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& THE LEFT**

May 1990

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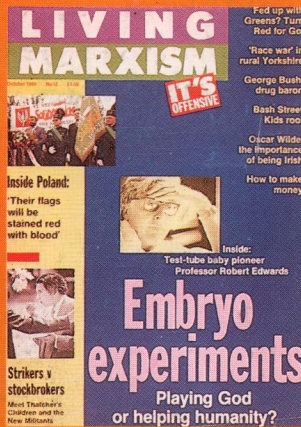
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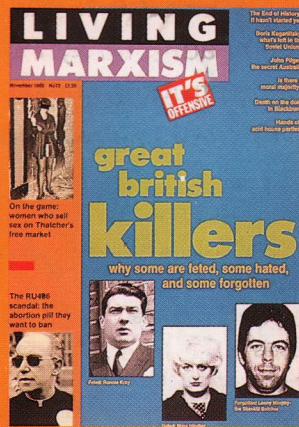
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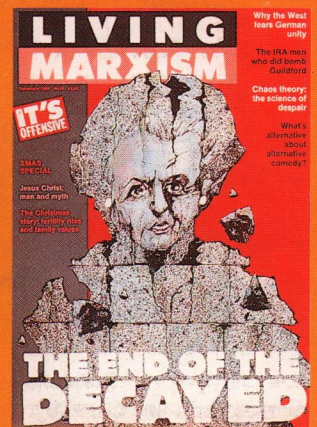
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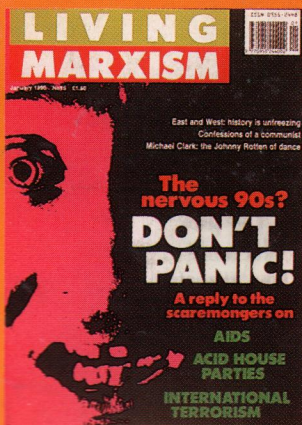
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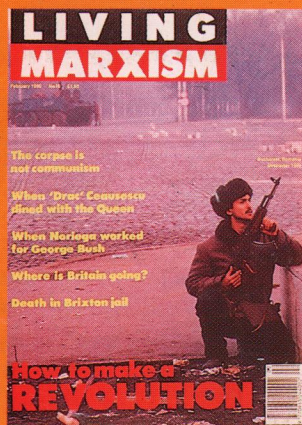
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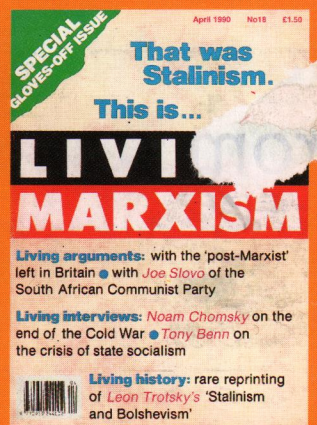
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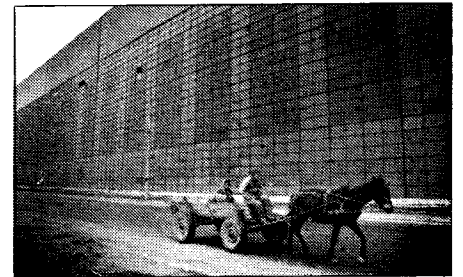
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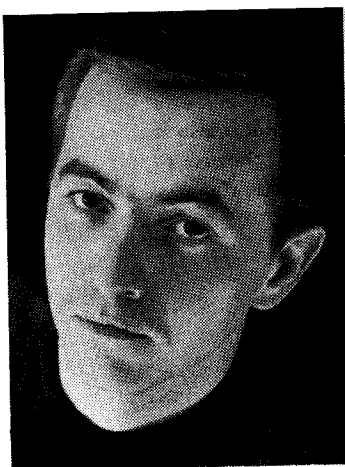
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# editorial

## The riots: left and right unite and fight?



editor  
**mick hume**

**Y**ou can learn a lot about British people, and British politics, from a riot at an anti-poll tax march in London.

You might discover, for example, that the police force which you thought was employed to serve the public with a smile and give directions to Piccadilly Circus was in fact deployed to preserve public order with a baton directed to the solar plexus.

You could find that many of the young people who, the media assures us, are apathetic individuals only interested in raving, turn out to be angry and gutsy enough to go up against the police cavalry and armoured cars, with some considerable success.

You could see that, although the Tories pride themselves on being the law and order party, Labour MPs can be even more vicious in condemning as 'lunatics' and 'extremists' those who don't respect the law of the baton charge and the bloody head.

And you might discover that some socialists who always professed to be enemies of the system turned out to be self-appointed policeman's mates.

The violence in the West End of London

on 31 March was one of those moments that provide a handy snapshot of the political state of the nation. Contrary to the impression given by the rush to set up inquiries on all sides, the central question to arise from the riot is not who cast the first stone, but whose side are you on?

On one side stands the state, represented on this occasion by the police, an increasingly paramilitarised force which now forms the frontline defence of the British ruling class. This is the police force which brought you the Guildford Four, Birmingham Six, Hillsborough, Orgreave, Wapping and many more outstanding examples of violence and victimisation.

On the other side stand the working class youth whose fury against the authorities (and by no means just over the poll tax) exploded on the streets on that Saturday afternoon. Some of them in Trafalgar Square were the unkempt, unemployed occupants of London's squats. Many more were the clerks, sales

if the perks were better. The hanging home secretary David Waddington spoke for them all in praising police restraint and condemning the 'sheer wickedness' of the lawbreakers who should be 'severely punished'.

The Tories talk of the law as if it were carved on a holy tablet, so that anybody who breaks it must automatically be damned. In reality the major laws which were opposed and broken in the West End—from the poll tax legislation to the Public Order Act—are just Tory Party prejudices which have been rubber-stamped by parliament, and as such they deserve no more respect than a Conservative Central Office press release.

Yet theirs were not the only, or most strident, voices which appeared to be coming from behind police lines in the aftermath of the riot. There was Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party, talking of 'cowardly and vicious...enemies of freedom' who should be 'treated as criminals and punished'. There was Labour MP George Galloway ranting

strike-breaking and red-baiting efforts. In the present Neil Kinnock and his party are going further still, in an effort to demonstrate that they could be trusted to govern as ruthlessly as Thatcher, Waddington and the rest of the rat pack.

Thus it was that Kinnock threatened to sack any Labour councillor who wouldn't impose the poll tax and prosecute non-payers; that Labour's deputy leader Roy Hattersley demanded the prosecution of left-wing and anarchist groups which the media had tried to blame for organising the riot; that no Labour spokesman suggested that the police had been anything less than angelic; and that Hackney Labour council suspended a worker for voicing the anti-police views of one small group, Class War—a witch-hunt which would have made McCarthy proud. This sort of police work is now what passes for the Labour Party's political opposition to Thatcher.

The fact that the Tory and Labour parties



It says much about the Labour Party and its camp followers today that they should consider standing up to the state to be a sign of lunacy

assistants, storemen, etc, who prop up the enterprise culture.

Such a direct conflict polarises opinion and, whether they like it or not, everybody else has to line up with one side or the other. Of course many people insisted that they were on neither side. But there is no middle ground in a riot.

The state refuses to respect anybody's neutrality when its authority is challenged in a battle for sovereignty of the streets. If you are not supporting the forces of law and order with all flags flying, then you are treated as a member of the criminal classes. Ask the man who stood between the battlelines in Trafalgar Square making hippy peace signs (he was trampled on by the riot police); or the arrested woman from Reading peace camp who claimed she had been protesting against both the brutality of the police and the hooliganism of the marchers (the magistrate found her guilty of obstructing the police and fined her £100).

So, on which side did the political players of the left and the right line up? Few surprises from the Tory MPs, many of whom would probably have been policemen or paratroopers

about 'lunatics, anarchists and other extremists'. There was a spokesman for the march organisers, the Militant-dominated All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation blaming 'lunatic troublemakers'. And there was (re)tired sixties radical Tariq Ali (whose old left-wing group used to wear crash helmets on marches) blaming 'a bunch of nutters who go berserk'.

It says much about the Labour Party and its camp followers today that they should consider standing up to the state to be a sign of lunacy. This was not the first time that Labour leaders have led the lynch-mob; but it is perhaps the worst time.

Converts to any faith are conventionally its most fervent advocates, seeking to prove to the church elders that their belief is true and total. In this spirit the Labour Party has spent years trying to convince the establishment that its radical reputation is undeserved, and that it should be admitted to full membership of the British capitalist club. In the past Labour governments have often gone further than their Conservative predecessors in their

took the same side in the riot row was damning (if predictable) enough. An even worse indication of how one-sided British politics has become was provided by Militant, the moving force behind the Anti-Poll Tax Federation which called the march.

With one eye on its tenuous relationship to Kinnock's Labour Party and the other on its equally fragile socialist credentials, Militant tried to straddle the divide. Its newspaper editorial accused the Tory government of having 'violently attacked millions of working people through the introduction of the poll tax', and complained about 'the lashing out by riot squads at innocent and peaceful demonstrators'. But it also took care to join in the all-party chorus, condemning the 'individual nihilistic violence' begun by 'tiny groups of anarchists', and slamming the 'anarchists and quasi-Marxist sects' who were trying to 'justify unprovoked attacks on the police and looting'. It called for a labour movement inquiry to 'unmask' and 'deal with' the 'disruptors and disorganisers of Saturday's demonstration' (6 April).

This sort of doubletalk won't do as a response to the right. The 'disruptors' of the

demo which we ought to worry about exposing and dealing with are surely the riot squads which *Militant* describes 'lashing out' at marchers. This is the organised violence of the capitalist state machine, directed against its political opponents by hundreds of armed, combat-trained police. We should reject out of hand any implication that it can be equated with, or blamed upon, 'unprovoked attacks on the police' by 'tiny groups of anarchists'.

Suppose the stories in the media (from *Militant* to the *Mail*) were right, and the first blow was struck by somebody on the demo. What difference would that make when it comes to taking sides with either the state or the youth? Were the police passive and neutral spectators who were suddenly provoked into violence when somebody tweaked their nose (and who just happened to have a few tonnes of riot gear handy)?

The details of who trod on whose toes first in Whitehall cannot alter the class loyalties of

long as they don't try to exercise that right in reality (especially not in the reality of an Anti-Poll Tax Federation march).

The poll tax riot was different, according to *Militant*, because it was down to 'individual violence'. Unfortunately the paper does not explain what this means. Those facing the police were certainly disorganised and were not operating under the same collective discipline as the Force. But there were an awful lot of 'individuals' involved, many of whom worked together to protect each other from arrest and injury.

Exactly how many more people would be required before it ceased to be individual violence? The 'one million' whom *Militant's* editorial board dreams of the Labour and TUC leaders mobilising on to the streets? While it is waiting for this miracle to happen, it denounces the 'individual nihilistic violence' of those who made the mistake of not hanging around for Walworth Road's ap-

to the riot suggests that, even if they were to manage an electoral victory, there would be little change in the repressive climate of Thatcher's Britain. A Labour government would continue with the Tory law and order crusade, endorsing the militaristic culture which has put armed police on the streets and more and more people in the prisons.

More immediately, the reaction of Labour's right and left demonstrates that, unlike in the early seventies, the party's rising challenge to a Tory government is having no radicalising effect on political life. As Kinnock advances, swearing loyalty to the Queen, the police force and free enterprise, the left continues to retreat. In these circumstances, why should we get excited at the prospect of a Labour success? The fighting spirit shown by those who stood up to the police in London provides far more hope for the future than does Kinnock's pathetic imitation of a Tory backwoodsman.



When the courts convicted a youth of stealing a bucket and 40 copies of *Militant*, it seemed a fitting comment on the tendency's role in the political battle about the riot

the state, nor change the fact that the police exist, and operate at marches, as a force for repression. By blurring this point, and drawing distinctions between the mass of 'innocent and peaceful demonstrators' and some 'tiny groups of anarchists', *Militant* only strengthens the hand of the police chiefs and politicians seeking to portray a popular backlash against them as the work of a handful of conspirators.

*Militant's* arguments are a weak attempt to justify the equivocal line on the police which it hopes will placate the Labour leadership. The condemnations of looting are also beside the point, since most of it was done by opportunists following in the wake of the street fighting. Which leaves us with the case against 'individual violence'.

'*Militant* supporters are not pacifists' declares the same editorial, and then goes on to list the situations in which *Militant* supports the right of the working class to use force: Spain in 1936, Chile in 1973, South Africa now. Just about anywhere and anytime, in fact, except Trafalgar Square, March 1990. But that is the only incident which matters in this debate; the Tories, Labour leaders and police are not presently trying to witch-hunt those who resisted generals Franco and Pinochet. This attitude amounts to supporting the right of working class people to defend themselves against the state in principle, so

proval. Meanwhile the law and order lobby wastes no time in dragging scores of demonstrators through the courts and announcing plans to deploy SAS-style police squads at future demonstrations.

In its efforts to avoid conflict with the Labour Party, *Militant*, the left-wing group most prominently associated with the riot march, has put at least one foot on the wrong side of the divide. In the immediate aftermath of the trouble, Anti-Poll Tax Federation spokesman Tommy Sheridan stepped further over, announcing that their inquiry into the events would have 'no qualms' about 'informing the police' of any rioters it could identify. Days later, the courts convicted a youth of stealing a bucket and 40 copies of *Militant* at the march. It seemed a fitting comment on the tendency's role in the political battle about the riot.

So the Labour Party leaders joined the Tories in the riot cops' fan club, and its left wing failed to offer any clear-cut defence of the youth. This strikingly unbalanced debate assumes wider significance when looking at British politics today; for it puts into sober perspective Labour's big lead in the polls.

The reaction of the Kinnocks and Hattersleys

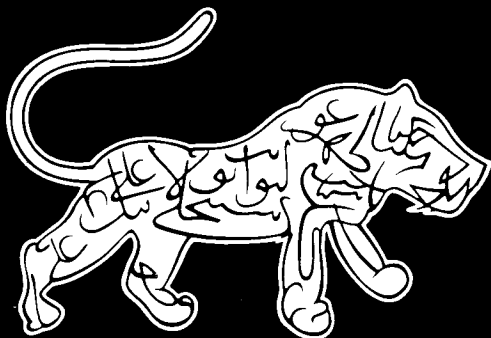
The post-riot debate has confirmed, however, that the angry working class youth are almost entirely separated from what is normally thought of as politics. If this keeps them from being infected by the ideas of the past, fair enough. But it also means that the instinctive resistance to the government and the state lacks political direction and organisation. A riot won't change the world. That spirit needs to be cohered into a sustained political revolt against capitalism.

From *Militant* to *Marxism Today*, most of the old left has objected to the violence on the grounds that it will alienate traditional Tory voters and other moderates from the anti-poll tax campaign. A far more important consideration ought to be that, in adding to the reactionary howl against the riot, these groups risk alienating the very people who are most important to the revolutionary project—working class youth. If we want to throw off the exploitation and oppression of the old world and build a new society, we will find that those prepared to confront a baton-swinging mounted policeman make far better allies than do disaffected Tory shopkeepers.

It's time to take sides, stop worrying about who started the fight, and start working out who's going to finish it.

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## the end of apartheid?

The release of Nelson Mandela and the removal of the bans on the African National Congress and other organisations by president FW de Klerk led to worldwide celebrations among all who detest the apartheid regime.

This pamphlet examines the factors, international as well as national, that have produced this dramatic shift in the policy of the South African state. It exposes the plans agreed between Pretoria and its Western backers, with the complicity of the Soviet Union, to pursue negotiations with key black representatives while stepping up measures to fragment popular resistance.

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# liberation

Times are tough for radical nationalist movements; the Sandinistas defeated in Nicaragua, Swapo stitched up in Namibia—and now Sinn Fein under renewed pressure in Ireland. British ministers talk with increasing confidence of isolating the Irish republican movement, and rumours of impending ceasefires abound. However, those who assume that the Irish War is already over would do well to look at a key area of IRA support like South Armagh. Fiona Foster and Joe Watson found that there, the relatively low level of conflict today has less to do with the British Army's success than with its refusal to come out of its bunkers

The British press claimed that a mob of 40 people had stoned troops and police to prevent them capturing three armed IRA men. The Sinn Fein paper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, insisted that just half a dozen locals, mostly women, had scuffled with members of the security forces and stopped them assaulting and arresting their neighbours. Everybody agreed that, at the end of February, the might of the British military had clashed with the civilian population of the tiny village of Silverbridge, South Armagh; and that, not for the first time in that reluctant corner of the 'United Kingdom', the state had come off worse.

The *Sun* responded to the stoning story in a leader, 'Mob Rule', demanding that the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and Army simply 'return to Silverbridge today and arrest the whole pack of them'. The *Guardian* called the operation an 'important coup for the security forces'. These ridiculous attempts to show that the British authorities control South Armagh are contradicted by the story itself, which

suggests the precise opposite—that this part of the 'UK' is Irish soil, inhabited by people who do not recognise the rule of British law. Many readers of British newspapers may have been shocked by a story of ordinary people defending IRA suspects. But for the locals, the surprising thing would have been that the British occupation forces had come out of their bunkers and tried to arrest anybody.

South Armagh—'bandit country'—has long been a dangerous and lonely place for the British security forces. But recently this fear and isolation has prompted changes in British security policy which have led some Irish commentators to conclude that South Armagh is 'being left to the charge of the IRA'. The *Irish Times* has commented upon these developments with alarm:

'British security policy in South Armagh has led to a marked reduction in deaths and injuries in recent years but only at the cost of allowing the IRA free run of parts of the countryside....The IRA has found it almost impossible to strike at the

Who says South Armagh is British?

# In the bunker



British Army in recent years following a change in military policy in the area, which, in effect, removed British troops from the fields and roads where they were being killed by the IRA.'

The afternoon before we arrived in South Armagh the IRA had staged its own foot patrol in the tiny village of Cullyhanna, a few miles from Crossmaglen. The *Irish News* called it a 'mysterious IRA show of strength' and described '10 masked Provos in full battle dress carrying a assortment of weapons including rifles and machine guns as well as a rocket launcher'. Far from being terrorised, however, locals were



relieved to discover that the checkpoint had been set up by the IRA rather than the British Army. 'As soon as the word spread that the Provos were out', said one woman, 'everyone came to their doors and watched'.

This IRA 'show of strength' may have mystified the *Irish News* journalist who observed that 'the fact that there was no media presence usually associated with such propaganda displays added to the mystery'; but it was no mystery to the residents of Cullyhanna. They understood that it was intended to attract the attention of the British Army, not the BBC. Drawing out the TV cameras would be relatively easy, but drawing out the military in South Armagh has become harder and harder over the last two years—good for British casualty figures but increasingly frustrating for the IRA.

The Army's effective retreat into the bunker is the latest attempt to

Armagh, cut off from its natural neighbours by the artificial British-built Border, it is obvious that the issue at stake in the conflict is not religion or terrorism but the division of Ireland.

## Flying from fear

Over the years the British authorities have had to take extraordinary measures to cope with the hostile environment of South Armagh. They reviewed security policy in the area in the late seventies, hoping to reduce high casualty figures by abandoning the perilous roads of 'bandit country' and taking to the air. Troops travelled everywhere by helicopter, foot patrols and roadblocks being airlifted into the countryside. But casualties remained high, the IRA's superior knowledge of the land and links with the community giving it the upper hand, and in 1985 Britain again reviewed its military policy in the area. The Anglo-Irish agreement of that year, hailed as a major step towards peaceful progress in Ireland, marked a new and sinister phase of British occupation for the people of South Armagh.

Within months of the signing of the Hillsborough accord, a chain of military outposts, now known as the Hillsborough Wall, was erected on the hilltops of the area. With their hi-tech monitors, surveillance equipment and infra-red cameras, the British forces could now watch every move of this hostile community while avoiding the dangers of normal contact with them.

## 'Unapproved' Border

A slight change in the colour of the tarmac and the Irish tricolour flying just inside 'British territory' mark one of the illegal Border crossings between South Armagh and the Republic of Ireland. Few people use the authorised Border crossing. All ignore the 'unapproved road' signs put up by the British, who lost that particular battle early on in the war when their attempts to blow up and block these Border crossings were foiled by locals who came out with picks and shovels and tractors to repair them.

Republican South Armagh is a rectangular shape; from Newry West to Crossmaglen is about 20 miles long and 10 miles wide. On each corner sits a major Army base and in between, standing ugly and intrusive on the horizon, the military outposts encircle this wild countryside. Jim McAllister, elected Sinn Fein councillor for Crossmaglen, acted as our guide. He is dubious about the advantages of being one of the least harassed Sinn Fein activists in Northern Ireland. A few years ago he was occasionally stopped by patrols that had been airlifted into the

country lanes around Crossmaglen, but now he rarely encounters the occupying forces in person. 'It's different now, we have less contact with them but they're watching us from every angle, noting down our movements 24 hours a day—they can even see into our homes. It's a more psychological harassment. If you thought about them watching you as you go to bed, as you get up, you could crack up. George Orwell's biggest nightmare's got nothing on this. But then again no matter how closely they watch us there are people watching them even closer.'

Surrounded by reinforced steel, equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance gear, armed with advanced weapon systems, the British forces are still vulnerable. The outposts are often attacked, one in a spot called Glassdrummond has been attacked 20 times since it was erected four years ago; the smaller post built lower down the hill to protect it was completely demolished by an IRA bomb, killing its three occupants—it hasn't been rebuilt.

## Flash, bang, wallop...

Rebuilding outposts and barracks after IRA attacks is a treacherous task, forcing the Army to use the dreaded country lanes of bandit country to transport heavy materials (one of the main roads it has to use is known to locals as 'bomb alley'). Last May a multi-million pound convoy bringing building materials into South Armagh was attacked five times despite a major security operation—one soldier was killed and several injured.

Soon after the first outposts were built, in May 1986, the local British garrison decided on a little propaganda exercise to demonstrate its control of South Armagh. Having got the all-clear from troops securing the area, Major Andrew French, commanding officer Second Battalion Royal Anglians, emerged from barracks along with two RUC officers and an official photographer. As the uniformed men climbed to the highest mound in a field to pose for photographs, an IRA bomb exploded underneath them, killing all three and delivering a forceful message about who controls South Armagh—but not one that reached the headlines.

Time and time again the IRA has broken through the reinforced British defences in South Armagh. Eighteen months ago Jim McAllister was arrested in a massive North-South security operation, during which the Border was sealed off, Southern Irish police and army raided 50 000 homes, and South Armagh was caught in a pincer. 'It was amazing', he remembers, 'there were Brits everywhere, Free State troops everywhere, the gardai and the RUC were running about, the skies were

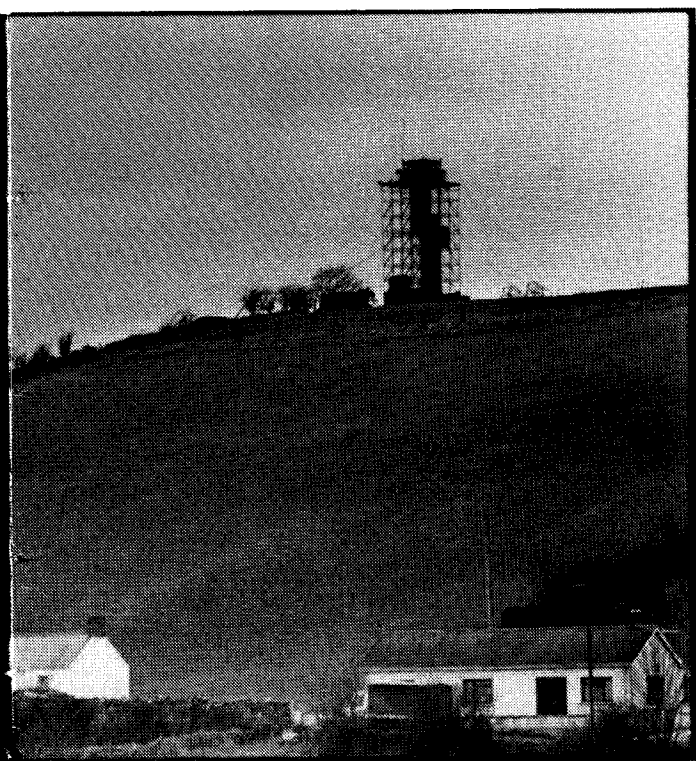


PHOTO: Joe Watson

**Country retreat: holed up in their fortified, hi-tech outposts on the hillsides, the army tracks local people's every move**

cope with the IRA stronghold of South Armagh. This is an area where the reality of the Irish War is clear cut. The familiar British claim that the IRA is just an unpopular handful of criminals does not stand up in a region dotted by memorials to fallen republicans, where the locals act as the eyes and ears of the IRA and refuse even to speak to the British troops. Nor can the British authorities claim that they are separating rival communities in South Armagh, since there is only one community in villages and towns like Silverbridge and Crossmaglen—the nationalist community, which views the British 'peacekeepers' as an army of occupation. In South

# liberation

crawling with helicopters'. In the middle of all this the IRA went into Glassdrummond and mortared a British Army platoon camped in a field, seriously injuring two soldiers. 'Even local people were amazed by that one', says McAllister, 'the fact that they'd managed to break through all that security'.

## Doing a foreigner

How do they do it? How have a handful of local IRA volunteers, often using makeshift weapons, made the world's most experienced counter-insurgency force fearful of setting foot in South Armagh? 'It all comes down to the fact that the Brits are foreigners here, they don't understand the area or the people', says McAllister. 'They aren't allowed to serve in these parts for more than three months at a go, which saves their sanity, but operationally it means they never get to grips with their enemy. And what you have to realise is that in this area almost everyone is their enemy.' If a local farmer found British soldiers dug into his field he would ensure the republicans got to know. 'He might vote SDLP or be completely apolitical but he'll feel he's doing the right thing letting them know. If the same farmer found the IRA dug into his field he wouldn't tell anyone, he'd feel kind of reassured.'

McAllister points to a recent attack on the Crossmaglen barracks as an example of how the IRA's links with the community allow it to strike the British forces even in their most secure bases. The operation last November involved a tractor driving into the town square at noon, parking up in front of the barracks ostensibly to allow its driver to visit the public toilet. Seconds later several mortars were launched from the back of the tractor, hitting the base and peeling the six-inch metal roof off 'like a sardine can'. The normal movements of that tractor were surely known to the British and the IRA, but only the latter is in the position to use such routines to its advantage.

The isolation and fear which have resulted in the British forces being virtually confined to barracks were revealed all too clearly in our own unsolicited exchange with them in Crossmaglen. The sharp contrast between the heavily fortified barracks on one corner of the market square and the open shopfront of the Sinn Fein office on the other makes clear to any visitor which one of them is on home ground. In the town square between the two buildings stands an impressive statue of a figure with the rising phoenix, dedicated in the words of Behan to 'all you praised and humble heroes who have willingly suffered in the cause of Irish

freedom'. Local people call it simply 'the man'; they paid for it to be erected as a mark of respect. British soldiers have often made marks of a different kind by paint-bombing the memorial.

Completely out of proportion to the town, Crossmaglen barracks is a twentieth-century castle posing as a village police station, a mountain of military green steel, barbed wire and iron bars topped by video cameras and a windsock for the helicopters. The barracks backs on to the Gaelic football ground, where people play with low expectations of having their ball returned should it accidentally be kicked over the fence.

## Neighbourhood Watch?

The windows of the barracks are narrow slits, through which they can see us without being seen. We looked for some kind of entrance. Difficult to distinguish, but it is there, defined by the oddly normal 'Police' sign and the recruitment poster to one side and the camera just above it. It seemed unlikely that many Crossmaglen people would visit their local police station to report a burglary or a missing pet.

As we stood taking photographs, there was a flurry of activity inside; flashes of Army uniform and the metallic green of gunbarrels were visible through the gaps, while the muffled sound of shouted orders escaped through the thick metal gates. Perhaps it was a training exercise; that would make a good picture. Then the gates were flung open and two RUC officers ran out followed by about a dozen armed soldiers, their guns pointed at us. They didn't look like they were training. Deciding we didn't want to be detained within frogmarching distance of the barracks door, we ignored their orders to stop until we had reached the town square.

## Hostile territory

Out in the open, the young soldiers were visibly scared. They squatted, shaking and nervous, while a breathless policeman questioned us. He suddenly realised he had come out without his gun—the equivalent of being naked for a policeman in Crossmaglen—and fell to the ground to be covered by a young squaddie. The RUC man repeatedly asked us to come into the barracks: 'Everything will be much quicker and easier if you'll just accompany us into the police station.' Our refusal irritated him, if we were just British journalists why hadn't we gone through the official channels to get permission to take photographs? We said we had intended to knock and ask but we couldn't find the door. He wasn't laughing. 'This is a very sensitive area. If the locals approached you for

these photographs they could fall into the wrong hands.'

Some of them searched our car while the others took up firing positions around the square. It was ironic to see squaddies crouched in the doorways of local people's homes and in the gateway of a primary school—using the community they occupy as a shield. By now we had attracted a local audience. One woman watching the soldiers from her doorway expressed what the others were no doubt thinking. 'Sometimes I even feel sorry for the eejits', she said, sounding more bitter than sorry: 'Imagine it, they can't buy a box of matches, a bottle of beer, no one would even sell them a newspaper. They're terrified to come out of there and when they get back in they must just sit there praying they don't get attacked. Jesus you'd wonder do they never ask themselves what in the hell are they doing over here.'

## SAM factor

All the supplies for the 200 soldiers at this base are helicoptered in—even their rubbish is airlifted out because local binmen refuse to touch it. Jim McAllister often quotes the response of Paddy Short, local publican (and uncle of Clare Short MP), when an American journalist asked him about local reaction to the occupying force. 'The Brits', said Short, 'you wouldn't even ignore them'. McAllister claims this is a common attitude; 'to ignore the Brits would be to recognise they exist, that they have a role to play here, they don't'. Unfortunately it's not always possible to pretend they don't exist, as evidenced by the British bullet wound in Paddy Short's leg.

Rumours that the IRA has acquired SAM—surface to air missiles—have caused some panic about a further threat to Britain's reorganised security arrangements. After all, the British military has already been forced to abandon the roads of South Armagh; if it was forced out of the air it would be impossible to maintain the pretence of control. The IRA has already brought down two helicopters without SAM. In response, helicopters in South Armagh have been fitted with machine guns, and taken to travelling Vietnam-style with five or six protecting each other.

We left South Armagh with the inevitable helicopter clattering overhead, so close you might have thought it was about to land on the car roof. 'Well, think of it this way', said Jim McAllister in a parting shot, 'you'll be able to say you succeeded where the Provos have failed, you drew them out of the barracks'.

'The Brits are the foreigners here, they don't understand the area or the people'

# The Nazis next door

**F**ifteen years ago the man who lived in the flat below mine took to pouring paraffin and petrol under my front door. His wife could be heard weeping, and remonstrating with him in English, against a torrent of drunken Lithuanian. Neither I, the Lithuanian's wife, nor my 19-year old boyfriend dared to call the police. As fracas followed fracas we became adept at relieving him of flammable liquids and talking him into a less murderous frame of mind. My boyfriend started doing his wife's hair, and I had calming little chats with him about modern history. Things improved. He stopped banging and shouting and threatening to burn us alive. We got to know him quite well. He had fled from the Soviet invasion of the Baltic states and had joined up with the German forces in 1941, eventually becoming a member of a special SS unit. With this unit, he had marauded across East Prussia, Lithuania, Latvia and Byelorussia settling scores with Russians, Poles, Jews, Gypsies and, of course, the 'fucking queers'.

We had our very own neighbourhood war criminal. But what were we to do? We kept him as sweet as we could, and moved house as quickly as possible. Not to worry. Nowadays we would be able to denounce him to the war crimes unit being set up under the jurisdiction of British courts. This is specifically designed to enable the courts to try people who fought for Britain's enemies between 1939 and 1945. In particular the British state has decided to drag some very old, and very unpleasant, men before the courts for carrying out the mass deportations and the mass executions ordered by the German colonial authorities in Eastern Europe.

Now, I am reasonably certain that this exercise in imperishable justice is not being carried out to protect gay couples from elderly Lithuanian arsonists. So why is it happening? Roy Hattersley has explained that prosecution of these old men is justified as a 'demonstration of revulsion' against the 'conscious and premeditated slaughter of people'. Home secretary David Waddington is making a

similar case: these old fascists did such terrible things that even the passage of nearly 50 years cannot permit them to go unpunished.

As it happens, I believe that these people should have been put up against a wall and shot long ago. Unaccountably, however, many slipped through the net. Hundreds, if not thousands, of hangmen and gunmen who policed Eastern Europe from 1941 to 1944 took refuge in Britain. The huffing and puffing of the Labour frontbench and home office officials is designed to convey the impression that they have only just discovered that Britain has been used as a safe haven by Hitler's slaughterhouse men for all these years. On all sides of the house of commons dismay and surprise has greeted the findings of a special government inquiry: 78 suspects are still alive, and there are a further 46 that they still want to trace. Something must be done!

It seems that any amount of hoo-ha is justified if it keeps the concept of *war crimes* alive. War crimes, we must remember, have only ever been carried out by the Germans, Russians and the Japanese, and mostly by the Germans. Even when they were carried out by Croats, Estonians or Ukrainians they were done on Nazi orders. Of course our chaps sometimes lost their tempers, sometimes behaved badly. But no British person ever committed a 'war crime'. To qualify as war crimes, atrocities must be sanctioned by German or Japanese imperialism. Gratuitous violence, mass imprisonment, war-induced famines and killings by the trainload do not count as war crimes if they are carried out on the orders of British (or American) governments and generals.

The massacres, rape, pillage and atrocities of previous wars are meant to have been entirely overshadowed by the modern 'war crime' committed by the enemies of Britain and, of course, of humanity. The war crime idea was a legal fiction essential for the creation of the idea of German responsibility for the war. In its turn, German guilt helped to conceal the real war aims of the British:

instead of slaughter on the grand scale in defence of imperial interests the war was fought on behalf of 'humanity' against the Germans who, for some unfathomable reason, were determined to commit 'crimes' against it.

Britain and America used the twin ideas of war crimes and German guilt to insist upon unconditional surrender; to occupy Germany and crush its working class by tarring millions of ordinary people with the same brush as their fascist rulers. War crime trials were used to promote hatred of the entire German people. However, by 1947-48 the attitude of the British Labour government was changing. Hating Germans became less important; promoting a fear of communism in general and Russians in particular took pride of place.

Within three years of the collapse of the Nazi state, Britain had lost interest in war crimes. The Labour government, ably assisted by Winston Churchill, decided that it was 'now necessary to dispose of the past as soon as possible'. The trials were brought rapidly to an end as the West turned on the Russians and the Red Menace. Consequently, former SS men and fascist policemen from the Baltic states and Byelorussia were admitted into Britain as 'displaced persons' and refugees. It was regarded as churlish, even unforgiving, to question, let alone punish, these demoralised killers. Meanwhile, the businessmen who had bankrolled Hitler were allowed to return to power in Germany, while former Nazi spies and scientists were recruited to help the West in the Cold War.

Today, things are different again. As Germany prepares to reunite and returns to its pre-eminent position in Europe, with the deutschmark becoming the Continental currency, the British authorities have moved swiftly to remind everybody of German guilt. Consequently, the war crime has made its reappearance. The ageing hangmen—captains of Europe's very own death squads—are now to be rooted out of obscurity in Glasgow and Bradford, Newcastle, Hammersmith and Leeds. In the hype that follows, their worthless lives will be paraded before the public; the newspapers and TV news will demand our indignation. The authorities will attempt to whip up our fury and our revulsion at man's inhumanity to man. Most particularly, the establishment will use the investigations and the trials to remind us of the crimes perpetrated by the Germans against the people of Europe.

In such circumstances I advise a balanced approach. The idea that Roy Hattersley or David Waddington could be the arbiter of what does, and what does not, constitute moral outrage is frankly ridiculous. Their sudden desire to prosecute six dozen fascists who have been living openly in Britain since 1950 has clearly got nothing to do with seeking justice for the victims of Nazism. It's just that they want us to hate Germany and the Germans, as well as Russia and the Russians. The message is: moral outrage must move with the times and with the needs of British imperialism.



'The politicians huff and puff to convey the impression that they have only just discovered that Britain has been used as a safe haven for Hitler's slaughterhouse men'

PHOTOS: Simon Norfolk



**Germany unites:** the West's chancellor Kohl is cheered at a Leipzig election rally  
**Romania divides:** tanks separate the Romanian and Hungarian parts of Tirgu Mures, Transylvania

# A British Moment in Eastern Europe

**A**s the checkpoint door swung shut behind me at Friedrichstrasse, I stepped into a country which was dying to escape from the past. Change could not come too quickly for people who had spent 40 years making a public pretence of loyalty to a system they despised and strove in their private lives to escape from. The following Sunday, in their first free elections in more than half a century, most East German workers voted for the Christian Democrats as the party promising the quickest exit to the future.

It was not difficult to see why people were so desperate to put the past behind them. The pasty, old-before-their-time faces of the East Germans and Poles who had queued beside me at Friedrichstrasse said it all. It was 5pm and many were returning home after another soul-destroying day at the Krempelmarkt near Potsdammer Platz on the Western side of the wall. Krempelmarkt means 'rubbish market' and that is literally what the East Germans and Poles are selling and the poor West Germans and immigrants are buying.

Hundreds come to sell their personal possessions and bits of junk for precious deutschmarks. They sit or stand in the mud and stagnant pools on a stretch of wasteland, their wares set out on plastic sheets: a pair of plastic shoes, wooden crucifixes, trashy jewellery, vile-smelling perfume, lightbulbs that don't work, homemade

## Deutschland: dying to escape the past

vodka, Polish army uniforms that have seen better days. One woman stood with arms outstretched, a pack of butter in either hand. An old man sat in the dirt with a tin of shoe polish, some door-handles and a pair of trousers. It was a desperate sight.

The Krempelmarkt captured the yawning gulf between East and West which will not be overcome by the legal act of reunification. The people of East Berlin were a week away from voting in an election which would seal the dissolution of the East German state. But the disjuncture between the politics of imminent reunification and the persistence of the old system was acute.

East Berlin was a city without a soul, existing in a state of limbo between the glitzy allure of the West and the overwhelming desolation of its Stalinist past. In the streets the splashes of red, blue and green on the election posters plastered on every wall stood out amid the uniform greyness of the crowds hurrying home from work to the sanctuary of their private lives. By 6.30pm the city was already closing down for the night, except for the throngs of men and women who lingered on Alexanderplatz, distributing election propaganda and talking politics.

Apart from the election campaign,

the only other evidence that change was afoot was the omnipresence of the deutschmark. Everywhere I went, oranges and bananas, Adidas trainers and Pepsi Cola, Roger Whittaker and Sydney Youngblood, Peugeotts and skateboards, were being sold at rip-off prices by West German traders, for deutschmarks of course. Sometimes the politicking and the Western packaging got mixed up. In Halle marketplace the day before the polls, the Christian Democrats were dispensing beer, sausage, propaganda and pop music.

But it was mostly business as usual. People were still turning up for work drunk at 7am. The Stalinist chiefs were still sitting behind their desks. The Stasi were still spying on people from their private flats. Women were still queuing for food. People were still tending their allotments every spare minute. The timetables still refused to bear any relationship to what was happening on the platforms. The phones still would not facilitate a call to West Germany.

### One issue: one Germany

Everywhere you felt the desire for change and the painful absence of it. It was this longing for the past to disappear that meant there was only one issue in the election: the speed of reunification. Everybody chose who to vote for according to the strength of their desire for change and the emphasis the parties were putting on the pace of reunification.

The working class wanted change most desperately, because it had suffered most under the old system. Workers voted overwhelmingly for the Christian Democrats because they were pushing for a speedy political merger and the immediate introduction of the deutschmark. 'The CDU is picking up support because it's saying "reunification now!"', explained a 40-year old factory worker, drinking beer and schnapps in a bar off Ho Chi Minh Strasse in East Berlin. 'And people want reunification now because they can see it offers the only possibility of escaping from the old system.'

Off the dual carriageway in the concrete jungle of Halle-Neustadt, CDU voters outnumbered supporters of the Social Democrats by at least four to one. Most people told us that they were voting for the party which would unify Germany fastest, as the only hope of raising living standards.

With events in the East

being used as evidence against

Marxism in the West, Joan Phillips crossed

Europe to give an alternative view of what

the demise of Stalinism

and arrival of

the market will mean

**Marxism  
in Europe**

## east and west

'The longer the whole process takes', said one engineering worker, 'the longer the communists and their filthy system will survive'.

Most workers expressed fears about factory closures, unemployment, rents and inflation when the market was introduced. Yet most still insisted that a quick union was the only way forward. 'People know there will be problems with the whole business', explained a postal worker. 'I fear for my job, my wife and my kids. But the way I see it, the CDU will make the suffering shorter. Better a short, sharp shock than a slow death.'

just GDR rubbish which has treated us like dirt.' Her hatred of the system was passionate. She said she'd never seen a banana until the wall came down. Her mother is too ill with arthritis and heart trouble to work, but the authorities keep telling her she has to. Her husband was already in West Germany and if things didn't change fast she would join him.

The Social Democrats certainly lost the votes of many workers as a result of their more cautious attitude towards reunification. The election rally at the Immanuelkirche in Prenzlauer Berg on my first night in East Berlin set the

Socialism, was interpreted by some left wingers in the West as a progressive vote for socialism. In reality, the PDS drew support from the most conservative sections of society. It projected an even slower approach to reunification and demanded the maintenance of the old social welfare system. Like the SPD, it warned against a policy of *Anschlöss* and appealed to East Germans to preserve something of the past.

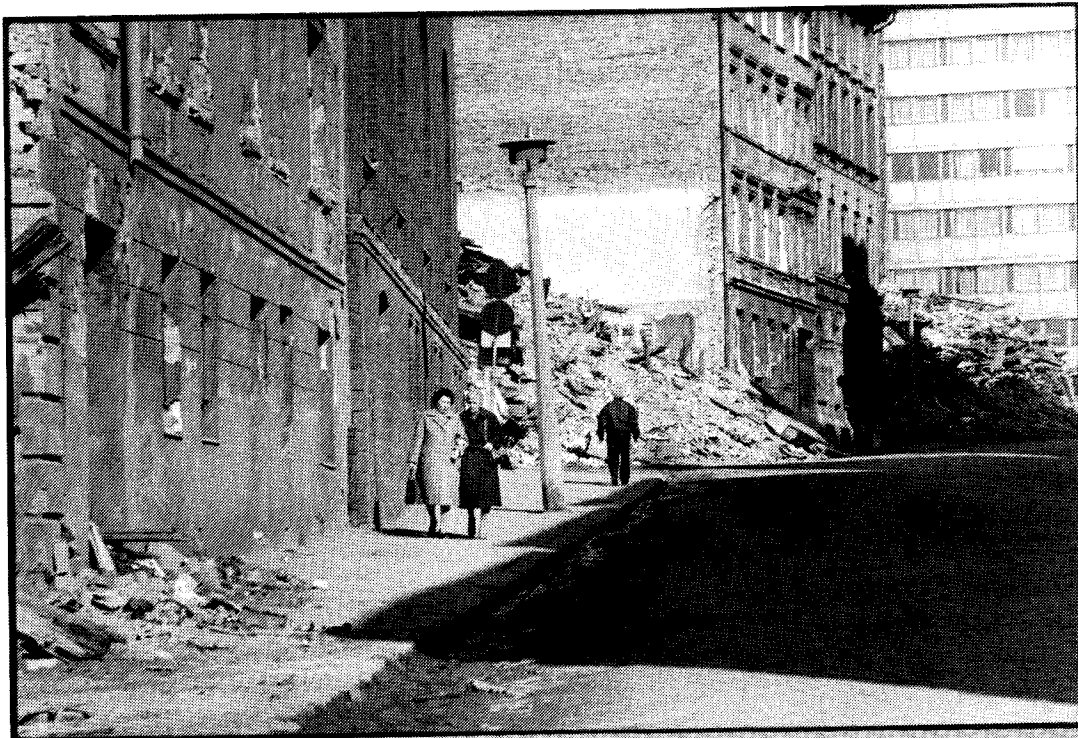
The PDS had an obvious constituency among the beneficiaries of the old system. Its biggest base was among the party officials and state bureaucrats of the old order. But it also picked up support from people who had never been in the party before, but who had enjoyed advantages under the old system. I met quite a few teachers who said they were voting for the communists because they had the best social welfare programme. These people had relatively good jobs and had never had to eat dirt like manual workers. The PDS also won votes from groups such as middle class students, who often articulated the strongest fears about reunification and came across as the most conservative section of society.

### 'Anschlöss now!'

Few working class people could comprehend why anybody would vote for the PDS. They accused the communists of running a dirty campaign by playing on fears about the future. In marked distinction to the students who yearned to hold on to something of the old society, workers wanted to escape from it as fast as possible. 'Why should we mourn the passing of the GDR: it gave us nothing but heartache.' And as for all the talk about a takeover or *Anschlöss*, this is what most workers wanted more than anything!

One of the most striking features of the election campaign was the absence of genuine excitement. Most workers just wanted the elections to be over so that the new government could get on with the really important business of reunification. Of course we met people on polling day who said it was one of the most exciting days of their lives. But most were disconcertingly unemotional about voting in the first free elections in their lifetimes: it was all right, it was nothing special, it was free election, that's all. But behind the studied indifference, it was possible to detect deep fears that nothing decisive was really changing. 'We are afraid the past will come back' said one woman outside the polling station at Klubhau der Gewerkschaften in Halle. After the elections the people of East Germany are still waiting impatiently for the future.

• Thanks to Thomas Ritter



These ruins in Halle, East Germany, would make suitable monuments to Stalinism—except for the fact that people still have to live in them

'My job will probably be one of the first to go', confessed a 22-year old shopworker. 'Instead of 30 people behind the counter, there will only be 10.' But she was still convinced that the benefits of reunification outweighed the disadvantages. A 24-year old canteen worker agreed. 'Of course I've got fears about what's going to happen after reunification, especially to the whole social welfare system for women and kids. But I know we can't go on like this any longer. People voting for the CDU are saying you've got to vote for the party of the capitalists.' Other workers also emphasised that they were voting for the CDU as the *Geldpartei*, the party of money.

Angriest of all was a working class woman in her thirties, who had obviously had as much as she could take. She told me she was voting for the CDU because it was the only party from the other side. 'Everything else is

tone for the whole campaign. Hans Jochen Vogel and Walter Momper both stressed their party's opposition to a Western buy-out of East Germany and emphasised the theme of reunification on equal terms, in a bid to key into the angst of ordinary people. They misjudged the mood of the majority: people were full of fears about the future, but they were even more fearful that things were not changing fast enough.

The SPD voters I spoke to tended to have better jobs and living standards than the majority of workers, and so felt they had more to lose as a result of reunification. They were afraid that things were happening too quickly. A 25-year old teacher from East Berlin was typical: 'Reunification is OK, but everything is going too fast and I think we're losing out.'

The substantial vote for the new face of Stalinism, the Party of Democratic

# Y

ou must have courage to go to Sighisoara now', said the softly spoken young man behind me in the ticket queue at Budapest's Nyugati railway station. Sighisoara, across the border in Romania, is the nearest stop to the Transylvanian city of Tirgu Mures, where tensions between Romanians and Hungarians had just exploded into bloodshed. The man was Oly, a Romanian who had cut short his holiday with his wife in Italy as soon as he heard about the conflict in Transylvania. 'We had to come back. The revolution was too beautiful for something so terrible to happen. We cannot understand it. We must go back to see for ourselves.'

### Vatra Romaneasca

Oly refused to believe that the trouble in Tirgu Mures had been instigated by local Romanians: 'The Romanians and Hungarians have lived together peacefully in Transylvania for a long time. I have many Hungarian friends. These people who did this cannot be Romanians from Transylvania. They must be from Moldavia or Wallachia, followers of Vatra Romaneasca [Romanian Hearth] or the Garda de Fier [Iron Guard], those fascists and revanchists. It is terrible what has happened.'

Terrible, but not really surprising. Under Ceausescu, the Romanian authorities had made chauvinism against Hungarians a central tenet of their corrupt brand of communist orthodoxy. The pogrom in Tirgu Mures was a stark reminder of the backwardness of the societies created by Stalinism. It struck me that it was also a graphic refutation of the notion being put about in the West that the countries of Eastern Europe have entered a new era of freedom, democracy and enlightenment. On the contrary, it seemed to me that in a backward country such as Romania, reactionary ideas and movements are likely to flourish as long as people's aspirations for far-reaching change and a better life remain unfulfilled.

I was very tired, but I didn't sleep a wink during the 11-hour journey to Sighisoara. The train was a bewildering riot of ethnic groups, stuffed into carriages and corridors without regard to national sensitivities. Romanians jostled with Hungarians, Saxons, Gypsies and Bulgarians en route for Sofia. A babble of ethnic tongues competed for mastery. In the carriage with me, there was Janos, a Hungarian going to visit his relatives in Transylvania and a Bulgarian couple travelling home to the Black Sea from their holidays in Bratislava. Just before we crossed the border into Romania, we were joined by two very poor peasant women from Transylvania, who had been visiting their cousins in Hungary for the first

The pogrom was a reminder of the backwardness of the societies created by Stalinism—and a refutation of the notion that Eastern Europe is now enjoying a new era of enlightenment

## Bloodshed in Dracula country

time in more than a decade.

Janos spoke good English. Like everybody else on the train, he had no idea what to expect in Romania, and being a Hungarian he was frightened. Paranoid that the couple sitting next to me might be Romanians, Janos kept slipping a few words of Romanian into our conversation and darting a look across the carriage to see if they registered. They didn't. He finally plucked up the courage to address them directly in Romanian. They shrugged their shoulders and apologised in Bulgarian. Janos heaved a sigh of relief: 'It's OK, they're not Romanian.' I noticed, however, that the Bulgarians were following our conversation closely; it later transpired that they understood English.

After this fraught beginning, the

major topic of conversation was the national problem in Central Europe and the Balkans: Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania; Slovaks and Hungarians in Slovakia; Bulgarians and Turks in Bulgaria; Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo; Germans and Poles in Poland, etc. etc. While the Bulgarians politely dismissed the notion that there was any problem with the Turks in their country, Janos had plenty to say about the conflict closer to home in Tirgu Mures. To him, the Romanians were a savage, uncultured race who could never live on the same level as the Hungarians. His belief was that now the Romanians had won their freedom, they didn't know what to do with it: 'If you give freedom to an uncivilised people, you turn them into animals.'

On this note, we stepped off the

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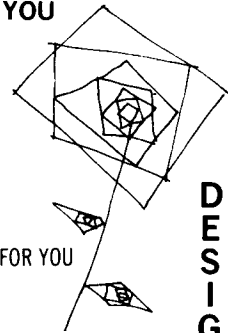
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# east and west

train into Sighisoara, a beautiful old town in the foothills of the Carpathians. Janos had three hours to wait for another train and we had a bus to catch. 'They had a war again this afternoon', said the Hungarian woman who sold us tickets to Tirgu Mures, 'not as bad as before, but still a war'. This only made Janos more nervous and me more impatient to get to Tirgu Mures. But we had an hour to kill before the bus left. Janos took us on a guided tour of the town.

The tension in the air was palpable. Sighisoara is predominantly Romanian, with Hungarians making up about 20 per cent of the population and Saxons and Gypsies adding to the ethnic mix. Janos led us to the ruins of the old Hungarian houses, torn down under Ceausescu's systematisation plan in 1989, pointing out Romanians under his breath as we walked and speaking a few words of greeting to the Hungarians we passed. Suddenly a dozen dark-skinned, wild-looking young men charged out of a doorway. The leader stopped three yards in front of us and stared with menace. 'Look at this guy', shuddered Janos, 'how loaded with hate he is. He is so vile, so full of hate, like gasoline'. I began to wonder whether I should have stayed on the train. They ran off and Janos told me where these hill people were from. I made a mental note never to go mountain-climbing in Moldavia.

## 'I feel the fire'

We passed two old Hungarian women talking in the street. Janos picked up their remarks: 'I can die here like a dog and nobody would care.' If this was the normal topic of conversation in the streets of Sighisoara, what would they be saying in Tirgu Mures? As we walked along most Romanians threw us glancing looks. It was probably because I was a Westerner, but Janos was convinced they were all staring daggers at him because he was a Hungarian. As the time approached for us to catch our bus, he became more and more agitated about spending another two hours alone in the town: 'As I walk along, I feel the fire in some people and I feel a little bit afraid. They all have guilt written on their faces. When you go I will try to hide myself until it's time to catch my train.'

As our bus left Sighisoara, a Red Cross team was loading medical supplies into a van; maybe there had been more fighting that afternoon. An hour and a half and a few fights among Gypsies later, the bus arrived on the outskirts of Tirgu Mures. Tanks guarded the road into the city and armed soldiers boarded the bus to check ID. We half expected to be turned back; but in the darkness at the back of the bus, the young soldier didn't even seem to notice us or our British passports. We had made it.

As we walked through the dark streets we heard the roar of a crowd and ran in the direction it came from. We passed the Grand Hotel, grand no longer after being wrecked by the mobs on the night of fighting. Beyond the soldiers guarding the entrance, several thousand Romanians were assembled in the Square of Roses, hemmed in by tanks, more soldiers and police. The chants of the crowd went on late into the night: 'We fight, we die, but we won't give in to the Hungarians.' At this point we had little idea of what was really going on; but nor, it seemed, did anybody else. Tirgu Mures was a town in the grip of rumours, lies, hysteria and fear. The report of 'another war this afternoon' which we had heard from the woman at the bus station in Sighisoara turned out to be just another scare story.

In the bright Saturday morning sunshine, Tirgu Mures looked as pretty as the pictures on the postcard I sent home and as normal as any town could be in Transylvania. It happened a few times before I realised that every tenth person passing me in the street had a bandage on their head or hand, a patch over an eye, a plaster cast on their arm or a pair of crutches. Women as well as men, old and young. Not so normal after all, this town with nowhere to sit down; the mobs had ripped all the public benches to pieces and battered Hungarians with the heavy wooden seats.

Now expert at spotting the difference, I noticed that there was not one Hungarian on the streets of the city centre. The Romanians were already out in force in the square in front of the town hall. So too were the lines of young conscript soldiers, laughing as middle-aged Romanian women thrust bags of apples, packets of cigarettes and bottles of fruit juice into their arms. Their officers didn't seem to mind them smoking, drinking and fooling around with the younger women who were always hanging about.

A visit to the hospital confirmed that all was not well in Tirgu Mures. There were soldiers on every entrance and exit, stopping everybody going in and especially the foreign press. Only close relatives of the wounded were being allowed in and only after they had surrendered their passports. A foul-mouthed army officer told us what to do with our press credentials. Nobody would confirm how many had been killed and injured in the fighting. The Red Cross man tried to be helpful, but could only quote the official figures of six dead and 300-plus injured.

The Romanians who were demonstrating in the square said the official figures were lies. '*Unde sint disparutii?*' demanded their placards: 'Where are our disappeared?': '*Vrem adevarul despre morti!*': 'We want the truth about our dead!' The protesters

told me that up to 200 people from the Romanian villages of Hodac and Ibanesti had been missing since Tuesday: they had convinced themselves that they had been ambushed and killed by the Hungarians. Three orthodox priests were trying to calm the crowd, but their voices were drowned out by the chants of 'Down with [president] Iliescu'; 'Iliescu is another Ceausescu'; 'Traitors of our country get out'; and 'Why doesn't the television tell the truth!'. The truth the Romanians wanted broadcast was an entirely partisan interpretation of the conflict earlier in the week.

Almost every Romanian blamed the Hungarians for provoking the confrontation. 'They say they want Hungarian this, Hungarian that, Hungarian everything', exclaimed 23-year old Marius, referring to Hungarian demands for the restoration of ethnic and cultural rights denied to them under the Ceausescu dictatorship. In Tirgu Mures, a city of 200 000 divided roughly equally between Hungarians and Romanians, the

'Where are our  
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Romanians enraged  
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Hungarians want the right to be taught in their own language; the return of their old schools and universities; street names in both languages; more representation on official bodies; and more local control over their affairs.

### Unreasonable rights?

'All our demands are for equal rights', a young Hungarian student told me. 'But the Romanians present them as a demand for separation. Ceausescu accused us of wanting to return Transylvania to Hungary. Now the National Salvation Front is saying the same thing.' None of the Hungarians I spoke to was interested in the idea of an autonomous Transylvania, let alone reincorporation into Hungary. 'Hungarian demands are very modest', insisted Csaba. 'Under Ceausescu, first they changed the street names; then they got rid of the Hungarian universities; next they started on the schools, making everybody speak in Romanian even with classes of 25 Hungarians and five Romanians. All we're asking for is to be treated equally.'

The Romanians thought these requests were unreasonable. 'The Hungarians are asking for too much', declared Catalin. 'Even under Ceausescu they had their rights; they had their own schools and libraries and separate sections in the schools.' Hdiko Badescu, a local teacher of mixed parentage, was also adamant that the Hungarians were asking for rights which they already had. The Romanians were responding to the Hungarian demands by spreading wild rumours. It was not difficult to see how ethnic tensions had built up and exploded in Tirgu Mures.

In an atmosphere of growing animosity kindled by the demands of the ethnic Hungarians for equal rights, thousands of Hungarians travelled to Transylvania on 15 March for the first open celebrations of the 1848 revolution in 40 years. In Satu Mare they incensed the Romanian community by raising the Hungarian flag in the cemetery, while in Tirgu Mures they hoisted the flag over the library. They placed flowers in their national colours on statues of the

Hungarian heroes of 1848, and wore the flag on their breast pockets. 'Romanians didn't know whether they were from Transylvania or Hungary', said a young Romanian woman Emilia. 'These people antagonised many Romanians and then they went home and left the problem behind in Transylvania.'

The following day, the first serious incident occurred in Tirgu Mures. A Hungarian woman refused to serve a Romanian man in a chemist shop in a working class area. The heated row drew a big crowd. Two girls unfurled a sheet from some flats opposite, demanding Hungarian-only schools. Romanians ran up and wrecked their flat and their neighbour's before the police arrived. The Romanians made their way to the town centre, where a Trabant car careered into the crowd, injuring 14 people. The man driving the car was drunk, but he was a Hungarian and that was enough to convince the crowd that it was a calculated attack. They marched through the city centre shouting anti-Hungarian slogans.

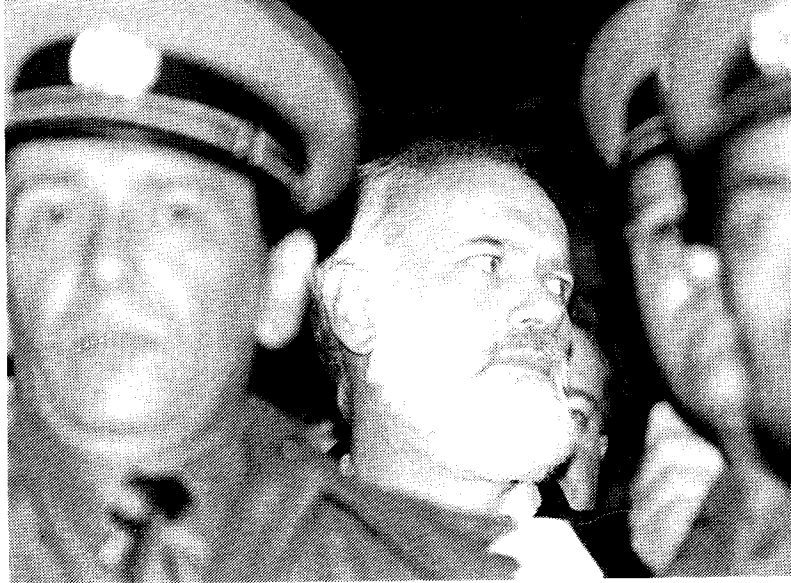


## east and west

On the Saturday and Sunday the city was relatively quiet. But on Monday, thousands of Romanians gathered in front of the town hall to demand the dismissal of Hungarian leaders from the district council. In the afternoon they marched to the offices of the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania and laid siege to them for five hours. More Romanians arrived by bus armed with axes and pitchforks, wrecked the building and attacked the people inside. The Hungarian poet Andras Suto suffered broken ribs and lost his left eye in the carnage. Augustin, one of the few Romanians I met who sided with the Hungarians, told me he would never forget seeing a big, 50-year old peasant woman walking round with an axe over her shoulder.

The next day, thousands of Romanians and Hungarians confronted each other in the main square. All day the tension grew as more and more people joined the stand-off. At about 6.15pm, busloads of Romanian peasants from Hodac, Ibanesti and Ideci arrived in the square and attacked the Hungarians with axes, meat cleavers and pitchforks. Battles spread through the surrounding streets. A truck full of Romanians went out of control, hurtled up the steps to the church and cut through the Hungarians. The driver died in

**RIGHT: Surrounded by generals, deputy premier Gelu Voican addresses the angry crowd (below): the National Salvation Front's failure to offer people anything more than rhetoric and tanks has fuelled the frustrations which erupted in Transylvania**



hospital. Then the tanks arrived but the fighting continued into the early hours. Other weapons appeared: catapults with ball-bearings and Molotov cocktails. Restaurant tables and chairs were used to build a barricade. In the morning the streets were strewn with bloody shirts, shoes, spectacles and a carpet of broken glass. 'Vatra Romaneasca' was smeared on the walls in blood.

Without some grasp of the history of the region it is impossible to make sense of the intensity of nationalist feeling in Transylvania. The question of who arrived in Transylvania first is a subject of violent dispute and a good few jokes among Romanians and Hungarians. What is not in dispute is the history of oppression as power passed backwards and forwards between Hungarian and Romanian rulers.

### Old scores

In the seventeenth century, Transylvania became the centre of Hungarian culture and humanism. Romanians were treated as serfs and their culture was suppressed. In 1848, the Hungarians offered to liberate the Romanians in Transylvania if they would help Hungary fight Austria. Instead, they helped Austria conquer the new liberal Hungarian state. The Austrian authorities made the Romanians the privileged elite of Transylvania, until Austria and Hungary established a dual monarchy in 1867. For 51 years until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, the Hungarians lorded over the Romanians in Transylvania.

After the First World War, the Romanians of Transylvania demanded union with the new Romanian state next door. Romania responded by annexing Transylvania. The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 handed the disputed territory to Romania despite its historical relationship with Hungary. Now it was time for the Romanians to oppress the Hungarians.

With such a past, it is hardly surprising that nationalist enmities still rage in a place like Tirgu Mures. But ethnic conflict is not simply a matter of

ancient history. Under the Stalinist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian authorities nurtured nationalist hatred for the two million-strong ethnic Hungarian minority in Transylvania. In order to dilute the Hungarian presence in the region, Ceausescu carried out a forced resettlement programme which uprooted thousands of orthodox Romanians from Moldavia and Wallachia and brought them into Transylvania.

### The Front backtracks

At the same time, Ceausescu set about the forced assimilation of the ethnic Hungarians into the Romanian way of life. The slow suffocation of Hungarian centres of learning began with the closure of the Hungarian university in Cluj in 1959. Soon all Hungarian schools were closed, Hungarian publications were banned and radio stations taken off the airwaves. Ceausescu started by taking down Hungarian street names and he finished by bulldozing Hungarian houses and villages. In December 1989 the grievances of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania erupted into street protests in Timisoara. That was the spark which ignited the flames of revolt across Romania and toppled Ceausescu.

Immediately after the overthrow of the dictator, the National Salvation Front promised that the rights of minorities would be guaranteed in a new constitution. The new provisional government vowed to establish a ministry for ethnic minorities and offered Hungarians separate schools and greater freedom to practise their language and culture. Three months later, the Hungarians of Tirgu Mures were clubbed off the streets for demanding equal rights.

How did it happen? I remembered Oly's words: 'The revolution was too beautiful for something so terrible to happen.' For millions of Romanians, the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime raised expectations that everything would change. People put their faith in the new government of the National Salvation Front. They were to be



cruelly disappointed. The clique of old Stalinists who dominated the Front and seized power on the back of the popular revolt have proved incapable of fulfilling people's aspirations for a new Romania. Since December there has been no significant change in the lives of ordinary people: they are still working in appalling conditions for starvation wages; still queuing interminably for scarce food; still struggling to survive. The government of Ion Iliescu is imitating its predecessor, desperately clinging to power by monopolising the media, mobilising the army, suppressing its opponents and fixing elections. For most people, the future seems even less certain than it was under Ceausescu.

In the climate of insecurity generated by the machinations of the Front, even the most elementary demands of the Hungarians were perceived as a threat by many Romanians. Extremist nationalist organisations such as Vatra Romaneasca have played on these fears and insecurities and whipped up a pogrom atmosphere against Hungarians. Formed in Tirgu Mures on 1 February, Vatra Romaneasca has gained a wide following by articulating the anxieties of new Romanian settlers in Transylvania and of impoverished workers and peasants. The day after

the attack on the HQ of the Hungarian Democratic Union, crowds were queuing to join Vatra. Its president Dr Silviu Olariu has accused the Hungarians of 'indecent haste in seeking not their natural rights, but their old privileges'.

Afraid of being outflanked by nationalist outfits like Vatra, the Front retreated from its commitments to the Hungarians. The government shelved the idea of a ministry for ethnic minorities and pleaded a shortage of funds in order to delay educational reforms until September 1990. In early March, the Front refused to allow Hungarian textbooks into the country for use in Transylvania. When its policies sparked the pogrom, the Front sought to ride the tide of nationalist fervour in the country by accusing the Hungarian government of instigating the violence.

Tirgu Mures became a battleground between ethnic Hungarians fighting for their rights and Romanians spurred to nationalist excesses out of fear for the future. The ferocious battles that erupted there have left deep divisions between the two communities which will remain long after the tanks which split the city in two have gone. When the city institutions opened again on the Monday after the fighting, 450 mixed couples applied for a divorce under pressure from their families. Hungarians are evicting Romanians from their houses and vice versa. Romanian students and teachers are refusing to sit in the same classroom as Hungarians. Hundreds of Hungarians are packing their bags and leaving for Budapest. The Hungarians who are left behind face a grim future.

This month, Romanians are due to go to the polls in a country where little has changed. In the next issue of *Living Marxism*, Joan Phillips reports on **Romania: the revolution that never was**. In the shops 31 May

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# east and west

Can the market save  
Eastern Europe?

Alan Harding

# No second Spring

disputes claims that the return of the  
market economy will mean another  
1848-style 'springtime of nations and peoples'

in Eastern Europe

**A**fter any major upheaval the commentators and the experts search for events by which to measure them. The chosen yardstick for the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe has been 1848, 'the year of revolutions'. In the spring of that year Prague, Berlin, Budapest, Warsaw, indeed most European cities, experienced popular uprisings. Even in Britain there was a general strike. The analogy between 1848 and 1989-90 has been pressed into service to associate the collapse of Stalinism with what became known as the springtime of nations and peoples.

The banners and barricades of 1848 proclaimed the causes of liberty, democracy and nationhood against the ancien regimes of absolute monarchy and empire. In the contemporary version Stalinism is the bad guy, and enthusiasts now look forward to the creation of what was sought 142 years ago—stable, prosperous capitalist democracies in Eastern Europe.

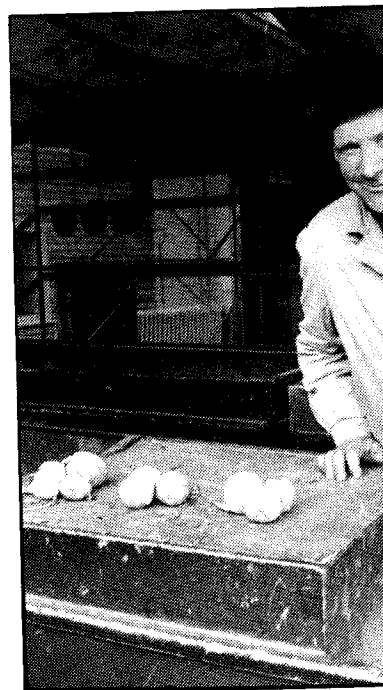
## Historic failures

Legitimate comparisons can be made between 1848 and 1990 but the establishment of benign and rich regimes is not one of them. The salient fact about the 1848 revolutions is that they all failed. Certainly they were revolutions, which brought about more fundamental changes than have so far been achieved this time around. Even so, in 1848 the revolutionary students and intellectuals in central and eastern Europe failed to establish independent and unified nation states which could provide a secure home market for capitalist development.

This failure is the benchmark for the historic weakness of capitalism in eastern Europe.

Indeed, the real value of comparisons with 1848 lies in indicating the difficulties of creating stable capitalist democracies in Eastern Europe. It proved impossible when capitalism was an expanding, dynamic and self-confident system in the middle of the last century. This says a lot for the chances 150 years later when the world capitalist system is in a state of weakness, its rulers are fearful of the future, and the economies of Eastern Europe have been further devastated by the experience of Stalinism.

There is no bottomless reservoir of



**RIGHT: Capitalists are quite keen to get into industrialised East Germany (bottom); but they are hardly rushing into Romania, where 10 vegetables make a market**



capital on tap for Eastern Europe. Investment will only be diverted from elsewhere if capital can make a short-term profit. This means that Western money will be available to regenerate more attractive sectors, such as East Germany and parts of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but that large swathes of territory, especially in Bulgaria, Romania and Poland are likely to become an even bleaker economic wasteland.

## Modern-like Turkey?

For much of the region, democracy could well remain more of a slogan than a reality. The recent experience of Turkey indicates the price that a relatively impoverished country may have to pay for modernisation today. Turkey has enjoyed economic growth and integration into a wider European sphere, while suffering under a military dictatorship which seeks to attract foreign investment by hammering the working class and all political opposition.

To understand the contemporary problems which capitalism faces in its bid to reconquer Eastern Europe, it is worth looking at its historic failure there. Western intellectuals have been pleased to note that, as in 1848, students and the intelligentsia have played a disproportionate role in recent events. Thus, like 1848, 1989 was 'a revolution of ideas'. The problem is that this was the weakness of the nineteenth-century revolutions.

## Ideas are not enough

The students, state officials, and professional classes who made up the revolutionary national assemblies of 1848 were inspired by the ideas of the great French Revolution. As the French had demonstrated in 1789, however, revolutions are made not by ideas alone, but by movements in society giving forceful expression to those thoughts. The revolutionaries of 1848 wished to emulate their forebears of 1789 for more practical reasons than simply a shared philosophical approach.

Their orientation was liberal, democratic and national because they were the representatives of a bourgeois class seeking to wrest power from archaic absolute monarchies, which ruled over backward and divided realms. To develop capitalist economies, the new bourgeoisie needed to consolidate a homogeneous nation state within which the free movement of labour, the free and equal exchange of commodities and the rule of law could be assured. These hard-headed concerns found reflection in their demands for national self-determination, freedom and justice.

There was, however, a crucial difference from 1789; in 1848, the bourgeoisie in eastern Europe

proved too weak to carry through its national revolutions and lay the foundations of capitalist success. The ideas proved of limited use without the power to put them into practice.

## National revolutions

Historically, capitalists have been able to establish their own class power in a relatively stable fashion only in the handful of nations which became the great economic powers. The English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, and the American and French revolutions at the end of the eighteenth, each brought the respective national bourgeoisies to power. Although their circumstances differed considerably, the new ruling classes all set about creating integrated states with a national identity, sweeping away the autocratic structures and parochial customs of the old order.

Even in France, however, the state lacked the economic power to sustain stability. Since the 1789 revolution France has had five republics, two empires and two royal restorations, testimony to the bourgeoisie's difficulty in organising its class rule. In 1848, a new republican government had barely been set up in Paris before it took fright at popular demands for guaranteed work and wages and turned its guns on the revolution's proletarian supporters; 60 000 were slaughtered in the July days.

Just half a century on from the Declaration of the Rights of Man the bourgeoisie had ceased to be a revolutionary class and embraced reaction. This happened in France, spiritual home of the Continental revolutionaries; further east, where the bourgeoisie was far weaker in 1848, the capitulation was even more abrupt.

## Peasant politics

Throughout central and eastern Europe the fledgling bourgeoisie was so weak economically, and so frightened of the potential power of the masses, that it could not even carry out the basic agrarian reform which had won the support of the French peasantry and sustained the 1789 revolution. So the Slav peasantry continued to perceive its enemy not as the absolute monarchs in faraway Petersburg or Vienna, but as the German, Hungarian and Polish landlords whose exactions were a daily reality. As a consequence the peasants—the majority of the population in eastern Europe—failed to identify with the national democratic revolutions of 1848, and remained preoccupied with narrow parochial affairs.

Support for carving out a German, Hungarian or Czech national territory was concentrated among the

bourgeois intelligentsia in the major cities. Their attempt foundered, not because of an alternative sense of national identity in Transylvania or Slovakia, but on the social question of land ownership. For the urban bourgeoisie of central and eastern Europe, the creation of independent nation states was a passport to capitalist development. But nationhood was meaningless to a peasant tied to the land by feudal exaction and brutalised by unchanging hardship. To him, a foreigner was any stranger in the village—especially if they did not share his religious traditions.

In the east the failure of the bourgeoisie to make effective nation states and to solve the land question froze ethnic and all other social relations within the historic boundaries of polyglot empires, such as the Hapsburg dominions centred on Vienna. This patchwork of territories (when the Austrian army mobilised in 1914 the order was given in 15 languages) stretched from Galacia in the north to the Greek frontier in the south; from Austria itself and Bohemia in the west to Transylvania and Moravia in the east.

## Balkan cockpit

The Hapsburg empire was a vast, rambling territory without the economic dynamism to cohere itself. Instead, it was held together tenuously by an allegiance to the dynasty, which was felt strongly only by the regime's own bureaucracy. Within the frontiers the antagonistic claims of different social groups frequently took the form of ethnic divisions. Thus the old hatreds and conflicts between communities, which more developed capitalist states had suppressed within a national identity, remained very much alive among the Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenians, Slovenes and many other peoples in the territories of central and eastern Europe.

Sandwiched between Germany and Russia, these territories—especially the Balkans—became the cockpit of rivalries among the great powers. Indeed it was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by a Serbian nationalist in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo in July 1914 which proved the final catalyst for the First World War between the empires.

Before, during and after the First World War the Western powers brought ruin to the peoples of eastern Europe. Through the Versailles settlement of 1919, the victorious powers of Britain, France and America rewrote the map of Europe. They paid lip-service to the principle of self-determination but drew borders, created small states and

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



PHOTO: Saatchi & Saatchi

# east and west

prompted new conflicts in accordance with no other principle than their own self-interest.

'Official governmental, national, civilised, bourgeois Europe—as it has issued from the war and the Versailles Peace—resembles an insane asylum. Artificially split-up little states, whose economy is choking to death within their borders, snarl at one another, and wage wars over harbours, provinces and insignificant towns. They seek the protection of larger states whose antagonisms are likewise increasing day by day.' (Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol 1, pp 121-2, 1945 edition)

So Trotsky summarised the fate of the newly created states of eastern Europe at the time. The indigenous bourgeoisie had proved incapable of meeting even the most primitive aspirations of the people. It aspired to many that only an anti-capitalist revolution offered them the prospect of freedom. That hope was crushed by the intervention of the imperialist powers against revolutionary Russia and the soviet organisations which identified with the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917.

The Budapest soviet government, established in 1919, was drowned in blood. With Anglo-French gold, Poland and Czechoslovakia aided the counter-revolutionary Whites in the civil war within the Soviet Union itself, while more than 150 000 British, French, American and other Western troops landed on Soviet soil. The wars of intervention caused terrible destruction, playing a major part in undermining the revolutionary regime and facilitating the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The revolutionary movement was held in check in eastern Europe only with the intervention of the imperialist powers. Within the region, capitalism remained a chronically sick system which could only survive by enforcing the most brutal and repressive regimes. In June 1923 a military dictatorship was established in Bulgaria. Dictatorship came to Lithuania in December 1926. The Balkans were rounded off by a monarchist coup in Yugoslavia in January 1929, and another in Romania in February 1930. In Poland Marshal Pilsudski executed a military putsch, and after a long period of reaction a thoroughgoing fascist regime was established in Hungary by the mid-thirties. Czechoslovakia was the single democratic exception (although even there, the Slovaks were forcibly integrated on a subordinate basis, the nearest they got to exercising their constitutional right to autonomy

being the insertion of a hyphen in Czecho-slovakia). The state's reward for trying to adopt Western values was to be sacrificed at Munich in 1938.

The poverty and repression of the inter-war years were followed by the Second World War, when German imperialism used the whole of eastern Europe as a colony. Forced labour, concentration camps, and extermination as a state policy accounted for millions.

As the fortunes of war swung against Germany, the advancing Red Army was seen as a liberator. National Communist parties had often played a leading role in the anti-Nazi resistance and were well placed to take advantage of widespread social unrest. Economic devastation and fascist terror were the twin legacies of capitalism which people were anxious to put behind them.

## Ripe for revolution

The expansion of Stalinism into eastern Europe in the forties lent a temporary image of dynamism to that stagnant system. The key point to grasp, however, is that the creation of pro-Soviet regimes had nothing to do with any strength of Stalinism; it reflected instead the historic weakness of capitalism in eastern Europe. The fact that the Stalinists were able to take power and later to overthrow the market economy demonstrated that the region was ripe for anti-capitalist revolution. In the absence of any movement that could take advantage of these circumstances, the Stalinists reaped the benefits.

The combination of inefficient command economics and repression (often by secret policemen who were ex-fascists) ensured that the Stalinist regimes were quickly discredited and became the objects of popular hatred. Today the post-war process is being reversed; where once the discrediting of capitalism created space for a Stalinist model, now the failure of 'actually existing socialism' is allowing the market to regain control. But as the unhappy history of capitalism in central and eastern Europe suggests, this is unlikely to bring much relief to the peoples of the region.

The market is now being reintroduced across most of Eastern Europe, encouraged by new governments and old Stalinist officials alike. It is creating an anarchic carpet-bagger economy, full of black markets, beggars and corruption. The hustlers and sharp operators are arriving from around the world, while former 'Communist' bureaucrats seek to privatise their enterprises and convert themselves into capitalists.

Western financiers will not be constructing hi-tech factories in Bulgaria or putting motorways into the Carpathian mountains. But capital, especially of the German variety, will wish to integrate the skilled labour, large markets, energy resources and infrastructural capacity of key areas. East Germany is a special case where penetration from the West is already well advanced, but the area of Bohemia around Prague and parts of Hungary will also be part of this economic development.

Yet there is no guarantee of success and prosperity, and all investment will be constrained by wider developments in the world economy. It is unlikely that dreams of a social market economy with a pluralist democracy will be fulfilled. Instead, in the short term, much of Eastern Europe looks set for a capitalism red in tooth and claw, in which the shock troops of the enterprise culture go in for a quick and big killing. A recent headline in the *Washington Post* described the initial impact of the Solidarity government's pro-market reforms: 'Capitalism off with a bang in Poland: prices soar, wages plummet, lay-offs loom.' The results of elections in East Germany and Hungary illustrate how the social democrats are being steamrollered in the rush to take the fast track away from Stalinism.

## Carnival of reaction

Far from overcoming the historic backwardness of the region, the reintroduction of the market is accentuating social divisions. The bitter ethnic conflicts and reactionary sentiments which 1848 failed to deal with have never been overcome, but were temporarily submerged by a common fear and loathing of the Stalinist regimes. Now they will be unchecked. Hungarian-Romanian conflict in Transylvania, anti-Polish chauvinism in the eastern marches of Germany, and anti-Semitism everywhere are the order of the day.

The reactionary garbage which was the result of the failed social movements of 1848 has returned to plague the peoples of eastern Europe. Intellectuals east and west may believe that social crisis can be resolved with a few emollient words about human dignity and the soul of the people. But there is nothing dignified about soup kitchens and bare feet. The re-emergence of cut-price monarchs, aged leaders of peasant parties, and the atmosphere of the pogrom testify to the failure of first capitalism and then Stalinism to produce the material conditions necessary to liberate humanity from all the old crap.

The creation of pro-Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe reflected the weakness of capitalism, not the strength of Stalinism

# Capitalists in the Kremlin?

Rob Knight on why Gorbachev  
is gambling all  
on the market

**M**ikhail Gorbachev's success in having himself made state president marks the beginning of a new drive to transform the Soviet Union into a capitalist country. Gorbachev is gambling that as the president elected by the supreme soviet, he will have more legitimacy than as general secretary of the Communist Party. He will now, by his own reckoning, be better able to push through the radical changes needed to introduce the market, as he made clear in his inaugural speech as president:

'We must really get down to creating a full-blooded domestic market....In this respect we cannot get by without reforms in the system of price-fixing, marketing, sales and distribution and the introduction of...stock markets.' (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 16 March 1990)

The important thing about the constitutional change is not that it

gives the president more power. From Stalin to Brezhnev, leaders of the Soviet Union have had no shortage of dictatorial power at their disposal. What is new is the formal transfer of power away from the party to the state machine. The president will rule with the aid of a council of ministers, appointed by him and ratified by the soviet.

The party central committee and its apparatus, the organs of power until now, will be cut loose and abandoned, probably to go the way of the Communist parties in the rest of Eastern Europe. Its diminished future role has been indicated by

Gorbachev's main ally on the politburo, Alexander Yakovlev: 'Never, even at gunpoint' he replied when asked if he would like to take over as leader of the Communist Party after Gorbachev.

This manoeuvre has been forced on Gorbachev by the continued failures of his policy of perestroika ('restructuring'). For Gorbachev, the purpose of perestroika has been to stimulate the Soviet economy through a new orientation towards the market, while at the same time preserving the power and privileges of the ruling bureaucracy. Five years after Gorbachev came to power, his project of pro-market reform has reached a critical phase. A series of half-hearted attempts to push through change has only made things worse. Now, with opposition on the increase, the Soviet bureaucracy is running out of time. Gorbachev's latest move is a desperate attempt to salvage something by forcing through full-blooded market economics.

**Despite the PR stunts, Western investment in Moscow is still a Mickey Mouse affair**



# east and west

The list of the bureaucratic system's economic failures is now familiar. An ever increasing shortage of basic consumer goods has led to an informal system of rationing. By December 1989, meat was rationed in an estimated one fifth of the country and sugar was rationed almost everywhere. The inefficiency of Soviet agriculture has also caused a grain shortage in what should be one of the world's richest bread baskets: last year, an estimated 20m tons of grain was imported from the USA.

Because the Soviet 'command economy' cannot even take command of a railway timetable, a million tons of desperately needed goods rot in railway sidings. When West Germany donated free food to the Soviets, Gorbachev's government had to charter ships with scarce foreign currency because neither the Soviet merchant navy nor the railways could guarantee to import the food. Overall, growth in the economy halved last year. It seems that nothing can be done to halt the continued stagnation of the state-run system.

All of this has increased the sense of dissatisfaction among Soviet people. Responses to the economic crisis have varied. In the republics

involves creating a local base of support by playing on nationalism and anti-Semitism. In Baltic states such as Lithuania this has gone so far as to lead to a split in the Communist Party. In the Caucasus it has led to the party encouraging ethnic strife, especially between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

The twin crisis of economic stagnation and political illegitimacy persuaded the party leadership to adopt Gorbachev's presidential proposals. These were then endorsed by the congress of people's deputies. The stage is set for a more radical effort to transform the Soviet economy.

Those around Gorbachev see the market as a panacea for all economic ills, as the president's new economic adviser, Nikolai Petrakov, outlined in a recent interview:

'The market is no synonym for anarchy and chaos, but an opportunity to choose versions of economic development, pluralism in investment policy and satisfaction of demands. The market is also a permanently backed balance of demands and production potentialities, of supply and demand.' (*Moscow News*, 7 February 1990)

this law was introduced, the effects of the reform were immediately nullified by the conditions attached. Farmers were restricted to spending no more than a third of their currency on foreign goods. Then the state set very high prices for the overseas goods through its monopoly of foreign trade. Finally, the state decided it would buy the grain for less than the domestic market price.

The second and most serious obstacle to economic change comes from the Soviet working class. Most workers hate the Stalinist system, and no doubt many accept the logic of the market in principle. But they also object strongly to the higher prices and harsher work conditions produced by the pro-market reforms in practice. With the number of working days lost through strikes rising from two million in the first half of last year to 5.5m in the second half, and the undercurrent of working class discontent spreading, fear of unrest prompted the bureaucracy to backtrack and slow the pace of reform. Reform economist Yegor Gaidar pointed to this problem when replying to Western critics who complained that change was not happening fast enough:

'Under conditions of a chaotic market and growing scarcities, the energy of the enterprises, irrespective of what they are called, inevitably turns to speculative operations. And this, coupled with a rapid growth in the cash incomes of the entrepreneurs, gives rise to a powerful wave of protest with immediate demands to stop all economic innovations. The crux of the matter is not in the ideological formulation of these demands, but in the real interests which stand behind them.' (*Moscow News*, No 41, 1989)

Congress of people's deputies member Nikolai Shmelev put the point more bluntly in an American business journal: 'Already we have five million unemployed. Another 30 million of our personnel are employed, but inefficiently. They must be sacked. But you can understand the danger of social reprisal if they are all let go at once.' (*Fortune*, 12 March 1990)

So far, economic reforms have been aimed at encouraging the growth of privately owned cooperatives and self-reforming enterprises. As Gaidar points out the high prices charged by these outfits have served only to provoke opposition to the reform process itself. The government has had to back down and put restrictions on cooperatives, as well as retaining price controls in the larger enterprises.

'Another 30 million of our personnel...must be sacked.  
But you can understand the danger of  
social reprisal if they are all let go at once'

there has been a rise in support for nationalist parties calling for secession from the Soviet Union. There are also more and more protests against Communist Party rule, leading in places to the ousting of party leaders.

Already this year there have been demonstrations in Moscow and provincial cities calling for a faster pace of change. Russian nationalism and anti-Semitism are on the rise, and there is even a growing sense of nostalgia about the Stalin and Brezhnev years. Compared to the uncertainty and chaos of the present, any past period can look like the good old days.

In the local elections in February and March official party candidates suffered further humiliations. In many places party bosses refused to stand, preferring the illegitimacy of an unelected post to a public humiliation at the hands of the voters. The party is engaged in a desperate survival exercise which

The Soviet bureaucracy may be able to produce a good case for the market on paper. However, the problem it faces in imposing market economics is not theoretical or ideological, but practical.

There are two major obstacles. One is the opposition of the bureaucracy itself to changes which could undermine its traditional position. State administrators and enterprise managers will concede a need for drastic change. But once this change begins practically to impinge upon their control, they will quietly push against it. 'You won't find anyone who advocates a return to the old system', says deputy premier Leonid Abalkin, 'but, inch by inch, an instruction here and an order there, a real return develops' (*Report on the USSR*, No 49, 1989).

Take agricultural reform. Grain farmers have been given the right to sell their grain to the state in return for foreign currency, with which they can buy goods from abroad. When



In response to the failures so far the balance of opinion within the bureaucracy has shifted. Instead of encouraging the gradual development of a grassroots enterprise culture, the Stalinists now want to force through a dramatic change in the social relations of production from the centre. This has long been argued for by the increasingly influential pro-market economists (for the latest and best examples see Tatyana Zaslavskaya, *The Second Socialist Revolution*, and Abel Aganbegyan, *Moving the Mountain*). Their central argument has now been accepted as necessary at the top of the party. If implemented, for example, the new draft law on property will mean that the previously state-controlled means of production can be owned and disposed of by individuals, foreign companies, joint ventures and foreign citizens.

Soviet newspapers are already reporting the early efforts of Soviet bureaucrats seeking to follow the example of their East European counterparts and privatise themselves, becoming profiteers through 'business relations':

'The management of the Yara cigarette factory, the directorate of the Moscow association for wholesale trade in sugar, confectionery, tobacco and salt...and managers of the state transportation network entered into "business relations". They create artificial shortages in the capital and quickly and easily sell the "superfluous" consignments elsewhere. State-owned organisations operating on a contractual basis were replaced by cooperatives set up either by relatives of managers participating in this "business" or by the executives and managers of the tobacco industry themselves. This scenario is not unique to tobacco.' (*Moscow News*, 4 March 1990)

This spivish kind of privatisation may enrich individual bureaucrats and provide them with an investment fund. On its own, however, it cannot overcome the overall lack of a market, nor the vested interests which remain opposed to one. Until this is done the Soviet Union will remain an unattractive proposition for Western investment.

Only 1400 agreements have been signed with Western firms proposing to set up shop in the Soviet Union. And most of these deals exist on paper only. By the start of the year just 50 Western-run manufacturing plants were operating in the Soviet Union. The experience of McDonald's, which had to set up an entire food production, transport and processing system of its own in order to sell burgers in Moscow, illustrates

some of the obstacles investors face and shows how little perestroika has changed things. The fact that the rouble still can't be converted into foreign currencies also remains a major drawback.

The Soviet leadership now recognises that the sort of drastic measures needed to break through the logjam will require strong central direction. This led to the campaign for a massive increase in presidential clout, creating, as Gorbachev put it, a presidency 'with all the requisite plenipotentiary powers to implement the policy of restructuring'.

The creation of a powerful presidency has great advantages for the bureaucracy. It will mean that unpopular measures can be pushed through against both the wishes of the population, and protests emanating from the congress of people's deputies. The fact that the president is elected by the congress and is not a party appointee gives the post greater legitimacy, and allows Gorbachev to argue that he has a mandate for change.

### Party's over?

The transfer of power to the president means that the reforms will not be implemented in the name of the party. It is even possible that the party will now split or change its name. The experience of Eastern Europe suggests that this need not be a major problem for the Stalinists. So long as the bureaucrats control the state machine, they have a future, party or no party. Gorbachev can pursue the attempt to transform the economy towards capitalism. The old bureaucrats can find new roles in the state or in private industry.

The authorities have now shifted the emphasis of economic policy away from encouraging small businesses within the framework of the old system, towards transferring ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. In a speech late last year prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov told his colleagues to 'remember that we are living at the end of the twentieth century and not in the middle of the nineteenth':

'Even in developed capitalist countries private ownership by specific citizens of the means of production has for a long time not served as the basis of the economy. Owners are as a rule, joint stock companies—corporations, which can only with great reservations be regarded as private property.' (*Report on the USSR*, No 51, 1989)

The question of what constitutes private ownership is being blurred, paving the way for a transfer of ownership from the state to the bureaucrats.

In his bid to accelerate the introduction of the market, Gorbachev is involved in a complex manoeuvre with no guarantee of success. He does however have a number of factors on his side.

Gorbachev's critics are divided—some want faster reforms, some want slower—and neither side has a coherent alternative strategy. In this situation it is possible for Gorbachev to remain in power almost by default. Neither the bureaucracy nor the working class has any principled objection to the market.

Gorbachev still has vital support in the West. But he is far less popular within the Soviet Union. However, the mass of the Soviet population has remained essentially passive in its dissatisfaction. The collective efforts of all opposition groups could only get 100 000 on the streets of Moscow in the run-up to the local elections. The Russian state machine is immensely more powerful than its counterparts in Eastern Europe. It will require more than a few large demonstrations to bring it to its knees.

Opposition to change will continue to come from bureaucrats who fear losing their privileges, and from the working class. Even if it remains passive, such resistance can still hinder the kind of reforms which Gorbachev wants. There is some evidence, however, of people becoming so weary of the crisis and so desperate for change of any sort that more will support the restoration of the market, with all the sacrifices that entails. And while the fragmentation of the Soviet Union has certainly added to the atmosphere of crisis, it has also enabled the bureaucracy to use national and ethnic grievances to deflect popular anger from itself.

Yet it remains open to question how long Gorbachev can continue to divide and rule before the potentially explosive nationalist and ethnic tensions get out of hand. It is also doubtful that enough can be done to satisfy the basic needs of the population before opposition becomes more bitter.

Gorbachev looks likely to need all of his new powers if he is to bulldoze the capitalist market across the Soviet Union and remain in control. Little wonder that the normally unsuperstitious *Economist* has advised the nervous Gorbypheles of the British establishment to 'Cross your fingers' and hope (24 March).

● Tatyana Zaslavskaya, *The Second Socialist Revolution: An Alternative Soviet Strategy*, IB Tauris, £19.95

● Abel Aganbegyan, *Moving the Mountain: Inside the Perestroika Revolution*, Bantam, £14.99

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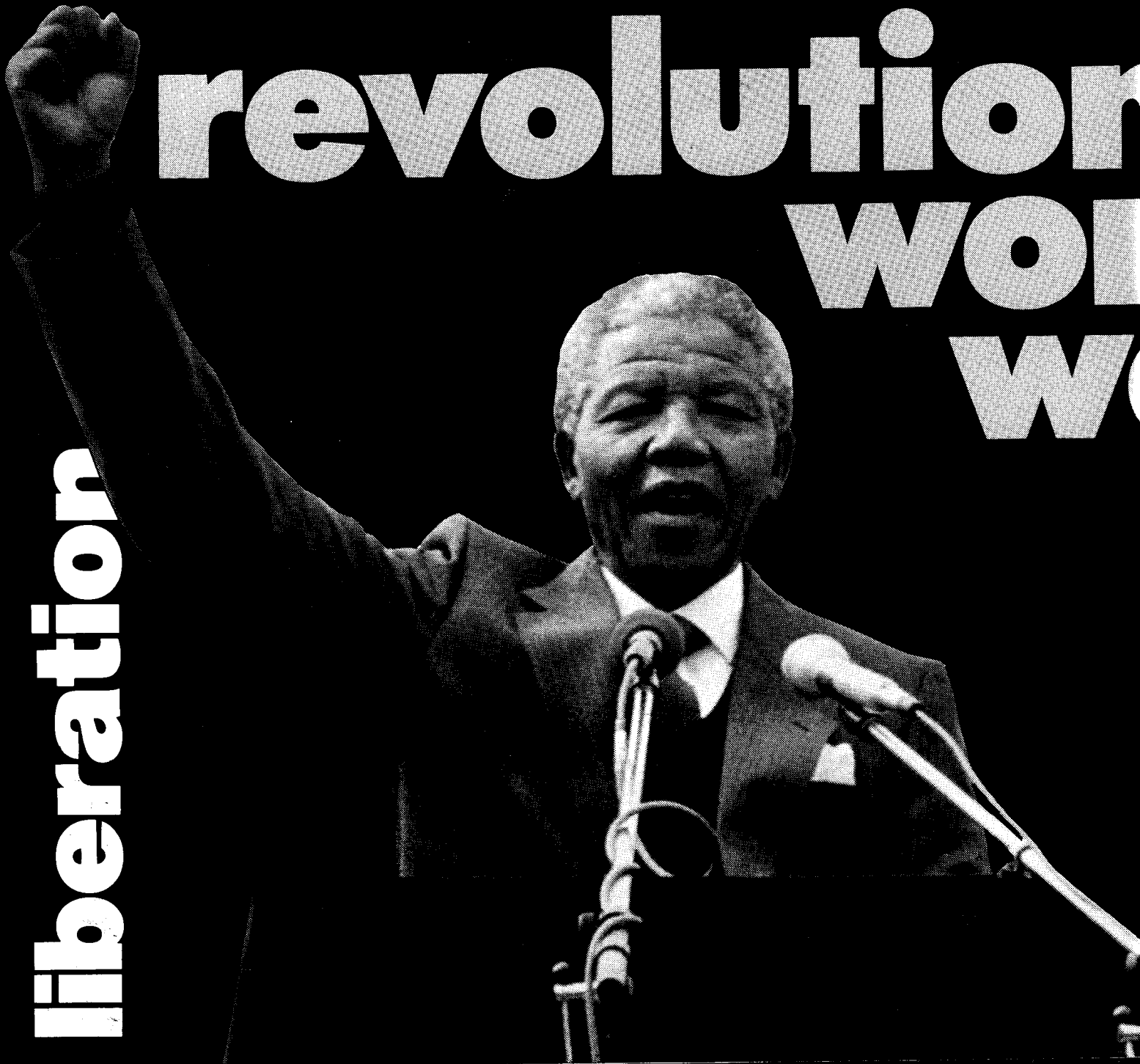
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Dangers ahead in South Africa

# Why a two-stage revolution won't work



liberation

Democracy today, socialism the day after tomorrow: the strategy backed by the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party separates the struggle against apartheid from that against capitalism.

Frank Richards and Barry Crawford suggest that such a two-stage theory of revolution represents a one-way ticket to disaster

# Age nt ork

**ANC president Nelson Mandela and apartheid president FW De Klerk: there can be no common ground between the oppressed and the oppressor**

**S**outh Africa appears very different to any other class society. In terms of the institutionalisation of racial oppression, it is in a class of its own. Indeed the question of race rather than class provides the overriding theme in all the debates about the future of South Africa. And yet the apartheid system is, in the end, only a variant of capitalism. Thus the Pretoria regime's main concern today is not to preserve white power for its own sake, but to ensure that any new political arrangements do not threaten the basic framework of

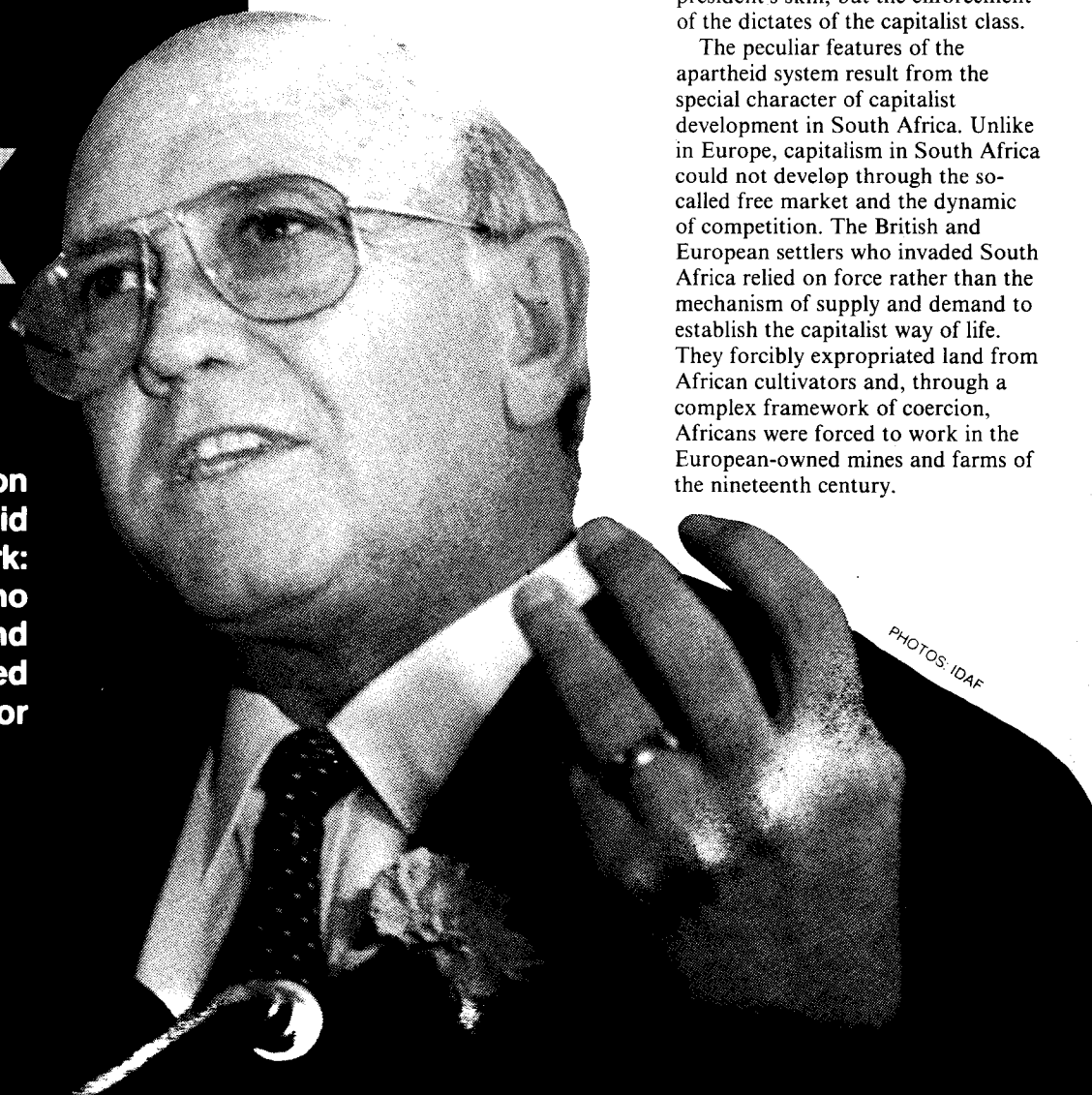
capitalist production. This was the key point emphasised by president FW De Klerk when he announced the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) back in February.

De Klerk argued that, with the collapse of the Stalinist bloc in Eastern Europe, South Africa need no longer fear that a future ANC-influenced government would pursue anti-capitalist policies:

'The collapse, particularly of the economic system in Eastern Europe, also serves as a warning to those who insist on persisting with it in Africa. Those who seek to force this failure of a system on South Africa should engage in a total revision of their point of view. It should be clear to all that it is not the answer here either.'  
(*Independent*, 3 February)

During the past year, Western diplomats and experts have argued along similar lines, suggesting that apartheid can now be reformed away without endangering the market economy. They believe that the successful transfer of government to an elected black administration in Namibia shows that capitalist interests can be preserved in a new form. The real issue for them is not the colour of the South African president's skin, but the enforcement of the dictates of the capitalist class.

The peculiar features of the apartheid system result from the special character of capitalist development in South Africa. Unlike in Europe, capitalism in South Africa could not develop through the so-called free market and the dynamic of competition. The British and European settlers who invaded South Africa relied on force rather than the mechanism of supply and demand to establish the capitalist way of life. They forcibly expropriated land from African cultivators and, through a complex framework of coercion, Africans were forced to work in the European-owned mines and farms of the nineteenth century.



PHOTOS: IDAF

# liberation

Of course, the creation of a capitalist society always entails the use of violence against the rural communities and the newly created proletariat. But whereas the use of naked force and overt political domination is seen as an episode in the history of most advanced industrial societies, in South Africa these measures became the intrinsic arrangement of capitalism. The tiny white capitalist class could not rely on the market and the episodic use of force to keep the black working class in check. To enforce its interests, the capitalist class needed to institutionalise racial discrimination. The black majority was excluded from economic influence and forced into an inferior social position.

The institutionalisation of political domination eventually resolved itself into the system of apartheid. Through apartheid, inequality is given racial justification. Apartheid provides the white capitalist class with an extra base of support, since it mobilises *all* whites, including the white working class, behind the state by appealing to the racist factor. The need to cohere a white bloc embracing all classes explains the ruling National Party's enthusiastic promotion of apartheid from the late forties onwards.

From the point of view of the South African ruling class, then, the virtues of apartheid have been

twofold. First, it created a framework within which the police state could regulate the everyday life of the black working class; second, it helped to forge an all-class white alliance against the black majority which gave the regime an essential base of support.

## Rational apartheid

One other consequence of apartheid is that it gives the reality of capitalist exploitation and domination the appearance of racial conflict. Apartheid seems to be exclusively about racial discrimination and the denial of democratic rights. Its class content and its relation to the capitalist system are almost entirely obscured. This is why a lot of well-meaning liberal opponents of the Pretoria regime argue that apartheid is an irrational system, the removal of which would not interfere with the everyday running of the capitalist economy. The fact that the apartheid system has been *entirely rational* from the point of view of the ruling class is missed by the liberal analysis, which concentrates on the denial of democratic rights and ignores the underlying reality of capitalist domination.

What is at stake in South Africa is not just discrimination and the denial of democratic rights. Modern South Africa is the product of an historical

process in circumstances where capitalist relations could exist only through racial domination. Of course many specific aspects of racial domination are irrational and unnecessary for capitalism, such as the petty apartheid colour bars in hotels and on beaches. But the overall benefits which capital has gained from apartheid have been enormous. The creation of a controlled labour market through the use of migrant labour, pass laws and the system of homelands gave the capitalist class the opportunity to raise the rate of exploitation and enjoy high profits.

The present discussion about reforming apartheid often confuses the symptom with the cause of the problem. The tremendous inequalities which are products of the past century of capitalist domination cannot be eliminated by reforming the law. Of course, the more democratic rights available to the masses the better. But the right to buy land in a white-reserved neighbourhood in Johannesburg is a meaningless right to a black squatter living in a shanty town. Given the nature of capitalist domination in South Africa and the tremendous polarisation of economic power, legal reforms in themselves would make little difference to the lives of the black masses.

Throughout this century, one of

Miners' canteen in the sixties: far from being irrational, the racial discrimination institutionalised through apartheid was vital to the development of South African capitalism on the backs of the black working class



the main debates among those fighting oppression has been about what kind of change is required. According to the dominant tradition, progressive change will come about through a series of stages. Thus the first objective of those fighting for change is the achievement of democracy. Proponents of this theory suggest that only after this first stage has been realised, and democracy has been achieved, is it possible to go on to the second stage—social liberation. During this second stage, they argue, socialism can be achieved. There are many variants of this basic *two-stage theory of revolution*. Some argue that the first stage is but a step to the second; others are of the view that the first grows into the second. Whatever the differences, all advocates of this point of view make a distinction between the democratic and socialist stages in a revolutionary process.

### Stalin's theory

The two-stage theory of revolution is by far the most influential strategy of change proposed this century. It was first advocated by the Mensheviks in Russia during the 1905 revolution. The perspective was later given coherence and popularised by Stalin and his colleagues. Under Stalin, the two-stage theory of revolution became the norm among 'official' Communist parties. It was

also taken up by anti-imperialist movements throughout the world. Today, this outlook characterises the perspectives of the ANC and its close ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP).

The most coherent arguments against the theory of two-stage revolution are found in the writings of Lenin and Trotsky. According to these Bolsheviks, the danger of separating a distinct 'democratic' stage from the objective of socialism is that it ignores the underlying conflict of interests between classes. It is only when democracy and social emancipation are properly linked that real advance can be made. Let's go through the arguments.

### No common ground

According to the Stalinist tradition, the struggle for democracy is of concern to all classes. Everyone benefits from freedom, therefore the working class should unite with all other democratic classes in a common fight. This point of view is upheld by the ANC and is promoted through its Freedom Charter. The ANC explicitly encourages class collaboration and has even suggested that there is some common ground between black workers and white capitalists, as its journal noted after one discussion with representatives of big business:

'The talks were on the basis of these businessmen's disagreement with apartheid in some respects. And as such thus far, the businessmen have some common ground with the forces of liberation. This common ground in turn creates real possibilities for these businessmen to cooperate with the South African revolutionaries in the struggle against apartheid.' (*Sechaba*, October 1988)

At first sight, cooperation with anti-apartheid businessmen seems harmless enough. It could be argued that we should use anyone to win freedom regardless of their background. The problem is, however, that there is no common ground between the exploiter and the exploited. The capitalist survives through the appropriation of the surplus produced by those he dominates. His power depends on the denial of the power of others. Under such circumstances there can only be 'common ground' in the most trivial of matters; for example, we all have a common interest in putting up traffic lights at a busy crossroads. But there can be no political arrangement that could be of benefit to both classes. Of course, if any individual capitalist or anyone else is interested in supporting the fight for freedom—fair enough. But that freedom has to be on the terms of the masses.

The two-stage theory of revolution

not only confuses the issues at stake, it also prevents workers from liberating themselves. By establishing a 'common ground' between the classes this perspective ignores the distinct interests of the masses. The common ground is that of formal democracy based on individual rights. This democracy can only be formal because individuals are not equal, and therefore are not equally capable of exercising their rights. Freedom means something quite different to the owner of a goldmine than it does to a black miner. To the owner, it means the freedom to own private property, and the freedom to exploit. To the miner, it means freedom from want and the freedom to enjoy a decent life.

There is an even greater problem. Who guarantees that, after the system has conceded democratic rights, it will not take them away again? So long as the capitalist class remains in power democratic rights remain conditional. If the liberation struggle is restricted to the objective of a democratic stage, the capitalist class can use the outcome to consolidate its own position. This is what happened in Zimbabwe. The democratic stage of replacing the white supremacist government was achieved—the outcome, of course, is the one-party Mugabe regime. Because the working class remained an undifferentiated part of the liberation movement it lacked the independent capacity to influence events after independence. In contrast, the capitalist class retained its hold on state power and could decisively shape Zimbabwe. Predictably one of the first acts of the Mugabe regime was to attack the urban working class. Freedom in Zimbabwe has meant the partial Africanisation of capitalism—and that is all.

### Whose democracy?

According to Alfred Nzo, the secretary general of the ANC, his organisation wants 'a democratic state, based on the will of all the people', for 'we seek no more and no less than other colonial people have sought' ('Freedom Charter—a beacon to the people of South Africa', *The African Communist*, No 81, pp36-7). These are nice statements. Unfortunately they are meaningless. A 'democratic state based on the will of all the people' is a fiction. Democracy is always directly linked to class power. In ancient Greece there was democracy—provided you were a slave owner. Western parliamentary democracy presupposes capitalist relations and their perpetuation; the democratic process does not extend to a vote on whether we want to be exploited. Without social liberation, a democratic state in Africa can only mean the



# liberation

consolidation of capital in a new political form.

The two-stage revolution thesis is not just deceptive, it is sheer dogma. There are countless examples of situations where the liberation movement has fought for and achieved the first stage of the revolution. *There is not one case in which the first stage led to the second.* The achievement of the first stage simply meant the rationalisation of capitalist power in a new political form.

## Slovo's lip-service

One of the most elementary of Marx's views is the proposition that real democracy must have as its content social emancipation. This proposition is so well known that the leadership of the ANC's sister organisation, the SACP, is forced to pay lip-service to it. Thus Joe Slovo, general secretary of the SACP, has told interviewers that 'from our point of view there can be no liberation without economic liberation and I'm not talking about socialism yet' (*Weekly Mail*, 16-22 February 1990). It is worth asking Slovo what he means by 'economic liberation' that is not socialism. If it is not socialism, presumably it must be capitalism. How does he reconcile the possibility of economic liberation with the reality of capitalism? Clearly Slovo is playing with words. He talks about economic liberation only to negate this objective in practice. Worse still, by implying that economic liberation can be achieved before socialism, Slovo helps prepare the way for the demoralisation of the South African working class in the future.

## Act of betrayal

The ANC, despite the heroism and sacrifice of its individual members, is leading the struggle against apartheid towards the dead end of a cleaned-up South African capitalism. It even boasts that 'the Freedom Charter, instead of suggesting the abolition of the capitalist system, actually guarantees the expansion and development of the small bourgeoisie, especially from among the blacks, who have been barred from this possibility by the apartheid colonial laws' (*Sechaba*, July 1987). Whether it is justified as the 'development of the small bourgeoisie' or as economic liberation without socialism, the ANC SACP is advocating a programme that goes against the interests of the black working class.

Many critics of the ANC/SACP inside South Africa see a monumental act of betrayal in the making, one that will make Zimbabwe pale in comparison. Some militants have become active in the trade union movement and counterpose their 'class' orientation to the preoccupation of the

ANC/SACP with formal democracy. While this may provide a useful antidote to the Stalinist perspective of the ANC/SACP, such an orientation is fundamentally flawed.

The very counterposition of class to democracy is itself a problem. In South Africa political domination and economic exploitation exist as a complex of mutually reinforcing relations which are impossible to separate out in practice. Moreover, the distinctive feature of apartheid is that capitalism is experienced in the form of racial domination. Consequently, in general the problem is perceived as the lack of democratic rights. Any strategy for liberation must relate to this perception and put the struggle for democracy to the fore. What is required is a perspective which directs the struggle against apartheid through the fight for democratic rights—but from a proletarian point of view. In other words, democracy must be fought for from an anti-capitalist perspective and through anti-capitalist means.

The secret of success for the liberation struggle in South Africa is to grasp the relationship between political and social change. It is possible and necessary to consider the problem of democracy and social emancipation as specific ones, so long as they are considered in relationship with each other. This means that in

South Africa the question of democracy will provide the main focus for the liberation struggle.

Because life's problems are experienced by the black masses mainly as the denial of rights, the question of democracy is *logically* prior to that of the struggle for socialism; a workers' movement which attempted to leap over that experience by downplaying the problem of racial oppression and concentrating on narrow trade union 'class issues' could not hope to win significant support or success. But although democracy is logically prior, it cannot be *chronologically* separated from the struggle for social emancipation in some sort of two-stage revolution. The achievement of one is dependent upon the realisation of the other.

Conducting the fight for democratic rights from a proletarian point of view will lead to the recognition that there are not two separate stages along the road to freedom. The abolition of racial oppression in South Africa requires the overthrow of the economic and social system which sustains and benefits from apartheid.

The ANC, despite the heroism and sacrifice of its individual members, is leading the struggle against apartheid towards the dead end of a cleaned-up South African capitalism

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# liberation

## 'Apartheid's homelands are burning'

Charles Longford spoke to a fieldworker at the Johannesburg offices of the National Committee Against Removals about the unrest sweeping South Africa's homelands

South Africa's homelands or bantustans are desperately poor reserves where the apartheid regime effectively imprisoned blacks, only allowing them into white areas to work. Some homelands were declared 'independent', so that their residents could be denied any citizenship rights within South Africa.

Despite recent reforms in black people's rights of residency in South Africa, the homelands and their black stooge leaders have remained central to apartheid strategy. Until the mid-eighties, the regime pursued a policy of 'removals'—forcibly uprooting entire communities or 'blackspots' and dumping them within a homeland. More recently Pretoria has switched to 'incorporation'—redrawing homeland boundaries to take in more communities.

However, since president FW De Klerk announced the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress, the homelands have erupted in insurrectionary violence as the people demand reintegration into South Africa.

**Why have the homelands become the focus of widespread revolt? It has been suggested that homeland residents fear being left out of any political solution and so want to make their voice heard.**

'The release of Mandela and the unbanning of political organisations raised spirits, as people felt the system was collapsing. The years of living in the homelands under corrupt apartheid-imposed dictators, where so-called independence had been forced upon the people, where conditions have been deteriorating, exploded. Many celebrations of Mandela's release were met with police violence—this was the spark which ignited the fire.

'Bophuthatswana reveals how this happened. After Mandela's release spontaneous demonstrations called for president Lucas Mangope to resign and for the homeland which gained its "independence" in 1977 to be reincorporated into South Africa. They were violently crushed by the police; more than 30 people died and hundreds were injured. Then over 150 000 people took to the streets to demand reincorporation into South Africa, lower rents, more housing and schools; 14 were killed and 400 injured when police attacked the march. Stayaways are continuing and a state of emergency is in operation. Similar things have been happening throughout South Africa.

'I cannot say how much has been organised or is spontaneous. What is clear is that the scale of the unrest has surprised activists and government alike. The people have shown through popular mass uprisings that they regard the homelands and the homeland leaders as illegitimate. The pressure has been building up over the years. The struggles over the new strategy of incorporation into the homelands is the backdrop to the current unrest.

'Since the Mogoepo removal was carried out with considerable force in 1984, Pretoria has tended to avoid physical removals. It's not good publicity. Instead they resorted to incorporation: redrawing the

boundaries of bantustans, so that "blackspots" would now fall miraculously inside them. Whole communities of blacks could be made exiles without moving an inch, simply by lifting a pen in the government planning office and making an agreement with homeland leaders behind closed doors. There has been fierce resistance to these changes over the years in Ciskei, KwaNdebele, Venda, QuaQua and Bophuthatswana. In many cases, the resistance of the communities paid off: the 120 000-strong Moutse community successfully resisted incorporation into KwaNdebele and as many as 500 000 in Botshabelo prevented inclusion into QuaQua.'

**Did these developments have anything to do with the recent coup in Ciskei?**

'Very much so. The recent coup was the result of long-established grievances which incorporation began to bring to the surface last year. Mandela's release brought it all to a head.

'Let me explain: in October last year the Ciskei government declared a state of emergency in three villages in east Peleton and in a fourth village next to the Ciskei capital Bisho. The struggle was over the incorporation of these villages into the Ciskei. Incorporation meant losing their South African pensions [double the amount received in the Ciskei] and access to unemployment insurance. The villagers were now also liable for "voluntary" but arbitrary taxes and other forms of tribute. People fled the area, houses were destroyed, thousands detained and beaten up. After many months the people won a famous victory when South Africa accepted their right to stay after they sought refuge.

'The east Peleton victory showed Ciskei's leader Lennox Sebe could be taken on. Even before Mandela was released, over two thirds of Ciskei was in open revolt. Villagers destroyed their Ciskei National Independence Party cards. Carrying a CNIP card has been a matter of life and death in

Ciskei: it was proof of loyalty to Sebe without which it was difficult to get social services, pensions, schooling and sites on which to build houses. Destroying the CNIP card was symbolic of rejecting the system.

'When Sebe openly jeered at Mandela's release referring to him as a "thug" and a "scoundrel" it was like a red rag to a bull. The "president-for-life" was removed to be replaced by Brigadier Dugald Bhebe. Interestingly his first appearance before the people was in front of ANC and SACP flags. His first promise was to push for the reintegration of the Ciskei back into South Africa.'

**What do you think the consequences of this will be for De Klerk? Does it mean the collapse of the homeland strategy?**

'There is certainly real confusion on the part of the government. But after the victory of the people in Moutse, and then east Peleton and others, the government's response was to pass the Alteration of Boundaries of Self-Governing Territories Bill. This makes it almost impossible for residents to challenge incorporation through the courts and can reverse previous victories.

'This shows that at the beginning of this year, the government was still committed to its grand apartheid scheme: denying black South Africans citizenship thus removing the threat of black majority rule. In areas where disputes have raged over incorporation, the army and police have stopped school buses, lined children up on the side of the road and asked which of them regarded themselves as "South African". Those who thought they were were beaten on the spot, or detained for days and sometimes weeks.

'Now, however, it is hard to see how Pretoria can continue with this homeland policy. The recent struggles have revealed that the so-called "leaders" in the homelands have no legitimacy at all. Even people who have benefited from aligning themselves with bantustan leaders—civil servants, businessmen, magistrates, etc—are now organising against them. This is how widespread the resistance is in the homelands today. The homelands are burning and almost all the people are openly aligning themselves with the liberation forces against any half-way measures.'

**But what of leaders like Gatsha Buthelezi? As far as I am aware KwaZulu has been relatively untouched by the most recent unrest.**

'Buthelezi has become even more important than before. Unlike any other homeland leader, he has managed to build a base. Yes, it is like Ciskei with the membership cards and all that, but KwaZulu is different, particularly because it is not "independent". Buthelezi still retains some credibility.

'If you contrast this with Mangope in Bophuthatswana you can see the problem. Mangope has no support. At the moment I am talking to you hundreds of thousands of "his" people are on strike or in open revolt, calling for his resignation and the destruction of Bophuthatswana. Pretoria has had no option but to go in and rescue him. What is interesting is that Pretoria did not intervene in the Ciskei when their ace-stooge "president-for-life" Sebe was removed recently. Why? Because it seems Pretoria recognises it is better to have leaders in the homelands who are more popular and do not carry the legacy of past collaboration and brutality.

'I think what this all points to is that Pretoria will tolerate changes if they can provide new homeland leaders who might have more credibility. Already foreign affairs minister Pik Botha has hinted that such changes will be acceptable and has even mentioned that reintegration was an option for future negotiations.

'Everyone here has been surprised by the ferocity and determination of the people's struggle in the homelands. Expectations have been raised and while some homeland leaders talk of holding referenda on reintegration, the people have already signed their statements with blood and fire.'

# for progress

Ann Bradley on why we can't treat embryos  
as human beings

**W**hen does human life begin?' is a question that has kept moral philosophers busy for centuries—and the house of lords busy for the last few months. The government's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has taken the debate on the origins of human life out of the realms of philosophy and on to the parliamentary agenda. The bill seeks to bring research on human embryos, and infertility treatment involving human sperm and ova, under the control of the state. This has raised discussion about whether scientists and doctors should be allowed to 'tamper' with embryos at all. The house of lords recently voted overwhelmingly to allow research on embryos to continue, but even the most liberal speakers in the debate conceded that there should be a time-limit of 14 days, and that only licenced experiments should be carried out.

The assumption behind the government's bill is that the use of embryos raises moral and ethical problems which are not an issue in experiments on other human tissue. It is difficult to imagine both houses of parliament engaging in such agitated debate about what experiments could and could not be done on a human kidney. The concern about embryos is explained as concern for the way 'human life' is treated in its earliest stages. For many protagonists in the debate, not all of them bishops, embryos should be treated with the same respect as human beings—and rather privileged human beings at that. 'The embryo is the start of life', argued the Duke of Norfolk, 'and must be given the same status as a child or a grown-up person, or a member of this house'. Lord Stallard denounced embryo research as 'a violation of rights of human beings in the same way as slavery or assault or any crime against the person'.

Even public figures who defend embryo research concede that the embryo is worthy of special treatment. Mary Warnock, whose inquiry into the subject six years ago formed a blueprint for the Embryology Bill, has agreed that experimentation on embryos should cease at 14 days because 'it is at this stage that the human individual, of infinite worth, comes into existence'.

The debate about when life begins has generated a library full of literature. Most writers conclude that human life begins either at fertilisation, or with the development of the 'primitive streak' about 14 days later. All of them look for a 'marker event'—a moment at which some fundamental change in the embryo converts it into something worthy of the respect we accord to human life.

## In the beginning

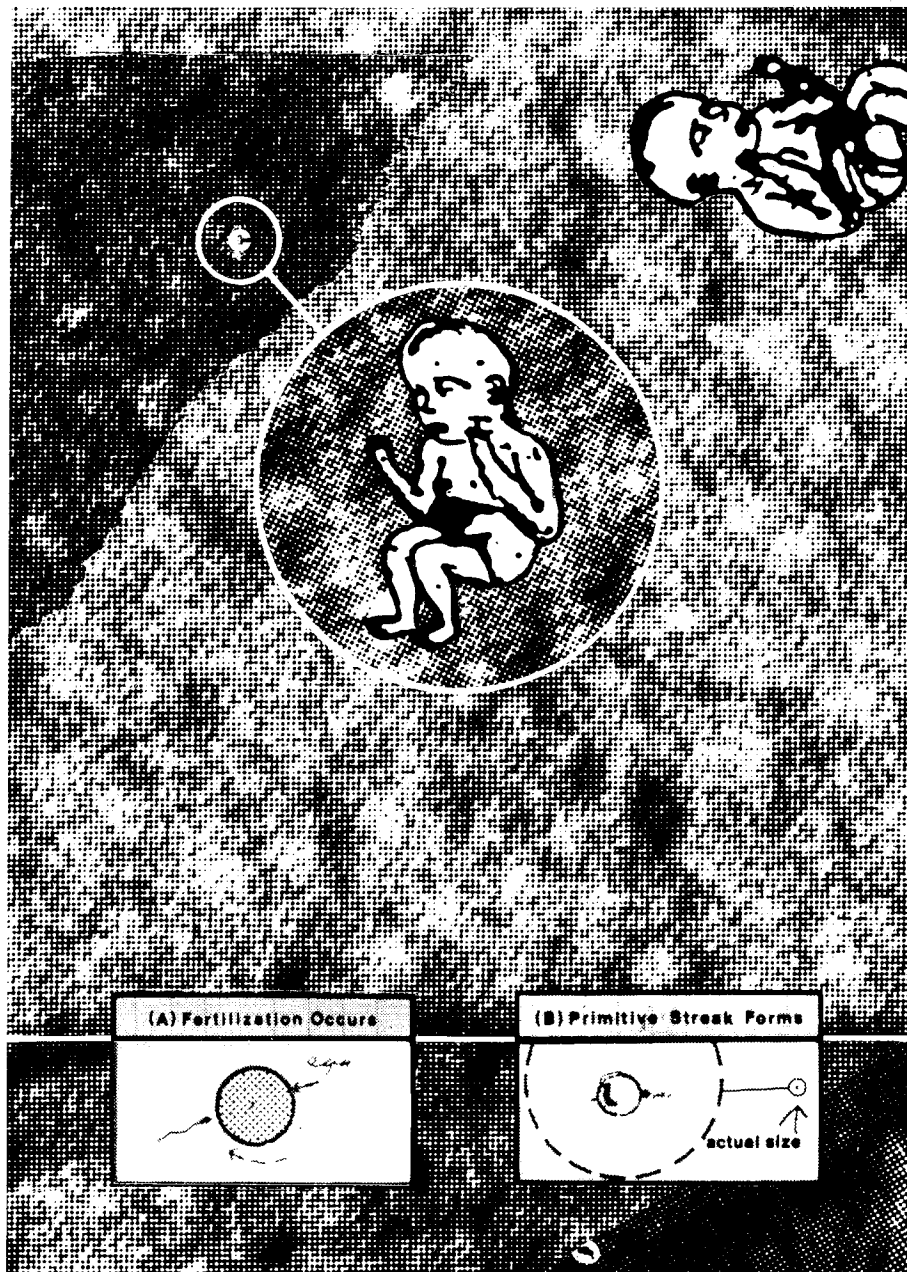
Both positions claim scientific support. Those who take fertilisation to be the 'marker event' root their claim in genetics. Thus Paul Ramsey, a leading authority on Christian ethics, swaps his Bible for a scientific textbook: 'Genetics teaches us that we were in the beginning what we essentially still are in every cell and in every generally human attribute and in every individual attribute.' This argument has now been taken up by academics and agitators alike. 'From the moment of conception', says a recent leaflet from the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (Spuc), 'the embryo is a genetically unique living human being. At conception everything about a human being is established: the

colour of hair and eyes, the sex, the eventual height, and complete genetic make-up of the individual with all his/her gifts and talents. At conception the embryo simply has to grow and develop just as at any other stage in life'.

Other writers eschew fertilisation as the 'marker event' by arguing that the human individual does not begin until the formation of the primitive streak. This event is seen as an important landmark because it indicates the main features of the embryo's body plan. Before this point there exists only a clump of undifferentiated cells. The emergence of the primitive streak enables us to tell which cells will develop into a fetus and which will make up the placenta. If two primitive streaks emerge, then two embryos will develop into identical twins. If no primitive streak develops then an embryo will not develop.

In *When Did I Begin?* (1988), Norman Stone chooses the primitive streak answer because 'prior to this stage we do not have a living individual human body, but a mass of preprogrammed loosely organised developing cells and heterogeneous tissues until their "clock" mechanisms become synchronised and triggered to harmoniously organise, differentiate and grow as heterogeneous parts of a single whole human organism. In this way cells lose their own ontological individuality to form a new ontological individual' (p175).

In reality it is impossible to resolve



scientifically which of these two moments represents *the* marker event to define the creation of a new life. All that can be said is that they are biologically significant stages of the embryo's development. It would be possible to add a number of other unique and equally significant developments. The beginning of brain activity could be one; doctors take brain death to equal human death, so why not brain life to equal human life? Viability, the stage at which a fetus is capable of surviving outside the womb, could be another marker event. While all of these occurrences are of medical and scientific significance, there is no reason why we should attribute any moral significance to them.

In particular, attributing moral significance to fertilisation or the formation of the primitive streak seems to contradict the realities of normal pregnancy. While philosophers, scientists and bishops

agonise over the meaning of life for an embryo in a petri dish, 'Mother Nature' is far less discerning. Humans have a notoriously inefficient reproductive system and the 'natural wastage' rate of human embryos is extremely high.

A study published in the *Lancet* concluded that about eight per cent of human pregnancies are lost at such an early stage of development that the woman is unaware that she was pregnant. The possible fate of an individual ovum has been summarised thus: '16 per cent of ova do not divide, 15 per cent are lost during various pre-implantation stages in the first postovulatory week, 27 per cent of ova abort during implantation in the second postovulatory week, and 10.5 per cent of ova surviving the first missed menstrual period subsequently abort spontaneously' (quoted in E Kenyon, *The Dilemma of Abortion*, 1986, p25). It is difficult to understand

why scientists should writhe in moral agonies over the fate of an embryo in a petri dish and about 'interfering with nature', when 'natural' human reproduction spontaneously destroys so many.

The key issue in the debate is missing from these biological attempts to pinpoint when life begins. To answer the question 'when does human life begin?' we first have to resolve what is distinctive about human life. After all we are not overly respectful of 'life' in general—few of us have any serious qualms about living animals being killed for meat—so there must be something about *human* life that commands our respect.

## Social animal

Some Marxists have addressed this question by looking at the evolution of humanity. They conclude that what makes human life distinctive is man's development into a social animal. Humanity, the quality of being human, is not simply a question of biology. While membership of the species 'homo sapiens' is biologically determined, people are distinct from other creatures in that they are above all products of society. Everything that makes us 'human' is a result of our *collective* interaction with nature. Humanity's relationship with the natural world is a practical and transformative one. The ability to produce tools and use them in cooperation with others sets people apart from the animal kingdom. Through the conscious application of labour, humanity exerts control over nature and plays a role in changing the world. Knowledge and consciousness are the results of humanity's collective endeavours.

In *The Dialectics of Nature* Frederick Engels observed an essential difference between humanity and other species. He pointed out that an animal only uses its environment instinctively, and brings about changes in it merely by its presence. Humans, on the other hand, actively change nature, mastering it and making it serve predetermined ends. Human beings are thus distinguished by their conscious activity in society rather than their biological characteristics.

## Unconscious embryos

So when does human life begin? The very fact that humanity is distinguished by its social organisation and activity, rather than by its biological functions, has been used as an argument against the idea that embryos are the same as people. After all, if humanity is defined by its conscious activity in society then fetuses, which cannot act consciously on anything, cannot be regarded as

human life. Although this approach could not provide a precise answer to the big question, it would at least allow us to state that the earliest life can begin is a moment *after* birth.

However, while this argument contains some important insights, its conclusions are flawed. When Engels described the ability to transform nature by acting consciously within society, he was writing about the distinguishing characteristics of humanity in general, not about what makes individuals human. It is inappropriate to transplant an analysis of the evolution of humanity and apply it to the evolution of a particular individual.

A baby, although born, cannot *consciously* act upon its environment—and yet we readily acknowledge the child as part of society. If we do this in recognition of the baby's potential to become a fully fledged member of society then, it could be argued, we should extend the same treatment to fetuses. With modern medical care we *expect* a fetus to develop into a child unless we terminate the pregnancy. If a child can be regarded as a human being when it has only the potential to become a part of society, then why can't a fetus?

## When does life matter?

It is wrong to imply that the process of being born itself imbues a baby with the distinct properties of human life. The passage through the birth canal is no more nor less transformative than the appearance of the primitive streak, or the development of the brain. It is simply another stage in the individual's development. A baby five hours after birth is little different, *in itself*, from a fetus five hours before birth. Of course there is a vital difference; after the birth, child and mother can be separated for the first time. But this difference is of importance to the woman rather than the baby. A newborn baby is as dependent as it was in the womb—someone has to care for it or it will die. But it can now be kept alive without the involvement of its biological mother. For the first time since the start of her pregnancy a woman can be independent of the fruit of her womb.

It is not possible to fix an objective point at which life begins: neither fertilisation, nor the formation of the primitive streak, nor any moment after birth. Biological life is a continuous process. Fetuses and embryos are biologically alive. But that does not mean that we are obliged to accord the life of the embryo or fetus the same moral worth as the lives of adults, children or babies. Underlying the question of when life begins is the issue of when life becomes human in more than a biological sense. In other words, the

key question is really 'when does life matter?'

Throughout history, the value attributed to human life has always been determined by the level of development of society, and its ability to maintain life. In twentieth-century Britain infant care is a priority for medical science. The death of a baby is rare and a cause for great concern. We expect our babies to survive birth, and we expect to have access to modern medical facilities if they have problems. In a situation where babies do not normally die, infanticide is seen as one of the most heinous crimes a mother can commit. Yet only a couple of hundred years ago newborn babies died so frequently that the death of a baby was a common occurrence which provoked little comment. In societies unable to maintain infant life, such life was, and is, little valued. Infanticide was used to control family size by many working women in Britain until well into the nineteenth century.

The importance attributed to life at any stage of its development is resolved by contemporary society, not by biological investigation or by abstract ethical considerations. It is not something we *discover*—it is something we *decide*.

Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer in *Should the Baby Live?* (1985) explain the basis for infanticide in many primitive societies as being the survival of the community. In conditions of scarcity they found that it was common to kill babies who would place an intolerable burden on the resources of existing families. Unlike in modern Britain the lives of the elderly were often valued above the lives of the young, because their knowledge (of hunting grounds or customs) was of more value than another baby. However, typically in societies reliant on infanticide, Kuhse and Singer note that the practice was only allowed before the child was given a name, or underwent an equivalent ceremony which showed that the infant 'has been accepted as a bona fide member of society' (p110). In effect, for these people 'life' begins with a social ceremony.

When we say that society decides when life begins, we recognise that 'society' is not a homogeneous collective which spontaneously leaps to a consensual conclusion. Society is made up of different interest groups which will pursue particular conclusions designed to stabilise and reaffirm their own position. The views which predominate in society will be those of the dominant group. Thus in capitalist society the predominant views will be those of the ruling capitalist class, which seeks to shape the consensus of society around its own aims and interests.

The current debate about when life

begins may seem to have no more relevance to the lives of ordinary people than did the medieval debates about how many angels could dance on a pinhead. However, we dismiss it as irrelevant at our peril. The creation of a consensus which holds that biological life is the same as 'humanity' will have severe consequences for women's everyday lives. Already members of the establishment are using 'scientific' claims that embryos are equal members of humanity to oppose women's right to abortion and certain forms of contraception. When Lord Rawlinson argues that 'life should be honoured from the moment of conception', and Sir Bernard Braine argues that in the light of recent discussion it is 'morally repugnant' to allow abortion, they are saying that the limited human attributes of an embryo should take precedence over a woman's right to end an unwanted pregnancy. The 'discovery' of fetal life leads to the conclusion that women must either sacrifice themselves to the role of incubators, or stand accused of murder.

## Pragmatic choices

For those of us who might fall prey to just such unwanted pregnancies, this is an unacceptable conclusion. We may justifiably feel that the significance of embryonic life is trivial compared to the quality of the lives of women. We may accept that an embryo is unique in that it is 'potentially a baby', but still believe that a woman is entirely justified in sacrificing its potential to retain control over what is actual; her life. The physiological qualities of embryos cannot be allowed to interfere with women's right to abortion.

Those who accuse us of defending the taking of 'life' in the name of pragmatism will do well to remember that the authorities now lecturing us about embryo rights are no less pragmatic. We argue for abortion rights in the belief that the biological life of the fetus is of less importance than the social life of a woman. The authorities, meanwhile, uphold the morality of a society in which nurses have to make decisions about who will live and who will die as a matter of routine. Every time a doctor decides which of three premature babies gets the single incubator place left in the hospital, or who will be offered the one available dialysis machine, he is deciding whether human life continues or ends, based on the options which present-day society makes available to him. The discussion of when human life begins is susceptible to just such pragmatic, social considerations.

The value attributed to human life has always been determined by the level of development of society

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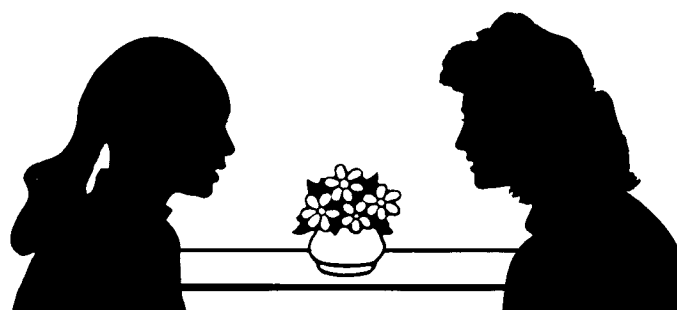
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The heritage industry

# Making a living in the past

Where there  
used to be muck, there's brass: Andrew Calcutt  
and Simon Norfolk review the growth  
industry which sells 'the way we were'

**H**eritage is popular. Nearly 100m people visited British museums last year. Heritage is a Big Idea. According to arts minister Richard Luce, it expresses 'the human need for roots when all about us is changing so fast'. Heritage is Big Business. Museums contribute £500m a year to the British economy. Former arts council chair Sir William Rees-Mogg has pointed out that 'heritage and the monarchy, with the arts, support a tourist trade which brings in £5 billion'.

What is heritage? 'Anything you want' says Lord Charteris, chairman of the National Heritage Fund and former private secretary to the Queen. It can be a celebration of Empire, a recreation of the early years of the labour movement, or a way to make a fast buck by turning the past into merchandise. It is also one of the few growth industries left in Britain.

In *The Heritage Industry*, Robert Hewison points out that every week or so, somewhere in Britain, a new museum opens. Dr Neil Cossons of the Kensington science museum added: 'You can't project that...much further before the whole country becomes one big open air museum.' There are almost 3000 museums in Britain, three times as many as in 1970. Most of the new ones are privately owned.

Heritage Projects Ltd led the field. In 1984 its founders (an army major, an archaeologist and a garage owner) opened the Jorvik Viking Centre, York. 'Pioneer for a new breed of museum', Jorvik was designed to take the fee-paying visitor back to 'real life Viking Britain' of the tenth century, via a ride around a series of fixed, life-size tableaux complete with

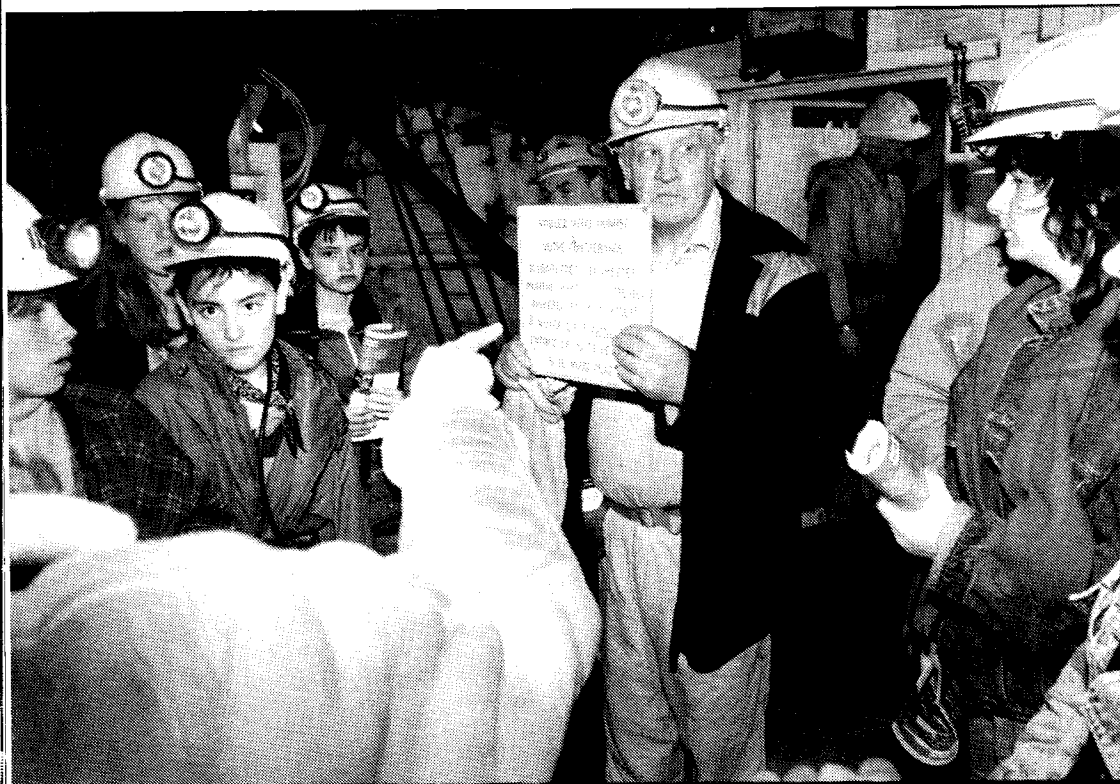


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

sounds and smells. The effect, known as 'imagineering', is like being on the studio set of an authentic historical film. In 1988, there were 890 000 visitors. Heritage Projects Ltd went on to create more 'experiences' in Oxford and Canterbury, and now offers itself to other museums in a 'turnkey package' including production of museum environments, consultancy, and retailing services ('particular emphasis has been placed on commissioning themed products specific to the attraction').

Jorvik is an upmarket museum experience. At the other end of the scale, Leading Leisure transformed an old pub in Winchester into The Crusades Experience for the princely sum of £650 000. The Tales of Robin Hood is housed in a disused supermarket on Nottingham's Maid Marion Way, where tourists are

costs eight times less than a job in manufacturing, and 80 times less than a job in mechanical engineering. Many opened up with a staff of community programme workers on wages of about £50 a week. Gilbert the Goblin at Winchester Crusades Experience now earns £2.80 an hour. He's not the only museum worker who can barely afford a new pair of tights. A 1987 survey conducted by the Museums Association reported that 40 per cent of British museums use volunteer labour.

### 'Priceless asset'

The Tory government welcomes the marketing of Britain's heritage. In a letter endorsing Museums Year 1989, Margaret Thatcher praised the new museums for their 'outstanding overall contribution to our national life'. Government funding is made

Heritage serves a useful political purpose for the Tories. By promoting such themes as Victorian values, Margaret Thatcher's government has continually evoked the past in support of the status quo. With its emphasis on tradition and continuity, the heritage culture helps to lend legitimacy to the British system of government and to confirm the authority of national institutions.

With modern Britain facing an uncertain and distinctly unpromising future, its rulers and their supporters are increasingly seeking comfort from the glories of the imperial past.

### 'Unifying element'

'I think of a morning mist on the Tweed at Dryburgh where the magic of Turner and the romance of Scott both come fleetingly to life; of a celebration Eucharist in a quiet

Norfolk church, with the medieval glass filtering the colours and the early noise of the harvesting coming through the open door.' Thus Tory MP Patrick Cormack, author of *Heritage in Danger* and member of the all-party parliamentary heritage committee, lovingly recalls Britain's past. In the *Daily Mail*, right-wing historian Jeffrey Richards declared that 'heritage makes sense economically and intellectually' because it is 'a return to the nineteenth century's priorities'. Sir Roy Strong, former director of the Victoria and Albert museum, welcomes heritage as 'a deeply stabilising and unifying element within our society'. And *Observer* columnist Neal Acherson has recognised heritage as 'vulgar nationalism' noting how 'invocation of the past, the suggestion of an immemorial and accepted English order...is infinitely important to Mrs

Thatcher's governments'.

There are also grubby commercial considerations which make the heritage boom important to the Tories. Britain has declined from the workshop of the world to a third-rate economy with a £20 billion trade deficit. Without an industrial future to look forward to, British capitalism is turning out one repackaged version of its past after another. The Tories have little choice but to celebrate the enterprise of turning the country into a heritage theme park.

Thousands of British families flock each summer to the Ironbridge museums complex in Shropshire. Ironbridge embodies the world of difference between eighteenth and



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

### The Big Pit Mining museum, Blaenavon (left), and The Way We Were, Wigan pier (above)

transported around on a conveyor system based on an abattoir carcass-carrier. Eden Camp in North Yorkshire offers to show visitors a prisoner of war camp 'built in 1942 with the aid of Italian prisoners'. Some heritage entrepreneurs are not too fussy about historical detail. 'What's history if you can't bend it a little?' says 'freelance heritage manager' Pruno Peek. His attitude has upset the industry's self-appointed moral guardians, who rail against 'the Mickey Mouse View of History'.

But Mickey Mouse makes money, and so do the new museums. They are cheap to open, and labour costs are low. Creating a job in tourism

available to the heritage industry via the department of the environment, department of employment, English tourist board and the office of arts and libraries. Arts minister Richard Luce has said that an extra £250m will be made available to put 'national museums in good shape for the 21st century'. A wide range of lobby groups enjoys official support: National Heritage in Danger, Save Britain's Heritage, English Heritage, The Georgian Group, Heritage Coordination Group. The Tory government passed two Heritage Acts and appointed two ministers of heritage, David Trippier and Lord Hesketh. Trippier declared heritage to be 'our most priceless asset'.

# the british museum

nineteenth-century Britain which led the world into the industrial age, and late twentieth-century Britain which is a deindustrialised tourist attraction.

Widely regarded as the birthplace of the industrial revolution, Ironbridge came to prominence in the eighteenth century as the site of the Darby family's ironworks and associated factories. In 1837, Charles Hulbert described it as 'the most extraordinary district in the world'. Hulbert marvelled at the rows of 'ironworks, brickworks...[where] hundreds and hundreds of busy mortals are assiduously engaged'. In 1990, 'hundreds and hundreds of mortals' are paying to look at exhibitions and working models showing the exertions and achievements of their forebears. In as

much as the Ironbridge museum has turned manufacturing into a service industry, it is a symbol of modern Britain.

Built in the second half of the nineteenth century, the first generation of British museums were a triumphal reflection of industrial power. The crop of museums now opening in Japan has a similar character. In the USA, industrial museums have often been added on to factories which are still in production. But the story behind Britain's museum boom is one of declining production and obsolete technology.

Forty years ago, during a period of limited technological renewal, the British government gave grants for the removal of outdated factory equipment. In the nineties, British

capitalists who can't make a profit from manufacturing are halting production, and their factories are re-opening as heritage museums displaying their antiquated machinery. Even when British manufacturing tries to be modern, it cannot make the grade. It cannot make history because it is history. British Rail's Advanced Passenger Train (APT) is a case in point.

Unveiled in 1981 as Britain's answer to high-speed trains in France and Japan, the 'Concorde of the iron road' boasted a tilt mechanism which would allow speeds of 160mph and more. On the first trial run from Glasgow to Euston, the tilt mechanism jammed and passengers tumbled from their seats. Subsequent trials were equally embarrassing. After eight years in a siding at Crewe,

## Mining heritage

# Painting it white

Jenny Midwinter asked Yorkshire miner Gerry Allman for a face-worker's view of Caphouse colliery museum

For £3.95 you can go underground for a guided tour of the Caphouse mineshafts which closed in 1984, shortly before the start of the miners' strike. The cage took two minutes to lower us 450 feet to pit-bottom. Gerry found the pace a little gentler than normal.

'At a working pit, it's a bit hairy. There are three decks to a cage, 40 men packed into each deck. It's pitch black. All of a sudden it drops. You're travelling so fast the cage clangs against the shaft. On each shift there are 500 men taken down to 900 metres. The riding time for all of them put together is 10 minutes. And this place is so quiet. Down the pit you have the scream of the cutting head, the face conveyor clanking away and the noise of the fans. You can't hear yourself think. But this is just dead. The quiet makes it eerie, ghostly.

'The pictures they have are not really truthful. They show everything down the mine shining and white, like it was at Selby when the Queen came and they whitewashed it. Everything comes down white but it only stays like that for a week because of the damp. They also show the place as if it's well-lit. But at pit-bottom there are no fixed lights except at stations—where two shafts join. Where you are working you have only your cap-lamp.

'You don't get a sense of the physical tiredness, or the heat. I work with just a pair of shorts on. When a party of nurses came down management told us to cover up, and the nurses all fell asleep on the paddy train because the heat got to them. And it's impossible to put across the dust. You finish work on the Friday. On Sunday you're still coughing black up. You're still doing it at the end of the first week of your fortnight's holiday. You wear dust masks but that doesn't stop the fine stuff that does the damage. The worst thing about this place is that in the shop they sell "coal dust" sweets. That is sick.

'The museum gives you the impression that the bad old days are over. But that's a bit dishonest. The dust is worse now because of the machines we're working with. It's safer than when the mines were private. But accidents happen, and because of the type of machinery you're using, any accident is going to be fairly serious, like losing fingers or an arm. Any miner knows 10-20 people who have been

hurt, and somebody that's been killed. Six months ago at my pit hydraulic supports fell on a man. He was gone straight away. People are often squashed against the ceiling while they are cleaning above the hydraulic chocks.

'The way the museum talks about pit disasters is a bit romantic. "Of hardy miners, brave and strong, who toil near danger's brink...Inured to hardship grown...." I am in the pit rescue team and the leader was at a pit in Scotland where there was a fire. The men in the paddy cars were melted and fused together. He was fetching his mates out in plastic bags. The whole town was round the pithead asking him "have you brought out so and so?". And he couldn't tell who was who.

'If you stuck to the health and safety regs in the Mining and Quarries Act, "you'd never get a cobbler of coal out". You would be sent out of the pit if you stuck to them. But when a serious accident happens management blame the miners for not abiding by them. So it's not really true that the bad old days are over.

'On a real face it's all about getting the coal out. It's noisy, dusty and full of people. If the belt stops for a minute, there's people screaming "get the coal", "get the steel forward". If you're not going forward for any reason, they're on the phone in 10 minutes. Then at the end of the shift, they call you into the office, and it's not for a polite chat.

'There's always pressure. Management are always on about the markets. Then there's the pressure to get your bonus, that's half our wage. I have to be topping 50 steel arches a week for a decent bonus. You take risks but people look out for each other.

'They are selling flat caps and scarves in the museum shop. It reminds me of when we went collecting in Brixton during the strike. I've no complaints about the support we got, but you could tell they expected us to wear a cap, a silk scarf, with a pigeon on your shoulder. Another memory from that time is of being chased through a field by mounted police and hearing the horse breathe behind me. That and scrabbling for coal on the slag heaps. A few people got killed doing that.'



the APT is finally to see service—as the cafeteria in a railway heritage centre.

In *The Heritage Industry*, Robert Hewison explains how the museums boom took off in response to British decline: 'Instead of manufacturing goods, we are manufacturing heritage....The rise of industrial archaeology is an ironic commentary on the decline of the industries it studies....Britain will end up like Peter de Savary's heritage theme park at Littlecote Manor, "the Land that's Trapped in Time".'

While the entrepreneurs and ideologues of British capitalism retreat into heritage, the left and the labour movement are making their own pilgrimage to the past, seeking to divert attention from today's defeats and surrenders by glorifying the struggles and achievements of yesteryear. Thus Neil Kinnock and Tony Benn can unite on the annual Tolpuddle Martyrs march. These sentiments have given birth to a left-wing branch of the heritage industry. Lothian district councillor Paolo Vestri recently opened Edinburgh's People's Story museum, fulfilling an election pledge 'to house the city's radical heritage'. One radical museum professional even suggests that the cardboard boxes used for sleeping in London should become part of a people's museum collection.

Mimicking their free-market counterparts, some Labour councils have put socialist heritage up for sale. In the early eighties, as the town went into apparently terminal decline, Wigan borough council set about selling its past. It brought in a tourism consultant, who pronounced 'the name Wigan pier' to be 'an inestimably valuable marketing asset'. The original Wigan pier, an iron frame used to empty the contents of tip-up trucks into canal barges, was sold for £34 scrap in 1929. The council reconstructed it and spent £3.5m refurbishing adjacent warehouses. Equity-card carrying actors, in period costume, were employed to populate a schoolroom and other carefully contrived 'environments'. Opened by the Queen in 1986, the Wigan pier heritage museum attracted 25 000 visitors in its first year. This prompted construction of The Galleries—£30m worth of private sector shopping development nearby.

Other Labour councils have followed Wigan's lead, selling industrial dereliction as heritage. Wakefield has its Caphouse colliery museum (see left), while Liverpool council invites film-makers to bid for the rights to shoot the demolition of derelict buildings.

Clearly there are important interest groups who stand to gain by

promoting heritage and putting it on the market. But if heritage is marketable, it follows that someone must be willing to buy it. So what strikes a chord with the 100m people who visited museums last year?

Heritage connects with widely held feelings of pessimism and perceptions of decline in modern Britain. The advance of social and economic decay in recent years has spread fears about the future, and encouraged the growth of a popular culture of nostalgia in every field from architecture to TV drama. Thus when the authorities create what Hewison calls a 'denial of the future' in the form of heritage, their doubts and insecurities find resonance among many people to whom a mythical 'golden age' seems a warm and inviting alternative to the cold dawn of an uncertain tomorrow.

The heritage industry is more than a conspiracy by profiteers and politicians. To paraphrase Richard Luce, heritage expresses the human need for roots when all about us is decaying so fast. That it is booming is an indictment of a redundant system which can offer no better future and which truly belongs in the past.

• Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, Methuen, 1987, £6.95

# COMIC SHOPS

## IN VIRGIN MEGASTORES



After all that excitement, I really needed a bath, a shave, and a change of clothes.



**LONDON**  
14-16 OXFORD ST., W1  
TEL: 631 1234 EXT. 260

**MARBLE ARCH**  
527-531 OXFORD ST., W1  
TEL: 495 0395

**BIRMINGHAM**  
98 CORPORATION ST.  
TEL: 021-200 1437

**BRIGHTON**  
157-161 WESTERN RD.  
TEL: 0273 25300

**NOTTINGHAM**  
6-8 WHEELERS GATE  
TEL: 0602 476 246

(Don't forget codes in London change from 6 May!)

'E verywhere else is seriously dull by comparison.' Tony Wilson—Factory records supremo, Granada TV personality and general motor-mouth of the Manchester scene—left us in no doubt about his home town. He can afford to brag. Manchester produced all four winners in the race for top British group of 1989. Stone Roses, Happy Mondays, Inspiral Carpets and James carry on where Factory's Joy Division-New Order left off. Since the beginning of the year, new bands Northside (recently signed to Factory), 808 State and Paris Angels have all been acclaimed as the best of the next. As well as Factory, the Manchester area boasts a host of lesser labels: Bop, Playtime, Playhard, Cut Deep. Record stores like Spinn Inn, Eastern Bloc, Vinyl Exchange and Expansion make the latest stock at Virgin Megastore sound like hymns ancient and modern.

The club scene in Manchester, born of northern soul, championed by the Hacienda and honed down by house music, is unbeatable. The latest club is *Konspiracy*: two dance rooms and a quiet room for 'chilling out'. The city even has its own hip uniform: baggy flared jeans, hooded tops and loose flowing t-shirts with slogans like 'On the sixth day God created Manchester'. Never mind the arrogance, any town with the gall to dress up in flares must have good reason to be self-confident.

Of course there's been a lot of hype. 'Every record company has got to have its underground Manchester band' said Ben from Archie's bar on the Oxford Road. Photographers can't get enough of so-called scallies (no Mancunians would describe themselves as such) with pudding-bowl haircuts lounging on the sixties airport furniture at the Dry bar, latest outpost of Wilson's Factory empire. It's hard to find a flare-wearing Manc who hasn't been interviewed by the *Independent*, *i-D* or German TV. In his new book *The End of the Century Party* Steve Redhead has put Manchester at the centre of his post-modernist analysis of popular culture in Britain. Despite distortion and over-simplification, one thing is clear about the Manchester scene: unlike many another hyped-up 'youth culture' there was definitely something here in the first place.

Why Manchester? According to Wilson, 'London is too big'. The front-runner could have been Glasgow, Newcastle or any provincial city big enough to draw on a range of experiences, yet compact enough to create 'a community where everyone knows each other and bounces off each other'. Martin from 808 State agrees: 'It's a massive party family here.' 'At the Hacienda on Friday, everybody's together', says Christine who works at Dry: 'Everybody just gets on with it.' This community does have an inner circle, the 400 on the Happy Mondays G-Mex gig guest list who Wilson says 'are in each others' pockets'. But thousands more identify with the scene.

What's so marvellous about Manchester?

'Cool

At least, that's what it says on Inspiral Carpets t-shirts. Andrew Calcutt and Jez Mitchell look into the spacey, rave culture of Manchester, city of the moment

Some of the biggest names, like Ian Brown of Stone Roses, disagree with Wilson's community theory. 'as if we all socialise together. I only met the Inspirals last week. Manchester is just where we're from' (*Bop City*, No 1, November 1989). No doubt Brown is preparing for international stardom rather than provincial notoriety, and insuring himself against the moment, which may already have come, when Manchester's creative circle turns into a self-indulgent clique. But there can be no denying that

over the last two or three years the local traditions of guitar-based musical innovation and all-night drug-induced northern soul dancing fused to create a 'spacey' sound and a subculture unlike any other.

The fusion was encouraged by a city that was neither in boom nor slump. In 1987-88, when things got going, Manchester may not have been enjoying a boom on the London scale, but nor was it on the skids like Liverpool—the city which hardly has a rush hour. More Manchester school-leavers were finding



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Living

# as fuck'

permanent, albeit low-paid, jobs. They weren't about to buy a Porsche, but they could afford a bit of self-expression, so long as it was cheap.

Manchester's identity was pieced together from a range of relatively inexpensive styles which carry an unconventional message. House ('obscure black American homosexual music'—Wilson) is Manchester's muzak. Instead of designer labels with flash names like Armani and Gaultier, the Manchester look favours flared jeans (the bottoms get mucky as soon as you walk down the street) made by local Asian manufacturers who call themselves Joe Bloggs, along with hooded hip-hop tops (at £15-£40 much cheaper than a casual leather jacket), loose day-glo t-shirts (*never tucked in*), battered Gazelle trainers, army surplus capoules and long hair instead of square necks and Brylcreem. Manchester's 'anti-fashion' fashion is now being imitated and adapted by youth all over Britain.

Although baggy flares and long hair are reminiscent of the late sixties and seventies, the Manchester scene is not primarily concerned with nostalgia ('the best thing about the sixties is that it was 20 years ago and we weren't there'—Inspirational Carpets). Jeans sold at indoor clothes market Afflecks Palace may be cut from seventies patterns, 'but they are worn differently', insists stallholder Mick Anderson, 'always in the context of now'. 'Now' in Manchester means giving two fingers to the neat, smart middle class culture of what is widely regarded as the yuppie South. When Wilson claims 'this is the most blue-collar popular culture since 1956', he is not far wrong.

Some observers have compared the Manchester scene with the widespread use of drugs in the swinging sixties. For the benefit of the press, Manc kids sometimes pretend to get stoned on three paracetamol and a bottle of Lucozade, but that doesn't alter the fact that drug-taking and Manchester clubbing go together like Tamla and Motown. Stone Roses guitarist John Squire told the *NME* last year that 'draw' (marijuana) was a 'poor man's CD', giving 'depth' to the sounds.

## Under the influence

The 'spacey' sound of the Happy Mondays was developed under the influence and probably sounds much better that way. The band's reputation as former drug dealers has produced scores of Mondays jokes: 'What's the difference between Bez and the Three Degrees? There's only six Es in the Three Degrees.' With a tab of Ecstasy reportedly selling at £25, there is plenty of money to be made, and, so it is said, plenty of connections between gangsters and the legitimate music industry.

The Manchester scene emphasises drugs as did the subcultures of the sixties. But the type of drugs in circulation, and the enjoyment people get from them, seem different.

In the sixties, drugs were about experimentation. In the late eighties and nineties, they are about escapism. Happy Mondays started taking drugs 'out of boredom'. Wilson believes that Ecstasy and all-night dancing while on holiday in Ibiza were the inspiration for the new generation of Manchester clubs: 'Then E-dancing all night finds its hip music in this very obscure stuff [house] which is being played by Mike Pickering at the Hacienda.' Ian, who works on a stall in Afflecks Palace, explained that Ecstasy is the ideal drug for those who have to work because 'you can do it and be there, a bit wrecked, on a Monday morning...not like acid for sixties students who could trip for days on end'.

Some things, however, don't seem to change in the

music world. 'Women are waiting to be shagged' say Happy Mondays. They enjoy talking about 'a cripple for Gaz, he likes that sort of thing...Shaun's dick weighed 4lbs when he was born' (*NME*, 31 March). When a girl singer appeared on stage at the Mondays' famous G-Mex gig in March, the audience chanted 'get your tits out for the lads'. Inspirational Carpets are renowned for their collection of 'botty mags'—pornography. Their stage show includes slides of dogs having sex. Both bands talk about 'faggots'. Of course it's partly a wind up. But that's an old excuse. The role model is Jack the Lad and no doubt Motorhead's Lemmy is proud of them for that.

Manchester bands are no more backward than their heavy metal counterparts, and some like the Stone Roses don't seem to be backward at all. But metal has long been recognised as essentially immature—one of the reasons why it hasn't been particularly fashionable. The sad thing about the Manchester scene is that, for the first time in a decade, it's cool to be chauvinist.

Up to now, we have been talking about a blue-collar subculture in Manchester which both opposes and echoes the prejudices of the society which produced it. The mainly working class audience has coexisted with ex-student entrepreneurs and wide-boy local merchandisers who produced the records, designed the t-shirts, ran the clubs and hired warehouses for raves. It has been their scene, and nobody else's. Now Manchester is about to go global.

Tony Wilson ('T' to friends) has a lot to do with this. Sitting in the canteen at Granada studios he confessed wryly that he was 'the 40-year old groovy entrepreneur and heterosexual Brian Epstein'. He likes to test out his 'street knowledge': 'Going to see a group is the same as the practical criticism paper of the Cambridge English Tripos: you have to decide whether it's Shakespeare or doggerel.' His judgement on music and fashion is certainly sounder than on current affairs. He thinks that the students in Tiananmen Square were 'an example of youth culture, but I actually have a lot of sympathy for the Chinese leadership...I would have shot them. That's being controversial, but...a couple of thousand people is not a big price to pay when you're dealing with a country of one billion people where five million a year used to die of starvation until 1954...I don't want to sound like a bleeding liberal like Kate Adie because I don't have the same concerns as Kate Adie'.

Right now, Wilson's concern is to use his public persona ('a typical Charles Dickens hero, an irrelevant ciphers in the middle, with energy') as the link between Manchester, the media and the big audiences in the USA and Europe. Who would have thought that Factory (remember the radical Manifesto) would get into franchising a Europe-wide chain of Haciendas. That's what Wilson has in mind for the future. Some mourn the passing of the Manchester scene. 'Underground is when you're not supposed to go' said Dean, manager of Expansion Records, a DJ who used to work the Hacienda. 'The scene has discovered clubland and taken it over. The Manchester look is no longer the property of an underground subculture. If the rest of the world is ready, the serious marketing is about to begin.'

● Steve Redhead, *The End of the Century: From Youth and Pop Towards 2000*, Manchester University Press, 1990, £9.95

Factory  
supremo  
T Wilson  
(below) and  
the Return of  
the Trousers  
that Time  
Forgot



PHOTO: Factory Communications

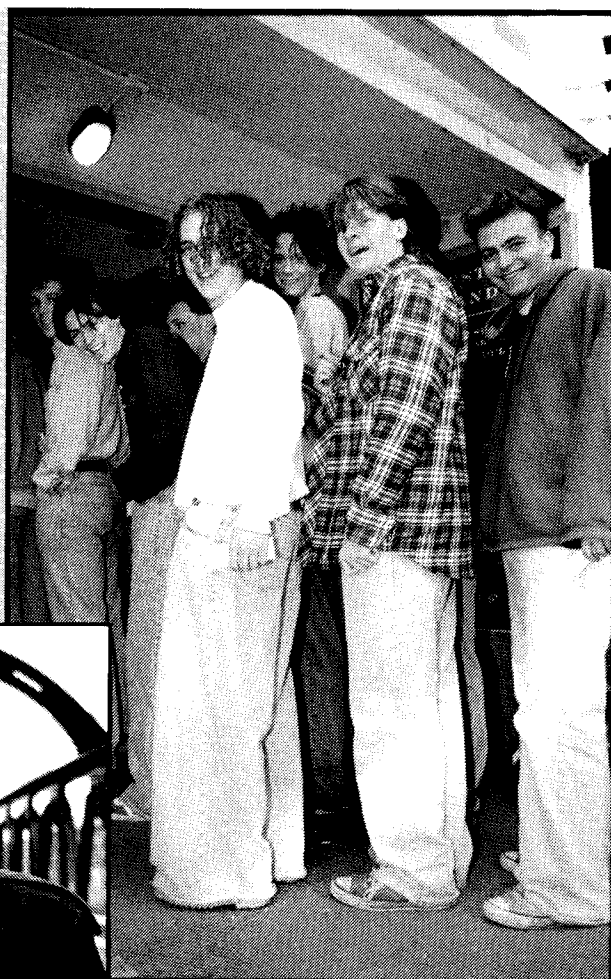


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

# The Granada tour

If any ITV company has claim to be part of our heritage, it is Granada. Two of its oldest programmes, *World in Action* and *Coronation Street*, when they're on form, epitomise much that is good about British television. They are part of our history and part of our present, as the recent account of the Birmingham bombings again showed. So it's not surprising that Granada has done what all the other cultural establishments have done; opened up a nice little heritage theme park.

The Granada Studios Tour in Manchester is however very different from other British heritage attractions; for one thing there isn't a bar of fudge or a sachet of pot-pourri for sale in the whole place. Unfortunately it has gone further than this and done everything in its power to suggest that it is not British at all.

When you arrive at the home of *Coronation Street*, *Brass* and *Brideshead Revisited*, the first thing that greets you is a reconstruction of an American street. Here you wait until your tour is called. To amuse yourself, you can either watch a variety show or hang out in an American-style diner, where you will learn from the photographs that Natalie Wood and Robert Wagner once starred in a Granada production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. If you didn't know this already, you are going to know it like your mother's name by the end of the day. You will see stills from it; the costumes they wore; Natalie Wood's dressing room and so on. On the peg of this one, rather poxy, brush with Hollywood, the tour sets out to project Granada as a studio in the same sense as Paramount or Columbia.

Of course Granada is like Paramount in the same way that the flat biscuity objects they serve in

the diner are like blueberry flapjacks, ie, not remotely. In an extremely cynical ploy the street is bordered by a forest of telephones—the only thing to do while you're waiting is to phone somebody. For those with nobody to phone, the number of the Samaritans is clearly displayed. Then the tour begins, and so does the nightmare.

All tours are guided. You are pointedly not allowed to wander round this place on your own, presumably to give the impression that if you did you might bump into Natalie Wood. You wait for your guide in front of a big screen showing extracts from Granada's prestigious back catalogue. Here is a tantalising glimpse of the contribution which the company has made to British culture. Then the guide appears wearing a stripy blazer and carrying a microphone. His opening gambit is 'Anyone here from Rochdale? Give yourselves a cheer. Come on. Can't hear you!'. My four-year old son says 'What's wrong with him?'. My two-year old falls asleep.

The guide takes us on a brisk forced march past a mixing desk and some camera equipment. These look interesting, but he stops only to point out a little chair. When he tells us it belonged to Alfred Hitchcock the lights go out and a loud scream rends the air, waking up my two-year old. 'Let's press on to the make-up room.' We charged through a mocked-up make-up room, getting warned not to touch anything and told to hurry up.

Then it was Natalie Wood's dressing room. A reconstruction of course. Of course. The assumption behind the speed we moved must have been that nobody could possibly be interested enough to look closely. The assumption behind the tour generally is that you had made a mistake coming in the first place. Then we saw some costumes and some special effects. Finally, we were taken

on to a reconstruction of the set of *The Return of the Antelope*—a series about Lilliputians. There was a huge piano and a massive fireplace, through which you walked into a studio set up for a jungle scene and, at last, on to *Coronation Street*—or at least a reconstruction of *Coronation Street*.

These last few moments of magic threw into relief many of the contradictions of British television. The entire place whinged with insecurity and self-doubt. Why should an organisation with such solid achievements have to spend so much money pretending it is something it is not? Why should it name-drop like a has-been? The reason is that deep down many of the people who run Granada, like a lot of people in Britain, think that television is not that serious or important as a cultural event.

I like a bit of glitz myself. I'd rather have Natalie Wood than *Brideshead Revisited* any day. But the contrast with the rest of the heritage industry is fascinating. The Wigan pier museum, for instance, may be marred by a nauseating nostalgia, but at least you feel that the pits and mills are confident of their place in history, of their own importance. The Barnum atmosphere of Granada sees television merely as a box of tricks. Not that this admission leads to any demystification or involvement. You are bullied through the tour at an exhausting pace. You do not get to press any buttons or inspect anything close up. Whenever you do get somewhere interesting something is produced to distract you. In the wardrobe, for example, just when you think you can settle down and look at the costumes, the ghost of Annie Walker appears and you are asked to scream and then led away.

The insecurity manifests itself as a cheery, bullying arrogance. It is like being button-holed by the pub bore, a bore who you happen to know is the one-time world karate champion, but who insists that he was actually a great ballet dancer. You are not going to get any wiser about karate from him, nor any wiser about television from the Granada tour.

We made our way back across the freezing American street and back into Manchester, a city swaggering with confidence at the moment, thanks to its domination of the ways we dress and dance. Granada has a stake in this confidence. Unlike other ITV companies it has encouraged the region to develop and express its own identity. For instance, the boss of Factory records, Tony Wilson, is a Granada presenter. We passed the Granada building which was advertising its dramatic *Who Bombed Birmingham?* programme, and its new series of *Brass*, probably the funniest thing ever written.

So much to be proud of, but the people in charge seem not to have noticed. When Granada first took off, the first thing its bosses did was diversify into a notorious motorway catering racket, bingo halls and publishing. Television was a milch cow to them then, and it still is now. That's another big difference between Granada and Paramount. At Paramount they liked making movies.



'Granada is like Paramount in the same way that the flat, biscuity things they serve in the diner are like blueberry flapjacks'

Red or Dead

# Art and sole

Tessa Myer visited the Red or Dead fashion house to talk about Space Baby shorts and mock-croc Pimp shoes

**R**ed or Dead is not a lefty fashion company. 'There is no political connection at all. It was a way of getting a name in the press. As soon as you're known you can dissociate yourself from it. Our image is young, fresh, changing all the time and fun.' That's Wayne Hemingway talking, 29-year old creator and supremo. You may have seen the logo, a red flag and a sleek abstract mutation of Soviet symbols and the letters R and D.

The attention to image and sales hype has paid off. The orders are in for this summer's Space Baby collection, and the company can boast worldwide sales (30 shops planned for Japan), and a main slot in British and European fashion shows. Red or Dead is 'too outrageous for France' but in Hongkong, New York, Japan, West Germany and Scandinavia people are 'going crazy'.

It all started in 1982 when Wayne and his partner Gerardine (they had met in a Burnley nightclub) set up a small stall in Camden and made DMs into a fashion boot by introducing patches and colours other than black. Wayne says the 'Red' idea came from his father, a Mohawk Indian, Billy Two Rivers, who was once a world champion heavy-weight wrestler. 'Or Dead' was what the young Wayne asked following his father's supposed death in a car crash.

The products are aimed at the well-off and trendy. Kitting yourself out in Red or Dead (Union Jack Heel shoes £65, Space Baby shorts £40, leather jacket £90) is serious business. 'Our clothes aren't cheap so you need to have access to money from your parents or be in work. The clothes are too witty for most working class people to understand. They won't wear an animal on the back of a Space Baby because they don't understand the fun in it. They want a label like Lacoste or Kickers, they won't go for something that isn't in general circulation.' Or for 'the fun' of paying £40 for shorts.

## Ermintrude on the catwalk

Wayne, who can't sketch to save his life, plays a big part in design. Something like the autumn 1990 Wheel of Animals collection starts off as a silly idea in his head, then the designers translate them into saleable products. 'I once had this sweater that had Galen from *Planet of the Apes* on it, and I thought it would be great if you could wear trendy tank-tops with animals on the front.' Sure enough Red or Dead models at the London Fashion Show this year were draped in brightly coloured printed t-shirts of Ermintrude the Cow, Henrietta the Hen and Penelope the Pig, bell-shaped Heidi skirts, checked tweeds in aqua, pink, lemon and winter white, complete with cow-horned and pig-eared hats.

Leading designer John McKitterick, kitted out in silver shorts, a white t-shirt and silver DMs with babies, says the development of the Red or Dead style is closely associated with what nightclubbers



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

and the designers like to wear themselves. 'The Space Baby collection, [slogan: 'Don't worry about the future, you are in safe hands'] was designed as we approached the new decade which is about rebirth. Since 1984, 1990 is the most futuristic year

we've had and plastics lent itself to that. Real babies are nothing to do with fashion as Vogue's catwalk baby implied. "thirtysomething" refers to a generation and isn't anything to do with fashion which is about exciting people who thrive on the edge.'

## Mock-croc and corduroy

Careful attention to footwear is one of the company's strengths. This autumn's shoe textures are shiny and metallic patents, mock-croc, fake snake, tartan, bouclé and corduroy in pink, teal, loden, white and various shades of red. For anyone interested in loafers with flared, squared-off toes in mock-croc the Pimp shoes will be in the shops next autumn. To finish off a Wheel of Animals outfit watch out for the bouncy roller-soled shoes in red with animal motifs on the tongue. One of the best-sellers is the Cowboy, which shoe designer Vicki Pratt wears herself. 'It's a high-heeled shoe which bounces, so you feel you're wearing DMs. They're a sexy shoe. DM shoes get us our bread and butter and the crazy shoes get us our name. The Hovercraft has just taken off in America. It has a sole which looks like it's been blown up. All the hip-hop boys are dancing in them.'

Patrick Chamberlain wears curly-tongued shoes with leather soles designed by Vicki. He keeps a close eye on the shoes other firms sell. 'The Hovers are successful because they're original. The multiples copy our successful shoes eventually so shoes we've done three or four years ago you'll now find in places like Miss Selfridge. Sometimes they are toned down or altered or just copied verbatim. Shoe copy is a very grey area. You can't claim to hold a design for a shoe. The courts are a long and expensive business. All you have to do is put an extra lacehole in a shoe and it's a different shoe.' He is quick to point out the similarity between their brown and white striped Correspondent shoe and a shoe from Piccadilly Shoes in Manchester. The outrageous see-through Space Baby DMs with grinning baby patches still remain to be copied.

Wayne works in brown plimsoll pumps, coordinating a blue Warehouse sweatshirt with orange jeans. 'You can't wear Red or Dead for work, you'd get it dirty', he says. But some people who don't get dirty do wear Red or Dead to work: Bros, Erasure. Yazz, Lisa Stansfield, Kylie, Jason, Kim Wilde, Lenny Henry, Fine Young Cannibals, French and Saunders, to name quite a few. John McKitterick does not think they have much influence on fashion, 'You can't force fashion on people. There's no right or wrong. Nothing in fashion happens accidentally'. Wayne is not so modest: 'Now we can dictate a bit and create fashion.'

## Manchester's Irish scene

# Police toss the Feathers' fans

Manchester has another music scene which is also attracting the punters and the police, say Hilary Savage and Lesley McDonnell

**'A**t the end of the night we were coming out just singing. The next minute I had this big hand at the back of my neck and before I knew what was happening, I was in the back of a police wagon. They didn't say anything, they just chucked me in the back. At the police station they were taking them out individually and beating

them up outside, kicking and punching people.'

Raves aren't the only parties which the police like to poop. This happened in Manchester recently, and it wasn't at the Hacienda or a Stone Roses gig. It was on an alternative club scene: contemporary Irish music of the sort produced by Planxty, Christy Moore, Moving Hearts, Stockton's Wing, everything from traditional reels to the Waterboys.

The concert where big hands were laid on the back of necks was at the International, featuring one of Manchester's favourite Irish bands of the moment, Toss the Feathers.

The neck belonged to Seamus, a 21-year old Belfast lad studying in Manchester. 'We don't want any of those lot over here', the arresting officer told him. Seamus gave his name in Irish and was promptly labelled 'a republican student'. The police are apparently not keen on the large popular following now growing around Irish bands like Toss the Feathers, Rattle 'n' Reel and Jack Alley. They turned up at the International with riot vans and a new helicopter, complete with searchlight.

### Reelin', not rellin'

Other people are showing a more constructive interest. Rattle 'n' Reel have released their first tape and have been negotiating with Factory about a video on the music scene. They're a five piece (all with Irish roots) with flute and fiddle, guitars and drums, and play ballads and blue grass as well as all the Irish styles. They throw a few rebel songs into the set, but singer/guitarist John says it's because the audience like it, not for any political reasons. He will tell you that British troops should pull out of Ireland but he's wary of making an issue of it. 'Get the Brits out' is not at the front of the band, it's come and have a good time, have a dance and enjoy it.'

Toss the Feathers are much further down the road to fame and fortune, and have fully absorbed the rules. Bass guitarist and singer Dave: 'When we first started we did rebel songs because they were popular. As soon as we started getting anywhere that was put a stop to. You can only get to a certain level playing republican songs. Like the Wolfetones have got a cult following but they could never be mega just because of what they do.'

Toss the Feathers are obviously going for mega. With three singles (the second, Skidoo, was a first in acid folk), two albums and an American tour behind them they may be going the right way about it. A new album is out soon and they are featured in a forthcoming BBC/RTE/Sky collaboration along with heavyweights like Elvis Costello, Van Morrison, Sinead O'Connor and Bono. Dessie (fiddle) and Michael (flute/whistles) were the duet champions at last year's All Ireland Fleadh and both are past champions on their own instruments. Like Paul (drums) and Chris (banjo/mandolin) they received their grounding in the comhaltas.

### Arrests and abuse

Two members of the band, Eddie (singer/guitar) and Chris, were born in Ireland. The rest are second or third generation. Like Rattle 'n' Reel some of them might hold nationalist views, but politics isn't really an issue. They found it hard to see why the police descended on them complete with helicopter, arrested 60 people, and advised the club-owners to cancel the next Toss the Feathers gig (which they did). Dave wasn't sure that it was deliberately anti-Irish: 'But at the same time, if we hadn't been an Irish band, would they have needed a hundred police for a gig?' Since then the police have pressed other clubs to cancel Toss the Feathers; when the gigs go ahead, they wait outside to pass anti-Irish abuse at the punters.

Seamus spent the night in a cell and got another beating for resisting his fingerprints and photograph being taken. He pleaded guilty to using abusive language and behaviour under the Public Order Act and, to his horror, was fined £70. 'I took a chance, thinking I wouldn't get that much. The prosecutor said I was singing, causing a nuisance, which is a bit way out because everyone was singing. I live in Belfast. It would take a bastard of an RUC man to do you under such an act. I mean you go to football matches and you sing far more abusive things. It's just because this was an Irish concert it was totally different.'



# The tube map Underground movement

Toby Banks on Harry Beck, unsung hero of the London Underground, and an exhibition about his masterpiece at the London transport museum

**A**t long last, London Transport is paying tribute to Harry Beck, creator of the tube map (or journey-planner as it is sometimes called, aptly enough, now that a tube trip has indeed become a journey). The map is efficient, user-friendly and modern-looking—that's right, unlike the decrepit shambles it represents. It has become a world-famous design icon, a classic combination of function and style. Its brilliant simplicity has never been bettered: most of the world's subways have followed the diagrammatic format, colour-coded lines and clear interchanges. It has become a symbol of London reproduced on postcards and t-shirts. There is even a copy in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Harry Beck wasn't an expert, nor even a designer, but a 29-year old engineering draughtsman employed by London Underground. Like most passengers, Beck was baffled by previous tube maps, unintelligible spiders' webs superimposed over London street plans. While he was laid off work during an economy drive, he began doodling improvements. A piece of lateral thinking led him to adopt the principles of electrical circuitry and draw the tube network as a *diagram* rather than a map. This produced a topographical representation of the lines instead of proportional or scaled portrayal. For maximum clarity lines could be straightened or bent and spaced, regardless of their real geographical position. It is hard to imagine what a radical breakthrough it was at the time.

During the late twenties, the underground railways had been amalgamated under the auspices of Frank Pick. He was an enthusiastic modernist, commissioning the famous circular logo, new architecturally homogeneous suburban stations and a series of stylish advertising posters by leading artists. Pick was praised for the new map when it was introduced in 1933. It was an instant success with the public and its modernist appearance and sans-serif lettering fitted perfectly with the new corporate image.

Two years earlier, however, when Beck first submitted his design in a school exercise book

Pick turned it down as 'too strange and revolutionary...people wouldn't understand it'. He was later to admit, grudgingly, that it was 'very convenient'. It was in fact indispensable. Dropped once in 1960, the public outcry was so great that it had to be reintroduced immediately.

The map changed the way people viewed the capital. Indeed for many people it is London. Few have any geographical grasp of where all the outer stations are. The effect of compressing the distances between the suburban stations made things clearer to the passenger, but the deception was also useful for the tube managers. They were extending the Underground into the suburbs but the new lines were hardly used outside the rush hour. So they started a publicity campaign to get people to come into the centre to shop and go out to the country at the end of the line. With Harry Beck's map it didn't look that far at all.

Beck's story is a striking example of how workers are ideally placed to spot and solve problems, how innovation often comes from the shopfloor. It is an example of something else too. They paid him five guineas for the rights to an idea which a design company today would sell for a small fortune. Five guineas wouldn't have covered his lost earnings as he sat at home and doodled. Back at work he remained at their beck and call, refining and adjusting the map over many years as new stations and lines were added. All unpaid, all in his spare time.

Obviously Beck was motivated by the sheer challenge and it became a labour of love, indeed a consuming obsession. He wasn't after money, but even so, he was ripped off. They never even put his name on the map. The exhibition is full of various versions of the map and of his beautiful sketches and plans grappling with the mind-boggling problem of illustrating 250 miles of track and 273 stations. It goes some way towards giving him the recognition that he so richly deserves.

• 'Finding the Way' is at the London transport museum, Covent Garden, until 3 June

The face of 2000AD?



Sci-fi and the future

# Not-so-great expectations

Andrew Calcutt boldly goes to Forbidden Planet, the sci-fi super store in London's West End; below, Sean Thomas reviews trends in science fiction. They find futurism out of fashion

It will soon be 2001, but judging by the clientele at Forbidden Planet few science fiction fans of today expect to see spaceships like Major Tom's in their lifetimes. To them computers are boring, space opera is too implausible and hyper-advanced societies out of the question. They prefer dystopias to utopias, or just to dwell in JG Ballard-style psycho-dramas where, as one fan put it, 'everyone is his own universe...the future is in yourself'.

Who are the sci-fi fans? Forbidden Planet's customers are mainly young, white and male. Many live in suburbs or new towns. Shop manager Dick Jude thinks that they are more narrow-minded these days, 'My definition of science fiction is speculative fiction that broadens parameters. I used to expect radical people to be involved in sci-fi. But some of the people in here are very narrow. They are quite a conservative bunch'.

One shopper, Steve, is typically cautious about the potential for new technology now. 'A digital watch is a computer at the end of your arm. People were dreaming of that not long ago, and now it's just nothing. But space travel has stopped. Car design is not going anywhere. There hasn't been that much development.' Another observed that attitudes change 'according to the period we are living in. In the sixties people were far more optimistic. That was when a lot more of the big developments were made. Nowadays it seems as if technology has devastated the world'. Jude agreed: 'I can see why people don't think of technology as liberating if all it does is dump you on the dole.'

I tried to suggest that technological advance held out great possibilities for social progress. I got short shrift. 'I could progress' said one young man, 'I could get a flat in South Kensington. But progress, you mean changing a whole society, I'm not sure how that could happen'. Somebody else pointed out however that in countries where technology is still advancing sci-fi and its readership have retained their optimism: 'It is particularly English writers who paint a bleak picture. Japanese comic books celebrate technology and the things it can do, which is a reflection of Japanese society. I think England is not really geared to change. It's always lagging behind.'

Dick Jude compared Britain with the USA, 'Generally speaking downbeat future histories don't sell there. American readers love the idea that we get over problems on Earth and move into space. If you're a middle class white American there's reason to be optimistic. Whereas in Britain, for a lot of people, science fiction is just a bucketful of sand to put their heads into'.

While Japanese 'graphic novels' (comics) celebrate technological advance, and American 'space opera' retains a patriotic swagger, the low horizons of British sci-fi and its readership reflect the fact that the Starship British Enterprise is being shunted off into the scrapyard. Instead of social advance, post-apocalyptic urban savagery is the stock-in-trade of Forbidden Planet's best-sellers. At worst, the customers expect the real future to be eco-doom; at best, to be much the same as the present.

In *Watchmen* graphic writers Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, alias 'Dr Manhattan', recently pronounced 'Science, the traditional enemy of mysticism and religion, has taken on a growing understanding that the model of the universe suggested by quantum physics differs very little

from the universe that Taoists and other mystics have existed in for centuries'. This backward-looking mystical approach was echoed by several customers in Forbidden Planet: 'People are beginning to have more respect for Earth-type values', 'I think in some ways we were better in a rural society. Western society is not working and we need to go back to the more natural, intuitive aspects of ourselves'.

Intuition instead of knowledge? Mysticism instead of science? Nature instead of society? Sci-fi fans seem to be going back to the future.

• A Moore and D Gibbons, *Watchmen*, Titan Books, 1987, £9.95

## Grim things to come

Of 52 Anglo-American science fiction films made between 1970-82 only three showed the triumph of progressive technology and the vision of a better future (and even these were aimed at a younger audience). So says H Bruce Franklin in a new collection of essays, *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. Not one of these films shows a functioning democracy; most depict a nightmarish future of social collapse, terror and dictatorship. Franklin's conclusion is blunt: 'The only future that seems unimaginable in Hollywood is a better one.'

You may feel this is a fairly apt comment on the existing world order. After all, if you were asked to envisage capitalism in 20 or 50 years time what would you see but more decay, war and famine? So *Blade Runner* doesn't seem so far after all. But all this hardly fits with the system's triumphalist self-image; and it jars too with the much less fatalistic attitude with which the science fiction of the past viewed the future.

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) and David Butler's *Just Imagine* (1930), despite their liberal disgust at class conflict, hardly denied the potential for improvement. Even in the thirties with fascism and war looming in Europe science fiction writers spread the idea of progress not

barbarism. In 1938 Isaac Asimov founded a group called the Futurians, in a conscious attempt to combat the ideas of American writers who flirted with fascism and chauvinism.

Asimov, who had fled with his family from the Bolsheviks in 1923, is regarded as the founder of modern science fiction. His major work, the *Foundation* series (a 14-book epic), written between 1942 and 1988 is the unwitting optimistic story of the American century. Asimov saw the 'old empire is crumbling into barbarism' and wanted to see 'the nucleus of a new empire...dedicated to art, science and technology'.

*Foundation* was a great success, partly because it made it seem possible that America could fulfil the expectations posed by technological and economic development. Space flight, cities in the sky, longevity, medical breakthroughs, robots, etc—these are some of the typical science fictions. Don't forget, it was because they were talking about these sort of things that the word science was used in the first place. As time passed, however, a tension developed around the sci-fi genre because in the real world society was failing to keep up. Increasingly science fiction, albeit unintentionally, made promises on the basis of developing the existing technology which capitalism could not keep.

Almost inevitably, the genre itself lowered its

expectations and began to explore fantastical pasts where nature ruled or dreadful futures where tyrants dominated. Technology itself soon came to be seen as the cause of the problem, as Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner show in 'Technophobia', their useful contribution to this collection of essays.

In post-war America not even a generation had passed before the possibilities had become improbabilities. Writers like Philip K Dick emerged alienated from and suspicious of the success built upon American domination. That success had after all brought the patriotic thuggery and machismo of writers like Larry Niven, Poul Anderson and Robert Heinlein, and led Hollywood to inveigh against an assortment of bodysnatching subversives and alien invasions.

In the eighties the 'cyberpunk' novels caught the mood of computer-literate youth trying to eke out a living against and between the huge corporations. In William Gibson's pioneering *Neuromancer* (1984) the battleground is a new dimension: 'the virtual world' or 'matrix' created by computer data. Here artificial intelligence can kill, society does not exist and only the streetwise mercenary computer hacker can survive. It is as bleak as anything Hollywood has offered, and on the same trajectory.

Even Isaac Asimov has joined the gloomsters and doomsters. He has been quoted as saying that humanity has a fifty-fifty chance of making it to the next century in one piece. That new empire based on art, science and technology seems to have faded from their view.

• H Bruce Franklin, 'Visions of the future in science fiction films from 1970 to 1982'; M Ryan and D Kellner, 'Technophobia', in A Kuhn (ed), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Verso, 1990, £8.95

# Professional crime **From the Krays to crack**

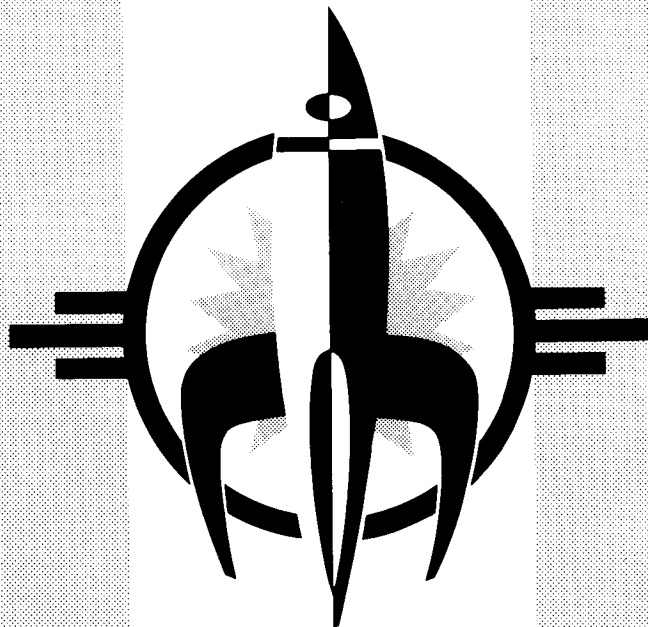
Duncan Campbell told John Fitzpatrick about his new book on the changing face of professional crime, *That was Business, This is Personal*

**S**entencing the Great Train Robbers in 1964 the judge said, 'this is nothing less than a sordid crime of violence inspired by vast greed'. Another judge, 25 years later, put two of the robbers away again, this time for cocaine dealing, with the words 'you...know exactly what you were doing and your motive was greed'. Two things strike Duncan Campbell about these comments: the hypocrisy of the judicial moralising and the fact that the elderly train robbers had been employed dealing drugs rather than in the more traditional pastime of blagging. His book is an attempt to explore both the humbug and the changes which have befallen professional crime in Britain over the past 30 years.

He has done a remarkable job. His book consists of 23 interviews with ex-criminals, criminals, their families and friends, lawyers, a judge, a victim, a prison officer, several policemen, a crime reporter and others. In fact they are more than interviews, they are compelling mini-portraits of a gallery of characters who have all been closely associated

with the world of professional crime. The profession is the 'business' of the title, the 'personal' is what they have to say for themselves. *Guardian* journalist Campbell has induced normally shadowy characters to step into the light for a moment. When was the last time you read an interview with a cocaine dealer, a drugs squad officer, a judge or a prison warden? He acknowledges the 'unconscious' inspiration of GF Newman's TV series *Law and Order* which was built around 'the villain's tale', 'the brief's tale', etc.

With the help of his witnesses, which include celebrities as Ronnie Kray, Wally Probyn and Mike Mansfield QC, he takes us through the heyday of the gangster (over by the late sixties), the robber (over by the late eighties), the drug dealer (still with us) and finally into the hi-tech crime of today. Campbell is suspicious of accounts of crime that come only from one source. 'Because of the relationship between the police and crime reporters some of what is written is simply nonsense, but sometimes it is geared in a certain way. The



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PHOTO: Richard Blanshard

Bonnie does a little business in the new Krays film

weakness of a lot of reporting on crime is that the reporters only get the police side of things. You should get away from the stereotype of lovable rogues and outlaws as well.'

Campbell hopes readers will see the double standards at work. 'It is so hypocritical of the judge to say your motive was greed when there are people earning salaries of £450 000 as if they have some other motive. Greed is terrifically OK if you're a captain of industry, but for others it is absolutely the most appalling thing, like sadism or something. The eighties philosophy is to own a house, own shares, own as much as you can by whatever methods are available. People who are not able to do it are looked down upon as too lazy or too stupid. You can't be surprised if people take slightly shorter cuts than those already being taken.'

He proceeds to tell of one short cut which came his way; a tale which would not have been out of place in the book. 'I was covering a police conference at the seaside. There were loads of crime reporters and home affairs correspondents, "the lads". We had to go to a particular restaurant. It turned out that was because the owner handed out loads of blank receipts. People find that irresistible, you get the bloke beside you to write it out, say a meal with a detective sergeant for £86, and you've actually stolen £86.' 'Did you fill one in?' I asked. 'No. I wouldn't take one. Not out of any deep-seated morality, but there were people there I wouldn't like to have anything on me. Only two others out of 13 reporters refused them. The next day we'd all be reporting about the appalling rise of crime in Britain. What it says is that when people can get away with it they'll do it.'

### Rebels without a clue

Criminals and crime reporters aren't the only ones trying to get away with it. So too are the police. Many of the interviewees simply assume that the police are corrupt, and stories of crooked deals abound. Getting nicked is widely assumed as well. Only one criminal here, a drug dealer, has made crime pay and retired without getting convicted. For the rest there seems to be a grim inevitability about their progress through various prisons, probably even grimmer for their wives and families. Wisdom generally comes after a 10-year stretch. 'I've not been a competent criminal', says Wally Probyn, 'Mostly it's been motivated by rebellion which is rather incompetent because there are better and more efficient ways I could have rebelled had I had it over again'.

One fascinating contribution comes from an able, if slightly megalomaniacal, detective sergeant Saltmarsh of the drugs squad. He worries about drug misuse being 'hijacked...for political reasons'.

'In this era of detente, with things changing so much in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, some people are looking for a new folk devil on which many of the ills of society can be dumped and with which they can worry the electorate.' He doesn't think crack will catch on in British conditions; instead, the 'next drug of preference' will be 'ice' (crystallised methamphetamine).

The book's rather rigid application of the category 'professional criminal' does exclude important areas. The term is more apt to cover the Krays and Probyns of this world than the young black men who are so extensively criminalised by the police; thus we are left with just one, scorchingly articulate, contribution from a black ex-prisoner, Trevor Hercules. Nor does it easily embrace the new criminals, the computer fraudster or the inside dealer in the City. Campbell could not get a representative of this most discreet and sophisticated capitalist crime to confide in him. He hopes to make that good in a second edition.

Together the 23 stories produce a strong sense of the oppressive and often irrational nature of the judicial and penal system. Even the lawyers are in its thrall, including the insufferably smug judge. Campbell would like to see the drug laws and

sentencing policy reformed. 'Somebody got 10 years today for smuggling cannabis. That's crazy. Heavy sentences for cannabis divert the dealers into heroin, cocaine and crack. It's gradually being realised, especially since Strangeways, that sentencing policy is a disgrace and a disaster. You could halve the numbers in jail tomorrow without anybody worrying about walking down the street.'

One theme running through the book is the sneaking regard which the public has for criminals, so long as there is no threat to them. 'People aren't remotely disturbed about protection rackets or about the Krays. From school onwards people find those who break the rules more attractive than the prefects, those who question authority more entertaining than those who want to enforce it. That's the appeal of Ronald Biggs or Buster Edwards. We are all leant on. We don't have an enormous chance to shape our lives, so when someone gives them two fingers in a way we wouldn't dare, we get excited about it.'

• Duncan Campbell, *That was Business, This is Personal: The Changing Face of Professional Crime*, Secker & Warburg, 1990, £14.95.

Film: *She-Devil*

## At last, unhappy families

Joe Boatman greets with relief a film that doesn't think family life is the last word in fulfilment; Susan Seidelman's *She-Devil* opens in London on 11 May

**T**wo years ago that cautionary tale *Fatal Attraction* took us on a terrifying tour of the dangers of promiscuity and adultery and then delivered us, like children shaken by a nightmare, back to the reassuring comfort of family life. Going to the cinema is like a recurring nightmare these days; you always get caught up in the claustrophobic comfort of family life. From children's films (*Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*), through comedy (*Parenthood*) to crime capers (*Family Business*) family ties knot the plots and sticky sentimentality seals them together. This year's darkly comic cautionary tale *The War of the Roses* and Susan Seidelman's new comedy *She-Devil* provide a little respite, both taking a more jaundiced view of the happy home.

The story of the Roses' destructive marriage is set like a shattered gem in Danny DeVito's glowing wedding ring. He hedges the account of their battles with references to his own conjugal bliss. But while its formal message may be in the moral mainstream, its dramatic message defies it. As Mr and Mrs Rose mercilessly destroy the possessions that have become all that they are to each other, it makes a change to see that star attraction—marriage—turn out to be fatal. *She-Devil* starts with an adulterous infringement of family life and also entails the spectacular demolition of the family home, but this time rejected wife Ruth Patchett (the *She-Devil* played by Roseanne Barr) uses her wicked wits to get a result for herself.

Based on Fay Weldon's satirical novel *The Life and Loves of a She Devil*, the film celebrates a wife's revenge. Using a lot of manipulation and even more money the book's heroine achieves a bitter triumph; she gains power over her husband's destiny (jail then reunion with her), influence over his mistress' fate (poverty and death) and control over her own life (wealth and beauty). It's not a particularly inspiring tale, partly because—however cunning our schemes for personal and poetic

justice may otherwise be—most of us just can't budget several million for adjusting the world to our taste. And her victory remains somewhat hollow since restoring a deranged and dejected husband to her home is more an exercise in power than in pleasure.

Seidelman's avenging *She-Devil* is more sweet than bitter, she has a bit more fun than in the book. Ruth Patchett's accountant husband (Ed Begley Jr) lists his assets as house, family, career and freedom and dismisses her as his one liability. Mrs Patchett responds by dismantling his life and reorganising her own.

Working from his list, each foundation of his patriarchal reign is dealt with in a series of mischievously ironical manoeuvres. First, in a cathartic attack involving a diabolical application of those handy home-making appliances, the house goes up in flames. It's triggered off by a home-made bomb complete with flashing timer (an aerosol can in a microwave). His precious nuclear family unit is then destroyed by the fiendishly ingenious stroke of reassembling it in his mistress' previously ideal home. Bob Patchett and his mistress (Meryl Streep, hilarious as a breathless and simpering Barbara Cartland-type) find the romance of her fictional ideals exposed to the grimmer realities of unruly children and a disruptive 'in-law'. Finally his career and freedom are simultaneously despatched with a fraud frame-up, achieved with the aid of the army of 'discarded' women she has assembled.

The result is a film in which everybody is improved by their experience, born again in various versions of New Man and Independent Woman. OK, it's an improbable and inappropriate approach to getting even (and yes it does cost Mrs Patchett a lot of dollars to do it her way), but as Roseanne Barr eyes the reformed Meryl Streep with an evil glitter before sashaying off to the strains of 'You're the devil in disguise', it's nice to know she's not necessarily going home.

# Letters

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

## Defend the Sandinistas

In the article 'A gift from Gorbachev' (April), Stefanie Boston rather unfairly says of the Sandinistas 'that they sought to create a safe environment for the development of an independent national capitalism', and that they had never had any 'special progressive character'.

Sure, the Sandinistas sought to bolster their country's economy allowing some private enterprise to continue among the peasants and farmers. But, as you are no doubt aware, Lenin also allowed the market, as a temporary measure, among the kulaks and peasants because he knew that the success of the revolution depended on the buoyancy of the economy and the willing participation of peasants and the workers.

Referring to a previous article in *Living Marxism*: 'The corpse is not communism' (February), the authors argue that 'Marx and Engels recognised that capitalism could not be transformed overnight....In this phase class relations would persist because the material relations for equality would not be completed'. I think this sums up the post-revolutionary Nicaraguan situation perfectly.

Stefanie Boston also argues that the industrial and agro-export capitalists received major concessions from the Sandinistas while the workers and peasants suffered plunging incomes and soaring inflation in the name of revolutionary austerity'. But she also acknowledges that Washington continued to sponsor the Contras' terrorism and sabotage against the Nicaraguan people. The peasants and workers suffered falling incomes, cuts in health and housing and inflation because half the budget went into defending the country against the US-sponsored Contra war.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, the fledgling Soviet state also suffered at the hands of counter-revolutionaries. But after suffering heavy losses and much damage to the economy they managed to pull through, although what followed was hardly something to celebrate.

I think that instead of knocking the Sandinistas who managed to achieve a lot while under extreme pressure, *Living Marxism* should be looking at the effect counter-revolution can have on post-revolutionary societies in the light of the Soviet and Nicaraguan experience.

**Kevin Reid**  
Edinburgh

## Not boxing clever

Nick Johnson's article 'King of the ring' (April) on the sudden demise of Mike Tyson explodes many of the common prejudices that are held about top boxers. But Johnson holds a few prejudices of his own.

Of course Don King is the current ringmaster who controls much of the financial circus which passes for boxing promotion. Undoubtedly he will destroy many top boxers like Tyson who became flabby and self-obsessed under his protection. But Don King is too much of an easy target. He is everybody's hate figure; but then a black ex-con who becomes the number one Mr Fixer of the ring will always disturb the *Guardian* sportswriter's view of boxing.

The idea that boxing is a noble art that has been degraded by (dodgy) money leads to a search for a mythical golden age when boxers just boxed, trainers just trained and coke was just a drink. The Tyson-D'Amato relationship fuelled this nostalgic view of the sport. Tyson, the bad kid from the wrong side of the tracks and heading for a short life of crime, is steered by D'Amato, the father Tyson never had, right to the pinnacle of his profession. But of course the people who controlled Tyson before Don King didn't do it because they loved the kid. They did it for the money, the fame, and to keep their man at the top.

The sad thing about top competitive boxing is not that the likes of Don King (or Frank Warren for that matter) ruin boxers, but the state of the sport itself. The remarkable thing about Tyson is not that he lost but how easy it was for him to get to the top. Tyson may have been explosive and exciting at times but who did he supplant? Johnson may be right to suggest that 'Tyson was the most exciting heavyweight since Ali', but that's only because his contemporaries were about as dynamic as a sack of potatoes.

Today boxing is dominated by the likes of Sugar Ray Leonard who box to a written script and talk like pop stars. Tyson was never that sort of clown but nor was he about to save boxing from the circus it has become.

**Joe Watson**  
London

## Degenerating Marxists

Mike Freeman's article, 'Marxism lives!' (April), is correct to focus on Gareth Stedman Jones' renegacy from Marxism. Indeed, it seems unclear whether Stedman Jones regards himself as a socialist in any sense of the term nowadays. It was Stedman Jones who, in 1989, was to be found lining up with right-wing educationalists complaining that his Cambridge students couldn't spell!

However, I'm not so sure that Mike Freeman has got Stedman Jones' political trajectory right. Back in the sixties he was very much associated with the abstract and idealist Marxism of Althusser, and this tendency has now led him away from Marxism altogether. Thus in his *Languages of Class* (1982) he stressed the formalistic links Chartism had with late eighteenth-

century radicalism and denies its revolutionary content. In his writings for the *New Socialist* in the early eighties, the formation of the working class is pushed further and further back until the idea of the working class is denied. And if there is no working class then the Labour Party cannot be blamed for selling it out!

Stedman Jones' latest writings can be found in the *History Workshop* volume 'Metropolis' (1989) and are little more than a mish-mash of radical concerns. But abstract Marxism aside, has he really ever stood for anything different?

**Keith Martin**  
London

## German questions

Dave Chandler's argument against support for German reunification (letters, April) is confused. He charges that 'for or against unity' is the wrong question. But he also fails to indicate what the right question might be. In fact it appears that it is Chandler himself who is obsessed with the isolated question of German unity—certainly his rejection of support for reunification wrenches the issue out of its real context.

The unfreezing of history that reunification represents is not simply a shift in imperialist relations. Some of the props on which imperialism has rested for the past 45 years have been swept away. The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe has denied the maintenance of the Cold War status quo.

The reunification of Germany cannot be separated from the demise of Stalinism: it was immediately placed on the agenda by the abdication of the Honecker regime in the GDR. To compare this with Japanese remilitarisation makes no sense at all. Stalinism's role of artificially stabilising Europe and blocking the development of progressive working class politics has disappeared. This is a source of concern for the imperialists, who, like Margaret Thatcher, have new-found enthusiasm for the Warsaw Pact and other institutions of the past. But these new circumstances also raise a welter of new questions for the working class.

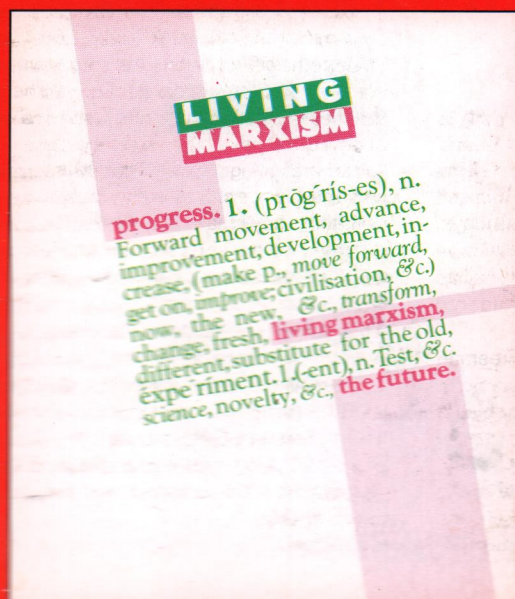
It is hard to disagree with Chandler's argument that anti-German chauvinism must be opposed in Britain and German nationalism in Germany. But these are only partial conclusions if the source of these new questions are not recognised. To conclude that 'Marxists are neither for nor against reunification' is to refuse to give a verdict on the impact of the collapse of Stalinism for the working class internationally. Both the leaders of the Western world and most of the left have their doubts. But for those who wish to see the creation of a genuinely independent working class politics, there can be no ambivalence.

**Carol Wheeler**  
Birkenhead



Berlin Wall, January 1990

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