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28 February, High Court, London
ITN v LM

Free speech on trial

LM libel appeal

The OFF THE FENCE fund

28 FEBRUARY 2000—ITN v *LM*

WE STILL NEED YOUR HELP

Dear *LM* reader,

As you may know, ITN is suing *LM* magazine for libel, over a story about ITN's award-winning pictures of a Bosnian camp published in the February 1997 issue. The case is due to start in the High Court on 28 February and we need your support to fight it.

For the past three years, ITN's libel writs have been hanging over the magazine. The case has already cost us tens of thousands of pounds in legal fees and expenses—money that should have been spent on expanding and improving *LM*. Now, if we lose in court, we are faced with the threat of bankruptcy. The case has broader implications for press freedom in this country.

The magazine only survives thanks to the regular support of our subscribers and Friends of *LM*, for which we are very grateful. But in these extraordinary circumstances, we are asking for your support again. As you read this the meter is running on our legal costs. To fight this case, and defend press freedom, we desperately need your help.

Many Friends of *LM*, as well as eminent writers, journalists, academics and artists, have already supported the *LM* defence fund. Join them by making a donation today, using the form below. Please give as much as you can afford for free speech.

Yours sincerely,

MICK HUME
Editor, *LM*

HELENE GULDBERG
Co-publisher, *LM*

To keep up to date with the case, go to http://www.informinc.co.uk/ITN-vs-LM/

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PHOTO: PA PHOTOS

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COVER: CAMERON SEDLEY

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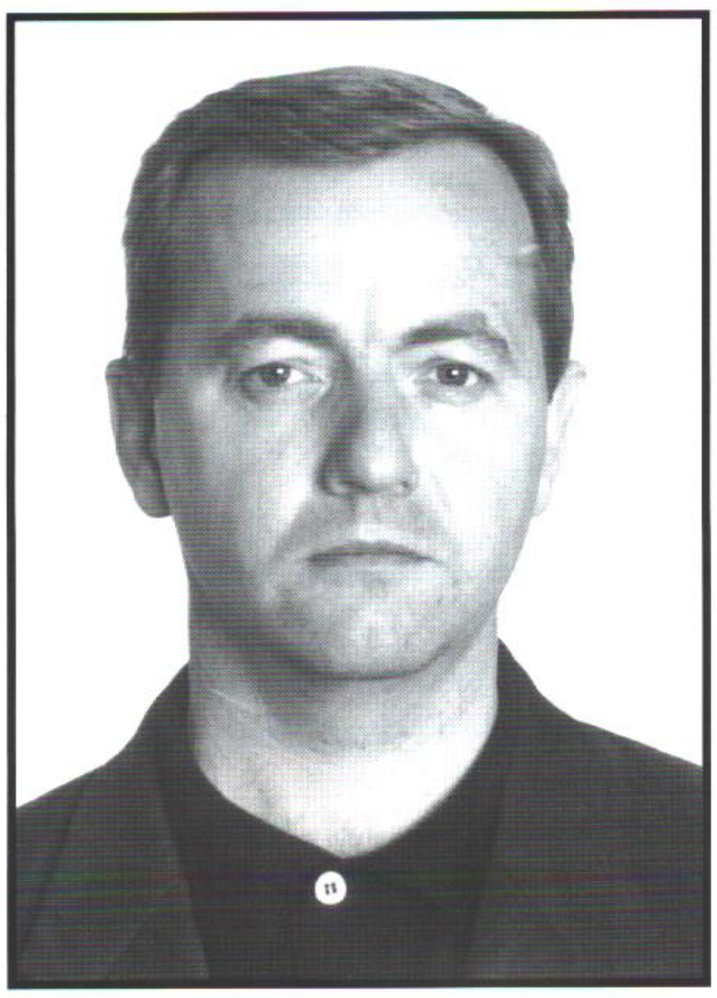

MICK HUME

Editor

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE *LM* BEGAN, I am having a relaxing break from editing this month. Instead I am spending March down at the High Court in London, defending the libel writ which ITN has brought against the magazine's publishers and me. After three years of prevarication, the trial is finally due to start on 28 February.

The case centres on an article entitled 'The picture that fooled the world', published in the February 1997 issue of *LM*, which investigated ITN's award-winning pictures of a Bosnian Serb-run camp. For legal reasons I cannot speculate about the evidence beforehand. I am confident about our case, less so about the justice of Britain's notorious libel laws. But there are some things of which we can be pretty certain. For one, as is the nature of such cases, there is likely to be a fair bit of mud flying around (see the Hamilton-Al Fayed circus).

I have no wish to play the libel lawyers' game of mutual character assassination, or to get involved in a slanging match with anybody. Some take a different approach to public debate. Over the past three years, many malicious rumours have been circulated about *LM*—who we get our money from, where our political loyalties lie, etc. None of these allegations has ever been substantiated, which is not all that surprising, since none of them is true. So, before the libel trial begins, let us try to set the record straight as to what *LM* is really about.

LM is an independent magazine with no links to any political party. (The magazine was originally published as *Living Marxism* by the Revolutionary Communist Party, before it was bought by Helene Guldberg and Claire Fox and relaunched as *LM*.) Run on the proverbial shoestring, the magazine survives through the money we raise from sales and events, and thanks to the generosity of our contributors (none of whom is paid for what they write), and of our supporters in the Friends of *LM* fundraising scheme (see page 13).

But what does *LM* stand for now? '*LM* has become a phenomenon', Ian Hargreaves, professor of journalism at Cardiff University, wrote in the *New Statesman* in February, 'admired by the political right as well as the left'. As editor, I like to maintain an open door policy on contributors to *LM*, publishing authors of all political persuasions and none at all. The only condition is that they should have something thought-provoking to say, which chimes with *LM*'s commitment to Question Everything.

THERE ARE, HOWEVER, SOME BROAD principles that determine the kind of issues and arguments in which *LM* is particularly interested—and which mean that we often appear to be going against the grain of conventional wisdom.

LM stands for progress. This is, of course, a widely discredited concept. Contemporary society is uncomfortable with its own achievements. We live in an atmosphere of self-loathing in which it seems that, for many, industry equals pollution and poverty, science means Frankenfood and eugenics, while knowledge is just a code word for elitism and arrogance. Experimentation goes against the grain of the new religion of risk-avoidance, the first commandment of which is the precautionary principle—'Thou shalt not chance it'. The saying 'nothing ventured, nothing gained' encapsulates the drive to take calculated risks that has brought humanity from the caves to something approximating civilisation. Today, however, its slightly less snappy equivalent would be 'nothing ventured…at all, unless we can have a detailed independent audit of all the long-term environmental consequences in advance'.

In the face of all this superstitious nonsense, *LM* upholds a future-oriented worldview that unambiguously champions the extension of human knowledge and control in every sphere. Raising productivity and investing in development are necessary stepping stones towards the creation of a more civilised and enlightened society, in which people can have more options about how they live. Removing all of the barriers to experimentation is vital, if we are first to assess and then to realise the potential benefits of new developments, such as genetic engineering. How many gains of the past 200 years would have been possible if the dead hand of the precautionary principle had been on society's tiller? If we allow it to take over now, we will end up more sorry than safe.

LM stands for a human-centred morality. Despite the fact that we live in a time of unprecedented opportunities, there has been a general loss of faith in humanity. Partly due to the failure of past experiments in social change, many no longer believe in our ability to take control of our destiny and make the right choices about changing things for the better. This dangerous fatalism makes it necessary not only to take on the mysticism of religions, old and new, but to challenge every contemporary notion that promotes a degraded view of humanity.

That is why this magazine has won a

CORD STRAIGHT

reputation, for example, as a scourge of such fashionable causes as animal rights, population control and environmentalism, and a trenchant supporter of unpopular issues like animal research or third world development. This is not because I have anything in particular against cats or trees. It is because the elevation of these moralistic causes, often at the expense of scientific or economic advance, is a side effect of humanity's tarnished self-image. What is sorely needed is a morality whereby what is deemed right in any given circumstances is that which will bring the greatest benefits to people.

IT FOLLOWS THAT *LM* STANDS FOR AN ambitious definition of the human potential. We should insist upon our ability to handle life as autonomous individuals who can make our own decisions—and mistakes. Many contributors to this magazine have fiercely criticised the development of a therapy culture, in which we are all encouraged to see ourselves as victims who need counselling and support in order to cope with everyday problems. With the state now intervening in people's private affairs not as a nanny, but as a counsellor, it seems that every social policy pursued by the New Labour government has a therapeutic underpinning, designed to raise the 'self-esteem' of young people, poor people, single mothers, etc. That emphasis might sound fair enough. But since self-esteem is now defined simply according to how you feel about yourself, regardless of what you actually achieve, this approach looks more like a way of reconciling people to lower expectations.

LM, on the other hand, favours raising our sights in pursuit of life, liberty and having it all. In particular, that means opposing attempts by outside agencies to regulate interpersonal relations and invade the private sphere. There is an increasing tendency today towards the juridification of everyday life, with the growth of an entire industry seeking to sort out our personal affairs through mediation and the courts. Encouraging a healthy scepticism towards third-party intervention of any sort is a way of asserting our freedom to decide our own destiny.

LM stands for intellectual conflict and the polarisation of ideas. In an age when consensus is queen and 'adversarial politics' two dirty words, public debate has collapsed into a bland blancmange of the centre ground; we are all supposed to be New Labour now. New Britain is a society increasingly run by committee, press conference and special advisory group, where political life is being replaced by technocratic management techniques, and *demos*—the people—is being separated from democracy. Compared to that, we at *LM* are more comfortable with the imperfections of representative democracy, a system which at least rests on the assumption that the electorate can be trusted to judge for themselves, and that an open clash of ideas over the good society is the only way to establish some clarity about the best way ahead.

In sum, *LM* stands for restoring belief in people's potential to take control of their lives; seeing humanity as the subject rather than the object of history, as the author rather than audience. The magazine's aim over the past three years has been to change the agenda of public debate in that direction.

The precondition for making any of this possible is that we have the right to freedom of speech, to present the truth as we understand it without worrying about offending public opinion or existing morality. At a time when any contentious opinion is likely to be met with cries of 'you cannot say that', there is a pressing need to take a stand for free speech. The decline in support for this freedom is another reflection of the degraded view of humanity today, since it suggests that people cannot be trusted to handle ideas which are dangerous, extreme or just different. Some of us, however, would rather take our chances in the open court of public opinion than leave it to the experts and the authorities to control what can be said.

MANY PEOPLE HAVE BACKED OUR stand in defence of free speech throughout the libel dispute with ITN, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their support, without which we could never have got this far. I would also like to extend special thanks to those who have pulled together to ensure that this issue of *LM* comes out, despite the pressures of the court case—especially Jennie Bristow and Brendan O'Neill on the editorial side, and our designer, Alex Cameron.

As I write, the future is in the balance; the publishing company, the co-publisher Helene Guldberg and me would all face the threat of bankruptcy if we were to lose the libel case. But whatever happens in court, the project we are involved in at *LM* will not be killed off. As they used to say at the end of those old Fu Manchu movies (probably the only international villain *LM* has not been linked with), 'the world shall hear of us again'. Starting with the April issue, on sale 30 March. ●

LM STANDS FOR A HUMAN-CENTRED MORALITY

LM Online

RUBBISHING DEMOCRACY

The news that Jörg Haider's right-wing Freedom Party would form part of Austria's new coalition government caused an international outcry. Haider and his party stand accused of racism, xenophobia and, in the words of US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, refusing to 'distance themselves clearly from the atrocities of the Nazi era and the politics of hate'. On 3 February, 14 EU member governments 'quarantined' Austria, downgrading diplomatic contacts and threatening sanctions, while the US government expressed 'deep concern' and called its ambassador back to Washington 'for consultations'.

Does Haider's move into government really herald a return to Europe's dark past? Anti-Freedom Party protesters in Vienna waved placards saying '1938 reasons to oppose the Freedom Party', comparing the election of the Freedom Party in 2000 with Austria's annexation by Germany in 1938. Commentators point out that Austria has never come to terms with its past, which is 'now coming to the surface in the form of socially tolerated dislike of immigrants' (*Guardian*, 5 February). The Freedom Party may be racists who blame immigrants for Austria's social and economic problems—but with every EU member state demanding that the party adopts European principles of social democracy, and given Haider has promised to toe the line and behave like a 'proper European politician', Europe is unlikely to be drowned by a new wave of fascism.

More worrying was the European Union's reaction. It seems that the 'European democracy' we have heard so much about means voting for whomever you like—as long as they fit in with the EU's definition of what makes acceptable politics. The Freedom Party won 27 percent of the vote in last October's election; but backing from the voters is no longer a good enough justification for taking your seats, as anybody who mentioned Haider's mandate found when they faced accusations of apologising for the party's anti-immigration agenda. The notion seems to be that democracy is dangerous as soon as it allows people to vote for those who do not meet with the EU's approval.

The idea that Europe could slip back into its fascist past may be the product of fevered imaginations. But the undermining of democracy in the name of preserving European unity is all too real. ●

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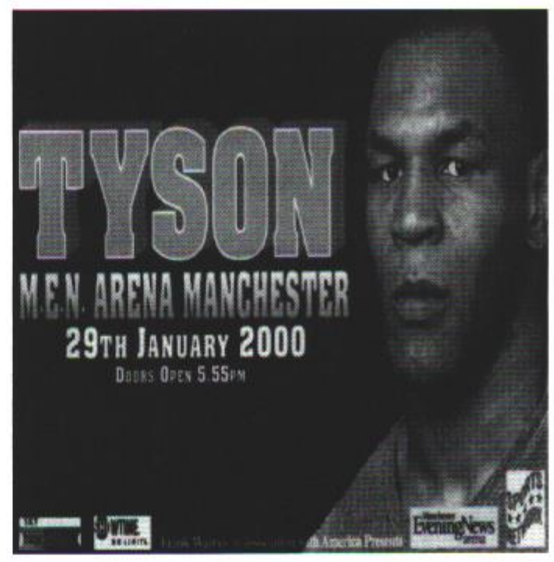
PULLING NO PUNCHES



Having predictably defeated Julius Francis in two rounds and less than five minutes, Mike Tyson can go back to life in the United States knowing that he will never be a 'nice guy'. Since his conviction for rape in 1992, Tyson has made some attempt to rehabilitate himself: marrying a doctor, converting to Islam, and claiming he is much misunderstood. But his visits to the mosque weren't going to wash in Britain. While all the London mayoral candidates joined forces with Lambeth City Council and Justice for Women to condemn Tyson as a 'pariah' and a 'menace to women', Trevor Phillips condemned 'the Tyson-as-victim scenario' as just another PR stunt.

Why does Mike Tyson inspire such an excited reaction from those who wouldn't normally recognise a boxer if he hit them in the face? At a time when 'masculinity' and macho values are seen as an anathema to today's emotionally literate society, Tyson, with his misogynist record and brutal profession, has become the personification of everything that is 'the trouble with men'. He is nasty, menacing, brutish, mean, insensitive and violent. But then, he is a boxer. And as Francis quickly discovered, sensitivity does you no favours in a match. ●

Sally Millard sallym@easynet.co.uk

GUILT-TRIPPING PARENTS

With the spotlight on cot death once again, parents may well find themselves unable to sleep. The study *Sudden Unexpected Deaths in Infancy 1993-96* was published in February, amid a flurry of publicity; a national conference on cot death is due to be held in April; and cot death 'appeal week' looms in May. The fact that the number of babies dying from cot death continues to fall rarely makes the headlines. Instead, parents still find themselves blamed for the deaths that have occurred.

Cot death is an ill-defined term used to describe any infant death for which there is no other explanation. Ninety-two percent of cot deaths in 1998 occurred in babies aged under six months. There are no sure signs and the precise mechanisms that can cause cot death remain unknown. According to the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID), 'the UK's leading cot death charity', since 1991 cot deaths have fallen by 72 percent, from 1008 to 284 in 1998. This makes the risk of cot death very rare indeed (0.45 per 1000). The FSID sees this fall in numbers as the result of its campaign in

SIGNS of the times

'It was the greatest time of my life. We were so idealistic and we thought we could change the world. I feel so sorry for young people today. Their world is so flat and they have no dreams'
Victor Alba, former Spanish republican, talking to Michael Portillo about the Spanish Civil War. Portillo found this remark 'astonishing'

'You want to read him about jazz, you want to read him about food, you want to read him about the extraordinarily complicated cosmopolitan popular cultures that we're all participating in'
Beatrix Campbell speculating on Karl Marx's potential as a newspaper columnist. That puts *Das Kapital* in its place

'She agreed to oral sex'
Chris Eubank defends Tyson live on Sky Sports' coverage from Manchester. 'We dissociate Sky and Sky Box Office from those comments. That was a personal opinion', said anchorman Paul Dempsey, seconds later. Eubank mysteriously disappeared from the studio soon afterwards

'It's fucking freezing!'
Former Manchester United footballer Micky Thomas, commentating for BBC Wales. 'I didn't know we were on air', he explained later

RINGSIDE

With less than 48 hours to go until showtime, I got the call. Friends in Glasgow had been 'given' a handful of tickets to see Iron Mike live in Manchester and I gained the added perk of spending the evening with Glasgow Celtic and Manchester United legend Pat Crerand. Crerand summed up the attitude of most boxing fans when he commented that 'being there' was just as important as what happened in the ring.

Julius Francis received a good reception from his countrymen, but Tyson entered the stadium to what felt like an earthquake. The fight began with a clumsy barrage of slaps from Francis, and everybody knew what would happen next. A devastating blow to the body, followed by a right uppercut that sent Francis to the canvas for the first time, was only matched by the raw power that followed every Tyson punch.

Tyson may not have the boxing head of my childhood hero Muhammad Ali, but he makes up for it in his determination to win and win quickly. I heard no complaints about the length of the fight—even from those who had paid. Five minutes was enough to give a snapshot of the powerful boxer Tyson once was. ●

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The what's NOT on guide

MINORITY CONCERNS: The Broadcasting Standards Commission has slapped Channel 4's *11 O'Clock Show* for joking about the late Jill Dando (six complaints received) and Jonathan Ross for making light of the 'date rape' drug Rohypnol (one complaint received). For the 58 million UK citizens who did not complain about either of these remarks, tough. **WINDBAGS:** Glyn Hopper, head of Sowerby Primary School in North Yorkshire, has written to parents asking them to stop their children watching the cult cartoon series *South Park*, after a rise in swearing and bad behaviour among pupils. Some pupils drew Hopper's attention to this problem through the school council. 'I am proud of them for bringing this up', says Hopper. Clearly, she hasn't seen the *South Park* film where Kyle's mom organises a boycott of *Terrance and Phillip*—the *South Park* kids' favourite TV show whose farting characters and crude stories bear more than a passing resemblance to, well, *South Park*. A case of life imitating art, perhaps? **BLOWING THE BIG TOP:** The US Congress is set to pass a bill outlawing performing elephants in circuses. Sam Farr, proposing the bill, claims that 'dancing elephants and other performing animals give children a distorted view of wildlife'. And you see trapeze artists every day. **THE FRENCH CONNECTION:** A French comic book exhibition was forced by Catholic protesters to withdraw a Robert Crumb poster, only weeks after the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyons was fined 5000 francs for the sex and violence featured in an exhibition of comic book art. The UK's *Viz* (celebrating its anniversary with a London exhibition) should take note. **OUT TO LUNCH:** Sixty women librarians and curators at the British museum have petitioned to have a sculpture of a nude woman removed from the canteen. They say it 'grossly distorts the female form', is sexist, offensive, puts them off their food and encourages men to make lewd remarks. Yes, but is it art? ●

Compiled by Sandy Starr

PAGEMASTER: BRENDAN O'NEILL (brendan@mail.informinc.co.uk)

the early 1990s which advised parents that, through adopting certain types of behaviour, they could potentially 'Reduce the risk of cot death'. Now, in an attempt to lower the incidence further, yet more advice is being issued to parents.

The problem is that, despite the rarity of cot death, this advice causes all parents to worry about almost every aspect of their behaviour. Since the early 1990s they have been told to: 'Place your baby on the back to sleep; cut smoking in pregnancy—fathers too; do not let anybody smoke in the same room as your baby; do not let your baby get too hot; keep your baby's head uncovered; place your baby with feet to the foot of the cot.' Now the following guidelines have been added: 'Do not fall asleep with a baby on a sofa; do not share a bed with a baby if you are a smoker, have recently drunk alcohol, are excessively tired or take drugs or medication that make you sleepy; do keep your baby's cot in your bedroom for the first six months.' Implicit in this advice is that, if tragedy strikes, you must have done something wrong.

The focus on parenting methods as a possible cause of cot death means that everyday parenting practices have become open to scrutiny by healthcare professionals, who are expected to deliver the above guidelines and ensure that parents follow them. Health visitors and GPs have been accused of failing to prevent cot deaths (12 percent and eight percent respectively) because of substandard care. Meanwhile, the authors of *Sudden Unexpected Deaths in Infancy 1993-96* accuse parents of ignoring advice on cot death prevention and estimate that this contributed to 60 percent of the deaths that occurred during those three years.

Because the tragedy of cot death continues to affect disproportionately families living in poor circumstances, support is now to be targeted at them through government initiatives such as 'Sure Start'. But families will not be given any of the dedicated £450 million directly to tackle their socioeconomic deprivation. Instead, they will receive a range of additional support, services and advice from a variety of professionals. This will not guarantee parents' immunity from the unlikely tragedy of cot death, but it will invariably add to the worry and concern parents already feel with regard to babies and young children. It is time to lay off. ●

Bríd Hehir is a specialist health visitor in London ■ bhehir@hotmail.com

NHS IN TRACTION

Lack of money is the least of the health service's problems under New Labour, argues Dr Michael Fitzpatrick

If the National Health Service was merely required to treat the sick, then the cash boost pledged by Tony Blair to David Frost in response to the January flu (non-) epidemic might do the trick. But under this government, healthcare is not so straightforward. In its determination to use the NHS to advance a wider social and political agenda, New Labour is imposing a burden of expectations that will be almost impossible to fulfil.

Professor Rudolf Klein, a leading social policy academic, observed nearly 20 years ago that 'as an institution, the NHS ranked next to the monarchy as an unchallenged landmark in the political landscape of Britain' (*The Politics of the NHS*, 1983). More recently, shrewdly anticipating the winter flu crisis, Professor Klein commented in October 1999 that New Labour's health policies risked 'generating extra demand on the NHS by raising public expectations'. He pointed out that the government's centralising policies would 'increase the political costs of any failure to meet those demands', and warned that 'the NHS could yet turn into as much of an incubus for Labour as it proved for the Conservatives'.

But the solution to New Labour's health problems is not simply to plough in enough money to prevent horror stories of old ladies languishing on casualty trolleys for days (though after two years of austerity resulting from the continuation of Tory spending limits, these issues will be difficult enough to resolve before the next election). The bigger problem facing Tony Blair is that his government clings to the NHS as it clings to any possible focus of national unity. When most other institutions that once inspired popular loyalty are now, like the royal family, widely scorned, and attempts to foster a collective spirit around football, Britpop, the millennium celebrations and the Dome have proved a big disappointment, New Labour is left with that great standby of Old Labour politicians, the 'jewel in the crown' of the postwar welfare state—the NHS.

The NHS serves as a focus for New Labour's populist gestures to the consumer culture, which it believes to be the authentic voice of today's Britain. It is also a key target of New Labour's modernising zeal, taking on the forces of conservatism in the crusade for quality, transparency and accountability. The NHS is destined to play a key role in the government's drive to foster new bonds of community, through the promotion of collaboration in the name of health among different agencies and professionals. New Labour hopes to take advantage of the prestige of the NHS to advance its project of revitalising the institutional framework of British society, and restoring the links between the individual and the state.

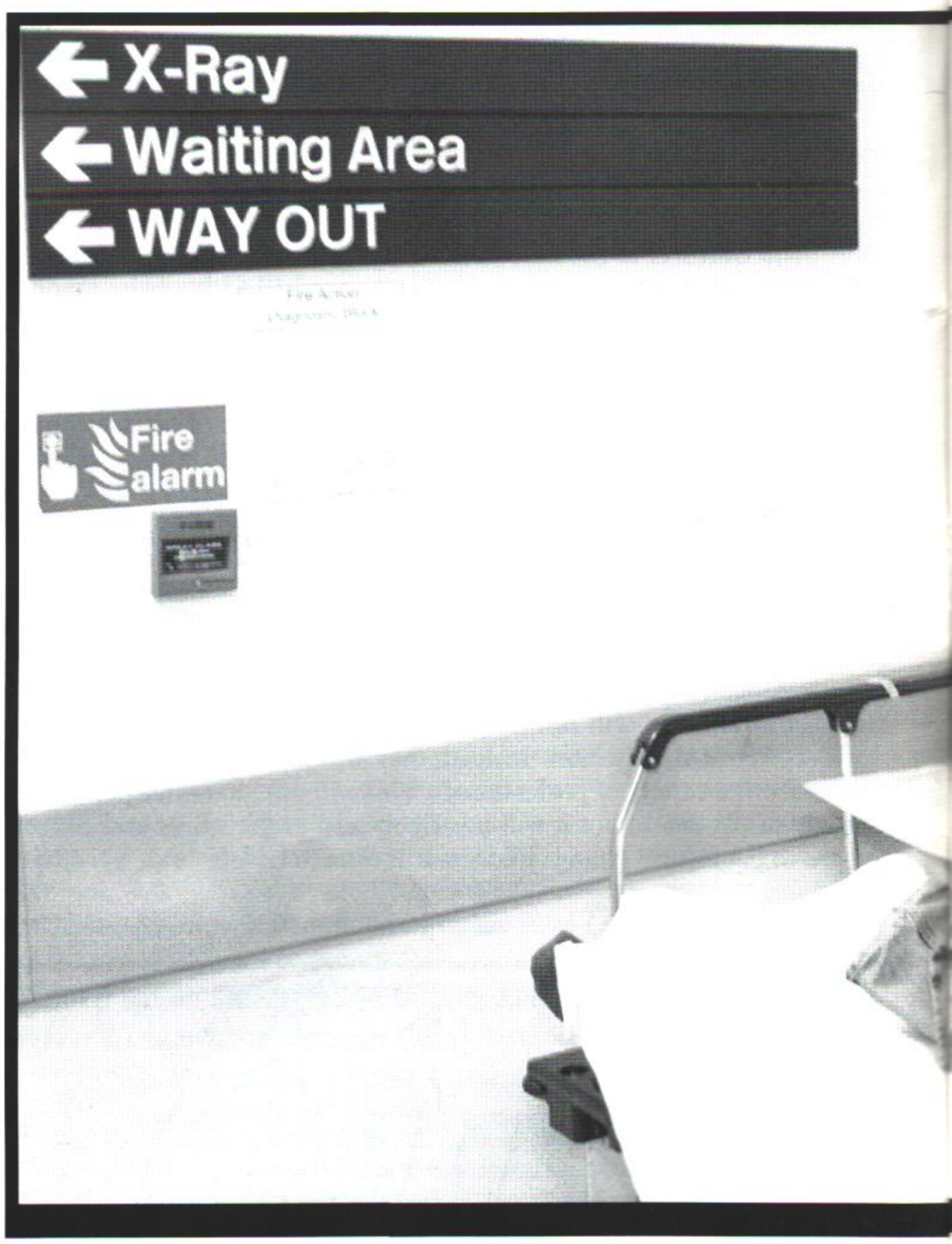
So it was significant that Tony Blair, in an interview on the completion of 1000 days in office, singled out the establishment of NHS Direct, the 24-hours-a-day nurse-led phone line, as one of his greatest achievements. This service, like the provision of 'walk-in' GP centres, was introduced in response to the discovery—from focus groups and other surveys—that there was a demand for rapid, easy access to medical advice and treatment. After cursory pilot projects last year, but before any serious evaluation could be made, the government pushed ahead to implement these services nationwide.

The fact that influential figures in the world of health policy—such as King's Fund supremo Julia Neuberger—seem to believe that NHS Direct and walk-in surgeries will help to reduce demand on services such as the overloaded hospital casualty departments would be funny, if the problems facing these services were not so grave. The 'Beveridge fallacy', named after the progenitor of the welfare state (who anticipated that once the health service was underway its costs would decline as the population grew healthier) has been rediscovered by every postwar generation. In fact, as John Knottenbelt, A&E consultant at Northwick Park hospital in north London, complained, 'this NHS Direct thing is not a good thing as far as we are concerned; all they are telling patients is "if you are feeling ill, go to A&E"' (*Guardian*, 12 January). (And of course, one additional benefit of all the flu calls to NHS Direct was that they gave Liam Donaldson, the government's chief medical officer, the confidence to inflate the flu figures to epidemic proportions, thus allowing the government to claim exceptional circumstances to justify the winter crisis.)

Services like NHS Direct and walk-in surgeries belong more to the world of political hype than that of healthcare. They create their own demand: if they exist they will be used, but in addition to, not instead of, existing services. The fact that they go down well with focus groups is more an indication of the way such techniques can be manipulated to reflect the prejudices of the New Labour elite, rather than a genuine expression of popular demand.

These sorts of propaganda initiative do not merely divert resources from real healthcare. They help to promote the public preoccupation with fears about disease, and so create a spiralling demand for reassurance. Such initiatives also indulge the consumerist prejudice that access to healthcare can be delivered in the same way as a trip to the supermarket or hairdresser. Transferred to the NHS, these notions are both corrosive of relationships of care and trust, and create aspirations that are likely to be frustrated in any publicly funded health service.

Another example of the abuse of the health service by populist gesture is New Labour's celebrated election pledge to reduce waiting lists by 100 000. The government is on course to meet this target—partly through the expedient of accelerating the treatment of patients



waiting for minor surgery while others, some with undoubtedly serious conditions, have to wait even longer for their first outpatient appointment. The latest propaganda target is the guarantee that anybody suspected of having cancer will get an outpatient appointment within two weeks. It was dismissed as 'window dressing' by the leading cancer specialist Professor Karol Sikora, now working for the World Health Organisation. Professor Sikora points out that the problem of British cancer services is not the delay in getting an appointment, but the shortage of specialists and specialist facilities for treating patients once their cancer has been diagnosed.

The commitment to *modernise* the NHS was the central theme of the White Paper *The New NHS*, published in December 1997. It has moved apace with plans to impose 'clinical governance', a code for managerial control over medical performance, and, most recently, proposals for stricter regulation of doctors' fitness to practise, requiring periodic assessment and 'revalidation'. In his party conference speech last September, Tony Blair singled out the British Medical Association (BMA) as among the 'forces of conservatism' that were resisting the government's modernisation plans in the health service.

This was rather unfair: a few minor quibbles aside, the BMA, and other leading medical bodies like the General Medical Council and the royal colleges governing different specialities, have actively supported the government reforms. Indeed, in substance, they initiated them. While forces of Blairism dominate the medical establishment, forces of conservatism—indeed any forces of opposition to the government's modernising bandwagon—are very difficult to identify. No doubt the old system of medical autonomy and professional self-regulation sheltered some incompetence and corruption. But it is to be doubted whether the introduction of a system of bureaucratic regulation will be any more effective in protecting patients. It seems inevitable, however, that it will be demoralising and coercive for doctors and that this will foster a climate of distrust between doctors and patients.

One of the most radical reforms New Labour has introduced in the health service is in its rhetoric. Out have gone the internal market, competition and contracts; in have come cooperation, collaboration and partnership. The focus of the government's public health programme—especially its flagship 'health action zones'—is on promoting local networks, interagency working, flexibility in professional roles. The idea is to take advantage of the popularity of primary healthcare services (GPs, district nurses, midwives, etc) to restore the bonds of neighbourhood and community that have been severely eroded by the social and political trends of the past decade.

The GP surgery has been identified as a central focus for all this health networking. The reason for this is straightforward. A *Guardian*/ICM poll in January asked people to grade various professionals (on a scale of one to 10) according to how they were 'respected by people in general': doctors came in at 8.4, exceeded only by nurses (8.5). Cabinet ministers and MPs tied at 5.5. At a time when other agencies—notably social services—are held in low regard, they would like to dissolve and regroup around doctors and nurses, in the hope that this will increase their public acceptability.

PHOTO: PA PHOTOS

SERVICES LIKE WALK-IN SURGERIES BELONG MORE TO THE WORLD OF POLITICAL HYPE THAN THAT OF HEALTHCARE

New Labour's initiatives converge with a long-running dynamic in general practice to expand the definition of the job into wider areas of social concern. Thus GPs have taken on some of the roles of social workers and the police in relation to drug and alcohol problems, child protection, domestic violence. Some are now collaborating with social workers, sometimes in voluntary organisations, around family intervention, parenting programmes, and initiatives presented as having a 'preventive' role in relation to concerns about child abuse.

The result of these trends is that GPs are pulled into a more intrusive and authoritarian approach to their patients, in a way that is destined to be damaging to doctor-patient relationships, and inevitably to their professional status. It is rather ironic that, after seeking to take over the management of the social as well as the medical problems of the neighbourhood, many GPs complain of high levels of stress (not to mention a growing inclination among their patients to assault them).

So Tony Blair may be able to find more money for the NHS. But given that he seems to be expecting it to provide feelgood PR, restore community *and* treat patients, his expectations, as well as those of millions of others, are likely to disappointed. ●

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

Dr Jennifer Cunningham diagnoses the problem with fashionable new 'cures' for autism

All parents anticipate the fascination of watching their children grow up and develop, and sharing their excitement and sense of achievement as they play, make discoveries and master new skills. So imagine the devastation experienced by the parents of autistic children as they realise they will enjoy very few of these pleasures, and that their children's severe behaviour problems and learning difficulties will seriously disrupt the lives of all members of the family for the indefinite future.

The diagnosis of autism is agonising news, made worse by the uncertainty surrounding the condition. We know that autism is an organic brain disorder and that there is a genetic contribution to its development, but there is no diagnostic medical test (blood test, genetic marker or brain scan) available. The diagnosis has to be made on the basis of behavioural or psychological features. Autistic children must show a number of deficits or abnormalities, before the age of three, in the areas of social interaction, social communication and imagination. They must also display aberrant behaviours such as stereotyped and restricted interests, adherence to routines and rituals, preoccupation with parts of toys and repetitive hand or body movements. Once the diagnosis has been made, parents must contend with the fact that medical research is not yet sufficiently advanced to offer rational treatments. Trials of various psychoactive drugs have been disappointing or inconclusive. There is evidence that very structured, behaviourally orientated teaching programmes are most effective in improving children's social interaction, play and language development, as well as decreasing their obsessive, ritualistic behaviour. But the scope of these interventions remains very restricted.

Unless parents gain a realistic appreciation of their child's long-term difficulties, they are liable to exhaust their emotional and financial resources chasing after every new therapy or theory, however poorly substantiated scientifically, in search of a 'cure'. But in the past two years, several theories about autism have received unprecedented media attention (and sent parents off on just such a chase).

First was the theory that the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine causes an inflammatory bowel condition and autism. Then a gut hormone, secretin, was discovered which, it has been asserted, reverses the symptoms of autism. Similar claims have been made for diets that exclude gluten (wheat) and milk products. Paediatricians and GPs have been inundated with requests to refer children to gastro-enterologists, to prescribe gluten- and milk-free diets and to endorse secretin injections. Most of those working with autistic children have been loath to comply with such requests because of the lack of scientific evidence for these theories. But many parents have disregarded our reservations, put their children on to these diets and taken them (often at great expense) to those practitioners prepared to administer secretin injections.

The perception now exists among parents, encouraged by the media's coverage of these issues, that most of us working in this field are part of a conservative and intransigent medical establishment. We are prepared to defend vaccination campaigns even if they put some children at risk of autism, yet we are not prepared to accept new medical theories and treatments that could help relieve the symptoms of autism. The researchers who propound these theories and the doctors administering these treatments, by contrast, are regarded as courageous pioneers battling against official indifference and dogma. Dr Andrew Wakefield, the gastro-enterologist whose study linked MMR vaccination to a new form of inflammatory bowel disease and autism (reported in the *Lancet*, 28 February 1998), has insisted that he has acted out of a sense of moral duty to his patients. 'If there are children who are damaged by these preventive measures they have to be listened to, investigated and treated. I know it makes it difficult for the public health doctors but there is nothing to be done about it.' (*Independent*, 27 February 1998)

But even if Andrew Wakefield is intrepid, that does not exempt him from the exacting requirements of credible scientific research. His research team at the Royal Free Hospital, London, produced an earlier study in 1994 that suggested that measles or measles vaccine virus are implicated in the inflammatory bowel disorder Crohn's disease. These results have not been replicated by other researchers and the theory is now discredited (see the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*), 17 January 1998). In fact, Wakefield's study of autistic children did not find any evidence of measles vaccine virus in any of their tissues—making the theory of MMR vaccine damage entirely circumstantial and speculative. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide have received measles-containing vaccines since the mid-1960s without developing chronic bowel problems or autistic disorders. National data in Britain indicate a rise in the incidence of autism, but it started over a decade before MMR vaccination was introduced in 1988 and it showed no change at that time (*BMJ*, 7 March 1998). Even if one accepted that some autistic children have an associated form of inflammatory bowel disease (and most gastro-enterologists refute this), it does not mean that it is *causally* related to autism. In Wakefield's study the behavioural changes postulated to result from malabsorption in the bowel and consequent neurological damage *preceded* the bowel symptoms in nearly all their reported cases.

Nonetheless, Wakefield's postulate has been tied in with theories about secretin. Secretin is a hormone produced in the small bowel that acts on the pancreas, leading to the release of water, bicarbonate and enzymes. These enzymes break down proteins into polypeptides and then into amino acids, which are absorbed through the gut wall into the bloodstream. A test dose of secretin is sometimes given to patients being investigated for gastrointestinal problems, to assess pancreatic function. After such a test dose was administered to an American child with autism, Parker Tucker, in 1996, his parents reported a dramatic improvement in his behaviour, eye contact and speech. This set in train an avalanche of demands for secretin injections from parents in the

SECRETIN HAS NEITHER UNDERGONE SAFETY TRIALS NOR BEEN LICENSED FOR USE IN CHILDREN

USA, and was repeated in Britain two years later. The theory is that autistic children have low levels of secretin which result in inadequate digestion of proteins, especially gluten and casein in milk, and the subsequent absorption of polypeptides through a 'leaky' bowel (this is where Wakefield's theory comes in). These 'toxic' polypeptides or opioids, it is argued, bind to morphine-like receptors in the brain and disrupt normal neurological transmissions.

Whether one regards this theory as elegant or contrived, it remains unsubstantiated. Reports of the efficacy of secretin are largely anecdotal. Three trials in the USA comparing the effects of secretin with a placebo injection of saline found no difference in children's behaviour between the two groups. Two Taiwanese trials reported that secretin improved some of the symptoms of autism, but the validity of the results has been strongly contested. What is more alarming than this lack of evidence is that secretin has neither undergone safety trials nor been licensed for use in children in either Britain or the USA. We do not know whether it is safe to give children repeated doses of secretin injections or if it will have any long-term effects on children's health and growth.

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH CHAPMAN

So why have these theories taken off among parents? When I became part of an autism assessment team five years ago, parents were just as desperate as parents are today to find the cause of their children's condition, and a cure—although I do not believe they would have subjected their children to unregulated trials of an unlicensed drug. But now parents, like researchers and doctors, are influenced by a very different set of social attitudes and trends. There is currently a widespread cynicism about modern medicine, and a move away from it towards alternative medicine and therapies. Parallel with this is a growing indifference to scientific method and an acceptance of less rational (religious or mystical), and more subjective, justifications for treatments or therapies. Then there is the perception that modern society has produced an increasingly polluted and toxic environment, resulting in an increased risk of serious allergies, antibiotic-resistant infections and genetic damage, among other dangers. In such a climate it is hardly surprising that people begin to fear the very things that helped to conquer disease in the twentieth century, such as antibiotics and immunisations.

But probably the most important contemporary trend is the development of a culture where people are encouraged to see themselves as the victims of harmful external agents or culpable agencies. Such a culture cannot accept that accidents—in nature just as in social life—are just that, unintended and coincidental. Instead, people are driven to look for something or somebody to blame when things go wrong, be it a natural disaster or a genetic abnormality. Under these circumstances it is easy to see why the parents of autistic children are so susceptible to scares about MMR vaccination or the food their children eat. We can appreciate why they are hostile to the medical establishment and turn to professionals who are prepared to accommodate to their frantic quest. But they do so at the cost of abandoning medical standards of safety and scientific standards of proof. ●

What is autism?

Autism is a severe, lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder of social communication. We now know that it is the result of structural or functional abnormalities in the brain, arising during brain development (probably in early embryogenesis) and impacting on children's intellectual, social and emotional development. The abnormalities appear to involve the 'motivating' parts of the brain: those involved in the control of attention and the perceptual guidance of action and those involved in the patterning and communication of emotion. But the impact of these abnormalities on a child's development often does not become apparent until the second year, by which time autistic children frequently show problems in their social development.

What is meant by social communication? The most obvious prerequisite for effective communication is language. Another essential component of communication is the interaction between persons, involving the sharing of ideas and emotions. It is in terms of their lack of responsiveness to other people that autistic children's development is most strikingly deviant.

Babies come into the world preprogrammed to respond to social stimuli and form attachments to carers. By nine months, infants begin to show two extremely important behaviours. They show *joint attention*: sharing their experiences of objects or actions with others and monitoring the emotional responses of adults, such as responding to tone of voice, and pointing to things they find interesting to draw other people's attention to them. This is a major developmental step, indicating a sense of self *and* other Secondly, they look at people's faces for information, a practice known as *social referencing*. Infants and toddlers look at their carers' faces and by picking up the emotional signals they will decide on their action. When they receive encouraging or positive signals they will approach and engage with an object or situation; when the signals are anxious or negative they will retreat. Joint attention and social referencing allow children to learn through other people about how to respond to experiences, both behaviourally and emotionally.

Autistic children are usually very focused on their own activity and show no desire to share their experiences. They seldom imitate other people's actions, rarely follow the gaze or pointing gestures of others, and fail to look at adults' faces and use the emotional display to guide their behaviour. Nor do they point at interesting things. This lack of joint attention and social referencing both impairs the child's judgement about situations and impairs their understanding of emotions and relationships with others. The fact that autistic children do not see situations from other people's perspective will have profound and cumulative effects on their cultural learning and social relationships. ●

Abuse of trust

Codes regulating the behaviour of those who work with children rest on a broader suspicion of adults, says Frank Furedi

'If a man says he wants to work with young boys, people jump to one conclusion.' Jo Tupper of the British Scout Association was explaining why the Scouts face a shortage of adult volunteer leaders. And research carried out at Hertfordshire University suggests that fear of being unjustly labelled a pervert is turning men away from careers as primary school teachers. Mary Thornton, who conducted the study, claims that many male students on teacher training programmes felt uneasy about how they should handle young children. Could they escort children to the toilet, or change wet underwear? Should they cuddle a distressed child—should they even be alone with a child?

From voluntary organisations to primary education, well-meaning adults are put off from playing a valuable role instructing and inspiring young children. At a conference organised by Playlink and Portsmouth City Council in November last year, the delegates were enthusiastic professionals committed to improving children's lives through outdoor play. But several of the playworkers felt that their role was diminished by bureaucratic rules designed to regulate their contact with children. One playworker complained that she often could not do 'what's right' by the children, because if she did not follow the rules it would threaten her career prospects.

Nursery workers, teachers, play leaders and voluntary sector workers report that one-to-one encounters between adults and children are increasingly perceived as an invitation for misbehaviour. The most innocent attempt by a teacher to comfort an upset child can be endowed with a malevolent meaning; and since it is simply impossible to avoid physical contact with primary school children, teachers are often placed in a vulnerable position. In some cases, teachers have been warned against putting suncream on young children in case this leads to false accusations of abuse. This might seem paranoid until you consider that, according to teachers' union leaders, every year hundreds of classroom staff face just such accusations.

There was a time when parents assumed that nurseries were safe places where caring teachers looked after their toddlers. But now, anxiety over the intentions of child carers has encouraged the introduction of hi-tech internet cameras in a number of nurseries. That some parents now feel the need to spy on their children and their carers shows how little they feel able to trust anybody other than themselves.

A government report published in September 1999 allows sports coaches to give teenagers a celebratory hug during the game or rub an injury. Any other form of physical contact has to be avoided. I recently discovered that an acquaintance who used to manage a children's Sunday football team has given up his post, having found that the rules and regulations laid down to guard against abuse made managing the team a 'permanent trial'. The team has since folded—nobody else has been prepared to volunteer.

Even religious organisations have adopted guidelines that minimise contact between children and grown-ups. In Australia, Roman Catholic priests have been banned from having any private contact with lone children, and guidelines drawn up with the approval of the Vatican mean that confessionals have to be fitted with glass viewing panels. Things are marginally better in Britain—volunteers working with church-related organisations are not banned from being with a child alone, just so long as the door is not closed. All this has consequences. Reverend Gerald Kirkham, rector of St Michael's Church in the village of Northchapel, West Sussex, was forced to disband his choir of up to 20 children because, under the new code, at least two adult chaperones were needed to attend the weekly rehearsals.

MAQUETTE FOR FAMILY GROUP, HENRY MOORE, 1945

THE MOST INNOCENT ATTEMPT BY A TEACHER TO COMFORT AN UPSET PUPIL CAN BE ENDOWED WITH MALEVOLENT MEANING

Those who work with children are automatically undermined by codes that regulate their behaviour to this degree. If it is assumed that professional carers need to be told how to relate to the children in their charge, why should parents—or children—trust in their authority and integrity? But it is not only professional carers or volunteers who are affected by these codes. At their core is a more general distrust of adults. It is assumed that adults cannot be expected to respect the line between childhood and adulthood; that they need to be told what almost all of them know by instinct—that children are vulnerable creatures who need protection, not to be treated as equals. This means comforting a distraught child with a cuddle just as much as it means not abusing those young people who have put their trust in you.

The negative image of adulthood enshrined in codes aiming to prevent 'abuses of trust' has far-reaching implications. The healthy development of any community depends on the quality of the bonds that link the different generations. When those bonds are subjected to a culture of suspicion, the ensuing confusion will threaten the very future of a community. After all, relations of warmth and affection are inherent in family relationships, and even in relations between children and professional or volunteer carers. If an adult's touch of a child comes to be regarded with anxiety, how can these relations be sustained?

It should really come as no surprise that some children have begun to play off this general distrust of adults to make life difficult for those they don't like. Most children are enterprising creatures, for whom adult insecurities can provide an opportunity to exercise their power. A commuter friend of mine recounted his confrontation with a young child playing with the door of a moving train. 'You can't tell me what to do, because you are a stranger' was the child's response. A few, fortunately very few, go a step further and make a malicious accusation against their teacher. But it is not their fault. They are merely manipulating a dirty-minded world created by obsessive adults. ●

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PRISONS OF THE MIND

Brendan O'Neill would rather be banged up than screwed up by jail therapy

'There is something wrong with the old-style culture which treats a prisoner as somebody who is a subordinate to you. You need to have the same responsibility of care for a prisoner that a nurse has for a patient in hospital....' Forget the image of malicious screws in films like *Scum*, who look down on their charges as the lowest of the low. Sir David Ramsbotham, chief inspector of prisons for England and Wales, wants prison officers to be more caring. Launching his annual report last year, Ramsbotham attacked the 'culture of domination' in Britain's prisons, and called for 'care for and awareness of others...the heart of what healthy relationships between staff and prisoners are all about'.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and prison reform groups are keen to make incarceration a more 'positive' and 'inclusive' experience. In a letter to Ramsbotham, one governor complained that 'our relationships with [prisoners] usually stress their inferiority and exclusion'. The Samaritans argue that prisoners are denied the opportunity to live full, emotional lives, and have set up 'Listener' schemes in 23 prisons, where specially trained inmates share the problems of their fellow prisoners. Ramsbotham wants to move away from the old days of retribution and reform and towards the goal of the 'healthy prison', where inmates recognise that 'feeling good about ourselves is closely bound up with the respect which others show us'.

Britain's prison system could certainly do with an overhaul. We have all heard stories of beatings by officers at Wormwood Scrubs, and how 16-year olds at Feltham Young Offenders' Institution live in 'dilapidated, dirty and cold' cells (the Inspectorate's words, following an unannounced inspection at the end of 1998). Most prisons are infested with vermin, and some prisoners are locked up for 23 hours a day with poor access to educational facilities and healthcare. But will the shift from authority to empathy, with inmates more likely to be sent to counselling than to solitary, really improve the prison system?

Today's reformers are embarrassed by the traditional lock-up, slop-out, laundry-work imprisonment of the past, and want to make prison sentences more like a 'stay in hospital'. Pointing out that imprisonment can be bad for your mental health, HMIP aims to reorganise prison life around the physical and emotional wellbeing of inmates. In May 1999, HMIP launched the report *Why Suicide is Everyone's Concern*, pointing out that the old-style prison culture had led to an increase in the number of prison suicides. In October, Home Office minister Paul Boateng announced his 'action plan' for prison reform after visiting Brixton Prison in south London, where 30 inmates had tried to kill or harm themselves in the space of three months, while figures revealed that up to 1000 prisoners across Britain attempt suicide each year.

How true is it that Britain's prisons are hotbeds of mental illness and suicide? The number of suicides rose from 64 in 1996 to 68 in 1997, before jumping to 82 in 1998—an increase of 18 suicides in just two years. But over the same period of time, the prison population rose by more than 10 000, from 54 655 in 1996 to 64 744 in 1998. So the number of suicides actually rose from 11.7 per 10 000 prisoners in 1996 to 12.6 per 10 000 prisoners in 1998—hardly the most shocking increase. It's a bit rich (not to mention unscientific) for government ministers to be horrified by the rise in prison suicides while failing to point out that they have packed already overcrowded prisons with more and more offenders.

On closer inspection, it seems that today's reformers are concerned not so much with prisoners' health as with their values and behaviour. The HMIP report *Patient or Prisoner?* stresses that 'healthcare must not be seen solely as a medical service. It includes the part each person plays in maintaining a healthy environment'. *Why Suicide is Everyone's Concern* argues that 'healthcare and health promotion are key activities in helping prisoners to develop self-respect'. It soon becomes clear that the 'healthy prison' will have little to do with health in the old-fashioned sense, and more to do with creating the right kind of environment with prisoners who behave in the right kind of way.

Today's reformers are most concerned that the old-style prison culture gives rise to all the wrong

Wot no fear? by Kenneth Mc Laughlin

From July to December last year *Community Care* magazine ran the 'No Fear' campaign, addressing the problems of 'violence and stress in social work' which 'have reached unacceptable levels'. The campaign followed the murder of Jenny Morrison, a social worker in London who was killed by one of her mentally ill clients, and a *Community Care* survey which found that 54 percent of social workers who responded had been 'violently attacked' and 49 percent felt 'severely stressed' at work. Another study, by the National Institute of Social Work, found that 75 percent of staff had been 'verbally abused'.

As somebody who works in a mental health team, I was surprised by these figures. If half my colleagues have been violently attacked, they have certainly kept quiet about it. But *Community Care*'s respondents were self-selected, so maybe only those who had reason to feel strongly about the issue bothered to reply. The reality is that the risk of being killed by a client is extremely rare—according to a government source, there were eight cases in the 1980s and 90s, even though social services employees are in contact with over two million clients every year.

So why the inflated sense of risk? Partly

values—where prisoners become hostile to authority and assert their independence. HMIP points out some of the 'belief rules' that are problematic: 'be competitive...do not rely on anybody other than yourself...be especially wary of prison officers...work out the institutional regime...keep your head down and do your time...emphasise your independence.' The benefit of the 'healthy prison', by contrast, is that inmates will be encouraged to avoid 'disguising their weaknesses beneath the "macho" culture which prevails in closed male prisons' (*Why Suicide is Everyone's Concern*).

According to HMIP, 'Behind much of the antisocial behaviour demonstrated by people who find it difficult to cope in prison is a serious lack of self-esteem'. No wonder penal institutions will become more like hospitals, with prisoners seen as feeble individuals in need of lessons in self-expression, rather than as offenders who must be punished for having done something wrong. And those who refuse to play the part of

WARDENS WANT THE KEY TO PRISONERS' SOULS

the pathetic patient will face stiffer sentences. Announcing in January that prisoners would be forced to attend courses in 'anger management', Lord Bingham made clear that 'if the offender refused to cooperate in the treatment, that could be reflected in an extended penalty' (*Express*, 24 January). Welcome to the therapeutic prison, where the things that might make prison life that bit more bearable—self-reliance, independence, working out the regime—will be written off as 'macho', as prisoners will be encouraged to be more open in their relationship with the authorities. Screws already have the key to prisoners' cells—now they want the key to their souls, too.

The debate about prisons and their role in society has raged for over 100 years. But in the past it was a debate divided between those who thought prison should be about retribution and those who thought it should be about reform. Right-wing law-and-order obsessives argued that prison life should be harsh, to punish those who had deviated from society's rules and regulations—while reformers wanted prison to be centred around constructive work and education, in an attempt to transform the ruffians into half-decent citizens who could be returned to society. Both sides shared a patronising view of offenders, but they also had a sense that the offender was responsible for his crime, had to face up to the error of his ways, and could then be given a second chance.

Today, offenders are seen as mentally ill and prison as a way of counselling them. The flipside of this argument can only be that everybody is seen as incapable of taking responsibility, as criminal automatons who might at any moment fall victim to the 'sickness' of crime—maybe the solution should be life sentences of therapy and counselling for all. And the end result of the new 'healthy prison' is that the distinction between being imprisoned for doing something wrong and being freed to get on with your life again is increasingly being blurred.

'A healthy establishment is one which...sees its duty as extending beyond the prison gates', says HMIP, ensuring that 'other social services and health services are involved where necessary'. Just when a prisoner thinks he has done his 'bird' and paid the price for his crime, he'll find that the healthy prison stretches beyond the walls of Strangeways or the Scrubs, and into society itself. Healthy prisons will ensure that the counselling received on the inside will also be available on the outside. Electronic tagging has already been introduced for some released prisoners, placing them under virtual house arrest by sending a signal to the police if they stay out beyond a set curfew. Now, healthy prisons are set to extend their influence into the world of the ex-con, making sure that the idea of being free once more to regain your independence and rebuild your life is a thing of the past.

Prison reformers once argued that denying an offender his liberty was punishment enough; beyond that, prisons should be comfortable and constructive. Today it is not enough to deny an offender his liberty—we also have to strip him of his independence and self-confidence, and ensure that whatever he was like when he entered prison he will leave as a feeble-minded loser who can't be expected to take responsibility for his actions. Hard labour would be better. ●

this is a result of the loose definition of violence. For the British Association of Social Workers violence can be 'serious assault' and 'murder' (fair enough), but it can also cover 'verbal abuse' and 'threatening behaviour'. Considering that social workers work with people who are mentally or physically incapacitated, in severe distress, and at the margins of society, the fact that 75 percent suffer verbal abuse at some point in their career is hardly surprising. Do they expect to be thanked by a parent whose child they have just removed, or by a patient whom they have just detained under the Mental Health Act?

But there are other reasons for this focus on fear. Employers are acutely aware of the threat of litigation by stressed-out employees—in January, a council worker was awarded £200 000 in an out-of-court settlement, the latest in a series of payouts for work-related stress. And gone are the days when unions argued for better pay and conditions. Today they emphasise how vulnerable we are and demand that we be protected. If the *Community Care* survey is anything to go by, such a pathetic sense of self is being embraced by social workers themselves.

Social workers often emphasise their isolation, feeling pilloried by libertarians for being draconian and castigated by the media for failing to protect children. But *Community Care*'s campaign has united everybody from the government and senior management to the unions and those on the ground. Surely an easier solution to the stresses of community care would be to get a life—or another job. ●

PILL-ORIED

Professor Carl Djerassi, inventor of the contraceptive pill, told Ellie Lee the story of its controversial history

'Oral contraceptives are of such low risk to healthy young women, they should be available over the counter.' Professor Carl Djerassi sees 'no medical reason' why the pill is still only available on prescription. So why do women still have to make that annoying six-monthly trawl to their GP or family-planning clinic?

In 2001, the pill will celebrate its fortieth birthday. Over that time it has become the most researched drug on Earth, and has been proven to be safe. The risk of blood clots resulting from pill use—one of the ongoing fears—has been measured at 15 to 25 per 100 000 (compared with 60 per 100 000 for having a baby). And a recent study of 46 000 women over 25 years convincingly challenged the notion that ill health will result some time in the future in pill users. Mortality rates in pill users and non-users were little different 10 years after pill use ceased. In terms of fertility control, the benefits of the pill are clear—it has been estimated that, with typical use, 15 couples in 100 will get pregnant where condoms are used, compared with two or three per hundred for the pill.

Yet despite the effectiveness of the pill and its proven safety, it remains dogged by a suspicion that has surrounded the drug since it first came on the market. When Djerassi first synthesised the hormones used in the pill, at a laboratory in Mexico in 1951, it was, he says, in a climate where 'pharmaceutical companies, the media, and the public proclaimed and accepted the benefits of the postwar chemotherapeutic revolution with barely a reservation', and when 'the search for new approaches to contraception was a glamorous and exciting field'. But the pill came on the market in the 1960s, 'the worst of all times' to bring a new drug on to the market, according to Djerassi. In the wake of the Thalidomide tragedy, where a drug given to pregnant women to alleviate sickness resulted in the birth of children with severe limb deformities, the issue of the deleterious side effects of any new drug 'came to preoccupy the American public' and led to a new demand for safety.

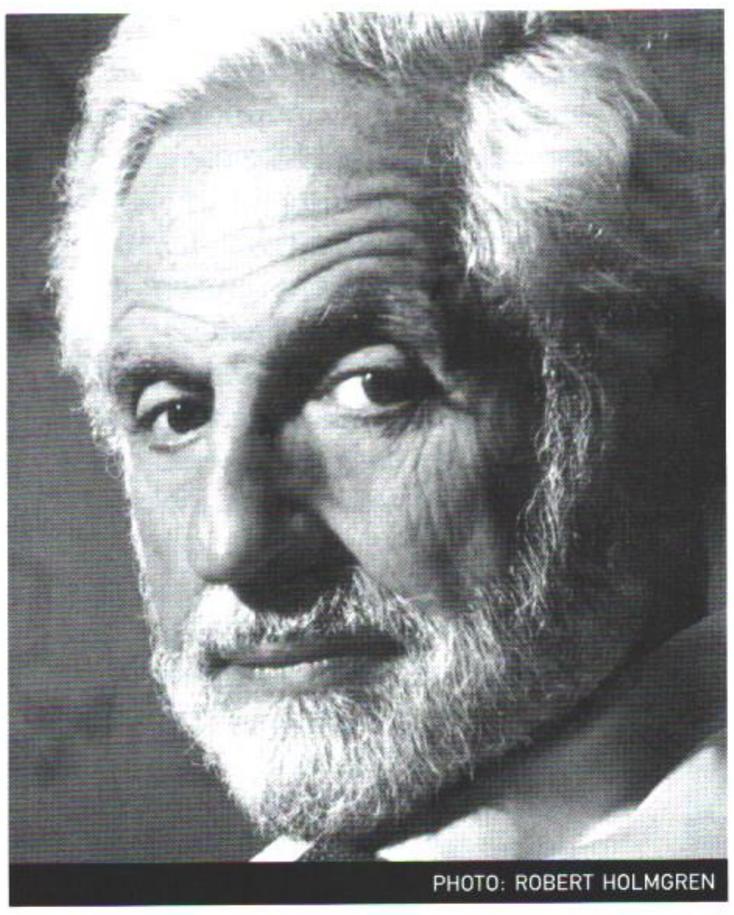


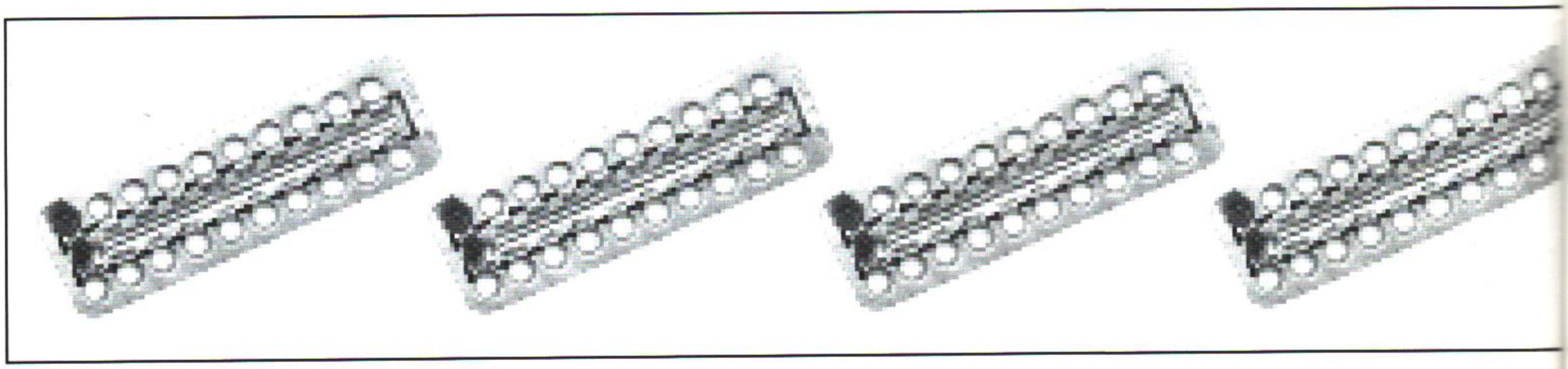
PHOTO: ROBERT HOLMGREN

'THE PILL CAME ON THE MARKET AT THE WORST OF ALL TIMES'

While it is common sense to want a drug to be properly tested and safe, it is simply impossible to guarantee absolutely that no side effects will result from a new drug. Djerassi suggests that this was not clarified in the 1960s, generating a climate of 'risk aversion' in attitudes towards new medicines—especially contraceptives. Since the pill is taken by healthy people, who are less tolerant of potential side effects than those suffering from disease, Djerassi argues that people are already more predisposed to sue where any health problems emerge which appear to be connected to contraceptive use. Indeed, in 1982 the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment reported that during the preceding decade, liability costs facing contraceptive manufacturers had been higher than in any other drug category.

But Djerassi also points out that the litigious approach of the 1960s was encouraged by three newly emerging social movements, 'the women's movements, environmental protectionism, and consumer advocacy', all three of which were 'intrinsically suspicious of technology and even science'. Fuelled by sensationalist media headlines such as 'Pill kills', representatives of these three movements encouraged litigation as an expression of their hostility to the pharmaceutical industry. While their concern for optimising women's health was legitimate, in retrospect Djerassi suggests that those in these movements may look back on their influence with some regret—their litigious approach has 'ultimately only penalised the very constituency that stood to benefit most from continued research'—women of reproductive age.

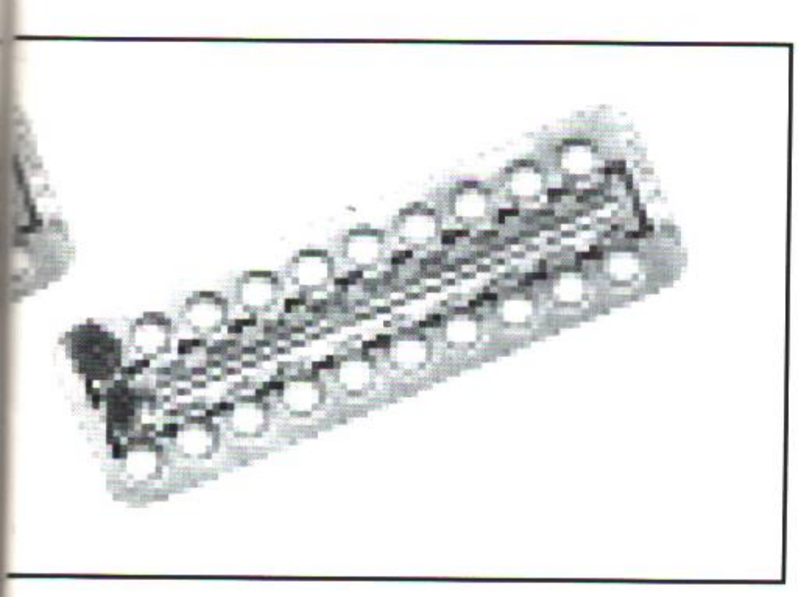
The pharmaceutical industry played its own part in contributing to the suspicion surrounding the pill. Djerassi uses the example of the 'Nelson hearings' of 1970: a 'pivotal' event, which pushed contraceptive research 'permanently into the minor leagues'. Held before a subcommittee of the US Senate, the Nelson hearings were set up in response to concerns being raised about the pill's safety. 'Witness after witness was produced to illuminate the potential dangers of the pill', says Djerassi. Not one representative from any pharmaceutical company testified, reflecting 'the industry's paranoid perception of hearings': a 'tactical mistake', according to Djerassi, which led to a bitter, unrebutted condemnation of the pharmaceutical industry during the hearings. Further bad press for the pill resulted, and further lawsuits.



The end result of all this was a startling deterioration in contraceptive research and development. According to Djerassi, by the end of the 1970s the pill, with regard to prospects for spending on research and development, was a 'boat that had set sail'. Djerassi himself, who was in charge of research at Syntex, an American company that until the 1970s had spent a higher proportion of its research and development budget on contraception than any other company, took 'the regrettable though unavoidable step of recommending to the board of directors that Syntex withdraw from this field of research'. Djerassi advised that the company's stockholder's money should be spent on health areas for which there were fewer barriers. Since then the pharmaceutical industry, unwilling to spend the time, energy and resources necessary to refute the pill's critics, has maintained its focus on 'the bottom line'.

It is disturbing that the pill, which first became available four decades ago, remains the most recent real breakthrough in contraceptive technology. Other areas of medicine have witnessed dramatic new developments. Yet those new contraceptive developments that have taken place, such as Intrauterine Devices which release hormones, lower-dose pills, contraceptive implants and injections, are all variations on a theme, rather than substantially different products from the pill. There continues to be litigation around the pill—last year it was reported that 137 women are to bring a joint action against pill manufacturers. Litigation has also been responsible for the withdrawal last year of the contraceptive Norplant from the British market. In this climate, a positive change in pharmaceutical companies' attitudes to contraceptive research is unlikely. It's a good job Djerassi invented the pill when he did. ●

Ellie Lee is coordinator of the research and education trust Pro-Choice Forum (www.prochoiceforum.org.uk)



Embryonic developments

by Juliet Tizzard

'**Ovary the moon!**' shouted the *Mirror*'s front page, above the smiling face of 34-year-old cancer sufferer Carolyn Neill. In January, Neill won the right to use her frozen eggs—collected before she underwent chemotherapy—to have a child. Inside the paper, the 'Voice of the *Mirror*' continued with the celebratory tone: 'to women like Carolyn, who see their chance of motherhood vanish through illness, new hope is given by these brilliant new techniques.'

Reproductive technology was not always greeted so positively. The media frenzy surrounding the birth of Louise Brown nearly 22 years ago has, in the world of reproductive technologies, been matched only by the news of Dolly the cloned sheep in 1997. From the very beginning of Louise Brown's life, concerns about the moral acceptability of *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) were raised. For those who believed that life begins at conception, the fact that IVF involved the destruction of human embryos made it an abhorrent practice. Even the British Medical Association did not publicly approve of IVF until 1985—by which time Louise Brown was seven years old and the government-commissioned Warnock report had recommended legislation permitting embryo research.

But when Louise Brown reached her twenty-first birthday last year, nobody took much notice. With half a million test-tube babies now walking the planet, IVF itself is no longer controversial. Today, the concerns have shifted to how this technology is used.

The reaction to Carolyn Neill's case may have been entirely positive (even the pro-life lobby had trouble objecting). But the idea that this same technology might be used by women who are not cancer survivors, but just want to delay motherhood for a decade or two, was met with disapproval. Jacqueline Laing, writing in the *Daily Mail*, typified the media reaction to egg freezing for reasons of convenience when she said that it 'ignores the rights of the child and trivialises the act of procreation. It makes a baby into a commodity to be ordered up for the freezer when convenient'.

But how are a child's rights violated by being born of egg freezing? And how exactly is the act of procreation trivialised by having children this way? Carolyn Neill is planning to have a child by exactly the same means, and she is applauded for doing so. Yet a woman who has a non-medical reason for using egg freezing is somehow acting in a morally dubious fashion.

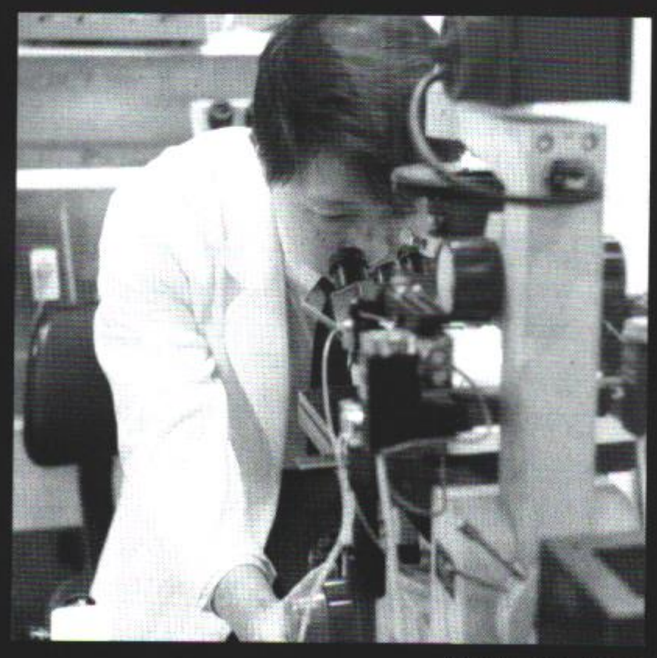


PHOTO: PA PHOTOS

The message that Jacqueline Laing and commentators like her seem to be trying to convey is that it doesn't matter so much which method you use for having children, but why you wish to use that technique. If nature has dealt you an unfortunate hand—if you have had cancer or a premature menopause—egg freezing is seen as a right and proper way out of your predicament. But if you want it—or any other reproductive technology—for anything other than medical reasons, expect to meet with disapproval.

In a similar story before Christmas, a young woman suffering an early menopause had had one of her ovaries frozen and then returned to her body. The success of Margaret Lloyd-Hart's ovarian graft has—like egg freezing—given hope to young women whose fertility has been damaged. Those women may now be able to freeze their ovarian tissue before their fertility is destroyed by chemotherapy or premature menopause, and have it returned at a later date to try to get pregnant. Again, while the application of ovarian tissue grafting caused little concern, a debate kicked off about 'career women' who would use the technique to cheat the biological clock and have a child for convenience.

But what is wrong with career women using new reproductive technologies to have a child later than nature might make possible? How is this scenario different from that in which a woman decides to stay on the pill because she isn't ready to be a mother yet? Both women are opting for the most convenient time in their lives to have their children. And what could be wrong with this? Careful family planning tends to make for happy, fulfilled mothers with, as a consequence, well-rounded happy children.

In fact, it will be a long time before egg freezing for 'convenience' reasons takes off. It is an expensive, invasive procedure which offers little chance of success. A 45-year-old woman is more likely to conceive naturally than she is by egg freezing and IVF. But one day, this technology might be cheaper, easier and much more successful. What would be so wrong with a woman using science to avoid having a baby just because nature dictates it, and waiting instead until her children are planned, prepared for and very much wanted? ●

Juliet Tizzard is director of Progress Educational Trust, a charity set up to promote the benefits of reproductive and genetic science (www.progress.org.uk)

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Could the reaction against GM crops damage the future of human genetics? asks John Gillott

The tragic death of 18-year-old Jesse Gelsinger in September last year provoked new concerns about human genetics. Gelsinger was participating in a human gene therapy trial at the Pennsylvania Institute—one of the foremost centres worldwide for this experimental procedure, where correctly functioning copies of genes are transferred into patients in an attempt to compensate for genetic or cellular malfunction. Although this was not the first death to occur in the 10-year history of gene therapy trials, it was the first to be officially attributed to the procedure rather than the underlying condition. Gelsinger, who had a relatively mild form of liver disorder, volunteered for the trial to help others.

In January the US Federal Drugs Administration (FDA) suspended all gene therapy trials at the institute, pending further investigation of what it considers to be the centre's inadequate adherence to regulations. Gelsinger's father, who continued to praise the work of the institute immediately after his son's death, is now contemplating legal action.

Gelsinger's death, and the FDA's action, have shaken the gene therapy community. But the case has also led to renewed expressions of support for the principle behind the work. Patients and researchers in the field have stressed that, while every effort must be made to control the risks through proper scrutiny of the trials, 'like most medical interventions, gene therapy is potentially dangerous', and that some level of risk is justified because such work offers the hope of cures for currently incurable disorders (editorial comment, *Nature Medicine*, January 2000). This was in sharp contrast to the reaction of Britain's Lord Alton. Echoing the language used to condemn non-human applications of genetic engineering, the veteran moral crusader and anti-abortion campaigner told the *Mail on Sunday*, 'I take a cautious position on research like this....The science is unproven. Safety and ethical considerations are unresolved. These factors are enough to require a moratorium to allow us to stop and consider' (23 January 2000).

Was this merely a predictable response from a conservative figure of the past—or a warning of trouble to come? In recent years genetically modified (GM) crops have become the focus of massive concern and calls for caution and restraint. Now some in the field of human genetics are worried that human genetic engineering and other therapeutic applications of related technologies—currently fields in their infancy, but experiencing rapid growth—may provoke the same reaction.

There is an argument for not being too concerned. Opinion surveys show that genetics as applied to medicine currently enjoys a much higher level of public support than does GM food. A MORI poll, conducted in 1999 as part of the government's review of the regulation of the biosciences, reported that advances in human health are seen as the biggest benefit to arise from scientific developments. The percentage of people giving the thumbs up, minus the percentage giving the thumbs down, was +56 for new medicines. For the development of cures and/or the eradication of disease it was +42. By contrast, GM food scored -44. The report also noted that 'the main issues which the public would take into account in determining whether a biological development is right or wrong are whether people would benefit from it and whether it would be safe to use'. Similar results were recorded across Europe in *The Europeans and Modern Biotechnology*, a major survey published by the European Commission in 1996—genetic testing and medicines received an overall positive evaluation; GM foods a small net negative.

But it would be complacent to think that the reaction against GM foods witnessed over the past two or three years will pass human genetics by—it is already crossing over. Nor can a general public support for medicine be relied upon to carry the day.

Lord Alton may be out on a limb in his reaction against human genetics, but he does connect with something. Alan Irwin, who monitored some of the pilot workshops for the government's biosciences review of last year, reports that 'there was a sense that these areas of science were slow to deliver tangible benefits (for example, compared to rapid progress in information technology). At the same time, the biosciences seemed to generate unexpected outcomes and findings (Dolly was often quoted) that set new problems for society'.

While medical applications of human genetics are supported in the abstract, some of the very measures that might bring these about and speed up the delivery of 'tangible benefits' are also the 'unexpected outcomes' that so concern people. The ends are popular; the likely means less so. In the study commissioned to accompany the biosciences review, MORI reported a net score of -55 percent for cloning technologies—an even lower score than that for GM foods. In another MORI poll for Novartis, 74 percent opposed the cloning of animals and 60 percent opposed the cloning and development of human cell lines.

The rapidity with which negative attitudes towards GM crops sharpened, and the reasons for this, suggest that unease with medical applications could develop into a more focused critical response. Reflecting on the 1996 study *The Europeans and Modern Biotechnology*, Martin Bauer and colleagues detected an underlying unease: 'When thinking about biotechnology in general terms, the public expresses a sense of unease. This is based on concerns about gene transfers across species boundaries, together with feelings that government spokespersons and regulators are biased towards an industry driven by commercial interests, and a certain amount of scepticism that the longer-term safety issues are given insufficient attention.' But back then, they did not notice a widespread strong opposition to any form of biotechnology: 'in 1996 biotechnology was not a particularly salient subject with the general public. Although there was an attentive minority whose attitudes towards biotechnology tended to be relatively polarised, a considerable proportion of the UK public appeared both untouched and untroubled by the subject.'

What has happened over the past three years? The public clearly has become more sceptical of GM foods, but the strength of reaction against this technology has not come from there. Campaigners strongly opposed to GM foods have played upon a general public anxiety about science, risk and new technological developments to create a platform for their own views, assisted by sympathetic sections of the media and academia. The government's inability to hold its nerve in discussions of these controversial new technologies has made it more and more likely to cave in under pressure. Scientists, placed on the defensive, have often failed to mount a strong defence of their work and the principles behind it. The consequence of all this has been that the terms of the debate are now reposed.

A striking example is given by a recent report from the ESRC Global Environment Change Programme, *The Politics of GM Food: risk, science and public trust*. Based heavily upon the work of the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change at Lancaster University, it seeks to replace 'sound science' with other measures as the basis for regulating the field. So according to the ESRC report, 'if anything, the public are ahead of many scientists and policy advisers in their instinctive feeling for a need to act in a precautionary way'. When critics of mainstream science have attempted to point up specific faults in the risk assessment process, they have usually been convincingly rebuffed. The get-out clause is to play upon uncertainty. This is how the notion that the public is ahead of scientists is justified—they, unlike the men in white coats funded by

industry, do not have a vested interest in pretending we know more than we do.

This is the approach promoted in the ESRC report. A chief failing of the regulatory process, its authors argue, lies in its treatment of 'deep uncertainties and "ignorance" about the possibility of entirely unforeseen events'. What they are really calling for is not so much regulation as restraint on science and technological applications. After all, what else could regulation based on dealing with 'entirely unforeseen events' mean? Scientists who might chafe against this idea are warned that the only way to regain trust is to become more humble. Along with government they must 'maintain a culture of humility and pluralism in the face of the many sources of uncertainty and ignorance in the appraisal of GM foods and other agricultural strategies'. Unsurprisingly, the authors of the ESRC report call not only for no commercial planting of GM crops, but also for a halt to the trials.

The fact that such views are now being taken seriously by government is the greatest cause for concern. Many of the arguments advanced have the potential to restrict developments in areas such as xenotransplantation, the therapeutic application of cloning technologies, the use of transgenic animals in medical research and applications and gene therapy. Consider the third of Tim O'Riordan's 'six rules for a precautionary world': 'where there is the possibility of irreversible damage to natural life support functions, precautionary action should be taken irrespective of foregone benefits.' We might think it farfetched to imagine that irreversible damage on such a scale could possibly result from the areas of research mentioned: but the precautionary principle also asks us to give weight to 'deep uncertainties and "ignorance" about the possibility of entirely unforeseen effects'. In America, bioethicists are already challenging areas of research on grounds similar to this, and a leading player in the field, George Annas, wants a new Federal Human Experimentation Agency to be created, guided by the spirit of the precautionary principle.

The promise of direct benefit to patients does strike a chord with the public. In the poll for Novartis, when it was suggested that procedures such as cloning might be needed to fight disease, support for them went up. And for the moment at least there isn't a vociferous well-organised campaign to restrict human genetics. But popular attitudes and the focuses of campaigning activity are in flux, while therapeutic applications of human genetics are still some way off. Outright bans are unlikely in all but a few areas, but more subtle restrictions, such as excessive delays in decision-making, high regulatory hurdles and a cautious attitude among investors, could well end up becoming the norm if supporters of human genetics accept the new received wisdom on how to regulate the field, and rely on public support for medical applications of science to protect the field from its critics.

In the USA, the Turning Point Project, a coalition including well-known anti-biotech activists such as Jeremy Rifkin, has taken out a series of full-page advertisements in the *New York Times* (at $40 000 a throw), accusing scientists of 'creating genetic pollution'. In case we are in any doubt, board member Andrew Kimbrell made plain in an interview with *BioCentury* that this includes all aspects of genetics: 'the biological pollution issue cuts across sectors and applies to agriculture, medicine and military uses of biotechnology.' If those interested in medical application of genetics need a wake-up call, that should do it. ●

LM Mail

CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Jennie Bristow ('The politics of Waaaah!', February 2000) has missed the serious point about the anti-capitalist demonstrations in Seattle—the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in world politics.

Since the early 1970s NGOs have been increasingly involved in the process of international law. Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, formalised the role of NGOs in all stages of UN policymaking. NGOs set the agenda at all levels of discussion and police the implementation of policy. They claim to represent public opinion, yet are unelected and unaccountable. In fact it is more accurate to say that they mobilise public opinion on behalf of the UN—partly the reason for their being coopted.

In the name of saving the planet, NGOs have given the UN the mandate to restrict severely the movement of technologies around the world, and to intervene in the internal practices of sovereign states. Lesser developed countries stand to suffer the most, and have long resisted the swamping of the UN with NGOs.

Pressure from these countries had kept the NGOs at arm's length from the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Last March the WTO organised a meeting with NGOs, at which most of the G-77 (developing) nations were not present. Seattle marks the defeat of the lesser developed countries' resistance to NGOs. Greenpeace insisted that the WTO should operate 'safe trade' policies, and in typical style there was a carnival, with NGO activists masquerading as a concerned public. That Clinton invited the NGOs into the talks is significant—there is now no international body that doesn't operate under the 'Global Governance' ethos of the NGOs. The luddite eco-imperialism that is dominating international affairs promises nothing for lesser developed countries, and little better for the West.

David Dunn, London

WHAT'S LEFT?

Your argument that the ideologies of capitalism and socialism have been exhausted raises some new questions.

Marx's economics may well be lacking and the working class has long ceased to be a significant force in politics—but does this mean that the fundamentals are now obsolete? Does this mean that Marx's words—'What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable'—in reference to the idea that the proletariat is the agent for change, are nothing more than dialectic wordplay based on wishful thinking?

It is important to leave a lot of baggage in the last century, and so much Marxist verbiage has been used to mystify rather than clarify. Similarly, the dismal impression left by socialism/communism in the twentieth century would best be forgotten. But without the goal of socialism, things become meaningless; without direction, struggle is just knee-jerking; without a goal there is no incentive for change. Will it no longer be 'the point is to change it', but more 'what is the point?'.

Paul Gurnett, Kent

ON GROWING

As Helene Guldberg observes (LM Mail, February 2000), Piaget played a key role in establishing the concept of the child as an active learner. Although Piaget is still revered by modern educators, they are a little less likely to enthuse about his belief that children are harmed by premature attempts to teach them to read. His theory of 'reading readiness', which early-years teachers use to explain away their failures, is now thoroughly discredited: children who don't learn to read in the first years of school very seldom catch up later. A leading psychologist, Keith Stanovich, has demonstrated how early reading failure seeps into all areas of cognitive development.

Ironically, one of the most effective programmes for teaching reading is Siegfried Engleman's Direct Instruction (Distar). Engleman is an unrepentant Skinnerian behaviouralist, yet for almost 30 years Distar has been coming out on top in impartial trials. A Scottish Office study released in October 1998 showed that four- to five-year olds taught with a British version of direct instruction were 14 months ahead of those taught according to the dictates of the more 'child-centred' National Literacy Strategy.

Tom Burkard, email

GREAT SCOT

Dolan Cummings' article 'Tongue-tied' (February 2000) makes some important points about the claims of the lowland Scots mode of speech to be a language. Certainly the Scots accent is distinctive and words and expressions are used which are peculiar to Scotland. However, as the author points out, these turns of phrase vary greatly across the country and are no different in their relationship to standard English than are regional English accents. Scousers would indeed find it strange to be told that they speak a different language.

WE WELCOME READERS' VIEWS AND CRITICISMS

Write to The Editor, *LM*
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The key to understanding the insistence that Scots constitutes a language is indeed 'Scotland's peculiar semi-national identity'. The desire to find linguistic legitimisation to claims of nationhood is strong. The irony is that most folk north of the border continue to treat Gaelic, the original language of the Scots, with contempt. Surely, however, it is to the Gaelic that Scots should turn to find linguistic identity. Over 250 years after the British state's military assault on the Gaelic people, and after two centuries of official neglect and discouragement brought by attempts to cohere a United Kingdom, the language continues.

Only a self-confident and fully independent Scotland will find a way out of this identity crisis, and Gaelic has its part to play in giving vocal expression to that aspiration.

Calum Mor, Glaschu (Glasgow)

REALLY?

Jon Peterson's letter (LM Mail, February 2000) suggests that your support for red-blooded unPC fun is insincere rhetoric to make a point about freedom. If this is so, and you're really a bunch of new-age tree-hugging vegans, please cancel my subscription immediately.

Paul Williams, London

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OPINION

Ann Bradley

AIDS—an epidemic of complacency?

According to the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS), last year there were 2457 newly diagnosed cases of HIV—the highest for a decade. Concern at the increase has been heightened by the revelation that, for the first time ever, the number of people who apparently contracted HIV through heterosexual sex (1070) was higher than those infected through homosexual sex (989). The remainder was accounted for by intravenous drug-users inclined to share needles.

The Health Education Authority leapt on these figures, claiming that they back its own research among the heterosexual community—that outside the gay community people sometimes do not appreciate 'the very real risk of HIV transmission'. And throughout the health promotion industry there is increasing frustration at people's resistance to 'safe sex messages'. Where there was once a great fear of AIDS, the new drugs that make the disease more treatable have apparently led to an outbreak of complacency. Today's teenagers are too young to remember the ludicrously alarmist, but memorable, awareness campaigns of the 1980s; and contemporary youth just isn't concerned about HIV.

But is this a problem? Arguably no, because HIV is rare and difficult to catch.

Dr Angus Nicholl is head of the HIV and sexually transmitted diseases division at PHLS, which is responsible for the collation and publication of the HIV statistics. He admits that an increase in the number of newly diagnosed HIV cases does not mean that HIV infection is increasing. Rather, he explains, 'Much of the increase is the result of initiatives to encourage people to get tested, such as the government's new policy of offering universal antenatal screening for women'. He also confirms that 'the majority of those heterosexually acquired infections affect people who are from, or who have spent time in countries with a high prevalence of HIV, in particular sub-Saharan Africa'. Look at the figures carefully and you find the scrap of information that is of real relevance to most people here—in 1999, the number who contracted HIV through heterosexual sex in Britain was 62 in total.

The risk of contracting HIV from a single act of unprotected sex with an infected partner is a mere one percent

This should not really be a surprise. With only 30 000 people in Britain believed to be affected with HIV, the chances of Wendy from Worcester or Ben from Bristol picking up an infected partner is pretty remote. And, even if they were that unlucky, they are unlikely to contract HIV despite the encounter, because HIV is pretty difficult to catch. One of the least reported statistics in the Social Exclusion Unit's discussed-to-death report on teenage pregnancy is that the risk of contracting HIV from a single act of unprotected sex *with an infected partner* is a mere one percent. To put this into context, the report quotes your chances of catching herpes from an infected partner as 30 percent and gonorrhoea as 50 percent.

So in a nutshell, to contract HIV from a heterosexual partner you have to be doubly unlucky—unlucky enough to find yourself in bed with one of the 30 000 people in the country thought to be infected *and* unlucky enough to be that one in a hundred.

In the 1980s the health promotion industry could generate a panic about AIDS because it was the great unknown. We were told that by the end of the decade we would all know somebody with the disease. But we don't and we won't, and there is something a little ridiculous in the attempt to 'scary up' the prevalence statistics each time they are published—as if to keep the AIDS issue alive in our minds. After all, the reason why young people are increasingly cynical about (or bored with) discussions about HIV is not because they are woefully ignorant about the threat—but because they react to the reality of life around them. They do not know anybody with HIV or AIDS.

The new data should inspire those genuinely concerned with preventing and treating illness to focus their attention on the small identifiable higher-risk groups for whom HIV is a real issue. Unfortunately this is unlikely to happen. The government's sexual health strategy team is already muttering about the need for lifelong sexual health education, and you can bet the price of a gross of condoms that the risks of HIV will be in there somewhere. ●

BURIED ALIVE

Reports of Britain's death have been greatly exaggerated, says Andrew Calcutt

According to the latest spate of cheery commentary about British life and culture, the nation is on its last legs. Journalist Andrew Marr prophesises in *The Day Britain Died* (the book of the BBC2 TV series), that 'if Britain is not reimagined and restored, Britain will die as a state and as a constitutional tradition'. In *After Britain*, old New Leftist Tom Nairn declares that Britain must die—but then, he's been queuing up for the lying-in-state since 1977 when he published *The Break-Up of Britain: crisis and neo-nationalism*. Meanwhile, the black 'devil's advocate' Darcus Howe has been on an ethnographic tour of the local *White Tribe* (Channel 4), only to find that the British are more like a lost tribe.

Published or broadcast in January 2000, these books and TV programmes were researched in the year of Scottish and Welsh devolution. To varying degrees of success, they give substance to the death-of-Britain sentiment which entered circulation around the time of the state opening of national assemblies in Scotland and Wales, prompting novelist Irvine Welsh to declare that British identity is in 'terminal decline'. 'Mis-manager' Malcolm McLaren, who made his name by encouraging the Sex Pistols to spit at powerful British institutions such as the monarchy, pondered: 'what does British mean now? Is there even such a thing as British?'

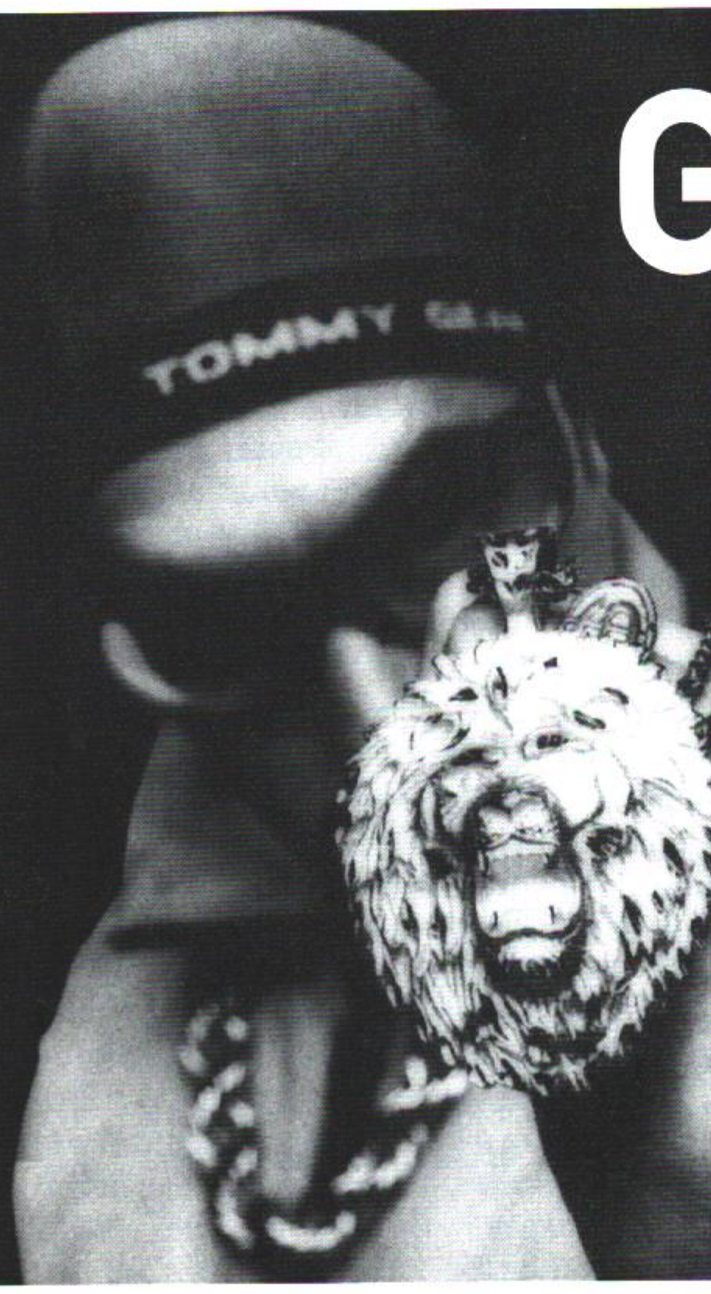
But the obituarists are premature. *Within the Changing UK*, the BBC's recent instruction book to journalists, requires acknowledgement of 'the nations of England, Scotland and Wales'—but this does not mean that 'British' has been banned by the United Kingdom's own broadcasters. Likewise, at the very moment when the Scottish and Welsh assemblies were opening their doors, allegedly signalling the end of Britain, two prominent airlines were racing to claim the Union Flag for their livery. Having previously abandoned it in favour of tailfins painted with African jackals and Chinese calligraphy, British Airways reintroduced the Union Jack only hours before Virgin unveiled its own Union Jack logos. Last summer's competition to 'fly the flag' indicates that British is still a label which some people want to be identified with.

Those bashing nails into Britain's coffin seem to have buried their sense of recent history. Only a few years ago, Channel 4 and BBC2 were overloaded with reports claiming that British was the coolest brand in the world. Britpop, a buzzword invented in the offices of a Camden PR company, fired a broadside at American grunge and came to rule the airwaves. When Britpop converged with the impossibly enthusiastic response to Mark Leonard's idea of 'rebranding Britain', Cool Britannia was born. In its two-year reign (1995-7), this label launched a thousand chat shows, op-ed pieces and magazine covers—more than this year's model, the death-of-Britain debate. When Cool Britannia began to suffer from the dead hand of official patronage, it was swiftly superseded by the notion of New Britain, initiated by New Labour and catalysed by the death of Princess Diana. Far from being a kingdom on the brink of dissolution, we were said to be a nation united in grief like never before.

From unity to dissolution in the space of two years? This sort of tossing and turning only occurs in the fevered imagination of the media-cracy. But even their flights of fancy are derived from something more solid.

The common experience underlying both the morbid vision of Dead Britain and the wishful thinking of Cool Britannia is the real experience of British decline. The veteran commentator AH Halsey put his finger on it in the introduction to the thirtieth anniversary edition of *Social Trends*: 'At the beginning of the [twentieth] century, the Union Flag flew over a fifth of the world's people and territory. At the end, its fluttering was confined to one hundredth of the world's population. Accordingly, the story might be interpreted as one of rapid decline, especially if nothing else had changed to offset our nineteenth-century notions and means of empire.'

Cool Britannia was an attempt to offset the now discredited 'notions and means of empire' of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nation which no longer ruled the waves tried to reimagine itself as Creative Britain—not the workshop but the recording studio of the world. In this context the Union Jack took on different connotations: less to do



GEED UP

by Ed Barrett

Ali G, for the benefit of anybody who lives on Mars and can only pick up 20-year-old sitcoms on UK Gold, is the comic TV persona of Sacha Baron-Cohen, a Cambridge-educated Jew. Ali G is an illiterate idiot who lives in a fantasy world where he is a figure of importance who demands 'respect'. He wears slightly over-the-top street gear (hat, shades, jewellery, etc) and adopts a preposterously over-the-top street demeanour, which is constantly undermined by references to his 'hood' in Staines. Baron-Cohen interviews the great and the good and asks them outrageously facetious questions with a straight face, using his moronic, self-important persona as a cover.

This is the same trick that Caroline Aherne used for Mrs Merton, but the effect is more subversive and disorientating, because Baron-Cohen's victims find him harder to read. Is he black, or Asian pretending to be black, or white pretending to be black? Nobody is sure. One gets the sense that they are reluctant to laugh at him or tell him to piss off, for fear of appearing racist.

Of course, it's not only the interviewees who have difficulty getting a handle on him. Viewers do too. It is this uncertainty that provoked January's heated debate about whether we should approve of him or not, with various black comedians condemning his act as racist. 'Negative' portrayals of black culture are a sensitive issue, even when coming from ethnic performers, as black American comics have discovered. Coming from a white comedian, it can appear downright insulting.

Flagging...design consultancy Mother's vision of a new British flag

THIS IS IMPERIALISM IN DENIAL

with Lord Kitchener (figurehead of Edwardian glory days), and closer to I Was Lord Kitchener's Valet (camp 1960s boutique which sent up the imperial legacy). Similarly, in canonising Princess Diana and declaring 'New Britain', the British elite made a public disavowal of its previous methods; henceforth it promised to put emotionalism and victim-hood on a pedestal, instead of looking up to old-fashioned figures of power and authority.

In recent years British institutions have engaged in successive bouts of self-flagellation, so desperate are they to distance themselves from what were once considered the glories of the past. But this paroxysm has corrosive consequences. If the British tradition is so moribund, why bother trying to breathe new life in to it at all? The death-of-Britain thesis is in fact a continuation of reimagining Britain as Cool or New. The common elements underlying all three are the experience of irreversible decline and the uncontrolled desire to get away from Britain's imperial record.

This is imperialism in denial—but imperialism nonetheless. Although the yardsticks were changed (CD sales instead of steel output, Blur and Oasis in place of Dreadnoughts and Trident), Cool Britannia was still an attempt to raise Britain's standing in a competitive, culture-driven world. Similarly, New Britain eschewed old-style authority, but catalysed a new tyranny of grief (we have ways of making your mourn). Whereas Margaret Thatcher and John Major reran British history as a heritage panto ('Victorian values', 'Back to basics', the Falklands War as imperial farce), Tony Blair seeks other ways of reclaiming Britain's geopolitical role and re-establishing legitimacy here at home—raining bombs on Kosovo in a 'humanitarian' war, and crying with the People at Diana's funeral. Blair's methods are decidedly different, but he faces the same historic problems. In the very attempt to get away from Britain's past, New Labour shows how inescapable it is. ●

Andrew Calcutt's *BritCult: an A-Z of British pop culture* is published by Prion in March

Inevitably there have been comparisons with the bad old days of the 1970s, when Jim Davidson's 'Chalky White' ruled the airwaves. Superficially, there is some truth in this: Davidson, like Baron-Cohen, was holding up a ridiculous caricature of black people and inviting us to laugh at it. But the social context has changed completely since then. I grew up in the same part of south-east London as Davidson, at the same time. He was a local hero, and he closely reflected local views. The point of Chalky was that he was a Londoner who affected a Jamaican accent. In those days there was a lot of open racism and little mixing between blacks and whites. Some black teenagers adopted a 'black' persona and spoke 'patois' as a reaction against hostile white society. Whites took this as proof that they didn't want to fit in with 'our way of life'.

Go to south-east London now and you find a completely different situation. Black culture rules. Kids of all races speak a kind of black cockney and dress 'black'. It is this homogeneous culture that Ali G is addressing. Whether he is actually supposed to be black, white or Asian is irrelevant—every teenager can identify with him because he is instantly recognisable. A newspaper poll of the black community found that 86 percent thought Ali G was funny. It's hard to imagine such support for Chalky White back in the 1970s.

Ali G is, after all, a lot funnier than Chalky. He made an instant impact in a way that hasn't happened since Harry Enfield's Loadsamoney in the 1980s. He struck a chord because there was something true and immediately recognisable about him, even if it was difficult to define exactly what it was. (And it is interesting to note that the media furore didn't happen until well after Ali G's run on the *11 O'Clock Show* had finished and his video had already topped the charts, suggesting that the 'controversy' means nothing to Ali G's intended audience.)

Like Loadsamoney, Ali G invites us to laugh with him and at him simultaneously. This invitation is extended to everybody, regardless of colour. Black kids find him funny for the obvious but often overlooked fact that they have a sense of humour just like anybody else. They are fully capable of appreciating the huge disparity between Ali G's posturing and the reality of his suburban life. Most important of all, they are probably more aware than anybody of the inherent preposterousness of macho rap culture. To ignore this is to believe, like the racists of the 1950s, that the black man is in thrall to the flashy trappings of wealth and incapable of appreciating any higher form of culture. It is to believe that every black youth is brainwashed by brutish gangsta rap and aspires to be some kind of cartoon avenger, joylessly raping and shooting his way through life. Merely to express such an idea is to expose the ridiculousness and offensiveness of it.

I look forward to Baron-Cohen's next move. Now that Ali G is famous it is hard to see him continuing. His targets will be forewarned and forearmed, as Mrs Merton discovered when her guests started to play along with the joke. Whatever he decides to do, I hope he keeps his nerve and follows his instincts. As Bernard Manning says, they can't stop us laughing. Respect to the Staines Massive. ●

Boy oh boy—youthful rhetoric in 1997 PHOTOS: PA PHOTOS

BLAIRIN

Despite its toughest month in a thousand days, the striki consensus it has managed to achieve, explains Jennie B

When Tony Blair celebrated his first 1000 days in office in January, many commentators remarked that he could not have chosen a worse month. The government came out of the new year celebrations marred by an apparent health service crisis and the spectacular failure of the Dome, and straight into a series of embarrassing gaffes and climbdowns. Mike Tyson came into Britain while General Pinochet was sent home to Chile; the government stood accused yet again of ignoring its own ethical foreign policy by selling parts of Hawk jets to Zimbabwe; and it found itself suddenly embroiled in a bizarre row about Section 28 of the Local Government Act—an ineffective piece of Thatcherite policy which prohibits the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools. From the London mayor to the Welsh assembly, the government seemed to be losing votes and sympathies. And to top it all, while home secretary Jack Straw managed to infuriate London New Labourites with some ill-thought-out attacks on 'Hampstead liberals', Peter Kilfoyle, the junior defence minister who resigned his post at the end of January, accused London-centric New Labour of alienating the rest of the nation as well.

So yes, the government has had better months. But does any of this carping really pose a threat to Blair?

The prime minister himself seems far less ruffled by his 1000-day critics than he did by the realisation that he could still get his missus pregnant. 'In the end what is essential is to have a vision and stick to it', he said on 21 January. 'The daily headlines, the passing frenzies…all that comes and goes. But the vision of the big picture must remain.' And he is right to be confident. However much mudslinging Blair's government has to withstand, New Labour remains the only game in town.

Blair might think he has a vision, but part of the secret of his success has been precisely New Labour's lack of big ideas and grand schemes. When the government came to power in May 1997, a defining feature was its self-conscious political pragmatism. Traditional left-wing politics were unceremoniously ditched and replaced with the more consumer-led, business-friendly, non-committal language of the Third Way, while its campaign slogan held the great but non-specific promise, 'things can only get better'. New Labour quickly forgot about loyalties to its members and its traditional constituency, and became the ideal party of Middle England. What we witnessed in 1997 was the arrival of Britain's first post-political party.

What has changed since then? Things, apparently, can still only get better—note the way that every deficiency in schools, the health service and the economy is still smoothly blamed on the mistakes of the previous Tory administration. And although deputy prime minister John Prescott might make noises about wooing the party's core voters and Tony Blair makes trips to depressed rural areas like Cornwall in an attempt to share their pain, New Labour cares little about the electorate on the ground. Plaid Cymru might win in the Ceredigion by-election, but who is going to vote Tory or LibDem in a general election?

The only obvious difference between today's government and 1997's government-in-waiting is that the bold, forthright rhetoric used to usher in New Britain seems more subdued now. As Charlotte Raven observed, 'if New Labour was an electoral contrivance born out of bleak necessity, a Labour government was a wholly different matter'. Once in power, Blair's administration had to cope with the grotty reality gap of making its rhetoric into policy. The youthful Tony Blair, with his talk of a reborn nation built on enlightened values and modern priorities, provided a glimmer of inspiration in the dog days of Majorism. Fewer than three years in, he looks more like a weary father who spends his life coping with the everyday tedium of just sorting things out. Things are never so easy as they seem in opposition. So banning foxhunting looks nice as an election promise, but not so nice when it means barbour jackets camped outside your front door. Repealing Section 28 seems the most straightforward, inoffensive gesture going until a coalition of Scottish clergy and bigots starts making a fuss.

Again and again, New Labour's instincts seem to clash with what it seems capable of pulling off. Left to his own devices, Jack Straw would have extradited General Pinochet faster than you can say con carne, and would have been more than happy to banish Mike Tyson back to the United States. But faced with the wrath of Margaret Thatcher and Brixton boxing fans, he lost his bottle. So it's a free vote on hunting, a wobble over Section 28 and a climbdown on Tyson and Pinochet.

Is this, as some would like to believe, a series of victories brought about by a swell of long-awaited opposition to New Labour's prejudices? Hardly. The Countryside Alliance may look formidable compared with the Tory Party, but that only shows just how pathetic Hague's opposition is. Insofar as New Labour has given any ground, this is largely motivated by its own insecurities. Just as the emergence of a middle-aged newt-breeder like Ken Livingstone in the mayoral contest is enough to throw the party leadership into a blind panic, so a Scottish cardinal can turn what was an easy, uncontested move to rid the Local Government Act of a minor piece of unpopular legislation into a major media discussion and almost immediate relaxation of the government's line.

The tendency to panic in the face of criticism is the biggest indication of New Labour's weakness. In the paranoid fantasy world inhabited by the Blair administration, this government is fighting a relentless battle against the shadowy 'forces of conservatism' on the one hand, and the reds under Livingstone's bed on the other. But back on the ground, the forces of conservatism amount to little more than a handful of has-been aristocrats. The mayoral race is effectively a contest

NG OUT?

king thing about Blair's government is the level of
Bristow

One thousand days later—reality takes its toll

between five Labour candidates, with even the Tory contestant prepared to toe the government's line on funding the Tube (apparently the only aspect of London life the mayor will be expected to sort out). Labour supporters criticise the government only for not being New Labour enough, through failing to stick to pre-election promises, having a less-than-ethical foreign policy, and refusing to put General Pinochet on the next train to Spain. And as for the Tories—Hague might bray in the Commons, but most of their criticisms seem to be born out of little more than envy. They don't want to be anything other than New Labour—they just want to sit on the other side of the House.

New Labour's success has come less from its political strength than from the absence of any opposition. And what can look like a political climbdown is only a change of tactics. The ideas and motivations of the Blair administration are no different from those it trumpeted in opposition. But it has become more cowardly about putting some of its prejudices into practice as formal policy, and in terms of its pet projects, has shifted to a more softly, softly approach.

Notice how many of New Labour's new initiatives are voluntary. From proposals to provide 'growing up' camps for school-leavers to retirement camps for pensioners, enabling them to make the transition from work to a life of leisure, nobody is forcing anybody to be part of the government's project of inclusion. And notice how many initiatives are framed in terms of guidance and advice. There is no ban on smacking children, simply guidelines about what pressure to apply where; the National Family and Parenting Institute is not a borstal for expectant mums, but a body that gives you helpful advice on child-rearing. Teenagers are not to be forced to attend counselling sessions in schools, but provided with a 'learning mentor' with whom they can share their problems if and when they want. It was even reported in January that the Health Education Authority would be abolished precisely because of its 'nannying' campaigns warning of the dangers of sitting in the sun and drinking too much, to be replaced by a Health Development Agency, which will focus on specific targets for reducing cancer, strokes, heart disease and suicide. Of course, the substance of both campaign styles is the same—it all amounts to a demand to change your lifestyle habits. But bossiness dressed up as a neutral health campaign is much easier to swallow.

The voluntary, neutral-sounding way in which such initiatives makes it almost impossible for those who criticise New Labour's 'nanny-stateism' to be convincing. And in all but a very few cases, the government is not the nanny state, telling people what to do against their will, but the therapeutic state—offering a helping hand to what it perceives to be a vulnerable, feeble electorate in need of advice and guidance. That nobody can argue against this is just the icing on the cake.

'Struggle is part of politics. And here is the rub', proclaimed Blair, again on 21 January. 'Reform is hard, it causes dissent, it upsets vested interests, some very well-meaning. It can seem unfair, even when its very purpose is greater fairness in the long term.' Such get-tough, get-real rhetoric has become a well-known aspect of the personality Blair likes to project, and helps further the illusion, held dearly by those who want to criticise Labour's 'nanny state', that bossy-boots Blair gets a kick out of forcing people to conform. But when dissent and confrontation happen, they rage around issues that really don't matter. So what if the government feels forced to concede some ground on foxhunting, Section 28, Tyson or Pinochet? The media, the Tories and a few campaign groups can whip themselves into a 'frenzy' over these things while the government gets on with the quiet, insidious business of building New Britain.

If the government started its term in office as the party of 'new' politics, going beyond the old framework of left and right to represent the Third Way of the middle ground, in less than three years it has shown itself capable of going beyond politics itself. As the critics focus on parliamentary mishaps, climbdowns and broken promises, New Labour in parliament can seem beleaguered and defensive, and may well lose some votes. But ultimately, with nothing else out there, everybody that wants to be 'in' is somehow in New Labour. What is remarkable is not the criticisms Blair has attracted, but the level of consensus he has managed to create. ●

AGAIN AND AGAIN, NEW LABOUR'S INSTINCTS SEEM TO CLASH WITH WHAT IT CAN PULL OFF

LM Online

To discuss the ideas and issues raised in this article, go to:
http://www.informinc.co.uk/interaction$forum/blair

New Labour's folly

...was to think it had enough ideas to fill the Millennium Dome, says Penny Lewis

Described by the cultural critic AA Gill as 'the biggest fridge magnet in the world' and by Prince Charles as 'a monstrous blancmange', the Millennium Dome was propelled into 2000 by an unrelenting stream of bad news stories about late trains, falling visitor numbers, long queues and broken machines. Even one-time Dome enthusiast Polly Toynbee was forced to admit that the Millennium Experience matched 'high-minded messages' with 'low-tech exhibitions'. But was this an inevitable disaster?

It is easy to see why the Dome has made its visitors cringe. The Work Zone reminds you of a Restart interview and the Talk Zone is like being trapped inside a BT television ad. The Mind Zone, which investigates the tricks that the brain plays, sounds promising; but Zaha Hadid's structure—a massive gravity-defying cantilever—gets lost in the crowd and the content is weak. The Tunnel of Love, leading into the Living Island Zone, begins with lovehearts and ends with a mealy-mouthed environmentalism. The zone is full of garden gnomes grasping bottles of weedkiller and artificial fertiliser instead of fishing rods, and fruit machines which demand reductions in car mileage and household waste. The most overt attempts to drum up some kind of collective feelgood factor are the weakest. Shared Ground, the zone made almost entirely from cardboard donated by 23 000 *Blue Peter* viewers, is more a social attitudes survey than a show.

It's not all bad. The Play Zone, designed by Peter Higgins and created by Land Design Studios, makes imaginative use of computers and technology to develop games that are simple and genuinely interactive. The Journey Zone is a museum on a ramp, which follows the history of human travel from the invention of the wheel to the present day. There is none of the usual hectoring about the overuse of the car, and the final section on the future is a fascinating display of the latest transport innovations, including the tilting train, Terminal 5, and the tiltrotor (a cross between a plane and helicopter). The Journey Zone is one of the most distinctive structures in the Dome and the interior is beautifully designed with clear graphics. It clearly benefited from the fact that the designers, Imagination, took full responsibility for the entire project.

Nigel Coates' design for the Body Zone has been the butt of jokes for over two years, but the interior makes an impact—even though it does seem to be designed to turn people *off* the human body. The tour begins in the pubic hairs, complete with crabs and lice and a pierced clitoris (which my father mistook for an ear). The fertilisation space feels like a flashback to Woody Allen's *Everything You Need to Know About Sex*, and the brains that imitate Tommy Cooper raise a smile. Unfortunately, once on the outside, the zone deteriorates into an unhealthy concoction of lifestyle advice, new-age mysticism and psychobabble. And even the Play Zone has come under pressure, as Peter Higgins says, 'to pass on a worthy way of living in the future'. Although it is both 'interactive' and 'edutainment', Higgins dislikes both expressions: 'The expressions have been misappropriated, they are used to mean a worthiness attached to hedonistic gameplay.' Proof of this worthiness was given in February, as the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) barred children on free school trips from the fun Body and Play Zones because they clashed with the 'educational nature' of such visits. And even after Jennie Page, the Dome's chief executive, was eventually sacked, her EuroDisney replacement was warned that he could not think of this project as 'just another visitor attraction' like Disneyland or Alton Towers.

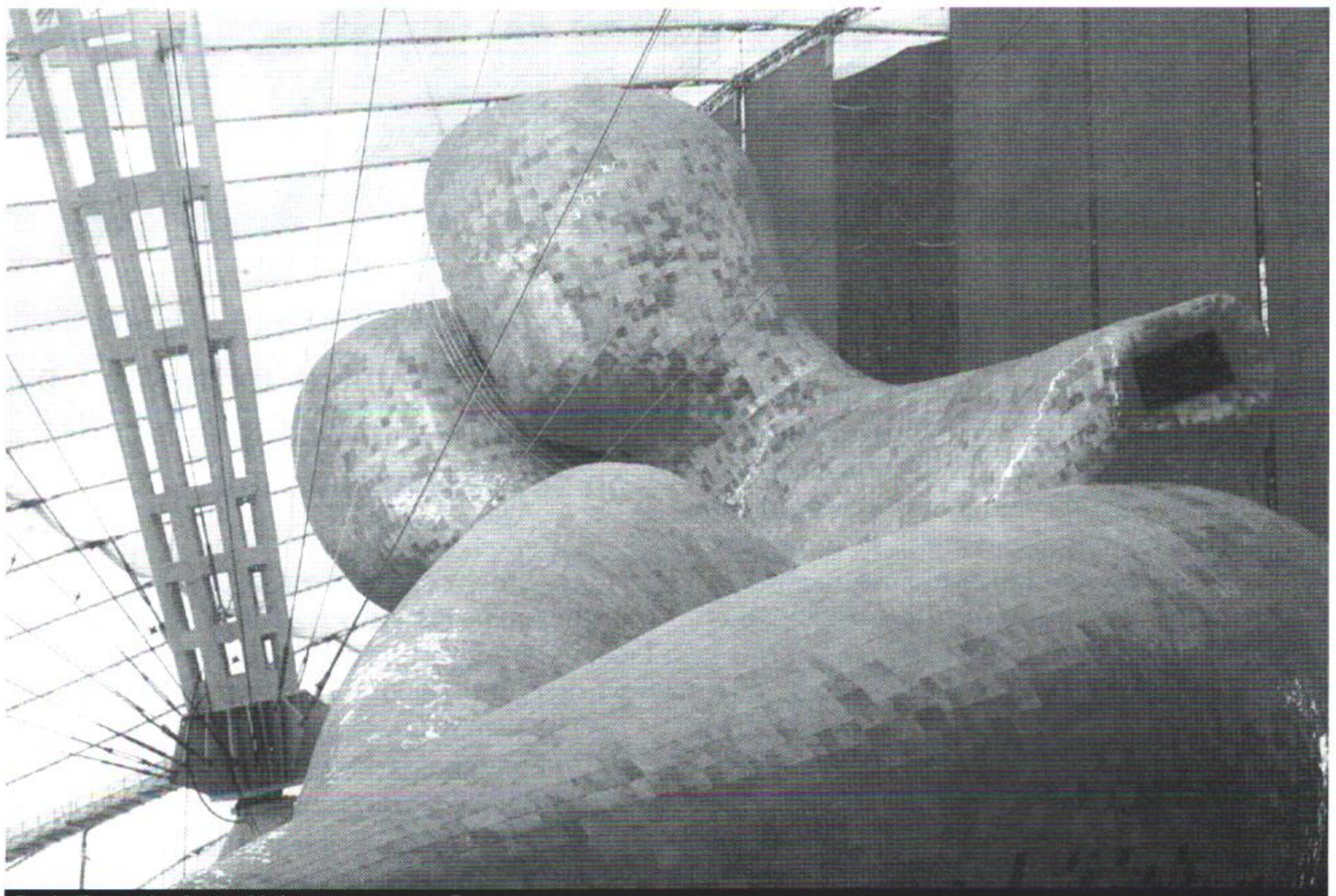
Some aspects of the Dome had potential. So why did it end up such a mess? Simon Jenkins, the millennium commissioner who has driven the project from its conception, refuses to admit the project is a flop and is convinced that it will pass into folk memory as a great event. But he is prepared to concede that the Dome is a 'product of its times'. Others hold a view of inevitable doom: *Regeneration*, Adam Nicolson's history of the project, presents the Dome on a hiding to hell from the creation of the Lottery under John Major. *Sorry Meniscus*, a short book on the Dome by Iain Sinclair, holds the geography responsible: 'It was very perceptive of New Labour to nominate Bugby's Marshes as the site for their monumentally expensive folly. Where better to greet the millennium than this ravished swamp with its history of plague, pestilence and pillage?' The Dome organisers were always going to be fighting a losing battle, in a society that has grown uncomfortable with big, costly and ambitious projects.

But the government's approach to the Dome made these problems far worse. The prime minister was not content with having the Dome as a showcase for British creativity: he wanted it to have a therapeutic quality, to be a real tonic for the nation. And what became painfully clear in the development of the zones was that New Labour could not manufacture the 'sense of community' it so desperately desired.

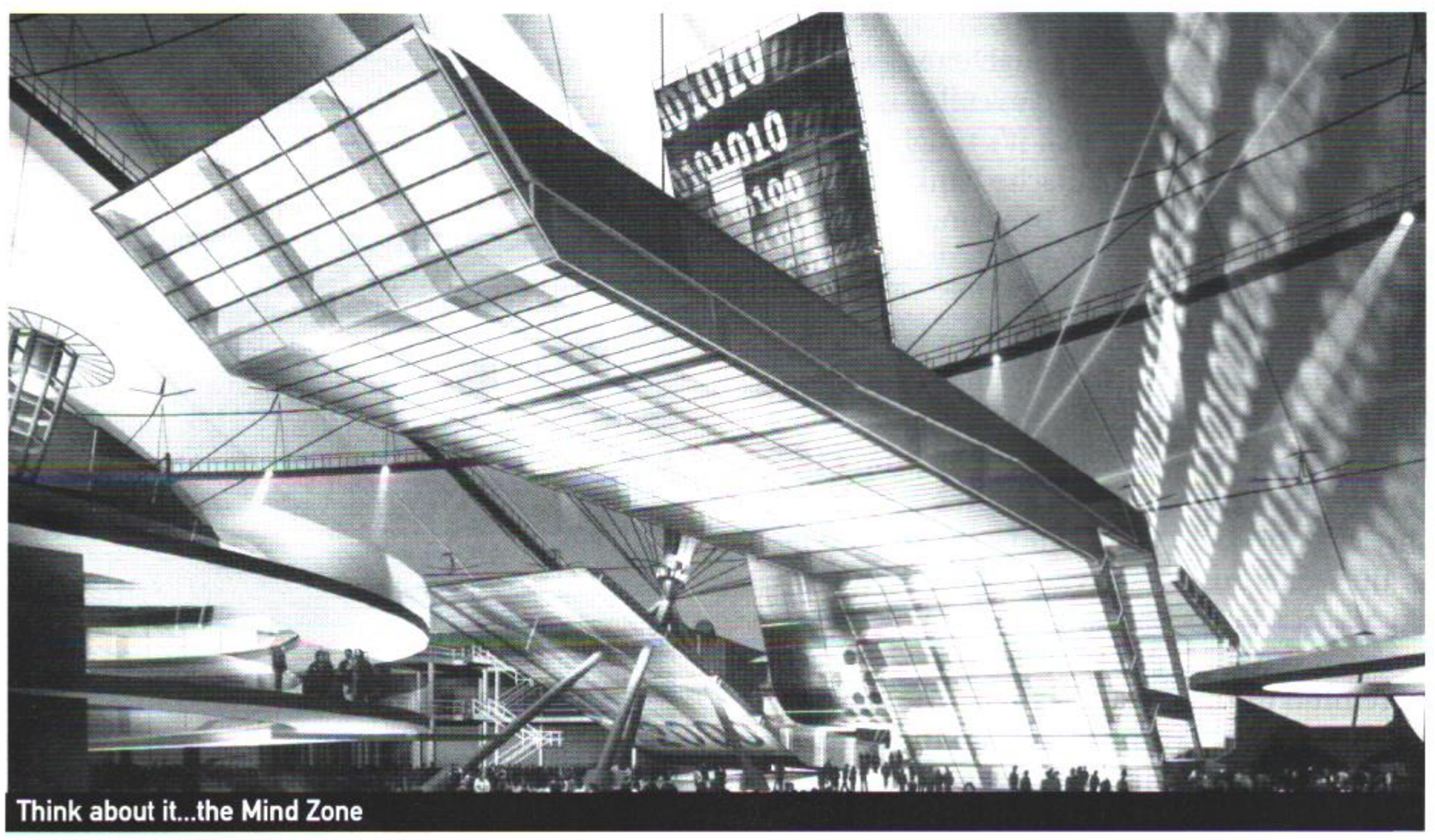
Jeremy Irons, the actor whose voice is used on the Dome's TV adverts, claimed that the Dome suffers from the 1990s problem of being 'all about style, but not substance'. Stephen Bayley was the creative director until he resigned after Peter Mandelson was photographed in Disneyland getting ideas for the Dome. According to Adam Nicolson, Bayley spent much of his time at the NMEC staring at the ceiling or looking at his nails. Bayley may have been a little precious, but his criticism that the zones lacked substance or intellectual depth was legitimate. The response to Bayley from Martin Newman, the Dome's contents editor, was that 'we are never going to have the authority to give answers. We are only going to have the authority to ask questions'. But the reluctance to do anything more than pose a few questions is precisely the problem with the Dome's content. With a few honourable exceptions, it's hard to get much creative or intellectual stimulation—or even fun—from the zones, because not much thought and creativity has been invested in them. Zaha Hadid, the designer of the Mind Zone, put it another way, claiming that the NMEC assumed 'every visitor is an idiot who can't understand complicated ideas'.

Just because New Labour is short on ideas, does that mean the Dome had to be? 'Definitely not, they were controllable', says the Play Zone's Peter Higgins of his clients. Tony Blair said he wanted the Dome to be a 'monument to our creativity', but the result was a snapshot, throwing light on all the worst aspects of the creative sector in Britain. The creatives may claim that their hands were tied and that Peter Mandelson was the source of all the problems, but zones like the Play Zone show that it was possible to produce some interesting work, if you had some ideas of your own and were prepared to work hard to develop them. And the external structure of the Dome provided some clues to what could have been possible. Construction within the necessary time was a Herculean task made possible by the determination of the Richard Rogers Partnership and Buro Happold, the engineers. The Dome is the largest covered space in the world,

ACCORDING TO THE DESIGNER OF THE MIND ZONE, THE GOVERNMENT ASSUMED 'EVERY VISITOR IS AN IDIOT'



Body Zone, the butt of jokes PHOTOS: NMEC



Think about it...the Mind Zone

and the development of the design has provided important information on how domes behave and how dome structures may be used in the future. The story of its construction by a rigging team of mountaineers, a tall ships bosun and a rock-face rescuer, is compelling. With this level of inspiration on the outside, the failure of creative content inside did not have to be a foregone conclusion.

The Dome's critics must also share the blame for its failure. Some of the knocking copy is the inevitable reaction to Blair's hype and the NMEC's attempts to over-hype the 'Amazing Day'. But much of it is cheap and unhelpful, and some of the more serious stuff betrays an extremely uncritical attitude to the government's agenda. 'The Millennium Experience was the first major misjudgement by the New Labour conceptualists. How can Blair, who emerged so powerfully, a sensitive manipulator of national emotion, from the week of public mourning for the Princess of Wales, have been persuaded to give his blessing to the Teflon hedgehog?', says Iain Sinclair in *Sorry Meniscus*. Inside the Dome Polly Toynbee and Hugo Young can see the half-baked environmentalism and the feelgood communitarianism for what it really is: dull and boring. Outside the Dome, they are prepared to take the same ideas very seriously. As Hugo Young put it, 'far from glorifying New Labour, [the Dome] distracts from what the government is doing. Forced to up his rhetoric to heights of overheated vacuity, Mr Blair does his real project less than justice. This project is more solid than the Dome will ever be'.

But the failure of the Dome is that it shows the vacuity of the entire New Labour project: the hole at the heart of political imagination and ambition today. When combined with designers who often seemed only too willing to restrict themselves to the government's narrow vision, and critics sniping more about cost and queues than content, the Dome is what you get—a Millennium Experience that nobody wants to take part in. ●

TOO CLOSE FOR

Work is a dangerous place these days—and I'm not talking about industrial accidents. In a high-profile sexual harassment case in January, City banker Kay Swinburne won a substantial award for having to resign from the 'hostile environment' at Deutsche Bank. A top law firm is working on the first British 'love contract' for an unnamed medical company—where employees will have to tell their bosses if they are having a relationship with a colleague, so the company can avoid allegations of sexual harassment. According to the Home Office report *Living Without Fear*, the government is reviewing a package of 60 recommendations on sexual harassment from the Equal Opportunities Commission, and is also reviewing the effectiveness of the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has demanded that the government introduce a specific new law against sexual harassment, drawing on an official EC definition and series of recommendations.

The consensus seems to be that not enough is being done to prevent people—especially women—falling victim to workplace harassment. But under existing legislation, employers are legally responsible for their employees' behaviour: if they do not take such steps as are 'reasonably practicable' to prevent harassment at work they are liable under a wide range of legislation, including the Sex Discrimination Act, the Race Relations Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, health and safety law, and a variety of pieces of employment protection legislation. No public sector organisation is without its own anti-harassment policy or statement, and these are becoming increasingly common in the private sector. These informal policies carry at least as much scope for regulating workplace behaviour as any law could, and already have severe consequences for those accused of harassment.

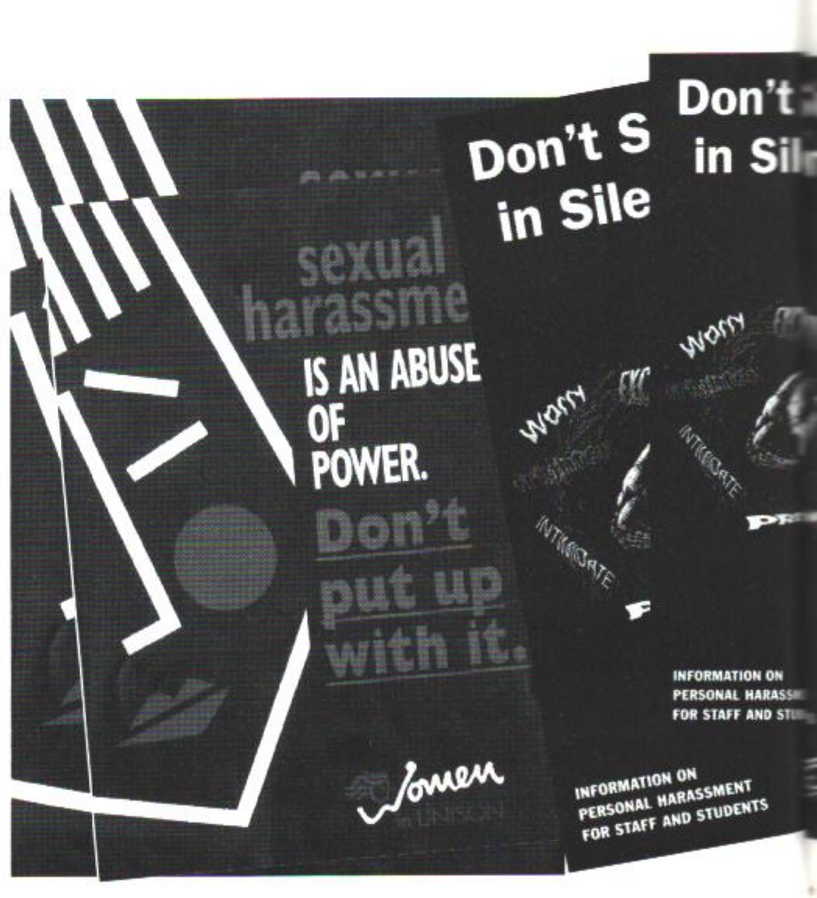
But anti-harassment policies are not there to prevent such abusive behaviour as sexual violence, assault or rape. These are crimes, subject to criminal penalties in the courts. Sexual harassment policies are there to police behaviour which is not illegal—and sometimes they focus on the most trivial forms of behaviour. Much of Kay Swinburne's case rested on the basis that 'one of the managers frequently referred to women colleagues as "hot totty", "birds" or "chicks"', and that her colleagues were encouraged to laugh at her. Swinburne's QC summed up her manager's crime: 'he would say things in order to get a rise out of her. She reacted with righteous indignation and he enjoyed that.' One might be forgiven for assuming that an investment banker earning £300 000 a year might be tough enough to deal with this—admittedly juvenile—sort of behaviour, recognising that it's tough at the top. Not any more—Deutsche Bank will need to monitor its employees' behaviour much more closely in future, to ensure words such as 'chick' cross nobody's lips.

Why has this kind of office banter become the focus of such controversy and regulation? Sexual harassment has often been understood as an expression of a clear abuse of power in the workplace—bosses demanding sex under threat of the sack. We all know the stereotype of the lecherous boss, trying to put his hand up his secretary's skirt and demanding sexual favours. But now, policy after policy is careful to remind us that it can happen to anybody: 'It can occur between workers on the same grade, or where a member of the public harasses a worker at her workplace.' (Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union) We are even provided with helpful examples. According to a TUC Women's conference

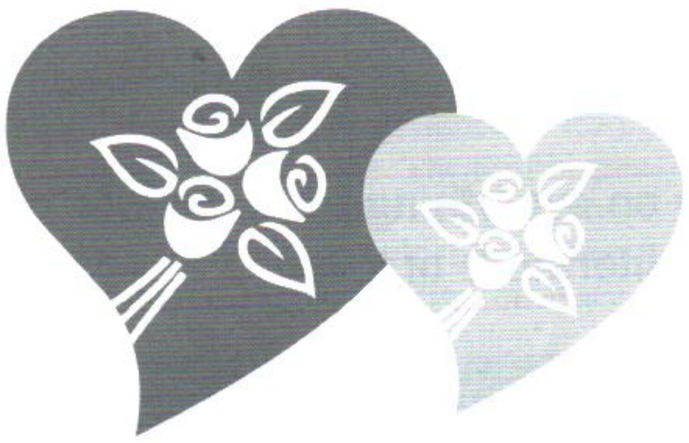
Sara Hinchliffe finds herself 'worried, troubled, tormented' by the plethora of workplace codes on sexual harassment

survey, 'the sexual harassment took the form of the men constantly teasing and making coarse remarks to C [a woman postal worker], and picking arguments with her'.

The sexual harassment policies developed today assume that abuse is everywhere, and imply that all working relationships are potentially harassing. The lists of proscribed behaviour include almost any human interaction, with men—and in particular male sexual interest—being automatically suspect. Anything that can make people at work feel 'uncomfortable' may be harassment. It is interesting that, despite the 'informal' nature of harassment policies, the



LOVE ON THE JOB?



by Tessa Mayes

Got problems in bed? Your best friend is bad at listening to your emotional problems, or your work colleagues use information about your sex life to undermine you? Well, help is at hand. Companies are offering new ways to help their staff find love and satisfaction in their personal lives.

Explaining why Pertemps Recruitment Partnership offered 700 permanent employees free introductions to the dating agency Elite Introductions, chairman Tim Watts said, 'Our motivation is that if we can find them someone, we can make them happier. We have found the divorcees can become enormously miserable'. This all sounds very well-meaning. But why would you want to let your boss organise not only how you work, but how you rest and play too?

It's not hard to work out that for companies, spending a few hundred pounds on putting a smile on the face of poor Ms Smith in computing or that sad Mr Taylor

COMFORT

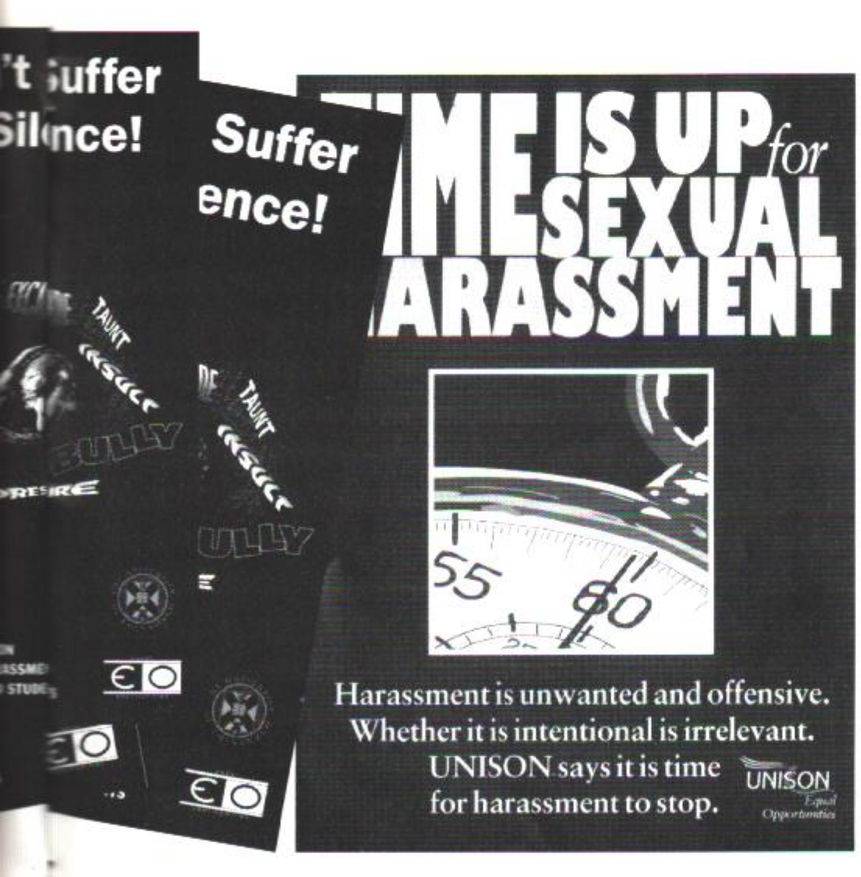
same phrases crop up again and again, as if they had been dictated by a central advisory body. Asking a woman out ('any sexual advance, request for sexual favours'), giving her an appreciative look or compliment ('suggestive looks or remarks'), a touch on the arm or shoulder ('unwanted physical contact') may be construed as harassment. Not wanting to socialise with colleagues or not inviting them to lunch ('exclusion') may be harassment.

You may harass a disabled person by offering them help ('giving uninvited, patronising or unnecessary assistance'). You may be guilty of academic bullying if you argue your case forcefully ('asserting a position of intellectual superiority in an aggressive, abusive or offensive manner') or if you suggest students' work is not up to scratch ('threats of academic failure'). If you are a manager and you criticise your staff's performance or insist on deadlines, you may be guilty of bullying ('setting arbitrary or unreasonable workloads or deadlines, inappropriate or derogatory remarks in connection with performance'). Offering any form of criticism and even being inconsiderate may be actionable ('conduct—aggressive or otherwise—which over a period of time undermines an individual's self-confidence').

What happens if you are accused of harassment? Very few policies offer any advice for those on that end. The Association of University Teachers (AUT) is one exception—it advises members in this position to 'reflect on [your] behaviour and the possibility that you might be at fault, whether consciously or not'. For the AUT, as for all harassment policies, 'what counts is the perception of the person complaining of harassment'. It is striking that the range of harassment rules insist that the 'perpetrator's' intention is irrelevant—all that matters is that they made somebody else uncomfortable. Unison puts it like this: 'harassment is unwanted and offensive. Whether it is intentional is irrelevant.' To the harassment advisers, innocent intent is meaningless. Individuals are to be held to account for the perception of their words or actions. Natural justice—where people are only held to account for voluntary, intentional acts—is ignored.

Harassment is invariably a disciplinary offence. If you are 'convicted', management can apply the whole range of sanctions up to dismissal. Many employers record all accusations of harassment; even where cases are unproven. According to the University of Southampton, 'even if no *prima facie* case is made or the allegation is unproven, a confidential record...will be made by the head of department'. And because employers are legally responsible for their employees' actions, managers are encouraged to intervene in cases where no complaint has been made and even without the knowledge of the presumed victim—'your section or unit heads will normally respect your wishes as to whether the matter should be dealt with by informal means but may nevertheless decide (in exceptional circumstances) to apply the disciplinary procedure' (University of Sussex).

One might hold out hope on the basis that surely we're not all so pathetic as to rush to complain of harassment over behaviour which is a part of working life. Perhaps so. But even if you do not personally stand accused of harassment, the very existence of the policies has consequences. When jokes, human contact, flirting and 'saying things to get a rise' are outlawed as potentially abusive behaviour, this can only create an uptight and sterile working environment in which everybody is forced to think twice before saying anything. Office banter and spontaneous chat are the substance of building relationships with our colleagues, and the very things that make working enjoyable and worthwhile. Do we really want to sacrifice this for the security of a 'comfortable' working environment? ●



THE LISTS OF PROSCRIBED BEHAVIOUR INCLUDE ALMOST ANY HUMAN INTERACTION

in accounts may well boost productivity. The message seems to be if your sex life is good, then your working life will seem infinitely more pleasurable. And so companies are happily buying in to new schemes which help 're-incentivise' their staff. Following a government-led initiative that encouraged employers to 'balance' their employees' work and play, companies are willing to concentrate on play at work if it works out financially. As a result, workers are offered such personal perks as granny crèches (Peugot car company), free makeovers (Price Waterhouse Cooper), poetry workshops (Marks and Spencers), music at work (Office Angels secretarial recruitment company), 'Make Yourself More Interesting' schemes (St Luke's advertising agency), dress-down Fridays (workers can wear casual clothes at the end of the week), free massages and summer parties.

The twenty-first century workplace is now relaxed, fun and educational if you believe the hype. But don't forget that long hours, poor pay and short-term contracts still take their toll on people's love lives. And forget about the demands of private and work life being balanced; now companies want to know how you organise your whole life, not just your professional time. At Cabal Communications, the publishing firm set up by Sally O'Sullivan (former editor of *Harpers and Queen*), staff are entitled to one 'mental health' day every three months. Goodbye to the days when employees just took a sickie, and hello to a new regime which describes staff—never mind the reason they take a day off work, of course—as mentally unwell. There's respect.

This year Eddy Ankrett, managing director of Elite Introductions, is keen to introduce a national 'It's Okay to Talk Day' for workers everywhere. It may seem healthy enough to open up, but is it really wise to tell all at work? Bosses are still bosses—and what starts off as the usual chit chat about problems in the sack could easily end up with you getting the sack.●

AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN WASHINGTON

Helen Searls

Government plots

With just a few months left in office, Bill Clinton's presidency is more lame-duck than ever. And as November's elections loom on the horizon, Clinton's opponents in the Republican-dominated Congress seem determined to shoot down all the president's pet projects, from hate crimes legislation to gun control.

But luckily for Clinton, he does not need Congressional approval to launch some policy initiatives that affect millions of unsuspecting Americans. One of the hallmarks of this administration is that it has been able to sidestep many of the old political channels and has adopted new ways of reaching out to influence the electorate —like scripting entertainment shows to keep us morally on-message.

Over 100 TV shows were deemed worthy of the drug tsar's stamp of approval

In January the online magazine *Salon* revealed that for the past two years Clinton's drug 'tsar' has persuaded some of America's most popular TV shows—including *ER*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Chicago Hope*, *The Practice*, *Home Improvement* and *The Cosby Show*—to fill their episodes with anti-drug pitches to cash in on what *Salon* called 'a complex government advertising subsidy'. The networks were allowed to sell advertising slots, previously reserved by law for free public service announcements, if they included anti-drug messages in their primetime shows. It is estimated that this arrangement has netted the six leading networks about $25 million (see www.salon.com for the full story).

Apparently unknown to all but a handful of network executives, the White House has been merrily previewing scripts and suggesting modifications to soaps and drama series across the networks. Of course the TV executives denied that the White House actually caused them to change storylines, but evidence quickly emerged that modifications were made. Producers of CBS's *Chicago Hope* have admitted that they resuscitated a previously trashed script with a strong anti-drugs message after getting a phone call from one of the show's bosses. In total, over 100 shows were deemed worthy of the drug tsar's stamp of approval. When you consider the number of repeats on the US networks it is hard—if not impossible—to get away from government-sponsored plots.

Salon's revelations caused a storm. An editorial in the *New York Times* decried the possibility of 'censorship and state-sponsored propaganda' while the leader writers at the *Washington Post* fretted about where the policy could lead. 'Could the government pay the networks to slip idle comments into *ER* about the virtues of a particular healthcare policy?', they asked. But no sooner had the newspapers printed their condemnations than they too were exposed as cooperating with the White House drug control office in return for financial benefits. The *New York Times* was allowed to sell space reserved for public service advertisements when it agreed to produce 30 000 anti-drug booklets for New York teachers. The *Washington Post* earned credits by putting a link to an anti-drugs site on their website. All in all, the drug tsar probably got more media hits than the president himself.

The most worrying thing about these revelations is not simply that everybody is at it. When it comes down to it, nobody really objects to the drug tsar's insidious influence. Commentators may have been outraged that scripts were previewed by the White House and perturbed by the fact that so few people knew what was going on. But the White House operation is criticised for its style rather than its content—which is generally applauded. As the *Washington Post* explained: '[W]e happen to agree with the [White House] spin, and the idea of sitcoms and television dramas carrying anti-drug themes seems healthy.' In other words, the ends—getting a healthy moral message across to the mass of Americans—justify the means, however sneaky and undemocratic these may be.

In fact, the drug tsar's message is just as objectionable as the secret methods employed by the White House. How can it be seen as acceptable that the entire US media should become one big public service announcement for the White House? The idea that somebody in the media might want to transgress from the White House line, and go off-message by suggesting that taking drugs is exciting, or even hint that drug-taking does not lead to instant death and misery, is not even considered. At least 'idle comments slipped into *ER* about the virtues of a particular healthcare policy' would be an obvious plug for the government. Slipping in an anti-drugs message as if it were a natural part of the story is no different from this—simply more cunning.

I am told by my Democratic friends in Washington that, in the old days under Reagan, the propaganda war against drugs was much more objectionable and intrusive. Apparently an authoritarian Nancy Reagan used to pop up during the commercial breaks saying 'Just say no' through clenched teeth. But at least in Reagan's time there was some separation between politics and entertainment (even despite the president being a former movie actor). In the Clinton era, by contrast, such distinctions are disappearing. Over the next few months we will undoubtedly see Congress block nearly all of the 102 proposals that the president outlined in January's State of the Union address. But with Hollywood doing such a sterling job for the president, Clinton will still be able to touch parts of America that Reagan would never have dreamed possible. ●

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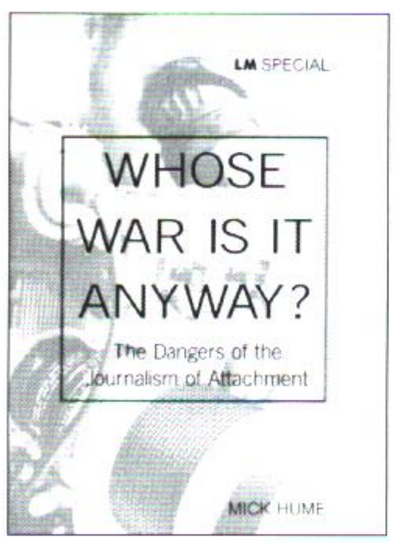

'...A FIERCE AND TRENCHANT PAMPHLET....HUME MAKES A DEVASTATING ATTACK ON THE "JOURNALISM OF ATTACHMENT", ESPECIALLY AS APPLIED TO THE WAR IN BOSNIA.'
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ALL OR NOTHING?

Family-friendly working practices cannot resolve the tensions between work and motherhood, says Ann Furedi

High-flying career woman Shirley Conran, a government adviser on women and work, believes that professional women trying to 'juggle' a family and a career should stop whinging and learn to organise their lives better. And it strikes a chord. Little is more tedious than journalists parading stories of their family lives across the broadsheets; and following January's *Panorama* programme on the conflicts of domestic and work life, various media pundits have debated this issue to death. *Panorama* laid a minefield through which it seemed every woman columnist felt obliged to stagger, using autobiography as a map.

At issue was a study showing that, after the birth of a first child, 19 percent of working women had quit their jobs altogether and a further 17 percent had switched to a part-time position. Why? According to Susan Harkness of the University of Sussex, author of the research: '[t]here was no accommodation within their jobs to account for the fact they now had responsibilities for a very young child.' One interviewee, a marketing director for a publishing company, explained that she hadn't been hounded out of her job but had her working day 'made so guilt-ridden [she] couldn't bear to carry on'. A lawyer had won compensation from her employers because they would not consider her demand for flexitime, so that she could come in late. Another complainant was a team manager who wanted to work part time but would not accept a lower grade.

Conran is exasperated. 'How can you be a part-time team manager if your team is working full time?', she complained. 'If there are problems, a team manager solves them as they come up. He or she needs to be there.' (*Sunday Times*, 30 January) She argues that the time conflicts involved in combining career and work can be resolved by better time organisation at home. Instead of looking to change work practices to accommodate our needs we should change family life to accommodate our work, by involving fathers more and applying the same planning skills to home as we do to our jobs. 'Neither the government nor I can help if you insist on washing your hair and reading stories to your children at the beginning of your working day', she advises. 'That's truly appalling time management.'

What is, in essence, a demand for working women to get their act together is somewhat harsh. To those who believe that current employment practices fail to meet the needs of women, and see further state intervention to promote genuine equal opportunities as the answer, it would seem downright offensive. But the traditional feminist view, that the integration of women at work would be resolved through changed attitudes and equal opportunities policies, seems less convincing now. Despite the fact that substantial gains have been made in equal opportunities at work, we still seem to be facing a reality clash between externally determined standards of professionalism and the unpredictable demands of family life.

It is an uncomfortable but undeniable truth that the requirements and professional responsibilities of many jobs cannot be adapted to accommodate a person's changed circumstances—how ever liberal a boss may be. Deadlines are deadlines, and as broadcaster Jenni Murray wrote in her *Express* column, 'We have to accept that in some jobs a work/life balance is achievable and in others it's not'. The problem faced by most professional new mothers who wish to continue their careers is whether their work is susceptible to a new balance or not—and unfortunately time management is not the crucial issue. As Conran points out, time management is relatively easy and it is hard to see why she sees hair washing and an early morning story as such intractable problems. The solution is to simply get up a bit earlier.

The real difficulty faced by working mums is not time per se but the required shift in priorities. Whereas once a woman might have placed her job at the centre of her life, and organised herself around it, that place is now occupied by a child and this necessarily demands that the job becomes less of a priority. The tension that this creates is difficult to resolve through organisation because the nature of children's demands is that they are unpredictable and often cannot be resisted, and disrupt the most carefully prepared schedules. Children get sick (and so do childminders and nannies). They get frightened in the night and need comforting (regardless of whether you have allocated the time to work on the project proposal you have to present the next day). With a child at home it is difficult—no, impossible—to be as flexible or responsive as you were before. You can no longer stay on at the office for as long as it takes to get the job done and when an evening meeting drags on longer than expected, it does so without you. Mother must clock-watch. Mother must work a hundred times harder than non-mother to remain 'reliable'.

Nor is the incursion of a child into your life the cause of merely practical inconveniences. They colonise a lot of mental space that may previously have been devoted to 'the company'. You used to spend time in the bath mulling over that new deal—now you spend it planning how to amuse Zoë at the weekend. And you enjoy doing it, because it would be wrong to present children as an unwilling distraction. If you have a child because you want a child, you will want to enjoy the child. Many of the working mothers whose comments have filled the broadsheets are expressing guilt, not just because they are unable to make that 6pm meeting, but because they *want* to get home to little Simon or Alexandra.

'What about the father?' you ask, and of course fathers experience some of these tensions too. Most modern fathers make some attempt to share the load, but an equitable distribution of responsibility is almost impossible. It is a strange fact of life that no matter how near to a child's nursery the father works, and no matter how distant the mother, when a child develops a temperature of 102 mum gets the call. And while it is possible to insist that father pulls his weight with an equal share of responsibility, this simply means the professional lives of both parents become compromised rather than just the mother's. To return to Jenni Murray: 'As Tony Blair will undoubtedly demonstrate when the latest addition to his family comes along, a part-time prime minister is never going to be an option.'

The 'tensions of parenthood' may be deemed resolvable by trainers in equal opportunities who believe that the issues could be resolved by more family-friendly employment policies, but it is glaringly obvious to employers that this is not the case. Encouraging mothers back into the workplace has become a key plank of government policy, and there have been suggestions that legislation to impose a legal right for new mothers to demand their old job back on a part-time basis is crucial to this. It will come as no surprise that such legislation is being fiercely opposed by employers' organisations. A survey of the Institute of Directors in January showed that already, 45 percent of their members admit that they would think twice about taking on women of childbearing age because of maternity legislation. Cue sharp intake of breath and mutterings of 'sexist bastards'. Then consider this unscientific, anecdotal support. A school-gate discussion with some mums of kids under five elicited the admission that, after having a child themselves, they would be less disposed to employ somebody in a similar position—or who they thought would be likely to have a child in the near future. So much for sisterhood.

The implications of the continued tension between work and family affect all women in their late twenties and thirties. Even if you

THE REAL DIFFICULTY IS THE SHIFT IN PRIORITIES

decide to absolve yourself of motherhood and devote yourself to your career, you will still be perceived as potential-mother and possibly discriminated against as a consequence. The great compromise that is motherhood affects us all regardless of our individual reproductive intentions. And it is a strange dichotomy that, in these feminised times with so much rhetoric about the inclusion of women, there is still a fundamental barrier to women's equal participation in the workforce—at least among professionals. But it is difficult to see how these tensions can be resolved without a fundamental shift in society's attitudes to work and parenthood.

Conran exhorts that 'having children is a huge burden. These days women have a choice whether to have a child or not.... You shouldn't have a child unless you are prepared to make all the sacrifices it involves'. Many young couples are taking the childfree choice precisely because they feel unable to incorporate the additional responsibility. But do we really want to see a society polarised between parents and non-parents? How attractive is a world where children are raised by women who are either bitter with their exclusion from the world of work, or with no desire to participate in it? Do we not think that the experience of parenthood can, in small ways, foster skills that can benefit the boardroom?

Childcare is a crucial issue. While not alleviating all the stresses of motherhood, the provision of affordable, adaptable childcare would soothe many of them. But standard nine-to-five childcare (or worse, 8.30am to 3.30pm school) is a joke. In Germany, there are currently experiments involving round-the-clock nurseries where children can be booked in for evenings or even sleepovers. Concerns that these would be 'abused' by couples abandoning their kids for the week have been shown ill-founded. The convenience is tempered by parents' desire to spend time with their children. Yet even the notion of such an arrangement rests on an assumption that it is normal for mothers to have legitimate non-family related demands on their time: a view that rarely comes into any discussions about crèche facilities or nursery care in Britain.

Enforcing a compromise on the professional standards expected of mothers is not the answer. We do not want to pretend we are able to do a job well. We do not want to do a job well—in a 'motherish' sort of manner. We want to be able to use our creative and professional skills to their full potential. Our ambition does not die when we conceive. Must it really be so hard to live one life while raising another? ●

Lessons in life

Teenagers, whether gay or straight, will not benefit from sex education, argues Stuart Waiton

'Do Scots pupils really need lessons in homosexuality?', demanded Scotland's bestselling tabloid the *Daily Record* in response to the government's move to repeal Section 28 of the Local Government Act—the controversial clause outlawing the promotion of homosexuality in schools. But as the row went on, nobody asked the more basic question: do kids need lessons in *any* type of sexuality?

Whatever prejudices people may have about classroom discussions of homosexuality, the idea that lessons in sex and relationships are as important as maths and history is accepted pretty much across the board. The Scottish Executive has promised that new guidelines on social and sex education will be in place by the time members of the Scottish Parliament have to vote on the repeal of Section 28. Meanwhile, Donald Dewar, Scotland's first minister, has explained that he wants to see 'proper safeguards, good support and good counselling' not only for children in schools, but for the whole community, 'who may have problems with their sexuality'. Why is he so concerned?

Developing a sexual identity and negotiating relationships are seen as things that young people can no longer cope with—at least not by themselves. The Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) recently found that young people get most of their information about sex and relationships from magazines, TV soaps and friends. Concerned about 'lad mags' in particular, which do little to encourage boys to think about the emotional and physical consequences of sex, HEBS has argued for 'sex forums' for pupils aged 16 and over to be included in the curriculum, to help them voice their fears about future relationships.

One argument increasingly used to justify teaching young people about sexual relationships, as well as about the basics of reproduction, is that adolescent couplings are not only tricky—they are potentially abusive. For health minister Tessa Jowell, one priority of sex education is to help teenagers avoid being 'browbeaten by their peers into having sex too young'. After a study of 2000 youngsters by the anti-domestic violence campaign Zero Tolerance found that young women find negotiating relationships excruciatingly difficult, Zero Tolerance is pioneering resources to help schools, youth groups and parents to encourage discussions on the nitty gritty of sexual negotiation.

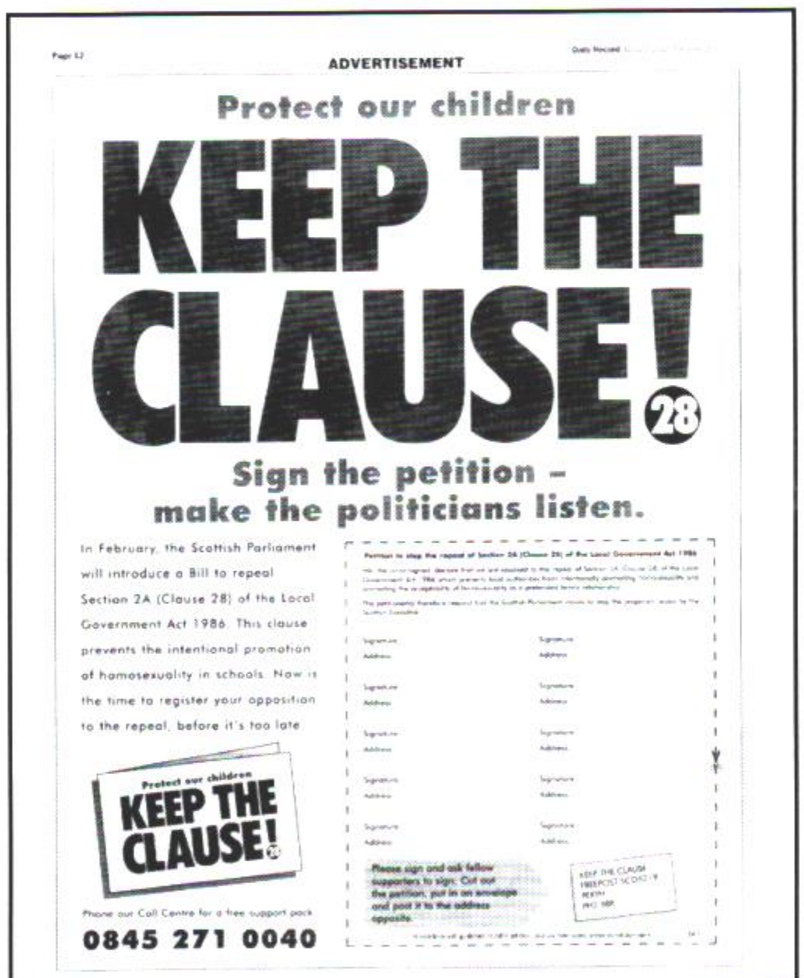
There is a rather patronising assumption here that young women cannot cope with the attention of young men without the support and backup of the government. And it is the same assumption that lies at the heart of New Labour's desire to repeal Section 28. In place of the clause the government wants to develop a framework for 'those who have problems with their sexuality' to come forward and accept the 'proper safeguards, support and counselling'. Isn't this a rather caricatured image of young lesbians and gays as confused, emotional, sensitive and defenceless?

It could be argued that problems with your sexuality are more effectively resolved out and about with your peers, than in the cosy framework of the classroom. Yet part of the motivation for repealing Section 28 is a sense that young people's friends are actually their biggest problem, and peer-group attitudes need to undergo a dramatic transformation. So as well as giving support to confused youngsters, this initiative is an onslaught on the prejudices of the 'lad'—the brutish, homophobic, emotionally illiterate ape, who without the support of Donald Dewar's counselling, it is assumed, will grow up unable to express his feelings or admit his vulnerabilities. In an attempt to train these lads to be tolerant, anti-bullying initiatives and research projects have been set up in Scotland, focusing their attention on 'sex taunts' in schools. One such report has led to a booklet being distributed to all schools, recently reported under headlines like 'Children as young as seven are victims of homophobic bullying'. Whether or not these seven-year-old children themselves are aware that they are either the victims or perpetrators of 'homophobic bullying' is unclear. What is clear, however, is that if the criteria of intolerance and abuse is based on calling somebody a poof, then every child in Scotland I have ever worked with must be a homophobe.

The notion that homophobia and homophobic bullying are among the biggest problems facing schoolchildren today is particularly strange when you consider that, while a majority of Scots have come out in opposition to the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools, over 80 percent of adults believe that *tolerance* of homosexuality should be taught in schools. And there is no doubt that tolerance of homosexuality is greatest among the younger generation—18- to 34-year olds, who are capable of a relaxed attitude towards homosexuality without ever having had it lectured to them by teacher.

The overriding problem with the emphasis on sex and relationships education, whether it deals with homosexuality or not, is that informal relationships once developed by young people themselves are made into an emotional framework laid down by schools, counsellors and government ministers. Friendships developed by young people are often the best way for them to learn about issues they don't fully understand or feel comfortable with. Through gossip or mickey taking, as well as the intimate discussions had by all teenagers (even lads), young people are able to explore how they and others feel about areas of life they often feel unable to discuss with adults. Now, this spontaneous process is perceived as the problem of young people being 'browbeaten' by peers, and sex and relationships are treated as formal subjects that can only be taught by experts and regulated by laws. How approaching this aspect of growing up as a GCSE in the making, with right answers and scripted forms of behaviour, will actually help young people improve their confidence or decide their sexuality is anybody's guess.

As a bit of a boy at school myself, with no formal training in tolerance or sexual awareness, I still managed somehow to go to university and campaign against the introduction of Section 28. I could never have imagined then that the move to repeal it would have its own, more powerful moral agenda—dressed up in the language of tolerance. ●



The repeal of Section 28 has angered Scotland's bigots: but the government's alternative is just as moralistic

Stuart Waiton is a community worker and a researcher for Generation: Youth Issues (www.generation.clara.net)

SECOND OPINION

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick

The dangers of deference

Now that Harold Shipman, the Manchester GP convicted of murdering 15 of his patients and suspected of causing many more deaths, is securely behind bars, numerous commentators have pointed out the absurdity of making this bizarre case the basis for restructuring the medical profession.

Yet within hours of Shipman's conviction one member of the council of the British Medical Association, east London GP Sam Everington, appeared on *Newsnight* to proclaim his agenda for reform. He denounced the General Medical Council (GMC) for not striking Shipman off the register for a drug offence 25 years earlier, and called for a lay majority on the council, thus effectively ending the principle of professional self-regulation that has prevailed since 1858. A closer look at Dr Everington's agenda reveals some ideas that could pose a greater threat to the integrity of the medical profession, and to the relationship between doctors and patients, than Shipman ever could.

Dr Everington first came to prominence in the campaign for shorter hours for junior hospital doctors in the 1980s. A long-standing Labour Party activist, he became an adviser to Robin Cook when he was shadow health secretary before the 1992 general election. However, Everington's main contribution to the campaign was what became known as 'the war of Jennifer's ear', which followed a party political broadcast featuring a five-year-old girl whose grommet operation had—allegedly—been delayed because of Tory health cuts. Unfortunately the broadcast provoked a public row between Jennifer's father, a Labour supporter who approved of it, and her mother, a lifelong Tory voter who denounced it. Exit Everington.

Rumours up to the 1997 election that Everington would become an MP, and after the election that he would join other New Labour toadies in the House of Lords, all came to nought. Instead he teamed up with a minister of the United Reformed Church to set up the Bromley by Bow Healthy Living Centre, which he modestly describes (on the website of the New Health Network, a virtual think-tank committed to modernising the NHS) as a 'focus of national and international attention for policymakers'. According to Everington, 'the centre has been named as a flagship project by the government, offering an example in practice of what the Third Way is about'.

Indeed, the Bromley by Bow centre figured prominently in the public health green paper *Our Healthier Nation*, published in 1998, which explains that the object of such centres is to provide 'opportunities for local community action to improve health and for individuals to take responsibility for improving their own health'. They are also 'an important means of raising local awareness' about matters such as diet, smoking, drinking, drugs and exercise. In other words, the Third Way means a doctor and a vicar preaching the same old 'look after yourself' sermon that Virginia Bottomley wrote when she was minister of health back in the days of Jennifer's ear. The only difference is that this victim-blaming message can be much more effectively communicated in the 'healthy setting' of 'an attractive urban village community' financed by the lottery and private sector funding.

Now we risk having Everington's 'vision of primary care'—an insufferably patronising, intrusive and implicitly authoritarian vision—imposed upon us in the guise of the 'modernisation' of the health service. This process is being driven by a powerful elite in the world of medicine in alliance with the New Labour government, which brings us back to Everington's *Newsnight* performance.

Though Everington was critical of the past record of the GMC, there is less a real conflict than a division of labour between himself and Sir Donald Irvine, who became its president in 1995. Under his direction, the GMC has taken a much more proactive role in regulating the profession and has substantially increased lay involvement. Like Everington, Irvine has been impatient at the slowness of the GMC, a notoriously conservative body, to accept reform. In 1998, he seized on the case of the Bristol children's heart surgeons—which he chaired personally—as an opportunity to promote the reform agenda. Last year the GMC finally agreed to introduce a system of regular revalidation of all doctors, which is currently under discussion.

Given all the recent horror stories, it is worth noting that there have always been medical rogues—and the GMC has long been criticised as an ineffectual watchdog. What is new in recent years is a declining trust in doctors, which is part of a wider breakdown of trust in society. The most striking recent development is the medical profession's loss of confidence in itself, which is expressed in the quest for reassurance through some form of audit or assessment. One irony of recent trends towards professional self-abasement is that they are taking place after a period of general improvement in medical standards (particularly in general practice) and after the GMC has become more dynamic than at any time in its history.

The tradition of self-regulation reflects the medical profession's confidence in its capacity to maintain its own standards. Doctors have long asserted their independence of both market forces and the state. Whereas the market ideal is that the consumer rules, the professional answers to a higher standard—that of the authoritative judgement of fellow professionals. A traditional definition of a quack was a practitioner who tries to please his customers rather than satisfy his colleagues.

Everington's notion that lay people should sit in judgement over doctors is a New Labour populist gesture which merely expresses a lack of professional self-respect. That some doctors have fallen below an acceptable standard, and that the GMC has been dilatory in maintaining this standard, is a poor justification for abandoning a tradition of autonomy which remains an important protection for patients and doctors, and a crucial guard of the integrity of the relationship between them. ●

'IT HAS WORKED

Margaret Forster talked to Jennie Bristow about the legacy of the Sixties and the 'gluttonous supermarket' of sexual relationships


PHOTO: JANE BOWN

'Nobody is embarrassed any more about anything. There's nothing that can't be discussed in a queue or on a bus.' Novelist and biographer Margaret Forster 'spends her life' eavesdropping on public transport. 'There are no hushed voices or whispers, it's all out there. And sometimes I wish that there could be perhaps just a little bit of a return to reticence.'

In these confessional times, the end of 'reticence' is often lamented by those who, like Forster, remember a time when it was frowned upon even to discuss your problems in private. But Forster is no old fogey. Overturning the values of the past has been central to both her personal life and professional work. In her bestselling memoir *Hidden Lives*, she contrasts the lives of her grandmother, mother and herself, and relentlessly exposes the thwarted ambitions of women living before the 1960s, finishing with a passionate declaration that 'everything is better now'. Her novels, too, brutally dissect the pressures and constraints of familial relationships, from the way younger generations become tied into a suffocating duty of care towards their parents to the destructive impact of moral judgements surrounding sexuality and illegitimacy.

But while welcoming the destruction of many of these past pressures and constraints, Forster voices a niggling feeling that maybe 'we've almost been too successful'.

'My generation, the parents in the 1960s, had this sweet little thing that we wanted our children to be our friends, because we'd been brought up by parents who we couldn't begin to expect to discuss anything with', she explains. 'None of my generation would have dreamed of going to their mother and talking about intimate or personal things, it just would never have occurred to you. But today, our children do. And it's lovely that it has worked, but it's worked at a price. You've got to have them sharing with you the most godawful terrible things, the tragedies and dreadful things that have happened to them. I have often thought, well, wonderful that he/she can weep and tell me these things, but so awful that...dear God, it's too much.'

For Forster, and many others of her generation, the 1960s marked a major shift in values—from reticence to openness, from strict sexual morality to sexual liberation, from the acceptance of inequality to a striving for equality. Superficially, it seems that the values endorsed by her generation finally triumphed by the 1990s. Yet she suggests that society has paid a price for this—the loss of some aspects of traditional values that were actually quite good. So 'I believe in secrets and keeping things from people, and I don't think it's necessarily bad, but I think a lot of that has gone', she says. Now, 'secrets are there to be found out—on a public as well as a private level. Nobody's allowed to have secrets or a secret life'. In public, the result is the Clinton-style confessional: 'it was unbearable, the whole thing. Every time he spoke I just felt ill...poor Americans.'

And then 'there's the old-fashioned thing about pride, which has always been a *very bad thing*. But I think there are some good things to be said for pride'.

Is the ambivalence Forster feels towards some of the values of today really a result of her generation having been 'too successful'? There is a world of difference, after all, between families being able to talk openly among themselves and the Clinton/Blair style of emotional public address. Likewise, the recognition that a culture of stubborn pride

AT A PRICE'

prevents people from asking for help need not lead inexorably to a situation where having secrets becomes taboo and people are pushed into counselling whenever they face a problem. In fact, the 'values' embraced by society today may have the same labels of openness and personal freedom as the aspirations expressed by many of Forster's generation, but the similarity ends there.

If the 1960s was the time when the onslaught on traditional values began, the motivation for this was largely positive, even liberatory. It was assumed that people, when freed from the moral and social constraints of the time, could achieve greater things and more fulfilling relationships—they could move beyond the narrow expectations that society held of them. Today, by contrast, many of the 'progressive' values associated with the 1960s have been adopted for very different reasons. In this culture of openness,

'NOBODY'S ALLOWED TO HAVE SECRETS OR A SECRET LIFE'

for example, keeping things to yourself is frowned upon because people are assumed to be incapable of coping with emotional problems on their own. The demand for openness is not born out of a rejection of stifling social etiquette, as it was 40 years ago. It has become a new etiquette itself, which insists that people talk about their private life in public, and lay themselves and their families bare to interference from professionals offering help and counselling.

In a similar way, what could look like the success of sexual liberation today bears little relation to the original ideal. 'My generation really believed sex wouldn't be any good unless you had a deep and lasting relationship, and as anyone can see, that's rubbish', explains Forster. 'But on the other hand the fact that you can sexually experiment and indulge yourself and give free rein to any passion you're feeling must bring problems. It's like a kind of gluttonous supermarket—it becomes a different thing and it starts so early, it's very nearly the first thing.' Her conclusion? 'Theoretically I approve of it—of women thinking I fancy that bloke and the bloke fancies you and that's it and you have your one night stand and why not, that's what my head says. But I can see that it might also really be quite disastrous.'

That the traps of marriage and monogamy no longer exist as they did 40 years ago should be a cause for celebration. But what have we made of this freedom? Increasingly, intimate relationships are played out against a general culture of distrust, in which giving 'free rein' to passion is perceived as dangerous—not because society disapproves, but because this lays individuals open to being hurt. Casual sex is accepted precisely because it allows for an emotional distance between people. Even this is surrounded by fears of disease and other complications, while longer-term relationships are commonly discussed as potential sites of violence and emotional abuse.

Forster remarks wryly that 'none of my experience is ever relevant, as my children are always reminding me. It's freakish and ridiculous meeting one person when you're 16 and never having had anyone else'—and then goes on to argue that she knows 'lots of people from my generation' who are equally freakish in their happy, monogamous, long-term relationships. 'You get all these hidden, harmonious partnerships, but you never hear about them.' What has changed is not people's relationships, so much as the kind of relationship that society sanctions. Today, you can experiment with your sexuality and have a series of (preferably non-penetrative) relationships, but is this a result of freedom—or of a fear of commitment?

One of the biggest 'value shifts' since the 1960s has been in personal and familial relationships. Much of Forster's work—both fiction and memoirs—painstakingly details the extent to which rigid family structures, and the expectations surrounding them, have wasted people's talents and thwarted their ambitions. Forster aims her fire particularly at the suffocating impact the family has had on women; but she comes back again and again to the constraints placed on younger generations by notions of family duty, loyalty and approval. And although she felt a very strong obligation to care for her own parents, she is adamant that 'I do not ever expect anything from my children'.

'You still sometimes hear people from my generation talking about the future and how they'll be looked after, and I'd never want that. I felt duty strongly towards my parents, because in a way their generation hadn't chosen to have children; and my parents hadn't been very successful in life, and they'd been *good*. I felt that I had a duty towards them, but my children haven't got the same duty towards me.' And as she points out, now that having children is largely a matter of choice, it is 'one of the most selfish things anybody ever does': 'what else are you doing it for except for your own self-gratification?'

That having children and a family is now down to choice, more than biology or social obligation, is perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the past 40 years. To have kids because you want them, when you want them and with whom you want them must lead to a relationship with your children that is potentially more loving and less prone to resentments on both sides, than in pre-contraceptive times. Yet in today's insecure climate, the existence of this choice only seems to complicate the process of parenting, by constantly emphasising what cannot be taken for granted in the parent-child relationship. The endless stream of government-sponsored advice and interference in the process of child-rearing undermines the spontaneous trust between parent and child—after all, if the government doesn't think mother knows best, why should her son and daughter? Younger generations, meanwhile, use their newfound freedom from the shackles of family duty by becoming increasingly reluctant to fly the parental nest, with over half of men aged 20 to 24 still living at home with their parents. And the less parents demand of their children, it seems, the more younger generations are likely to hold up an 'unhappy childhood' as the cause of their current problems.

Forster's reaction to many of these developments is tempered by a sense that something must have gone right. From counselling to 'that terrible phrase "coming to terms"—it's so banal it's become absolutely meaningless', she adds that 'these things, however much I sneer at them, are probably good'. But however positive it is to have moved on from traditional morality, the progressive-sounding morality of today tends to distort even those things achieved by the 1960s, as well as laying many new traps. Things may be better today than they ever were before—but we can do a lot better than this. ●

Culture Wars

PAINTING BY POLITICS

A democratic exhibition of *People's Portraits* does not get Mark Ryan's vote

PETER FAULKNER, CORACLE-MAKER, TOM COATES

Can we democratise art? *People's Portraits*, an exhibition of paintings of 'ordinary people' currently touring the country, would seem to suggest we can and we should. Previous eras, claims the blurb, gave us portraits of statesmen and grandees. This celebration of the ordinary person is supposed to give us a snapshot of who we are in the year 2000.

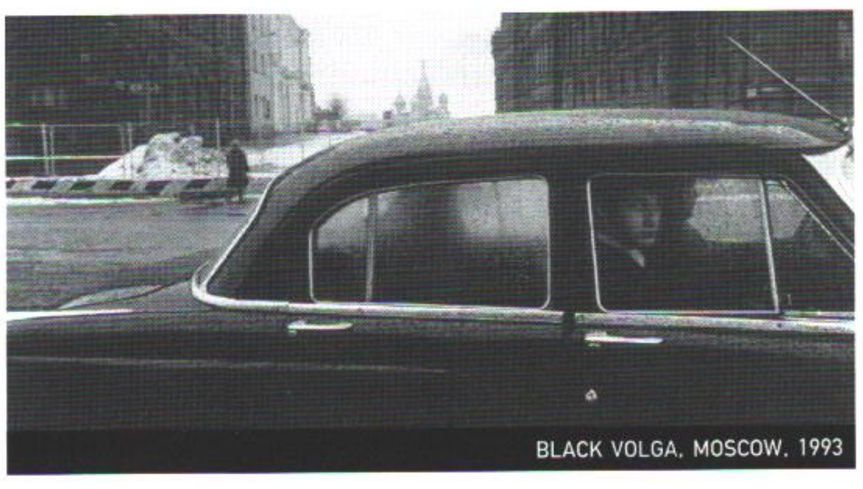
'Who are we?' is the sort of navel-gazing theme New Labour pursued at the Millennium Dome, to risible effect. It fares even worse here. To start with, the question has already set up the answer—it assumes there is a 'we'. 'The People' is little more than a figment of the culture industry's imagination: a twenty-first century equivalent of those terrible murals that inner-city Labour councils used to paint on derelict gable ends in the late 1970s, depicting council residents of every age, colour, sexual inclination and disability contorting their bodies in ecstatic frenzy in support of the council's nuclear-free policy. Now, this fantasy of ordinariness has support right across the spectrum.

The only redeeming feature of *People's Portraits* is that its contributing artists are more technically accomplished than the mural painters of the 1970s. But you wonder if the brief was much different. If, as the blurb suggests, the purpose of the exhibition is to show the rich diversity of our society, then it is not surprising that the painters came up with some odd subjects. Are blacksmiths, furniture makers and carpet weavers typical representatives of New Britain? Apparently there are still coracle-makers on the banks of the River Teme, though like many of the subjects in the collection, their jobs are not really jobs at all but hobbies. Almost every second one gives the usual old lament that his trade is on the verge of extinction and that he will be the last in the line. So the selection ends up proving not that we live in the most diverse society ever, but the very opposite: that our society is becoming more uniform. Like the richly fascinating community of happy citizens Noddy and Big Ears lived in, this one is entirely in the minds of its inventors.

Despite the attention to ordinary people, nearly all the subjects remain strangely remote and uninteresting. Even eccentric or whimsical subjects, such as the priest-clown Roly Bain (a figure who captures that peculiar idiocy of Middle England), left me cold. Apparently, all the artists were told to go out and pick somebody whose face they found interesting. That sounds all very nice and spontaneous, but what comes through just as much is the other side of such a procedure—its random, indifferent character. In the odd case, such as *Thief* by Robert Wraith, it works, perhaps because the random character of the procedure and the fleeting, wispish nature of the subject are in harmony with each other. The rest of them simply lack that commitment to the subject which is an essential ingredient of a good portrait. I was left wondering what would have happened if the artist had walked down a different street or gone to a different cafe—presumably, we would have a different face, approached with the same shallow level of commitment.

SHOOTING STRAIGHT

by Michael Walter



BLACK VOLGA, MOSCOW, 1993

What is photojournalism? What is news photography? There is a sense among photographers that 'real stories' are not possible any more, as publications limit their demands to celebrity pics and stories spun by PR executives. It was with this question in mind that I approached the Anthony Suau exhibition at the South Bank Centre, titled *Beyond the Fall: the former Soviet bloc in transition 1989-99*. Suau notes that his work, 'although praised by editors, remained largely unpublished in the USA'. He explains that 'the Western media focused more intently on profitable stories such as the Clinton sex scandal and new digital and information technologies'.

Here is an exhibition of serious pictures—a brilliant show of sophisticated, beautifully constructed images. Some almost surreal, some subtly bleak. Others are funny: notice the Mafia victim lying on a trolley waiting for surgery smoking a cigarette. Elsewhere, two small figures dwarfed by huge machinery appear to be pushing against the Earth itself. And there is not a PR woman in sight.

Perhaps the most stunning aspect of the exhibition comes from the way Suau has made wide pictures work with the subject in the middle distance. A wide-angle lens, normally considered to be less than 50 millimetres, creates space between foreground, mid-ground and horizon, which can be difficult to compose with. Photographers often use wide-angle lenses to go in very close and fill the foreground with the subject. Yet on occasions, Suau effortlessly stands back, placing his subject in the middle distance and making an empty foreground work. See the picture of the horse galloping or the Russian stretcher crew carrying the body of a dead comrade from an armoured personnel carrier under the ruins of a church in Chechnya. These pictures are serious photography. There is pain,

I doubt very much if any true artist ever set about a portrait with the thought in his mind 'I am going to give future generations the representative face of my time'. It would be a contradictory move, because instead of a real commitment towards the subject in front of him, it would be starting out with some preconceived plan in which his subject was no more than a prop. This indifference to the subject would surely come through. It is commitment to the subject, in all its undivided intensity, which is the mark of a great portrait. The fullness of life which the subject acquires through this process, later generations then interpret as a sign of the face of the age.

CHRIS MCCANN, SCAFFOLDER, JUNE MENDOZA

Could any compendium designed along the lines of *People's Portraits* give us a more accurate representation of who we are in the year 2000? Even with the best of motives, I doubt it. Art is not made more comprehensive and complete by the application of spurious democratic principles, because art is not about democratic representation. The more portraits you add in an attempt to make up a composite picture of society, the more you demonstrate your uncertainty as to what the total picture might be. Not only that, but the more representative it tries to be, the more it leaves you with the sense that so many people have been left out. My first reaction was to ask, 'where are the IT consultants? Where are the McDonald's staff?'. Presumably none was sufficiently interesting for any of the artists concerned. The whole procedure only highlights its own undemocratic character. This is not people representing themselves, but being nominated from above according to whether they fit in with a preconceived notion of how New Britain should be. ●

death, deprivation and war, as well as life and humour.

A colleague was critical of the exhibition—he thought that Suau did not tell a story, and that it was all a bit 'arty'. It is true that the chronological layout of the exhibition is ill-considered. But the charge of artiness v journalism is raised in the use of inkjet prints on art paper rather than conventional photographic prints. The porous character of the art paper makes the ink bleed and softens the images. The pictures are black and white (bar a few that are colour but look like old hand-tinted art prints) and with this treatment look more like distant art objects, like pictures from the middle of the last century, rather than contemporary documents.

CENTRAL GROZNY AFTER WEEKS OF SHELLING BY THE RUSSIAN MILITARY, 1995

This brings me back to the initial question: what is photojournalism? This exhibition is about life, not celebrity trivia. The subject is fascinating and a 'real story'; the stuff of gritty journalism. Yet somehow we are distant from the participants in this story. Is this a simple question of technique, or of being too arty? Or is it that for photojournalism to evoke strong passions it requires our existing passions to be strong? ●

Dung ho

by Aidan Campbell

Holy Virgin Mary, the famous 'elephant dung painting' by Young British Artist Chris Ofili, scandalised New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani when it was exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art last year. Ofili had attached to this religious portrait the same balls of elephant dung that he sticks on the rest of his works—an initiative deemed by Mayor Giuliani to be highly offensive to the city's Roman Catholic minority. In the subsequent furore, some American critics sprang to Ofili's defence by claiming that elephant dung should not be considered blasphemous, since it is venerated by some African cultures.

But if scatological art has a tradition in any culture, it is in that of the Western world. Captain John Bourke's magisterial *Scatologic Rites of All Nations* (1891), for example, gives no reference to any special African reverence towards elephant droppings. But he does document how the excrement motif was introduced into the margins of Western culture via folk verse and art, which gradually became elevated into the satirical form. Bourke suggests that the famous pissing mannequin of Brussels is a forgotten local deity. In Barcelona, pottery compositions of the traditional Xmas crib scene include a squatting figure who is blatantly emptying his bowels.

Authors from Rabelais to Swift, and from de Sade to Bataille, enhanced the literary authority of popular Western scatology. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, caricaturist James Gilray filled his cartoons with the crapulent and incontinent. Aubrey Beardsley's long-suppressed *Lysistrata* print series contained references to the flatulent, at the end of the same century. But coprophilia in art has many more forms than crude satire. Dutch genre art aspired to negate the High Renaissance schools with its stark realism. Rembrandt made a number of fine etchings of people engaged in a basic human function. In the twentieth century, ordure in art came into its own. Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, Francis Bacon, Piero Manzoni, Yoko Ono, Andy Warhol, Carolee Schneemann, Gilbert and George, Paul McCarthy, Hundertwasser, Andres Serrano and Helen Chadwick—they have all contributed different motifs to scatological art. David Hammons was making installations based on elephant dung back in the 1970s.

Not only is scatalogical art largely a Western phenomenon. Outside of New York's city-hall politics, it is not even particularly controversial. In the 1960s, wild-eyed performance artists like the notorious 'Aktionists' of Vienna provoked outrage when they drenched themselves and their audiences in buckets of sewage and offal. Now you can see happy clappy Continentals using cowpats for paint or carving turds on Channel 4's *Eurotrash*. And when Ofili's painting was aired in the *Sensation* exhibition at London's Royal Academy in 1998, if it got noticed at all, his trademark dung was regarded as quaint. Skid marks are no longer iconoclastic: like an Andrex advert, effluvial art is now good clean fun. ●

Culture Wars

PAST TENSE

The Elgin Marbles may be in Britain, but their value is universal, explains Ian Walker

As if the series of rows surrounding the British Museum's ownership of the Elgin Marbles had not caused it problems enough, the museum is currently undergoing a massive building programme. Sections are closed off and familiar routes are altered. So a visitor to the Marbles can easily take a wrong turn and stumble into the Americas gallery: a room full of Aztec and Mayan artefacts. It's a good mistake to make.

The most striking of these artefacts is a set of carved lintels from the doorway of the Mayan Temple of Yaxchilan. These have figures carved in a manner that flattens the human forms into two dimensions, so they appear as caricatures with features exaggerated and bodies twisted into grotesque shapes. In some of the lintels the figures, which represent the Mayan ruler Lord Shield Jaguar and his wife Lady Roc, are involved in a savage bloodletting ritual, surrounded by creatures from the American jungle—snakes and jaguars—representing the Mayan gods.

The contrast between the Americas gallery and the Elgin Marbles highlights one of the unique strengths of the British Museum. Both the Marbles and the Mayan carvings are from significant temples, and tell us something important about the respective cultures. But the differences are striking. The human forms in the Marbles are more realistic representations, and so have a greater universal appeal than the grotesque caricatures in the Mayan sculptures. There is a significant difference in the representation of nature—the Marbles depict tamed horses being led in a procession, while the pictorial representation of nature in the Mayan imagery shows it to have a cruel and overarching power. The Greek sculptures represent the gods in human form, while in the Mayan sculptures the humans take on the forms of the gods as animals (hence the name Lord Shield Jaguar). In the Greek sculptures the humans and horses emerge from the marble, giving the Marbles a three-dimensional form, in contrast to the grotesque flat imagery from Central America.

However obvious these differences may be, the comparisons can only be drawn because these two sets of stones are housed in the same museum. The contrast will lead the visitor to draw aesthetic and intellectual insights, in a way that cannot be matched if the same insights were described in text or even if shown in photographs. Comparisons and contrasts exist throughout in this unique institution, whether these are in representations of nature, of the human form or of death rituals.

In the ongoing controversy about where the Elgin Marbles should be housed, the idea that Greece has a 'right' to the Marbles is as petty and shortsighted as the Little Englander prejudice that only Brits can care properly for these sculptures. Both sides miss the point that the British Museum's entire collection, as a whole, has a universal value that comes precisely from bringing cultures and histories together. The differences strike you, but more importantly you are confronted by what all the exhibits have in common—the history of humanity. Removing the Marbles—or any other artefacts—would rob the visitor of seeing a particularly powerful example of the works of man within a comprehensive collection built over the past 250 years. This is something that gives a unique benefit to visitors from around the world; to destroy it would benefit nobody. ●

Veiled truths

Lifting the Veil, a new report on research and scholarship in museums commissioned by the Museums and Galleries Commission, contains the statement that research is 'an identifying mark of being a museum rather than some sort of theme park or entertainment centre'. For those concerned that museums are indeed trying to imitate theme parks, it should come as some relief that according to the report, research activity has increased over the past 10 years.

But a closer reading of the statistics reveals that research is on the increase, not because scholarship is in abundance, but because today there is 'a wider definition of what constitutes research'. The term is now used in relation to activities from customer surveys to answering visitor queries. This seems to be less a commitment to scholarship than a pernicious game of wordplay. So when it comes to research, *Lifting the Veil*'s authors, Ann V Gunn and RGW Prescott—who in general have written an excellent, thorough and insightful study—fudge the question of definition. Using the usual phrases so familiar in every Department for Culture, Media and Sports circular, they call for a 'diversity of activities' to be classed as research and for a definition that is 'inclusive rather than exclusive'. But as one respondent notes, if research is 'any further investigation into a problem' then 'research is thriving in museums'. On that definition it is thriving in the primary school classroom and the bookies as well.

The focus of research that is conducted by museums has shifted, away from collections and towards exhibitions. Sixty-two percent of responding museums undertake research for exhibitions, compared to 54 percent for collections catalogues. The report's authors chide anybody who suggests 'that exhibition output for the public is necessarily of a lower academic standard than the collections-based output of the past'; and it does seem reasonable to point out that there is 'a substantial research input required to mount a successful exhibition'. But when the priority is wooing an audience, content can too easily be sacrificed. After all, what makes a successful exhibition? One curator

PHOTO: DAVID COWLARD

Museums should research their collections, not their visitors, argues Claire Fox

explains that 'visitor numbers are the main indicator of the success of an exhibition, and these will give no clue as to the quality of information provided. Newspaper and journal reviews do not often evaluate the intellectual content of the exhibitions'. Another respondent states that 'research is costly if it fails to fulfil its objective—an academically well-researched exhibition will not necessarily bring in the visitors'.

This heightened concern with getting the visitors in, sometimes prioritised above the content of the collection they come to see, features strongly in the reasons for the decline in 'object-based research' and the increase in a more service-orientated research with greater attention to visitors (40 percent of responding museums have staff undertaking research into delivery of service). People like you and me are now the subject of PhD theses, scholarly papers and endless statistical reports. Should we be flattered? Hardly. Not only have the frequency of our visits, our needs and responses been spuriously dressed up as research; we are also implicitly blamed for the anti-scholarship atmosphere in the museum world. This view of the visitor has a corrosive impact on what we go to see. If scholarship dries up in our name, we will be left with a static, heritage-like view of objects. One curator explains: 'It is as if once an object or collection has been researched there is nothing more to be said. It is not understood that research is ongoing, dynamic, cumulative, and constantly changing....New facts come to light and can change the way an object is seen, or provide new ways of interpreting it.'

Does research in museums matter to the visitor? When we look on in awe we are rarely aware of whether research into the object has happened or is happening. But what we want from a museum is the ability to ask new questions, think new ideas, see something of the past, and increase our knowledge. Read the accompanying case studies to *Lifting the Veil*, which range from research into sixteenth-century scientific artefacts to a project which led to the discovery of a Veronese at the V&A, and you'd be amazed what you don't know. Go to a visitor-centred research museum and you may never find out. ●

IMPOSING CULTURAL WHITE SPACE

by Mike Small

Chris Gilligan writes in 'The creation of Cool Caledonia' that 'there is little beyond tartanry, haggis, shortbread, whiskey and Irn Bru which can be definitively claimed as distinctly Scottish (and even the distinctiveness of some of these is open to question)' (*LM*, November 1999). To which one can only respond 'an fhirinn an aghaidh an t-Saoghail!'. As there is nothing distinctive about Scottish culture, including presumably language, this will need no translation for *LM* readers. Gilligan's outlining of what he believes to be the defining features of Scottish identity are trivial, insulting and commodified examples, which have been resolutely rejected or vilified in Scottish cultural writing over the past 30 years, as part of a process of self-examination that has been integral to political renewal.

While we should guard against movements of civic democracy turning towards nationalism, we should also be wary of universalism stifling cultural expression. There is a danger that we mistake bland postmodern globalism with a universalist cultural ethic. If metropolitan England is consumed by cultural white space, it would do well to avoid imposing this on others. This projection may come from three specific strands: the left tradition of internationalism; the confused morass which is contemporary British/English culture; and perhaps also the modernist project which *LM* still signifies.

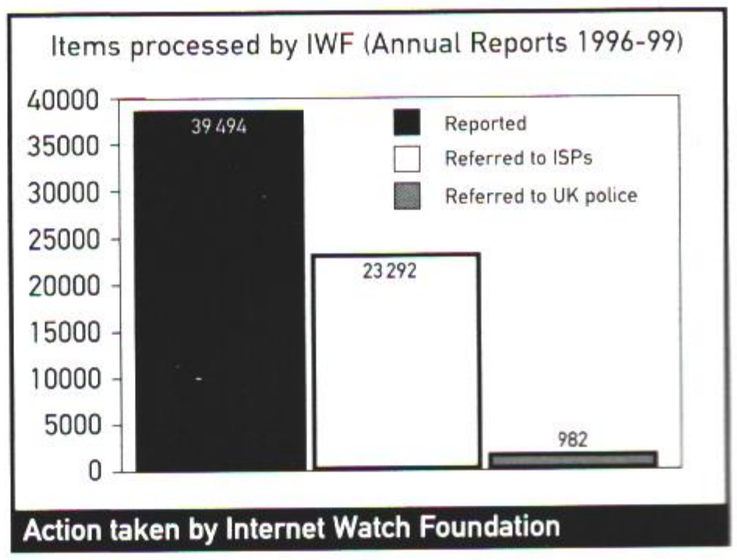
The very complexity of the work of writers like David Greig, Don Paterson or AL Kennedy makes the accusation of nationalist naivety a nonsense. Each explores his or her theme and world from an individual view, but it's one which is informed (like it or not) within a cultural context. They are historical testimony to a contemporary truth—that your own culture is often a springboard towards internationalism and the appreciation of other people's culture. Burns' 'For a' that and a' that' or Hamish Henderson's 'Freedom come all yea' are hymns to the very socialist universalism to which many of us aspire.

We have experienced what Murdo Macdonald has described as a 'mislaid history'—one in which much of our own culture has been deemed unimportant. Unsurprisingly this has often been the history and cultural artefacts that are the most radical, challenging and provocative. In fact this mislaid history is much of the material that is distinctly Scottish, such as the Democratic Intellect, the tradition of dissident writing and internationalism and visions of language—all which is expressed by so many contemporary Scottish artists and writers today. ●

['An fhirinn an aghaidh an t-Saoghail!' means 'The truth against the world', and is a Scottish saying often associated with the 1820 uprising.]

Vetting the net

Internet Service Providers have powers to regulate and censor that put the courts to shame, argues Chris Evans



There is a perception that the internet is an anarchic medium resistant to regulation, control or censorship. Yet material is removed from the net almost every day. Websites are forced to close, newsgroups are blocked, postings are deleted. Most of the time you will never even know that the material has been removed, and if you are one of the unfortunate victims whose site is closed there is little you can do to get it reinstated.

Regulation of the net in Britain began with the establishment of what is now the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) in 1996. IWF was set up by Peter Dawe, ex-chairman of Pipex Internet, to tackle the availability of child pornography through a reporting hotline and content filtering. Today, IWF is funded by the internet industry, with the backing of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Home Office and the police, and has unprecedented powers to regulate and control the internet.

IWF's remarkable regulatory role is illustrated in the graph above right. Of the 39 494 items reported, IWF advised Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to remove 23 292. Only 982 were passed to the police and could have reached UK courts—and recent accounts record only 24 successful prosecutions for internet-based child pornography (Y Akdeniz, *United Kingdom Section of Regulation of Child Pornography on the Internet*, 1999). While IWF has no statutory powers, it reports that ISPs consistently comply with removal instructions. So 96 percent of the material removed from the net sees neither judge nor jury, and by IWF's own admission would be unlikely to result in a successful prosecution if brought to court. Of the 23 292 items removed, an estimated 0.1 percent of them could have been in direct response to a court ruling. No other British non-governmental organisation has such a level of command over a whole industry, outstripping state powers nearly one-thousand-fold.

From the outset, ISPs have failed to challenge popular misconceptions about the internet and its supposed dangers and risks. Instead they have sought to demonstrate a responsible attitude towards 'unsuitable' or 'offensive' material online. This has been achieved by financing IWF and backing it through the two leading trade organisations—the Internet Service Providers Association and the London Internet Exchange. But many service providers have gone even further, playing a leading role in policing content on the net.

ISPs have been able to close sites in cases that would have been unlikely to succeed in a court of law. Examples include: the Dunblane massacre shooting game website closed by Virgin Net in August 1997; a US serial killers site closed by America Online in September 1997; the *Euskal Herria Journal* website, reporting on Basque separatism, closed by Easynet in September 1997; a Koran parody site closed by America Online in June 1998; Irish Heritage discussion boards suspended by America Online in January 1999; the Nuremberg Files anti-abortion site closed by Mindspring in February 1999; a website critical of UK judges closed by Kingston Internet in November 1999. The list goes on...

ISPs get their legal powers from the contractual arrangements made with their customers. Unlike public authorities, whose powers are enshrined by statute and who are held to account through the courts, ISPs are free to place any restrictions on consumers provided these restrictions do not contradict the law. Until recently, this did not pose too much of a problem, since commercial organisations had little motivation to place additional constraints on their customers. But the drive for regulation has meant that many ISPs now have extremely restrictive conditions to which they bind internet users. Even businesses and their investors have been overcome by a desire to avoid offence and to appear ethical. Like all businesses, ISPs are accountable to their shareholders whose primary concern was to ensure profitability. Now, the concerns of ISPs and their shareholders about avoiding offence mean that internet users are denied access to internet material.

Violations of conditions of service allow ISPs to terminate contracts at will, resulting in the closure of websites and withdrawal of customer access to the net. So section D1 (ii) of Virgin Net's Terms and Conditions of Service expressly requires customers to not 'send or receive any material which is offensive, or which we believe may be abusive, indecent, obscene or menacing, or in breach of confidence, copyright, privacy or any other rights'. In practice, Virgin Net's policies are even more restrictive, including removing material which causes annoyance or anxiety. Debbie Caldicott, press office manager at Virgin Net, explained:

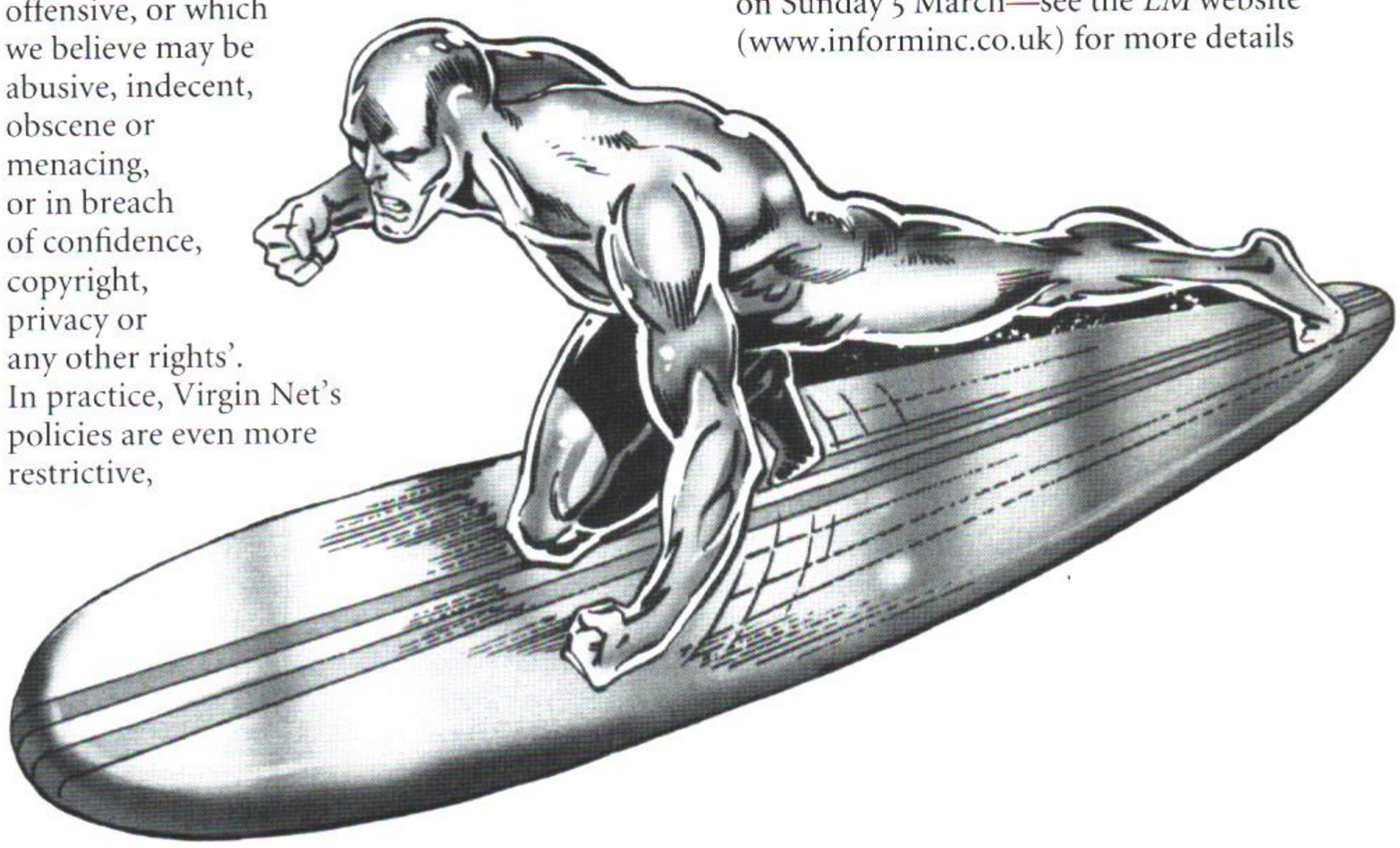
'If material generates complaints and it is deemed to be abusive, indecent, obscene or menacing, causing recurring annoyance, inconvenience, or needless anxiety to a substantial body of subscribers, then it is removed from the service.'

Virgin Net's policy is typical of ISPs. Indeed, there is a consensus among service providers that certain newsgroups should be banned, making it almost impossible for UK subscribers to access their content without taking out accounts abroad. As a result, it is now extremely difficult for owners of closed sites to find alternative routes for publication.

No court in Britain or America has the power to suppress material simply on the grounds that it is 'menacing, causing recurring annoyance, inconvenience, or needless anxiety to a substantial body' of people. ISPs have gained unprecedented powers as arbiters of acceptability, and can remove material from the internet at will. While the state may not always operate in the interests of the majority of citizens, at least it is formally held to account through the courts and parliament. ISPs face no such formal checks.

The regulatory acts of bodies like IWF are not open, not subject to review, and provide no mechanisms for redress. IWF has successfully established a mechanism for secret censorship that reaches the parts that the government alone cannot reach. ●

Dr Chris Evans lectures in ecommerce and multimedia computing at London's Brunel University, and is founder of the cyber liberties organisation Internet Freedom (www.netfreedom.org). He will be taking part in an online debate about internet censorship on Sunday 5 March—see the *LM* website (www.informinc.co.uk) for more details



READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Wendy Earle toys with the discussion about children's literature

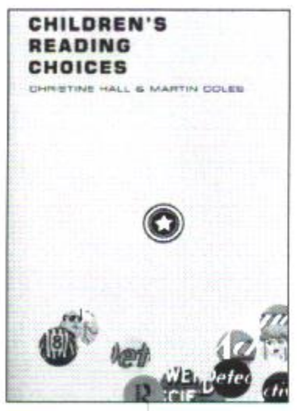
KIDS' STUFF

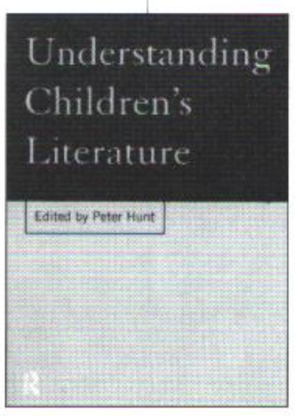
CHILDREN'S READING CHOICES
Christine Hall and Martin Coles
Routledge. £12.99 pbk

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
Peter Hunt (ed)
Routledge. £14.99 pbk

WHEN JK ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER AND THE Prisoner of Azkaban* nearly won the prestigious Whitbread Prize in January, children's literature became big adult news once again. In contrast to the old-fashioned notion that children who read too much might become lazy dreamers, now the common wisdom is that children who do not read will be mentally and emotionally deprived, socially inadequate and ultimately unemployable. The National Year of Reading, which ended in September 1999, was motivated entirely by a concern to make sure that everybody, but especially children, understood that reading is 'a good thing to do'.

But is there any need to worry about children not reading enough? According to *Children's Reading Choices,* by Christine Hall and Martin Coles, they read about as much now as they did three decades ago. Hall and Coles compared a survey of 8000 girls and boys aged 10, 12 and 14 with a similar survey conducted in 1971.





They found that children at age 10 and 12 read more than they did 30 years ago, and 14-year olds tend to read slightly less now than in the past. In 1971, Enid Blyton was way ahead in the list of favourite authors. The second favourite—Charles Dickens—got only 10 percent of Blyton's vote. Of the other writers listed only CS Lewis, Robert Louis Stevenson and Louisa M Alcott fall into the 'writers for children category'. The remaining writers listed as children's favourites in 1971 included Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming, HG Wells, Conan Doyle and Alistair MacLean.

A much wider range of books is now written for children, and over 8000 children's books are published each year in Britain alone. Roald Dahl has become by far and away the most popular children's author (that is, until JK Rowling came along), followed by Enid Blyton. Adult books appear with less frequency. Stephen King, John Grisham, Danielle Steel, Catherine Cookson and ➘

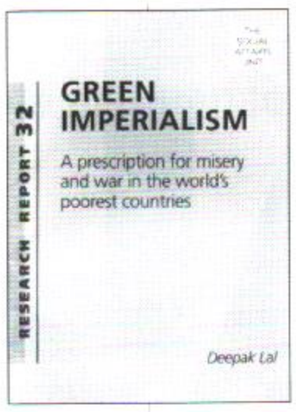
LESNIK-OBERSTEIN POINTS OUT THAT *THE SLAVE DANCER* WAS CRITICISED BY ONE CRITIC AS 'AN INSULT TO BLACK CHILDREN' AND HAILED BY ANOTHER AS 'A NOVEL OF GREAT HORROR AND AS GREAT HUMANITY'

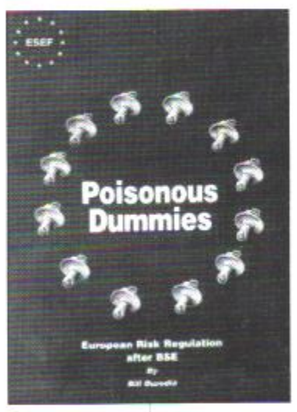
↖Michael Crichton (*Jurassic Park*) are included among the 14-year olds' list of favourites, but hardly appear below that age. Charles Dickens and Agatha Christie are also mentioned in the top 30 authors. Though Louisa M Alcott and RL Stevenson are mentioned, only CS Lewis remains a popular choice among children today.

So rather than obsessing on the quantity read by children, should we be turning our attention to the quality of the books? Introducing *Understanding Children's Literature*, Peter Hunt points out that 'the study of children's literature has been skewed towards the reader and affect, rather than towards the book as artefact'. Judgements tend to be based not on notions of what makes a good children's book, but on views about what kind of books are good for children. Agreeing on this is less than straightforward, as Karin Lesnik-Oberstein's contribution to *Understanding Children's Literature* illustrates. The varying perspectives of critics who may be sociologists, psychologists, educationalists or literary theorists mean that a book that is seen as good from one point of view may be bad from another. Lesnik-Oberstein quotes an example of *The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox, which was criticised by one critic as 'an insult to black children' and hailed by another as 'a novel of great horror and as great humanity'.

Until fairly recently, knowing what books were good for children was reasonably straightforward. CS Lewis' Narnia stories were not particularly well-written, but were immediately recognised as classics. A strong narrative and central characters that children can relate to enabled the writer to convey a clear message about the courage to fight for good against the forces of evil, the readiness to make sacrifices and be true to your beliefs. But the CS Lewis centenary last year, far from affirming this view, led to an angst-ridden discussion questioning the heavy underlay of Christian morality in his work. At a time when such moral certainties are generally disputed, a consensus about what makes a good children's book is far from clear.

Perhaps it is inevitable, then, that most of the essays Hunt has chosen to represent the academic perspective on children's literature do little to illuminate our understanding of the art of writing for children. They examine literature for children from psychological, psychoanalytical, sociological, deconstructionist, feminist, postmodernist, linguistic, critical theory and mental health perspectives. In the end, dear reader, one finds oneself no nearer an understanding of what makes good literature for children. No wonder the modern definition of a children's classic has become a book that a lot of children (and adults) are reading. Unfortunately, the 'Harry Potter phenomenon' says less about the quality of JK Rowling's writing than about the simplistic notion that if you (and your child) have got your noses in a book this has to be 'a good thing to do'. ●





ECO-WORRIERS

GREEN IMPERIALISM: A PRESCRIPTION FOR MISERY AND WAR IN THE WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRIES

Deepak Lal. Social Affairs Unit. £6 pbk

POISONOUS DUMMIES: EUROPEAN RISK REGULATION AFTER BSE

Bill Durodié. European Science and Environment Forum. £5 pbk

Review by Joseph Kaplinsky

DEEPAK LAL'S *GREEN IMPERIALISM* STARTS FROM the assertion that the 'gravest danger facing the third world today is from the political moralism infecting the West, and the desire by many of its activists to legislate their "habits of the heart" globally'. He terms this desire to impose environmental concerns on the third world 'eco-imperialism', and claims that this is 'modelled less on the nineteenth-century scramble for Africa, than on the Crusades'. According to Lal, this is an inverted clash of civilisations where conflict is between the West and the Rest—but here it is the West which has rejected modernity while the Rest embrace it.

Lal locates the roots of environmentalism in a Christian worldview going back as far as Augustine. This account of environmentalism-as-Christianity is accurate as a superficial description, but unfortunately Lal takes it too seriously as an analytic framework. He has taken over wholesale the old right-wing criticism that Marxism is nothing more than a rehash of Christianity, and applied this critique to what he calls 'eco-fundamentalism'. Lal hopes that the East, unburdened by Christian cosmology, will embrace technology and the market. And it is true that the fast-developing markets of East Asia currently seem to demonstrate a great enthusiasm for economic growth and progress. However, the fascination many 'eco-fundamentalists' in the West hold for the mystical religions of the East suggests that Hindu or Sinic 'values' may not be as incompatible with environmentalism as Lal would like to believe.

Bill Durodié's study of 'poisonous dummies' illustrates the resonance that the environmentalist approach has with state officials and hard-headed business people. He examines the various components of Greenpeace's campaign against phthalates (an ingredient used to soften PVC, found in various products from medical equipment to toys). Phthalates are well-studied chemicals present all around us: in the water, in products like inks, and in our food. Having been commercially produced for 40 years their safety has been carefully assessed. Feeding lab rats high doses of phthalates can make them ill—but this is true of about half of all substances tested, whether natural or manmade. The dose makes the poison, and human intakes of phthalates do not even approach the levels at which adverse

DOWNING STREET IS KEEN TO GET ALEX FERGUSON'S MAN-MANAGEMENT SKILLS INTO THE HOUSE OF LORDS. ACCORDING TO LABOUR SOURCES HE IS 'JUST THE RIGHT PERSON TO BRING POLITICS INTO THE LIVING ROOM'

effects are seen in animals or thought possible in humans.

So how did this harmless chemical spark a major campaign? Durodié documents the way that campaigners, on seeing a potential risk with phthalates, highlighted their concerns in relation to everyday products, like plastic ducks. This played on parents' fears for their children's safety while the manufacturers, put on the defensive, refused to prioritise a rational defence of their products over a public show of sensitivity to the need for precaution. Product withdrawals provided further grist to the campaigners' mill, which put the issue on the regulatory agenda. A state-backed investigation of safety started a consumer panic, as the generalised assumption of a conspiracy to poison the population mixed with a broader susceptibility to inflated fears about health. Concern moved from Europe to the USA, from toys to medical equipment, and from phthalates to their proposed replacements.

These developments have continued to unfold since *Poisonous Dummies* was published last year. The European Commission proposed a temporary 'emergency ban' on PVC teethers and toys containing phthalates to give time to further assess the evidence of harm caused by phthalates. (What emergency? Who died? Who went to hospital? Nobody.) In response, retailers and manufacturers in Britain declared a voluntary product withdrawal.

Both studies illustrate the way fears about potential environmental risks can slow down new developments, and have a real impact on human welfare. No doubt the pro-market think tanks that published these critiques have their own reasons for questioning increased regulation. But in going against the grain of today's precautionary climate, *Green Imperialism* and *Poisonous Dummies* are useful contributions to the debate around science and risk. ●

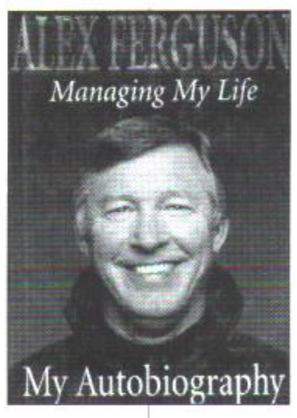
KICKING OFF?

MANAGING MY LIFE: MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Alex Ferguson (with Hugh McIlvanney)
Hodder and Stoughton, £18.99 hbk

Review by Carlton Brick

SIR ALEX FERGUSON HAS BEEN AS PROLIFIC WITH his pen as his team has been in winning trophies. This is his fourth book in seven years. *Managing My Life*, which won book of the year at the British Book Awards in February, is in fact Ferguson's first 'proper' autobiography (even though it was actually written and edited by *Times* sports writer Hugh McIlvanney)—the other three are devoted to his managerial career at Manchester United. The first 13 chapters (of 25) are devoted to Ferguson's early life, playing career (at Queen's Park, St Johnstone, Dunfermline Athletic, Glasgow Rangers, Falkirk and finally Ayr United), and managerial career (East Stirlingshire, St Mirren, and Aberdeen) in Scotland. Ferguson's account of his pre-United career is certainly as candid as one could expect from a man who has become infamous for his belligerent, stubborn and outspoken manner. Accounts of clashes with press, chairmen, board members and players make for entertaining and at times interesting reading, and offer a partial insight into the character of a man who has adopted the motto 'no one likes us, we don't care' as his own.

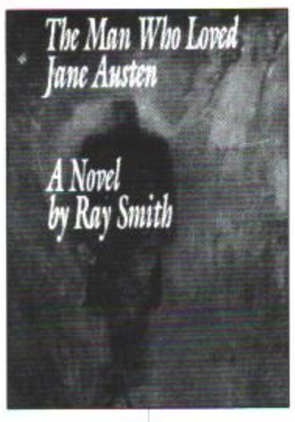


But, excuse a bad pun, this is a book of two halves. Such an honest account of his managerial career at Manchester United is conspicuous by its absence. On its publication, overwhelming coverage in the media was given to Ferguson's 'fraught' and 'strained' relationship with United's chief executive Martin Edwards and the plc board. Ferguson goes into some detail regarding the problems he faced when negotiating his own contract with the United board, but on the whole is keen to praise Edwards and the freedom he has allowed Ferguson in managing the team. Ferguson also makes great play to stress Edwards' role in providing the basis for United's current period of success, suggesting that this is something the fans should be grateful for. This point is made with brief reference to the controversial attempt by BSkyB to buy Manchester United—a move Edwards and the plc board were in favour of, and one for which they have been derided and much maligned. On his own views and opinions of the BSkyB bid Ferguson is a little less forthcoming. There is one brief but rather general mention when Ferguson states that he feels the club to be 'too important' to be put up for sale. Such a non-committed public stance by Ferguson is perhaps not surprising given that he is still an employee of the club and to all intents and purposes Edwards is his boss, but it is still a little disappointing considering his reputation as a man of forthright and principled views.

A more intriguing omission from *Managing My Life* is that Ferguson makes no mention of his relationship with Tony Blair's New Labour. Ferguson is a close friend of Alastair Campbell, Blair's press secretary and spin-doctor, and during the 1997 general election acted as an adviser to Blair and Campbell on fitness and stress management. This relationship has since been formalised, with Ferguson taking a starring role in New Labour's European election broadcasts. Downing Street, it seems, is also keen to get Ferguson plying his man-management skills and tactical know-how in the new-look House of Lords. According to Labour sources Sir Alex is 'just the right person to bring politics into the living room', and they hope to make him a Lord in the near future. You wonder why Ferguson has seen fit to leave out political facets of his life from his autobiography—he is generally perceived as a very political person and staunch Labour supporter. Perhaps the answers will form the basis of next year's autobiography. ●

SUE TOWNSEND TAKES THE VOICE OF THE ADOLESCENT ADRIAN MOLE INTO THIRTYSOMETHINGDOM. SKILFULLY RETAINING EVERYTHING WE HATED MOST ABOUT HIM

READON READON READONREADONREADON



THE MAN WHO LOVED JANE AUSTEN

Ray Smith. Porcupine's Quill. $18.95 pbk

Review by Irene Miller

FRANK WILSON IS A MAN LOSING CONTROL. An English literature teacher, he has two small children, a dead wife and a mother-in-law even Roy 'Chubby' Brown wouldn't joke about. *The Man Who Loved Jane Austen* is a surprisingly sad story of a man's endless struggle to rebuild and regain control over his life after his wife's death in a car accident. With in-laws trying to destroy him and take his children by whatever means necessary, he has a struggle on his hands.

The book makes an impact because it is so painfully believable. The dialogue, particularly between Frank and his children, is charmingly well-observed. Yet Ray Smith just manages to stop Frank being pathetic. Although often ineffective, Frank puts up a fight at every stage. Finding out the reality behind his idolised wife, he remains rational and continues to try to move on. A previously placid and satisfied husband and father, Frank finds himself thrown unwillingly into a fight for his children and, ultimately, his life. The most effective part of the book is your understanding, as a reader, of how Frank is being worn down. When he begins to give up the battle, he does not elicit pity, but anger.

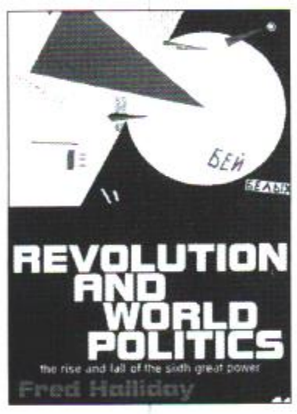
References throughout to Canada's peculiar nationalist issues and the divisions these have created among its people mean that the book is in some ways very 'Canadian'. But this only adds depth to the characters involved, reaching beyond national boundaries to make this an incredibly moving story. ●

REVOLUTION AND WORLD POLITICS: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SIXTH GREAT POWER

Fred Halliday. Macmillan. £16.99 hbk

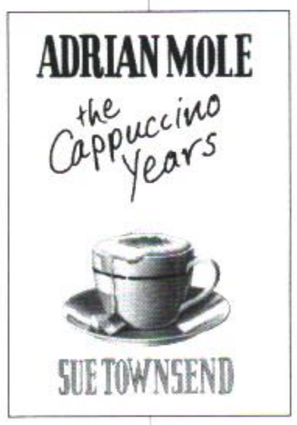
Review by Michael Savage

IN *REVOLUTION AND WORLD POLITICS*, FRED Halliday provides a comprehensive account of the relationship between revolutions and international relations, by weaving together historical and theoretical themes. His account is sensitive to the ways in which both international and domestic factors conspire to tame revolutionary regimes, which he traces through the development of the thoughts of revolutionaries themselves. This is a useful corrective to the tendency in international relations theory to focus on structural factors in the international system. The concluding section develops some implications for international relations theory and world history. Halliday identifies a number of levels of analysis that should be considered in international relations, but his historical approach rightly cautions him against providing a model to apply to every case. Instead, the relative weighting of the state, the social system and ideologies should be established in relation to specific cases and problems, using concepts and methods from international relations and history.



The main problem with this book is that Halliday appears not to take some of his own theoretical points seriously enough. He tends towards determinism in his identification of three levels of international relations (state, society and ideology), which seem redundant if his points about historical sensitivity are taken on board. And by identifying these levels of analysis he often avoids the question of social agency altogether. For example, his theory of globalisation rests on the idea that states and communities exist in a world increasingly unified by economic and social processes, by both transnational formation and by the pressure on societies to conform with each other in an increasingly unified, and unequal, world. Here, he seems to be evading the question of what determines these global processes, which for a critical analysis of international relations should surely be a key task.

However, Halliday's ability as an historian militates against these extremes. In such a wide-ranging work each reader will inevitably quibble over details and omissions, but for its scope and sophistication it deserves consideration by a wide audience. ●



ADRIAN MOLE: THE CAPPUCCINO YEARS

Sue Townsend. Michael Joseph. £14.99 hbk

Review by Hannah Lake

IN THIS LATEST BOOK IN THE ADRIAN MOLE series, Townsend has succeeded in taking the authentic voice of the adolescent Adrian into thirtysomethingdom, skilfully retaining everything we hated most. A disastrous husband, an inconsistent and unreliable father, an ever-ungrateful son, a stinge with money, a selfish individual lacking in willpower and forever wallowing in self-pity...the list does go on. And the transition to adulthood doesn't feel awkward: he is everything we expected him to be.

The Cappuccino Years is a funny and easy read. Throughout, Townsend manages to balance some marvellously surreal happenings with the almost painful normality (boringness) of Adrian's personality. There is partner swapping, the sale of fresh air, and the book culminates in a deranged arsonist falling head over heels for our feeble hero. Yet despite a glimmer of humanity at the end, I have to say I won't *ever* like Adrian. ●

An Intellectual Map for the Twenty-First Century

The Institute of Ideas LM

16 JUNE – 16 JULY 2000

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