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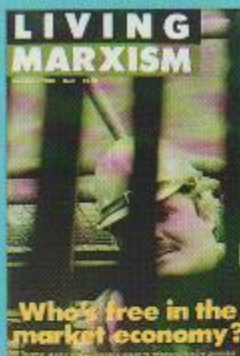


# THE END OF THE DECAYED





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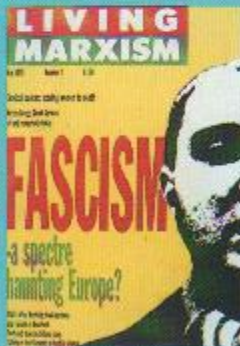
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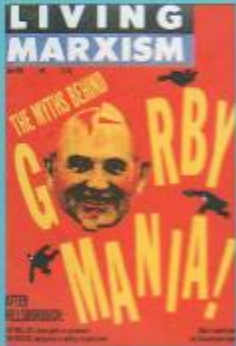
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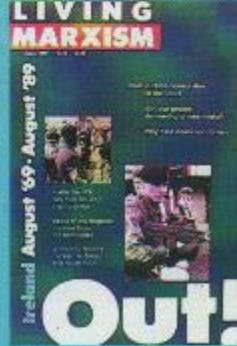
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PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



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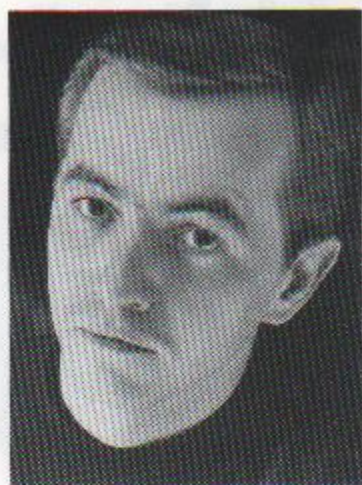
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**MICK HUME**  
EDITOR

# THE END OF THE DECAYED

While 1989 is still warm, the faces of the eighties are already fading into the past.

Nigel Lawson, unassailable economic miracle man, has been successfully assailed. Inflation, interest rates and the EMS mess have pricked his bloated reputation and reduced him to a blip in the history books.

Cecil Parkinson, Thatcher's favourite insider, has lost his brylcream sheen in a succession of scandals (who's the father? whose are the shares?) and disasters (first as minister for Piper Alpha and nuclear power, now as secretary of state for the Chunnel). Heir today, gone tomorrow.

Elsewhere, the businessmen who spent the eighties doing billion-dollar deals before breakfast are now having trouble paying the bills.

Sir James Goldsmith, prince of stock market predators, no

longer knows where his next highly-leveraged transatlantic takeover bid is coming from.

Rupert Murdoch, ruler of the *Sun* and Sky, has been born again and, like many another desperate debtor, now looks to Heaven for salvation.

The Saatchis, who sold Britain Thatcherism and bought up their overseas competitors, are reduced to selling off their paintings and worrying that their own firm might become part of a foreign corporation's private collection.

Plenty more of the big financial and political players appear to be going down with their decade. Not least among them is Margaret Thatcher, who beat the eighties into shape and said she would do the same to the nineties, only to discover recently that somebody has taken the brick out of her handbag.

In 1982 Thatcher walked on water through the South Atlantic. In 1984 she stomped on the coalfields. Today, in two embarrassing privatisation debacles, even water and fossil fuels are getting their own back. 'Ten more years, ten more years' the Tories brayed on her anniversary a few short months ago, and she promised them that she would 'go on and on'. Now the woman herself suggests that one more election victory will be enough, while more and more people believe that it would be one too many; the popular refrain is, in the words of Brian Walden, 'prime minister, I must stop you there'.

● The close of the decade brings closer the end of the decayed. It couldn't happen to a nicer bunch of people. But we are witnessing more than the decline of a few

charmless capitalists. The entire enterprise culture of the late eighties is being called into question.

Just a couple of years after the Conservatives conjured it up, their vision of the future appears outdated. The promise of a Thatcherite millenium, in which free market economics would spread prosperity ever further, sounds out of step with the times already.

Buzz-words of the business age—'popular capitalism', 'share-owning democracy'—have turned stale and been discarded as quickly as a piece of playground slang. The recent spate of films and TV series about smooth, successful City dealers and the continuing advance of yuppiedom must have seemed a good and topical idea when production started a short while ago; yet even as they reach the screen today, they look



like tired repeats. The sensitive scouts from the high fashion houses have also picked up a change in the wind: 'power-dressing' and shoulder-pads are already considered passé on the catwalks of London and Paris.

The eighties were supposed to be only the beginning, the dawn of an age of miracles, economic and otherwise. They were going to turn plastic into the magical provider of endless consumer goods. The working class was to be abolished. Everybody would become a self-employed owner-occupier, a citizen of the share-owning democracy, their personal organisers organising their personal pension and health schemes, their designer cars and designer clothes developing a conservative designer consciousness. The miracle was that they kept that illusion alive for more than a fortnight.

● 'Let's make money' was the cry on the City dealing floors, which became a slogan for the age. And the Tories and British businessmen did make money; but they didn't make anything much else. The decay of uncompetitive British industry forced them to look elsewhere for a quick profit. So manufacturing went to the wall as falling investment and soaring imports passed each other, travelling at speed in opposite directions. Meanwhile, to keep their system alive, they printed cash and lent it out by the wheelbarrowful.

Credit exploded across society. Debt became distorted into a symbol of affluence; the more you owed, the more status points you accumulated. Low-waged council tenants who owed a few quid to the local loan shark (big interest rates and bigger debt collectors) were considered members of the 'underclass'. High-salaried home-buyers who owed six figures to the banks and the building societies were doing rather well for themselves. The really seriously indebted used to be called bankrupts; in the eighties they became yuppies.

With credit notes being handed out like calling cards, the Tories were able to create the appearance of an economic boom. The billions of borrowed pounds slushing about the place

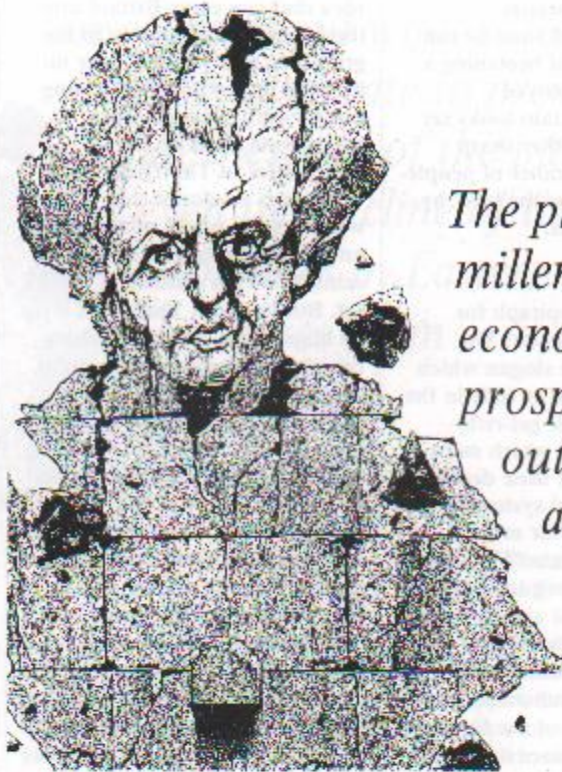
allowed capitalists to ask fancy new prices for old assets, and increase the spending power of many in work. For a moment, the decayed had a chance to look fresh again. From City institutions through high-street stores to suburban semi-detacheds, everything was going up. It seemed that by entering the market to buy and sell (or bid and offer as the City has it), anybody could do a modern Dick Whittington and make a million.

Unfortunately, however you dress it up, debt is debt. If the

long as the paper economy has some real wealth-making industry behind it. But Britain has no such thing. Establishment spokesmen have recently let this closely-guarded secret slip in the debate over Britain's relationship with the European Monetary System.

British politicians and economists are expressing fears about sterling being dominated by the deutschmark. They talk as if German banknotes have some mystical power that makes them 'stronger' than British pound coins. Yet there is nothing

deindustrialisation of Britain, like an estate agent clinching a sale while the demolition gang is knocking the house down. The shortlived credit-fuelled boom of the eighties was centred on the City and the financial sector. Capital flowed away from unprofitable industries and into junk bonds and overseas investments, and the Square Mile rose in stature as an international centre for share and currency dealing. The Tories said this showed Britain was in a strong position to face the future. In fact it was always an



*The promise of a Thatcherite millenium, in which free market economics would spread prosperity ever-further, sounds out of step with the times already*

last few years have proved that you can spend what you don't earn, the last few months of increasing economic uncertainty have brought a reminder that the red bill will arrive eventually. Most capitalist powers now face a hangover from the eighties credit binge. But Thatcher's Britain has a worse one than the rest.

Money does not grow on trees, nor can it continually be conjured up from the vaults of the Bank of England. Credit can only help to postpone a capitalist crisis so long as the cash stands for something, so

magical about strong money. The reason why the deutschmark rules the Continent is that West Germany has a powerful industrial engine room supporting its currency and financial dealings on the upper decks. HMS Great Britain, by contrast, has only the luxury cabins of the City of London perched precariously atop a manufacturing sector that barely qualifies as a rowing boat.

Perhaps this was the government's most remarkable achievement; popularising an image of economic regeneration while it presided over the

indication of underlying weakness, and the good times could not last for long.

The financial sector and stock markets form a dangerously soft foundation for an economy, because they do not produce new wealth. They are parasites, even by capitalist standards. Those involved make their profits by creaming off some of the value which has been produced elsewhere. They charge consultancy fees, they take dividends, they sell insurance, they strip assets. They make nothing. As the international markets expanded in the



deregulated eighties, there was plenty of cream for the City to feast upon. But this successful sponging off the world economy did nothing to alter the long-term decay of British industry.

The self-important British capitalists of the eighties left the menial tasks of investing in new technology and training engineers to ordinary mortals like Johnny Jap and Gerry. Meanwhile the Brits made a fat, fast profit by buying shares in other people's companies and producing an army of accountants and financial consultants.

Now the movements in the world economy are turning against sterling and the City speculators, leading to a loss of international confidence and business, and stripping away the flashy frontage that hid Britain's decay for the last few years. British businessmen are left sitting atop a house of credit cards, clutching handfuls of depreciating paper shares and currency. They have high interest rates, a record trade deficit, their pretensions to play a leading world role have been exposed as empty arrogance, and they have little of industrial substance to fall back on at home. Britain's economic weakness is not underlying any more. It is right up front, and the lying government stands exposed.

The eighties are ending in a dizzying round of economic crises, Tory Party ructions and new City scandals. Every showpiece of Conservative economic strategy seems to be turning into an almighty show-up. The government can only sell water at a loss, it cannot sell nuclear power stations at all, the London Docklands development is turning into a ghost town even before the cranes come down, the Channel tunnel link is making poor progress through the seabed and none at all through the Kent countryside.

With the decline of the North Sea oil industry symbolised by the collapse of a rig in November, just about the only companies reporting good prospects are those which dispose of toxic waste produced by foreign firms, and those which dispose of the assets of insolvent British ones. Meanwhile the collapse of

underfunded public services continues to turn Britain into a shoddy, dirty and dangerous hole that no self-respecting European would want to put their hand into without gloves on.

As always, the capitalists are seeking to ensure that other people pay for their problems. The millions who were promised a prosperous future through the Thatcher revolution are left to look nervously into the nineties. Sid sold his British Gas and Telecom shares a long time ago. Far from making money out of the water and electricity sell-offs, he is worried about how much privatisation will put on his bills. He is probably having trouble paying more and more for his mortgage on a house that is worth less and less. And, as the economy veers towards recession, he could soon be out of a job. Instead of becoming a nation of self-employed entrepreneurs, Britain looks set to experience another sharp increase in the number of people 'breaking free from the boss' by signing on the dole.

What is a fitting epitaph for the eighties' headstone? We would suggest the slogan which the financiers tried to hide in the small print of their get-rich-quick adverts, but which sums up the inability of their decayed and out-of-control system to secure prosperity for more than a few moments: 'The value of investments can go down as well as up.'

Yet Thatcher insists the nineties will be 'business as usual'. Her government has no alternative vision of the future with which to replace its bankrupt strategy, no new solutions with which to attack the rising pile of problems on its desk. The new faces in Thatcher's cabinet look as bereft of brain as the old ones. But the problem facing the Tories is not just an intellectual one. The roots of their crisis are firmly buried in the state of a British economy which has been declining for a century. Such a plunge downwards through history cannot be reversed overnight by a reshuffled minister waking up in a cabinet meeting and having 'a jolly good idea about this making Britain great again business...'

The exhaustion of the Thatcher government's policies is now evident to many of its longstanding supporters. Only a lunatic or a member of the house of lords could seriously believe government claims that the economy has 'overheated' and been too successful for its own good, or that everything from transport disasters to clashes between party-goers and the police are just the 'problems of prosperity', caused by people having too much money to spend on a trip on the Thames or on Ecstasy.

Discontent is welling up within the Tory ranks as the government loses direction. Yet Thatcher's critics are no better than she is at identifying a Big Idea that can carry Britain into the future. Listen closely to the grumbles, and you will hear no brilliant policy proposals being put forward. Instead, Tory complaints focus on the deficiencies of Thatcher's 'style'.

There is no doubt that watching the prime minister rant and froth is enough to make a saint throw his sandals at the TV set. But how can Thatcher's style be blamed for the approaching crisis? Her tendency to shout at people seems an unlikely explanation for this year's expected £20 billion trade deficit. Her dislike of foreigners and falling-out with the diplomatic Sir Geoffrey Howe is hardly an adequate cause of sterling's slump on the international exchanges.

Thatcher's Tory critics concentrate on matters of style because on matters of substance they have nothing new to say, no political alternative to fight for. As with most of the designer goods of the eighties, all they offer is the same old tat under a different label. Serious though they be, the conflicts within the Conservative Party at the moment represent more of an attempt to shift the blame for past and present problems than to plough a fresh path into the future.

Since nobody is challenging the Thatcherite programme, the odds currently favour Thatcher carrying on as leader as the nineties begin. From the Tory point of view, she at least has a

reputation for strength and can appear resolute as she stands amid the rubble. From the point of view of the rest of us it seems clear that, whatever the outcome of their internecine squabbles, the Tories will pursue the same discredited course and the old defunct policies.

Whether or not it sticks with Thatcher, the British establishment has no vision left. It is terrified of the nineties and the uncertainties to come. That is why the dominant mood in Britain today is to look longingly backwards, to seek comfort in the mythical good old days. Nostalgia is back in fashion in the arts, in entertainment, in dress and in politics. The right-wing press and politicians would far rather talk about Victorian values or the glorious Second World War years than consider the approach of the twenty-first century. It is a sign of how little they have to offer today that they should turn to the times of Dickensian squalor or wartime suffering for future inspiration.

The British authorities feel so insecure about what is to come and so desperate to preserve what they can of the past that even the decline of their old enemies in Eastern Europe scares them. Of course the hired guns of the capitalist press are trying to use the death-throes of the Stalinist regimes to prove that their own system is alive and well by comparison. But pointing out that the patient in the next bed is even sicker than you is hardly evidence of blooming health. And despite all the back-slapping about the 'victory for freedom' in the East, the accelerating pace of change there is causing panic in the West.

The British ruling class and its American allies knew where they were with the Cold War. The division of Europe and the solidity of the 'iron curtain' have been key sources of stability for them as well as for the Soviet Union throughout the post-war years. The existence of the unattractive Stalinist bloc acted as an advert for Western ways, and a justification for the militarism of Nato. Today they are frightened of losing the props of the past, and more frightened still of what might



replace them. Above all, the re-raising of the question of German unity threatens to pull apart the old world order, primarily at the expense of the decayed powers which benefit from the status quo—like the USA, the USSR, and the UK.

So alongside the eulogies to 'the expansion of freedom', we hear Thatcher urging caution about altering traditional East-West relations, asserting that East Germany will remain part of the Warsaw Pact, and trying to think up some excuse for

will not declare themselves to be outdated, as the East Germans have done, nor will they pull down their institutional equivalents of the Berlin Wall. These representatives of the past will fight us to control the future. And they have a powerful armoury to do it with.

Not everything that the Thatcher government achieved in the eighties was illusory. It also constructed an all-too real machinery of repression. Piece by piece, almost imperceptibly, the Tories have put together an

Labour Party was Thatcher's greatest source of strength through the eighties. Today Labour appears to be getting its act together, operating more smoothly, telling better jokes in parliament. But it has no more vision of the future than do the Tories.

Thatcher's ministers have gone back a decade and taken a leaf out of the last Labour government's book, lecturing low-paid ambulance workers about the need to accept a real wage cut or risk destroying

their fire on Thatcher's style of government. The consequence is that, even if they were to succeed in unseating her, it would make little difference to the future direction of British capitalism. Kinnockism would be a caricature of Thatcherism, another strain of the politics of the past.

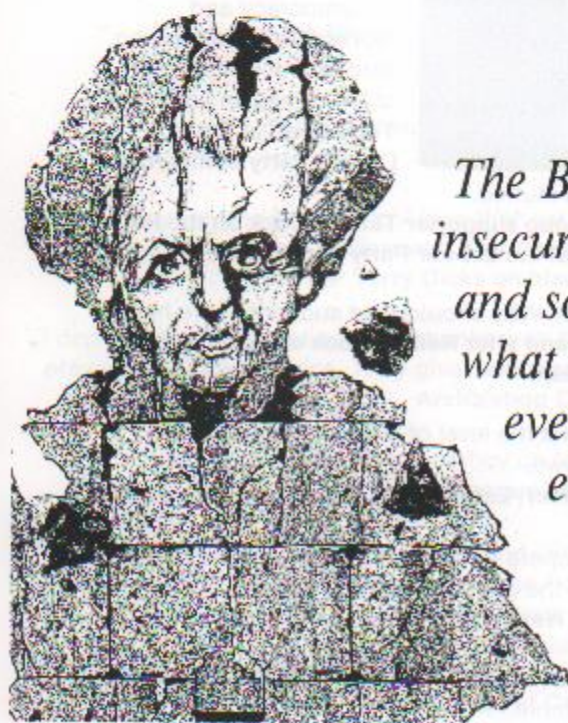
The decayed remain in power, but without the confidence and authority which they enjoyed for a decade. A gaping space exists today for a fresh vision of the future. The defenders of the old order are trying to close it by devoting what's left of their energies to asserting that Marxism is an outdated dogma.

Marxism has nothing to do with incanting sacred laws written long ago (that's religion). Nor has it had a hand in sustaining the stagnant Stalinist regimes of the East. Marxism is always the most modern of ideas, because it addresses the future; it is the theory of human liberation through social revolution.

Marxism has no detailed blueprint for tomorrow's world. But it has a vision to fight for, of a society freed from the restraints which hold us back—the profit laws, the police states, the moral hypocrisy—in which the future would be something to strive towards and get excited about, not to fear and shy away from. As the inability of capitalism to provide a decent future becomes apparent once more, a new chance arises to bring Marxism alive among those seeking a better life.

Let us enter the nineties aware that there are many dangers ahead, but convinced too that there are unprecedented opportunities for popularising an alternative, positive view of future prospects. East and West the world is changing, and all the safe bets of yesterday are off.

The struggle to give shape and direction to the nineties has already begun. But with Christmas and the New Year approaching, we take a moment to remember the reactionary politicians and rich financiers who rose high and have fallen low in the eighties. As the decayed depart the public stage, we send them the season's greetings: Goodbye. It has been very unpleasant knowing you.



*The British authorities feel so insecure about what is to come and so desperate to preserve what they can of the past that even the decline of their old enemies in Eastern Europe scares them*

keeping the Nato gang together. Earlier this year, Whitehall and Washington sighed with relief when the Chinese regime reimposed the old, safe order with tanks in Tiananmen Square. Today there is a similar feeling that, behind their thin smiles, Thatcher and Bush would like to take up the trowels and repair the Berlin Wall.

It is good to see those who have swaggered through the eighties stumbling at the first hurdles of the coming decade. But we should not expect the Tories to collapse of their own accord. The British establishment is not as lightweight as the East German bureaucracy. It has a long history of crisis management, and the experience and authority gathered in conquering history's largest colonial empire. The senior figures in the City, the CBI and the Conservative Party

impressive collection of new laws, new powers, new-style police forces. The state now has the capacity for censorship, criminalisation and violence on a distinctly un-British scale.

One of the most significant but least noticed appointments in Thatcher's post-Lawson reshuffle was making David Waddington home secretary. Waddington is a political animal in every sense, a would-be hangman with a more authoritarian bent than any of his post-war predecessors. The appearance of troops on London streets in the ambulance dispute gives a taste of the official attitude we can expect in an increasingly repressive society where organising an acid house party can get you 10 years in jail.

The decayed have one other advantage in their struggle to stay on top: the official opposition. The weakness of the

British civilisation. Meanwhile, with typical ill-timing, the Labour Party has adopted the basic themes of Thatcherism just as they become exhausted. Thus at this year's Labour conference, while the economic crisis approached and interest rates soared, Neil Kinnock's team announced its latest initiative—the Labour Party credit card.

Labour's policy review was out of date before it was printed. It has publicly declared itself to be the second party of the market and of 'good housekeeping' cuts in public spending. While the Tory rows occupy centre stage, all Labour can do is side with one establishment faction against another, offering to hold Lawson's coat while he fought Thatcher. The emptiness of Kinnock's think-tank explains why, like the disgruntled Tories, Labour spokesmen have to focus



# WHAT THEY SAID IN '89

It took us a long time to get over the effect of the French Revolution 200 years ago. We don't want another one.  
**Margaret Thatcher.**

Is it that we know more of every single disaster, or is it that the standard of living is higher and more people go out and do things than ever before?

**Margaret Thatcher explains away the disaster boom, standing at the spot where the *Marchioness* sank.**

Thatcher: I'm staying my own sweet, reasonable self.  
Walden: Prime minister, I must stop you there....  
Thatcher: No you must not.  
**Thatcher sweet-talks Brian Walden.**

We are fighting on slightly more fronts than we intended.  
**Peter Brooke, former chairman of the Tory Party.**

Inflation never comes down in a straight line.  
**Nigel Lawson, former chancellor of the exchequer.**

I absorb my ideas from the ether,  
not from the written word.  
**John Major, chancellor of the exchequer.**



PHOTO: Pandora Anderson

We've closed quite a lot of hospitals over the past 20 years. I think it's a good thing. We haven't closed enough.  
**Health secretary Kenneth Clarke.**

I could abolish poverty tomorrow simply by abolishing all benefits.  
**John Moore, former secretary of state for health and social security.**

If identification cards had been in use it would have helped to identify the dead.  
**Irvine Patnick, Tory MP for Sheffield Hallam, on Hillsborough.**

Homeless people may be examples of a rise in individualism and a taste for independence.  
**David Willets, director of the Centre for Policy Studies, scraping the bottom of the Tory think-tank.**

The capitalist system—it is the system we live in and we have got to make it work more efficiently, more fairly and more successfully in the world marketplace. This is what the policy review is about, and we shall reject any sort of naive shopping-list socialism.  
**Neil Kinnock.**

It has been the happiest week of my life.  
**Eric Hammond on the Labour Party conference.**



PHOTO: Pandora Anderson

The flickering flames of democracy and representation are being snuffed out in the name of New Realism and victory.  
**Tony Benn at the Labour Party conference.**

We have been stuffed.  
**Campaign Group supporter Tim Beacock on the left's performance at the Labour Party conference.**

It's disgraceful. Why should God suddenly save him?  
**Barbara Cartland after Neil Kinnock escaped unhurt from a car crash.**

I'm pleased that the level of wage settlements is marginally down.  
**Michael Meacher, Labour spokesman on employment.**

A visit to the opera on the South Bank can be spoiled by having to run the gauntlet of those reduced to begging.  
**Labour Party News.**

In Grimsby we know a woman's place. It's on her back on a kitchen table.  
**Labour MP Austin Mitchell.**

We may be bastards. But we're your bastards, not Ford bastards.  
**Jack Adams, transport union negotiator at Ford, after his union executive told Dagenham workers to stop wildcat strikes.**

The egalitarianism of modern America represents the essential achievement of the classless society envisioned by Marx.  
**Francis Fukuyama of the US state department, whose Washington office is essentially yards from a third world ghetto.**

Our people are linked by more than sediment.  
**President George Bush on relations between the USA and Poland.**

[We] will work very closely with the new government to ensure the total elimination of human rights in El Salvador.  
**US vice-president Dan Quayle in El Salvador, where the death-squad party Arena had just won the presidential election.**

The secret service is under orders that if Bush is shot, to shoot Quayle.  
**Senator John Kerry.**



The market is breathing a sigh of relief that Deng is coming out on top.  
**Wall Street Journal after the slaughter in Tiananmen Square.**

We are against doctrines which export revolution and counter-revolution.  
**Gorbachev during his visit to Cuba.**

Socialism need not be synonymous with absence of unemployment.  
**Soviet labour expert Vladimir Kostakov on dole-queue glasnost.**

We have taken power into our own hands in the city....We have allocated patrols of workers for the mining settlements, the city centre and the pits. Power is controlled by us.  
**Member of the Ukrainian miners' strike committee.**

Our defeat is total.  
**General Wojciech Jaruzelski on the June elections in Poland.**

If they want to go back to Africa then we can give them some ladders and they can climb up trees.  
**Tory MP Terry Dicks on black immigrants.**

I deplore the collaboration of the banks with the evil system prevailing in South Africa. They give capitalism a bad name.  
**Archbishop Desmond Tutu.**

I think it's really terrible what they do to those rhinos.  
**Kylie Minogue on South Africa.**

He has been in power for 20 years and clings on to it by showering oil wealth on Libya's poor, housing them in modern flats, schooling their children and giving them adequate healthcare.  
**Ross Mark, Washington correspondent of the Daily Express, on the crimes of Colonel Gaddafi.**



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

If you are Irish and you're arrested on a terrorist, political type of offence you don't stand a chance, you just don't stand a chance.  
**Gerard Conlon on the day of his release.**

Thank God for our bobbies. Their image has been severely dented recently. But how many of the Guildford Four were driving ambulances in London yesterday?  
**Sun editorial when the release of the Guildford Four coincided with management's lock-out of London ambulance drivers.**

Why doesn't he go and die in Barrow-in-Furness? He's not wanted here. I don't know why he came to Reading. It really is not the best place for alcoholics. The North is a far better place to go for that.  
**Judge Jack Ellison, sentencing a drunk.**

I would class them as animals.  
**Police sergeant Robert Burns on Liverpool fans at Hillsborough.**



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

If you want to be involved in good crime, you must join the Met.  
**Anonymous police officer speaking on Radio 4.**

The sinking of the *Belgrano* became a great issue, yet at the time it was one of the simplest decisions that I personally found myself involved in. It was taken when some of us had gone down to Chequers at the weekend for lunch.  
**Lord Whitelaw.**

When we were going through the trenches and seeing lots of corpses, I can always remember thinking that the politicians who sent us should come and bury the dead.  
**Frank Gilchrist, former Scots Guardsman decorated in the Malvinas War.**

[South Armagh] may be a seldom-go area, or a slow-go area.  
**Unionist MP Ken Maginnis denying that Crossmaglen is a 'no-go' area for British forces.**

The UDR have done remarkable work....A very, very, very brave group of men.  
**Margaret Thatcher speaking on the day two Ulster Defence Regiment members were charged with sectarian murder.**

He is the last person in the world I would invite to come to anything, anywhere at any time.  
**Neil Kinnock on Sinn Fein MP Gerry Adams' appearance at the Labour Party conference.**

Wanted dead or alive, Fenian bastard taxi drivers for skinning. Good rewards given for whole bodily parts or kneecaps with proof of Fenian connection.  
**Leaflet distributed in West Belfast by British soldiers.**

The music brought the roof down. Big Deal.  
**Graffito, Falls Road, West Belfast.**

There is a hell of a lot of straw lying around which gets burnt every year. You can heat largish houses that way.  
**Prince Charles.**

I really care when someone shouts 'parasite', because of course it is going to affect you.  
**The Duchess of York.**

The ruling class cliché is out of date. Anyone who has the desire, ability and the cheque book can play.  
**Geoffrey Kent, Prince Charles' polo associate.**

We don't pay taxes. The little people pay taxes.  
**Leona Helmsley, New York billionaire and convicted tax evader.**



Exposed: British injustice for the Irish

# The Balcombe Street bombshell

The authorities have known who was really behind the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings since 1975, says Sharon Clarke. The story of the Balcombe Street unit of the IRA shows the lengths to which the establishment will go to preserve the illusion of British justice where Ireland is concerned

'Find the REAL killers' demanded the *Mirror's* front-page headline on 25 October. The Guildford Four—Paul Hill, Gerard Conlon, Patrick Armstrong and Carole Richardson—had been released a week earlier, amid long overdue revelations of a frame-up. Now the police wanted to change the subject and to recover their reputation by focusing attention on the hunt for the guilty men. 'Someone *did* carry out those murderous attacks all those years ago', said a Scotland Yard spokesman in the *Mirror*: 'We have a duty to find out who.'

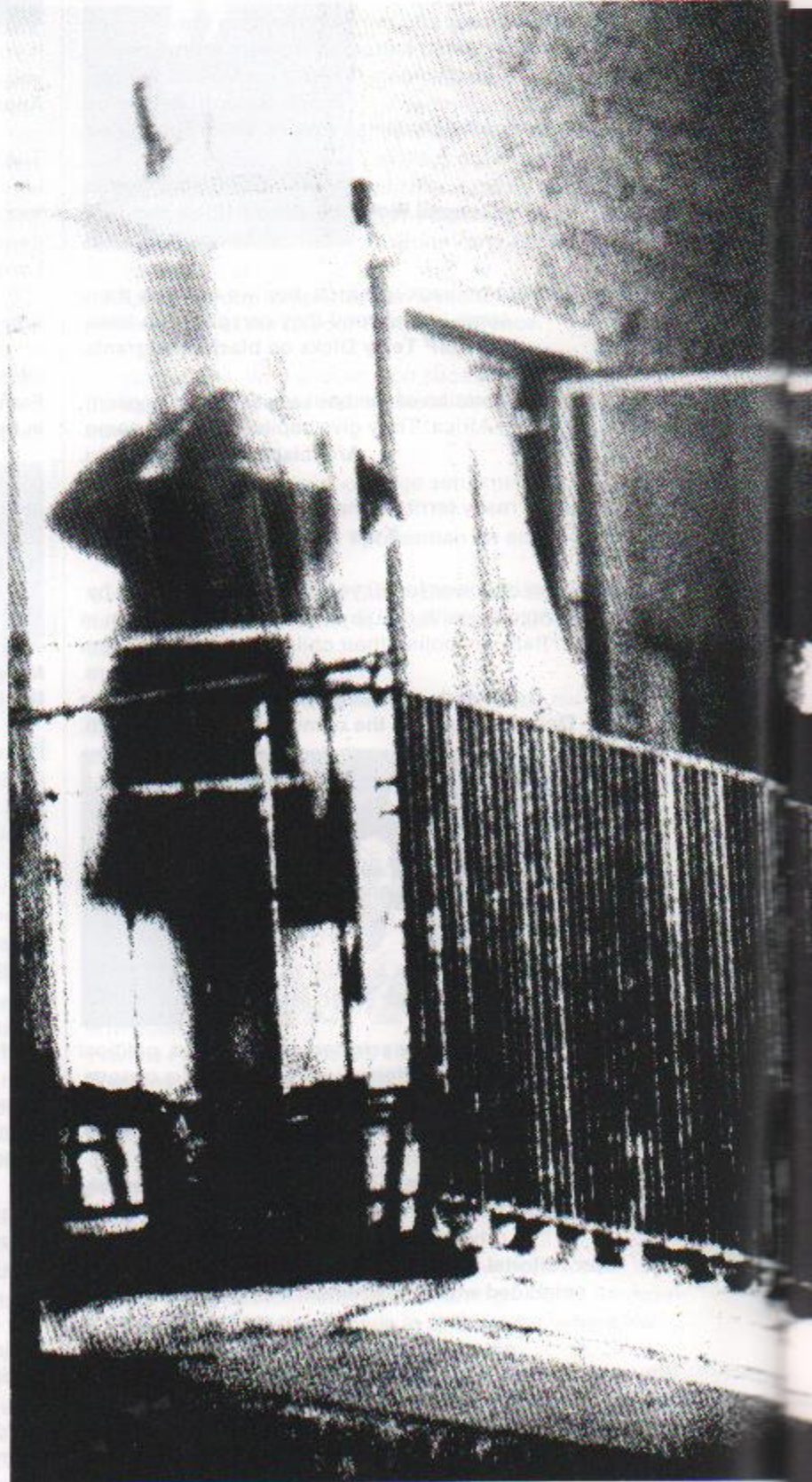
This should not prove too difficult a piece of detective work for Britain's finest, since they know 'who' and have known it for the last 14 years while the Guildford Four were rotting in jail.

The bombing of pubs frequented by soldiers in Guildford and Woolwich in 1974 was carried out by the men who became known as the Balcombe Street Active Service Unit of the IRA. Don't take our word for it. The IRA volunteers themselves first told the police that they were responsible for these attacks after their arrest in December 1975. They told the world the same thing at their trial in January and February 1977.

The authorities and the media conspired to suppress these admissions, because they had already jailed Hill, Conlon, Armstrong and Richardson for the Guildford and Woolwich bombings. They did not want that frame-up exposed by the IRA. The Balcombe Street trial must surely have been the only occasion on which the British legal system fixed the evidence so as to 'prove' that a group of Irishmen were *not* responsible for acts of violence.

The story of the Balcombe Street unit is the least-publicised side of the Guildford Four saga. It demonstrates that, despite their high-minded statements about justice, the British authorities are not concerned with such legal niceties as 'guilt' and 'innocence' where Ireland is concerned. They want to criminalise all Irish people in the minds of the

(Continued on page 12)



RIGHT: The end of the Balcombe Street siege, 12 December 1975



# 'Our whole nation is the prisoner'

*Speech from the dock by IRA volunteer Joe O'Connell at the end of the Balcombe Street siege trial, 7 February 1977*

'Members of the jury:

There has been an attempt by this court to isolate certain incidents which have been called "crimes". These incidents have been put completely outside the context in which they occurred, in a way that is neither just nor consistent with the truth. The true context is that of the relationship between this country and our country—Ireland. That relationship is one of a state of war against the occupation of Ireland by Britain.

'No mention has been made in this court of the violence suffered by the Irish people: the use of internment without charge or trial in the Six Counties; of the conviction before the European Court of Human Rights of the British government for the torture of Irish people; nor of the many brutalities of British colonial rule. The judge has attempted to restrict the reference to bombings and shootings to "terrorist" offences. We would like to ask the judge whether the bombing of Hiroshima and Dresden were terrorist offences? Whether the torture carried out by British soldiers in Aden and Cyprus and Hola Camp, Kenya were acts of terrorism? Whether the British were guilty of terrorism when they forced thousands of civilians into concentration camps in South Africa where thousands of them died?

'We say that no representative of British imperialism is fit to pass judgement on us, for this government has been guilty of the very things for which we now stand accused. This government carried out acts of terrorism in order to defend British imperialism and continues to do so in Ireland. We have struggled to free our country from British rule. We are patriots. British soldiers in Northern Ireland are mercenaries of British imperialism. Yet none of them has ever been convicted for the murders of unarmed civilians which they have committed in Ireland. We ask the members of the jury to consider this paradox.

'We are all four Irish republicans. We have recognised this court to the extent that we have instructed our lawyers to draw the attention of the court to the fact that four totally

innocent people—Carole Richardson, Gerry Conlon, Paul Hill and Paddy Armstrong—are serving massive sentences for three bombings, two in Guildford and one in Woolwich, which three of us and another man now imprisoned, have admitted that we did. The director of public prosecutions was made aware of these admissions in December 1975 and has chosen to do nothing. We wonder if he will still do nothing when he is made aware of the new and important evidence which has come to light through the cross-examination by our counsel of certain prosecution witnesses in this trial.

'The evidence of [police forensic experts] Higgs and Lidstone played a vital part in the conviction of innocent people. Higgs admitted in this trial that the Woolwich bomb formed part of a correlated series with other bombings with which we are charged. Yet when he gave evidence at the earlier Guildford and Woolwich trial he deliberately concealed that the Woolwich bomb was definitely part of a series carried out between October and December 1974, and that the people on trial were in custody at the time of some of these bombings.

'Lidstone in his evidence at this trial tried to make little of the suggestions that the Guildford bombs could have been part of the "Phase one" bombings with which we are accused, with the excuse, and this appears to be his only reason, that the bombings in Guildford had occurred a long time before the rest. When it was pointed out to him that there were many clear links between Caterham and Guildford and that the time between Guildford and the Brooks Club bomb with which we were originally charged was 17 days and that Woolwich occurred 16 days later, and that equal time gaps occurred with many of the incidents with which we were charged, Lidstone backtracked and admitted there was a likely connection.

'Those two men, Higgs and Lidstone, gave evidence at the Guildford and Woolwich trial which had no place in their true conclusions as scientists; they gave evidence which they must have known was untrue. The evidence which they gave was completely in line with police lies so as to make the charges stick against those four people.

'Then we come to [bomb squad] commander Nevill. He said he only wanted to get the truth concerning Guildford and Woolwich in fact when he gave evidence in this trial; yet he has not done. Why? Because Nevill knows that the truth means the end of the road for him and many other senior police officers and because his superiors know it would be a dangerous insight into how corrupt the British establishment really is.

'This shifty manoeuvring typifies what we, as Irish republicans, have come to understand by the words "British justice". Time and again in Irish political trials in this country innocent people have been convicted on the flimsiest evidence—often no more than extorted statements or even "verbals" from the police.

'Despite the often repeated claim that there is no such thing as a political prisoner in England, we would like to point out the stress laid in Irish trials on the political beliefs of the prisoners and the fact that over the last few years convicted republicans have been subjected to extreme brutality in English prisons. This brutality has led to prisoners being severely injured like six republicans in Albany in September last year, and to the almost constant use of solitary confinement for such prisoners. It has also resulted in the deaths of three of our comrades—Michael Gaughan, Frank Stagg and Noel Jenkinson.

'We do not wish to insult the members of the jury when we say they are not our peers. An English jury can never be the peers of Irish men and women. We will be judged only by our countrymen. Any verdict or sentence from this court is nothing more than the continuation of the hypocrisy of British rule in Ireland and the injustice it has inflicted on our country and its people.

'We admit to no "crime" and to no "guilt", for the real crime and guilt are those of British imperialism committed against our people. The war against imperialism is a just war and it will go on, for true peace can only come about when a nation is free from oppression and injustice. Whether we are imprisoned or not is irrelevant, for our whole nation is the prisoner of British imperialism. The British people who choose to ignore this or to swallow the lies of the British gutter press are responsible for the actions of their government unless they stand out against them.

'As volunteers in the Irish Republican Army we have fought to free our oppressed nation from its bondage to British imperialism, of which this court is an integral part.'





British public, to help present the war in Ireland as a legitimate law and order operation. To this end, one Irish face will fit into the frame as well as any other.

Shortly after 4pm on Friday 12 December 1975, two men with their hands on their heads walked on to the balcony outside 22b Balcombe Street, a flat in Marylebone, London. A few minutes later two more followed. They walked towards an army of armed police and the massed ranks of the world media. It was the end of the six-day Balcombe Street siege, and the end of the IRA's most successful military campaign in Britain.

### Fifty missions

The four IRA men had taken refuge and hostages in the Balcombe Street flat during a police chase, after they had fired a gun into Scott's oyster bar in London's West End—one of several attacks on what one of them was later to describe as 'ruling class' restaurants. This turned out to be the last mission in a campaign of bomb and gun attacks that spanned 18 months and almost 50 operations.

The Balcombe Street four were Joe O'Connell, Harry Duggan, Eddie Butler and Hugh Doherty. Along with another man, Brendan Dowd, who had already been captured, they had run the police forces of London and the home counties ragged, outwitting and humiliating the authorities time and again. Their best-known attacks included the assassination of Ross McWhirter, after he offered a £50 000 reward for their capture as part of a 'Beat the bombers' campaign ('That man thought he lived in Texas', said Butler, 'he put a bounty on our heads'), and the bombing of the London flat of former Tory prime minister Edward Heath ('He was prime minister when internment was introduced', said O'Connell, 'so he was classed as fair game').

After their capture, and before the Balcombe Street trial began in January 1977, O'Connell, Duggan, Butler and Dowd had revealed their part in the Guildford and Woolwich attacks (Doherty had not been in Britain at the time of those bombings). They had given solicitors detailed accounts of how the operations were carried out, including facts which could only have been known to those responsible. This threatened a major embarrassment for the authorities.

In October 1975, at the end of a farcical trial, the Guildford Four had been convicted of those same bombings on the strength of invented and uncorroborated 'confessions'. Paul Hill had been sentenced to serve 'the rest of his natural life', Paddy Armstrong had been given 35 years, Gerry Conlon had got 30 years and

17-year old Carole Richardson (an English girl whose crime was to be Armstrong's girlfriend) had been ordered to be detained 'during Her Majesty's pleasure'.

Police had only obtained these confessions through beatings and bullying (and by drugging Richardson), and had only sustained the convictions by deliberately suppressing alibi evidence. Now they were faced with a highly professional team of IRA volunteers who declared that they had bombed Guildford and Woolwich, and that they had never heard of the people convicted of these attacks. The dedication and expertise of the Balcombe Street men made them far more credible militarists than the Guildford Four, young drifters who were living a twilight existence on drink and drugs. Stage two of the state frame-up went into operation, with the doctoring of evidence relating to the Balcombe Street trial. That trial was a remarkable affair, at which a top-level political conspiracy began to be revealed.

### The missing charges

The initial charge sheet against the Balcombe Street four totalled 144: when the trial opened, this had been reduced to 25 indictments against each of the four. While the original list included offences dating back to August 1974, the first charge in the edited edition related to an incident in December 1974. The authorities had thus erased any suggestion that the IRA unit was operating at the time of the pub bombings and of the Guildford Four's arrest.

### The censored statements

When the charges were put to O'Connell, Duggan and Butler, each refused to plead, following the IRA tradition of refusing to recognise British courts. But they did announce from the dock that Guildford and Woolwich should be included in the charges—the first public announcement that the Guildford Four had been framed. Every British newspaper was represented in the packed press gallery when the IRA men made their short statements; all except the *Guardian* chose not to mention this extraordinary development. The press kept up these high reporting standards throughout the trial.

### The experts' omissions

The men of the Balcombe Street unit offered no defence during the trial, instructing counsel only to cross-examine prosecution witnesses with the intention of exposing how the Guildford Four had been framed. Under cross-examination, police forensic experts Douglas Higgs and Donald Lidstone agreed that the methods and the devices used at

Guildford and Woolwich fitted perfectly into the series of attacks which had continued for more than a year after the Guildford Four were arrested. Higgs further admitted that he had included Woolwich in his original list of connected throw-bomb attacks carried out between October and December 1974. So why had he later omitted Woolwich from his report? Because, said Higgs, the bomb squad, in the person of police sergeant Doyle, had told him to take it out.

### The police and the DPP

The Met's detective chief superintendent Bill Hucklesby and detective superintendent Peter Imbert later gave evidence, as did commander Jim Nevill of the bomb squad. Between them they conceded that Butler and O'Connell had made statements admitting to Woolwich and that, on the strength of these and Higgs' original forensic report, the director of public prosecutions had been advised that there was sufficient evidence to charge members of the Balcombe Street unit with Woolwich. The DPP had clearly decided that no such embarrassing charges should be brought, and the senior policemen had gone along with the cover-up by dropping any further investigations.

### The judge and the jury

As it became obvious that the authorities had suppressed ample evidence linking the Balcombe Street unit with Guildford and Woolwich, Mr Justice Cantley halted the cross-examination on the grounds that, since the pub bombings were not on the charge sheet, the court could not concern itself with who had carried them out. The prosecution case ended. All that remained was for Joe O'Connell to make his speech from the dock, speaking over continued interruptions from the judge. The jury then retired to consider its verdict.

Before the trial began, it was discovered that the police had vetted the jury panel; 10 panel members admitted that they had been affected by the bombing campaign. They were stood down, after which each IRA volunteer exercised his right to reject seven potential jurors. The first consequence of this was a largely working class jury including five women and three black people; the second consequence was a speedy change in the law to reduce the number of jurors whom a defendant could reject from seven to three.

After retiring to consider their verdict, the jury asked for a copy of O'Connell's speech, which the judge refused them. Then, after just under eight hours, the jury returned as expected with unanimous verdicts—except that some of the verdicts were 'not guilty'. All of the defendants



As a reward  
for their  
unsatisfactory  
performance  
in court,  
police  
arrested some  
of the jurors  
and chased  
others down  
the street

were acquitted of five bombing offences, which the forensic experts had established were part of the same campaign as those for which the jury returned 'guilty' verdicts. The implication was clear; the jurors were not happy with the prosecution case, and were impressed by the IRA volunteers' response, as one anonymous juror later explained:

'I remember the police were very shocked by the fact that there were acquittals and, of course, it was quite likely that the Balcombe Street men did do the lot. But what happened was that we were, in a way, rebelling against being railroaded by the court into unanimous verdicts of guilty. Some of us got very upset. We thought it was immoral....Also, we definitely felt that at least some of them were connected with Guildford and Woolwich.' (Quoted in G McKee and R Franey, *Time Bomb*, 1988, p387)

After the judge sentenced each of the IRA men to a recommended minimum of 30 years, the jurors adjourned to a nearby pub and continued discussing the case. As a reward for their performance in court, the police went in, arrested some of the jurors and chased others down the street.

Why did the authorities go to such extraordinary lengths to clear IRA men of bombings which they admitted, and to keep four hapless people in jail? The cover-up can only be understood in the context which O'Connell sought to establish in his speech from the dock: that of a colonial war in Ireland, fought between a British army of occupation

and the IRA, a guerrilla army which enjoys the support of thousands of nationalists in the North for its fight to unite Ireland free from British interference.

The British state has sought to lend legitimacy to its occupation of Ireland by denying that there is a war on, and portraying the Irish republican movement as a small criminal conspiracy. The case for British involvement in Northern Ireland rests upon the notion that justice and the unbiased rule of law are on the side of the Crown.

### Focus of frenzy

To sustain this lie within Britain, all Irish people are depicted as potential criminals and 'terrorists'. In the seventies, the Guildford Four (and the Birmingham Six, framed for pub bombings in a similar fashion) became the focus of the British establishment's frenzied campaign of anti-Irish propaganda. For the authorities to admit that they had been the victims of a political conspiracy would have seriously undermined the illusion of British justice which hides the truth about the dirty war in Ireland. So, whatever the Balcombe Street unit said, Hill, Conlon, Armstrong and Richardson had to languish in jail for 15 years.

Since evidence of how the Guildford Four were fitted up finally came to light, the authorities have moved on to another stage of the cover-up. They released the four without an open appeal hearing, which could have implicated senior members of the establishment past and present (such as, to name but two, Sir Michael Havers, prosecuting counsel at the Guildford trial who

became attorney general, and Sir Peter Imbert, leading detective in the Balcombe Street case who is now chief constable of the Metropolitan Police). And they are trying to shift the blame on to a few bent Surrey PCs. It remains to be seen how successful this ploy will be.

Whatever the final outcome of the Guildford Four saga, one thing is certain: their release, while a cause for celebration, does not mean the end of British injustice towards the Irish people, any more than the release of a few political prisoners in South Africa signals the end of apartheid. The Birmingham Six and others like Judith Ward are still in jail on the strength of similarly fixed evidence. And then there are the Irish republicans, like the men of the Balcombe Street unit, imprisoned for their part in the war. They too are political prisoners, not ordinary criminals. If there were no British troops on Irish soil, they would not be in British jails.

The story of the Guildford Four and the Balcombe Street unit demonstrates that the British authorities make no distinction on the grounds of guilt and innocence in their ruthless efforts to maintain their domination over Ireland. Those who seek some real justice will surely have to adopt an equally uncompromising attitude: by supporting an amnesty for all Irish political prisoners, as part of a campaign to expose the truly guilty men and women—the criminal conspirators of the British establishment.

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## The Cheltenham Five

# 'SUSPICIOUS'

Sara Llewellyn on the latest case of injustice for the Irish in Britain

At the crack of dawn on 12 October, armed police stormed a small hotel in Cheltenham. Guests at the Cleveland House hotel were woken by shouts and bangs to find the corridors full of gunmen in flak jackets and baseball caps, sniffer dogs searching the rooms and more armed police surrounding the building. Assisted by marksmen from the Defensive Weapons Section, the Special Branch was commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Brighton bomb with a vengeance, by arresting five Irishmen staying at the hotel under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Initial media reports linked the arrests to the IRA attack on Deal barracks. In fact the five were arrested on suspicion of having Irish accents and looking at Cheltenham town hall, where a Conservative Party conference is due to be held next March. While forensic scientists hoovered up every speck of dust from the hotel carpets, the five were held and interrogated for two days, then released without any charge.

### Marked men

Local press reporters say that the hotel raid followed a tip-off from a 'member of the public' who picked up their 'suspicious' accents. The five men were steel contractors working on an industrial estate in a village ten miles from Cheltenham. Hotel manager Gary Whatford said that the workers, from a Northern Ireland-based firm, had stayed at the hotel since work began on the Winchcombe building site. Builder Brian Compton, who lives next door to the hotel, said he noticed nothing strange about the men. 'They just seemed like ordinary blokes. I was led to believe they were Irish by their accents. They were quiet but they liked a drink—after that they were a bit noisy.'

Mr Hughes, the men's boss in Kilkeel, County Down, was with them during their ordeal. 'I was appalled at the way they were treated', he said. 'They were just dragged from their beds. They have nothing to do with politics at all, let alone anything to do with terrorists. No one has apologised for what happened and their names have not been cleared. They are marked men.'

Two days after the men returned to the Six Counties, one was stopped by an Ulster Defence Regiment road block. As his identity was checked, a soldier looked at him and said: 'You're one of the Cheltenham Five.' 'They're marked in Northern Ireland now',

commented Hughes, 'and they're completely innocent'. His steel business has also suffered from the effects of criminalisation. 'My company has lost thousands of pounds as a result of what has happened. People I have dealt with will no longer take a cheque in business dealings.'

### 'Not one word'

Cheltenham police had just 23 words to say about the case after the men's release: 'Following extensive enquiries, the five persons detained at Cheltenham under the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act have been released without charge.' Detective Inspector Terry Moore later stated: 'Not one word will be added to the official statement. We are not trying to be difficult, but we have orders not to add anything. The prevention of terrorism is not something we will be questioned over.'

The police refuse to be questioned about pulling Irish people out of bed at gunpoint. They will not be questioned about interrogating Irish construction workers in cells for 48 hours. And they will not add one word that might discourage others from treating their victims as terrorist suspects for the rest of their lives.

### Same old story

In any case, the police are under no pressure to answer embarrassing questions. The media simply echoed the official version of the Cheltenham events. When the men were arrested, the papers gave the case banner headlines and frenzied front-page coverage. When they were released, the papers buried the story in the one-paragraph 'News extra' columns inside. This is par for the course. Over the past year, *Living Marxism* has reported the truth behind several cases where the Prevention of Terrorism Act has been used to intimidate and harass Irish people in Britain. Every time, the mainstream media have toed the police line. The Cheltenham case shows that, even in the light of the release of the Guildford Four, the press still go along with the opinion that all Irishmen are, by definition, guilty.

The most hardnosed Tory hack could not have believed the police story that they arrested the five men on suspicion of being an IRA unit. The five members of this 'secret cell' hardly went out of their way to be inconspicuous. They made no attempt to conceal their identities, accents and contact with each other from the



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Police have issued this photofit of a top IRA bomber

residents of Cheltenham. They lived together (occupying almost half of the space in a small hotel), travelled to and from work in a van together, and drank together in the local pubs where, it has been claimed, they got 'a bit noisy'. They even asked the locals for directions to the town hall which they apparently planned to blow up.

The Conservative conference in Cheltenham next spring coincides with the Gold Cup festival—one of the

major events on the horse racing calendar. Thousands of Irish people make the trip every year. Now, with one timely raid at the town, the police have set the tone for Irish Crimewatch. Members of the Cheltenham public will be on the look-out for 'suspicious' accents. They have a licence from the British authorities to suspect on sight, and to invite in the uniformed gunmen.

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Don Milligan

# BURYING LENIN

We are now entering the panto season—a time of corny jokes, mawkish sentiment and foolish mummery. So I was particularly taken by a seasonal statement from the Soviet information service in London: 'Lenin's tomb closed.' A kindly woman at the embassy thought I needed reassuring: 'Oh no, Lenin's tomb will be reopened very soon.' The new season at the mausoleum begins on 15 January 1990. My suspicions were unfounded. Apparently, it's simply time for Lenin's check-up. He has one every 18 months. Dr Sergei Debov, chief embalmer to the central committee, is topping up the chemicals. When the temperature has been adjusted and the air expelled, it will be time for Dr Sergei to bring on the cosmetic experts and the lighting technicians to prepare the effigy for his public.

And what a public...more than 105 million people have queued to see the corpse. It has been on more or less continuous public display since 23 January 1924. When I went to see it, I was suitably impressed. Moscow's Red Square is dominated by St Basil's, an ancient church in the fluted and brightly coloured gingerbread style favoured by the rulers of Muscovy. The elegant gold and silver domes of the Kremlin's churches glitter high above the crenellated red walls. In contrast, the Lenin Mausoleum looks modest, rational, unobtrusive. As you approach it you gradually become aware of its massive no-nonsense design; like a bunker left over from the Great Patriotic War.

You enter into the gloom between the ceremonial soldiers, who guard 'Post Number One', as they have been doing for 66 years. Down some steps into a dark corridor. Suddenly turning a corner you find yourself in the gallery of a tastefully simple marble chamber. You look down and there in the eerie half-light is a bourgeois-looking gent, apparently asleep. Clean shirt, new tie, decent dark suit, neatly trimmed beard. 'It's Lenin! It's Lenin!' The impassive guards, propped up in the corners, snarl something at you beneath their breath. You recover your solemn composure and stand and stare.

As you regain the daylight you begin to wonder what other wonders your tour guide has in store. Person-

ally, I was a bit sorry to have missed Stalin, but he was only briefly in residence. However, I did have a nagging doubt: what was Lenin, the foremost materialist and political organiser of his (and our) century doing on display, at best as a tribute to Soviet embalmers, and at worst, as the bones of a saint?

Of course, like most things in the Soviet Union it wasn't planned, it just sort of happened. When Lenin died at Gorki on 21 January 1924 the Bolshevik Party was stricken with grief. The gun carriage and the six white horses sent to the railway station to haul his body in pompous state to the Kremlin were sent away. Instead the coffin was carried shoulder-high through mile upon mile of frozen streets.

soleum was hastily constructed. At the end of the funeral his body was placed in the mausoleum; the 'lying in state' simply continued. The mausoleum was not made permanent until the consolidation of the Stalin dictatorship. In 1929 a tomb fit for a pharaoh was ordered. 'LENIN' was carved on a 60-ton block of red granite and a pile of marble, porphyry, black labradorite and norite was assembled to house the body. The building that was opened in October 1930 was five times the size of the temporary wooden structures. The Lenin cult was official.

The iconography of the Stalinist bureaucracy was now well established through paintings, books, film, posters and statues. Voluptuous women overfulfilling their quotas strode across corn fields dotted with bright red tractors. An elaborate fantasy was constructed where the men

'What was Lenin doing on display, at best as a tribute to Soviet embalmers, and at worst as the bones of a saint?'

Initially, Lenin's body laid in state for 72 hours; 750 000 men, women and children queued six-deep for two miles to pay their respects to the leader of their revolution, the symbol of all of their aspirations. The thermometer was fluctuating between 28 and 35 degrees below zero. The party leadership was deluged with telegrams and letters from the delegations of workers' and peasants' organisations who were desperately trying to reach Moscow in time for the funeral. They delayed it for one day, but this would not be sufficient—crossing the vast and devastated country could take weeks.

Professor Abrikosov had embalmed the body the day after Lenin died and a temporary wooden mau-

were men and the women were women, and the well-fed children, all suitably equipped with red kerchiefs, sang songs about Lenin. It was a world where all the multicoloured races of the earth held hands around a globe garlanded in sheaves of wheat. And Lenin, supposedly the author of this purely imaginary Soviet cornucopia, was plastered here, there and everywhere. On bridges, on street signs and headscarves. Lenin prizes for peace, art, science, technology, literature. Lenin institutes, schools, factories and kindergartens. Everywhere monuments to the soaring genius of the little body in the big glass-topped coffin.

In the West, Communist parties

have retailed little Lenin pamphlets printed in Moscow and Beijing. They have sold little plaster busts of the man in the mausoleum that obviously come from the same factories that produce effigies of Beethoven for the top of the piano and the desk. Possession of such objects, possession of the name, like possession of the body itself, apparently bestows some status on the owners. They are in some mysterious way the heirs of Lenin and the October Revolution.

Things brightened up for the sponsors of the cult when chic youth from New York to West Berlin started to sport shiny little Lenin icons and red stars on their black windcheaters. But the pleasure was short-lived; the youth of the bourgeois world had clearly never heard of Lenin and were not even vaguely interested in the claims of the 'official' Communist parties. As the political parties and the regimes loyal to the mortuary attendants in Moscow have started to decay (rather more rapidly than Lenin), they have been hurriedly taking the icons off the shelves, dumping the Leninist tag and trying to wriggle out of calling themselves communists. Having embalmed Marxism they are moving rapidly towards the announcement that both Lenin's body and his ideas are well beyond repair.

No doubt the spread of anti-Leninism to the East will give a temporary boost to the propagandists of the West. But in the longer term it is a welcome development. These 'official' Communists have proved themselves to be much more suited to tending graves than fighting for working class interests; they've certainly never had the slightest conception of what Lenin was all about. The sooner they bury his bones the better. I would be prepared to lend them a spade.

Once the body and the authorised plaster-bust and icon factory have gone the Stalinists will be done for. In Britain the old Communist Party will probably apply for affiliation to the SLD, while in Moscow and elsewhere they'll attempt to stay on top by opening a stock exchange and a chain of boutiques. Much good may it do them. Whatever these 'heirs of Lenin' get up to, their days of dragging the name of communism through the mud will be well and truly over.

But I don't want to end on a bitter note, let's try to maintain a sense of balance and proportion...give credit where it's due. Lenin's undertakers definitely produce the cheapest copies of his books; bound volumes of almost everything the great man ever uttered or wrote. Set against their skill at corpse manufacture it's not much of an achievement, but so long as they don't introduce market prices they'll have the edge over Penguin Classics.



Two thousand years on

# Jesus Christ: the man and the myth

In seasonal mood, Mike Freeman presents a Marxist view of the origins and development of the Christian religion

'And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

'And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them: and they were sore afraid.

'And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for,

behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

'For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'

(St Luke, 2:11-17)

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

(St John, 3:16)



Halo, baby: Adoration of the Shepherds, Domenico del Ghirlandajo (1485)



The events commemorated in the festival of Christmas lie at the heart of the Christian religion. The incarnation of God in human form was the first act in the process of his redemption of humanity which was finally fulfilled through the ultimate sacrifice of the crucifixion. Christmas is therefore a good time to reflect on some of the mysteries of the Christian faith. Who was Jesus? How did Christianity get established? What keeps it going? What is the Marxist line on Christmas?

There are many different interpretations of the personality of Jesus. For traditionalists who insist on a literal reading of the scriptures, Jesus is simply God made man. For those who take the more modern and enlightened view typical of liberal Protestantism, Jesus was a decent man who proclaimed a set of inspirational moral teachings. On the other hand, many radicals and socialists regard Jesus as a primitive communist preaching a subversive political and social doctrine. Before examining these views more closely, it is first useful to consider the historical context in which Jesus lived and worked.

The only facts about Jesus that can be established with any degree of certainty are that he was born into the Jewish community in the region of Palestine around 5BC and that he was executed by the Roman authorities in 30AD. This was a period of great turmoil for the Jewish people as they were incorporated into the Roman empire after several centuries of enemy occupation, exile and foreign domination. The Jews were already a predominantly town-dwelling and trading people with a strong cultural and religious identity, a priestly elite and a defined social hierarchy. Their territories also included substantial agricultural areas, worked by peasants, wage-labourers and slaves. In 63BC Judaea, the central region of Palestine including Jerusalem, became a Roman protectorate and in 44AD direct rule by Roman procurators was established. The Roman occupation was fiercely resented as a desecration of the Jewish holy land; it was enforced through harsh repression and punitive taxation of the Jewish people.

One consequence of Jewish hostility to the Roman conquest was military revolt. In the second and first centuries BC the Maccabees, a clan of mountain peasants (including some priestly families) who refused to pay tribute to foreign rulers, had briefly upheld Jewish independence through force of arms. From around 6AD a militant Jewish sect known as the Zealots followed this example. They launched guerrilla attacks on the Romans, culminating in a full-scale rising in 66AD, which

succeeded in capturing control of Jerusalem. Four years later the Roman generals Vespasian and Titus recaptured Jerusalem and razed the Temple to the ground—a devastating blow to the morale of the Jewish people. In 73AD the last revolt of the Zealots was crushed at the Dead Sea fort of Massada, where the fighters committed collective suicide rather than submit to the Romans. The last Jewish revolt against Rome took place in 132AD; led by Bar-Kokhba it was decisively beaten by 135AD. The diaspora of the Jews around the Mediterranean basin and beyond, already well under way before the Roman conquest, now intensified.

Another consequence of the profound social, political and psychic trauma of the Roman occupation was the emergence of millenarian sects within Judaism. The famous Dead Sea scrolls reveal details of one such grouping in that area—the Essenes—an ascetic and contemplative sect given to ritual bathing and property sharing. They anticipated the coming of a 'teacher of righteousness' and a war against the 'sons of darkness'. With their prophecies of an imminent deliverance from the diverse oppressions of the present, such sects attracted a ready following among those most alienated from the Roman regime.

### 'The end is nigh'

Though there is no evidence that Jesus was involved with the Essenes, there is little doubt that he emerged from the millenarian trend within Judaism. His teachings reflect the preoccupation of a section of contemporary Judaism with eschatology, the 'last things'—heaven and hell, death and judgement. The familiar slogan of the evangelical banner 'Repent, the end is nigh' sums up his apocalyptic message.

For Jesus, as for the Essenes, 'the end' anticipated was no metaphor, but the literal end of the current cruel world, and the establishment in its place of the 'kingdom of God'. In particular, the end meant the restoration of God's 'chosen people' from their present degradation to their rightful place in the firmament. And this end was 'nigh'. Jesus' concern was to indicate how a good Jew should behave in the last moments of suffering on earth: 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (St Matthew, 4:17) There was little new in Jesus' ethical teaching, which was common to the contemporary rabbinical tradition; what was distinctive was his declaration that the end of history was imminent.

The last book of the New Testament, *The Revelation of St John the Divine*, most closely expresses the spirit of the times, the 'chiliasm of despair' resulting from

the national and religious humiliation of the Jews. Its wild and rambling narrative, its almost hallucinatory visions and fantastic prophecies reveal a mind unhinged by terrible experiences, desperately seeking fulfilment in another world.

In the event the anticipated coming of the kingdom of heaven failed to materialise. Moving from rural Galilee, an area still not fully integrated into the Roman empire, to Jerusalem, the centre of Roman authority in Judaea, Jesus was soon arrested, tried as an agitator and crucified in the customary manner. Few modern scholars consider that Jesus or his followers believed he was divine, 'the son of God', and nobody now thinks he believed himself to be 'the messiah'. These titles and the whole idea of Jesus as 'the Christ' were creations of the early Christian communities in the years following the supposed resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Written around half a century after the death of Jesus, the gospels appropriated the historical Jesus as the founder of a new religion: 'He foretold the kingdom, but it was the church that came.' (P Fuller, *Images of God*, 1985)

In the New Testament the primitive millenarianism preached by Jesus in the remote countryside in the local dialect of Aramaic was transformed into a sophisticated synthesis of elements of contemporary Graeco-Roman philosophy and morality, expressed in the cosmopolitan Greek of the city states at the Eastern reaches of the Roman empire.

For centuries the Bible was accepted among Christians as the ark of history as well as of faith. However, from the eighteenth century onwards the development of scriptural scholarship, archaeology and science steadily undermined the historical status of the Bible story. Theologians began to retreat from the literal interpretation of the scriptures that had guided Christians through the centuries.

### Away with the manger

In a key work published in 1835, *The Life of Jesus*, the German philosopher David Strauss insisted that the idea of 'God made man' did not depend on the life of Jesus as a real person. For Strauss, as for a generation of young philosophers influenced by Hegel, the gospel was not an historical narrative but an unconscious tradition of myths, the product of the human imagination, not divine revelation. Variations on this theme have become predominant in modern liberal Christianity, especially among Western Protestants: the Bishop of Durham is the most familiar British exponent of such views. From this perspective, the validity of the story of the



Jesus' injunction to 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's' sums up Christian acquiescence to Roman domination

incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus does not depend upon proofs of the actual existence of a baby in a manger, a man on a cross or an empty tomb. The life of Jesus is a 'redeemer myth' expressing the yearning of humanity for divine salvation.

Some liberal opponents of fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible are prepared to dismiss much of the New Testament—the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, the shepherds at Bethlehem, the three wise men, the miracles performed by Jesus, even the very ideas of incarnation and resurrection. Yet they still protest their faith in Christianity, in its central myth of redemption, and in what they identify as 'the kernel' of the Christian religion: 'its morality—an exalted, godly, super-human morality' (M Machovec quoted in J Bentley, *Between Marx and Christ*, 1982, p146). But what was the moral code of the early Christian church?

### Christian slavery

In his monumental study of the ancient world Geoffrey de St Croix surveys the approach of the early Christians to a number of key moral questions (*The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 1981). On slavery, he notes that the advent of Christianity marked no advance towards liberation. St Paul exhorts slaves to obey their masters 'with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ' (Ephesians, 6:5). He concludes that 'whatever the theologian may think of Christianity's claim to set free the soul of the slave...the historian cannot deny that it helped to rivet the shackles more firmly on his feet'. There was no change in the status of slaves in the Roman empire after Christianity became the official religion in the fourth century AD. Indeed there was no absolute condemnation of slavery within Christianity until the emergence of Protestant fundamentalist sects in the seventeenth century: the mainstream churches continued to favour slavery as an easy means of conversion up to the eighteenth century.

In relation to property, St Croix notes in the New Testament a process of adapting the Jewish tradition, that poverty was associated with virtue, to the Graeco-Roman obsession with wealth and status and the view that riches reflected moral worth, and poverty the opposite. The characteristic millenarian themes of the 'sermon on the mount' (St Matthew, 5) and the 'magnificat' (Luke, 1) give way to the sober teachings of St Paul that a Christian may own property so long as it is no more than a sufficiency and used charitably.

Noting, in conclusion, the prevalence of slavery and other forms

of unfree labour, the widening extremes of poverty and wealth after the Roman empire became Christian, and the subsequent intensification of torture, persecution and mutilation, St Croix asks 'why did early Christianity so signally fail to produce any important change for the better in the Graeco-Roman society?' (pp438-39). He points the finger at the narrow individualistic morality upheld by early Christians:

'It was precisely the exclusive concentration of the early Christians upon the personal relations between man and man, or man and God, and their complete indifference as Christians to the institutions in the world in which they lived, that prevented Christianity from even having much effect for good upon the relations between man and man.' (p439)

Nearly 2000 years later Christian leaders continue to present a decent and compassionate Jesus and a resolutely other-worldly Christianity. In 1906, for example, the German theologian Adolf Harnack defined the gospel of Jesus as 'the joyous news to the poor and with them to the peaceable, the meek and those who are pure in heart; it's the news that the kingdom of God is near, that this kingdom will soothe the sorrows of the distressed, bring justice and establish their childhood in God, in addition to giving all good things' (quoted in *Between Marx and Christ*, p36). He continued that this gospel brought with it a new order of life 'above the world and politics' and defined the sphere of faith as 'pure inwardness'.

History has irrefutably confirmed that the end was nigh and the kingdom at hand neither in 30AD nor in 1906AD, indicating the need for a different foundation for ethics than the supposed imminence of the last judgement. But if, in a meantime already nearly two millenia in duration, the kingdom is to be sought on earth, then what is the purpose of Jesus Christ? A radical trend in Christianity has consistently sought to harness the biblical Jesus to the project of progressive social change, the goal of achieving salvation not merely in the next world, but also that of achieving liberation in this.

Writing in 1906 about the flourishing German New Testament scholars, one observer commented that looking down through nineteen centuries of darkness they saw only the reflection of their own faces at the bottom of a deep well. Indeed the 'lives of Jesus' produced in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries revealed a Christ in the colours of the Enlightenment, German idealism or incipient socialism, according to the author and his times. In 1908 the leading

German socialist theoretician Karl Kautsky observed that everyone had presented in Jesus not what he had taught, but what they wished he had taught. He promptly jumped on the bandwagon, portraying Jesus as a primitive communist rebel leader in his influential work, *The Foundations of Christianity*. More moderate socialist politicians have discovered in Jesus and the early Christian communities a model of social reform and communitarian living.

Kautsky's view of Jesus as a

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk







The modern crucifix might be a little tacky, but many still hang on to religion as 'the heart of a heartless world'

revolutionary remains popular with the left today: 'Jesus was, in fact, a daring and single-minded leader of Jewish resistance to Roman rule'; indeed, 'Jesus was, in fact, an apocalyptic revolutionary' according to one left paper last Christmas. In fact, there is no evidence to support the view that Jesus regarded himself as a political revolutionary, though he may have been perceived as subversive by the authorities. On the other hand there is little doubt that the early Christians were a socially

conservative movement from the outset. The New Testament clearly takes the side of the Sadducees, the priestly nobility who controlled the Jewish state, against the Pharisees, the more popular patriotic party who appealed to traditional Jewish law to justify resistance to Rome and opposition to the collaboration of the Sadducees. Jesus' well-known injunction to 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's' (St Matthew, 22:21) sums up Christian acquiescence to Roman domination at a time when Jewish resistance was on the verge of armed revolt.

The notion that the early Christians were 'communist' arises from a few passages in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles which emphasise their communal existence and the sharing of goods and property according to need. It is important to emphasise that this was simply communal distribution within a small and intimate sect, not communal production. It is not mentioned again anywhere in the New Testament.

Another contentious question is the supposed 'proletarian' origins of the early Christian communities. The most authoritative recent study concludes that 'from the beginning early Christianity was essentially a petit-bourgeois movement' (M Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Christian Church*, 1975, p60). While the applicability of either of the terms 'proletarian' or 'petit-bourgeois' to ancient societies may be questioned, there seems little doubt that the early Christians came from diverse social strata in an unstable society. It is clear that much of the debate about Jesus reveals more about the modern world, and its habit of projecting its own preconceptions into history, than it clarifies the turbulent events of the ancient world.

Christmas is a forceful reminder that nearly 2000 years after the birth of Jesus, the myths surrounding his personality retain a powerful influence in the world. Indeed in 1989 belief in the Biblical version of Jesus as a literal account of history seems to be on the rise in diverse fundamentalist groupings: in September around 200 000 people took part in 40 'March for Jesus' evangelical parades around Britain.

The 'liberal humanists' remain ascendant in Britain's major churches, but Archbishop Runcie and the Bishop of Durham have become favourite targets of evangelical attack and they are increasingly on the defensive, on theological matters as well as over women priests. Meanwhile, in Latin America, South Africa and elsewhere in the third world, advocates of liberation theology invoke the supposed

revolutionary traditions of Jesus and the first-century Christians as precedents for their campaigns against the established order. They too are increasingly coming under pressure from fundamentalists, often in the form of pentecostalist missions closely in league with the forces of reaction (see S Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*, 1989). How can we understand the survival and vitality of religion in the modern world?

While the disgrace of prominent American tele-evangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart reveals the extraordinary levels of hypocrisy and corruption in modern Christianity, it is important not to overstate the amount of deception and falsification involved in religion. As Engels recognised in his writings on early Christianity, 'a religion that brought the Roman empire into subjection and dominated by far the larger part of civilised humanity for 1800 years cannot be disposed of merely by declaring it to be nonsense gleaned together by frauds' ('Bruno Bauer and early Christianity', in K Marx and F Engels, *On Religion*, 1844, p171). Indeed both Marx and Engels took religion very seriously and many of their early writings were taken up with the question.

Marx and Engels closely followed the controversies arising from the intensive New Testament scholarship undertaken by David Strauss, Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach in the 1830s. Marx welcomed the bold demystification of the scriptures and the parallel humanisation of religion by exposing it as a product of human self-consciousness. At the same time Marx was critical of the way that the young Hegelians confined their 'critical criticism' to the realm of ideas, while never considering the connection between ideas and the real world. For them, both humanity and God were highly abstract. By contrast Marx insisted that the secret of religion was to be found not in the realm of thought, but in society:

'The foundation of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion, religion does not make man. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state and society produce religion's inverted attitude to the world because they are an inverted world themselves.' ('Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law', *On Religion*, p38)

Thus Marx turned from the criticism of religion to the criticism of society, emphasising that as long as history was at a stage where humanity's essential nature was negated by social and material conditions, then religion would remain.

How did religion survive the triumph of capitalism, and the challenge of democracy and the



Marx maintained a vigorous hostility to all forms of religion and their role in offering spiritual compensation that detracts from the struggle for material betterment

Enlightenment to the autocracy and obscurantism of the monarchs and prelates of the Middle Ages? Religion has survived and continued in capitalist society because of the contradiction between its promise of liberty and equality for all and the reality of the continuing exploitation and oppression of the majority of society. Marx developed these ideas in his 1844 pamphlet *On the Jewish Question*, in which he focused on the most politically advanced capitalist countries—post-revolutionary France and the USA. Here the bourgeois revolutions had established a secular constitution, thus declaring political emancipation from religion.

However, they could not liberate society fully from religion, because a regime established on the basis of capitalist social relations could not guarantee full human, social emancipation.

Indeed these societies manifested a sharp contradiction between the sphere of the state, before which every man was a free and equal citizen, and the sphere of civil society, in which these ideal citizens existed as real workers and capitalists, as landowners and peasants, free only within the terms of the market and far from equal. The church was now separated from the state; but religion was simply pushed from the public into the private sphere. The vast Catholic cathedrals of the Middle Ages gave way, first to a multitude of

small Protestant chapels, and in the end to a universal vague personal belief in a supreme being—a personal God for every atomised individual.

In this diffuse and fragmented form religion has continued in all advanced Western capitalist societies, while varying considerably in form and in the intensity of popular attachment. In these diverse forms religion remains, as Marx had it, 'the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions', as a source of consolation in a world of suffering. At the same time the churches provide a valuable bulwark to conventional morality and social stability.

Once Marx had clarified his critique of religion, he devoted the rest of his life to the task of advancing the overthrow of capitalist society which sustains religion in its modern form. He maintained a vigorous hostility to all forms of religion and their role in offering spiritual compensation that detracts from the struggle for material betterment. But he regarded religion as a secondary phenomenon, its role dependent on the wider balance of class forces and not worthy of independent criticism. His central commitment was to making a revolution, which would rid the world of religion as part of the process of social transformation.

How then to approach Christmas from a Marxist perspective? Of all

the feasts in the Christian calendar, Christmas has become the most important in reaffirming the validity of the Christian religion in modern society. It does this in relation to the story of Jesus re-enacted in a thousand junior school nativity plays, in public images of the crib at Bethlehem, in religious services attended by many on this one day in the year and a host of other media events. Christmas has also become established as the great annual celebration of the family, that fragile building block of modern society that requires much support from the cement of Christian morality.

In general Christmas is a good time to stay out of religious disputes, so here's an alternative Easter story to share with your Christian friends over the turkey (courtesy of Peter Fuller). The Pope is told that the remains of Jesus have been discovered buried in Palestine; there can be no doubt, their authenticity has been confirmed by independent experts. The New Testament doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus and his bodily ascension into heaven is in ruins. The Pope decides he must phone up Archbishop Runcie to break the bad news. Having told him, there is a long pause on the line... 'So you mean to say he existed after all'.

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# GOODWILL TO ALL?

The alleged season of 'goodwill to all men' doesn't extend to many workers.

Andrew Calcutt met some of them

**Y**ou may think I am a man dressed up in all this. But that is not so. I am Father Christmas and I can only speak to you as such. That is company policy.'

Ensclosed in a well-appointed grotto, which opened in October—to catch the half-term trade—Selfridge's Father Christmas is a polished performer working the up-market end of the Xmas industry. Here you can buy 'special Christmas gifts including a leather drinks case with four glasses and corkscrew at £99...personalised cards with 16 different calligraphic typefaces to choose from...and the largest selection of crackers in the West End, with prices ranging from £7.95 for a box of 12 and £16.95 for a more luxurious box of six' (Christmas at Selfridge's, press release). This is yuletide for yuppies, and it doesn't come cheap.

But who puts the crack in Christmas crackers, and how much do they get paid for it? Research by the Birmingham-based National Group on Homeworking reveals that some women cracker-makers are paid 20p or 30p an hour. Working at home, far from the bright lights of the department stores where 'Christmas is all wrapped up', their story is the hidden side of the festive season.

## DEPENDENT ON CRACKERS

The National Group on Homeworking points to the case of Mrs F, a 63-year old married pensioner, as a fairly typical example of the cracker-makers. For the past nine years she has depended on making Christmas crackers at home to make ends meet:

'I make crackers from scratch. My speed is quite good now but when I first started I made more mistakes and would often have to unravel a cracker because it was incorrectly put together or not presentable.

'I do the work in the bedroom on the floor. One of the worst parts of the job is when I glue the ends together by using my fingers dipped in the glue pot, which makes them very dry and irritated.

'I get paid the set rate of £1.50 per dozen crackers but I also make the boxes to display the crackers for which I don't get any extra payment. I have trained other homeworkers to make crackers for which I received £5

payment over a period of 10 days' work. It usually takes me about three days to finish a batch and I am working up to seven hours a day during most of the week. Sometimes I have to meet deadlines, especially at Christmas, but my husband helps me in these circumstances and I also try to get my friends and relatives to give me a hand when they come to visit me.

'I do not get any discount or special perks but occasionally I have some spare pieces of crêpe paper left over which I use to make crackers for some of my relatives, but my employer does not know about this.

'I used to work in a factory but since I have retired I have been doing homework to earn some extra money. It goes on food and bills. As I am a pensioner I would not like anyone to know I do homework even though the money is not much.

'When you have been doing this work for as long as I have it even becomes a bit of a joke to some people

and I get comments like "obsessed with your homework" and "they must be making you crackers". I must admit the work can be very boring and repetitive and all you can think about is finishing as many as you can.'

Mrs F's experience is a long way from recent hype about computerised homeworking. Cracker-makers endure Victorian conditions, working long hours for pennies. Like thousands of other homeworkers, they get no sickness or maternity benefits. They are not even recognised as employees, except by the inland revenue. They pay their own overheads. If they don't declare their earnings—and it's hardly worth working if they do—they must live with the fear of being exposed to the DSS by their employer. Few are willing to speak out about their plight. The scrooges who make a cracking profit out of Christmas are determined to keep their side of the industry under wraps.

## 'CHRISTMAS IS CANCELLED'

**T**he five drivers had been locked out of a north London ambulance station, in the dispute over management's attempt to impose a 6.5 per cent pay deal. Although they were not being paid, they were standing by ready to answer all emergency calls. They said they would stand there until Christmas Day if they had to.

'Christmas is 100 per cent cancelled', said Des. 'I had to sit my two young boys down and explain the position to them. For nine years I've been working seven days a week to keep our heads above water. You can't survive on the basic money. You have to do overtime, but you only get flat rate for it, even on a bank holiday weekend. Now there's the overtime ban and this week we're suspended. The money's just not there for Christmas.

'When I told my boys about it, they could understand. They're used to me not being there at weekends, dog-tired when I'm at home. They're used to having an early Christmas dinner before I do a late turn, or having a late dinner after I've come home from an early shift. I've worked nearly every Christmas Day, it's part of your normal shift pattern. Anyway, my family accept that Christmas is cancelled this year. If we gave in now we'd be in the same position every year. They'd stamp all over us every time we ask for a pay rise.'

'There will be no Christmas in my house this year', said Jean. 'That's gone by the board. Last year we could afford a proper Christmas because of the overtime, 8am to 10pm some days. This Christmas I won't even be able to pay the rent.'

Dave will be spending Christmas with his parents. 'My family understand that I won't be able to afford presents this year. I live with my parents. I took home £515 last month. I know I'll never get a mortgage unless I change my job or move to another area. On my wages I couldn't even buy a caravan.'

Christmas always highlights the hypocrisy of those in power who each year expect us to believe that they have suddenly become friends of the hungry and the homeless. In their pay dispute, ambulance crews have experienced similar treatment from the two-faced Tories. 'When there's a major disaster we are glorified. After Brighton they couldn't praise us enough. Now we're third-rate taxi-drivers.'

The drivers were appalled by the

deaths, most unreported, which had been caused or made certain by the government's use of police and troops to man ambulances. Steve recalled one incident after the London crews were locked out:

'The police radioed the Royal Free Hospital that an elderly man had "suspended"—stopped breathing. When the police car got to the hospital, they dragged the body out like a piece of meat. The man was blue. There was no equipment, no blanket, nothing. The only oxygen he was getting was through the car window. We'd already answered calls that morning, put to us unofficially by doctors. All management had to do was put the call through, and we would have answered it. It was legalised murder. It's heartbreaking.'

Small wonder if the festive spirit is in short supply among ambulance crews this year.



# GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Mark Reilly on the changing face of the December festival

Christmas is a time to eat, drink and be sick. Many look forward to it as a brief annual respite from the drabness of everyday life. Moral codes are suspended for the office party, and even the sight of the incapable vomiting in public seems to bring on seasonal feelings of fond expectation. All of this libidinal release is done in the name of home and family.

Such hypocrisy rested easily with the creators of the modern Christmas. Contrary to popular belief, Christmas is not a hallowed feast celebrated in much the same way for 2000 years. It was an ancient ritual all but forgotten until it was reinvented and cleaned up by the Victorian moralists.

True, Christmas was celebrated before, but with little regard for modern Christian values. Long before the alleged appearance of Jesus Christ, the Romans celebrated Saturnalia from December 17 to 24—a period of unrivalled debauchery even by Roman standards. The fun and games culminated in Brumalia on 25 December, also known as the 'Feast of the Unconquerable Sun'.

## No contest

The feast celebrated the sun's resurgence after the winter solstice. It was a cornerstone of the Mithraic religion which by the third century AD would be the major rival to Christianity in the Roman Empire. By all accounts it was a real whale of a time. Customs were reversed—masters waited on servants, men dressed as women and it was fertility rites all round. The Christians had little chance of competing with this. Rather than fight the hopeless fight, they adapted to Mithraism.

The Feast of the Unconquerable Sun became the feast of the unconquerable son. Christ replaced Mithras. But the early Christians didn't celebrate the birth of Christ. Some questioned whether he could have been born at all; since he was baptised at the age of 12, they argued, what state of grace was he in before that? To put a stop to this potentially damaging debate Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome, declared that the nativity should be celebrated. December 25 was settled on as the best date. The Church was spared the popularity contest with Mithraism when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion.



John Leech's illustration for *A Christmas Carol* captured the Bacchanalian origins of the festival that Charles Dickens was helping to reinvent as a Christian institution

During the Middle Ages many Roman customs mixed with the festival of Yuletide celebrated in the northern lands. Fertility rites played an important part. In the Mummers' plays, actors dressed up in animal clothing and performed lewd and explicit rituals. It was in the Middle Ages too that the Lord of Misrule emerged. Appointed as a master of ceremonies, the lord was usually one of the king's or noble's servants in whom was vested absolute control of the day. Any humiliation he chose had to be carried out, even if the king was the victim. Despite this, Christmas

remained a time for reaffirming the existing hierarchy. Alms were distributed to the poor and the king asserted his power by putting on a bash to impress his nobles. Richard II provided a feast of 2000 oxen and 200 tuns of wine to 10 000 party-goers.

As with much else in English society, it was Cromwell who put his Puritan boot down on the debaucheries in the seventeenth century. Christmas was, he said, 'unacceptable to all God-fearing people and an abomination to the Church of Christ'. Today Cromwell is portrayed as a killjoy. But at the time his anti-Christmas crackdown

struck a popular chord. The impoverished English masses did not exactly have turkey and all the trimmings at Christmas. And they had fought a civil war against the excesses of the court and the aristocracy. With m'lords spending far more on drink than alms, Cromwell's crusade against Christmas was widely supported as punishment for gluttonous parasites.

When Charles II took his executed father's throne after Cromwell's death, he brought Christmas back to the court, but pruned the antics and ditched the Lord of Misrule. 'There was a general feeling, after the restoration, that kingship had been dealt so dangerous a blow by Cromwell that it might not be able to withstand further corrosive assaults of laughter and parody.' (M Harrison, *The Story of Christmas*, 1951, p151)

The changes in British society brought on by the rise of capitalism finally destroyed the old ways. As people were driven from the land and into the urban infernos of the industrial revolution, a sense of turmoil replaced the parochial Christmas customs of the past, as Robert Southey noted in 1807:

'All persons say how differently this season was observed in their father's day, and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete. The cause is obvious. In large towns the population is continually shifting; a new settler neither continues the customs of his own province in a place where they would be strange, nor adopts those which he finds, because they are strange to him, and thus all local differences are wearing out.' (Quoted in JM Golby and AW Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas*, 1986, p65)

The new capitalist class had more important things for their employees to be doing than frolicking around dressed up as goats. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Christmas had become, like most other traditional holidays, a normal working day.

The Christmas we know today was invented by the Victorian establishment, as an aid to stabilising their shaky system by promoting conservative religious and family values. Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, published in 1836, marked the beginnings of the revival. While Victorian society was tearing the family to shreds in the drive for profit, its apologists promoted the family ideal in the myth of the family Christmas. While six-year olds were driven down mines and into sweatshops, the Victorians created the idea of childhood innocence. The authorities adapted old customs to create a sense of continuity and project their wholesome Christmas into the past: thus the carol, a French dance song condemned by the church as lustful and pagan, became a seasonal Christian hymn.

The new festival took off because it had something for everybody. The





PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

The office party: Brumalia it ain't

manufacturers fought hardest against it, conducting a rearguard campaign through the mid-nineteenth century to save their workhands from the depravities of a holiday. But by the century's end, as British capitalism lost its dynamism and began to shift from manufacturing towards retail and services, the employers accepted Christmas as a chance to offload goods on the public. For the middle classes the social and moral crises of Victorian society could be obviated in this annual celebration of hearth and home. To the working class, Christmas offered short deliverance from the grinding torpor of everyday life.

Of course, the Lord of Misrule had to go; the lower orders could not be allowed to get ideas above their station. Instead, the Victorians broadcast the new Christmas message of peace on Earth and goodwill to all men. The ruling hypocrites promoted the idea that the exploited and their exploiters could forget their differences and come together to celebrate the birth of Christ. Popular literature—of which Dickens' *Christmas Carol* was the outstanding example—portrayed the new rich as seasonal philanthropists; how could you go on strike against that nice Mr Scrooge who gave Tiny Tim a turkey?

Similar Christmas images played a part in popularising imperialism as a civilising mission. Victorian propaganda emphasised the eternal gratitude of the loyal colonial subject receiving a 'wee dram' from the Scottish soldier who had brought Christmas to the heathens—a particularly distorted image, given that the Scot was likely to be a hardline Presbyterian who still considered Christmas itself to be a heathen festival.

#### Lords of misrule

Today, from the school nativity play to the Queen's Speech to the Commonwealth, the message of peace

on Earth is still drummed home by those who spend the rest of the year breaking strikes, sacking workers and making war. They never mention the tradition of appointing a servant as king for a day, which might prompt the question as to why it's not like that all the time. Instead our little bit of hedonism is wrapped in a moral straitjacket. So we spend Christmas in the bosom of our families, which often means a dreary day with people we would never see otherwise. The fact that millions of decent people will resort to watching Bob Monkhouse is testimony to the awfulness of the alternative. For many, the office party provides the only occasion to let themselves go all year; the closest they get to a Bacchanalian revel at Christmas is another re-run of *Carry on Centurion*.

#### Alternative Xmas

I think we can do a lot better than that. A future society could take a tip from the Christians by keeping the old festival but changing its meaning. Our 'Christmas' would not be laden down with sanctimonious tripe from the pulpit. There would be no worship of hearth and home, no glorifying of a non-existent past. It would be an uninhibited celebration of our own genius and power; the Feast of Unconquerable Humanity.



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The British and God

# 'We believe in Him, but not in His beliefs'

Most people believe that there is a God; but they don't believe in very much of what His spokesmen on Earth teach. That is the conclusion suggested by our survey of British attitudes towards some aspects of religion.

The survey was restricted to people of Christian origin. It was deliberately weighted towards younger people

(half of the respondents were aged between 16 and 25), and it was conducted only in urban areas. No doubt these last two factors explain why the results show a more liberal attitude to some social issues than would be found in the Tory shires.

Among the respondents there is clearly a hardcore of dedicated Christians, and an equally resolute

and apparently larger section of atheists. Many of the other responses suggest a general and vague attachment to Christianity, and a willingness to abide by the more sociable of its conventions. Thus a majority believe that God exists, and are into church weddings, christenings and funerals. Although many admit that they see these ceremonies simply as British

traditions, in each case the largest section of those who wanted church services said it was for religious reasons.

At the same time, however, well over half of the respondents said that they only went to church for such family ceremonies, or never went at all. This lack of any active relationship to the Christian religion was starkly reflected in people's attitudes towards the churches' teachings on social issues.

As soon as religious doctrines touch upon people's personal lives and experience, they are widely rejected. Our survey recorded large majorities against the churches' teachings on sex before marriage, divorce, abortion and homosexuality. Largest of all was the majority of respondents from a Catholic background who rejected their church's anti-contraception line. The churches won only on adultery (by one per cent) and embryo experiments (by 0.2 per cent, with a large number of 'don't knows'). These results suggest that, despite the moral crusades of the last 10 years, there remains a healthy public resistance to prejudice, especially among many younger people in Britain today.

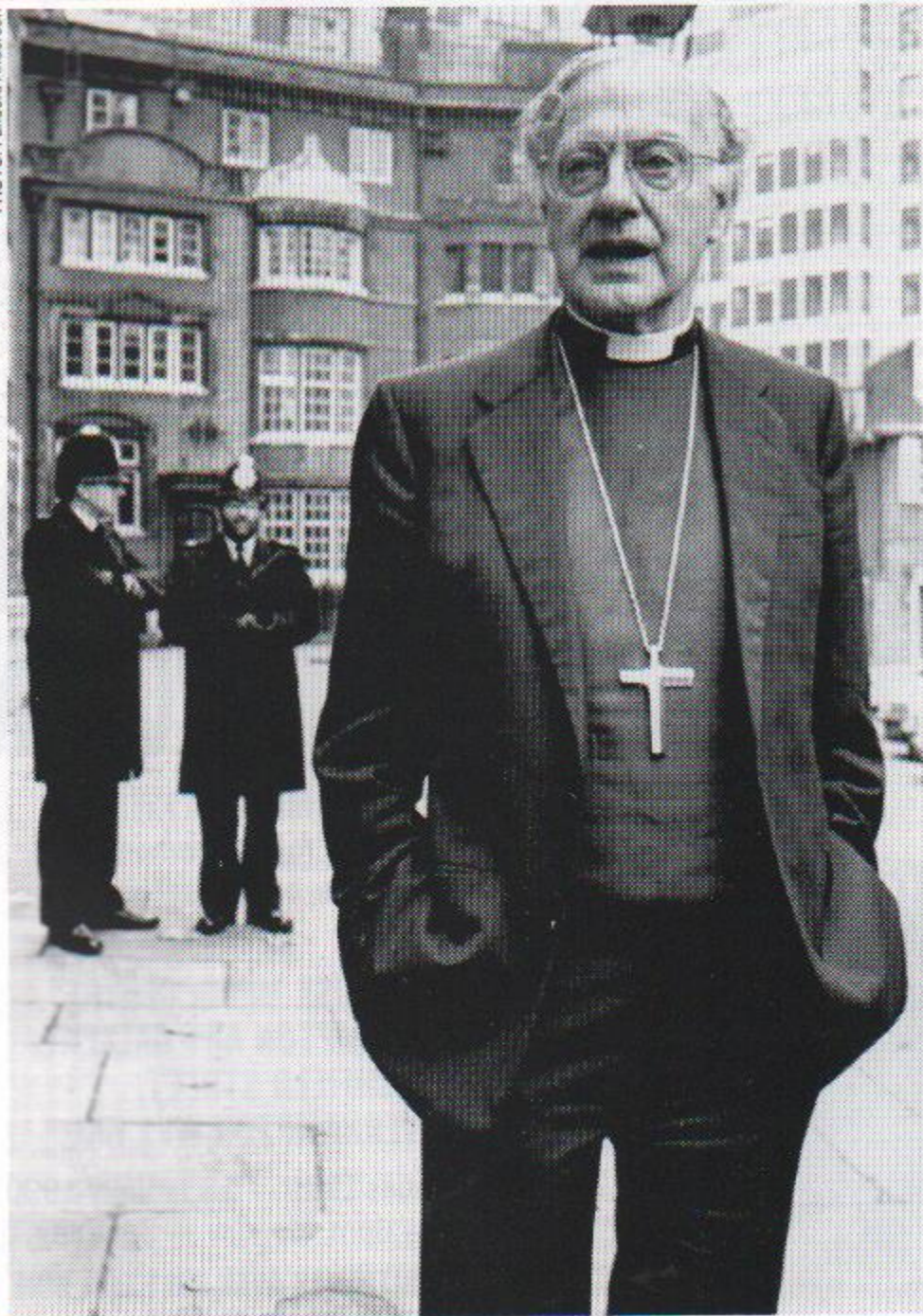
## Thatcher's creed

Nor was there much support for the Thatcher government's attempt to use religion for reactionary political ends. Most respondents opposed the government's attempt to make religious ceremonies compulsory in schools. The Tories have also tried to revive the blasphemy laws as a form of state censorship in the light of the Rushdie affair. But less than 12 per cent of respondents backed these laws in their present Christian form, while almost 40 per cent thought that they should be abolished altogether. More than 70 per cent thought it wrong for politicians to use religious arguments to justify their causes, as Thatcher has increasingly sought to do.

However, the survey also suggests a quite widespread view that the bishops are still on the side of the angels in political debates; a majority thought it right for the churches to become involved in politics. No doubt this partly reflects the fact that the pathetic performance of the opposition parties has often left the churches as the most outspoken critics of Thatcherism during the past decade. But that in itself is a worrying trend.

Almost half of the respondents thought that religion had become less influential in the past 10 years. In terms of its impact on the way people live their lives, they are right. But religion has returned to the centre of the political stage. Our survey suggests a welcome advance of many secular attitudes. It would surely be a sinful waste of that development if the bishops were allowed to influence the anti-Tory audience with their pious lectures about the meek inheriting the Earth.

PHOTO: Pandora Anderson



Archbishop Runcie, the nation's moral policeman





PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

**Compiled by Ian Haden**

**1. Do you believe there is a god?**

Definitely	43.2%
Probably	18.9%
Probably not	6.4%
Definitely not	16.5%
Not sure	15.0%

**2. How often, on average, do you attend church?**

Every week	16.9%
Every month	5.8%
Up to six times a year	11.3%
Once a year	8.3%
Only for weddings and other ceremonies	37.0%
Never	20.7%

**3. Have you been, or would you be, married in a church?**

Yes	72.3%
No	27.7%

**4. If yes, why?**

Religious reasons	37.9%
Tradition	31.8%
To please parents	9.8%
Sense of occasion	14.0%
Other reasons	6.5%

**5. Have you had, or would you have, your children christened?**

Yes	65.5%
No	34.5%

**6. If yes, why?**

Religious reasons	51.6%
Tradition	33.0%
To avoid stigma	5.2%
Other	10.2%

**7. Do you want a religious ceremony at your funeral?**

Yes	58.8%
No	41.2%

**8. If yes, why?**

Religious reasons	57.3%
Tradition	17.9%
For family's sake	19.0%
Other	5.8%

**9. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against sex before marriage?**

Yes	18.1%
No	73.0%
Don't know	8.9%

**10. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against extra-marital sex?**

Yes	44.9%
No	43.9%
Don't know	11.2%

**11. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against divorce?**

Yes	23.3%
No	67.1%
Don't know	9.6%

**12. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against homosexuality?**

Yes	32.0%
No	57.9%
Don't know	10.1%

**13. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against abortion?**

Yes	27.0%
No	62.2%
Don't know	10.8%

**14. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against embryo experiments?**

Yes	39.4%
No	39.2%
Don't know	21.4%

**15. If from a Catholic background, do you agree with the church's teachings against contraception?**

Yes	15.2%
No	81.2%
Don't know	3.6%

**16. Do you agree with the government's attempt to make all schools hold religious ceremonies?**

Yes	27.6%
No	63.3%
Don't know	9.1%

**17. In the light of the Rushdie affair, do you think that Britain's blasphemy laws should be:**

Maintained to protect Christianity only	11.8%
Extended to cover other religions such as Islam	24.0%
Abolished	39.9%
Don't know	24.3%

**18. Is it right for the churches to become involved in political issues?**

Yes	52.6%
No	47.4%

**19. Is it right for politicians to use religious arguments to support their political positions?**

Yes	29.1%
No	70.9%

**20. Has religion become more or less influential in the past 10 years?**

More	28.9%
No change	23.4%
Less	47.7%

This survey is based on the responses of 1010 people and was conducted in major British cities between 21 and 28 September 1989.



The German question

# The West will miss the Berlin Wall

Despite the political mileage they have made out of cheering the opening of the Berlin Wall, the prospect of German reunification frightens the Western powers far more than the Cold War. Frank Richards examines why, and suggests a Marxist answer to 'the German question'

It is no longer possible to keep up with the speed of change in East Germany. Although protest has not been on the scale of recent events in Armenia or Poland, its effects have been more far-reaching. With hundreds of thousands fleeing the country and mass demonstrations in all the major cities, the political isolation of the East German bureaucracy has been fully exposed. The overnight demise of the Stalinist leadership in East Germany and its most famous symbol, the Berlin Wall, has come as a shock to the West and has touched a raw nerve across Europe.

The political crisis in East Germany, and Bonn's growing involvement in events there, threatens vested interests throughout the world. These developments bring to the surface the artificial character of the division of Germany, and implicitly call into question the entire geo-political shape of Europe.

## Shaky foundation

As *Financial Times* correspondent David Marsh explains in his new book, *The Germans: Rich, Bothered and Divided*, the division of Germany provided the foundation for the post-war balance of power. However, he notes, with 'both West and East Germany now less under the control of their respective superpowers, and more free to evolve their own policies, than at any time since both states were founded in 1949, it is uncertain how long the delicate equilibrium can be maintained' (p2). Anything that threatens the division of Germany poses major problems both for the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact and for the Western Alliance. That's why the drama unfolding in East Germany is less than welcome to all the major powers.

Even before the recent wave of protest and panicky reforms in East Germany there were signs that 'the German question' was back on the agenda of world diplomacy. In the era of Gorbachev's diplomatic offensive, the East-West arms race and the Cold War make little sense to most Germans. Public opinion came out strongly against the Nato proposal to modernise short-range

nuclear missiles in West Germany. When Gorbachev visited Germany this summer he was greeted as something of a hero. The relaxation of East-West tensions has had the most profound effect in Germany, where these conflicts have been concentrated since the Second World War. The rapprochement automatically raises serious questions about the commitment of the two Germans to their respective military alliances.

Any mention of the German question provokes a nervous reaction in Western capitals. According to the *Times*, a 'reunited Germany is unacceptable to many people because of the political, geographic and economic dominance it would command in the centre of Europe' (20 September). The Western media were worriedly calculating the economic and political power of a united Germany before the dramas of October and November. The

PHOTO: Popperfoto



RIGHT: Sign of the times: an East German en route to the West alters his car sticker to say simply D for Deutschland



*Economist* had already noted that, 'thanks to Mr Gorbachev, a reunited Germany is no longer entirely unimaginable':

'Stick together the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic and you have a state with 78m people, more than 660 000 of them under arms, and a GDP of close to \$1.4 trillion, about half that of Japan.' (2 September)

Once you add on the impact of using more West German technology in the East, it is easy to conclude that a united Germany would rival the USA, dominate the EC and challenge the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

The question of German reunification has always been the weak link in the post-war international order. After the upheaval in East Germany it can no longer be evaded through the international conspiracy of silence

which has held good for 40 years. Inadvertently, the trainloads of refugees from East Germany unleashed a chain of events the final outcome of which may prove decisive in shaping the next century.

What is the German question, and why does it cause such consternation in ruling circles?

In most school history books, Germany is blamed for starting two world wars. This reputation for militaristic adventures is used to create a sense of doom about the consequences of a united Germany. Such simplistic accounts tend to ignore the fact that, traditionally, German militarism has not been a reflection of the national character, but a response to that nation's exclusion from the leadership of the capitalist world order.

By the time Germany became a powerful capitalist nation at the turn of the century, the world was already divided up under British hegemony. In this situation Germany could not expand its influence without coming into conflict with the main beneficiaries of the status quo—Britain, France and the USA.

### Nowhere to turn

Since Germany was the most powerful capitalist nation in Europe, its very existence constituted a threat to the other powers—most directly to its neighbour, France. Since British diplomacy relied upon preventing any one nation from dominating Europe, it too came to fear the assertion of German power. Later, from the twenties, the USA also began to worry about the consequences of a German-dominated Europe.

In principle these powers had no objection to Germany leaving their empires alone and turning eastwards to establish its own sphere of influence. But here Germany came up against another barrier: tsarist Russia in the First World War, and Stalin's Soviet Union in the second. The misfortune of German imperialism was that its existence posed a direct threat to the interests of all the status quo powers, East and West. Moreover, because its needs could not be satisfied within the prevailing world order, German imperialism represented a permanent source of instability at the heart of the international system.

World stability and the creation of an international equilibrium depended on solving the German question. During the course of the Second World War the other powers kicked around many ideas for solving this problem. Discussions among British and American diplomats centred on eliminating Germany as a player in the European balance of power. At one time the American state department even considered

implementing the Morgenthau Plan for 'pastoralising' Germany by destroying its industries and turning the country into one big farm. Although there were serious differences of opinion about how to deal with Germany, there was a general consensus among the Allies that its power had to be neutralised permanently.

When they came to work out the post-1945 settlement, the most pressing issue facing France and other West European nations was to find a solution to the German problem. For the dominant imperialist power, the USA, the situation looked somewhat different. As the end of the war approached, diplomats in Washington began to realise that Germany's defeat would leave a power vacuum in Central Europe. The only power that could benefit from this situation was the Soviet Union. The twin objectives of preventing the growth of Soviet influence while eliminating Germany as a factor in the new balance of power led Washington towards the option of dividing Germany. A leading American strategist, George Kennan, put the case in April 1947:

'We insist that either a central German authority be established along lines that will make it impossible for the Soviet Union to eliminate Germany...or that we retain complete control over the Western zones...I think it may mean the partition of Germany, and we all admit this is undesirable.' (Quoted in J.L. Gaddis, *The United States and the question of a sphere of influence in Europe, 1945-49*, in O. Riste (ed), *Western Security: The Formative Years: European and Atlantic Defence 1947-53*, 1985)

The decision to partition Germany coincided with the realisation that the country had to be stabilised to ensure European recovery. Without the restoration of German capitalism, the future of Western Europe would be put to question. But France and other West European countries were fiercely opposed to any reconstruction of German economic power. To counteract these fears, Washington provided a guarantee to France by establishing a permanent US military presence in Germany. At the same time European integration and the eventual creation of the EEC provided a framework for economic and political collaboration, which gave West Germany a stake in cooperating with its traditional enemy, France.

The partition of Germany also suited the Soviet Union. It removed the threat of German expansionism eastwards and it helped to consolidate a sphere of influence around Stalin's western borders.





Soviet troops permanently stationed in East Germany thus provided Moscow with a defensive shield against any potential danger from the West.

Whatever their differences, all the major powers of the anti-Nazi coalition could accept a settlement that eliminated Germany as a major force in world affairs. But partition did not provide a solution to the German question. It created a cleavage which artificially divided Europe and, indirectly, the whole world. The German question acquired the *form* of an East-West conflict. But the fulcrum of the international balance of power remained within Germany.

So long as the USA exercised unquestioned domination over the globe, the German question could remain unresolved without serious consequences. However, with the decline of American power, and the consolidation of European and Japanese capitalism, the question rises to prominence again. What makes this issue so pertinent is that both guarantors of a divided Germany—the USA and the Soviet Union—are experiencing an erosion

PHOTO: Hulton Picture Library





of influence simultaneously. The two main beneficiaries of a divided Germany are no longer able to shape the world.

The balance of power established during the Cold War was relatively simple. It allowed America to run the capitalist world and gave the Soviet Union a regional sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Despite Cold War tensions, the 'superpowers' cooperated in reinforcing the division of Germany. Even the policy of détente in the seventies was mainly about formalising the redivision of Europe after 1945. This settlement could be justified by the exigencies of fighting the Cold War. Today it is difficult to defend the post-war settlement, as a leading US publication recently noted: 'The post-war order of Europe—the division between East and West—is fast breaking down, and institutions erected to preserve it are beginning to look outdated.' (*Newsweek*, 16 October)

The recognition that the post-war settlement is breaking down immediately focuses attention on the linchpin of that arrangement—Germany. German reunification would lead to its domination of

Europe and the further erosion of American power. The fear of the dislocation of the world order has motivated diplomats and politicians to find a solution to the German question—one that stops short of reunification.

### Euro-solutions

Many Western strategists would like to speed up the full integration of Western Europe. France in particular believes that this could give the EC added influence over future negotiations concerning the partition of Europe. They hope that any unilateral German initiative could thus be prevented. The British authorities are being pressed to adopt a similar stance. According to the *Sunday Times*, the 'view that the European community is the best way to contain the Germans has long been understood in Paris, where fear of German neutralism is almost paranoid, but it has yet to be grasped in London' (11 June).

A possible alternative favoured by left and right-wing politicians in the EC is to deal with the German question in the context of some kind of a European federalist solution. In this scenario, two Germanys would coexist side by side within a united Europe.

The European-oriented solutions are an attempt at damage limitation. They are unlikely to be viable since the forces of change that have led to the re-raising of the German question also tend to undermine European cooperation. It is already clear that 1992 will benefit some but not others. Weak capitalist nations like Britain are already having second thoughts about how far they can go towards joining a single European market.

There is also a joker in the pack. Most Western powers are publicly happy about the crisis of the Stalinist bloc. The destruction of the East European systems and the explicit admission of failure by the Stalinist bureaucracy are portrayed in the West as arguments for capitalism. However, such public celebrations in Western capitals are qualified by the realisation that the end of the East-West conflict could upset the carefully created international balance of power.

### Winners and losers

British and American rulers who enjoy making propaganda points about 'the end of communism' also recognise that, if the East goes West, they have most to lose and Germany has most to gain. The breakdown of the Stalinist system creates an unprecedented opportunity for West Germany to expand eastwards.

It is an increasingly fair bet that Germany is set to win in peace the European supremacy that has twice eluded it in war. As communist

Europe goes capitalist, a market of 400m frustrated consumers beckons.' (*Economist*, 14 October)

Indeed, the crisis in East Europe provides West Germany with an alternative to the EC and the Western Alliance. So the discussion of the German question among the international powers concerns more than the reunification of one nation. They calculate that, above all, the crisis of Eastern Europe presents a lucrative opportunity for German imperialism. This calculation provides the most convincing argument in Washington and London about the dangers of going too fast on the road to rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

Given the opportunities for expansion which it involves, it might be thought that the West German capitalist class ought to be extremely enthusiastic about the prospect of reunification and the easing of East-West tensions. However, matters are not so straightforward.

The West German ruling class has prospered under the American-dominated post-war settlement. It knows that if it takes any unilateral step towards reunification it will face the hostility of its major economic partners. It also understands that such a course of action could destabilise the foundations of its economic success. From the vantage point of the West German ruling class, the break-up of the international order entails risks which it needs carefully to consider. This explains why, until very recently, the German media were very hesitant about conducting discussions on the question of reunification. Until mid-October, there was more media debate about this question outside West Germany than inside.

### Nazi shadow

There is also a more profound problem facing the German capitalist class. As a result of its past experiment with Nazism, the German ruling class faces a permanent crisis of legitimacy. Unlike its peers among other Western powers, the German establishment cannot claim the legitimacy of history and tradition. The moral collapse of German nationalism in 1945 makes it difficult to project a confident image around which a popular consensus can be built. In *The Germans*, David Marsh shows well how the basic symbols of German nationalism are often an embarrassment to the state. At the very least the use of such symbols tends to provoke an international outcry that Germany is reverting to its Nazi identity. Thus the present German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, got into trouble a few years back when he tried to rehabilitate the word 'Fatherland' because of its Nazi connotations.

The unacceptable face of 'the Fatherland': for 40 years, the legacy of Nazism has hampered Bonn's ability to use German nationalism. Now the right has begun to reassess Hitler's role in history





Kohl cannot easily imitate people like Thatcher or Mitterrand, waving the flag and pontificating about the past glories of the nation to mobilise support. That is why Willy Brandt, West German chancellor between 1969 and 1974, stated that 'a good German cannot be a nationalist' (*The Germans*, p46). The West German state cannot assume an overtly nationalist stance without reminding the world of its Nazi past.

The West German ruling class has tried to resolve its crisis of legitimacy by institutionalising anti-communism as a state philosophy. The virulence of anti-communism in West Germany is a symptom of the weakness of the state. In other words, the West German state has only developed any legitimacy by contrasting itself to the discredited East German alternative, and by emphasising the supposed internal communist threat. This is why, from Adenauer onwards, the West German ruling class sought to present itself as the vanguard of the anti-communist struggle.

### Paper policies

The ironic consequence of this is that the credibility of the political system in West Germany has depended upon intensifying partition and promoting the Cold War anti-communist crusade. As long as Germany is divided, the capitalist class can justify its existence by pointing across the border. This explains why German capitalists have generally been less than enthusiastic about reunification through the post-war years.

On paper, every major West German political party, except the Greens, is committed to a policy of reunification. In practice, however, the policies of these parties have been mainly concerned with formalising the relationship with East Germany. The West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) has generally taken the initiative in regularising this relationship. Its *Ostpolitik* is based upon the premise that reunification is not a realistic option. Instead the SPD traditionally argues for reconciliation. In the words of Egon Bahr, the main ideologue of *Ostpolitik*, the objective is that of *Wandel durch Annäherung*—change through reconciliation. From this perspective, Germany is seen as one nation consisting of two states.

During the past decade the main themes of *Ostpolitik* have been adopted by all the major parliamentary parties.

### New history

From the point of view of the West German ruling class, the main virtue of *Ostpolitik* is that it strengthens Bonn's influence over developments in the East without raising the difficult problems associated with

reunification. The precondition for decisively going beyond *Ostpolitik* towards reunification is the rehabilitation of German nationalism. The recent historical debates about Germany's Nazi phase, the so-called *Historikerstreit*, reflect fresh attempts to come to terms with this problem. Right-wing historians led by Ernst Nolte now argue that Nazi atrocities were a reaction to Stalinist terror. By equating the Nazi Holocaust with Stalinism, right-wing historians attempt to 'redistribute responsibility for the evils of the Third Reich' (see *The Germans*, p35).

Rewriting German history is of course fraught with danger. At the very best it would provoke an angry reaction from abroad. Consequently, the German ruling class must develop a more subtle approach towards recreating a legitimate nationalist tradition.

Recent events in East Germany have forced the Kohl government to make some panic adjustments to Bonn's traditional restraint on the issue of reunification. The chronology of the Kohl government's response to the East German crisis shows its indecisiveness.

### 'One people'

Bonn's first reaction was to counsel moderation, and make some half-hearted calls on the Stalinist regime to reform itself. Indeed, by calling only for reforms, the Kohl government implicitly accepted the partition of the country and the legitimacy of the East German state. Bonn was particularly anxious not to cause offence among its Nato allies. Kohl went out of his way to assure Nato that he would not embark on any unilateral policy which could threaten the Western Alliance.

It soon became clear, however, that Kohl had been overtaken by events. The resignation of the East German government and most politburo members showed the world that there was now a political vacuum in the middle of Europe. Kohl responded by promising economic aid to East Germany in exchange for political reforms. Even at this stage the old policy of caution held sway. It was only on 9 November, when the East German Stalinist leaders announced that they had granted their citizens unrestricted travel rights, that the Bonn government began to shift its emphasis. Since then, leading West German politicians have begun to speak without the usual qualifications regarding reunification.

It is unclear how far this trend can go. But Kohl's 'we are one people' speech, and the singing of the German national anthem in the federal parliament show how, since 9 November, the West German ruling class has been forced to modify its traditional conservatism towards

partition. It still remains hesitant, but it cannot ignore the power vacuum across the border. Moreover, the Bonn government can no longer remain indifferent to the growing popular mood in favour of reunification among its people.

It may be that the crisis in East Germany can provide a foundation for a new nationalist legitimacy in Bonn. The spectacle of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing communism and the manifest unpopularity of the Krenz regime strengthens Bonn's claim to represent all Germans. The enthusiasm provoked by the ending of travel restrictions and the prospect of dismantling the wall has encouraged the growth of popular nationalism in West Germany. The insecurity of the German working class about its national tradition, which has characterised its outlook for 40 years, may well be at least temporarily suspended under the impact of current events. The emergence of popular nationalism is an asset that the West German ruling class cannot but accept.

Obviously, the German ruling class cannot change policy overnight. It still must consider its international relations with other powers. However, it is now clear that it is not possible indefinitely to perpetuate the artificial division of Germany. The problem for the capitalists now is how to resolve this problem in a way that minimises the destabilising consequences of a united Germany. It is a problem for which, as yet, the Bonn government has no answers.

### Left behind

Many left thinkers in Germany and Europe are also worried about the consequences of German reunification. According to Egbert John the question of German reunification is a problem in the context of East-West conflict. It is the 'political character' of the border that acts as a barrier to any resolution (See 'Governments, social organisation and peace movements', in M Kaldor et al (eds), *The New Détente*, 1989, p89). This perception confuses form and content. East-West conflict provides only the form through which the division of Germany is expressed. The content of the problem remains the old dilemma of how to integrate a strong Germany into the international balance of power. The fundamental cause of the division of Germany is not the ideological conflict between East and West but the interests of most Western nations in preventing the growth of a strong Germany.

John is hesitant about arguing for real reunification because of the deep-seated fear that a united Germany could become an aggressive military power again. In liberal and



## The question of German reunification needs to be reposed as the unity of the working class

left-wing circles in central Europe there is an unstated assumption that whatever the problem with partition, at least it prevents the re-emergence of a predatory German imperialism. This view is reinforced by the fact that the far right is the most vociferous in putting the case for German reunification.

### Partition's purpose

The reservations about reunification expressed by liberals and the left are based on a confused appreciation of events. The aim of partition is not to preserve world peace but to establish a framework for an international balance of power which excludes Germany. Now that this balance of power has been called into question by the decline of the USA and the USSR, partition can no longer prevent the re-emergence of the German question.

The main catalyst for the re-raising of the German question is the crisis of the Soviet bureaucracy. Since the maintenance of the unpopular East German regime has been entirely dependent on the power of the Kremlin, any significant change in the Soviet Union is of decisive importance for the future of Germany. East Germany could not stand still once the Soviet Union began to change. The longer it attempted to hold back reform under the old regime of Erich Honecker, the more it demonstrated that it was run by bureaucrats without a shred of public support. Regardless of what the Western left would like to happen in East Germany, facts are a stubborn thing. And the most overwhelming fact about East Germany is that it contains a vacuum of power.

### American regrets

It is ironic that the dumbfounded reactions of the left to events in Germany are fully shared by its bitter enemies in Washington. For American imperialism the partition of Germany was a source of enormous stability. That is why it is concerned to play down the importance of recent events. President Bush must regret the day that he called on Gorbachev to get rid of the Berlin Wall. More than a few American diplomats must be fervently praying that Gorbachev will decide to crack down on popular protest in East Germany. No doubt many in Washington would even be happy to undertake a private arrangement to pay for the upkeep of the Berlin Wall. For unless the Soviet Union decides to solve this problem by deploying force, the USA will be left without a foreign policy. Everything which has legitimised American dominance of the post-war world—the Cold War, the supposed Red menace—is called into question by the collapse of Stalinism.

Knocking holes in the Berlin Wall directly undermines the justification for Nato.

What attitude should we take to these events? The most important consequence of the division of Germany for Marxists has been the division of the European working class. Splitting the working class enabled the capitalists to rebuild post-war politics under their control. In Germany the very process of partition restored some legitimacy to the capitalist class. Under the guise of uniting against the supposed communist threat, even the Nazi past of German big business could be forgiven. Centred on Germany and fuelled by partition, the Cold War divided workers and consolidated the power of the capitalists. The existence of 'socialist' East Germany, clearly compromised by its puppet status, gave the capitalist government in Bonn a degree of moral authority. So long as Germany remains divided it will not be possible to rebuild an effective working class movement.

### Workers' unity

Since Germany is the key to developments in the whole of Europe it follows that the development of the German working class is of decisive importance on the Continent. The successful resolution of the problem of partition is of direct relevance to Marxists throughout the world.

The question of reunification needs to be turned into an issue for the working class. This will mean reposing the question at stake as the *unity of the working class*. We should advocate the elimination of the border to facilitate the realisation of that class unity. The German question can only be finally resolved through the struggles of the working class. This is because it is only by forging class unity across state lines that we can counter the danger of conflict among the Western capitalist powers.

Perhaps the capitalists will find some solution to the problem of reunification, but they have no answer to the question of Germany and its place in the world. A united Germany under capitalist rule would inevitably re-raise the old question of where it fits into the balance of power. It would act as a catalyst for the consolidation of imperialist rivalries around the world. Most ominously it would become the dominant influence in Eastern Europe—in a good position to build a new empire.

### Settle accounts

Whatever the dangers represented by a united Germany, this question can no longer be avoided. German capitalism will not hesitate for long. If the working class does not take the initiative, the question of partition

will be resolved on terms dictated by German imperialism. The progressive alternative is for workers in the East and West to unite against the border and settle accounts with those in power on both sides who have perpetuated the divisions for over four decades.

There can be little doubt that in the short run the events in Germany will boost reaction. The crisis of Stalinism can be represented as a vindication of Western values. The sight of hundreds of thousands fleeing with only the clothes on their backs provides a much-needed vote of confidence in the Western way of life. These reactions are inevitable, and we cannot wish them away. Indeed it is better that we suffer the negative consequences of Stalinism now rather than later. At least we know that the imperialists will also be uncomfortable at seeing their cherished post-war world order coming apart.

### None too soon

Despite the negative fall-out, the re-emergence of the German question has come not a moment too soon for Marxists. As long as the Stalinist system survived intact, the project of a working class revolution stood discredited. The Stalinist bureaucracy usurped for itself the banner of Marxism and succeeded in disorienting successive generations of working class militants. By their very existence, the Stalinist regimes legitimised the imperialist system. So long as it could point to Stalinism as the only alternative to capitalism the Western ruling class had nothing to fear. The grim reality of Stalinist society was used successfully to curb dissent in the West and discredit Marxism in general. Anti-communism became a powerful religion, sustained by the division of Europe. With the demise of Stalinism the rulers of the West will have to convert to another religion. They will not find it easy to rewrite their holy texts.

We cannot predict the future nor wish our solutions on history. But we can see that the emergence of the German question raises new possibilities for Marxists throughout the world. The culture of the Cold War which was so successful in discrediting communism must now succumb to the culture of imperialist rivalries among the Western powers. As this shift takes place we must be ready to project the alternative political culture of Marxism and internationalism.

● David Marsh, *The Germans: Rich, Bothered and Divided*, Century, £16.95



## Political witch-hunts in students' unions

# BY ORDER OF THE MANAGEMENT

Lindsay Daniels notes a new regime in higher education

The first day at North London Poly was memorable. Within minutes of our arrival, a letter from management was thrust into our hands.

'Dear Student, Code of Discipline. Disciplinary procedures may be invoked if [there is] any act that the director has reason to believe is a breach of good discipline of the polytechnic.'

New students have been greeted like this in colleges all over the country. And The Management have been backing up their threats with action. Posters on controversial subjects have been ripped down from college walls. Meetings likely to cause 'a breach of the peace' have been banned. And in some cases, outside speakers invited to address political meetings have been forcibly prevented from entering college property.

The Education Reform Act has made its mark. In the past, polytechnics and colleges relied on local education authorities to fund staff wages and maintenance costs. Now colleges have to apply to a government-

appointed funding council which has the power to refuse grants to colleges that do not meet the 'terms of contract'. And they are being encouraged to look to private sector sponsorship to compensate for the cuts.

### Strictly business

Colleges have reacted by rewriting courses to suit the demands of the marketplace, expanding technology and business studies departments at the expense of the humanities, or merging social science courses with business-oriented ones to create such hybrids as 'sociology and computer science'. The political clampdown is another consequence of college management's need to project an image of good housekeeping and corporate respectability in order to compete for funds. There is no place for even the mildest agitation in the capitalist market. So The Management are clamping down on student union expenditure and potential disruption.

Students have been resisting management attempts to cut costs at their expense since before the autumn term began. Students at Newcastle Poly-

technic occupied the Fashion Centre, the polytechnic's showcase for the business world, after art students were told to pay £25 for course materials. And in Cardiff, first-year students occupied the local Butlins because the college had not organised accommodation for them before term.

This kind of student activity has not received the backing of the official students' union leadership. The National Union of Students machine has at best given token support to students, and at worst, actively collaborated with management to ensure that student activity does not get out of hand. In some colleges, students' union executive members have invited management to union meetings to listen to plans of action against them. In others they have refused to book rooms for political meetings and cancelled video showings of the Irish republican film *Behind the Mask*, presumably to save management the trouble.

### Pot Noodle politics

The problem with the NUS is not just that its officials are little bureaucrats more concerned with building a

career than with building an effective union (although many of them are). The bigger problem lies with the very nature of the NUS as a non-independent institution.

Students' unions are reliant on college management for their funds. This dependent relationship automatically means that the union is hamstrung when it comes to opposing management attacks. In Newcastle, for example, the authorities have just reacted to the art students' occupation by cutting £2000 from the union budget to pay for alleged damages, and similar punishments have been handed down elsewhere. Students' union officials are becoming increasingly unwilling to buck their paymasters. As NUS becomes little more than a provider of subsidised beer and other services, it is no surprise that few students are inspired to play an active role in the union; at some colleges, officials have been reduced to tempting students to register for an NUS card by offering them a decidedly untempting free Pot Noodle.

The Management have shown they will do whatever is necessary to impose the new business regime in the colleges. In these circumstances, students need a union which is financially and politically independent from the college authorities if we are to resist the attacks involved in the privatisation of education. The battle is on.

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## the other refugees



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Interviews by Andrew Calcutt

**Forget all the gushing statements from the British and other Western governments about how wonderful it is to welcome East German refugees to the Free World. Remember how Britain treats refugees from the oppressed capitalist world; people like Siho Iyigüven. Siho Iyigüven came to Britain in May, one of 3700 Kurdish refugees who have recently fled here from Turkey, where possession of a cassette of Kurdish music can get you arrested and tortured by the military police. His application for asylum in Britain was rejected, and he was locked up to await deportation back to Turkey. On Thursday 5 October Siho Iyigüven set fire to his cell in Harmondsworth detention centre in a desperate protest against Britain's treatment of Kurdish refugees. He died in the blaze. Three weeks later, 4000 people marched behind Iyigüven's coffin from east London to Downing Street, where No 10 remains a firm base of support for the butchering Turkish generals.**

'When refugees first arrived in Britain many were imprisoned, some for more than six months. They are not criminals but the immigration office made them guilty because they came here for asylum. One of our number was Siho Iyigüven. On 2 October he went for an interview at Harmondsworth. He wasn't optimistic: we know from experience that translators working for the home office are sending information about refugees back to the Turkish government. Immigration officers refused his appeal and detained him. On 5 October he burned himself.

'Siho and the other refugees had to stay in halls and community centres. Most have now found accommodation, but landlords charge us £200 or £300 a room, so people have to live like animals in a single room. We didn't get any accommodation from any council. Some are still living in halls.

'The British government sucked the oil out of our country. Now they don't want us here. They say we come here for economic reasons, but Kurdish people aren't allowed to work in Turkey. I don't think many are coming for £27.99 a week. We are a colony of Turkey and we come here to Europe to live like free people. Whether we are allowed to stay depends on British people. We expect their support.'

**Diyar Akin, Kurdish Workers Association**

'In his application for political asylum, Siho pointed out that he was Kurdish and Alevi [a Muslim sect with a radical tradition], and that was why he was being persecuted in Turkey. When he was told that he was to be deported, he said "Only my dead body will go back to Turkey". Then he and Dogan

Arslian [now recovering from 30 per cent burns] decided to burn themselves. This was not a suicide attempt resulting from depression. It was a protest against the way that the British government is treating the refugees, in order that others will not be treated the same way.

'At one point there were over 200 refugees in detention. Then after Siho's protest we suddenly found people being released virtually overnight. For months we had requested this but the home office flatly refused—until this incident. They kept only eight in custody. Two were to be deported, and there was a protest in the prison that same night; the warders beat some of the refugees very severely.

'Many families came here with only the clothing on their backs. But the department of social security will not give them a grant to clothe themselves and their children. When the refugees are interrogated, the immigration officers say "We have to inform you that the secretary of state has a mind to refuse you your application". Then a two-and-a-half page provisional decision is read out and they are expected to give an immediate answer. The officers take it badly if the refugees ask for legal advice.

'I protested about an interpreter who was mistranslating the story of a man who had a document to show that he had been denied a position in the Turkish civil service, despite passing the exams, because he was a Kurdish Alevi. To my dismay, the immigration officer told me she had complete confidence that the interpreter was interpreting correctly. I asked her if she spoke Turkish. She said no.'

**Ayse Hasan, Union of Turkish Workers**



## Chaos theory

# The science of despair

Chaos theory has been hailed as the science of the future. John Gibson and Manjit Singh believe that it belongs with the mysticism of the past

Top American management guru Peter Drucker has just produced a book, *The New Realities*, with a novel analysis of the failure of the Soviet system and the instability in the world economy today. Apparently these diverse events can all be explained by applying the fashionable mathematical theory of Chaos.

According to Drucker, Chaos tells us that complex natural and social systems are inherently unplanable, so there is no point blaming governments and economists for the mess things are in. Reviewing Drucker's book in the *Sunday Times*, Simon Jenkins summarises the argument: 'To accuse Nigel Lawson of having "got 1989 inflation wrong" or of being "five per cent out on his money supply" will one day seem as daft as flat-earthism—like accusing American forecasters of not seeing Hurricane Hugo coming a year ago.' (24 September)

## All in one

Chaos theory seems to be sweeping the scientific world. It attempts to explain everything: from the micro-world of subatomic particles, through the movements of the international economy, to the origin and evolution of the universe. It has been hailed as a revolution in science, a 'new paradigm'.

Chaos theorists argue that natural processes are unknowable and hence uncontrollable. They reject the outlook of Newton and the science of the Enlightenment. The Newtonian revolution of the eighteenth century was a product of the rise of the capitalist system. It was a time of intense ferment, when old barriers were torn down and an air of creativity spread from intellectuals to influence society as a whole. The widespread optimism of the period led to the belief that there was no limit to humanity's knowledge of, and hence control over, nature.

But the capitalist system has long ceased to be optimistic or confident about the future. Today, proponents of Chaos argue that we should shelve ideas about controlling the natural world and instead seek a more harmonious relationship with it. In the words of Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize-winning chemist, it is time to

start a 'new dialogue' between humanity and nature (I Prigogine and I Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos*, 1985).

If these theorists are right, then the revolutionary project of transforming society through a planned economy is doomed. So what is this new Chaos theory? And can it really explain everything from the earthquake in California to the turmoil in the Eastern bloc?

## Simple complexity

There are two intertwined strands to Chaos theory. The first is the search for simplicity in complex behaviour, and attempts to explain complexity from simplicity. The origins of this idea can be traced back to the late nineteenth-century mathematician Henri Poincaré. It really took off in the 1960s with the work of Edward Lorenz. From his attempts to simulate weather patterns with a computer, Lorenz drew two startling conclusions:

- 1) It is impossible to predict the weather more than a few days in advance because the smallest of changes in one part of the world can lead to major effects elsewhere. This has been popularised in the idea of the 'butterfly effect'—a butterfly flaps its wings in South America, which leads to a monsoon in India.
- 2) Although the weather never repeats itself exactly, there are certain patterns which tend roughly to recur. These he called 'simple attractors'.

The twin phenomena of super-sensitivity to initial conditions and simple attractors are said to be present in dynamical systems, both natural and social. This is the essence of the first strand of Chaos theory—its claim to universality. It has been used to explain the dripping of a tap, gaps in the asteroid belt in the solar system, the growth of insect populations, and the fluctuations in the stock exchange.

These ideas have recently been popularised in James Gleick's best-selling book, *Chaos*:

'Simple systems give rise to complex behaviour. Complex systems give rise to simple behaviour.

And, most important, the laws of complexity hold universally, caring not at all for the details of a system's constituent atoms.' (*Chaos*, 1988, p304)

The second strand of Chaos theory, articulated above all by Prigogine, concerns the development of ordered structures from less ordered matter, eg, biological organisms. Prigogine and his associates go so far as to suggest that matter and energy possess an 'innate' tendency towards creating ever more complex and ordered forms within dynamic systems. They have used this assertion to explain the emergence of human life and a host of other phenomena from turbulence in liquids to the evolution of all the ordered structures within the universe.

The universal claims of Chaos theory result from the fact that scientists model dynamical systems with the same kind of mathematical equations: second order equations, of which  $X^2 + X + 1 = 0$  is a simple example. Lorenz modelled the weather using three such equations. It is not surprising that this approach discovers common features in the most diverse phenomena; the common features are the properties of the similar equations which Chaos theorists use! It is highly questionable whether these represent the essence of the phenomena under investigation. What we are seeing with Chaos theory is a lot of speculative mathematical model-building. Simple systems like the motion of a free-wheeling pendulum may well exhibit chaotic behaviour under the influence of external forces. However, does the same apply to the evolution of the universe? Who knows? In fact very little is known about the dynamics of a river, never mind such cosmic problems. One Chaos theorist admitted as much in a recent book:

'Much of turbulence remains a mystery. Fully developed turbulence, if it involves strange attractors at all, may require attractors of enormous dimensions—a thousand, a million. At the moment we can say nothing worth knowing about these. Many





ILLUSTRATION: Mary Evans Picture Library

The belief that humanity must be at the mercy of 'Mother Nature' turns the scientific clock back two centuries

turbulent effects seem to be caused by boundaries—the walls of pipes, for example—and strange attractor theories haven't yet been related to the influence of boundaries.' (I Stewart, *Does God Play Dice?*, 1989, p191)

Indeed, the more Chaos theorists descend from the world of mathematical model-building to the study of real processes, the more speculative their theories become. In *The Cosmic Blueprint*, leading science writer Paul Davies begins his qualifying remarks on page 37 with 'a good approximation', moving on to 'it is tempting to believe' by page 63 and finally getting to 'it has been conjectured' on page 185.

A writer like Davies does bring out the appeal of Chaos theory. It has taken off, not so much because it is a new coherent body of thought, but because it addresses the limitations of Newtonian science and provides an all-encompassing answer from fairly simple equations. After one fairly wild bit of speculation, Davies says that his ideas may be 'bizarre', but that they fit handily into a gap in scientific understanding:

'The rather bizarre ideas I have mentioned in this section do not form part of mainstream science and should not, perhaps, be taken very seriously. Nevertheless they illustrate the persistence of the impression among scientists and laymen alike

that the universe has been organised in a way that is hard to explain mechanistically, and that in spite of the tremendous advances in fundamental science there is still a strong temptation to fall back on some higher principle.' (P Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, 1989 edition, p164)

This is a common feature of science in the twentieth century. Despite a recognition of the shortcomings of Newtonian mechanics, only partial, speculative alternatives have been put forward.

The stagnation of modern society imposes limits on the practical challenges facing science and the potential for carrying out



Social laws  
are created  
by humanity—  
and thus they  
are subject  
to human  
control

experiments. This is turning much of today's scientific inquiry into mathematical model-building. It is also blurring the divide between scientific papers and idealist philosophical tracts.

Why is Chaos theory gaining ground? After all, some of the ideas have been around for nearly a century and much of the essential work was done in the 1960s. Yet it took until the eighties for the ideas to become popular and respectable.

One key feature of Chaos theory explains why it has taken off today: its rejection of the possibility of knowing or controlling nature, which it explains as a consequence of the super-sensitivity of dynamical systems to initial conditions. This fits in with the wider attack by many scientists today on Newton and Enlightenment science—and with the still wider trend in modern capitalist society of turning backwards towards an age of superstition and mysticism.

Based on Newtonian science, Pierre Simon de Laplace put forward his famous statement of determinism at the dawn of the nineteenth century:

'An intellect which at any given moment knew all the forces that animate nature and the mutual positions of the beings that comprise it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit its data to analysis, could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom: for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain: and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.' (Quoted in *Does God Play Dice?*, pp10-12)

According to Chaos theorists, this approach has been proved totally redundant. 'Today', says Prigogine, 'we know that the golden age of classical science is gone, and with it also the conviction that Newtonian rationality, even with its various conflicting interpretations, forms a suitable basis for our dialogue with nature' (*Order Out of Chaos*, p29).

We don't have to agree with every aspect of Laplace's determinism, nor do we have to believe Newtonian science has all the answers. But it is certain that the Enlightenment was just that: an enlightening bolt of scientific light that cut through the fearful darkness of the superstitious past. Its optimistic vision reflected the major advances that were being made in the knowledge and capacities of humanity.

The same cannot be said of Chaos theory. Its rise is a testimony to the general stagnation of scientific research and its increasingly speculative character. Chaos theory provides a scientific justification for the present limitations on our

knowledge of the world, declaring that this is the way things must always be. Ian Stewart draws out the consequences in his heading for the final chapter of *Does God Play Dice?*: 'Farewell deep thought.'

The current pessimism about progress within society is caused by social factors: the inability of the systems which dominate the world to advance society in any meaningful way. Yet Chaos theorists attribute this to the workings of nature. The implication is that if society also works according to the laws of Chaos (which many like Drucker claim it does), then it too is beyond our ken and our control. Inevitably, this becomes an attack on Marx. Again, Stewart spells it out:

'If Newton could not predict the behaviour of three balls, could Marx predict that of three people? Any regularity in the behaviour of large assemblies of particles or people must be statistical.' (*Does God Play Dice?*, p40)

Whatever anyone thinks about certain natural systems working according to the laws of Chaos, it is unscientific nonsense to seek to apply the same rules to human society. The essence of social laws is quite distinct from natural ones. Social laws are created by humanity—and thus they are subject to human control. The barriers which prevent us exercising that control today—like the anarchy of the market economy—are creations of capitalist society, not of unknown natural forces. As such, they can be removed by humans acting to transform society.

### The mystics return

The other side of Chaos theory, which seeks the emergence of order from non-ordered matter, has also been used as a vehicle for pessimism about the capacities of humanity and outright mysticism about the workings of the world.

Prigogine notes what seems to him a strange relationship between mysticism and science:

'Remarkably enough, in the present-day revival of interest in mysticism, the derivation of the argument appears reversed. It is now science that appears to lend credibility to mystical affirmation.' (*Order Out of Chaos*, p47)

In fact this is none-too surprising, given the speculative character of Prigogine's work. Indeed, some who are searching for mechanisms to explain the emergence of order have gone on to conclude that inanimate matter and non-human life have the same capacity as we do for anticipation and planning. Biologist Robert Rosen is one of them:

'Complex systems can allow a meaningful, scientifically sound category of final causation, something which is absolutely forbidden within the class of simple systems. In particular, complex systems may contain sub-systems which act as predictive models of themselves and/or their environments, whose predictions regarding future behaviours can be utilised for present change of state. Systems of this type act in a truly anticipative fashion, and possess novel properties.' (In BJ Hiley and FD Peat (eds), *Quantum Implications: Essays in Honour of David Bohm*, 1987)

The Gaia hypothesis put forward by many environmentalists runs along similar lines. According to this theory, the Earth as a whole is a self-regulating system which keeps conditions fit for the continuation of life.

All of these theories remove what is distinctive about humans—the capacity for conscious organisation and action—by attributing this capacity to all matter. In the process, the scope for us to intervene in nature and take control of it is said to be limited by the existence of higher organising processes. Chaos theorists warn that humanity cannot master these, but may damage them irreparably by attempting to.

It would only be a short step from this attitude to the observation that 'God moves in mysterious ways', and the belief that tinkering with nature is a sin which risks damnation. It is as if the Enlightenment had never happened. At the end of the twentieth century, there should be no need to worship that which we don't yet understand or to endow nature with magical powers. Our task is to seek to understand it, and to change it.

Chaos theory may or may not capture the essence of the behaviour of some natural systems. But it can explain nothing about human society. It is not the reason for the decline of Stalinism, nor is it responsible for the anarchy of the world economy. The use of Chaos theory by economists like Drucker to excuse the failings of their own system is a symptom of their desperation and their relapse into mysticism.

The rise of Chaos theory is a sharp reminder of the need to fight for a new age of reason: to put the case for human progress through the control of nature, and to pin the blame for the chaos in our lives on the operation of the (eminently understandable) laws of capitalist society.



December 1979—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

# AMERICA'S FAILED CRUSADE

Ten years after the Soviet invasion, Sue Nicholls looks at how America's intervention has helped to 'Lebanonise' Afghanistan

A few months ago, as Soviet tanks rolled out of Afghanistan, the media assured us that the 'communist' regime in Kabul would soon collapse. It hasn't quite worked out that way. President Najibullah is still at his post; which is more than can be said for the head of Pakistan's secret service and the CIA chief in Afghanistan. They have both recently been sacked and scapegoated for the miserable failure of US policy in the region. The leaders of the mujahideen Islamic rebels, meanwhile, remain where they have been for the past decade, squabbling in their US-funded refugee camps in Peshawar.

Soviet troops moved into Afghanistan in December 1979. It wasn't long before the mujahideen joined the Nicaraguan Contras as America's favourite freedom fighters. Now they are an embarrassment, a public reminder of US weakness in the region. The mujahideen were never likely to be reliable US agents, divided as they are along ethnic and sectional lines. Like many third world countries with artificial borders drawn by colonial powers, Afghanistan contains several different ethnic groups. On top of these divisions, the mujahideen are split between two main factions—the traditionalists and the fundamentalists—each of which has its own internal power struggles.

## Khans and infidels

There are three main traditionalist parties. They are based upon the old village khan system, under which the major local landowner demands the allegiance of tenants and clients who either rent land from or owe money to the khan. The khans' opposition to the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul was never a principled ideological struggle. The landlords just want to maintain their privileges and wealth. They believe that their interests would best be served by a return to the corrupt old regime of king Zahir Shah.

By contrast, the fundamentalists have claimed ideological motives for making war on the 'infidels' in Kabul, and want to create a new Islamic state. Their leaders come from a narrow base, the Kabul University and

Kabul Polytechnic, which were hotbeds of Islamic fundamentalism (and, ironically, of Marxism) in the sixties. Both of these divergent trends expressed the disenchantment of the new middle class intelligentsia and state employees who were denied political influence and economic advancement under the old regime. There are eight main Shia fundamentalist groups and four main groups of the more numerous Sunni fundamentalists. The Sunni groups are themselves split between two 'moderate' and two 'extremist' factions.

## Squalid scramble

Both sections of the mujahideen represent narrow interests; on one hand the privileges of the feudal khans, on the other the Islamic aspirations of Kabul intellectuals. The infighting among them is a squalid scramble for personal power between different leadership factions. So how were they able to pose as popular movements and fight the Red Army for nine years?

The Afghan people have shown little enthusiasm for any of the various interest groups running the mujahideen. Instead, support for the resistance movements was based on a rural reaction against the clumsy policies of the pro-Soviet regime which took power in April 1978.

By October 1978 the Kabul government had embarked on a reform programme, sharing out land, banning private loan-dealing, ending the bride-price and centralising the Afghan tribes. With little or no popular support outside the cities the regime relied on local officials, often corrupt minions of the khans, to enforce its policies. The reforms were widely viewed as a threat to the very basis of Afghan society, imposed by a remote central state. As opposition to the government's policies grew, landowners and religious leaders claimed leadership of the resistance and shaped it to suit their own ends.

Faced with growing opposition the Kabul regime reacted with military force, which in turn bred more resistance. When the Soviets moved in to install a puppet government and

prevent instability spilling over their own borders, the struggle broadened into a war against an invading power. This made it all the easier for the Islamic factions to win local favour. Thus the mujahideen were able to claim the support of a far wider base than their own interest groups. Many of the Afghan people, however, displayed a marked reluctance to play any active part in the Islamic crusade; a third of the population have fled the country and are now living as refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

The insensitive reforms and the Soviet invasion caused a popular backlash which was capitalised on by the mujahideen. But the opposition factions needed more to keep 115 000 Soviet troops at bay. Without large-scale external backing from the USA and its allies—Britain, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia—the mujahideen could not have sustained the war with the Kabul regime.

The divided and reactionary nature of the mujahideen made them an unattractive investment for any foreign power. But the Americans had wider motives for getting involved. In the Reagan years they used aid to the Afghan guerrillas as ammunition in the international propaganda war to prove their determination to 'roll back the tide of Communism'. And, most importantly, the USA has bankrolled the mujahideen in an attempt to regain influence in the region. This became a serious strategy from January 1979, when the fall of the Shah of Iran left Washington with no dependable ally in an important and unstable part of the Middle East. The Soviet incursion made things worse for Washington. The Americans sought to establish an alternative power-base, by building closer relations with Pakistan and intervening in Afghanistan. These pragmatic strategic considerations, rather than any ideological commitment to freedom, were all that made the mujahideen seem a remotely attractive ally for the USA.

Fairly modest American aid to the mujahideen began in August 1980, under president Jimmy Carter. In 1985 the Reagan administration

doubled the annual aid programme to \$250m. Today the yearly figure tops \$1 billion. The CIA has also overseen the heroin trafficking operations through Afghanistan and Pakistan which have proved a key source of mujahideen funds.

American aid strengthened the mujahideen militarily and created the appearance of political unity. Washington insisted that the factions get organised together before they could receive aid. Thus was formed the IUAM—Islamic Union of Afghan Mujahideen—made up of the seven main Sunni groups. But even the carrot of US recognition and dollars could not turn the interim government-in-exile into a genuinely united body. The one thing upon which the factions agreed was that the Soviets must go. Since the Soviets went, the sectional differences have returned to the surface with fierce rows and even armed clashes among the mujahideen. Far from clearing the way for an arm-in-arm march into Kabul, Soviet withdrawal has helped to split the rebel alliance wide open once more.

The CIA and Pakistan have tried to impose control by assuming direct responsibility for more recent military campaigns. The results were the failed siege of Jalalabad, which was intended to last three days but dragged into months, and other similar flops. Despairing US policy makers have now announced their intention to bypass the mujahideen leaders who quarrel in exile, and send aid direct to the commanders in Afghanistan. This would turn US aid into another source of division, as the mujahideen factions fight for a bigger slice.

## Made in the USA

The US crusade in Afghanistan has deteriorated into an expensive and embarrassing aid programme to a collection of ramshackle outfits which spend much of their energies and ammunition killing each other. Afghanistan is undergoing a process of 'Lebanonisation', fragmenting along the lines of the old tribal warlords' fiefdoms. Meanwhile thousands of refugees continue to flood out of the country, and the CIA-sponsored heroin trade booms to feed them, with serious consequences for both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

While it remains a pawn in great power politics, things can only get worse for Afghanistan. Najibullah may still be in power, but he cannot unite the country. Granting local autonomy to warlords is his only solution. Yet the primary responsibility for this mess lies with American imperialism, and any success in its attempts to secure control would mean yet more suffering for the Afghan people. Washington's campaign to stamp its authority on the region, under the guise of an anti-communist mission, has created more instability and chaos, and taken a backward country a step closer towards the dark ages.



Should Britain join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism?

# ERM... YES AND NO

Jon Fryer thinks that, in or out of the European Monetary System, British capitalism is in a no-win situation

In the continuing fall-out from the Lawson-Thatcher-Walters controversy over the European Monetary System, it might appear strange that an apparently technical discussion of exchange rates could excite such passions. But there are far bigger issues at stake below the surface. So what is the debate all about?

The European Monetary System (EMS) is a product of the disintegration of the post-war international economic order. As the US dollar slipped from unquestioned world dominance in the late sixties and early seventies, it destabilised the international monetary system. Currency exchange rates fluctuated wildly, and European states tried to control them through coordinating monetary policy. But early attempts at European currency coordination—such as the 1973-79 'snake in the tunnel' system—failed to end the instability, since countries simply left the 'snake', allowed their currencies to depreciate and then re-entered the system.

When today's EMS was founded in 1979, the members took new steps to strengthen the coordination of national monetary policies and to move the centre of economic gravity still further away from the dollar and towards the West German mark. Now they are making efforts to reinforce the system; not as a high-minded move towards the European ideal, but as a pragmatic reaction to the increasingly bleak outlook for wider international monetary coordination. The EMS is a symptom of the break-up of the world economy into rival trading blocs.

Britain is formally a member of the EMS. The current debate focuses on whether (and when) Britain should integrate more closely, by joining the system's Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). This mechanism allows eight of the 12 European currencies to fluctuate against each other within fixed margins. All (except the Italian lira) are allowed to shift by up to 2.25 per cent either side of the centrally agreed rates.

When a currency threatens to break out of the range, concerted central bank intervention tries to pull it back. If a currency is sliding because of a flight of capital, central banks try to reverse the flow by buying it up. If this fails, coordinated measures such as interest rate changes aim to attract foreign investors into the flagging currency. Conversely, when a currency hits the roof, the central banks switch to selling mode and interest rate moves to dissuade foreign investors.

## 'Half-baked'

The ERM is not a system of fixed exchange rates. It is not even a system of compulsory adjustment. The lack of any compulsion means in a sense that Thatcher's ex-personal adviser Alan Walters was right to call the system 'half-baked'; it can easily fail, and when it does governments have to get together to realign exchange rates and establish new target ranges.

The ambiguity in Britain's attitude to the EMS reflects the ambiguous interests of British capitalism. Britain's growing reliance on trade in goods and services within Europe stimulates trends towards closer monetary

cooperation. But the sooner Britain becomes a full member of the EMS, the sooner will its economic subordination to West Germany become apparent.

The day Britain stops posturing as an independent financial power, and takes its place as a secondary European state, it will find it all the harder to claim a role as a major player in the world economy. This poses a serious problem, since British capitalism has residual—and very important—advantages to be gained from what remains of its international influence. The

mountain of assets which Britain holds across the world is one valuable legacy of Empire. British capitalists raked back a profit of £5.6 billion on these overseas stockpiles in 1988. Such windfalls from abroad are now vital, given Britain's mounting difficulties in managing a burgeoning trade deficit at home.

British belligerence towards the ERM results from the tension between the need to cooperate with Europe and the desire to maintain some semblance of independence. Alan Walters claims that the mayhem wrought by huge capital flows around the world market renders all exchange rate control utopian:

'The compelling argument against any pseudo-exchange rate system is that, because of the enormous funds sloshing around in world capital markets, such rates cannot be held either by feasible amounts of intervention or by acceptable monetary or fiscal policies. Surely Louvre and Black Monday proved that yet again.' (*Financial Times*, 6 April)

Walters might express concern about the general impossibility of sustained monetary coordination; yet he is really talking about the particular interests of British capitalism.

The City of London earns billions each year from the financial servicing of the capital that flows around the globe. Although Britain's capitalists cannot make much profit from exploitation in the home economy,



Thatcher is no more a consistent opponent of the EMS than Lawson is a 'good European'

PHOTO: Gerard Livett



they excel in the world of financial manipulation and the handling of other nations' capital. All of the apparently principled calls for 'free trade' and an open world economy, especially in financial services, are really an attempt to preserve the conditions which have allowed the UK to hold on to an extensive economic empire. Domestic stagnation and decay enhance Britain's dependence on such international factors. It has much to lose if the world economy splinters into rival and exclusive deutschmark, yen and dollar zones.

The particularly volatile nature of the pound also counts against Britain's participation in the exchange rate mechanism. Since the Second World War the pound has experienced major swings and falls and recurrent sterling crises. The anti-EMS lobby looks back at the disastrous attempt to put sterling into the European currency 'snake' in 1972, when massive speculation forced the pound to pull out within weeks.

Today the short-term factors which helped to push sterling upwards in the eighties—North Sea oil, the strength of the City, the relative weakness of other powers, and confidence in British political stability—are all either waning or exhausted. The projected £20 billion trade deficit for this year, and high interest rates sufficient to stimulate a new rash of bankruptcies and insolvencies, point to the prospect of a run on the pound which would not only endanger British entry but could blow the entire ERM apart. The pound is now the 'banana currency': hard on the outside, soft in the middle and always set to slide.

### Extravagant claims

Thatcher is no more a consistent opponent of the EMS than Lawson is a 'good European'. Both are committed to British entry into Europe, and both are opposed to any drift towards full monetary integration. Both have accepted British membership of the ERM in principle for 'diplomatic' reasons. Britain may lose by going in, but it loses still more by staying out. Like the rest of the EMS lobby, Lawson hopes the ERM can provide a more stable and predictable environment for intra-European trade. He wants to recruit the powerful reserves of the West German Bundesbank to help bail out the British economy.

Whether Britain goes into or stays out of the ERM it will not tackle the real problems facing British industry. The great EMS controversy is largely a focus around which the establishment can project its problems into the monetary sphere. Both supporters and critics of the EMS make extravagant claims for their approach, each side claiming that their monetary policy causes high growth, narrowing of exchange rate differentials and low inflation. In fact, such changes reflect shifts in the sphere of production, not that of circulation.

In his recent interview with Brian Walden, Lawson referred to the turn-of-the-century Edwardian prosperity that accompanied the pound-dominated gold standard. He took this to be a reflection of the superiority of international coordination and currency management, especially under British supervision. But it was not the gold standard which made Britain great; the power of British industry enhanced the global standing of the pound. The ex-chancellor can daydream in the old rectory at Blaby, but the 'workshop of the world' is gone forever, and with it the supremacy of the pound.

### Rewriting history

In order to depict the crisis of British capitalism as a narrow monetary problem, both Thatcher and Lawson now blame the government's own monetary policies for endangering its economic miracle. In a televised interview in June, for example, Lawson primarily blamed the rise in inflation on 'the fact that we deregulated our financial sector far more than any other country'. The government went wrong with 'the loosening of monetary policy in the wake of the crash'.

This analysis turns reality on its head. Relaxing restraints on the amount of money in the economy did not cause the crisis; indeed it was only such monetary measures which postponed the potentially devastating consequences of the October 1987 crash. Now that the beneficial effects of monetary expansion are all but exhausted, Lawson tries to blame the easy money policies which even the most strident monetarists and financial disciplinarians begged for at the time.

For her part, Thatcher has claimed that Britain picked up its inflationary tendencies when Lawson encouraged the pound to 'shadow' the deutschmark. Her famous 'you can't buck the markets' speech against this policy gave the impression that she favoured a free market attitude towards interest rates. But she is no more a supporter of a 'hands off' approach than Lawson. Central bank control of

interest rates has remained and been used throughout the Thatcher years; and it is now clear that she rebuffed his proposal to give the Bank of England more independence from government control of interest rates.

The Thatcher-Lawson dispute was really about how to use what small scope still exists for monetary manipulation: to tackle inflation at home (Thatcher) or to maintain exchange rate stability abroad (Lawson). Even in the Tories' own narrow terms, this dispute is now pretty irrelevant to the conduct of economic policy. Since the dominant trend towards a depreciation of sterling reasserted itself, the conflict between different uses of monetary policy means little in practice. Both the attempt to squeeze demand and the attempt to stabilise sterling now imply a high interest rate policy. Within the British establishment, all but the diehards can now see some advantage in having the Bundesbank assist in propping up sterling. Thus they urge at least a temporary accommodation within the ERM.

### 'No change'

The continuing EMS controversy is no longer about the EMS. It is an attempt to apportion blame for the 'hard landing' into recession. Lawson's alleged back-sliding in the struggle against inflation is now blamed for 'causing both the past boom and the coming recession' (B Reading, *Sunday Times*, 5 November). Meanwhile, the Lawson school of financial know-how blames the conflicts between ministers

and advisers for the diminishing credibility of government policy, the resultant run on the pound and the rise in interest rates.

Both sides seek to blame, and to dissociate themselves from, the economic strategy of the late eighties. Yet what alternatives do they offer? As a substitute for the half-baked EMS, Thatcher offers a hare-brained scheme for freely circulating privatised national currencies. Other than that it's 'no change' and 'business as usual'. On his return to the backbenches, Lawson announced that his dispute with Walters was 'merely the tip of a singularly ill-concealed iceberg'. We waited for him to reveal his iceberg that could cool the 'overheated' economy. But instead of describing some comprehensive counter-crisis strategy which had been thwarted by Thatcher, all Lawson had to offer was a paltry proposal for a bit more independence for the Bank of England. Even his own economic adviser—Samuel Brittan of the *Financial Times*—quickly disclaimed this idea.

Tory strategy is exhausted. But there is still no alternative. The EMS dispute has become the symbolic expression through which the dwindling authority of Thatcherite economics is expressed. It is testimony to the weakness of the opposition that the debate has not gone beyond the narrow terms set by the Tories. The important lesson of the row is that, in or out of EMS and ERM, there are no easy solutions for British capitalism.

PHOTO: Pandora Anderson





Neil Fletcher

I write to protest in the strongest possible terms about the misleading and inaccurate reference to our two Cubitt Town schools contained in the article by Kenan Malik published in your September edition 1989.

There is no truth whatsoever in the statement that children are segregated in the playgrounds. There is not one playground for whites and one for Bangladeshis. Each school has its own play area and the younger (infants) children (under eight) use one and the older (junior) children (eight to 11) use the other. As it happens, there is a similar proportion of Bangladeshi children in both schools, so both play areas are used by them.

I am appalled that you published such a statement undermining good race relations without making any attempt to check its accuracy with our press officer at County Hall or the schools. I demand that you publish an immediate retraction and apology with a clear statement of the true position. I also wish to know why you published the incorrect information about the schools and on what basis.

Kenan Malik

I did not raise the issue of racist attacks at school and segregation in the playground; the Bangladeshi community did. The comments about segregation in my article come from Kutub Uddin, general secretary of the Cubitt Town Bangladeshi Cultural Association. Bangladeshi parents also expressed their concern at a number of meetings in Cubitt Town over the summer. I am surprised Neil Fletcher has no knowledge of this given that Ilea representatives were at some of these meetings.

On 13 June a meeting of the Isle of Dogs Race Committee was presented with a number of reports which showed an alarming rise in the scale of racist attacks on children both inside and outside schools in the Cubitt Town area. The committee asked Tony Janes, chief executive of the Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood, to convene a special meeting to discuss the problem.

This meeting was held at George Green school in Cubitt Town on 6 July. Attending were a number of Ilea employees and officials including the head teachers of Cubitt Town infants school, Cubitt Town junior school and George Green school; the acting head of Seven Mills school; the deputy head of George Green; and the deputy education social worker from Ilea Division 5. Also present were Isle of

'The making of EastEnders'

# SEGREGATION IN SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

In the September issue of Living Marxism, we published an article by Kenan Malik—'The making of EastEnders'—on racism in Tower Hamlets, east London. One small part of the article dealt with racist violence at school and the authorities' response to this problem.

In October Neil Fletcher, Labour leader of the Inner London Education Authority, wrote to Living Marxism (and to black community newspapers which reprinted Malik's article) demanding a retraction and an apology. We can grant him neither. Here we publish Fletcher's letter, with a reply from Kenan Malik



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Did we invent the racial divide in east London?

Dogs Neighbourhood officials including the chief executive, the acting head of policy, the race adviser and Cubitt Town housing office team leader.

On the previous day, Bangladeshi parents had met under the auspices of the Bangladeshi Cultural Association to discuss what points to put to the meeting. Parents report that two major issues of concern were raised: the scale of racist attacks and the fact that children appeared to be segregated in the playgrounds.

Two parents' representatives, Elias Miah and Mr Choudhury, attended the special meeting on 6 July. According to Elias Miah, he asked the school authorities why the children were segregated in school playgrounds. He says that a representative of the teaching staff replied that they too were concerned about the separation of Asian and white children, but that they had insufficient teachers to ensure otherwise.

The Neighbourhood chief executive presented a report on this meeting to the racial incidents panel. Under the heading 'School perspective', the report notes that in George Green school 'play often took place in separate racial groupings' and that at Cubitt Town junior school 'children did not integrate well in their play'. In the section 'The way forward', the report records the feeling of the meeting

that 'whilst integration of play patterns was difficult some attempt should be made to bridge the divide between black and white children'. The implication is that no such attempt was being made at that time.

The chief executive's report implies that the authorities accept that segregation exists but seem to believe that it happens naturally. Bangladeshi, on the other hand, feel that it is the result of the way their children are treated.

I recorded an interview with Kutub Uddin on 8 August. He said of Cubitt Town junior school: 'In Cubitt Town school, they're treating Asian students as second class citizens. The thing is, they've got two playgrounds and one is used only for white people and one is only for Asian people.' When I asked him how he felt about this, he replied, 'They're teaching white kids how to discriminate. They've no right to do such things... The head teacher was saying they're very short of teachers so where students come together white pupils beat up Asian pupils' and they can't control them'. I tried to contact the school for its response, but as my interview with Kutub took place during the school holidays this proved impossible.

I saw Kutub Uddin and Elias Miah once more on 25 October, after receiving Neil Fletcher's letter. They both confirmed that there had been segregation in the playground. Both were also worried that the

authorities seemed to be complacent about the situation. For example, despite the 6 July meeting having agreed that 'a follow-up meeting would be held in September to review the situation at that time', no such meeting had so far taken place.

Thus, despite Fletcher's assertion to the contrary, it is widely accepted in the area that some form of segregation takes place. As for 'undermining good race relations', the intensity of racism in Cubitt Town ensures the isolation of the Bangladeshi community. As my article argued, Labour's token anti-racist policies have tended to reinforce this isolation and to deepen the divisions.

At Cubitt Town junior school, the lack of resources meant that it was easier for the authorities to prevent racial violence by keeping the two groups separate, or at the very least by not actively promoting integration. I am not suggesting that Ilea has a formal policy of segregation, but, in the context of a shortage of resources, the outcome of Ilea's bureaucratic approach to anti-racism is to reinforce the isolation of the black community.

If any apology is merited, it is from Ilea. The authority should apologise to Bangladeshi parents in Cubitt Town, and more generally to the black community in London, for its failure to tackle racism in schools.



**I**t's like a society living within a society. It's very, very segregated. They don't seem to be mixing very well, do they?

The comment came from a white woman living in Batley, West Yorkshire, interviewed in an October edition of the BBC documentary series *Public Eye*. The programme set out to answer the question: do British Muslims want to live in segregated communities, separate from the rest of British society? The answer, both of *Public Eye* itself and of most white people it interviewed, was yes.

The growth of Muslim militancy over the past few years, and particularly in the wake of the Rushdie affair, has created resentment and bewilderment within the white population. Muslim calls for the banning of *The Satanic Verses*, the demand for separate schools, the campaign for halal meat have all fuelled the idea that Muslims are a community apart.

A Harris poll commissioned by *Public Eye* seemed to confirm this view. The poll showed intense anger among Muslims about *The Satanic Verses*. The vast majority of Muslims polled supported the campaign to ban the book. Four out of five wanted action taken against Rushdie himself. A full third of those asked thought that Rushdie should be killed; among 16-20 year olds the figure stood at 45 per cent.

### In black and white

The poll also showed that Muslims were very concerned to preserve their culture and way of life. Almost half the sample said they would rather have separate Islamic schools, while 35 per cent preferred mixed schools. Sixty-six per cent said they would obey Islamic law if it conflicted with British law; even among 16-20 year olds, 61 per cent were of this view.

The Muslim response was in sharp contrast to that of the white population. Not a single white person polled backed the anti-Rushdie campaign. Three out of five felt that the government had to act to prevent the Muslim community from becoming 'completely self-contained'. 'They're never going to integrate if they don't mix from the beginning', said a typical white respondent.

At first glance the evidence suggests that Muslims do seek segregation. A closer inspection of the facts, however, tells a different story. Muslims did not raise the demand for segregation; a racist society imposed segregation on Muslims living in Britain. It is little wonder that a community under siege should now turn inwards for support and protection.

Muslims, like all black people, do form a community apart. Even before they set foot in Britain the authorities have singled them out. Immigration laws are specifically designed to keep black people out of the country. And for those who manage to squeeze past the immigration desk at Heathrow, a framework of racist laws and practices

### Do Muslims want to be alone?

# SEGREGATION IN BRITISH SOCIETY

*Kenan Malik questions the notion that Muslims are the ones promoting racial segregation in Britain*

ensures second class status, and creates ghettos in employment, housing and education.

Black immigrants came to Britain in the post-war years because of a labour shortage in this country. They settled in areas where they were needed to fill the jobs no one else would do—the inner cities, the mill towns. Their role as cheap labour ensured that, from the start, they were concentrated in certain areas: 43 per cent of the black population live in London; four per cent live in the south west and two per cent in Scotland.

Discrimination meant that, within these areas, the black population was further ghettoised. Immigrants were largely denied access to council accommodation. Bradford's large Asian community means that it is

in West Yorkshire, hit the national headlines after a group of white parents refused to send their children to a predominantly Asian school. The parents were outraged at the idea because for years the council had colluded in an informal policy of segregation, effectively reserving certain schools for whites. Figures in the table below from an internal council document show the extent of segregation.

The obvious conclusion is that the Thornhill schools had been preserved as exclusively 'white'. This was not by accident, or because Asian parents did not want to send their children there. The report notes that 'a quarter of the original applications for the Thornhill schools were Asian—a far higher proportion than had ever applied' but admits 'their applications...were

Muslims to look to their own for support. But this was not inevitable. An effective anti-racist movement could have struck at the foundations of segregation. However, the British left has consistently failed to combat racism. This has further isolated the black community, and encouraged Muslims to seek their own solutions.

### Islamic refuge

As racism has intensified in Thatcher's Britain, more Asians, especially of the younger generation, have turned to Islam as a source of strength and comfort in a hostile world. Many young Asians back the anti-Rushdie campaign. But their primary motive for so doing is not to defend fundamentalism (many are not even religious), or to protest about a book. Instead, the campaign against *The Satanic Verses* has become a vehicle to show their contempt for a racist society and express their solidarity with fellow Muslims. This is why, for example, young Asians on this year's anti-Rushdie marches directed most of their anger against the police, who have not written a word about the Muslim faith but who have been in the frontline of the racist assault on Asian communities. The growth of Muslim separatism is the result of the intensity of British racism and their isolation.

Yet, despite the hostility to their presence in this country, a great many Muslims still regard themselves as part and parcel of British society. The *Public Eye* poll asked Muslims whether they would rather live in Britain or an Islamic country. A third preferred an Islamic nation. But 49 per cent said they would rather stay in Britain. Given the intense hostility faced by the Muslim community, that is a remarkably high figure.

'I was born here', one young Muslim woman told *Public Eye*. 'I am British. We want our rights because they are our rights and we will get them no matter what.' Whether she, and thousands like her, turn to Islam or secular politics as a means of fighting for those rights, largely depends on whether the left in Britain shows an equal determination to stand up to the racists and the system which supports them.

Dewsbury's divided schools	Percentage of Asian pupils	
	1980	1986
<b>School</b>		
<i>Infants</i>		
Thornhill Lees Infant	4.0	24.0
Pentland Infant	100.0	100.0
Savile Town Infant	97.5	100.0
<i>Middle</i>		
Headfield	61.0	83.0
Thornhill Middle	3.0	1.5
Thornhill County	0.0	7.0
<i>Secondary</i>		
Westborough High	32.0	56.0
Birkdale High	26.5	47.0
Thornhill High	0.0	6.0

From 'The Dewsbury school affair'. Kirklees chief executive report, 1988

often described as 'the Muslim capital of Britain'. To this day, less than five per cent of council house tenants in Bradford are black. Where black people did get access to council housing, they were allocated the worst estates and the most rundown blocks. A survey in Tower Hamlets, east London, seven years ago showed that the proportion of Bangladeshis on the borough's 10 most desirable estates was less than five per cent; on some it was as low as 0.3 per cent.

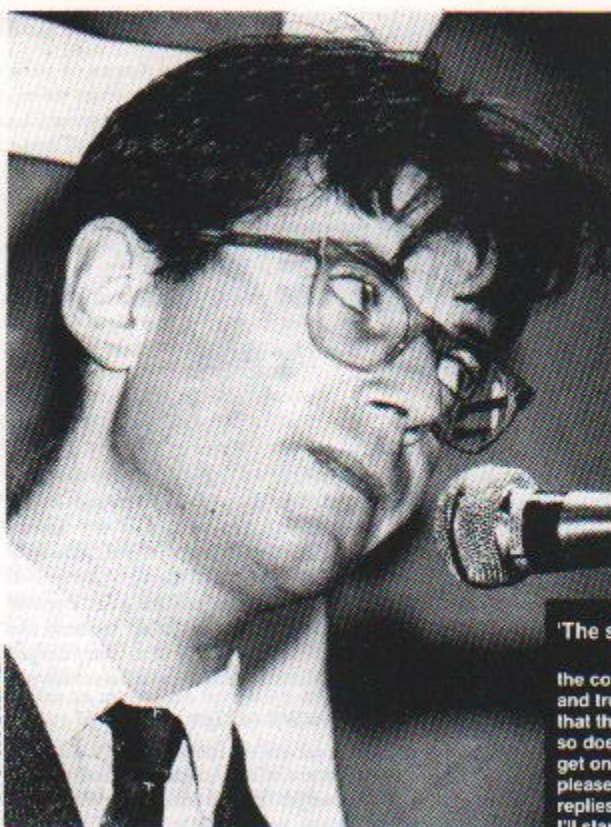
Segregation in employment and housing has led in turn to segregation in schools. Two years ago Dewsbury,

rejected' ('The Dewsbury school affair', Kirklees chief executive report, 1988).

Examples like the Dewsbury education scandal demonstrate that segregation has not been invented by Muslims. It already exists in society as a result of institutionalised racism. Racial oppression ensures that black people are denied access to the mainstream of British society. While we live under a system which treats black people as second class in all matters from immigration to education, integration is impossible.

The experience of racism prompted





Name: John Hegley  
Occupation: Poet  
Specialist subject: Spectacles

**'The stand up comedian sits down' by John Hegley**

the comedian climbs on to the stage and truthfully points out that the microphone smells of sick so does your breath says somebody get on with it says somebody else please—settle down replies the comedian responding well I'll start this routine if it kills me there is an outbreak of cheering at the mention of his death get off says the one who said get on with it and the comedian comes up with a line so apt and incisive that any further heckling is redundant unfortunately he comes up with it on the bus home

From John Hegley's 'Can I come down now Dad?', £2, available from him

*Is there life in the cabaret old chum?*

# LAUGH? I NEARLY DIED!

*What's alternative about the alternative comedy scene 10 years on? John Fitzpatrick asked cabaret circuit veteran John Hegley and newcomer Jenny Bone*

It wasn't the heckling which did it. It was the vicious indifference of the half-drunk audience as they began to chatter among themselves. The tearful comic fled the stage, choking some rebuke over her shoulder. I cringed in sympathy but her material was hopeless and what matters more, the mob sensed her lack of confidence like a dog smells fear.

It doesn't stop them coming back—the comics or the audiences. This 'death' occurred at the Cartoon at Clapham, one of the still growing number of pubs, clubs and theatres which put on evenings of cabaret, usually three or four comedians although there is a fair amount of poetry, magic and music too. When John Hegley first did an open spot at Soho's Comedy Store in 1980 (it opened in 1979) there was no circuit. Now the cabaret section is almost as big as fringe theatre in the London listings magazines, and the circuit extends beyond the capital. Hegley

can work five nights a week, one of which will be out of town.

Hegley was booed off more than once at first. But after working as a bus conductor and a mental nurse he realised 'this was a job I liked doing and could be good at'. Now for anything between £50 to £100 a gig he'll take himself, his mandolin and his little poetry books down to the venue about 9pm, have a drink, watch the other acts and then climb on stage. 'It's not a chore. I love it.' And by and large they love him. He tops bills, wins awards, and starred at the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh this year. With a series of poetry programmes made for Border TV due out next year, he now prefers to be called a poet.

Perhaps Hegley is about to make the same transition to the big time as Alexei Sayle, Ben Elton, Rik Mayall, Ade Edmondson, Nigel Planer, Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, Harry Enfield and others who started out on the 'alternative comedy' circuit, as

cabaret has been known. According to a new history of the scene by Roger Wilmut and Peter Rosengard, it was called alternative because it was leftist, frowned on racist and sexist jokes and saw the likes of Max Bygraves and Bernard Manning as the other alternative.

### Mainstream circuit

Many critics claim that there is nothing alternative about the circuit today. So what's changed? 'It is less political now', says Hegley. 'The fact that you're now working in an established form in itself means that it is less political. When it started out it was new comedy. There is something political about the unknown. It's a known quantity now. The joy has gone out of it a bit. It's an industry now, promoters care more about making money. The audience is more mainstream. People just want to have a good laugh. It's changed that's all. That's OK.'

'If you want to be political now the cabaret scene is not the place to do it. Cabaret is still alternative compared to watching television. If you stay in the house you've got all the insulation of that world. If you're out in the clubs something can happen. "There's hope when you're out of the house." Stick that in the article, it will save me having to write it down.'

Hegley's act is not overtly political. In a dry, deadpan manner he reads out poems with a fine sense of the surreal and the absurd; he can be whimsical (usually about his spectacles) but caustic too (with hecklers). He protests that he is very political, citing in full one of his two-line poems—'these national health glasses were devised/ before the vision of the people got privatised'. (I tell him I prefer the one about the sex life of an amoeba.) He doesn't do current affairs-type humour though, unless it is relevant to glasses. 'I'm interested in the eternal. I was really depressed when I heard that they were going to get rid of glasses with eye operations. It's going to take them a few years though, and I'll steal the plans if necessary.' He sometimes has a two-piece backing band, the Popticians. 'It's an artistic concept that, a band called the Popticians who just do songs about glasses. Quite Dadaist I think.'

### Bonebreaker

What makes people laugh? 'Comedy. I can't define it, that's the joy of it. You mustn't make it too conscious or you destroy it. I try not to watch myself on the box, because you become too aware of what you're doing. I try to pull the carpet out every time, from under myself and everybody else, show that it's all farcical so that we all fall over and start rolling around and then we all get up and have a good laugh.'

Not everybody on the circuit is so relaxed about the state of the art. Jenny Bone is 17. She came to London from Newcastle six months ago and works in a Hackney shoe shop. Four months ago she started telling jokes on stage. In December she appears at the ICA with Comedy Store original Tony Allen. 'I'd been along to the Hackney Empire. It was such a load of shit. My friend said, "You could do that Jenny", so I did. The whole cabaret thing stinks. It's not new, not punchy, not challenging. It's just not funny.' What, not even John Hegley? 'John Hegley is a wanker, all skinny and specky, and making jokes about it. He hasn't varied his set in about 20 years.'

Bone doesn't please everybody herself. When she took her own turn at the Hackney Empire and reached the final of a performers' competition, she was roundly heckled. She hurled her prize statue at the hecklers. The *Hackney Gazette* letters page carried protests about her foul-mouthed routine. She thought of using one of our 'It's Offensive' stickers to advertise her act, although she is more likely to read *Class War*. She storms up and down



fulminating at the Queen Mother and urging the audience if they see a yuppie on the way home to 'mug the bastard!'

'Most women comedians seem to be feminists who do jokes about periods. "Let's break the taboo": it's done so much it's just boring. There are too many middle class, university-educated wanker types performing to middle class audiences.' Her kind of comedy is 'anything that increases working class people's confidence and stirs up their hatred for the ruling classes. Just so long as you're not slagging off proles, your own kind, but having a go at the middle class and the trendy lefties. And the Queen Mother deserves all she gets'. What she gets from Jenny Bone is unrestrained abuse about her relations with 'little Willie' and the 'gusset soup' she feeds him.

### Repetitive sets

Bone at least makes a change from the often tame and predictable older generation. It is hard to argue with her complaint about repetition, which has always seemed to me to be the bane of the business. Even Hegley admits to surviving on a total repertoire of about two and half hours of material, although he has the advantage that much of his stuff is still good (his poem/song 'Eddie don't like furniture' is now demanded as an encore in the way that established pop groups use their fondly-remembered first hit), and

he ad-libs freely with his audience. But Bone is going to have this problem, too, and isn't yuppie-bashing a bit stale already? 'Yes, I'm going to have a good think. I want to be political but not ranting, which is just boring. You have to find a way of being more dangerous, doing something that's well out of order but funny with it.'

Hegley would not criticise other performers but conceded that while standards at the bottom end of the bill had risen, at the top end there is 'not much brilliance'. He remains optimistic, particularly about breaking down the barriers between comedy, poetry and music. He also thinks there should be more humour and art in politics as well as vice versa. He flicked through a copy of last month's *Living Marxism*. 'Where are the jokes? Why don't these articles rhyme? The Shankill Butchers, maybe that isn't the one to make rhyme. You've got to be careful. Ah, "Death on the dole", that sounds the sort of thing which ought to rhyme.'

- R Wilmot and P Rosengard, *Didn't You Kill My Mother-In-Law? Alternative Comedy from the Comedy Store to Saturday Live*, Methuen, £7.99
- John Hegley appears at the Hackney Empire, London 30 November, 1-2 December.
- Jenny Bone appears at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London 13-16 December (inclusive).



Name: Jenny Bone  
Occupation: Shoe salesperson  
Specialist subject: Queen Mother's gusset



## his Christmas what could be better than Jane Austen in stockings?

The shop opening hours are as follows:

<b>Charing Cross</b>	Mon - Fri:	9.30 am - 7.30 pm
	Sat:	10.30 am - 7.00 pm
<b>Hampstead</b>	Mon: - Fri:	10.00 am - 9.00 pm
	Sat:	10.00 am - 8.00 pm
	Sun:	11.00 am - 7.00 pm
<b>High St Kensington</b>	Mon - Fri:	9.30 am - 10.00 pm
	Sat:	9.30 am - 7.00 pm
	Sun:	11.00 am - 6.00 pm
<b>Old Brompton Road</b>	Mon - Fri:	9.30 am - 9.00 pm
	Sat:	9.30 am - 7.00 pm
	Sun:	12.00 am - 7.00 pm





American comic movie

# THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH BUBBLES

American comics have been accused of everything from political subversion to sexual perversion. Pat Ford put in a transatlantic call to Ron Mann, director of a new film about the history of the US comic book, which opens in London in December

One of the reasons why I made this film is that I wanted to find out why my mother wanted me to throw out all those comics when I was a kid.' Ron Mann has long been interested in the less respectable byways of American popular culture. In 1981 he made a film, *Imagine the Sound*, about jazz musicians Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Bill Dixon and Paul Bley. In 1982 he made *Poetry in Motion* about performance poets like Tom Waits, Charles Bukowski and William S Burroughs. He describes his new film *Comic Book Confidential* as completing the trilogy. 'What I'm all about is finding history in the margins and the out-takes.'

American comics have a rich and dramatic history and this fine documentary, combining archive material, interviews and generous stills and animation of the comics themselves, packs it briskly in. In the early thirties came the 'Funnies' to help sell the newspapers. In 1938 Superman was born, leading a parade of superheroes which marches steadily on to this day, including Jack Kirby's Second World War classic Captain America, and his later creations with Stan Lee, The Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk and The Silver Surfer. It was in the forties too that Will Eisner took the comic art to a higher plane with *The Spirit*.

The Cold War crusade for conformity and against 'un-American activities' hit the EC comic group of William M Gaines and Al Feldstein in the fifties. Their horror comics, such as *The Crypt of Terror*, were branded as dangerous to children. Censorship, in the form of a code, blighted the comic landscape until the sixties, when Robert Crumb (Fritz the Cat, Mr Natural) and Gilbert Shelton (The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers) encouraged by Harvey Kurtzman, the founder of *Mad* magazine (1952), blasted their way out of the underground. The talent has kept coming over the last 20 years, with artists such as Françoise Mouly, Art Spiegelman and Charles Burns of *Raw* magazine,



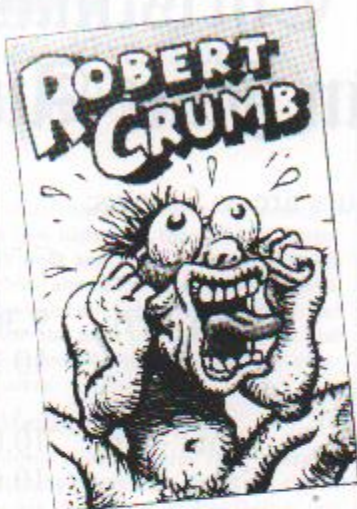
Jaime Hernandez of *Love and Rockets* fame, and Harvey Pekar of *American Splendor*.

Sometimes Mann's roll call of the great comic creations becomes a little breathless and uncritical but there is much of interest besides. He has, for example, clips of the hearings of the 1954 senate subcommittee on juvenile delinquency which attacked EC comics in a cartoon caricature of the McCarthy witch-hunts. 'It was part of the whole Cold War hysteria. Senator Kefauver wanted to run for presidency and J Edgar Hoover falsified statistics about juvenile delinquency. Both wanted to further their own political careers. A psychologist called Frederick Wertham gave evidence. His book *The Seduction of the Innocents* had fanned the hysteria by telling parents that comics would lead their kids to juvenile delinquency.'

Mann doesn't just think it could happen again; he believes that 'it is happening again. There are busts all over the place in North America. There is a cycle of outrage. Parents still treat their kids like furniture and

don't want them to think for themselves. Pressure groups like the Parent Teachers Association and Moral Majority are always threatening. A few years ago in Washington there were hearings about sex in rock and roll. Pressure groups wanted records to be stickered with warnings. Frank Zappa spoke eloquently about the freedom of the artist.'

He says that comics have been so controversial 'because of the misconception that they are for kids, and are bad for you, lowbrow stuff. They do have incredible power. Cartooning is simplifying, and boiling down to an essence in words and pictures. The perception has always been that in the hands of kids the comics have this power. Certainly *Mad* magazine



influenced me and the whole counter-culture. It broke away. It said question authority, your parents, advertisers, the establishment. One of the covers just said 'Think!!'

But how can drawings with speech bubbles have that sort of power? 'It goes back to hieroglyphics and cave paintings. It is a very instinctive form of communication. Comics are faster than the one-second, five-frame cuts

of rock videos. It really involves the imagination because what happens between the panels is where comics happen. It stimulates ideas, and what people are so concerned about is what that stimulation is going to do to a fertile young mind. Comics work against the messages we get from television and the movies in a very subversive way. They subvert the bourgeois images of the world with which we are constantly brainwashed and bombarded.'

Mann says that until quite recently he shared the view that comics were for kids. 'It was a revelation for me when I discovered that they had adult themes. The effect on me was like coffee and cigarettes.' He believes that there has been a substantial shift in recent years away from the more fanciful fantasies to the real world or at least to greater psychological realism. 'Harvey Pekar, for example, will just describe his own life. He



doesn't have to have a punchline at the end. He just goes out to work, tries to start his car, it doesn't work. That's it.' I must say, it doesn't sound very subversive.

Mann is confident that the comics industry, now resting, he says, on 5000 comic stores across North America, can resist the corporate pressures which shape television and movies. He sees comics as much nearer to video in terms of the access and control which small producers are able to exercise. He hopes his film will encourage people to discover and explore comics on their own terms. 'Comics have always been compared to literature or painting or movies or dance. But what is great about comics is that they are comics.'

• *Comic Book Confidential* opens at the ICA cinema, London, on Friday 8 December and runs for three weeks, accompanied by an exhibition of original comic art (December 7-10) and a day of discussion, 'Are we having fun yet?' (December 9) featuring such comic artists as Gilbert Shelton (of Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers fame).



Parliament, lies and videotape

# HERE COME THE SOUND BITES

Frank Cottrell-Boyce on the televising of parliament from the waist up

History has ended. On 21 November the Mother of All Parliaments finally succumbed to the seductive black hole of the camera's lens and went live (and thus died). That's according to the ideas of Jean Baudrillard anyway, yet another of those end of history merchants whose theories are currently doing the lecture circuit.

According to this particular Old Moore, history's terminus is not the market but the box. Once an event or an idea gets on to the screen, the real class relations which structure it (and motor history) dissolve into some strange semantic effervescence—a kind of postmodern Alka Seltzer that eases all our social ills and transforms them into an empire of signs.

This is called hyper-reality, and it is the theoretical version of a moral panic that is currently giving the media establishment a headache, namely, the collapse of the distinction between information and entertainment. You know the horror stories—the tabloids printing 'news' stories about soap stars; one tabloid printing news stories about alien sex fiends; and the one you hear increasingly, the big American news programmes becoming vehicles for star presenters. I like this one a lot because the evidence for it tends to be drawn not from 'real' life but from the film *Broadcast News*.

### Tedium medium

Anyway, the powers that be are stout chaps and they're taking steps to ensure that these mimetic confusions don't happen here. They will save history from the fizzy corruption of the airwaves. Information will not make its unholy marriage with entertainment on British soil. And here's how we're stopping them.

The first weapon is a traditional English speciality, tedium. Enter, the guidelines for televising parliament. With no coverage of disturbances or improper activity, we won't even get to see a *coup d'état*, so no repeats of those hilarious pictures of the coup in the Spanish parliament. Instead we've got the wide shot of the chamber and the solemn portrait shot of the speaker. From the waist up. Below-

the-waist disturbances—for instance gunpowder plots and pelvic thrusting—are out. The MPs have the same broadcasting restrictions as Elvis Presley.

It just won't work. It's hopeless trying to minimise the presence of a Canon Sure Shot at a wedding, let alone a big news camera in a public place. The eye of the lens coaxes people to perform in different, often bizarre ways. They suck their cheeks in; they expose their garters, they put toilet seats around their necks. In the commons, members are remembering to leave their stripy shirts at home in case they strobe. They are learning to gesture and shout less now they see how TV magnifies these things. Of course they will be turning up more often now, equipped with snappy turns of phrase—units of thought that lend themselves to quoting on the *News at Ten* (the sound bites).

### Esteemed members

Their self-esteem will improve when constituents start to preface their enquiries with, 'saw you on the telly the other night'. Some of them will take the opportunity to go over the heads of their bosses and lay their wares directly before the public. These are real changes which will have real effects on real people in a real building. They are on telly now, but there is nothing mysterious or difficult about it. It does not signify the end of history. And neither for that matter does the *Sunday Sport*.

Nobody believes the stories in the *Sunday Sport*—you only have to look at their letters page, which is actually wittier than that of *Viz*, to see that. In fact, each edition of the paper defeats any intention you might have of believing it. You can see for yourself that the Killer Shrub did not get the Queen Mum. You have only to roll over in bed to find that the alien sex fiends are not in there with you. The academic star turns have seen all this as evidence of a kind of collective loss of faith in all meta-narratives—eg, history, reason, the future and so on. But buying the *Sunday Sport* is not a rejection of truth, it's a cynical but canny comment on the newspaper industry.


The press is discredited, not by metaphysics, but by the fact that it is seen to be the province of a tiny interest group—mostly comprising Australian millionaires. I think British TV is being rumbled too. More and more people see that it has been run by and for the Oxbridge classes in collusion with British government since the day it was invented. Leaving aside the content, they have created a whole aesthetic (no strobing, no bad teeth) that is addressed to disguising the means of pictures' production, and therefore at mystifying the demands and effects of the medium itself. This is why things look puzzlingly different on TV. Only an academic would find it hopelessly difficult to trace the

patterns of class interest in these rather obvious manoeuvres.

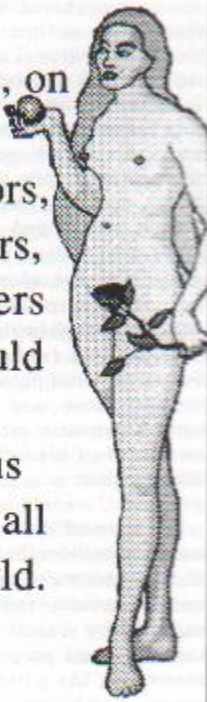
Television does not of necessity glamorise or trivialise. In fact, one of the effects of the stilted live broadcast from parliament might be to demystify someone who has become a complete mystery to me—Margaret Thatcher herself. The recent Brian Walden interview reminded me how carefully her minders have kept the cameras at bay of late. Here was this smiling, glowering death's head blinking away through 'advisers advise, ministers decide, the chancellor is unassailable'. When was the last time you saw her in anything but speculative long shot, haloed by flashbulbs and world leaders?

She had become a ghostly absence-presence, floating over the heads of her 'team' like a tongue of fire—hard to make out, hard to believe in, but powerful in its effect. Gloriana maybe—an epiphanic expression of the Idea of Governance taking corporeal form only very occasionally and in the presence of stills photographers (while holding an allegorical lamb, for example, or shaking hands with an even more allegorical worker). A bit of transcendence is always a good move if you think you're becoming a political liability (look at Stalin). But it's going to be more difficult for her now we're allowed to see her petty, pointless slanging matches, even if only from the waist up.

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Who is he calling a 'fat fuck'?

# SNOBBERY WITH VIOLENCE

Toby Banks and Sean Thomas throw up over Tony Parsons' attack on the working class in the up-market men's magazine *Arena*

'...white stay-press [sic] Levi strides, highly polished DM boots, button-down Ben Sherman shirt, thin braces, eighth-of-an-inch cropped hair and over the football on a Saturday running with the Shed because for the first time in your life the society that produced you was terrified of you. And it made you feel good...' (Tony Parsons, *NME*, 2 April 1977).

'You see them at the post office on Monday morning, at the football ground on Saturday afternoon, at every pub—those manly troughs—at any time. They belch and fart and threaten their way through life. They are the lager vomit on the Union Jack. They turn the city into a tattooed jungle.' (Tony Parsons, *Arena*, No 17, September/October 1989)

There have always been those who move from the public bar to the wine bar, and eke a living there by slagging off the working class which they are now ashamed to come from. Once upon a time in the seventies a younger Tony Parsons, together with his then partner Julie Burchill, pepped up a dreary *NME* with some self-consciously proletarian, amphetaminesque, punk journalism. She graduated from the university of life to the *Face*, *Mail on Sunday*, *Sunday Times* and *Ambition*. He made it to radical doyen status in *Arena*, from the columns of which he now regurgitates the prejudices of Auberon Waugh (without his wit) and Paul Johnson (without his spleen). Parsons can still put a bit of spin on the odd phrase, and struck a chord with his readers recently with his treatment of his latest target, the working class:

'Fat tattooed slob, dressed for the track and built for the bar, leaning out of the windows of their van—those rusty white vans—and screaming with rage, "Yew carnt! Yew farking carnt!"...These people make the city streets look like a toilet in a Turkish prison—Rambo steamingly defecating. Little Wayne tossing away his crisp packets, dad's tattooed arms working away on his motor, dumping his derelict big end in the nearest rose bush when it no longer functions. The way they foul the streets in the

tattooed jungle is positively Elizabethan. One of the worst things about these people is that they always act like the disenfranchised even when they have money...these rich serfs in their velcro-welded sneakers and boulder-rubbed denim.'

What an *angry* not-so-young man. Working class oiks? In his backyard? No way, Jose! The more he surveys the inner-city terrain of his youth, the more 'these people' let him down. They haven't heard of his favourite novelists, they drop litter in the streets and they fart in public. In short, they spoil everything. His rogues' gallery of boneheads and loadsamonies can even be amusing, drawing as it does on the canon of national comic stereotypes which includes Harry Enfield's monster, Alexei Sayle's Cortina driver and Hofmeister's bear, George.

But the ugly-minded Parsons isn't joking. He sees a brutal yob in every bloke walking his dog, and a brainless slag in every woman wearing a denim mini skirt. When he sees an overflowing skip on a council estate he rubbishes the entire local population. It is a land 'full of selfish little shits' where a working class woman's 'concept of glamour is derived from soap operas and prostitutes' and where everybody 'turns into a fat fuck at 20'.

## Ungrateful unwashed

It's old saloon bar stuff that wouldn't be worth a mention in itself; but the response in the *Arena* letters page suggests that Parsons is far from the only post-punk aesthete who holds these views. His article 'The tattooed jungle' was greeted with a huge sigh of relief which you could paraphrase as follows: 'I know it sounds awful, but I just don't like the working class. They don't deserve any better. You try to help them, but they're so *ungrateful*.... Give them the welfare state and what do they do? Vote for *that woman*.' An 'ex-working class' reader agreed, 'I thought I was a lone voice but your article shows I'm not. Let the bastards know they are beyond contempt—racist dickheads who have destroyed socialism and left us with what?'

This is rich: *the working class* has destroyed socialism. According to Parsons, 'Socialism is finished because it is no longer possible to feel

sentimental about the workers.... Something has died in them—a sense of grace, and feelings of community, their intelligence, decency and wit. They are the real class traitors, betrayers of the men who fought the Second World War, those men who fought for Churchill, but voted for Clement Attlee'. You begin to see what the *Arena* man is getting at. Like many a *Guardian* reader he will put up with a lot. He won't object to bingo taking over the local cinema; he'll turn a blind eye to them buying council flats and putting brass knockers on proper doors; he'll put up with a 'super brickee' building a tacky bungalow down the road with gold taps in the bathroom. He'll even let them call their kids Wayne and Yvette. Everything was alright so long as they knew their place and VOTED LABOUR.

*'These people', as Parsons calls them, didn't even invent lager, never mind racism and greed*

In the old days, Parsons says, you could trust the workers: 'Look at their faces in footage of cup finals in the forties and fifties. You do not have to look through pinko-tinted glasses to see how hopeful and happy and fundamentally *decent* they look, with their suits and their NHS teeth and their heartbreaking rattles.' (Emphasis in original.) Wasn't it marvellous? The government could keep rationing, use troops to break strikes, pursue savage colonial wars, pass off a shoddy health service and shoddier false teeth as a miracle, and people were still 'decent' enough to vote for Clem Attlee. Ah post-war austerity, bliss was it in that DHSS-office-vision-of-socialism to be alive.

'Thirty years ago the grandmothers of the Arthurs of this world would get on their knees and scrub their front

doorstep clean every morning. They wanted respect.' Now look what happens. The working class has got no self-respect, or respect for anybody else. They no longer show proper deference and propriety, unlike those 'ordinary Chinese people' protesting in London after Tiananmen Square: 'The quiet, angry dignity of their picket...was truly moving, awesome in its calm outrage.' If we emulated some of the 'ordinary Chinese people' of Beijing by hanging soldiers from lamp-posts, you can bet that Parsons would volunteer to become a tank driver. He just doesn't like the way ordinary British people show less and less respect for institutions like the police and the Labour Party. They make Parsons 'ashamed to be British'.

There are many aspects of working class culture which nobody would want to celebrate. There is no point romanticising traditions and tastes which are often nothing more than desperate escapism or the pathetic mimicry of richer forms of expression and enjoyment. No excusing either sexist or racist behaviour, or indulging reactionary attitudes. On the other hand, against the odds there is much that is positive and creative and invigorating in working class life, in music, fashion and sport, not to mention in literature and the visual media.

## Who's to blame?

Working class people are not the *source* of the ugliness which so offends the fastidious Parsons, even when they are its bearer. Is it the least powerful people in society, the 'people at the post office on Monday morning', the 'fat fucks' who set the trends, control the environment, form society's opinions and disseminate the ideas? Hardly. 'These people', as Parsons calls them, didn't even invent lager, never mind racism or chauvinism or greed. And if he wants to find a powerful champion of backward ideas and somebody to blame for 'ruining socialism', he would do better taking a nostalgia-free look at the Labour Party.

Of course once you've written the working class off as a spent force it's a short step to identifying them as the main enemy, and blaming them for the fact that the social fabric is nasty, brutish and short-lived. You become a snob, in sympathy with the Auberon Waugh of this world who sneeringly wrap the word worker in inverted commas to conjure up the sullen, threatening, fishfinger-eating rabble. This snobbery is dangerous. It's one thing to swallow the Thatcher line even at this late stage in the game, and start spouting it all back about how football hooligans, lager louts, Rottweiler owners and acid housers are the biggest menace to civilisation since Adolf Hitler. It's even worse to blame urban squalor, decay and poverty on all the people who have to live in it. The next step is snobbery with violence.



The invention of photography, 150 years ago, brought three entirely new features to the world of art. First, it brought an element of actuality, a picture content recorded much more directly from the material world than those images fully mediated by the vision and execution of the artist. Second, it provided the capacity to reproduce identical images; the concept of the unique original did not apply. Third, it enabled printers to mass reproduce images, including famous paintings.

We are still measuring the impact of photography on our ideas about the nature of artistic production. The mechanical but faithful nature of the new medium undermined the special role of the artist; anybody could do this. The reproducibility of identical images challenged the idea of the work of art as unique and unrepeatable. The dissemination of millions of prints of famous paintings made it easier to question mystified notions of artistic genius, and to dispel the aura of the original work.

The claim that photography cannot really be art has long been swept away by events. 'Art' photography, along with every other product of the camera, has become widely available. What's more the prints of Brassai and Henri Cartier-Bresson are likely to be piled high on market stalls alongside the reproduction Picassos, Magrittes, and Leonardos, all for the price of a t-shirt.

#### Dress code

The exhibition Art of Photography is a belated admission by the Royal Academy of Arts of the place photographic art occupies in contemporary culture. It is an admission, however, which the academy tries to make on its own terms. It dresses certain photographs in a new set of emperor's clothes and sits them on the throne of high art. The exhibition guide promises 'carefully selected images...what scholars, critics and connoisseurs on both sides of the Atlantic now acknowledge to be the key contributions to photographic art in the West'.

In order no doubt to establish a place for photographic prints in the upper echelons of the art-as-investment market, the exhibition guide assures us that these prints are nearly as unique as paintings after all: 'Although the negative-positive process invented by Henry Fox Talbot in theory allowed images to be reproduced in numbers, in practice very few of the images in this exhibition exist in more than a few prints, and even these are not identical. All the works...are prints either created by the photographers or under their close supervision.'

The most frequent criticism of the exhibition has been the conservatism of the selection, which features only a few well-known contemporary photographers. But it is not simply that the selection is tame, it is rather that the



Arthur Weegee's *Easter Sunday, Harlem (1940)*

*When is photography art?*

## PRINTS IN EMPEROR'S CLOTHES

*Joe Boatman and Pandora Anderson question the ideas behind the Art of Photography exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts*

diverse and often exciting photographs which are shown have been tamed. They have been let into the hallowed halls of the RA on condition that they come quietly, and conform as best they can to the traditional values of the place. Here they are in stately rows, all preciously illuminated and accorded the status of being art.

The 500 works of 85 photographers are divided into 16 categories such as nineteenth-century portraits, the modern movement, American documentary styles, etc. There is photography as substitute painting, photography as documentary or journalistic record, photography as a form of expression in its own right. All they have in common is that they are photographs and have been chosen by certain 'scholars, critics and connoisseurs' as 'photographic art'.

#### Reduced to art

From the outset there have been photographers who have tried to achieve the status of artist by emulating the style or posture of painters. Julia Margaret Cameron's soft-focus pictures (of the late 1860s) are composed with obvious reference to the work of the pre-Raphaelites, and in her description of

each portrait as 'the embodiment of a prayer' she summons inspiration from a realm above and beyond the territory of a technician.

Photographers like Walker Evans and Robert Capa weren't employed as artists. They worked respectively in the fields of social documentary and photo-journalism combining great technical skill and, yes, a unique selective eye. But they did more than that. They articulated a relationship between their subjects and society. Walker Evans' pictures of dustbowl America in the thirties inspired public support for state subsidies to farmers. Robert Capa's photographs of the Spanish Civil War and Second World War brought home certain propositions about suffering, heroism and patriotism. The effectiveness of their work resides precisely in their ability to make a mechanical record, since this aspect of the medium gives their work its authority. In removing these pictures from their social and political context the Royal Academy has not so much elevated them as reduced them to art. Nevertheless, the exhibition guide is insistent about why they're in: 'A documentary style pursued not for journalism's sake but

for the photographer's own ends transcends the document to achieve the intensity of poetic observation.'

Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) took up the camera to exploit its capacity to document events, to combine pictures with words in montage, to mass produce its images. He used the portability of the camera to look at life from new angles. He wanted to challenge existing ways of looking at the world in order to change it. He is no doubt included here on account of his innovative use of photography, but might just as well have been excluded because his art was a means not just an end.

Some of the prints are beautiful, and despite the RA's pretensions and prejudices, well worth a look. Here is the versatility of the camera and the diversity of the world. Arthur Weegee's *Easter Sunday, Harlem (1940)* suggests community in downtown black America; by contrast Robert Frank's *Canal Street in New Orleans 1955* evokes a stark sense of alienation; each passer-by is intently pursuing their own private business. Don McCullin's *Fallen North Vietnamese Soldier of 1968* captures, in the scattered personal effects of the soldier, the brutal callousness of war. Dmitri Baltermants' bleak pictures from Stalingrad and Moscow in 1941 are epic battlefield pieces, history in the making. Closing the show are some works from Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman and Victor Burgin who have consciously sought to exploit the new visual language of photography.

The Royal Academy has nothing new to say about photography here. Worse, it has tried to justify these well-established works within the criteria it traditionally has applied to fine art. Is it painterly or poetic? Is it unique? Is it formally innovative? What it has failed to promote (indeed has tried to deny) is the significance of those specific features of the photographic medium, such as its perceived authority, its reproducibility and so on, which make it such a revolutionary development in the way that we can see the world.

Photography, whether produced as art or otherwise, has expanded, clarified and complicated our view of the world. This year, for example, it has taken us to the outer reaches of the galaxy with *Voyager's* pictures of Neptune, and the inner reaches of life matter with New Mexico University's pictures of DNA. If, 150 years hence, the Royal Academy sticks these images up and calls them art, so what? If it is still insisting that is because they are just like paintings, it will still have nothing to tell us about photographic art.

● Art of Photography is on at the Royal Academy of Arts until 23 December.



Sunsational

## SOARAWAY SEX

Dr Vernon Coleman, *Sex for Everyone: How to Have Fun Without Fear*, Angus & Robertson, £4.99

Sun doctor Vernon Coleman has come up with some red-hot tips for your Xmas sex

life. Gals—'try a skirt so tight that you have difficulty walking'...'carry a small handbag and never wear a headscarf'...'if you wear a brooch it should be a bright one designed to draw attention to the breast upon which it is pinned'...'wax your legs regularly, trim away excess pubic hair'. Guys—'don't wear an earring, your watch should have a traditional face, digital is not good'...'a beard suggests a man who is more interested in men'...'walk with a bit of a swagger if you can master it without looking silly, or drunk'.

Come off it, Doc! You sound like Barbara Cartland at an acid house rave.

Coleman's sex manual plods through the anatomy and gymnastics of (strictly heterosexual) sex, providing no-nonsense advice and conventional prejudice. His advice for the woman whose man keeps getting a rash on his penis after fellatio is—change your lipstick! His explanation for the rising incidence of rape: 'women have become far more sexually aggressive.' What? Yes, 'a large number of women now wear clothes which are blatantly designed to arouse the male sexual response', with the result that men 'are kept in a constant state of sexual arousal'. This is the stuff which keeps him on Rupert Murdoch's payroll.

Unfortunately Coleman is controversial, not because of his crass sexism, but because he has challenged the establishment's Aids hysteria. He insists, quite rightly, that the threat of Aids to heterosexuals has been 'wildly and irresponsibly exaggerated' and that the only real risk in Britain is to homosexuals and drug addicts. It is ironic that in his populist enthusiasm for heterosexual experimentation, the *Sun's* doctor has accidentally done more to undermine the establishment's use of Aids to promote fear and insecurity around sex than the whole of the left.

Jenny Ross



PHOTO: Paul Weinberg

Black workers leaving a Johannesburg meeting on May Day 1985 are met by riot police who want to have more than a word in their ear. One of many memorable images in *Beyond the Barricades*, photographs of popular resistance in South Africa in the eighties, published by Kluwertown Books, £12

The serious side

## THURBER THOUGHTS

Michael Rosen (ed), *Collecting Himself: James Thurber on Writing and Writers, Humour and Himself*, Hamish Hamilton, £14.95

James Thurber said he wanted to write three sure-fire best-sellers: *How to Make Love and Money*, *How to Tell Your Blessings from Your Burdens* and *How to Pass the Joneses at a Dogtrot*. Sounds quite like the whimsical chronicles he did

write of smalltown, middling America; a world of moping dogs, electricity-leaking light fixtures, white rabbits, barking seals and the figgerin' Aunt Wilma. His stories of the little man battling against the superior intelligence of gadgets, animals and women have a quaint, if slightly anaemic appeal. But Michael Rosen's new anthology of Thurber's articles, essays, reviews and cartoons shows he had a sharp appreciation of the vanities and idiosyncrasies of the New York literary and cultural world in

which he moved from the twenties until the fifties.

His commentaries are best when he abandons the gentle nudge for the poke in the eye, particularly in his book reviews. He rightly called Gertrude Stein 'the most eminent of idiots', and had a go at a Steinbeck novel about the Nazi occupation of a small town: 'I suspect that if a writer conceives of a war story in terms of a title like *The Moon is Down* he is likely to get himself into soft and dreamy trouble. Maybe a title like *Guts in the Mud* would have produced a more convincing reality.' Steinbeck's publishers complained that, at a time when all decent writers should be acting as propagandists for the war effort, the review was 'a slap in the

face'. Thurber retorted: 'I am sorry...I didn't realise my hand was open.'

'Having tried for four decades to make some social comment', Thurber regretted, 'it is something less than reassuring to discover that what a jittery America wants is the boppo laugh or nothing'. But it is the boppo laugh, rather than his more perceptive pieces, that he will be remembered for. Thurber fans will enjoy this collection, but it is his other stories of sweet, incompetent middle class people flailing about in an irrational, but essentially cosy world which were so reassuring to the jittery America of the thirties and the forties. Maybe America will need them again in the nineties.

Kirsten Cale



## DO YOU WANT X APPEAL?

Lesley Abdela, *Women with X Appeal*, Optima, £6.99

**H**ow did Edwina Currie feel after she resigned as junior minister? How does Clare Short handle the male chauvinists in the house of commons? How does Shirley Williams see her future in politics? asks the cover blurb. Who on earth cares? Lesley Abdela cares. She is the founder of the 300 Group, which wants to get 300 women into parliament (you get the distinct impression she wouldn't be too worried about the other 299 if she made it herself). Her interviews with women MPs and hopefuls aim to show 'what it's really like to be a woman in politics today'.

If you want to know when Rosie Barnes plays Lego with the kids, or how difficult it was for Maggie Ewing to find the Ladies in the house of commons, then this book is for you. But you'll need a strong stomach for all the gushing about sisterhood and the fawning about parliament. The worst thing is how complimentary they all are about their opponents just

because they're all women in the 'man's preserve' of parliament. Jo Richardson complains more about the 'macho' atmosphere of the chamber than about the Tories, and Teresa Gorman praises the 'different feeling of camaraderie among us women' when the debate is between women speakers.

In fact, the hardline Tory women are much more straightforward about where their loyalties lie than the Labour women, who try harder to preserve the pretence that all women have something in common. At least Edwina Currie cuts the crap: 'I'm not a woman, I'm a Conservative.' Politics are of such indifference to Lesley Abdela that although we learn she was an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, she doesn't say for which party.

Abdela concludes: 'I see Political Woman as the spearhead of great social and political change.' This account suggests that if Political Woman is to achieve anything, she will have to find her inspiration outside parliament, in the fight against the b'stards of both sexes who are attacking our rights inside it.

Sara Hardy

PHOTO: Steve Pyke



Words without music

## POGUETRY

Poguetry: The Lyrics of Shane MacGowan, *Faber & Faber*, £8.99

**G**lossy books with lots of photos on the subject of rock bands can normally be given a very wide berth indeed. Luckily this one has, in addition to the photos by Steve Pyke, three advantages: a short foreword, some wonderful drawings by John Hewitt and nothing else but the lyrics of Shane MacGowan of the Pogues.

It is difficult to quarrel with Sean O'Hagan's opening assessment of the band, 'Since their inception in 1984,

the Pogues have cut a reckless and singular swathe through an increasingly conservative pop culture. Along the way, their fiercely individual music, drawing on elements of Irish trad-folk, Eastern melodies, rock 'n' roll and post-punk attitude, has gathered a huge audience disaffected by the superficial values of the mainstream'. Also, to their credit, they did a song for the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four, at a time when it was unfashionable to lend public support. No doubt the reference to the massacre at Loughall contributed to their radio ban.

Poguetry is not poetry because the lyrics of songs can rarely be satisfactorily considered in isolation from the music. That is particularly true of the Pogues' rumbustious musical idiom. Reading these words can only serve as a hint or reminder of what a very good songwriter Shane MacGowan can be. Songs like 'A pair of brown eyes', 'A rainy night in Soho', 'Fairy tale of New York' and 'The body of an American' will undoubtedly stand the test of time, and it is good to have them set attractively down.

Finally, some confusions can now be cleared up. The early sleeves did not carry the lyrics, and I had always heard on 'The dark streets of London': 'Every time that I look/On the first day of summer/Takes me back to the place/Where they gave me some tea.' Now I discover that last line is really 'Where they gave ECT'. So that's why it goes on: 'And the drugged up psychos/With death in their eyes.'

Pat Ford



Lawrence, Prince of the Posers, interprets 'The Awakening' (c 1935)

Male pin-ups

## ADONIS EXPOSED

Adonis: The Male Physique Pin-Up, 1870-1940, introduced by David Chapman, *Gay Men's Press*, £14.99

**T**his is a book of 93 full-page black and white photographs and an informative if rather humourless introduction. It demonstrates changes in taste in naked men as well. As the decades pass the waists get narrower and the stomachs flatter; taut like drums. The earlier models sport fig leaves, and I was gripped by the salacious desire to lift them, but hurried on to the photographs from the thirties. Here, a series of poses by a young man called CA Back and

another American, Tony Sansone, particularly took my fancy, but about this time the 'oiled body' seemed to come into fashion, and I lost interest.

The young acrobat, Mario Helne, photographed in Boston in 1898 has a certain charm, and the unknown naturist taken by Josef Bayer of Berlin in 1920 positively stirred me up. It's a strange collection, vaudeville acts, circus strong-men and Hollywood beefcake. Such photography is clearly damaged by fear of the censor and the somewhat limited concerns of the cameramen. The usual old Graeco-Roman statuary, academic 'art' poses and the odd histrionic queen; Lawrence, the Prince of Posers interpreting 'The Awakening' is definitely the best. It's sad to think that they are all long-dead or very old.

I think that at £14.99 it's a bit steep, so it's essential that you get somebody else to put it in your Christmas stocking.

Don Milligan

Lenin

## AN OPEN BOOK

Ronald W Clark, *Lenin: The Man Behind the Mask*, *Faber & Faber*, £7.99

**F**or Ronald W Clark, Lenin was an enigma. How could 'a charming, nicely spoken gentleman', fondly remembered by staff at the British Library, also be the cold, calculating commander-in-chief of the Bolshevik Terror? He researched Lenin's life and wrote it up concisely enough, but failed to solve the riddle because he tried to separate the man from the events that shaped him.

Focusing on Lenin's personality, Clark perceived his tactical flexibility as something bordering on schizophrenia, and the proletarian revolution as a perverting influence on Lenin's intellect, rather than as the source of his inspiring insight. Not that Clark was opposed to social change in a society such as tsarist Russia; he would simply prefer it to have been

organised in a more civilised fashion, from the top down, with that nice Mr Kerensky playing Lenin's part.

In any event the detail is intriguing: for example, Lenin's routines for maintaining physical and mental fitness while in prison, and for working two days in a row without sleep (a hot bath, cold shower, good breakfast and a brisk walk). But we are always dragged back to Clark's view of the October Revolution primarily as a product of Lenin's personality, in the way that many commentators talk about Thatcher's 'revolution' today.

Clark died shortly before publication of this, his last volume. The sad thing is that he need not have bothered. Lenin never hid behind a mask. His own writings are of unsurpassed clarity, and if you want the personal touch in your Christmas reading, stick to Alan Brien's *Lenin the Novel*.

Andrew Calcutt



# letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms of *Living Marxism*. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.

## AN EMBRYODIOUS ARTICLE

I would like to correct Ann Bradley's misquote of me in her article 'Embryo experiments: playing God or helping humanity?' on IVF scientist Robert Edwards (October). In my book I never called him an 'egg-snatcher'. It was irresponsible to imply that I did, and to give the impression that it is the highlight of my analysis. That language is not my style, nor does it reflect the evidence on which I based my explanation as to why women's eggs/embryos are so desirable in scientific research.

Further, I do not see him or any other IVF practitioner as monsters. I do see a serious situation, and medical scientists who are caught up in an oppressive worldview and medical model, one that the drug and biotechnology companies just love.

Pat Spallone  
York

It seems rather strange that *Living Marxism* can publish an article on embryo experiments which is so blind to the anti-life and authoritarian nature of the medical and pharmaceutical establishment.

The drug companies and medical researchers like Dr Robert 'Labour man' Edwards are making huge sums of money out of the socially conditioned obsession with fertility and blood relationships. Is it not at least open to question whether it is valid to invest huge amounts of resources into allowing women (and men) to have children that are genetically theirs—particularly when thousands of children are condemned to misery in state institutions because people will not adopt them? To judge by Ann Bradley's article it is not.

The final example of technical foresight and relevance in the article relates to Mantegazza and his predictions concerning the artificial insemination of farm animals. Again an example of technological 'advance' is given which unquestioningly assumes that the exploitation and killing of animals by the food industry is a good thing. Is it really just emotional to think of the Nazis and their obsession with fertility and genetics?

Karen Elliot  
Hastings

Ann Bradley quotes Robert Edwards' statement: 'Who can argue that these children should never have been born?' The fact that Edwards has photographs of children, however pleasant, is not evidence of scientific, moral or ethical truth. It is simple emotionalism and does not prove that IVF is a positive procedure. It only proves that some IVF pregnancies produce live children. Many do not. The unsuccessful participants in this technology do not make headline news.

Much was missing from Ann Bradley's article. Where was the reference to increasing medical risks to women of superovulation? Where was the recognition of the women who have died during IVF procedures? Where was the reference to the eugenic aims of the scientists working in this field? Where was the established, clear agenda of the scientists who claim they will be able to cure a whole host of genetic diseases? As long as we are asked to entrust the design of children to men like Edwards, 'Green' feminists like myself will object.

Pauline M Connor  
Feminists Against Eugenics

## PET HATES

It was disturbing to see the reaction to the article 'Puppy love and pet hate' (October). If Lesley Roberts (letters, November) wiped away the green froth from her mouth, and thought about the implications of equating genocide against Jews with disliking dogs she might not have made such an odious comparison. By the way, I suspect there were no letters from distraught dachshunds or perturbed poodles, only from their pious, self-appointed representatives.

I would also disagree with David Morris' point that a revolution would have to be accompanied by therapy to overcome the social alienation that capitalism has inflicted on human beings. Therapy cannot alter reality; it can only reflect on social problems that individuals face. A revolution would not immediately solve alienation, but it would remove the barriers to doing so.

Michele Carriere  
London

I found Lesley Roberts' letter most offensive. An animal must have some form of consciousness: it has a perception of space, of the world around it, of pain, of what it needs to survive. But this consciousness is very basic and simple—it is qualitatively different from human consciousness which is *socially* conscious. Unborn babies can only have a simple animal consciousness, and therefore *are* only animals until they leave the womb and have participated in social interaction. If you are not against the experimentation or destruction of simple organic creatures, then you should not be against abortion or embryo experimentation.

It can also be said that a computer can possess a type of consciousness, not necessarily different from that of animals. Parallel distributed processing computers are not fundamentally different from simple neural network creatures, apart from the fact that they live in simplified or different worlds. The most reactionary sources show us pictures of cuddly rabbits being hacked about to support their arguments about animal rights. Computers should be equated with animals, but no one would bat an eyelid if they were shown a disassembled computer.

I hold the view that we should command nature rather than obeying it, as people like Lesley Roberts would have us doing. We are not animals.

Benjamin Fairhead  
London

## BORIS AND 'BOSSSES' STRIKES

Boris Kagarlitsky of the Moscow Socialist Committee of the Popular Front believes that the Russian minority strikes in Estonia this summer are 'not really working class strikes because they are organised by the Russian management of the enterprises' (interview, November). How lovely life would be if the working class always fought under its own banners! Unfortunately, life is too complicated to allow us simply to put a cross wherever the bosses put a tick.

If the managers oppose Western interference in Soviet affairs, should we support it? Of course not. Socialists have to work out what the interests of the working class are first, and then decide on tactics. If one faction of bosses organise a strike that happens to defend workers, then we have to back it while fighting to remove their influence.

Kagarlitsky didn't say why the workers went on strike, or why they agreed to cooperate with their despised managers. There was nothing reactionary about the reason

for the strikes. They broke out because the Estonians proposed to disenfranchise migrants in order to railroad through their pro-market policies. The bureaucrats, anxious to save their privileged positions, encouraged their workforces to imitate the Siberian and Ukrainian miners and so block the reactionary nationalist project. The problem was not the strikes, but the fact that the managers' role in them increased their standing in the workers' eyes.

It is the responsibility of Kagarlitsky and other Soviet socialists to ensure that workers get an independent lead, whatever the squabbles between the Baltic nationalists and the Soviet bureaucrats. But Kagarlitsky's refusal to back the strikes at all accommodates to Baltic oppression.

Andy Clarkson  
London

## LABOUR GUILTY ON GUILDFORD FOUR

The article on the formation of the Ulster Defence Regiment ('Death squads don't change their spots', November) was a timely reminder of the Labour Party's guilt in Ireland—timely because of Labour's display of hypocrisy when the Guildford Four were released. To see Labour MPs like Roy Hattersley wringing their hands about the injustice of the Guildford case and applauding their release, you would think that Margaret Thatcher was responsible for fitting them up. But Labour (and Hattersley) were in office when the state organised its conspiracy against the Guildford Four, and almost right up to their release Labour played a part in stifling discussion on the case.

It was the Labour government which rushed the Prevention of Terrorism Act through parliament in 20 hours back in November 1974, giving the police a free hand to harass and arrest anybody Irish. It was in this climate and under this law that the Guildford Four were detained, beaten and framed. And only a few weeks ago, at the Labour Party conference, the party leaders refused even to discuss the case. Instead a motion calling for their release was deferred to a future meeting of the national executive committee—where it could be forgotten about.

Now that the lid is off the case, Labour wants to jump on the bandwagon. Let us remember and remind people what this party has done since it ordered in the troops and created the UDR 20 years ago, including the fact that it considered 'Free the Guildford Four' to be dirty words as recently as September.

Stephen O'Hare  
Glasgow



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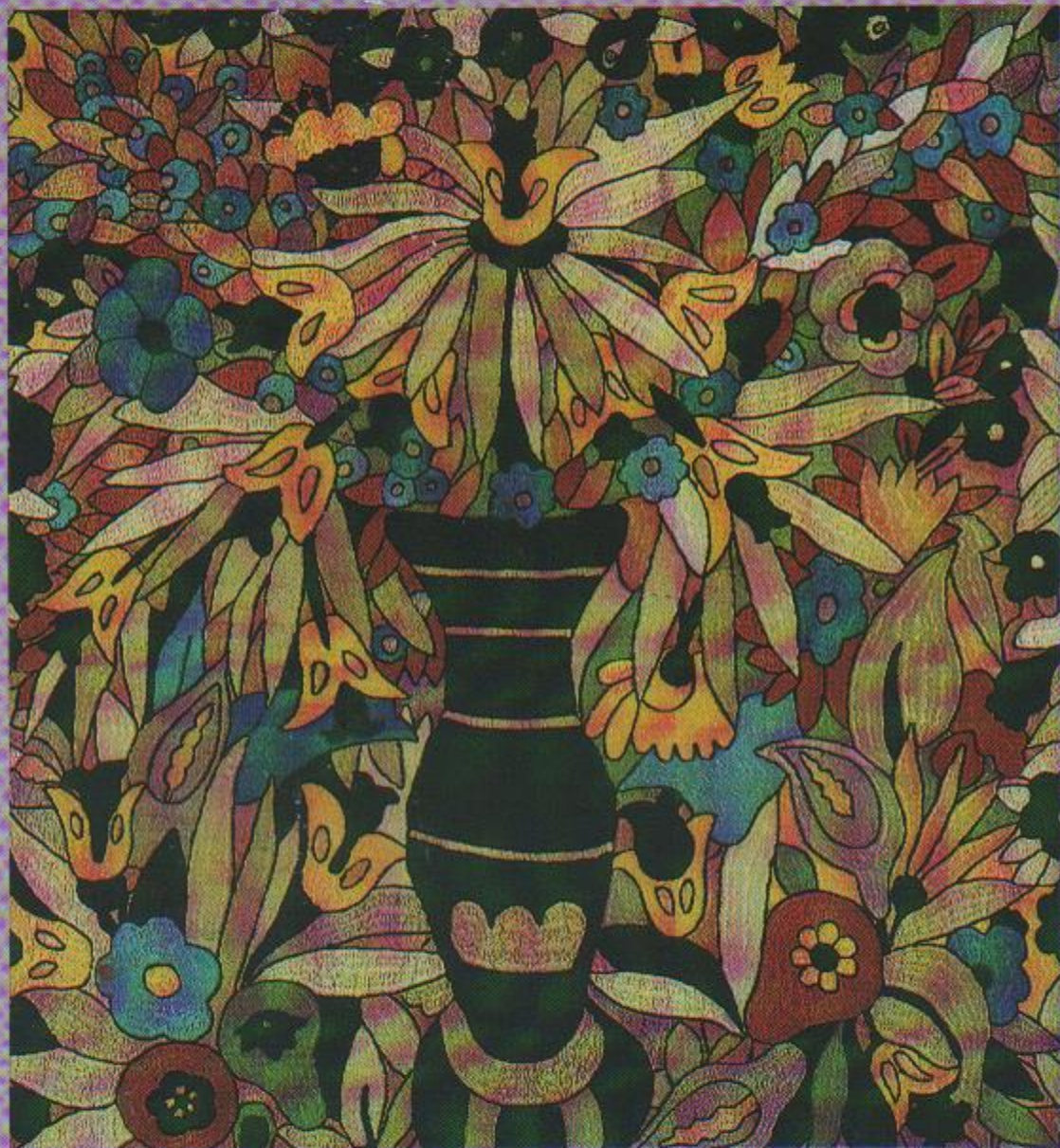
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