court is anything to go by. Litigation-happy holidaymakers are learning to sue, sue, sue, determined to make somebody pay if their holidays disappoint.

As the law stands, for a finding of negligence to be made it is necessary to show that the tour operator did not act as 'the reasonable person' in their situation would have acted. This is an objective standard against which potentially negligent behaviour can be judged.

So, a reasonable car-hire company would ensure that its rental vehicles were roadworthy and one that did not would be at fault. Similarly, a reasonable travel agent would ensure that holiday accommodation he was recommending was not half-built and one that did not would be at fault.

While this is all well and good, recent developments in the case law reveal a shift away from liability based on fault. The new breed of litigant is not concerned with fault but with making somebody pay when any disaster strikes—natural, self-induced or otherwise.

In 1995 two women won £3000 damages from their tour operator for psychological injury suffered while on holiday in Tunisia. The cause? Obscene gestures and love notes from lustful waiters. Aside from the fact that I know women who would pay extra for this, the implication is clear. Tour operators are to be held responsible for the sexual advances of Tunisian men. Ridiculous? Try this one.

In 1996 the Florida Court of Appeal ruled that a British holidaymaker shot by muggers in Miami could sue not only the car-hire company, but her travel agent and tour operator, for compensation. The idea that Lunn Poly is somehow responsible for the random criminal activities of an individual is ludicrous at best. At worst it presents a fundamentally twisted view of the nature of responsibility and fault. Law centres on the notion of the individual legal subject, capable of rational decision making. To suggest that a travel agent is at fault if a mugger in Miami decides to shoot a tourist undermines the entire concept.

But the acts of third parties are not the only thing that holidaymakers now feel tour operators should have control over. The weather is another popular cause of complaint. More than 400 passengers recently threatened to sue P&O after the cruise ship *Oriana* ran into a hurricane during a Caribbean voyage, narrowly missing two more. People have always complained about the weather—but whereas in the past rain would mean running for cover, today it is more likely to mean running for a lawyer.

The relatives of three holidaymakers who drowned off the coast of Cyprus are currently suing their travel company for failing to warn them of the risks posed by swimming. First Choice holiday firm apparently now gives a general warning about the dangers of sea bathing. Aside from the fact that First Choice clearly has no control over freak undercurrents, how long will it be before the firm starts advising holidaymakers to remember their armbands and crash helmet?

Holiday accommodation is another frequent cause for complaint. In August judge Anthony Cleary set a legal precedent by flying to a Malta hotel to see the conditions for himself and concluded that 'certainly it was fair value for the rock-bottom prices they paid'. As the brochure said: 'Malta is sub-tropical; cockroaches exist.'

While some of these examples may seem extreme they really are just the tip of the iceberg. (Funny how nobody on the *Titanic* sued.) They represent a shift away from fault-based liability to something very different, with potentially drastic consequences both at the level of law and of society.

If tour operators are to be liable for third party acts, weather conditions and freaks of nature, then the notion of fault and reasonableness goes out of the window. How can we decide if somebody has acted as 'the reasonable person' would have acted when nothing they could have done would have made a difference? In other words, how can a travel agent act reasonably so as to prevent a hurricane occurring? How can a car-hire company act reasonably so as to prevent muggers shooting tourists? The concept of reasonableness becomes meaningless, and there is no longer any possibility of objectively judging somebody's behaviour or their responsibility. Nothing and everything is reasonable and somebody could be sued for nothing, anything, everything.

Worse still, travel agents will be forced to treat us all like morons, incapable of dealing with the odd amorous waiter or of coming to terms with the fact that bad weather is simply bad luck. One of the best things about going on holiday is the adventure of it all—travelling to new places, meeting different people, and not quite knowing what to expect. In the future it seems we should expect safe, predictable and frankly boring holidays, where travel agents check to make sure we have packed the correct factor suntan lotion, where tour operators search our handbags at night to make sure we are carrying condoms, and where lifeguards belt us into our deckchairs in case we fall in without armbands.

In the meantime, back to daydreaming about my own holiday. I wonder if I'll have any reason to sue for harassment when I get back. Here's hoping! ■

'This wasn't in the brochure' PHOTO: UNIVERSAL PICTURES

NO MARKET FOR REFORMS

Tracey Brown reports from Russia, where international support for the status quo has helped make 'economic transition' the national joke

The collapse of the Russian currency and financial markets has led to talk of a world financial meltdown on the scale of 1929. The European and US press is full of concern that Russia will abandon market reform, and the planes to Russia are packed with jittery businessmen making frantic reports to head office.

The problems in Russia are real enough. The government is completely out of cash and unable to call on the banks to bail it out one more time. Even before the current crisis the Moscow administration announced that wages in many government sectors would be cut by 40 per cent. Now even this looks optimistic; few have been paid at all for three months. The marginal improvement on tax collection has done little to alleviate large-scale government debt.

These problems, however, have been constant features of Russian life for five years. The crisis has been a long time in the making. So why now?

We are told that the 'international community' is now forcing Russia to face up to its predicament. Tony Blair has been talking tough on the telephone to Bill Clinton and Helmut Kohl. There will be no more cash. Bill agreed and told it straight to elite economics students in Moscow. As the *Russkiyi Telegraf* reported on the Clinton visit, 'It would have been great to read out some sort of large-scale plan to save Russia. But there will not be one'.

Clinton's 'bitter pill' presentation to Yeltsin—the road to reform is hard but you must stick to it—has been hailed in the British and US press as the moment of truth. Russia has lagged behind schedule. Its 'gangster capitalism' has meant too many payouts and its corpulent bureaucracy has held up progress in the transition to the market.

In some ways this is a moment of truth. But the bitter pill is one that Clinton, Blair and Kohl have to swallow. Russia is in this mess precisely because of all the frantic, external attempts to stabilise the heart of the former Soviet Union. The billions of dollars pumped into Russia over the past five years have never made economic sense. They have never been seriously linked to any 'reform programme'.

Since the early 1990s every international discussion about Russia's progress has been shaped by exaggerated fears about communist comebacks, Nazi takeovers and general collapse. From the beginning of marketisation Western leaders hastily committed themselves to Yeltsin in an attempt to consolidate a stable leadership. Their rather excessive anxiety—fearing the region would be plunged into turmoil, spilling over into Western Europe and the world economy—led them to fixate on stability and pump in cash to shore up the existing Russian leadership.

Having once decided that Yeltsin was their man, foreign leaders have been unable to disentangle themselves for fear that any alternative would be destabilising. And of course the Yeltsin regime has become adept at playing to these fears. During the presidential elections in 1996, Russia received massive foreign cash injections in a bid to guarantee that Yeltsin won. The German loan of DM4 billion, just prior to election day, was personally overseen by chancellor Kohl. As the major regional power, Germany has been more frenzied than Britain or the USA in its attempts to consolidate and stabilise Russia, with the result that current figures show Germany holding nearly $30 billion of Russian debts (almost 40 per cent of the total).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also timed the release of loan payments to relieve pressure on Yeltsin at key moments. In July 1997 it pledged a further $22 billion, insisting that a proper repayment plan must emerge from Russia. The following December, despite the IMF's pleas that the Russian administration improve tax collection before further payments, it relented again. As Yeltsin tried to push his budget through the Duma, four major banks made another emergency loan to avert a crisis. The real problem for the IMF seems to be its inability to restrain its own payments. The slightest hint that the stodgy status quo in Moscow might be disturbed sends Western bankers and premiers running for their cheque books.

All kinds of comparisons have been made between Russia's situation and other crises, past and present, such as Britain's forced withdrawal from the ERM or the East Asian stock market contraction. These are quite inappropriate, and have only become popular in the Western press because nobody knows what the Russian path to reform is supposed to be.

From the beginning of Russia's marketisation, foreign ministers in the developed nations have seen cause for nervousness rather than opportunity. Since the early days of perestroika in the eighties, the international discussion about Russia has fixated on the more anxious issues of central stability, firing the imagination with the threats of the past and new dangers of extremism. Despite constantly barracking Russia to develop a free market, leaders in Germany, Britain, Japan and the USA have prioritised political stability. They themselves have shown little confidence in the market's ability to transform the former Soviet Union. So much so that anybody studying the past five years of Western intervention in Russia could be forgiven for thinking that market-oriented reforms mean shoring up the state and creating a preoccupation with order; which sounds not dissimilar to the approach of the old Stalinist regime.

Russia's own concerns today mirror the fearful preoccupations of the international elites, putting political stability before economic

'Sell, sell, sell'

reform. Its decadent economy reflects the speculative character of world markets. Much of the investment that has occurred has been financial speculation. As a report by the Russian-European Centre for Economic Policy noted last year, the expansion of Moscow's new stock exchange has meant little to the rest of the economy.

All of the warnings about reverting to the past and bringing back old economic solutions are missing the source of the problem: Russia has now consolidated its past in the new conditions.

There have been many changes in Russia's economic life, from the removal of price and trade controls to privatisation and the creation of a stock market. But because of the Western insistence on keeping things stable, there has been little urgency behind any programme to restructure the economy more fundamentally. This leaves few ways out of the current situation. The government may even print money again to pay its wages debts, which will be hailed as yet further evidence that Russia is in danger of reverting to the past. It would be nearer the truth to say that they will be forced to print money now because the pressure to restructure the taxation system has for years been alleviated by fear-fuelled Western aid and state borrowing.

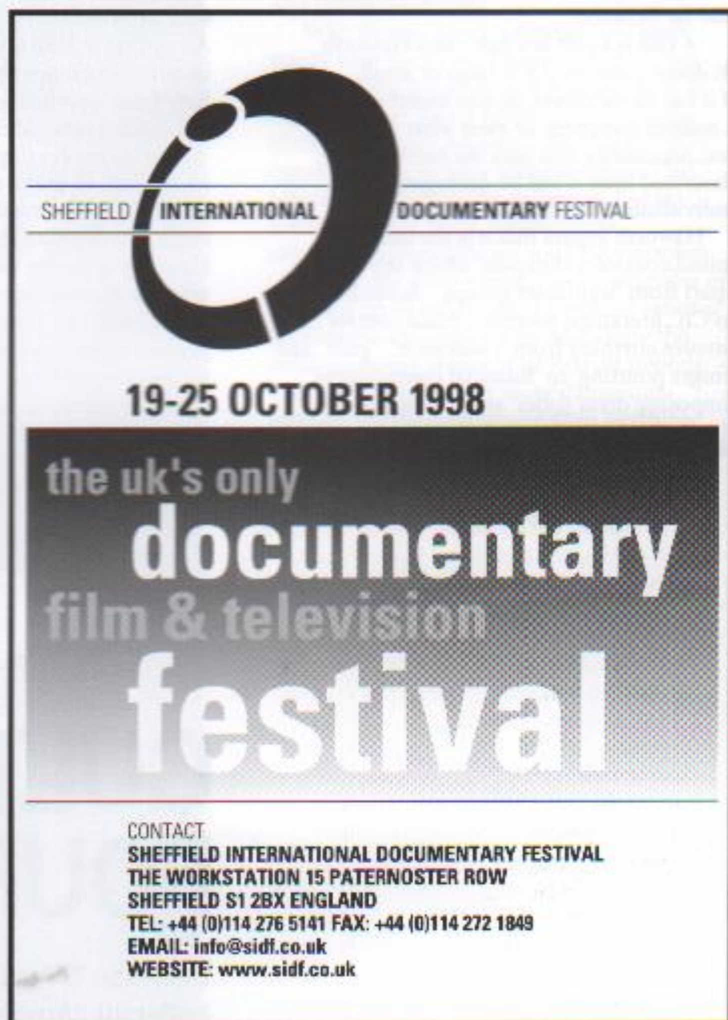
The discussion about Russia descending into civil chaos, or even a 'new revolution', makes no sense now. The only political conflict is a narrow jockeying for power within the elite. Even Russians who were quite opinionated when I met them during earlier elections feel that nothing much is at stake in the contest to be prime minister.

It struck me almost immediately on my arrival that Russians were treating this 'crisis' much like every other pronouncement of crisis in the past few years—meeting it with black humour and a lot of shoulder shrugging. 'I would have a BMW but I'm in transition', quipped my lift from Kazan airport when I inquired why he hadn't managed to sell his car. 'Transition' (*perekhod*) is now the butt of irony in Russia, long replacing perestroika and reform.

Russia's 'transition' to a free market has in reality been a period of consolidation of the old bureaucracy in its new position as gatekeepers of business. The past few years have seen the growth of financial speculation and the powerful Moscow banks, amid the decay and promiscuous auction of productive assets. The irony is that none of this would have been possible without the constant injections of politically motivated cash made by Western governments and banks. Because of their fantasies about Russia degenerating into uncontrollable chaos—fantasies which say more about insecurity in the West than the real situation in the East—they have sustained an expanded, degenerate administration that has helped bring the country to the brink of bankruptcy.

Tracey Brown is a sociologist working in Russian social research

PHOTO: LM ARCHIVES



CULT IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD

Brendan O'Neill enters the paranoid world of today's anti-cult campaigners

'Many people see cults as an American problem which doesn't affect us here in Britain. But the reality is quite different.' Ian Haworth has been campaigning against cults for nearly 20 years. As an ex-member of a 'therapy cult' he learned about weird groups the hard way. 'I was convinced I had been through a very real experience; it was only when I left the group that I realised I had been psychologically coerced.' In 1987 he set up the Cult Information Centre (CIC) to educate others about the dangers of such coercion.

So what exactly is a cult? 'It's a group which uses sophisticated mind control techniques to recruit members', explains Haworth. 'Its aim is to control its members' minds. The victim of this mind control then becomes the victimiser of others, usually within a matter of days, and so there is an exponential growth.' According to CIC there are over 500 such groups in Britain and the problem is getting worse.

But is this a realistic picture? We have all heard stories about strange groups, like the Jonestown cult in Guyana where 913 people committed suicide in 1978; or Waco in Texas, where David Koresh led 87 people to their deaths in 1993; or the Heaven's Gate cult in California which committed mass suicide last year when its spaceship failed to show up. But surely such disturbed groups are few and far between?

'A cult is a cult is a cult', says Haworth. 'It doesn't matter if it is large or small, if it has 20 members, 20 000 members or 2 million members, or even what its beliefs are, necessarily. If it uses the methods I've described then it will be damaging to the individuals concerned.'

Haworth argues that it is the use of 'mind control techniques' which sets cults apart from 'legitimate groups'. According to CIC literature, however, mind control can involve anything from 'confession', 'guilt' and 'finger pointing' to 'financial commitment', 'imposing dress codes' and 'playing games'. By these criteria the (girl) Guides, the Catholic Church, the Freemasons and teenage fanclubs could all be considered cults.

These days it seems that any group which has firm beliefs and which demands a high level of commitment from its membership risks being denounced as a cult. Groups which assume that their beliefs are superior to others', that they are right and others are wrong, are seen as the biggest problem. This is why evangelical 'cults', which make a point of converting people to their way of thinking, are at the top of CIC's hit list.

The mood of the times means that a cranky group like CIC can now be taken very seriously. In public life today, empathy and understanding is in, conflict and controversy are out. The buzzwords are consensus, agreement and tolerance—and in such a climate any group which wants to argue with people to quit the middle ground is easily denounced as 'extremist'. So the 500-plus groups that CIC defines as cults include not just evangelical nutters, but also political organisations and Buddhist peace camps. The definition of what constitutes a cult has been broadened to cover groups guilty of nothing more than standing up for what they believe in.

Those who see cults as a big problem seem to conflate having strong beliefs with being 'indoctrinated' or subjected to 'brainwashing'. The notion of 'brainwashing' betrays a view of people as sponges who will unthinkingly soak up whatever information they are fed. According to Haworth the majority of those involved in groups that CIC defines as cults have been 'psychologically coerced' and have not made a rational decision.

But surely developing strong beliefs is more likely to involve engaging in arguments about the issues involved and making a conscious decision about whether you agree? Haworth is having none of that. 'People would not get involved in a cult if they knew it was a cult', he says. 'The decision-making process is the very thing that is eroded by the techniques I have described. There is no conscious decision being made.' CIC insists that anybody can be manipulated by a cult and turned into a zombie who will automatically toe the line.

'Take your magazine *Living Marxism*', says Haworth. Excuse me? 'If somebody wants to be a Marxist in a democratic society then that is their right. But if somebody goes along to a meeting of something described as the "local boy scouts", and they are bombarded with information, deprived of food and sleep, put in a tranced state, and the heating is cranked up, and they come out saying "I'm a Marxist", obviously they have not made a conscious decision.'

Wow. That does sound scary. But where do these bogus boy scout meetings and mind-bending groups exist, outside of the most fantastically paranoid imaginations? And where are all the people who would fall for such a trick in any case? When I suggest that most right-thinking adults would realise they were being conned and would make for the exit, Haworth argues that they are the ones most likely to fall victim to the cult's powers. 'Those who think they are immune are only going to make themselves even more vulnerable.'

It looks like CIC holds people in pretty low esteem, even questioning our ability to make rational decisions. There may be some manipulative groups out there, but most of us have the nous to tell them where to go. A couple of years ago Eamon, a student in London, got involved with the Jesus Army, a group about which CIC is 'extremely concerned'. After being 'bombarded with love and information' for a week Eamon realised they were a bunch of weirdos and left. When a couple of 'Jesus freaks' turned up at his house a week later he told them to 'fuck off', and never heard from them again. 'I just decided I didn't want in', says Eamon, 'and when I make my mind up there's no changing it'.

However manipulative a group might be, however charismatic the next self-styled messiah might appear, the fact is that people decide whether or not to join. There may have been some cases in America in the 1970s where cult members were given drugs and

electrotherapy, but all those new age, middle class adults who join Christian, Buddhist or therapeutic sects today do so because they want to. And who is CIC or anybody else to deny them the right to make that choice, however strongly we might disapprove of it?

The Cult Information Centre looks at the world as if it were an episode of *The X-Files*: full of strange and dangerous groups of powerful conspirators preying on weak and corruptible people. It is not surprising then that it should propose a solution borrowed from the *X-Files* t-shirt: 'Trust no-one.'

'Question people who are excessively or inappropriately friendly', advises CIC, 'and people with invitations to free meals where the objectives are not clearly stated'. Isn't Haworth worried about spreading mistrust? 'We don't want people to become so distrustful that they never communicate with fellow human beings again. It's a question of balance.'

CIC promotes this message to students at the beginning of the academic year in its pamphlet 'Cults on campus'. 'Intelligent. Idealistic. Well educated. Does this sound like you?' the pamphlet enquires. '*Beware!* Protect yourself! Why go away for a weekend with a stranger or a strange group?' Such is the fear of 'cults' that people are being advised to be wary of one another, even fresher students who are supposed to be making friends and taking some risks.

Who knows, not so long ago CIC itself might have been considered 'cultish': it has a charismatic leader, it is obsessive about its subject matter and it promotes a message of distrust about the world. But today CIC's arguments are in tune with the times. That tells us much about the society we live in: a society where fierce commitment and passionate beliefs are seen as extremism, where people are presumed to be incapable of standing up to cranks and of making rational judgements for themselves, and where the solution always seems to be to trust nobody. This strikes me as a far more dangerous message for the millennium than anything about spaceships or second comings. ●

A THIRD

As Tony Blair meets Bill Clinton for another conference

'I am the Third Way, the truth and the light', proclaims Harry Enfield in his new role as the Reverend Tony Blair, preaching from the New Britain Bible in the forthcoming BBC satire, *Service from St Albion's.* No doubt New Labour's sanctimoniousness richly deserves such lampooning. But Blair's attempt to characterise the New Labour project as an alternative to rampant free market capitalism on the one hand, and bureaucratic state socialism on the other, has been dismissed by historians and political pundits as well as being ridiculed by satirists. 'There is a Third Way', insisted the prime minister before the summer recess, in a response to critics of the 'neither New Right nor Old Left' theme that has recurred in his speeches since he became leader of the Labour Party (*Times*, 25 July 1998).

Some commentators see little new in Blair's approach, regarding it as a return to 'real old Labour'—not to the 'hard left' of the 1970s, but to the ethical socialism of Keir Hardie and the pragmatic social democracy of Clement Attlee. Indeed, in some of Blair's statements he explicitly declares his aspiration to revive the early traditions of Labourism. Other critics acknowledge that New Labour has changed, but regard the Third Way as a cover for the adoption, on an unprecedented scale, of policies—such as privatisation, cutting welfare and squeezing public sector pay levels—formerly associated with the Conservative Party. Still others dismiss the Third Way as typical New Labour PR froth, projecting a middle course between alternatives which no longer exist (if they ever did).

There is, of course, some truth in these characterisations. But the very comparison of New Labour with Old Labour—or with the Tories—tends to exaggerate elements of continuity. It inevitably underestimates the dramatic change in the nature of politics and government over the past decade, resulting from the end of the Cold War, the demise of class politics and the collapse of the old polarities of left and right. It is in this context that Blair's New Labour has tried to define a distinctive approach.

Perhaps the most important feature of the Third Way is its self-conscious repudiation of the past. Blair became leader of the Labour Party in 1994 at a moment when both the major political traditions of the postwar period, if not the twentieth century, had reached the point of exhaustion. Labour had lost four consecutive general elections and socialism was discredited, at home and abroad. Despite their successes in the 1980s, the Tories had lost the initiative, dumped Margaret Thatcher and, under John Major, appeared feeble, incompetent and sleazy.

In proclaiming New Labour and the doctrine of the Third Way, Blair sought to avoid taking any responsibility for all the failures of the Labour Party, in government and in opposition, over the past half century. Standing aloof from old party allegiances and rivalries, Blair could justify pragmatically adopting policies formerly identified as left wing or right wing.

In the period leading up to the general election the main function of the Third Way was to symbolise New Labour's distance from Old Labour. The showdown over Clause Four marked the final humiliation of the left (though, as recent controversies confirm, Blair still has to deal with minor irritations such as Ken Livingstone's campaign for mayor, the left slate for the national executive, not to mention Roy Hattersley sniping from the *Guardian*). Before the election, however, the politics of the Third Way meant that Blair heaped scorn on the left while expressing qualified approval of Margaret Thatcher.

Since New Labour took office the Third Way has come to assume a wider significance in the way the government is conducted. The quest for historical parallels is of little value here because of the unprecedented contraction of the political sphere over the past decade. The disappearance of class and ideological conflict from parliamentary politics means that the political process is reduced to technical and administrative measures and media manipulation—hence the enhanced role of think tanks and spindoctors.

Nor will a focus on the traditionally central features of government policy—in the spheres of finance, industry or international relations, for example—yield many insights into the distinctive character of the Third Way. New Labour seeks to define a new role for government at a time when politics has given up on any concern about the nature or direction of society. As Blair argues, the Third Way is 'based on values, not on outdated ideology'. Its starting point is the conviction that we should ⇨

Keeping the faith—in caution and prudence

WAY TO WHERE?

on the Third Way, it is time to face up to the novelty of the New Labour project, says Linda Ryan

PHOTO: DAVID COWLARD

⇦ all adjust to the diminished possibilities offered by a society in which far-reaching change for the better is no longer considered feasible. This is how Anthony Giddens, director of the London School of Economics and a key intellectual influence on New Labour, puts it:

'In a situation where change has long ceased to be all progress, if it ever was, and where progress has become eminently disputable, the preservation and renewal of tradition, as well as of environmental resources, take on a particular urgency.' (*Beyond Left and Right: the future of radical politics*, p49)

What are the values of the Third Way? In a characteristic posture, Blair appeals over the heads of the 'political cognoscenti' to the mass of 'non-political people', into whose hearts and minds Peter Mandelson's focus group techniques have given New Labour privileged insight. According to Blair the people of Middle England 'distrust heavy ideology', but want 'security and stability'; they 'want to refashion the bonds of community life' and, 'although they believe in the market economy, they do not believe that the only values that matter are those of the market place' (*Times*, 25 July 1998).

THE VALUES OF THE THIRD WAY REFLECT AND SHAPE **A PESSIMISTIC** AND **CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE** TO THE UNPREDICTABLE WORLD OF THE LATE NINETIES

Fortuitously, in their quest for order and tranquillity in a chaotic world, the decent people have been rewarded with a government which takes a 'cautious' view of the prospects for the national economy and is also committed to 'prudent' public expenditure limits. It must also be reassuring for them to discover that this is a government ready to make 'hard choices' (especially against soft targets) and which takes a robust view of the responsibilities of the individual in relation to health and welfare. The values of the Third Way reflect and shape a pessimistic and conservative response to the dynamic and unpredictable world of the late 1990s.

According to Michael Jacobs, another key New Labour figure and leading light in the revived Fabian Society, 'we live in a strongly individualised society which is falling apart'. For him, 'the fundamental principle' of the Third Way is 'to balance the autonomous demands of the individual with the need for social cohesion or "community"'. One issue which New Labour has kept to the fore of public attention—drugs—illustrates how the government's preoccupation with social disintegration results in the forceful promotion of the values of the Third Way.

The early appointment of former police chief Keith Hellawell as the government's 'drugs tsar' signalled New Labour's determination to make drugs a major issue. This was followed rapidly by the announcement of plans to extend drugs education in schools, down to infant level. Last month the government announced an extra £217 million to fund the largest ever expansion of drug prevention and treatment programmes, focussing in particular on women and teenagers.

Just as the drugs issue is an apt symbol of New Labour preoccupations, its anti-drug policy is symbolic of the moralistic and coercive dynamic behind the Third Way. The apparently widespread use of drugs by young people encompasses the hedonism of the rave/club scene and the self-destructiveness of the heroin subcultures. New Labour strongly disapproves of both as manifestations of a menacingly antisocial outlook. Underlying the drug debate, the widening scope of the concept of addiction expresses the sense of individual loss of control, which in turn reflects the apparent powerlessness of society in face of the criminal infrastructure of drug trafficking. (For New Labour's spindoctors the drugs problem has the added advantage of being unquantifiable: it thus offers great scope for the production and manipulation of dodgy statistics.)

Dramatising the issue of drugs—a service dutifully provided by the media in line with government policy—encourages public approval for an interventionist policy to deter demand and to curtail supply. More than a quarter of the recent government grant to the anti-drugs crusade is ear-marked for compulsory testing and treatment programmes to be imposed by the courts on drug users and alcoholics. Further funds have been allocated for 'voluntary' testing and treatment in prisons. In this climate we can expect pressures to extend drug testing to schools and workplaces, measures already widely in use in the USA.

The trend towards moralistic, intrusive and authoritarian policies, justified by (exaggerated) concerns about social cohesion, is evident in other important areas of government policy. It is particularly notable in relation to children (the Sure Start programme, David Blunkett's bedtime/homework guidelines) and in the new public health plans (which seek to regulate behaviour in schools, the workplace and the neighbourhood).

These policies illustrate an additional feature of the Third Way. The very novelty of New Labour initiatives necessitates the appointment of new personnel and the creation of new institutions to overcome the inertia of the established structures of central and local government. To emphasise the importance of its drugs policy, the government has created the new office filled by Keith Hellawell and prefers to implement the policy through a plethora of voluntary organisations, rather than through traditional channels. Health action zones, education action zones and employment action zones are the chosen vehicles for policy innovation in their respective areas. At higher levels of government, semi-detached special policy units, think tanks and quangos play an increasingly important role. Foreign minister Robin Cook's recent proposal to hive off some of the functions of the Foreign Office to a private think tank is yet another indication of this trend.

Accusations of 'cronyism' against Blair over the recent appointment of television executive Gus Macdonald as a Scottish minister miss the key point: the government needs to bring in loyal outsiders in the process of forging a new political class and a new machine to push through its Third Way programme. New Labour is happy to include within its top ranks former left wingers such as Macdonald, former industrialists such as Lord Simon or former patron of the Aids establishment Baroness Jay. It is also delighted to parade its list of glittering celebrity sponsors—Mick Hucknall, Lisa Stansfield, Melvyn Bragg—to underline New Labour's independence of the unions. New Labour is not only a new party, but a new type of party with a new type of programme and a new team to promote and implement it.

One of the most dangerous trends in society today is the way that the policies and practices associated with the Third Way compound New Labour's anti-democratic tendencies. Blair's contempt for both his own party and for parliament was strikingly exposed in the way he recalled the house for 24 hours in September to railroad through the anti-terrorism bill. Not surprisingly, this action provoked only muted protests from elder statesmen of all parties. The role of the vast ranks of Labour MPs is merely to vote through the legislation drawn up by a leadership over which they have virtually no influence—and to deal with the complaints of their constituents.

Commentators who are still stuck in the mindset of traditional party politics are still anticipating that the New Labour government is likely to run into difficulties as a result of a new recession or because of a crisis in its welfare reforms. The experience of the first 18 months of New Labour suggests that both are unlikely. The biggest reverse so far experienced by this government was over hunting, a question of 'values' rather than 'ideology'. Fortunately, such issues provide fertile terrain on which to challenge the authoritarian imperatives of the Third Way. •

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As Labour slumps in the Scottish polls, Allan Massie argues that it is paying the price for playing the nationalist (small n) card against the Tories

Pandering to Scottish self-pity

Coming up to the Scottish Labour Party's special conference a few weeks before the general election, Tony Blair was under some pressure. His decision to hold a referendum on the party's devolution proposals had gone down badly with those who thought a general election victory would be sufficient mandate to introduce a bill setting up a Scottish parliament. There was some dissatisfaction too with the degree of control being exerted from Millbank. Though a majority of Scottish MPs had supported Blair in the leadership election—in the run-up to which Gordon Brown had learned that he couldn't count on the votes of a majority of his Scottish colleagues if he ran against Blair—both Blair's Scottish credentials and his commitment to traditional Labour were being questioned.

So we had a public relations stroke. We suddenly learned of Tony's granny from Red Clydeside, a notable battleaxe who had campaigned on the issue of 'Arms for Spain' in the thirties. She was actually no blood-relation, since she and her husband had adopted Leo Blair, Tony's father, and there was no evidence that she had ever influenced the young Tony. But that didn't matter. She served her purpose: to suggest that Tony had roots deep in the Labour Party in Scotland. Not a lot has been heard of granny Blair since; nothing really.

Blair, it is said, goes down badly in Scotland. He doesn't have the rapport he has established with Middle England. Indeed, his appeal to Middle England is held against him by many, and when he tried to suggest that there was a Middle Scotland too (which there is), people shook their heads in indignant disbelief. So there are those who claim that he is a liability, not an asset, in Scotland; though, as a matter of fact, the opinion polls don't support this view. They still show him as more popular than the Labour Party.

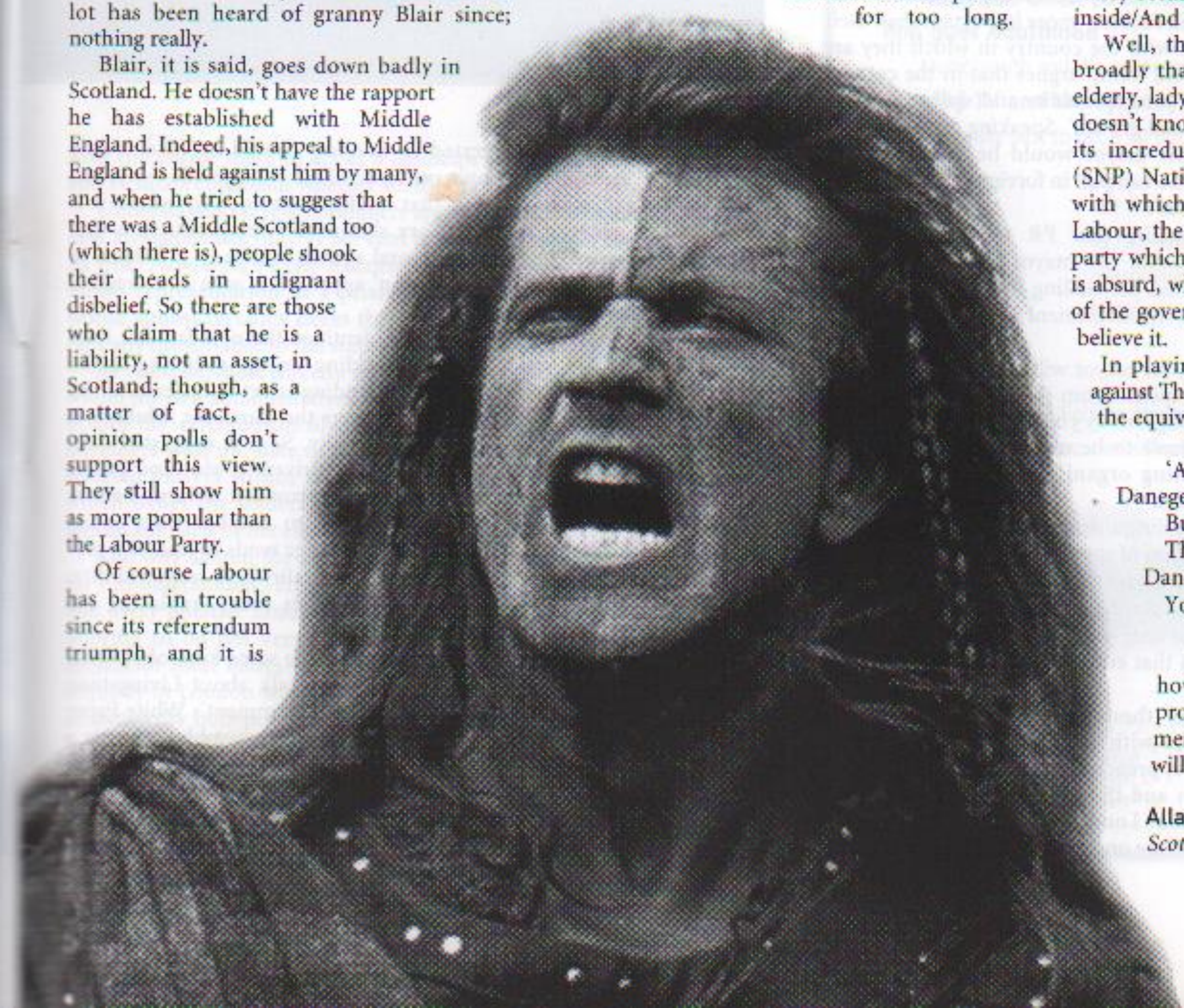
Of course Labour has been in trouble since its referendum triumph, and it is easy to lay this at the door of Blairism. Onslaught on single parents, imposition of tuition fees (from which students from Labour's working class support will be exempt)...these are dismissed as Tory policies such as Scotland rejects.

This is frankly rubbish.

That Labour has slumped in the polls is undeniable. But the reasons have little to do with a rejection of Tony Blair, however one may regret having to say so.

Certainly Labour seems to have lost some of its traditional support. Those who assumed that Blair's election would mean an immediate reversal of Tory policies have been disappointed, and may have drifted to the SNP where they can keep intact their illusion that cloud-cuckoo-land may be translated into reality.

But the real reason for the loss of support is different. It is first the series of scandals that have been exposed in Labour's west-central Scotland fiefdoms. Labour is no longer seen as a party defending the people against Tory harshness, but as a party which has itself been guilty for a long time of the abuse of power, and as a party mired in (actually small-scale) corruption. At a municipal level Labour now seems like a party that has been in power for too long. The Labour fiefdoms have developed all the faults characteristic of a one-party state. Now that the Tories have gone the spotlight has been turned on Labour, and an awful lot of voters don't like what it has revealed.



The second reason is equally potent, though in reality ridiculous. At least since Labour began to recover after the 1983 election, the party began to play a dangerous game in Scotland. Crying out that the Tories had no mandate, since they were a minority party in Scotland, Labour carelessly subverted the Union. It played the nationalist card in an attempt to embarrass the Tories and steal the SNP's ground. It succeeded in the first aim but not in the second.

The more Labour presented Scotland as a victim of Thatcherite aggression, the more it stoked the fires of nationalism. The party pandered to Scottish self-pity, and did not pause to consider that in doing so it was endangering its own position. Then, after winning the election, Labour compounded its folly by welcoming the support of the SNP in the referendum on devolution.

During that campaign, writing in opposition to devolution, I frequently quoted the old limerick about the young lady of Riga, who went, as you may recall, for a ride on a tiger. 'They returned from the ride/With the lady inside/And a smile on the face of the tiger.'

Well, the tiger is smiling broadly, more broadly than ever; and the young, or rather elderly, lady—the Scottish Labour Party—still doesn't know what has happened to it. So to its incredulous consternation, it finds the (SNP) Nationalists tarring it with the brush with which it so happily tarred the Tories. Labour, the Nationalists say, is a branch-office party which takes its ideas from London. This is absurd, when you consider the composition of the government; but some people seem to believe it.

In playing the nationalist (small n) card against Thatcher and Major, Labour was doing the equivalent of paying the Danegeld.

> 'And that is called paying the Danegeld;
> But we've proved it again and again,
> That if once you have paid him the Danegeld,
> You never get rid of the Dane.'

That is Labour's problem now: how to calm the nationalist spirit it provoked. I don't think wheeling out memories of Tony's Glasgow granny will do the trick. ●

Allan Massie is a columnist for the *Scotsman*

MAYOR MEAN

...and Mick Spencer is not happy about it

So the mayor is coming to town. More than 70 per cent of those Londoners who voted in the referendum on 7 May this year were in favour of the government's proposals for a Greater London Authority (GLA), a decision greeted by Tony Blair as 'a great boost for the capital'. The government will now create the post of mayor and a 25-member assembly, to start operating in the year 2000.

New Labour has hailed the London mayor as a figure who will 'make things happen', providing 'a strong voice, speaking up for the whole of London'. Others, harking back to the 'good old days' of the Greater London Council (GLC) under 'Red' Ken Livingstone, have suggested that the GLA and the mayor's office could provide a much-needed democratic base of political opposition to the Blair regime. Dream on.

Despite the trappings of power, the mayor will have little real clout. The mayor's office has been designed as a cross between a technical budget administrator and a PR agent, with whoever is elected acting as little more than a frontman for city financiers.

Apart from bringing business into London, the mayor's job is to keep political debate out of the capital's affairs. The new assembly, like its relatives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, has been given an explicit brief by central government to institutionalise 'consensus politics' and cross-party cooperation, at the expense of policy arguments and 'adversarial politics'.

The mayor's primary task will be to act as an advocate for London as a business location. This is seen by some influential opinion formers as the 'appropriate' form of governance for today's world cities. Stephen Hadley and Michelle Harrison at the Henley Centre argue that the relation of world cities to each other will become 'more important than their economic and social relationships with the country in which they are located', while the *Observer*'s Arnold Kemp argues that in the competition between global cities 'a mayor's personality and skills can make the difference between stagnation and growth'. Speaking at the London Guildhall Tony Blair said that the mayor would be 'an important national and international figure who can pull in foreign investment and organise projects like an Olympic bid'.

All this emphasis on personality and PR tells us, as Andy McSmith noted in the *Observer*, that the mayor will be a kind of 'super sales-rep'. The emphasis is on persuading footloose companies to operate in London, rather than on investment in the generation of new wealth.

Behind the PR image, however, the mayor will have little or no control over how local resources are spent. From the outset the GLA will control an impressive-sounding budget of £3.3 billion. But most of this is already tightly allocated. It will have to be used to meet the already determined annual costs of existing organisations which will soon become the responsibility of the GLA.

In practice Whitehall will not relinquish responsibility over crucial decisions affecting London. Allocation of spending programmes will still be made centrally, as will decisions about policy priorities, imperatives about how the cash will be spent and judgements about the results that are expected. No wonder the initial staff with which the assembly has to 'run' London will be smaller than that employed by London Weekend Television.

The elevation of the city over the nation, and the lack of real decision-making power that goes with it, provides a rationale for adopting an extremely parochial approach to policymaking. For some time the Corporation of London and the inward investment agency London First have pointed out that London generates more income than is ploughed back into expenditure on its development. They believe

that profits and taxes generated in London should be held locally and used to deal with London's problems. This is laughable—it is just as well for the City of London that wealth does not stay where it is generated, as most of its profits are skimmed from production that takes place overseas. But as the mayoral agenda is already so limited in vision, this kind of 'Village of London' approach is seen as a credible proposition.

A MORI opinion poll in May 1998 identified the now familiar local priorities for the London mayor: 'tackling crime, reducing traffic levels, improving the health service and ending street homelessness.' In the absence of new resources and real powers the search for solutions is also directed to what can be achieved locally. So it is suggested that, under the mayor and assembly, taxing car drivers could fund public transport; licensing laws could be relaxed provided citizens behave responsibly; communities should organise to combat their social exclusion. The absence of scope for wider change tends to lead to a preoccupation with questions of individual morality and responsibility. These have become defining issues in politics today, replacing the grander visions for classes and nations.

As for the notion that the mayor will provide some kind of political voice for the people of London—fuelled by talk about Livingstone standing as a rebel candidate—forget it. The government's White Paper spells it out: 'We shall require the mayor and the assembly to create a consensual rather than an adversarial relationship.' As Andy McSmith points out, this will mark 'another step in Tony Blair's triumphal crusade for confrontation-free politics'. A key word in London affairs today is 'partnership'—between the government, business and the people,

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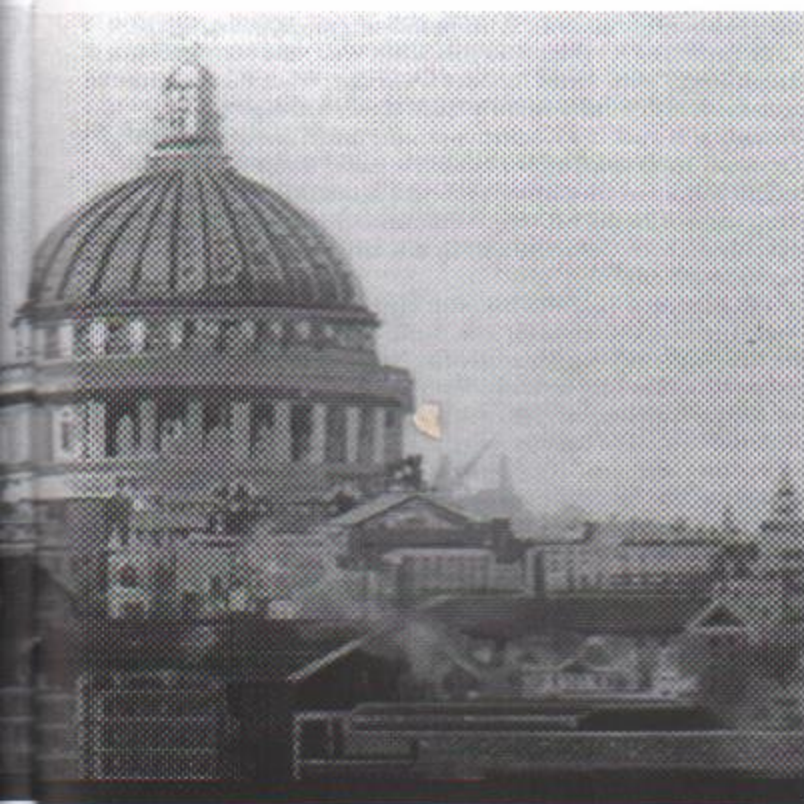

with the mayor there to act as a mediator whose job is to stifle debate and facilitate consensus whether we like it or not.

Understandably, few Londoners appear inspired or excited about the new arrangements; only 33 per cent bothered to vote in the referendum. As BBC *Newsnight*'s Peter Kellner pointed out, 'if this were a ballot for union representation in a private company, then Labour's new law would almost certainly deem the workforce too unenthusiastic to warrant any disturbance to the status quo'.

By contrast, those directly involved are feverishly jostling for position within the new administrative arrangements. The debate run by *Newsnight* before the referendum filled the Guildhall, as the audience rubbed shoulders with the slate of prospective candidates for mayor. The self-selected players within these circles are buzzing with an excitement which belies the underlying absence of a dynamic relationship with significant parts of the electorate.

And why should the rest of us be inspired by the new arrangements for running London? The limited scope of the new mayor's office means that every putative candidate from Jeffrey Archer to Ken Livingstone is offering to do not very much about more or less the same narrow agenda of local issues—transport, health, crime, etc. Ask just about anybody in London what they would do and they will say the same. As an avowedly non-political figure, with the important qualification of being aloof from any previous involvement in the messy business of democratic politics, Richard Branson looks best suited (sorry, sweatered) for the job of London's new PR man.

For all the difference it seems likely to make, you might just as well add Dick Whittington's cat to the list of candidates. •

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Caffeine ARTSPAPER

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HOW 'FEMINISED' IS THE MOTHER OF PARLIAMENTS NOW?

Sally Millard asked some New Labour women MPs from the class of '97

How much has parliament been transformed since the election of 120 women MPs last May, 101 of them New Labour? When I talked to some of these New Labour women before the election, their expectations were high. They felt that more women in parliament would bring women's issues to the fore and create a sea change in the way that politics itself was conducted. As Dari Taylor, now MP for Stockton South, put it, more women would bring 'a softer and more feminised parliament'.

But has the New Labour government succeeded in creating a feminised parliament or has it, as Helen Wilkinson recently charged, simply replaced 'old Labour's macho labourist culture' with a 'subtler, covert and insidious laddishness' (*New Statesman*, 7 August 1998)? The failure to create a cabinet post of minister for women is one oft-sited example of New Labour's failure to take women seriously; and to add insult to injury parliament still has its shooting range, but no crèche.

Dr Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes South West) and Margaret Moran (Luton South) were elected Labour MPs in 1997. When they first entered parliament, both women found it much as they had expected. 'Parliament is stuck in a nineteenth-century model', says Dr Starkey. 'Obviously that's much more a masculine model than a feminine one because women weren't active in nineteenth-century public life. So the whole ethos of the place is very confrontational and extremely elitist and public school. Certainly when we first arrived, that was incredibly striking.'

The attitude of male MPs has often been criticised by New Labour women. Jane Griffiths, MP for Reading East, made the headlines when she complained of being interrupted by 'mocking laughter' and rude gestures from the Tory benches when she made her maiden speech. For Margaret Moran, however, this problem is less important than it is made out to be. 'The reaction is like public school boys giggling at the back of the classroom, "It's a woman!". But they can soon be put in their place.' She feels that on the whole, 'women are much more concerned about policy and the way that policy is dealt with, than about a few unwelcome comments from the boys'. For Margaret Moran, getting more women into parliament 'is not just about how the House behaves, it's about the way we can make government much more open and accessible to people more generally'.

Moran has a point. As I argued back in June last year, the demand to feminise parliament codifies a fundamental transformation of politics. The trivial debates about men behaving badly were never really what was at stake in this process. Nor, unfortunately, was the desire to put women's needs first of more than marginal significance to the New Labour machine (witness the government's attitude towards single mothers).

The process known as 'feminisation' actually has little or nothing to do with women or sexual equality at all. It is more about New Labour's transformation of parliamentary politics through the imposition of a new etiquette. The feminisation lobby has provided the language and values to allow this to happen.

The challenge that feminisation poses is formulated through the language of 'openness', 'accessibility' and 'consensus', espoused by New Labour women MPs with Tony Blair at the helm. As Helen Wilkinson reminds us, it was Blair who promised 'New Labour would be "purer than pure", and that the style of politics he would foster would be open, honest, engaged, communicative, listening and empathetic'. Wilkinson feels that Blair has failed to deliver what he promised.

In fact a less confrontational, more 'open' and 'listening' government is what we have got. But this should not be confused with a more democratic one.

Dr Phyllis Starkey is on the House of Commons' Modernisation Committee, set up to look at ways to make parliament more 'user-friendly'. She described the changes she feels will create more opportunities for consensus, minimising the potential for old-fashioned confrontation: 'For example, changes in the way things are discussed in committees. Allowing the opposition to do the theatrical bit of opposing the basis of the bill, but then having lost the argument, which they will because they are in a minority, to make constructive criticisms about the way legislation can be improved, without it then being implied that they are supporting the legislation.'

The idea of William Hague's Tories putting forward any coherent critique of government policy, constructive or otherwise, has become something of a joke. But what is being implied today is that the notion

of politics as a public clash of competing visions should be ruled out as a matter of principle. Consensual debate centred on committees is now promoted as a more appropriate way to decide policy than the aggressive, confrontational style of parliamentary debate which Dr Starkey derides as 'theatrical'.

Of course, even the most ardent proponents of consensus recognise that without any difference of opinions, politics is rendered meaningless. 'My personal feeling is that there is a place for the confrontational debates over big issues of policy', says Dr Starkey. 'What I have a problem with is there not being room for the more consensual debates which would be more appropriate for a lot of the business that parliament does. I want there to be a better mix.'

Whatever Dr Starkey's personal feelings on the matter, by privileging consensus over argument, the rules on what is acceptable political practice have already been rewritten in a way that can only limit the scope for public debate. The principle of democratic accountability is also up for grabs in the feminisation process.

As parliament increasingly acts as a rubber stamp for decisions made elsewhere, the transition from talking shop to non-talking shop is well underway. There is perhaps no better illustration of this than the development of New Labour's 'women's juries'. Presented as evidence of a more 'engaged' and 'communicative' approach to politics, they actually push policymaking further out of the democratic arena.

'Throughout the United Kingdom', Harriet Harman told parliament in February, 'we are committed to building a new bond of trust between women and government, to replace cynicism and detachment by developing and sustaining a genuine dialogue with women, so that women's many voices are heard and heeded'. 'The jury model', said Harman, 'is intended to improve and enrich our democratic practice'. The result is the opposite.

Women's juries are briefed to approve a policy before its submission to government. This, Harman explained, is bringing women's perspectives 'into all work across all departments, building it into the routine mechanisms of policymaking, not as an add-on, but as an essential part of the policy process'. But who are these women? One thing is certain, they are not elected by us, and not accountable to us, so how do we know whether our 'many voices' are being 'heard and heeded'?

Under the guise of greater 'participation' by 'the People', women's juries, along with New Labour's other citizens' juries, help to undermine any real democratic accountability. They bestow a bogus popular moral authority on the policies which the cabinet decrees parliament must support. That they do so under the pretence of making the democratic process more accessible to women is both underhand and insulting.

Prior to the election, the fiercest criticisms of macho behaviour in the House were reserved for prime minister's Question Time, seen as an opportunity for backbiting and schoolboyish snide remarks. One of Blair's first acts in government was to reform Question Time, changing it from a twice weekly to a weekly affair and making it harder for MPs to spring surprise questions on ministers. This has not only made Question Time a more anodyne affair, it has conveniently allowed Blair to reduce his number of visits to the House. Between the general election and this summer's recess, he had voted in only 14 of 325 divisions in the Commons (*Daily Telegraph*, 31 July 1998).

Such is Blair's contempt for parliament, that he prefers to address his remarks directly 'to the People'. His first 'state of the nation' address was given in true presidential style from the lawn of Number 10, where awkward questions from MPs could be avoided. Even so, wanting to be kept 'in touch' with people's opinions, he went to Worcester, his favourite constituency, so that he could 'listen' to the questions of a few handpicked citizens.

This is what the process described as feminisation is really all about. Perhaps the most galling aspect is the apparent willingness of New Labour women to see these changes as a consequence of the positive impact they have made on parliament. As Margaret Moran says, 'Women do politics in a different way, we think more strategically and tactically, and go about things more quietly. We are better at finding ways of communicating to people, going out and about and doing surveys to find out what people want'. New Labour women have become the most effective PR agents for Blair's Third Way. In so doing they have helped to legitimise a process that leaves the majority of us even more excluded from debate and influence. ●

DR MICHAEL FITZPATRICK

Radical remedies

Skirmishes between the government and the medical profession in recent months—over merit awards for consultants and the way that part-time NHS contracts allow disproportionate time for private practice—suggest that New Labour has learned some useful lessons from its Conservative predecessors.

Kenneth Clarke, Mrs Thatcher's most successful health secretary, pursued two principles to considerable effect (see *Five Giants: a biography of the welfare state*, Nicholas Timmins, 1994). In his dealings with the British Medical Association (BMA) and other leading medical bodies, he adopted a combative approach, always seeking to 'get his retaliation in first'. Furthermore, in searching for ammunition to use against medical vested interests, he turned to the radical left-wing manifestos of the past, which provided a valuable source of anti-professional tactics.

Anticipating medical resistance to the 1989 White Paper 'Working for patients' that launched the internal market, Clarke recognised that 'the one thing we had to do was to knock the BMA off its pedestal'. To be precise, 'we had to pull them into the mud with us and make it clear that this was just another trade union, actually one of the nastiest I had ever dealt with, and battle it out'. At a dinner of the Royal College of General Practitioners, Clarke complained provocatively about doctors 'feeling nervously for their wallets every time I mention the word reform'.

In addition to mud-wrestling over the introduction of the internal market into the health service, the Conservative government also presided over the imposition of the new contract for GPs in 1990 (payment by rates of immunisation, smears and other screening and health checks) and the 'Health of the nation' White Paper in 1991 (the crusade against the evils of smoking, drinking, cholesterol and sex). These measures amounted to the wholesale implementation of the long-standing demands of the radical public health movement for the elevation of prevention over cure, primary healthcare over the hospital sector, the promotion of health rather than the treatment of disease. While a few radicals grumbled that the government's emphasis on changing lifestyle was excessively individualistic and victim-blaming, this approach was generally popular and the government could easily portray any critics—especially from the medical establishment—as old reactionaries.

New Labour health minister Frank Dobson has evidently found Clarke's approach something of a model. Under pressure to meet his self-proclaimed waiting list targets, he has not only resorted to the old Tory tricks of fiddling the official figures, he has felt the need to go on the offensive against the doctors—and, as a survivor of the days of Old Labour himself, he is no doubt more familiar with the critiques of the old left.

In August Dobson promised to review the system through which the NHS rewards consultants with substantial salary bonuses, the amounts decided by an elite medical clique, meeting in secret, according to secret criteria. No sooner had this pledge been made than Polly Toynbee, a journalist with close links to New Labour, launched a major polemic against part-time consultants who are discovered to be doing private practice when they should be working for the NHS ('Will New Labour end private medical practice of public time?', *Guardian*, 31 August 1998), blaming them for the persistence of waiting lists.

Both merit awards and part-time contracts are a legacy of the negotiations in the 1940s between Nye Bevan and the leaders of the medical profession over the introduction of the NHS. Bevan's historic comment was that he 'stuffed their mouths with gold' to buy off their resistance to the NHS. Both are undoubtedly outrageous scams, and both have been the targets of left-wing denunciations from the moment of their introduction.

The key questions here are—why now and who benefits? Though waiting lists remain an embarrassment to the government, it has wider objectives: to shift the focus of healthcare from hospital to the community and to extend the machinery of external regulation over the medical profession as a whole. These objectives are helped by the campaign against merit awards and part-time contracts, which implies that doctors are at best self-serving and at worst corrupt. While a few doctors may lose their bonuses and perks, patients are unlikely to benefit: as an intensive care consultant explained in a letter to the Guardian, the key factor limiting operating lists (and hence sustaining waiting lists) is not a lack of medical time, but shortages of hospital staff at all levels because of deteriorating standards of pay and conditions (4 September 1998). The only beneficiaries will be the officials drafted in to monitor medical activity—and the government.

The takeover of once-radical measures and postures and their repackaging as part of the new programme of government has become a central feature in health as in other areas of government policy. One of the last measures introduced by the outgoing Conservative government was a number of schemes within which GPs worked as salaried employees, rather than as self-employed contractors (another concession made by Bevan to the BMA in deference to its small shopkeeping traditions). The proposal for a fully salaried health service was first made by the Liverpool doctor Benjamin Moore in 1910, and codified in the programme of the State Medical Service Association he founded in 1912 (this became the Socialist Medical Association in 1930, and the Socialist Health Association in the 1970s). It has been a central theme in the campaigns of the left-wing Medical Practitioners' Union from its foundation in 1914 up to today.

Given that the recent White Paper on NHS reform insists repeatedly that the government has no intention of changing GPs' contractual status, it is widely expected that it will encourage the spread of payment by salary as part of the wider drive to impose more direct managerial control over doctors.

It is striking that, long after its demise as a significant force in society, the old left lives on in the form of its reappropriated initiatives. Though it is not surprising that New Labour should try to turn the old left to its advantage, it is still difficult to see what socialist virtue it ever saw in causes like the campaign to join the salariat. •

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POISONOUS DUMMIES

The scares over 'toxic' toys and toys in sweets and cereals confirm that, post-BSE, food regulation has become a Euro obsession. Bill Durodié reports

Environmentalist and consumer protection groups have been lobbying the European Commission for a total ban on the use of phthalates (organic compounds used to soften PVC) in plastic items liable to be placed in a child's mouth—notably numerous toys, teething dummies, and bathtime rubber ducks. When in July the Commission decided instead simply to invite member states to check products against new safety margins proposed by its Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment (CSTEE), there were complaints about Brussels going soft on the dangers of chewy PVC.

The lobbyists need not worry. The outcome will be much the same as a formal ban. In the cautious climate which now exists in the scientific and business worlds, no member state, manufacturer or retailer will sensibly choose to go against the new recommendation.

The BSE debacle has prompted a sea change in the way the Commission examines all issues concerning safety. Shocked into action by the biggest food and health panic of recent times, hardly a single speech by president Jacques Santer since has failed to refer to the need for new measures. While the jury is still out in determining possible links between bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and its transmission to humans in the form of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (nvCJD), the Commission's public health and consumer protection services have been reorganised accordingly anyway. These developments, allowing for faster and tougher responses to perceived problems, food-related or otherwise, will have far-reaching implications long after the last suspect beef herd is destroyed.

The potential for action in fields relating to human health protection, consumer protection and the environment was already contained within articles in the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty). The BSE crisis then acted as a catalyst for a new article within the Amsterdam Treaty last year, further expanding the Commission's remit. The consumer policy directorate at the Commission, only created in 1995, has been expanded to take on health protection matters; its staff has recently been tripled.

A Multidisciplinary Scientific Committee set up in 1996 to deal with BSE was replaced in June 1997 by a Scientific Steering Committee with a far broader mandate, and 131 leading European scientists (from over 1000 who applied) coopted to sit on its various subcommittees. At the same time a series of key documents were produced laying down the new hard line on consumer health and food safety matters.

Notably, the Commission established a Rapid Alert System and Risk Assessment Unit, and overtly adopted the 'precautionary principle' as the basis of its approach to all matters. The new reports even suggested that 'there may be demands...to go further in the area of the health protection measures than the scientific evidence suggests is necessary', referring to the new systems variously as 'farm to fork', 'plough to plate', 'stable to table', or any other alliterated or rhyming A-Z that could indicate how all-encompassing the new measures are intended to be. When the Commission issued its 'Green Paper on the general principles of food law in the European Union', the Consumer Committee's own response proposed applying the precautionary principle 'even where there is no known scientific uncertainty'.

However, far from heralding a new era of direct legislatory interference from Brussels, it would appear that the Commission has grown more circumspect in the application of its new powers. Lacking the nerve to stick its finger into every pie, the Commission increasingly prefers to let others determine the agenda. As *Financial Times* columnist Lionel Barber recently observed, 'today, Brussels is using peer pressure and voluntary codes of conduct to encourage minimum standards of compliance'.

The new panic-inspired methods of regulating the food industry are well illustrated by the Committee on Product Safety Emergencies, which led the initial investigation into phthalates. In 1997 this body had also investigated the risks associated with mixing unwrapped non-food articles with food products, typically toys in chocolate eggs, crisps and cereal packets. Although it did not result in a ban, the committee

declared a 'serious and immediate risk to health' from the outset. EU member states were required to review their existing procedures, and reams of scientific and statistical documents were produced. The result was to place manufacturers and retailers on the defensive, regardless of the quality of the evidence.

The panic had been triggered by two (non-fatal) incidents involving children choking on parts of toys contained in food, after which Belgium banned such products by royal decree in May 1997. But choking fatalities are fortunately rare, and when they do occur it is not usually toys that children choke on. Research commissioned by the UK Department for Trade and Industry in 1996 showed that 84 per cent of cases related to food products themselves. Among the non-food items on which children choke, coins form the largest single category. Cotton wool, conkers, stones, silver foil, tissue paper, even a child's dummy and half a penicillin tablet have proved fatal. Very few incidents have ever involved toys.

The world is full of small objects which could hypothetically cause death by choking. Legislating on the matter would prove futile as well as being irrational. But in the current climate of self-restraint, the food industry has proved willing to take action anyway, while consumer groups continue to lobby for even tighter restrictions, such as already exist in the USA. Last October, Nestlé withdrew its magic chocolate ball containing Disney characters from sale in America, even before any ruling as to whether it satisfied the stringent US food and drug regulations.

The research into phthalate toxicity, of which almost 100 papers were presented to the committee, also makes a far from convincing case for restriction. Experiments on rats to determine the 'no observed adverse effect level' (NOAEL) produce variations as great as three orders of magnitude. Nevertheless, true to the precautionary approach, the worst results are then multiplied by a further uncertainty factor of 100 to determine acceptable limits for humans.

In April and June this year the CSTEE issued an opinion paper and 'answers to questions' on phthalate 'migration' from toys and dummies. Both indicate human insensitivity to the hepatic peroxisome proliferation induced by feeding phthalates to rodents in determining the NOAEL, and taken to be an indicator of potential carcinogenic effects. While more sensitive changes, such as increased liver or kidney weights, are now taken as the critical endpoints, there is no evidence as to the applicability of such results to humans. Reproductive abnormalities, highlighted by campaigners against the products, do not appear in rodents at doses any less than 10 times the NOAEL.

The CSTEE documents also accept that 'the intake from toys may not be the major source', indicating that for at least one such compound, food products give us almost 90 per cent of our daily dosage. A recent UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food information sheet indicated that rather than being caused by plastic containers and packaging, this was more likely to be due to general environmental conditions. Indoor air provided most of the remaining 10 per cent, arising from the significant number of plastic objects and surfaces in our homes.

Due to the lack of uniformity in methodologies used to assess the oral leakage of phthalates from PVC, the Commission and toy industry alike are waiting on the results of a Dutch experiment by adult human volunteers, to revise their official safety margins. This new survey was expected to be considered by the CSTEE at its meeting in September. However, even if significant dispersal is found to occur through salivary contact, the case as to whether phthalates in such doses are detrimental to health would remain to be proven.

It is probable though that no amount of experimentation will determine the outcome of these issues. The Consumer Committee has already declared that even when scientific evidence is available 'too great an emphasis on this may be undesirable from the consumer's point of view'. Indeed the first biannual BSE follow-up report, communicated to the European Parliament in May 1998, went so far as to raise 'the possibility of taking into account minority scientific views'—in other words, of accepting the worst-case scenario regardless of what most scientists say.

When hard facts are replaced by the precautionary principle, the only possible outcome is to adopt the lowest common denominator. As soon as one region, manufacturer or retailer decides to err on the side of safety, then all others will inevitably have to follow. Referring to the lack of any proof that a danger exists, one supermarket chain in Europe has indicated that 'we choose to give our customers the benefit of this doubt'. While consumers now wait for further such doubts to 'benefit' from, it is already clear that the real poisonous dummies in this scenario are not necessarily the plastic teethers which so many are currently seeking to ban. •

Bill Durodié is director of the independent research group Objective Europe

FUTURES

The panic over low-level radiation is hampering medical diagnosis and treatment, reports Dr David Hall

WHO'S AFRAID OF RADIATION?

The threat posed by radiation is rarely out of the news. The government's decision to transport five kilograms of uranium from a reactor in Georgia to Scotland led to protests by boiler-suited Greenpeace supporters in Downing Street and mass media coverage. Articles about leukaemia clusters in areas near to nuclear power stations pepper both the scientific and popular press. And, 12 years on, the after-effects of Chernobyl are still being debated.

Two themes stand out. The first is that, testing of atomic bombs by India and Pakistan aside, the main concern is over the long-term, even intergenerational effects of prolonged exposure to relatively low doses of radiation rather than the immediate destructive effects of nuclear conflict. The second is the tendency to fear the worst. For example, the available scientific evidence suggests that radiation exposure is not responsible for leukaemia clusters (GJ Draper et al, *British Medical Journal*, 8 November 1997). However, as a recent MORI poll found, 83 per cent of people trust scientists from green groups, whereas only 47 per cent trust government scientists; so radiation risks tend to be played up (*New Scientist*, 18 April 1998).

One consequence of this excessive fear of radiation is that an enormous amount of money is spent on radiation protection. Preventing one death at Sellafield by radiation-protection measures during normal use has been calculated to cost £30 million ('Economic valuation of statistical life from safety assessment', D Fernandes-Russell et al, University of East Anglia, 1988). But there are other consequences, and at this point I should declare a personal interest.

I am a scientist working in the NHS, using radioactive materials. Radiation is widely used in hospitals today for both diagnosis and treatment. All of us have x-rays at one time or another, and we are familiar with the detail that can routinely be seen within our bodies. In addition nearly one in 10 of us will have radiotherapy for cancer at some time in our lives. Radioactive materials are also used in a medical context; for example, as tracers to diagnose the spread of cancer, or in larger doses to treat overactive thyroids.

In fact modern medicine could not do without radiation, in one form or another. So while I would certainly question whether £30 million to avoid the possibility of one death is money well spent, I am more concerned about how doom-laden proclamations concerning radiation are influencing both public attitudes and medical use. In rushing to protect patients from extremely unlikely effects we might compromise everyday diagnosis and treatment.

What are the risks? The radiation doses received in medical tests are fairly low and very unlikely to be dangerous. However, since many people receive these low doses it is important that their effects are well understood. The starting point for an examination of the issue is the fact that low-dose effects, of any kind, are hard to study. If only a small number of people suffer from a disease any variation, whether chance or otherwise, can seem large; so an increase in local leukaemia cases from just 10 to 15 in a year can be headlined as 'Child cancer soars by 50 per cent'. There are variations from area to area in the incidence of all sorts of rare diseases, and connecting these to any cause is fraught with difficulty. However, if there is any hint of exposure to radiation, it tends to be assumed that this is the cause of the increase, unless it can be proved otherwise. If the actual levels of radiation detected are then shown to be too small to cause an effect, it is easy to conclude that the risk of any particular dose has been underestimated.

So where do the official risk estimates come from? They are largely derived from studies of the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs. But even here it is hard to come to clear-cut conclusions, since of the 100 000 atomic bomb survivors, '20 000 are going to die of cancer anyway. We are looking at the difference between 20 000 and 20 400' (Eric J Hall from the Centre for Radiological Research at Columbia University, quoted in the *Washington Post*, 14 April 1990).

People who have received large radiation doses have measurable increases in rates of cancer, but smaller dose effects are much harder to measure, since the rates of cancer are close to normal. The simplest way then to estimate the risk of small doses is to assume that the risk is proportional to the dose, all the way down to zero. This is called the Linear No Threshold model (LNT) and is quite influential.

Given that we are all exposed to radiation from natural sources, small additional amounts from man-made sources should not be much of a cause for concern. Many environmentalists question this, and argue that the insidious effects of long-term exposure to artificial radiation have been underestimated. But we should also consider the other possibility: that the LNT model overestimates the problem.

The Hiroshima and Nagasaki data refers to individuals who received a radiation dose at a relatively high rate, which might be expected to overwhelm the body's defences. Perhaps a lower dose, experienced over a longer time span, might not overwhelm the defences and so would have little or no effect—even if the cumulative dose received were the same. Consider this analogy. Taking one aspirin a day for a month to protect from heart disease has no ill effects; taking 30 at one go is a different matter.

The effects of low dose and low dose-rate radiation have been considered in several large-scale studies, some of which have even suggested a health *benefit* from low-dose radiation. For example, a Canadian study of breast cancer rates in 32 000 women who received chest x-ray fluoroscopy for tuberculosis found that small doses actually *decreased* the rate of breast cancer compared with no dose, followed by an increase at higher doses. Another study, comparing lung cancer rates with average radon concentrations across 1729 US counties, covering 90 per cent of the population, found a reduction in the rate of lung cancer proportional to rising dose (*New Scientist*, 14 March 1998).

The full effects of radiation are still imperfectly understood, but should become clearer with a better understanding of the effects of radiation on DNA. The idea of genomic instability, in which the effects of radiation are propagated to descendants, and the idea that DNA repair mechanisms are stimulated by low-level radiation (which is used to explain the counterintuitive results given above), are but two ideas that remain to be properly explored.

Where does this leave us in relation to the medical uses of radiation? Generally we should be sceptical of those who emphasise risks: if the results we have in hand are even partly right it seems unlikely that the risks from low-level radiation have been underestimated. From the point of view of the individual patient it is worth pointing out that receiving radiation for medical diagnosis or therapy is a good risk, one in which you risk 'little for the chance of much', as Samuel Johnson put it in the eighteenth century. I am worried that some people are in danger of forgetting this today, and of separating risk from benefit.

It is often assumed by clinicians that it is preferable to use a test that does not involve ionising radiation, such as ultrasound or magnetic resonance imaging, and that if radiation is used the smallest possible dose should be employed. However, evidence suggests that in some cases we should increase rather than reduce the amounts of radiation used.

An editorial in the *European Journal of Nuclear Medicine* in February 1997 estimated that, on risk-benefit grounds, the amount of radioactivity used in many common tests should be increased by 10 to 20 times in order to improve diagnosis. If somebody already has a severe condition the benefit of learning more now must outweigh any possible small risk some years down the line. The rules under which radiation is given do not take this difference into account—they effectively treat everybody as if they were perfectly healthy and unlikely to gain much benefit from the test.

In healthcare, as in other areas of life, it is often necessary to take risks—good risks—in order to gain any benefit. With regulators adopting a precautionary approach, and patients showing a worrying trend towards litigation over the side-effects of treatments that have saved their lives, this is a message that needs to be put across if both patients and doctors are to avoid becoming victims of the fear of radiation. ●

PATRICK THE PERVERSE

The weird world of Patrick Hughes held James Heartfield spellbound

Signs of the times

The Bucharest palaces of the late Nicolae Ceauşescu are to be opened up to tourists, complete with staff, for those wishing to spend £2500 to be a 'dictator for a day'

'Just as Diana had to sit on her own outside the Taj Mahal, I sat on my own outside the Queensgate centre, greeting the constituents. What should have been the happiest day of my life was the most miserable'
Peterborough MP Helen Brinton describes one of the 'many parallels' between herself and the Princess of Wales

Patrick Hughes' *Perverspective* at Flowers East is the most arresting and extraordinary art on show in London or anywhere else. His perverse perspectives turn the world inside out, throw you into reverse, and move in a way they just should not. One Glaswegian friend described walking forwards and backwards past the Hughes in the Gallery of Modern Art there and laughing out loud each time the unexpected spasm of space turned the wrong way again. After three or four trips he had collected a whole train of compatriots, all giggling away. 'Perhaps it is a video installation?' somebody asked, unable to understand the mechanics of this perverse perspective. But there are no moving parts apart from you.

All two-dimensional rendering of perspective is a form of illusion. Hughes explains to me: the rows of houses, books or soldiers that recede towards the vanishing point in a conventional perspective are not really receding, they are just getting smaller. Your mind tells you that further away is smaller and so you accept the illusion of three-dimensional depth in a two-dimensional space.

Hughes perverts the illusion of perspective yet further. His perverse perspectives appear to be two-dimensional illusions of perspective, like any painting. Because the medium is perspective, the subject matter is often buildings, lines of trees or bookshelves—anything with enough detail to feed the eye, and tempt it to

enough detail to feed the eye, and tempt it to believe that it is looking at normal space, or at the two-dimensional illusion of space. But you only have to move to see the rules of perception turned inside out. Bob to the left, and what you see changes. Of course it does, you say: move your head and a different angle is revealed. But with a perverse perspective when you bob to the left, what is revealed is the view from the right. Lean further left, and all the information pouring into your eyes says you are moving yet further to the right. Go right, and suddenly you feel yourself move to the left. In Hughes' exhibitions you will be struck by people rocking to and fro, mesmerised, or walking backwards and forwards, unsteadily.

Like the two-dimensional rendering of three-dimensional space, the perverspectives are an illusion. But they are not two-dimensional. If you look sideways on, you can see that they are in fact great pyramids and ziggurats of wood, projecting out from the walls, with lines converging towards single points. The pictures they bear tell you, in the language of the two-dimensional illusion of three-dimensional space, that these points are the vanishing point, and that the lines are receding towards it. But this is perspective inside out. Where the two-dimensional illusion of a vanishing point rests somewhere in the middle of the page, trying to trick you into seeing it recede, a Hughes vanishing point projects forward, so that it is closer to you than anything else. You see it further away, just as you see the vanishing point of two-dimensional rendering of three-dimensional space further away. But actually, it is the closest thing to you. In fact everything that looks close to you is really at a distance. And once space is inside out it feels as if all bets are off.

The remarkable journey to the other side of the vanishing point is told in the book that accompanies the exhibition, an intelligent account of Hughes' art and life by John Slyce. The revelation for me was the unity of the work. Dealing with Hughes' love of turning things around and making you see things anew, Slyce's *Patrick Hughes: peverspectives* tells of a lifetime of invention and humour, from that first moment when, hiding from the *Luftwaffe* under the stairs, he first noticed the way that the inverted stairs above him went to another place entirely.

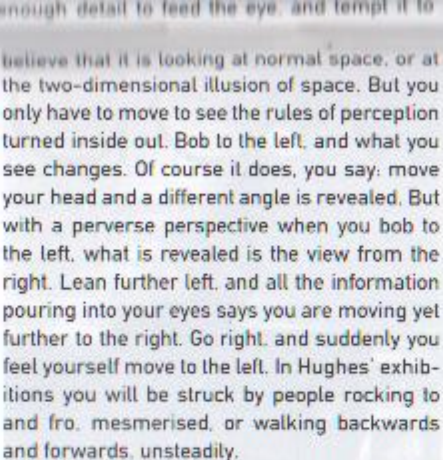
Talking in his grand east London studio, Hughes is telling me about a recent lecture to the Psychology Association on visual perception, 'a misnomer, I told them. It isn't visual perception. It's perception. My pictures show that you see with the whole of your body as much as with your eyes. They were very taken with stereoscopic view—the way your two eyes place objects in space. It is more likely that we have two eyes for the same reason that you have two kidneys: evolution just gave us a spare in case you lose one.

'My pictures show that perception is a relationship between the observer and his world. When you stalk your prey you look at it from many angles moving around it. Parallax, the way that you see your own movements in the revelation of new angles and vistas, is a relationship. Most illusions are disappointing because they tie the viewer down, and make him cover one eye, and then ask "what can you see?". Well the only proper answer in that condition is "Anything you want me to see! Just don't put my other eye out".'

Hughes is proud that his perverspectives do not tie down the viewer, but liberate him and use his own movements and viewpoints as part of the effect. 'The truth is I'm not really interested in rows of houses, or trees or soldiers. In fact I am not really interested in perspective. I am interested in the relationship between the viewer and the picture.' ●

Patrick Hughes' *Perverspective* is at Flowers East until 25 October.

Patrick Hughes: perverspectives by John Slyce is published by Flowers East, £30hbk, £17.95pbk



Patrick Hughes in perspective

PHOTO: DAVID DOWLAND

Jeanne Cummins was awarded £10 000 compensation after being sacked from her job as a secretary by Kingstonian Football Club because she 'cried for a week' over the death of Diana. Clearly, in today's tearful football culture, crying for a mere week is unforgivable

Hot on the heels of the relaunch of Spam (slogan: 'too good to be forgotten') another old favourite is back in the news. The Queen Mother's birthday was celebrated in best Second World War fashion, with a march played on pots and pans. A spokesman for the Welsh guards said the music had been played because it was 'jolly, cheerful and very British'. The Queen Mum was 'enchanted', and requested that it be titled 'Royal birthday'. Marvellous

alt.culture.football

RATTLING FOOTBALL'S CAGES

Author and former hooligan Dougie Brimson (left) spoke to Carlton Brick about why he is standing as the Football Party candidate for mayor of London

'I know that the Football Party is rather ridiculous, but for a lot of people football is all they've got.' Two years ago in his book *England, My England*, hooligan-turned-author Dougie Brimson half-jokingly suggested a single issue political party devoted to the football fan. The suggestion prompted many letters of support and Brimson recently announced his intention to stand as the Football Party candidate in London's forthcoming mayoral election. He knows that 'there are things more important than football, but this—the biggest sport in the world—cares so little about what the fans think and say. What I'm looking to do is rattle a few cages'.

Brimson is no fan of the corporate domination of football. Nor is he cheering on the institutions of New Football such as the government Task Force and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA)—'archetypal post-*Fever Pitch* fans. If they weren't in the FSA they'd be on some local council committee'. Mention of the 'so-called anti-racism crusade' prompts further criticism: 'I don't like campaigns like Kick It Out. All they have done is reinforce an idea that football grounds are hotbeds of racism.' For Brimson, 'there is a difference between physical violence and verbal abuse. If you hurl abuse in a football ground that does not necessarily mean you believe it—it's simply designed to provoke a reaction. Hurling verbal abuse is why people go to football'.

Not that anybody has to take it lying down: 'There are certain things that I find totally unacceptable, and when I hear them I will register my opinion, not to the police, stewards or the club, but to the individuals responsible. If people want to chant racist abuse, fine. But if they do it in front of me I'll tell them what I think.'

One journalist described the Football Party as the start of a 'working class backlash'. But Brimson harbours no such illusions. He knows that 'this is not the class struggle', and that he does not stand even a sporting chance of getting elected (politics and football are not that close, even now). Even if his own manifesto is somewhat at odds with his apparent commitment to free speech, his candidature might make the mayoral election a marginally more interesting prospect. ●

For more information on the Football Party, write to Fandom, PO Box 766, Hemel Hempstead HP1 2TU.

Carlton Brick is coordinator of Libero!, the football supporters' network

GONZO CINEMA

Toby Marshall heard Terry Gilliam explain why he has made a film of Hunter S Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Signs of the times

'For many of them, a week or two in Ibiza, drinking until they lie in their own excretions, is the high point of their existence'
Theodore Dalrymple on his favourite subject—British 'savages'. (Michael Birkett, the vice-consul in Ibiza, had just quit in disgust. Dalrymple described the job as consisting 'almost exclusively of rescuing repulsive people from the consequences of their own disgusting conduct')

'African Christianity is not far removed from witchcraft'
A leading US bishop responds to an African bishop's description of homosexuality as a 'white man's disease'

Johnny Depp as Raoul Duke, Hunter S Thompson's alter ego PHOTO: PETER MOUNTAIN

The world of political correctness didn't exist when Hunter wrote the book, and hopefully won't exist after this film comes out. I've been feeling since the eighties that we've gone through such a constricted time when everything has kind of tightened up. Everybody is frightened to say what they feel, frightened to live in an extraordinary, outrageous way, and it's time to take off those chains. The book has already spoken its mind. Now it's our turn.'

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Hunter S Thompson's 27-year old account of his legendary drug-fuelled trip to 'the city of eternal dreams', has been filmed by Terry Gilliam, director of *Twelve Monkeys*, *Time Bandits* and *Brazil*, and a founder member of the Monty Python team. A grossly exaggerated tale of wild hallucinations and equally excessive behaviour which initiated the trend known as 'Gonzo journalism' (defined by Thompson as 'a style of reporting based on William Faulkner's idea that the best fiction is far more true than any kind of journalism'), Gilliam conceived the film partly in reaction to the current climate of restraint. 'It's getting crazy', he told me. A woman sued McDonald's after she spilled a hot drink on herself, and 'now we all have to drink tepid coffee'. To Gilliam's way of thinking, restrictions on free speech are just as absurd: 'I want to be able to call you a bastard if you are a bastard...If someone is hurt by that, learn to live with it.'

With its opening shot, the film version launches us straight over the top. Thompson's alter ego, Raoul Duke (Johnny Depp) and his sidekick, the bloated Dr Gonzo (Benicio Del Toro playing a fictionalised version of Thompson's lawyer friend Oscar Zeta Acosta) are speeding towards the Mint 400 off-road motorcycle race with a carload of mind-bending substances. In the following few days, they get into a chain of absurd situations, first trying to cover a race which has become invisible due to the dust thrown up by the dirt-bikes, then going on to cover a national convention on drug abuse while stoned to within an inch of permanent brain damage.

The movie is highly entertaining, despite the poor visual quality of the trip sequences. Considering that Gilliam is an acknowledged master of fantasy film, it is disappointing to see him fielding monsters that look as if they have lumbered off the set of *Star Trek*. *Fear and Loathing* also falls uncomfortably between two cinematic styles: part docu-drama with footage of Vietnam and a concluding monologue on the failure of the sixties generation, and part drug-inspired vision. Well worth seeing through the dust and the haze none the less. •

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas opens on 13 November. The book of the same name by Hunter S Thompson with original illustrations by Ralph Steadman is published by Flamingo

GONZO JOURNO

From its inception in the early sixties the New Journalism promised to shake editors and readers out of their complacency. Attempting to overcome the old binary division between reporters and novelists, New Journalists had little interest in conventional notions of objectivity. The important thing was to be there and to be a participant in your own story.

Hunter S Thompson took this approach a stage further. With *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which first appeared as a series of articles in *Rolling Stone* magazine, he transformed the joyous, stream of consciousness New Journalism into a river of first-person paranoia which became known as Gonzo Journalism. It was a fitting response to the end of the sixties and the dawning of a new and dangerous decade.

I was 14 when I first read *Fear and Loathing*. By that time (the cusp of the eighties), it was the inspiration for a generation of fanzine writers, including *Loaded*'s founding editor James Brown who used to plug Thompson's books in his mag *Attack on Bzag*. Thompson appeared then as Uncle Duke in the broadsheet cartoon *Doonesbury*. But nowadays he is not confined to the comic strips. With its highly emotional emphasis on being fearful of a loathsome world, a great deal of 'straight' newspaper reporting has been converted to the spirit of Gonzo. Having Hunter on the big screen is an apposite reminder that we're all Gonzos now.

Graham Barnfield teaches American studies at Brunel University

SCREENPRINT OF RALPH STEADMAN'S DRAWING FOR FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS (1971) BY JOE PETRO III

'To be honest, I think you fit the profile quite well'
A Wolverhampton University admissions tutor replies to an undercover journalist applying for a place on the strength of three 'Unclassified' grades at A-level

'It weren't water, Peter'
Paul Dainton, former NUM delegate, reminds Peter Mandelson of a visit he made earlier this year to Kellingley colliery in Yorkshire—one of Mandelson's most famous photo-opportunities. The remark refers to an incident when Mandelson was descending into the pit in the miners' cages. One of the men is alleged to have relieved himself on the minister without portfolio's head

And on the subject of Mandelson, the man should be added to our 'name and shame' list of so-called football fans who didn't watch England World Cup games. While Tony Blair was glued to the England v Argentina match, preparing to give in-depth interviews on the subject the following day, Mandelson sat reading newspapers in the House of Commons tea room with his back to the television

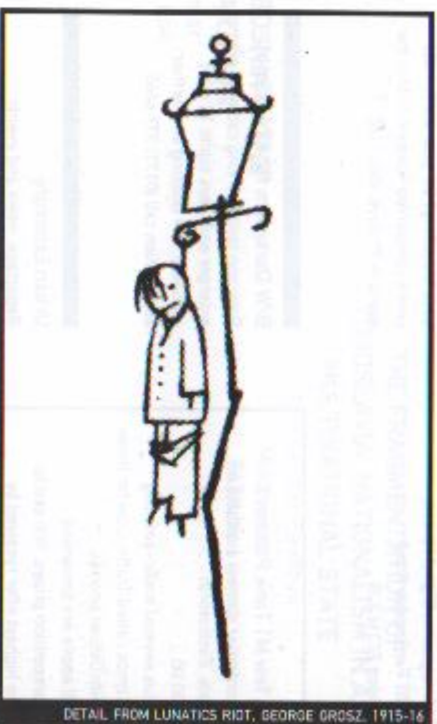
alt.culture.personal

RAGING AGAINST CALM

'Men in general are not very good at emoting, at sharing our vulnerability or sensitivity. It's good to be reminded that there is nothing wrong with it.' So said health minister Paul Boateng in support of the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), a government-sponsored health initiative which aims to stop young male Mancunians doing an Ian Curtis and committing suicide. Other sponsors include Sankey's Soap nightclub, Ear To The Ground dj collective, dance radio station Galaxy 102 and Tony Wilson's Factory Records. In Manchester it is cool to be CALM.

While the sponsors are raising awareness about 'the need to talk' outside targeted venues, CALM volunteers have been handing out plastic bags (with large ventilation holes) containing leaflets on dealing with despondency and depression. When I told one volunteer what he could do with his information pack, he lost his temper and came after me. I only averted an outbreak of CALM rage by climbing into the nearest taxi.

There is nothing wrong with seeking advice on personal problems because how you choose to deal with them is a private matter. I have no gripe against the Samaritans or the Citizens Advice Bureau which treat personal matters as such. But when private concerns are turned into a public issue, that is different; and maybe CALM is something to get worked up about.



DETAIL FROM LUNATICS RIOT, GEORGE GROSZ, 1915-16

If, like me, you object to the intrusiveness of CALM, you will be lectured about the relatively high suicide rate among young men in Manchester. In 1995 the official suicide figure for men was 45, but this also includes death by 'undetermined injuries' which could have been accidental or homicidal. If the statistics are unreliable, it is even more doubtful whether a poster and an information pack will do anything to reduce the suicide rate. In the thankfully rare instances of suicide the many variables at play are unlikely to be offset by a sticker with a phone number or a volunteer imbued with missionary zeal.

CALM and its government sponsors are certain that the diminished status of men has contributed to low esteem, depression and suicide. Boateng opined that 'young men are having difficulty confronting issues of their role now. Previous generations haven't had to address that'. But if the much-discussed 'crisis of masculinity' really was causing widespread suicidal depression among young men, it is hard to see how the CALM approach would do anything to help. One of the aims of CALM is to persuade young men to respond to personal problems in the way that women have always been encouraged to react: as a victim in need of outside help. In this respect it would tend to confirm the sense of being emasculated, rather than alleviate it.

What was once considered a sign of strength in a man—the ability to keep emotional problems private and the attempt to stay in control—is now seen as the source of our weakness. During Samaritans' Week, the *Guardian* reported that 'men are more likely to tell a sufferer from depression to snap out of it or to keep quiet about it, or more positively if not more usefully, to be taken to the pub and cheered up or at least made drunk'. If I get depressed I would rather have a stiff drink and severe talking to from a friend than a not-so-goodie bag from a CALM volunteer.

Neil Davenport is a well-adjusted Mancunian music journalist

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READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Dave Chandler looks at some lessons learned in the Bosnian conflict

THE END OF SOVEREIGNTY?

THE WARRIOR'S HONOR: ETHNIC WAR AND THE MODERN CONSCIENCE
Michael Ignatieff
Chatto & Windus
£10.99 pbk

DIVIDE AND FALL?: BOSNIA IN THE ANNALS OF PARTITION
Radha Kumar
Verso, £14 hbk

THE FRAGMENTATION OF YUGOSLAVIA: NATIONALISM IN A MULTINATIONAL STATE
Aleksandar Pavković
Macmillan
£42 hbk

IN 1991 THERE WERE NO FOREIGN TROOPS IN the Balkans; today NATO and United Nations troops are encamped in southern Hungary, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania, and have an indefinite mandate to remain in Bosnia. The UN high administrator for Bosnia has assumed legislative, executive and judicial powers over the new state, and can dismiss elected representatives and impose legislation against the will of elected governments at state, entity and municipal levels. Now there are growing calls for wider international mandates to be extended to Serbia's troubled province of Kosovo without restrictive UN Security Council resolutions. The books reviewed here all attempt to address this transformation of traditional norms of international relations and to analyse the ever-expanding role of the international community in the Balkans.

Michael Ignatieff's collection of essays, *The Warrior's Honor*, highlights the misanthropy inherent in what he calls today's 'moral internationalism' which is built on the fear of human evil. By contrast, says Ignatieff, the universalistic ideology of international relations in the past at least paid lip service to humanity's capacity for good. The redefinition of conflict as a series of crimes against humanity carried out in a struggle between abusers and their victims has created a narrow moral framework for understanding the world.

In the book's central essay Ignatieff examines how the old-fashioned universality of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stands in direct contrast to the 'moral internationalism' of groups like Human Rights Watch and Médecins sans Frontières. Since the founding of the ICRC in 1863, the organisation has upheld the doctrine of neutrality and a universal approach to war with every combatant and prisoner treated equally.

In the 1990s this approach has been out of line with the new moralistic view of international relations; in the Bosnian conflict, for example, many argued that intervention could not be impartial between Serbs and Muslims. This contrast, for Ignatieff, was epitomised by the ITN news pictures of Trnopolje which, in the eyes of the world, turned a transit camp into a death camp, while 'the Red Cross delegates on the scene watched ⇨

IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD THE ITN NEWS PICTURES OF TRNOPOLJE TURNED A TRANSIT CAMP INTO A DEATH CAMP, WHILE, SAYS IGNATIEFF, 'THE RED CROSS DELEGATES ON THE SCENE WATCHED THE ENSUING MEDIA CIRCUS WITH DISBELIEF'

⇦ the ensuing media circus with disbelief' (pp136-7). Alone among international humanitarian organisations, the ICRC refused to compromise its neutrality by giving evidence to the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague. It was also the only such organisation providing assistance to the 200 000 Krajina Serbs who were driven from Croatia in 1995, in the war's biggest single act of 'ethnic cleansing'.

Radha Kumar's *Divide and Fall?* puts the new interventionist capacity of major powers in the broader historical context of overcoming the negative legacy of imperialism. The international institutional arrangements established at the end of the Second World War, and preserved unchanged during the Cold War, were shaped by the postcolonial experience, privileging state sovereignty and limiting the rights of great powers to intervene. For Kumar, Bosnia has been an experimental ground for rewriting the rule book and for testing the new post-Cold War possibilities that have opened up for international peacekeeping interventions. She notes that this involvement has proved so attractive that it has been difficult 'to walk away from', so that 'each half-hearted intervention, however delusory, led to an expansion rather than curtailment of involvement' (p37).

Through a comparative study of the politics of partition, Kumar illustrates the international policy shift that has taken place in Bosnia. She divides international policymaking on Bosnia into three periods: 'divide and rule' from the recognition of Bosnia in 1992, where the international community is alleged to have followed a traditional peacekeeping approach of neutrality while the Bosnian factions sought to divide the state; 'divide and quit' from mid-1994 onwards, where Bosnia was divided on the international community's terms, and where there was a 'move away from letting domestic actors set the terms of negotiation and a move towards enlarging the role of European institutions'(p72); and 'divide and fall?' after the Dayton peace agreement, when what looked like a temporary international administration over a divided state turned into an indefinite external administration over a marginally more united one. This third stage in Kumar's view demonstrates the overcoming of the colonial legacy, so that partition is no longer seen as 'the lesser evil' to external administrations. This, Kumar thinks, has facilitated a new positive role for the international community, going beyond securing the peace to overcoming ethnic divisions through long-term regulation.

KUMAR'S HISTORY DOES NOT ONLY REWRITE the experience of international involvement in the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, but also revises the colonial experience itself. In her reading the emphasis is on how premature and enforced colonial withdrawal allowed ethnic divisions to re-emerge, rather than on how domination by foreign powers created or institutionalised ethnic segmentation.

Aleksandar Pavković's *Fragmentation of Yugoslavia* rightly questions the view that international peacekeeping in the Balkans has curbed ethnic rivalry or nationalist competition. He does not shirk from emphasising the importance of ethnic nationalist ideologies in the region, and begins by charting the rise of the national myths of Balkan groups such as the Croats, Serbs and Albanians and the conflicting nature of their territorial claims. He also explains the limitations of Tito's promotion of Yugoslavism in the 1950s, and how these national myths were used by the different elites in the Yugoslav republics in the 1970s and 1980s, as they fought over dwindling state resources. However, Pavković makes it clear that ethnic segmentation and conflicting nationalist ideologies were not enough to explain why the attempt to resolve the divisions between the Yugoslav republics ended in war. The military solution only became attractive, or even possible, once the international community entered the equation.

US AND EUROPEAN PRESSURE WHICH INSISTED that the Yugoslav state could not resort to force to defend its territorial integrity first put to question Yugoslav sovereignty, and encouraged fragmentation. In 1991 the European Union took over from the Yugoslav government as conflict mediator, proposed dividing Yugoslavia along existing republic borders, and offered little possibility of arbitration over disputed regions. It was this internationally imposed solution that undermined the possibility of a negotiated compromise or even the peaceful alteration of republic borders, which were originally drawn on the basis of preventing separation rather than to facilitate it.

Kumar welcomes the current indefinite extensions to the international community mandates in Bosnia as a commitment to challenge ethnic nationalism. There is little evidence that this is the case. Enforcing international policy through imposing legislation over the heads of elected representatives has done little to dampen tensions and insecurities in the region. With Bosnian institutions having no real authority, fear that externally decided policies will question entity borders or existing rights to land, homes and employment has led to high levels of support for nationalist parties and the marginalisation of political alternatives.

As Pavković suggests, international regulation has enforced rather than mitigated the importance of nationalism. The same point is made by Ignatieff who forcefully argues that the causative order of Balkan conflict has been, firstly, the collapse or weakening of states in the region, which then made interethnic accommodation more difficult and in turn fuelled nationalist fears and ethnic tensions. ●

FREE SPEECH IS A RIGHT THAT IS ENSHRINED IN THE US CONSTITUTION BUT, AS FREEDLAND NOTES, IT IS RESTRICTED BY ALMOST 50 DIFFERENT STATUTES IN THE UK

FREE THE UK 59 MILLION

BRING HOME THE REVOLUTION: HOW BRITAIN CAN LIVE THE AMERICAN DREAM

Jonathan Freedland, Fourth Estate, £14.99 hbk

BRITISH SOCIETY ALREADY BUYS INTO THE HIGHS as well as the lows of US popular culture; now *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland wants us to import the best of America's political culture, too. 'In the 1990s', he notes, 'we Brits all too often play Alfred to America's Batman…He is a muscled man of action; we are wrinkled and decrepit'. Freedland's message to Britain is Go West Old Man, and embrace the democratic dynamism of the more youthful USA—a 'creed' which, he argues, had its roots in the British radicalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before it was exported to revolutionary America. So the task now for British progressives is to bring our lost revolution back home.

For Freedland the key difference in the two political cultures appears simple enough. In Britain sovereignty remains in the hands of the Crown and its ministers, and power flows from the top of society downwards. In America, by contrast, sovereignty is invested in the people—or 'We the People' as the opening phrase of the US constitution famously has it—and power flows from the bottom up. This is essentially why, suggests Freedland, Americans can live the dream of freedom and social mobility, while stagnating Britain remains repressed and class-bound.

Drawing on stories gathered during four years as a US correspondent, Freedland evokes the undeniable energy of American society in fast and entertaining style. His polemical point is well made. British radicals could learn a lot about the importance of individual freedom and liberty from the US culture that they often love to sneer at. Nowhere is this clearer than on the key issue of free speech, a right that is enshrined in the US constitution but, Freedland notes, is restricted by almost 50 different statutes in the UK. The libel case that ITN is bringing against this magazine could never come to court under America's more liberal laws.

True, Freedland is sometimes in danger of overselling the virtues of what he calls 'Americanism', and of confusing the democratic self-flattery of the US system with the reality of how the country is run. The concept of bottom-up power, for example, is not much in evidence behind the closed doors of the National Security Council, the Pentagon or the headquarters of the CIA. The book is perhaps at its worst when it strays into the banal nineties-speak of 'civic society'. (Is a proposed law to make a Californian farming town put chat-friendly front porches on its houses really a way to rebuild community spirit?)

For all that, Freedland's call for 'British radicals' to 'immerse themselves' in 'libertarian and anti-authoritarian thought' comes as welcome relief as we labour under the intrusive Clinton-Blair regime. His proposals to abolish the monarchy and establish a British republic, complete with US-style elected judges and officials, are also refreshingly to the point.

Where Freedland surely goes astray is in trying to sell his proposals as part of an old British tradition of liberalism, stretching back beyond the American revolution and epitomised by the likes of Thomas Paine. He sees this as a way of getting around his audience's anti-American prejudices. Perhaps; but it also seems to avoid tackling the real reasons why freedom is increasingly out of fashion today on both sides of the Atlantic.

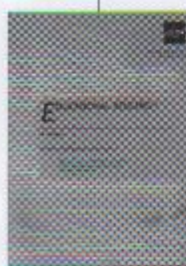
There is always a problem with trying to deal with today's social issues by reference to the past (as with Freedland's repetition of the rather tired notion that racism in modern America is a product of slavery, which was abolished before the oldest person in the USA today was born). Suggesting that one reason why the British should embrace liberty is because Tom Paine was born in Norwich seems likely to cut little ice at the end of the nervous nineties.

In these insecure and mistrustful times, dominated by the religion of risk-avoidance and the victim culture, many are more willing than ever before to invite the authorities to infringe their personal freedoms in the cause of safety. This is as true of the USA as it is of the UK, as evidenced by the willingness of modern Americans to take each other to court (which Freedland mistakes for a positive expression of rights), and the latest discussion about introducing victims' rights into the US constitution (which would seriously jeopardise many of the American freedoms that Freedland rightly treasures).

To be effective, the case for freedom today needs to be made more in opposition to the unfree spirit of our age than by invoking the spirits of freedom past. ●

Mick Hume

STUDIED IGNORANCE



EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH—A CRITIQUE

James Tooley and Doug Darby, Ofsted, £n/a

AT THE 1996 ANNUAL LECTURE OF THE TEACHER Training Agency, the leading Cambridge professor David Hargreaves argued that a high proportion of ⇨

RESEARCHERS' FINDINGS WERE OFTEN BASED ON BIASED EXAMINATIONS OF THE DATA. IN OTHER PAPERS THERE WAS EVIDENCE THAT RESEARCHERS HAD NOT EVEN BOTHERED TO REFER TO THE ORIGINAL TEXT

⇦ educational research was 'frankly second-rate'. Last year, James Tooley at Newcastle University and Doug Darby at Manchester University were commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education to investigate this claim. And indeed their work, published as *Educational Research—A Critique*, paints a convincing picture of alarmingly poor standards in educational research.

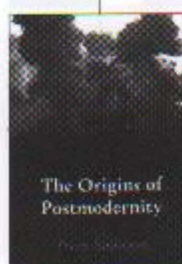
In their investigation Tooley and Darby took a representative sample of 264 papers from the four most highly respected education journals. After an initial analysis, and a further more detailed dissection of 41 papers, they concluded that 63 per cent of the works they had studied were of a dangerously low standard.

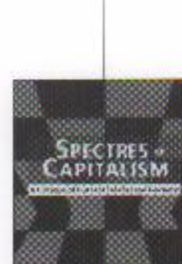
WITH EMPIRICAL STUDIES, THEY FOUND THAT researchers' findings were often based on biased examinations of the data. Alternatively, academics would often make sweeping generalisations, going far beyond the evidence presented. In some papers a single source of information was considered sufficient, and in many reports highly dubious sampling methods were employed, often without justification.

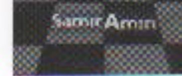
Tooley and Darby also found serious faults with many non-empirical studies. Blatantly contradictory arguments were sometimes made and concepts were frequently used in a careless manner. In other papers there was evidence that researchers had not even bothered to refer to the original texts or had uncritically accepted the pronouncements of supposedly profound postmodern thinkers. They also found that few papers had been critically examined by other researchers. The consequence of this, they argue, is that educational theory never really moves forward, as research is rarely independently assessed or scrutinised.

IN THEIR CONCLUSIONS, TOOLEY AND DARBY suggest that standards might improve if professional bodies such as the British Educational Research Association developed voluntary codes of practice. They also propose that the Higher Education Funding Council of England, the primary funder of educational research, could usefully start to fund larger, higher quality research projects, and begin to assess academics in terms of the quality, as opposed to the quantity, of their publications. Their conclusions, however, seem misplaced in as much as they seek institutional solutions to the problems presented. It seems more likely that a critical culture will only emerge if individual members of the educational research community start to take collective responsibility for standards. ●

Toby Marshall







POSTMODERN MALAISE

SPECTRES OF CAPITALISM: A CRITIQUE OF CURRENT INTELLECTUAL FASHIONS
Samir Amin, Monthly Review Press, $16 pbk
THE CULTURAL TURN: SELECTED WRITINGS ON THE POSTMODERN 1983-1998
Frederic Jameson, Verso, £11 pbk
THE ORIGINS OF POSTMODERNITY
Perry Anderson, Verso, £11 pbk

THESE THREE BOOKS ARE ALL CRITICAL ATTACKS on postmodernism from a radical left perspective. Samir Amin and Perry Anderson both have a reputation on the left stretching back to the sixties, when Anderson was editing the *New Left Review* and Amin was writing anti-colonialist works like *The Arab State*. Frederic Jameson, by contrast, made his reputation in the eighties with the essays reproduced here from the *New Left Review*, that identified postmodernism as 'the cultural logic of late capitalism'. Jameson pointed out the isometric relationship between the postmodern idea that everything is image and illusion, and a consumer-oriented and speculation-driven capitalism. Anderson's book is a companion to Jameson's, that traces the development of the idea of the end of the modern, re-raising Terry Eagleton's challenge that this is an ideology of despair and defeat (see *Illusions of Postmodernism*). Amin is, if anything, even more bullish, arguing that what postmodernists reject in modernism is 'that human beings make their own history'.

These are three well-argued and convincing books, but a sneaking suspicion remains that the authors are more culpable for the ideas that they are criticising than they let on. Anderson intriguingly recalls his own reactions to the social conflicts of the sixties, remembering that then he expected to see a return to a classical Marxism, concerned with class struggle, and the eclipse of the cultural preoccupations of 'Western Marxism'. As he says, the opposite turned out to be true: the left became more preoccupied with cultural matters and less with the struggle for power. But didn't the *New Left Review* have something to do with that turn? The *NLR* diligently serviced the 'cultural turn', throughout the seventies and eighties, not least with Frederic Jameson's eloquent articles. Samir Amin, too, excludes his own embrace of the 'cultural revolution' of the sixties from the general trend towards identity politics, and away from the conflict between capital and labour. ●

James Heartfield

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