LIVING MARXISM

July 1990 No21 £1·50

OUT OF THE DARK

racist violence in Italia '90, racket capitalism in Poland, irrationalism in Western thought

INTO THE LIGHT

the case for reason, science, progress and revolution

THE NEW ENLIGHTENMENT STARTS HERE

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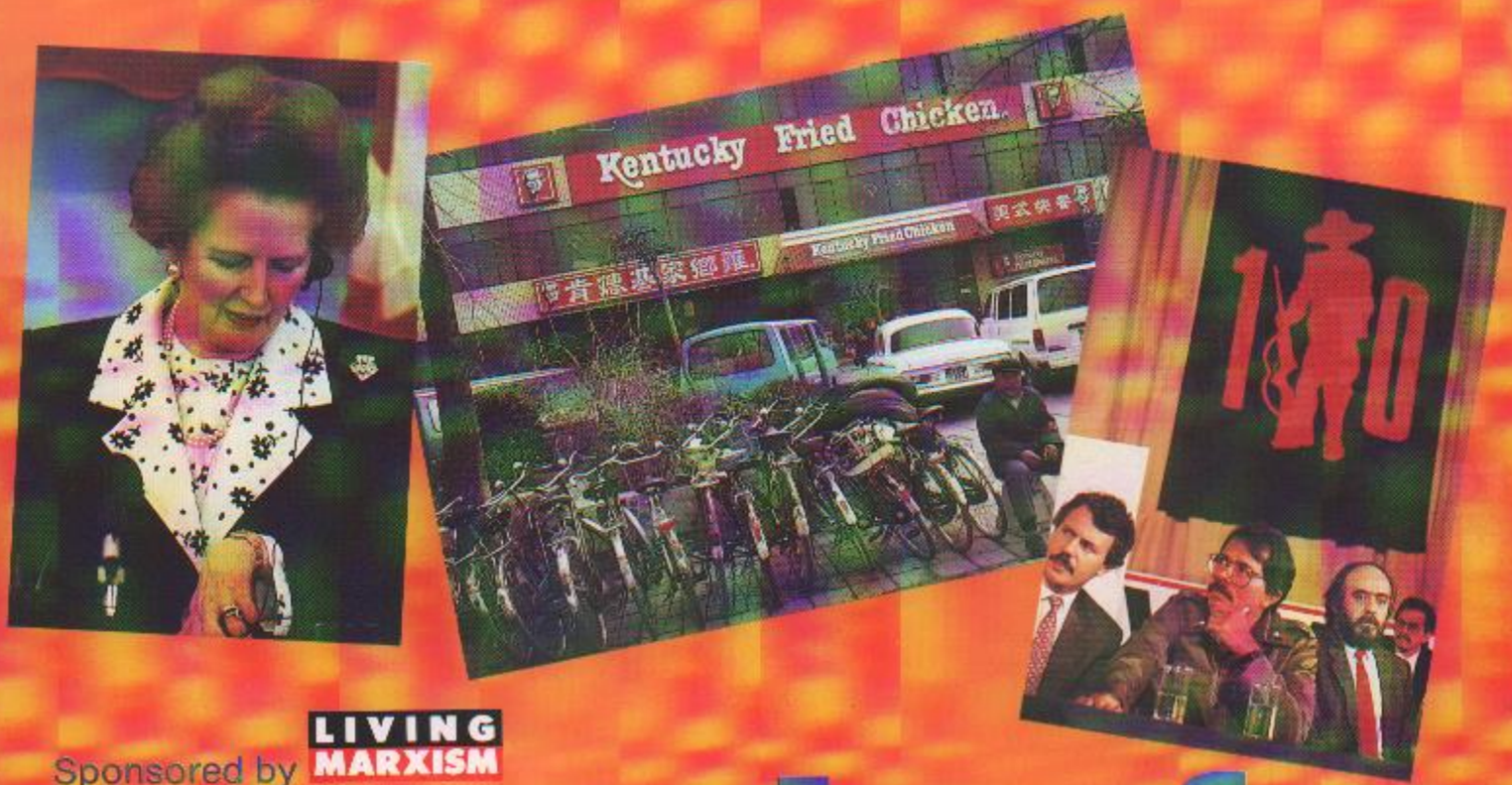

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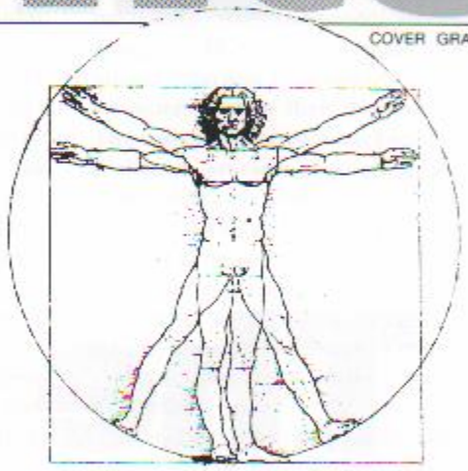

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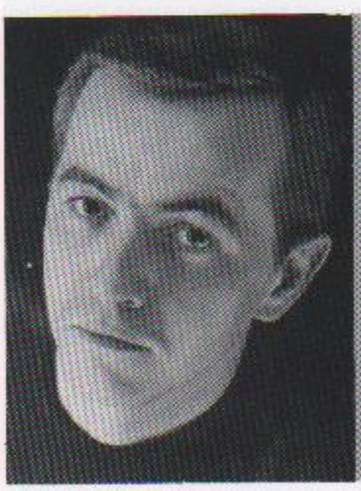
editorial

The New Enlightenment starts here



editor
mick hume

We live in superstitious times. People might like to mock the myths and irrational beliefs of old. But our age has some powerful hi-tech superstitions of its own.

The finest minds once believed that by sailing too far into uncharted waters you risked falling off the edge of a pizza-shaped planet. These days the Flat Earth Society doesn't carry much scientific clout. Yet its main message, the warning against over-ambitious explorations of nature's mysteries, finds a modern echo among many influential voices.

At the end of the twentieth century, experts and public figures ranging from the Pope and Ian Paisley to Chaos theorists and environmentalists all claim that the natural world has its own way of doing things, beyond our control and comprehension, and that the balance could be irreparably damaged by human interference. So scientists shouldn't risk sailing beyond set barriers. Flat Earthism is back in fashion.

Many of today's fast-multiplying theories about the doom-laden future facing the world display just such an irrational streak. Some of this is down to scientists making forecasts based on uncertain evidence. Some

of it comes straight out of the fantasies of mystics and charlatans. Whether it comes from the Greens or the gurus, the mood of the moment is to cast doubt on whether social and scientific progress is possible, or even desirable.

The major feature articles in this month's *Living Marxism* enter the debate about progress. Much of this discussion concerns humanity's ability to improve its condition through a struggle with nature. A belief in the human capacity to overcome once-formidable problems through the application of reason and science was a key feature of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which broke the stranglehold of ancient mythology. That progressive spirit has since been lost. We need to recover it—not by turning the clocks back 200 years, but by looking forward to the future.

The original Enlightenment embodied a vision of optimism at the dawn of the capitalist age, when scientific theory and technology were advancing on all sides and almost anything seemed possible. That innocent optimism about the progressive potential of the free enterprise system cannot be recreated today, amid the pessimism which marks the end of a century of decline; a century in which capitalism has distorted every advance, twisting atomic physics into the destruction of Hiroshima, biotechnology into the butchery of Dr Mengele, and the conquest of space into Star Wars.

The Enlightenment thinkers saw beyond the old order, towards the chance of creating a more advanced, enlightened society. We need to do now what they did then, and raise our eyes above the horrors of our time. The difference is that where they could look forward to the golden age of capitalism, we have to look out of its dark, declining years and towards the creation of a post-capitalist future. Thus the need for an entirely New Enlightenment.

Progress must involve change and experimentation—themes which are none too popular with those who control a rigid and conservative society today. If you take up the politics of progress in these conditions, it immediately implies a criticism of the status quo—which means, in the West, a critique of capitalism. This is why Marxists are now the only consistent champions of unfettered growth and progress in every sphere of human activity.

The defenders of capitalism, meanwhile, have adjusted their attitudes towards progress to fit in with the undynamic and sluggish state of their system. Now that they find economic and technological growth getting harder to sustain, many right-wing spokesmen have announced that perhaps such growth isn't such a good idea after all; as the *Financial Times* put it in June, 'it is time to face the economic consequences of Greenery'. Which is a bit like Bobby Robson and Andy Roxburgh saying that they didn't really want to win the World Cup anyway.

By casting doubt on the advisability of progress, the capitalists of today have turned their backs on the slogans of the Enlightenment—slogans, we should recall, that adorned the banners under which their forebears defeated the aristocratic ancien regimes centuries ago. The ruling class has outdone the Bishop of Durham in disowning the founding fathers of its faith. This demonstrates the seriousness of the depression and loss of direction afflicting the Western establishment today.

But whatever else they may have lost, our rulers retain the ability to shrug off responsibility for a mess of their own making. So it is that they now emphasise the importance of natural constraints on the advance of human society. Their bid to pass off social problems as natural phenomena is aided by fashionable eco-scientific theories which, in their reverence for nature, come close to supporting such pre-Enlightenment beliefs as 'God moves in mysterious ways' and the existence of an unalterable Great Chain of Being.

If the present state of society is dictated by nature, it follows that the alternatives must be unnatural, unrealistic and utopian. This is the accusation now levelled against progressives in general and Marxists in particular. In his contribution to a recent collection of essays published by *Granta* on the meaning of the upheavals in Eastern Europe, Czeslaw Milosz spoke for many intellectuals when he described the present as 'a period when the nineteenth-century idea of progress has died out and a related idea, communist revolution, has disintegrated'.

It is unclear exactly why the fall of some Stalinist despots should constitute an argument against progress. These regimes were among the most conservative in the world. They held the peoples of Eastern Europe back in the past, and imposed crude and uncivilised values and conditions which made Margaret Thatcher's Victorian values look almost futuristic by comparison. They were no more Marxist than they were Martian. The collapse of such a backward system as Stalinism provides strange 'proof' of the impossibility of society progressing forwards.

The real dreamers, those who deserve to be labelled utopian, are the ones who imagine that what is happening in Eastern Europe constitutes an argument in favour of capitalism, and that the countries there can now achieve enlightened status under a market system.

In his first speech after taking office, Czech playwright-turned-president Vaclav Havel promised to restore morality to political life in post-Stalinist Czechoslovakia. 'Our country', he told his people, 'can now permanently radiate love, understanding, the power of spirit and ideas. It is precisely this glow that we can offer as our specific contribution to international politics'.

This sort of idealised talk delights Havel's many admirers in the drawing rooms of the Western intelligentsia. But it bears no relation to the brutal reality which the transition to capitalism is bringing to Eastern Europe. After suffering decades of slow decay under Stalinism, one country of the region after another is now being plunged into a process of upheaval which is producing unemployment and poverty alongside outbursts of ethnic violence and anti-Semitism.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, Russell Osborne and Julian Laslo describe the havoc which the car-boot sale and casino economy of the market has wrought in Poland in a few short months. The pressures thus unleashed have divided Polish society and split the Solidarity government. In July, Czechoslovakia is due to embark on a similar fast-track to a free enterprise economy. Will Havel's 'glow' of 'love, understanding and the power of spirit' keep Czechs warm and content as the hyper-inflation and job cuts bite?

Marxists are now the only consistent champions of unfettered growth and progress in every sphere of human activity

Eastern Europe provides only the most graphic examples. There is an air of utopianism today in every attempt to ascribe some positive potential to global capitalism. Take, for example, the renewed talk of 'One World', in which international conflict becomes a thing of the past and nations come together to solve the common problems of environmental pollution. This Coke-advert imagery jars sharply with the reality of a harsh economic climate, in which conflicting national interests and secret trade wars mean that the capitalist powers cannot agree on beef safety standards, never mind reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

●

The trends towards crisis East and West do not make a very good case for the conservatism espoused by the right. Instead current events would seem to provide some pretty compelling arguments for far-reaching change and experimentation.

The situation facing Eastern Europe is unprecedented, and demands a new approach. Instead the peoples of the region are faced with a retreat back into the politics and economics of racket capitalism, which brought them only hardship and fascism 50 years ago. The global problems of the modern age are equally novel, screaming out for a search for fresh solutions. Instead they are met by getting out the garlic and crosses and hoping to scare the demons away with some old-tin.e voodoo science.

The need for constant change and experimentation, for taking calculated risks and making rational leaps into the unknown, is at the centre of the Marxist outlook. It would be a key theme of a New Enlightenment.

What, then, of the endlessly repeated accusation that the Marxist vision of social progress is utopian? Is it a dream to imagine the raising of society to a point where such evils as want, exploitation and oppression could be abolished and the environmental crisis resolved? Today you can scarcely open a political journal without finding some critic of Marxism repeating this argument—which rather begs the question as to why, if Marxism is such a fantasy, they think it necessary to use up so much paper denouncing our dreamy-headed ideas.

It is a testimony to the low standards and irrationalism of the intellectual world today that most of the attacks are aimed against a 'Marxism' which does not exist. If you want to play this game, all you need do is think up a statement, put it in quotation marks, call it a Marx quotation, and ridicule it. It would take a large volume to deal with all of these accusations, so let us restrict ourselves to a brief reply to one example; the idea that the Marxist vision of the future is utopian because you cannot make everybody equal.

In a recent pamphlet from one of the Tory think-tanks, Robin Harris, a close political adviser to Margaret Thatcher, says that Conservatives can deal with Marxists by 'rejecting the notion that men are naturally equal. Manifestly, they are not—morally, intellectually or physically. It is moreover extremely unlikely that even the most far-reaching environmental changes could make them so'. Which might be a strong argument against Karl Marx, if he had ever said men (and women) were 'morally, intellectually or physically' equal.

What Marx did say was that individuals 'would not be different individuals if they were not unequal'. The future society he aspired to was not one in which everybody was made 'equal' by doing the same work for the same reward and all wearing Chairman Mao suits. Indeed, where would be the equality in paying a woman with three children the same amount as a single man?

Marxism struggles to end a system based on class inequalities and discrimination. This would remove the capitalist law which dictates that goods and services should only be produced if they can be sold for a profit. Thus freed from the shackles of profitability, society would have the potential to expand its productive capacities. Then it could cope with inequality, not by somehow abolishing the differences between people, but by enabling every individual to seek to fulfil their potential in an economic system organised around the principle 'From each according to ability, to each according to need'.

Such a progressive vision would indeed be utopian if it were not possible to raise society's technical and productive capacities sufficiently to meet human need, if the pessimists were right to identify natural limits to growth. But here Marxism has a strong hand to play. Because the science and technology to do the job need not be plucked from the pages of science fiction. As John Gibson and Manjit Singh point out in their article this month, much of it already exists, if only in embryonic or experimental form, in the hi-tech sectors. The laws which prevent it being developed and applied for the benefit of humanity are laid down not by chaotic nature, but by the anarchic capitalist market.

The roots of a New Enlightenment already exist in the corrupted soil of present-day society. *Living Marxism* is dedicated to helping bring them to bloom. Joining the battle of ideas, to create an intellectual climate open to progressive thinking and rationality, is an important first step. But it will take more than a good idea or exciting theory to create the New Enlightenment.

The laws which prevent technology being developed and applied for the benefit of humanity are laid down not by chaotic nature, but by the anarchic capitalist market

The original Enlightenment was not simply about scientists and writers. Their work was facilitated through the tremendous leaps forward made by society itself. And the power behind those forward thrusts came from events such as the great French Revolution, as people rose up to fight for the future behind the banners of progress. It will take another social revolution finally to bring society out of this dark age.

Today we may be able to enlighten only a few thousand individuals. But that is how all ideas which are to shape history begin life. A declaration of our intent to struggle for a New Enlightenment at least makes a start in bringing together enough people with the collective power to turn on the big light.

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

WORLD CUP WARS

It didn't take long for events in Italy to bear out Alan Harding's point about media manipulation of 'the hooligan scare that elevates a handful of boors into Alaric's Visigoths marching on Rome' ('The World Cup war', June). A new feature this time around, however, has been the way in which the British media insist that they are the only ones allowed to criticise English football supporters.

After spending five years making out that British football hooliganism is a threat to world civilisation, British journalists got hot under the collar because the Sardinians took the threat seriously. Papers which are usually first in line to condemn hooligans accused the Sardinians of over-reacting to the England fans, describing police operations as 'ludicrously overmanned' and insisting that a run-in between fans and the police which resulted in 60 arrests would have been seen in Britain as 'a minor incident on the promenade'. (A similar event on the promenade in Bournemouth a month or so earlier, when mounted riot police charged Leeds fans, had conveniently slipped their minds.)

The papers even implied that the Sardinian police were cooking up evidence against the English fans, referring to an arresting officer who wouldn't reveal the injury which had allegedly been inflicted by an English hooligan. Of course the British police would never fabricate evidence, would they? Or do you remember Operation Own Goal, when the police were caught with those faked notebooks?

Some hacks have reaped the personal reward of their hard work in promoting the hooligan panic; a *Times* journalist was hauled out of the waters of Cagliari harbour by a police launch, suspected of being a troublemaker trying to sneak into town by sea. The final irony is that the word 'hooligan', popularised in the past by the British press as an insulting name for the Irish, is now used around the world to describe the English.

Jim McMahon
London

Alan Harding's comment that a war started between El Salvador and Honduras over a football match trivialises and misrepresents in order to prove a point. The 'Soccer War' was only a nickname given to the 1969 conflict between those two countries which followed a series of hotly contested World Cup qualifiers.

The real cause of the conflict was rooted in the expansion of commercial agriculture at the expense of the peasantry in El Salvador. This caused the migration of thousands of Salvadoreans to the less populous Honduras. In the late sixties pressures on the liberal oligarchic elite of Honduras meant that they began expelling large numbers of Salvadoreans. The returned peasants, who had become more politically aware in the somewhat less repressive atmosphere of Honduras, thus presented a threat to the Salvadorean regime which created the tensions that led to 'war'.

Of course I have had to simplify, but the immiseration and exploitation of the Central American peasantry is not a subject to be trivialised and set out of context in an article about the World Cup.

Lloyd Pettiford
Southampton

ORDEAL OF DISABILITY

Sara Hardy's article on embryo research ('Nothing Nazi about it', March) argues that more research would make it possible to detect many genetic defects at an early stage of fetal development, allowing a woman 'to opt for an early abortion or to prepare mentally for the ordeal to come'. This argument has caused a strong reaction from articulate people with disabilities and advocates for those with learning difficulties (mental handicap). They argue that if that option had been available when they were conceived they would not be alive today.

Society holds many prejudices about people with disabilities. People with learning difficulties have been (and still are) perceived as sick, as subhuman organisms, menaces, objects of pity, burdens of charity, holy innocents, objects of merriment and ridicule. Sara Hardy states her own prejudice when she implies that having a child who is disabled is an 'ordeal'.

Life for people with a disability can be an ordeal, not because of their disability, but because of their position in society. Surveys commissioned by the DHSS in 1984 showed that 14 per cent of the population have disabilities in this country. But people who are systematically devalued by society are more likely to be unemployed, earn substantially lower wages and live in poorer housing. As Britain enters a recession, people with disabilities are going to find their lives still more of an ordeal.

It is worth remembering that the eugenics movement was very popular in Britain in the first half of this century, and only lost popularity because of reaction against the atrocities of the Third Reich. How far are we away from creating a culture of oppression for people with disabilities in this country?

Marxists must fight hard for the rights of people with disabilities to overturn existing prejudices and create a society where they are valued and can lead valuable lives.

Tim Clement
Birmingham

RULE 43

If, as may be true, 'Rule 43 institutionalises and perpetuates the persecution of sex offenders' in prisons, as Adam Sampson argues (The Personal Column, June), then calling for the rule's abolition encourages the view that the prison authorities can manage a solution to the problem.

This makes no sense. The 'fiercely heterosexual' prison culture that necessitates the segregation of sex offenders is not a product of incarceration—any more than the chauvinism of some football supporters is created by standing on football terraces. Both attitudes are reflections of social standards which are institutionalised and perpetuated by the British establishment throughout society.

For this reason, the idea that the prison authorities—an arm of the state—can resolve the antipathy towards sex offenders is unrealistic. Adam Sampson admits that the prison officers collude in the scapegoating of 'nonces' under the existing regimes. It is unlikely that the abolition of Rule 43 would prevent the continuing victimisation of sex offenders by both prisoners and the prison authorities.

Ian Purdy
Nottingham

Adam Sampson's article on Rule 43 makes some interesting observations about the character of the prison population. But it is also worth considering the changing *composition* of prisoners. Why have their numbers increased and what offences have they been imprisoned for?

The most striking development has been the growing numbers of debtors in British jails, soon to be joined by influxes of poll tax defaulters. Social security 'fiddlers' (ie, the unemployed) far outnumber tax defaulters and insider dealers. And the rundown of social services has meant that the mentally ill, alcoholics and drug users, who may previously have received some support from the state, are now forced on to the streets and often end up behind bars—their behaviour diagnosed as criminal rather than medical.

The fact that working class people who have been caught on the sharp edge of an economic recession risk imprisonment is a telling indictment of British society today. The Tories can ill afford a debate on prisons in the nineties, in case we are reminded of Bedlam and Newgate.

Claire Foster
London

the personal column

The Personal Column is open to all *Living Marxism* readers, to provide a platform for your opinion on anything from pit bull terriers or the poll tax to Norman Tebbit or New Men. Write to us today—next month's Personal Column is waiting to be filled.

Send contributions (of about 1000 words) to The Personal Column, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX

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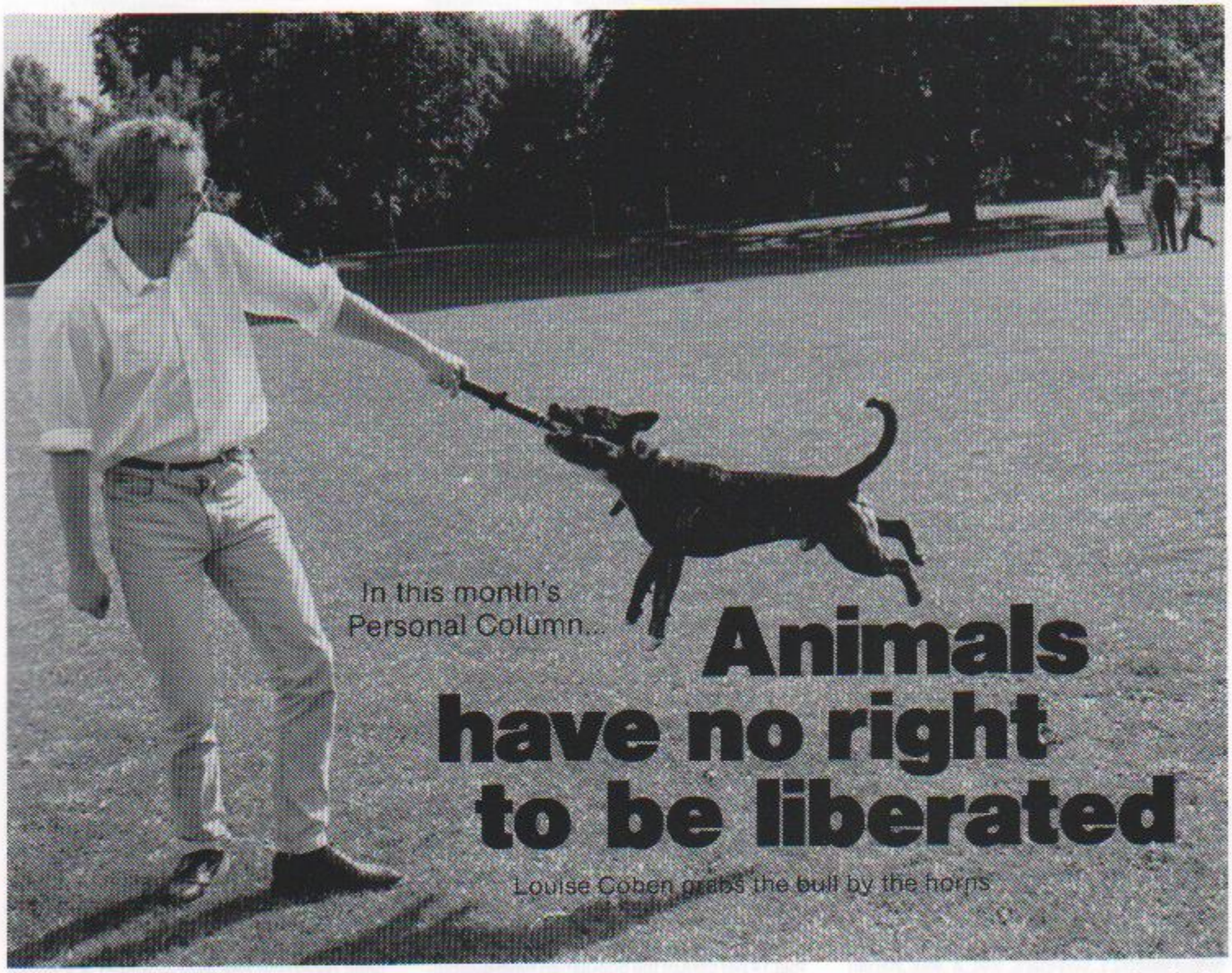

In this month's Personal Column...

Animals have no right to be liberated

Louise Coben grabs the bull by the horns

I don't much like animals. I like animal rights campaigners even less. I dislike animals because most of the one million kilos of dogshit deposited on British streets ends up outside my flat in Lambeth. I would happily electrify trees, banish dogs to specially designated areas and organise special hit-squads to deal with persistent foulers (particularly the mutt which lives at Number 8). But my loathing of animal rights activists stems from something more complex than the state of my shoes.

I have always found British sentimentality about animals peculiar. But groups like the Animal Liberation Front take this weakness to extremes. The ALF has gained instant notoriety for splashing acid on butchers' windows, blowing up scientists' vehicles and 'liberating' piglets, rabbits and beagles from research labs. Some of them have been jailed for conspiracy and criminal damage. I am not in favour of this state repression. But I strongly object to the idea that, because I am on the left, I should

be sympathetic to animal rights as a radical cause. To me, the idea of fighting for animal liberation is at best a diversion, and at worst an obstruction.

Animal rights has always been a non-issue. The ALF and its ilk seem to think that animals are invested with the same rights as human beings. But rights are not the genetic inheritance of every living organism. If this was the case, why not campaign for the rights of jellyfish or plankton? Only human beings can understand what a civil liberty is, never mind fight for and exercise it.

It is absurd to believe that creatures of instinct which crap on our pavements and then put their noses in each other's deposits have anything to do with the human rights so spuriously endowed on them by animal rights campaigners. Do they seriously imagine that bunnies have any interest in free speech? Or sheep in the right to vote? Or seals in lesbian and gay rights? People have organised and fought for rights which have made a difference to our lives: the eight hour day, trade union organisation, the right to demonstrate. But these rights, which are important to us, are unintelligible to a hamster in a box or a hen in a battery.

Yet the misguided supporters of animal liberation elevate animal rights over the rights of humans. We are surrounded by examples of human oppression, but they choose to campaign on behalf of dumb (and witless) creatures. This strikes me as a very weird sense of priorities. I can just about grasp why lonely old ladies give the contents of their building society accounts to their cat. But why do young activists make animal rights the centrepiece of a programme to change the world?

There is nothing radical about their preoccupation with the welfare of animals. It stands in a long British tradition. And British sentimentality about animals has often gone hand in hand with a brutish

PHOTO: Don Reed

disregard for humans. The gentry used to keep its horses in better condition than its servants. The RSPCA was set up with money from factory owners who wished to spare animals the misery they inflicted on their employees. Today, the same sentiment lives on: you can find it in the pages of *Country Life* (where the wives of the squirearchy are encouraged to donate to the upkeep of retired ponies), and in the manifestos of the animal rights lobbies. The irony is that in animal-loving Britain, pets are *still* better treated than human beings. 'Where there is animal worship', said GK Chesterton, 'there is human sacrifice'.

The animal rights project is not only stupid, it gets in the way of scientific development and the struggle to improve the human lot. Today, the authorities are probably preparing to use ALF's more high-profile activities as another excuse to clamp down on *all* dissent. And tomorrow animal rights activists aim to ban the use of animals in scientific research. Sure, animal experimentation entails needless repetition and waste, but that is a feature of every economic activity in capitalist society. (And I shouldn't have to make the point that capitalism won't be overthrown by revolutionary cows.) But animal experiments are necessary for science. On the most mundane level, animal-lovers complain that vaccines are tested on rabbits. Perhaps they prefer the pharmaceutical companies' other option: trying out dangerous drugs on the populations of the third world.

The animal rights lobbies are a sign of the times. Their willingness to fight for a cause is an expression of the human will to improve the world. But irrational ideas and animal rescue jobs do nothing but disorganise the one and only important fight, for human liberation. So a message to the ALF (and the dog at Number 8): cut the crap.

east and west

The Solidarity-led government has put Poland on a crash course in capitalist economics. In a few short months the market has created a culture of casinos, burger bars and car-boot sales alongside unemployment, pornography and crime.

In last October's *Living Marxism*, Russell Osborne and Julian Laslo reported from Poland just as Solidarity came to power. They recently returned to see if, nine months on, the new dawn of Polish capitalism looks any brighter than the dark Stalinist era

'This Labour Day will break from the past and begin anew—have new meaning, as thoughts of how mighty and effective the worker can be—united together in "Solidarity". In the lobby bar on 1 May, special holiday prices on Polish vodka and beer will help salute the worker and his stunning achievements.' (Menu, Warsaw Marriott Hotel)

When last we reported from Warsaw the first Solidarity government was just entering office, and Poland was a grey country of queues which still bore the heavy stamp of the Stalinist era. Some nine months later, Warsaw looks like a different city. The Poland of Solidarity is now open for business.

A new airport is under construction and advertising hoardings for Western companies line the boulevard into town. 'Try your luck! American roulette, slot machines, blackjack, bar: Casino Warsaw'; 'Opening soon, Casino Gdansk!'. This is the new Poland: land of the free market, a real casino economy. Under the direction of deputy premier Leszek Balcerowicz the Solidarity-led coalition government has tried to impose an instant transition to a market economy. From January, state subsidies on basic goods ended, inflation hit 100 per cent, wages were held down while unemployment shot up. The first soup kitchens opened in Warsaw.

The city skyline too has altered. Once the huge bulk of the Palace of Culture towered over everything, a grotesque gift from Joe Stalin himself and a monument to the granite-faced old regime. Now it has a rival just across the way, a temple dedicated to the market: the spanking new tower of the Marriott Hotel. While Warsaw

Solidarity goes to market

What price Poland?

debates whether to demolish the palace, symbol of a bitter past, for many the Marriott exemplifies the new Poland.

In the sumptuous brass and marble foyer of the hotel, ranks of uniformed bell captains and porters stand ready to serve the many foreign businessmen in town to check out the prospects. Assistant bell captain Romek tells us he's on a salary of 50 000 zloty a month (about $50). That's the same as he earned in his last job—as a teacher. But here the tips make all the difference. 'We must learn to be responsible', he says. 'Before, we had nothing, now we can work in the Marriott Hotel in services. It is progress.' Even in scruffy jeans and trainers, English accents are sufficient to ensure royal treatment at the Marriott. Only the casino is out of bounds to those without jackets. The bell captain will rent you one for $20 a night.

JW Marriott Snr and Jnr, the hotel chain's two founders, look down from a large and tasteless oil painting on excited Poles from the countryside leading their families over for a look at the escalator up to the Viennese-style tea lounge. As a string quartet plays Strauss, foreign businessmen gorge themselves on the best patisserie and talk about joint ventures.

'I was in Iraq on business when I heard about Poland, so I thought I'd go and check it out', says Bill Cary of Cary Cattle, 'out of Tampa, Florida'. Cary wears the stetson of his trade and elaborate cowboy boots. He travels around Poland buying steers from farmers eager to sell as feed prices escalate with the removal of state subsidies. At first he bought at $25 a head and sold for around $500, but now Polish farmers are catching on. 'There are those who now welcome you with open arms

and their calculators out, saying "OK, let's do business" ', says Richard, Cary's Polish-speaking British sidekick. Richard sports a 'glasnost' t-shirt from a Warsaw flea market and a large crucifix, Polish-style. He recommends the milkshakes in the Marriott burger bar; 'the best you've ever tasted'. The milk, along with much else at the hotel, is flown in from Germany as the untreated Polish product is considered unsafe for rich foreigners to drink.

$100-a-day

The $100-a-day Marriott bustles with Germans, Americans, Japanese and a few British and Israelis. Eager Poles perch nervously on the furniture as they wait to discuss their business schemes with the foreign money men. Servicing prospective foreign investors seems to be the major growth area in Warsaw. 'Many foreign businessmen spend a week here and never hear a word of Polish', says Richard. Even the Polish staff will only speak the language when pressed. Marriott staff members recently had their wages cut. Management argued that tips would more than compensate.

A few Poles are really cashing in on the influx of foreigners. Bill Cary is driven around by the sharply dressed Ziggy, translator and general Mr Fix-it who owns his own Mercedes and totes a large pistol for protection in the face of rising street crime. Ziggy now talks of bringing in a helicopter for the use of his foreign clients.

However, the success stories are few and far between. Poles are eager to do deals with the West, but little has been achieved so far. A 68-strong Japanese trade mission has just left the country having made no firm promises of investment. The Japanese liked the enthusiasm of the young Polish entrepreneurs, but felt that the Hungarians were better prepared to be serious business partners. Some Poles blame the lack of a decent golf course in Warsaw—apparently an essential ingredient for business deals with Japan. Richard is already well into negotiations to lease land for a nine-hole course from a local workers' sports club.

Most Poles are preoccupied with more important matters than putting, as assistant bell captain Romek confirms: 'The most important thing on people's minds is unemployment—not democracy or anything else. The way things are going, Poland will soon be like a third world country. Even though they've cut wages here people are still queuing for jobs because they have no money.' The Marriott management is said to be able to choose from among the best young Polish graduates, eager to take menial hotel jobs.

Richard's latest money-spinning scheme is typical of the deals being set up by the new-style Polish entrepreneur. He buys Czechoslovakian tractors in Poland at artificially low Comecon prices, and sells them to farmers in the UK at British prices. A windfall profit is assured, but this sort of new business won't create one job in Poland. Richard, however, is full of ideas for expanding employment in a new service sector. 'Look at the state of my car', he complains, 'somebody could at least start a car-wash business outside the Marriott—they could make a fortune and that would help develop a new service sector and provide employment'. We drink the last of our milkshakes and flip through complimentary copies of *USA Today* in the burger bar.

It is Saturday night in Warsaw, but the city is dead. Its ample parks are almost deserted as, in the time-honoured tradition of the Stalinist era, people flee to cottages or family in the countryside. In Warsaw's old city, a subdued tinkle of cutlery and music can be heard as a small privileged elite dines in exclusive restaurants behind closed doors. Less fortunate locals are drinking half-price 'happy hour' beer in the Marriott and talking about the new crime wave. 'It's getting like New York', complains one. 'If you hear your car alarm go off in the middle of the night you rush out or it may be gone, for sale in the market next day.' Less ambitious thieves steal rubber blades from windscreen wipers; many drivers now remove them when parking their cars.

'Unemployment is best'

According to World Bank forecasts the number of unemployed might reach 1.7m this year. Everybody in Poland knows that the removal of state subsidies will drive inefficient industry to the wall, but few seem to have much idea of what mass unemployment will really mean.

'Unemployment is the best way to teach people how to work—there is no other way' says Joanna, an official of the parliamentary club of Solidarity, as she sips in the Marriott. Solidarity labour minister Jacek Kuron, a one-time radical, insists that the figures for unemployment are only 'formal', not real. But his 'formal' unemployment already means that people are going hungry in Poland. Lately he has become infamous as the minister for soup kitchens, where the hungry are given a delicacy which Warsaw wall artists have dubbed *Kuronowka*—Kuron soup. Dressed in a homespun sweater, the down-to-earth Kuron also presents a weekly fireside chat on TV during which he attempts to get across Solidarity's austerity policies to ordinary Poles.

The price of rail tickets has increased massively since January. Although our 300km rail journey south to Katowice in the industrial heartland of Silesia still costs us only £1.50 in zloty, that is too expensive for many Poles. Last time we were in Poland we queued for hours at railway stations and stood for miles in crowded train corridors. Under Solidarity, most of these queues have disappeared, because few can now afford to travel.

Closing Katowice

Katowice is in Poland's most industrialised and most polluted area. The obsolete steel mills still belch acrid smoke and the wheels of the mineshafts continue to turn. But the market reforms of minister Balcerowicz and his mentor, American economist Geoffrey Sachs, will soon transform this grim furnace into an equally grim wasteland. Economic rationalisation is likely to wipe out the Silesian economy, sweeping away the old heavy industry.

'The Sachs plan [to rationalise the economy along free market lines] is a standing joke among economists these days', says Andrzej, a local Solidarity official who unusually calls himself left-wing. 'Some call Sachs the Mengele of the Polish economy.' Andrzej quotes a Polish proverb to explain the attitude of Silesia's increasingly cynical and desperate people: 'What you should do today, do tomorrow. But what you should eat tomorrow, eat today.'

Two young lawyers at the downtown Solidarnosc offices reel off the figures on the gap between the numbers of unemployed and vacancies in Silesia—a gap which school-leavers and the victims of rationalisation are making wider all the time. What will be the consequences of such a rapid jump in unemployment? 'It's in the hands of God', they tell us, and they don't sound as if they expect a miracle: 'The state doesn't even have any money to pay benefits.' But although people are dissatisfied, the lawyers believe that they are too apathetic to revolt.

Katowice is a dismal town and its people are poor. But even though they cannot afford to sample its wonders, the arrival of the free market still generates excitement after the stultifying atmosphere of the Stalinist years. 'What is this "united colors"?' asks an old man. Benetton has just opened its first shop in the city and its Western-level prices are astronomical by Polish standards. A

young Solidarity activist proudly displays a new skirt which cost her $35, almost her whole month's wages. 'My father helped out', she says, joking that the Solidarity 'New Nomenklatura' all clothe themselves at Benetton.

As bemused Poles gaze through the plate-glass windows at the dazzling merchandise, ragged vegetable sellers continue to ply their trade on the pavement. Passers-by toss a few coins into a hat as a pair of ancient musicians blast ragtime out of a trumpet and an accordion. Like the last time we were here, the *Cinkciarze*, the money changers, still hang around offering to turn your dollars into wads of near-worthless zloty. But now the official exchange rate is little different from the black market rate and the pushy young men look less cocky than nine months ago.

A German company has recently bought up a branch of the dowdy state supermarket 'Supersam'. It now sells exclusively German groceries and excited crowds queue to buy. Nearby state shops which offer the usual shoddy and limited range of foodstuffs seem unlikely to survive the competition of the new Supersam era. As people finish work there's a rush for the liquor counter. Many workers already slouch, half-drunk, on benches outside. Despite these signs of a continuing problem, even alcohol consumption has reportedly fallen as the new austerity hits Polish pockets.

In a bizarre reaction to the old restrictions, porn has become almost symbolic of the brash, free market Poland

A friend takes us down to the new street market on a strip of waste ground next to the railway tracks. Here you can buy just about anything. People selling video machines out of the backs of battered cars jostle with pedlars of Russian cameras, bootleg Benetton, toys, sausages, coffee, bras, bloody cuts of meat and pornographic magazines and videos. In a bizarre reaction to the moralism and restrictions of the old regime, porn has become almost symbolic of the brashness of the new free market Poland.

The scene is repeated in the streets around Katowice bus station. Nine months ago there was only an empty grey square with crumbling buildings. Now the place is a teeming flea market too. Hundreds of shabbily dressed traders squat behind cardboard boxes displaying their wares. Here a few bottles of beer, or a selection of cigarettes. There some cheese pies or hand-made slippers. A young woman is doing brisk business selling *The Interrupted Decade*, the newly released memoirs of former party leader Edward Gierek. A couple of vans at the kerbside are doing a roaring trade in bread and eggs, but most of the other would-be sellers look worn out and demoralised. Militiamen harass those who haven't paid for a trading licence. It costs the equivalent of a dollar a day—far too much for the man trying to sell one pathetic tin of meat. In their car-boot economy, Poles are paying a high price for the freedom of the marketplace. ●

In next month's *Living Marxism*, Russell Osborne and Julian Laslo report from Poland on **Solidarity–the new nomenklatura?**

Italia '90: the real losers

Ciao immigrante?

While Italy was meant to be welcoming people of all nations to the start of the World Cup, many Italians were voicing support for a man who claimed to be allergic to black immigrants. In the first part of their report on the rise of Euroracism, Stefanie Boston and Joan Phillips meet the newcomers who are not allowed to do as the Romans do

Il Mondiale was inescapable wherever we went in Italy (not that we wanted to escape it). Every city centre had its Italia '90 statue, every shop window was using the red, white and green lego man with the football head to sell its merchandise and every football fan proudly wore the same metal symbol on their lapel.

But for tens of thousands of recently arrived immigrants, there was a bitter irony in the ubiquitous Ciao and the generous welcome extended to foreign supporters. Only the hostile reception given to the English fans came anywhere near the treatment meted out to immigrants from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Somalia and elsewhere. *Corriere Della Sera's* colour supplement comment on the English fans—*Arrivano I Barbari*, 'The arrival of the barbarians'—could have expressed the popular reaction to the influx of foreigners from North Africa. The emotions aroused by the performance of the national team did nothing to sideline the passions ignited by the immigration debate.

Immigration is suddenly a burning issue in Italy. Unlike other European countries such as France and Britain, large-scale immigration into Italy from the third world is a relatively recent phenomenon. One study estimates that since 1985, legal immigration into Italy has increased by 50 per cent, alongside a more dramatic rise in illegal immigration. Since 1987, most people entering the country have been *extracommunitari*, from outside the EC. Immigrants from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are said to be entering the country at the rate of 50 000 a year.

Nobody really knows how many immigrants there are in total, but a figure of 1.3m is widely quoted. Italy now has one of Europe's largest registered immigrant populations, after West Germany, France and Britain. And it has the highest percentage of clandestine and *extracommunitari* immigrants of any country in Europe. It has become a mecca for immigrants from the third world because of its traditionally lax frontier controls. Until recently, Italy had no legislation restricting immigration from outside the European Community. But in a climate of growing antagonism towards foreigners, and under pressure from fellow EC nations to do something about its porous borders before 1992, the government rushed through its first immigration law earlier this year.

Right and left in parliament agree on the need to do something to stem the flow. The new law was written by the Socialist Party's deputy premier Claudio Martelli. The Martelli decree offers an amnesty to clandestine immigrants who register and can prove they were in the country at the start of the year. But it pledges tough future quotas and vigilance against illegal immigrants.

The novelty of the immigration issue in Italy is reflected in the crude racism of the popular reaction. Listening to the immigration debate, it sometimes seemed as if we were back in the Britain of the fifties and sixties, when new immigrants were treated as savages.

Antonio Dal Sasso, a 46-year old worker from Sarcedo in Vicenza, claims that he is 'allergic' to blacks. He works in the Lerolin factory which has recently employed about 30 immigrants. 'Ever since they put me next to them on the assembly line I feel ill', said Dal Sasso. 'My eyes swell up and they stream uncontrollably.' He is trying to get a medical certificate, to persuade management to remove what he says is the cause of his 'allergy'.

The press has given credence to Dal Sasso's story, and his village is divided between those who defend him and those who shrug their shoulders and laugh. But Dal Sasso is serious: 'I'm sure it's the blacks' fault. Maybe it's because of their strange smell. It's so bitter. Not even perfume can hide it. It makes me allergic. I can't go on like this. Whenever a black comes within a metre of me, my eyes stream. The minute he goes away I get better. It happens even in a bar.'

Dal Sasso is a supporter of the Lega Veneta, one of several regional autonomy leagues in the north of Italy which espouse chauvinist policies against foreign immigrants and migrant workers from the poor south of the country. His case has been taken up by the founder of the Lega Veneta, Franco Kocchetta. The politician was not as crude as Dal Sasso, but he was just as racist: 'It is not that black people stink, but they

are a danger to workers in Lombardy.' According to immigrant trade unionist Gabriel Diyatou, the allergy incident is just the tip of the iceberg of everyday racist discrimination: 'One thing is certain, the allergy to black workers is not an illness.'

No city has been more polarised by the immigration issue than Milan, capital of the prosperous northern region of Lombardy. La Cascina Rosa is a derelict ruin of a farm in the Largo Murani district of the city. Since August last year it has been home to more than 500 immigrants from Morocco.

PHOTOS: Stefanie Boston

The firebombed ruins of Abdelkrim Sadak's home at La Cascina Rosa

They live as best they can in what is left of the derelict farm buildings, in caravans and in makeshift homes built from cardboard, corrugated iron and plastic sheeting. There are three chemical toilets and an intermittent supply of cold water from a tank in the courtyard. The dustmen often forget to call.

La Cascina Rosa is a shanty town in the middle of the style capital of Europe. And the locals don't like it. The proprietors of a parade of shops adjacent to the old farm are adamant that the immigrants must go. 'They don't bother me personally. But what does bother me is the filth', says Renata from behind the counter of the electrical goods shop. 'This area used to be clean, now it's a pigsty. The farm is a health risk. Everybody is afraid of diseases spreading when the summer comes. The council should disperse them because when they're all together they are more menacing.'

Rita Frattantone was cutting up material in a clothes shop. When we asked about La Cascina Rosa, she looked as if she'd like to use the scissors on the immigrants. 'It is an obscenity. You should see these people, pissing on the walls and trees. The whole place is turning into a urinal. I saw someone pissing on a tree like a dog. The whole place stinks, it's filthy. I don't know whether it's because they're Moroccans or because there's no facilities. There's no gardens left in this area because they've become dustbins. When the summer comes it will be terrible. If one comes in the shop I have to hold my nose.'

Luigi, the portly middle-aged owner of a local bar, was short and to the point. 'The problem is they're all lumped together and they stink. It's the council's fault for leaving them there with no washing facilities and it's their fault because they don't wash.' One of his customers took over the tirade. 'They don't have the same customs as us', began Eugenia.

'People are afraid to go out at night. They stand on the streets selling drugs. They think all women are prostitutes and offer you L5000 [£2.50]. There is work for them, but they don't want it. They'd rather sell drugs. If they were the kind of people who wanted to get work they wouldn't have to stay in La Cascina Rosa. The trouble is that while they live there they get free canteens, free tickets to the public showers, free bus passes, free clothes and other handouts. They get everything for free, so if you offer them a job for L1m a month (£500), they'll turn it down because they'd lose their free handouts. That's the problem: we offer them too many free things. The government should give them the list of work and say accept this or get out.'

Not all local people held such racist views. A 70-year old man standing on a street corner blamed the government. 'They can't even make laws', he said in reference to the farcical organisation of a national referendum on hunting, 'so how can we expect them to sort this out? La Cascina Rosa has been uninhabitable for years. They should never have been put there, there's plenty of places they could go to if the authorities would only get their act together'.

But while many people blamed the local council for the problem, most said the solution was to get rid of the immigrants. Within hearing distance of dozens of Moroccans, a 40-year old petrol pump attendant shouted his opinion: 'There's only one solution: round them all up, put them on a boat and send them all back to their own country.' The young man sitting in the next car in the queue threw back his head and laughed appreciatively.

We went to get the view from inside La Cascina Rosa. 'I hate this life here', said 27-year old Abdellah, 'this is not living'. He has a good job and could afford to get somewhere decent to live. 'The only reason I'm staying here is because I want to help my people. Nobody should have to live in this shit.' With his brother and his mates, all smartly dressed in tracksuits and trainers, Abdellah took us on a tour of La Cascina Rosa.

Against all the odds, La Cascina Rosa is kept scrupulously clean. In the courtyard there is less litter than in the city streets outside. From the outside, the corrugated iron and cardboard huts look like any third world shanty town dwelling. Inside, they are spotless. In one, Abdelkrim Sadak lives with his wife Fatima and two children, Hicham and Abdelilah. The two makeshift rooms are separated by a curtain and the walls are made out of cardboard and plastic, but there are carpets on the floor, a stove, a fridge and a small dining table. 'We don't live like this in our own country', apologised Sadak. His story is typical.

He left his mountain village of Benimellal in Morocco because he couldn't earn enough to support his

family. He arrived in Milan in August 1989 and his wife and children joined him at Christmas. He left his youngest son with his mother in Morocco. At first, he lived in hotels and ended up spending all his savings. When he asked the council for accommodation, he was told 'you have to wait'. It looks like he will be waiting forever. He ended up in La Cascina Rosa.

After two months he found a job on a building site. He earns L70 000 for a nine-hour day; the Italians are paid L120 000. He works Saturdays, but doesn't get double time. 'The employers take advantage of our weak position and make us work harder for less money. If you complain you get the sack.'

Sadak told us that he had no trouble from racists. But a few minutes later, we discovered that his family had twice been the victim of firebomb attacks. For Sadak, as for so many immigrants, racism has become a way of life and such violence does not even seem worth mentioning.

The last attack happened at 3.30am on 10 May when the family was asleep. Their home was razed to the ground and they were lucky to get out alive. Sadak was badly burned when he went back into the flames to retrieve his passport and registration documents; risking the fire seemed preferable to facing the wrath of the racist authorities without his papers.

So what did he think of Italy? 'Nobody likes this life, but we have to put up with it. There's nowhere else to go.' Some of the angry, younger Moroccans we spoke to did not share his fatalism. 'Why should we have to live like animals?' demanded Azdu. 'We have asked the council so many times for facilities. But they've done nothing. Now it's getting hot, it's going to get even worse.'

Contrary to the rumours circulating outside, the inhabitants of La Cascina Rosa receive no free handouts. They have organised all the facilities there—built water pipes for the toilets, fixed up a rudimentary shower in the courtyard, wired up the electricity supply. La Cascina Rosa has its own restaurant, hospital, launderette, mosque, barber and car mechanic.

The Moroccans have also organised their own security system. They need it. Apart from the two firebomb attacks, local racists have organised a campaign to drive them out by any means possible. 'Those who have illegally occupied public buildings and live by their wits must be sent back home!', declared a leaflet from the Committee Against the Illegal Occupation of La Cascina Rosa.

Claiming that the derelict farm is an historic and cultural building, they have demanded that the council evict the immigrants immediately. Strangely, nobody campaigned for the farm to be made a national monument during the 30 years that it was allowed to go to rack and ruin. But suddenly last August, local residents started demanding that the farm be turned into a Lombardy botanical garden open to the whole of the city.

In February, the committee organised a demonstration outside La Cascina Rosa. Some 6000 locals laid siege to the farm. 'They were shouting "Out, out, out, go back to your own country" ', remembered a Moroccan youth, Said. 'They tried to force their way in here', added Abdellah, 'but we stopped them'. The local racists look set to try again.

La Cascina Rosa is not unique. Not far away in the Via Saccardo, hundreds of North Africans have to live in equally cramped and insanitary conditions in a disused cinema. In the darkness inside it is difficult to distinguish between the piles of bedding and the bodies lying everywhere. People sleep crushed between the narrow rows of seats or if they are lucky at the back of the hall or on the stage at the front. There is a smell of stale sweat.

Outside in the courtyard, dozens of immigrants sit in the hot midday sun, mattresses and belongings forming a wall around them. Muslim men are using flattened cardboard boxes as prayer mats. Wet underpants and vests are drying on the backs of chairs. Sellotaped to a wall are a map and photographs of Morocco, with its golden sands, blue sea and lustrous mountains. 'Beautiful, isn't it?', said a homesick young man standing next to us.

Until 17 April, many of the inhabitants of the Via Saccardo had been squatting an empty building in the Via Trentacoste, a short bus ride away. That evening a fire swept through the top floor of the building where 506 immigrants were sleeping. A 21-year old Moroccan, Ainane Moutissine, was killed trying to climb from the fifth floor to escape the flames. He was a university graduate who had come to Italy to find work. Thirty more immigrants were injured and 68 lost their identity papers in the fire. 'It took one and a half hours for the firemen to arrive', said Jaimal. 'They say the fire was caused by a gas explosion. But I don't know whether that's true or not.' The police evicted the immigrants and bricked up the building.

RIGHT: Franco Castellazzi of the Lega Lombarda: the posters are against 'scroungers' from southern Italy–foreign immigrants are considered even worse

The council washed its hands of the homeless immigrants. 'It's not up to us to guarantee the safety of squatted buildings', said council leader Paolo Pillitteri. So most people ended up squatting in the cinema. 'There's 360 of us here now. The main problem facing immigrants in Milan is housing', said Mohammed Chilali. 'In Genoa there's housing but no work, in Milan there's work but no housing. You have to sleep where you can, in empty buildings, caravans, abandoned cars.'

There are some jobs for immigrants in Milan; jobs which Italians don't want to do. 'I came to Italy thinking I'd be able to make a

better life', said Rachid, 'but instead things have got worse'. Most of the immigrants are young men: more than half are under 30. The majority are skilled workers or students with good qualifications. Yet about 70 per cent are unemployed. Those who have jobs do the lowest-paid, most menial work, and are made to work longer hours for less money than Italians. There is no such thing as security of employment, overtime pay or sickness benefit if your face is black.

Those who can't get jobs have to sell whatever they can on the streets. They sell anything and everything, handbags and sunglasses and cigarette lighters and Bic razors. 'We are tired of making a living selling cigarettes and lighters', said Haleem, a smartly dressed Kenyan. 'It's difficult to do even that now. I've been moved on everywhere, from corner to corner.'

Immigrants sell outside the exclusive boutiques in the shopping arcades around the Duomo, Milan's main tourist area. Some simply walk up and down the same stretch all day with their wares in their hands. Others have their fashionable bags and sunglasses set out on blankets at their feet, the blankets making it easier to pack up and run should the police pass by.

Nothing like the movies: Africans living in the courtyard of a disused cinema

Around the Duomo, the sellers are mainly Senegalese and Somalian. Nowadays they sit for hours in the shade of the cathedral, unable to trade because they are being watched by the *vigili urbani*. 'It is impossible to make a living now', Nnamdi told us. 'The police are always on our backs. They sit there for hours in their car. If they drive off you can bet they'll be back within minutes.' Nobody sold a thing while we were there.

There has been a concerted campaign sanctioned by the council and spearheaded by the police to drive the street vendors out of the city centre. 'It's our job to send them away', said one officer, wearing the blue uniform and ridiculous white helmet of the *vigili urbani*. 'They have no permission to sell this stuff here. Most of it is counterfeit anyway. We just arrested one of them now. Look, you can still see the marks where he punched me. [We couldn't.] The guy's at the police station now. If he's got any other charges against him, he'll be deported.'

The sullen group of street sellers sitting nearby told a different story. 'The police told our friend to stop selling, so he did. When they left he carried on selling somewhere else. Then they came back and started kicking and punching him. There were 10 against one, so he wasn't going to fight was he? They handcuffed him and took him away.' Police beatings are random and vicious. And it's not just street vendors; any immigrant is prey to the police. 'The police treat us like criminals, as if we are all drug dealers', protested Nabib. 'They see your face, ask for your papers, tell you to turn out your pockets. I hate that.'

The new racism has not yet been consolidated in Italy. None of the major parties wants to run on an anti-immigrant ticket. Even after the Martelli decree, the government has not closed the borders. A majority in the Christian Democrats, the most powerful force in the coalition government, still pays lip-service to the idea of admitting immigrants for humanitarian reasons. The Socialists are divided between hard and softliners. The government says it will fix quotas as soon as it gets a clearer picture of the flow of immigrants. But the debate about immigration has not been won and lost yet.

Nevertheless, an underlying hostility to foreigners is always close to the surface. We were talking to some fairly sophisticated young Italians about the lack of British press coverage of the race issue in Italy. Using a play on the Italian word for the press (*stampa*), one respectable young man said 'You can get blacks in the press, once they are there, turn the press and you get black juice!'. He thought it was a good joke, and many others would have agreed with him.

Iron bars and acid

All over Italy, immigrants face racist abuse and violent attack. In March, there was a series of attacks on blacks in Florence by gangs of youths armed with iron bars. In April, a firebomb was thrown from a car into a Rome hotel used by immigrants. In May, racists attacked blacks in Genoa with acid, knives and guns.

In Lombardy the Lega Lombarda, the regional autonomy movement which won 20 per cent of the vote in the May local elections, is leading the backlash. 'The politicians and unions say that African immigrants bring with them cultural richness and benefits', said a Lega leaflet about La Cascina Rosa. 'We say that immigration from the third world as allowed by the government and council brings only social disintegration, fear and racial clashes.'

Franco Castellazzi, leader of the Lega Lombarda's 15-strong group of councillors in the 80-seat regional assembly, told us why his party had just set up an autonomous trade union—to organise against immigrant workers: 'The immigrant presents a threat without a doubt. It weakens the position of our workers, Lombard workers. Do we want to transform Lombardy into a kind of European New York? Do we want to become a hotchpotch of races and create all sorts of tensions? We say we want to protect our territory, our traditions, our wealth, our people. There's nothing outrageous about that.' Racism may not have much of a tradition in modern Italy. But demagogues like Castellazzi are determined to make it as respectable there as in Britain or France.

• In next month's *Living Marxism:* Life in the shadow of Le Pen. Stefanie Boston and Joan Phillips report from the stronghold of the French National Front, Marseilles

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PHOTO: Simon N

The invisible economy

No more miracles

Even if the Tories do manage a pre-election boom, Phil Murphy reckons that British capitalism has never had it so bad

british capitalism

The economy was the key to Margaret Thatcher's third election win in 1987. Now it's the government's biggest problem. The image of an 'economic miracle' has been ruined; headline inflation is almost as bad as when Thatcher took office in 1979, while unemployment, interest rates and the balance of payments are all worse. The pace of redundancies is accelerating, reviving memories of the early eighties. But this time it's not just the traditional industries like steel and construction which are shedding jobs. Even the new service areas which are meant to have fuelled Britain's revival are handing out redundancy notices—to airline workers, estate agents, shop assistants and financial brokers.

Commentators are now wondering whether it is still possible for the Tories to engineer another pre-election boom. Three significant factors set the parameters for Tory tinkering today.

1 The international upheavals of the past year will tend to leave Britain more exposed to the ravages of the world market than ever before.

For 45 years, the post-war order has allowed Britain to retain a world status which its strength no longer justifies. The freezing of history through the division of Germany and Europe, and the political arrangements created around the Cold War, left Britain in the front rank of Western powers. This tended to obscure, and partially compensate for, Britain's relative economic decline.

Britain often only enjoyed influence by association, rubbing shoulders with the USA in Nato or some other global institution. But there were some practical economic benefits too, as the Americans rewarded Britain's sycophantic support by tossing it the odd titbit. For example, although the US dollar ruled the post-war world, Washington tolerated the pound playing a global role in the fifties and sixties—a key factor in helping the City of London to re-establish itself as the world's leading financial centre. Today, however, with its own economic decline and the resurgence of Japan and Germany to worry about, the USA cannot be concerned with propping up Britain. The UK's

How the world sees Britain: a tacky, expensive tourist trap

demotion from second to equal fourth place in the International Monetary Fund ratings is indicative of what's in store for British capitalism.

Global co-op

The post-war era has been marked by an atmosphere of political, military and economic cooperation among the Western powers under American leadership. This has allowed a weaker economy such as Britain to reap some benefits from working with its more dynamic allies; for example, the City has prospered by handling international capital flows. But as the old world order breaks up, and the tendency is towards competing powers forming their own regional economic blocs, international cooperation is already coming under strain. In future, other stronger capitals will be less inclined to bail Britain out of trouble. National interests are already increasing tension among the big three; note American and German reluctance to support the yen earlier this year. How much less likely it is that any power will be prepared to subsidise a peripheral economy like Britain.

Of course we can't predict precisely how fast international cooperation will fade, but we can be sure it will have a disproportionate impact on the British economy. British capitalism will have to stand on its own dwindling resources much more.

2 It is now clear that British capitalism has little manufacturing muscle to fall back on at home. Tory policies have not served to restructure production in any decisive way, and there has been no productivity miracle.

The mood of the capitalist class about the British revival has certainly become more subdued compared to the euphoria of the late eighties. Whatever chancellor John Major means by 'improving government statistics' (*Independent*, 6 April 1990), the treasury will have a job fixing the figures to cover up stagnating industrial production, falling levels of investment in manufacturing and record balance of payments deficits.

And it's not just dry economic indices which point to the scale of the problem. A veritable Who's Who of Thatcher's favourite business people have recently come to grief: Richard Branson (who's fortunately returning to ballooning; we wish him bon voyage), Alan Sugar from Amstrad, Sophie Mirman from Sock Shop, Blue Arrow's Tony Berry, the Saatchi brothers, and George Davis from Next are but a few of the fallen.

Yet there remains a consensus that certain features of the economic miracle endure. Everybody, from the Bank of England to the CBI, from the Institute of Directors to the government frontbench, blames today's difficulties on former chancellor Nigel Lawson. They claim that the problem is excessive domestic demand, fuelled by Lawson's lax monetary policies in 1987-88. But, with a bit of unpleasant medicine from the treasury, they argue, Britain can resume reaping the benefits from the enterprising eighties. American, German and especially Japanese businessmen all join British apologists in praising the new spirit among British workers which led to a 50 per cent increase in manufacturing productivity during the eighties—a figure second only to the Japanese.

There is one brutally simple reason why it is very unlikely that such productivity levels can be regained. Britain is running out of manufacturing industries to rationalise or close down. Productivity increases averaged out across the economy have in fact been grossly inflated by big gains in a few old industries: coal, steel and newspapers. Workforces here have been decimated, less efficient plants closed, and work practices intensified in the aftermath of major defeats for the trade unions.

For example, after the defeat of the steel strike in 1980, the workforce was cut by three quarters, major steelworks were closed and the remaining workers were made to work harder. The result over the eighties: a £1.5 billion loss was turned into a £500m profit, and productivity grew at over twice the national average. But such a productivity gain is a one-off. Today's smaller, heavily rationalised steel industry is far less significant to the economy. Sacking three quarters of remaining steelworkers would leave an 'industry' which could probably produce some spoons and penknives, but not much else. Looked at from this perspective, the productivity gains praised at home and abroad are a symptom of industrial decay, not of any new dynamism in manufacturing.

The superficial character of the productivity jump is confirmed by the investment figures. A real renewal of the manufacturing base must involve technological revolution. Yet comparing the eighties to the crisis-ridden seventies, we find that total fixed manufacturing investment *fell* by 20 per cent. More importantly, net fixed manufacturing investment (after the replacement of worn out capital), was down by all of 63 per cent. In layman's language these figures mean that the productive potential of manufacturing industry in Britain has contracted.

While Britain was supposedly undergoing a productivity revolution in the eighties, its share of world manufactures trade fell again, from eight to 6.5 per cent. So however fast productivity has grown in Britain, it has not stood still elsewhere. And British industry was starting from a long way behind. It would take two decades of the sort of growth seen over the last few years for Britain to be competitive with Holland again, never mind the USA.

The older heavy industries have been hardest hit. Those with relatively better prospects are concentrated in the finished products sectors, especially consumer durables like cars, TVs and fridges. Thus alongside the well-documented shift in the British economy from manufacturing to services, within manufacturing itself there has been a shift from capital to consumer goods—the sign of a less all-rounded capitalist power.

Even the comparatively healthy state of the consumer goods sector is a misleading guide to British manufacturing, however, since these have experienced the highest levels of foreign investment, first from the USA and now from Japan. The British TV industry collapsed years ago, but with National Panasonic and Sony on the scene from Japan, Britain is now a net exporter of TVs again. The same may happen with cars. With a trade deficit for the

motor industry of £6.5 billion last year, and worse to come this year, the British car market can boast the highest import penetration of any major industrialised country. Yet thanks to investment from Nissan, Toyota and Honda Britain could be a net exporter of cars again by the mid-1990s.

The much-heralded Japanisation of British industry will tend to boost national output, exports and productivity. No wonder Tory ministers are so often to be found in faraway places promoting the virtues of investing here. But a few billion pounds of foreign investment cannot turn around a century of decay and decline. Today Japanese industries in Britain employ only about 22 000, and sales represent less than a quarter of one per cent of national output. Britain can benefit from being chosen as Japan's manufacturing base for Europe; but the factories are largely cheap assembly operations, of the sort Western investors once reserved for the third world. Moreover, the reliance on investment inflows only emphasises how much British capitalism is now dependent upon movements in the world economy over which it has no control.

Britain's manufacturing revival has been far more shallow and narrow than the figures imply, and many of its productivity gains are unrepeatable. The idea that all that is needed is to tighten the reins, maintain high interest rates and cut consumer spending does not stand up. The pundits are wrong to suggest that cutting domestic demand will automatically release resources to boost both exports and the substitution of British goods for imports. Why? Because most British goods, with the exception of some Japanese-dominated sectors, remain uncompetitive on world markets.

3 Britain's so-called invisible earnings—the surplus from trade in services rather than material goods, combined with income resulting from foreign investment—are in trouble. This is of great importance, since these invisibles have done most to keep British capitalism afloat for 150 years.

Until recently it could be argued that the uncompetitiveness of British industry was not decisive, since Britain always has the invisibles to fall back on. Yes, 1983 was a turning point—the first deficit on manufactured trade since the industrial revolution—but Britain ran a trade deficit even when it was the 'workshop of the world' 120 years ago, due to its reliance on imported food and raw materials. It has always needed the export of services and income from foreign investments to balance the books, and these sectors have generally delivered.

The position has now changed, and the consequences for British capitalism could be dire. The invisibles are becoming invisible in the literal sense—they'll soon be non-existent earnings. Before examining this development, it is worth emphasising that 'invisibles' are much more than an arcane accounting term. They are as close as official statistics come to quantifying some of the economics of imperialism. The mechanisms involved show how a capitalist power develops a parasitical relationship to the world economy in a bid to compensate for the tendency towards declining profitability and economic stagnation experienced at home.

The first component of invisible earnings includes interest, profits and dividends from foreign dealings. After the USA, Britain is still the second largest holder of overseas direct investment; the level of net direct investment has quadrupled since 1980. Only Japan is a larger net exporter of foreign direct investment. These apparently impressive figures in fact confirm the function of capital export as a symptom of decay; British capitalists have emphasised overseas investment because of the moribund and unprofitable state of their industry back in the UK. And it is now much less possible for the proceeds from capital export to sustain Britain as they have for much of the twentieth century.

Soft currency

Much of Britain's overseas investments is far softer and less secure than in the past. An increasing proportion of total overseas assets is now in portfolio investment—securities, shares, government and company bonds. By 1983, Britain was putting more capital into these coupon-clipping forms of overseas financial dealing than it was putting into direct foreign investment.

Apologists for British capitalism might respond to this by pointing out that Britain made marginally more *direct* foreign investments than Japan during the eighties. But this is misleading. Most pundits now define a direct investment as one which buys more than 10 per cent of a foreign company's voting stock. Thus most of what are called Britain's direct investments are just portfolio-style investments on a larger scale; they involve buying up existing shares in other people's companies and technology, rather than investing in the establishment of new productive enterprises on the Japanese model. Last year British capitalists, with an economy one third the size of Japan, spent half as much again on foreign firms' shares as did their Japanese counterparts. When it comes to the most parasitic characteristics of imperialism, Britain remains the world leader.

The preponderance of portfolio investment, and of company rather than government securities within the portfolio, means that Britain's huge pile of overseas assets is a shaky structure. Portfolio investment is largely paper assets, and as such is more susceptible to being wiped out in a crisis. Britain's portfolio assets were hit especially hard by the October 1987 crash and the fall of the Tokyo stock market by a quarter early this year.

There is another factor now undermining the positive impact of

PHOTO: Janet Gill

capital export on the British economy. Companies have financed many of their recent foreign investments not from profits, but by borrowing from British banks. In turn, the banks have borrowed this money from abroad. Thus while profits come into Britain from foreign investments, there is a countervailing outflow of money going to pay overseas debts at high interest rates. All in all it's something of a con—British capitalism can look strong enough by doing a lot of lending and investing abroad primarily because it has also borrowed a lot from overseas.

The position on interest, profits and dividends has deteriorated still further recently, with the additional cost of financing the balance of payments deficits since 1986. British interest rates have had to be kept high to encourage foreign financiers to leave their money in Britain. These transient investments are what's called hot money. The result is that interest paid by British banks on money borrowed from abroad is now greater than the interest earned by British companies from foreign portfolio investment like Japanese equities and US government bonds.

Recent developments have also led to the recreation of significant sterling balances, as foreign capitalists and governments hold some of their capital in sterling to take advantage of high British interest rates. This investment helps to prop up the British economy, but also creates a serious problem.

Cash-flow crisis

Today sterling balances are in the region of £50 billion—double the level of the British government's official reserves of gold and foreign currencies which would be available to support sterling in a crisis. In other words, in the event of a run on the pound, Britain lacks the material resources necessary to buy back enough sterling to prevent a collapse. And, compared to when high sterling balances existed in the thirties and the fifties, Britain no longer has the political influence to persuade foreign holders of sterling to hold on to their pounds in a crisis. A sterling bloc of the Falklands, Gibraltar and a few other rocks around the globe hardly compares with the inter-war Empire or even the fifties Commonwealth. All this emphasises the fragility of Britain's formerly healthy relations with the world economy.

The second major component of the invisibles involves overseas earnings from the sale of services as opposed to material goods. Here too, things are less rosy than the spokesmen of British capitalism claim. The biggest services earner by some way is insurance. However, in the competitive environment of deregulated international financial services, British insurance remittances have fallen for each of the last three years.

International banking, which is conventionally overemphasised as a contributor to overseas earnings, is also making less each year and is back down to its pre-1983 level. The interest received by British banks on foreign currency lending sounds good at £30 billion a year, about six per cent of national income, but this turns into a loss when interest payments on even larger foreign borrowings are taken into account (see above).

When assessing the City's role as international financial centre, it's worth noting that London's banks—and these include Japanese, American, German, and Swiss-owned banks as well as British ones—have since 1983 made considerably more money from overseas portfolio investment on their own account than they have from providing financial services for the rest of the world. Banks are now more like financial speculators than institutions from which others obtain services. British bankers have joined British industrialists in the search for a fast profit in hazardous financial operations. All forms of capital in Britain are on a trajectory away from real productive activity.

Other City operations like securities dealers and commodity brokers have been more stable earners than insurance and banking in recent years, but they are less important in absolute terms and are likely to decline as Tokyo, New York, Frankfurt, Paris, Zurich and Luxembourg become less regulated and therefore more important financial centres.

Overall—and without even countenancing an international recession or a serious crash—Britain's banking, insurance and other financial services will find the going much tougher in the nineties. Financial upsets, as experienced on the Japanese stock market this year, only compound the problems. The resulting collapse of Japanese equity warrant business will hit London brokers hard, perhaps knocking £2 billion off their annual profit.

The other non-financial services which make up part of the invisibles, some of which are connected to the days of Britain's imperial glory, are also on the wane. The provision of shipping—a hangover from Britain's old role in world trade—is now in substantial deficit. The British merchant fleet has fallen from 1600 ships in 1975 to 600 last year, a reduction which also undermines the earnings of shipping-related activities in the City like the Baltic Exchange. Civil aviation earnings, of more recent origin, have met the same fate. And lastly tourism has become a big burden on the British economy, since British people are far more keen to escape abroad and spend their money than foreigners are to come here and spend theirs. The collapse of the traditional package holiday this year may give the British economy a small and ironic boost.

At the turn of the century Lord Curzon, viceroy of India, predicted that Britain would be able to live off its heritage, funded by foreign tourists who would 'come to see us just as they climb the Acropolis in Athens'. The Empire's decline has gone so far that even the rather pathetic vision of Britain as a tourist haven is fading.

The crisis of the invisibles sector compounds the problems of a weak productive sector. In practical terms this means that the growing trade deficit is no longer compensated for by invisible earnings. These have declined from over £9 billion in 1986 to about £2 billion last year. This year there may be no invisibles surplus at all; the final quarter of 1989 recorded the first deficit on invisible earnings since the Napoleonic wars. The material and political weakness of British capitalism means that it is less able to exploit the world market than ever before—at a time when the turn towards international recession is forcing even the more dynamic powers of Japan and Germany to look to foreign markets to survive in a more competitive climate.

British capitalism has lost many of its old props, and now faces the daunting prospect of international turmoil and the creation of a new world order in which it will play no major part. Thirty years ago former US secretary of state Dean Acheson said that Britain had lost an Empire and failed to find an alternative role. Now it seems fair to say that Britain has also lost the legacy of Empire, and will find itself in whatever role the world's new empires decide it deserves.

Present circumstances make it more rather than less likely that Thatcher and Major will attempt to pull off some sort of temporary pre-election boom. But it will be more difficult to create the aura of prosperity than before the elections of the past, including 1987. And even if their optical illusion succeeds, the underlying weakness of British capitalism means that the post-election economic fall-out will be much more severe and destructive for us all.

●

For whom the bell tolls: even Britain's traditional big earners, like shipping insurance through Lloyds of London, are in danger of sinking

'Wanted' pictures in the papers, dawn raids, stiff sentences in the courts; the crackdown on anybody allegedly involved in the London riot of 31 March is gathering force, reports Andrew Calcutt

Police and press run riot

After Trafalgar Square

PHOTO: Nick Miller

It's mid-morning in court number one, Bow Street. Acting on questionable legal advice, despatch rider John Revell (25) pleads guilty to obstructing the police near Trafalgar Square after the anti-poll tax demonstration on 31 March 1990. The prosecution claims Revell shouted 'fuck off, pigs', refused to move when asked, and raised a clenched fist. Revell says 'I was being pushed down the street where there was nowhere to be pushed'. The magistrate twitches and fines Revell £100 with £25 costs. The hearing lasts less than five minutes.

Hundreds of defendants charged with alleged offences arising from the West End riot of 31 March are now being processed through the bargain basement of the judicial system: the magistrates courts. By mid-June, around a hundred defendants who pleaded guilty to minor offences had been dealt with by stipendiary magistrates at Bow Street, Clerkenwell, Horseferry Road, Marylebone Road, Great Marlborough Street and Highbury. Most of the 400 defendants pleading not guilty have been remanded for trial in magistrates courts or for committal to crown courts. The day-to-day business of setting trial dates and hearing minor public order cases—sandwiched between traffic and shoplifting offences—makes the riot proceedings appear mundane, even boring. Yet the courtroom manoeuvres now taking place are the latest stage of a campaign which marks a new departure in joint police/media witch-hunts.

Police made 396 arrests on the day. After examining 90 hours of video and 30 000 photographs, Scotland Yard claims that 18 037 offences were committed including 537 assaults on police. Working from Cannon Street police station under the command of chief superintendent Roy Ramm, 125 detectives have netted a further hundred alleged offenders in dawn raids on their homes. Police spokesmen claim that they all shared a common purpose. Deputy assistant commissioner David Meynell spoke of 'mutual recognition of kindred spirits. They became a group with one aim'. 'The cases have a common thread running through them', echoed deputy director of public prosecutions David Gandy.

For the first time, the crown prosecution service (CPS) has set up a special unit to deal with the 'kindred spirits'. Operating from offices in Furnival Street, Holborn, 13 specialist prosecutors are engaged in the preliminary stages of a coordinated judicial assault which will run for months, culminating in a series of major showtrials which may not take place until the summer of 1991. The prosecution looks set to call for 10-year prison sentences for offences such as riot.

In dealing with minor offences, stipendiary magistrates have varied the punishment to fit the accused. Stiffer sentences are being meted out to young working class defendants.

David Cole got two months' jail and £2226 costs for breaking a window in Regent Street. Charged with theft, Stuart Bolt was sentenced to 28 days' prison after anarchist posters were found at his home. Magistrate Terry Maher handed out 'a deterrent sentence' of 14 days in jail to east Londoner Ronald McDowell, convicted of stealing a

pen. A black musician was fined £1000 for breaking a window. Magistrate John Nichols announced he would have sent him to jail if he was certain the defendant shouted 'kill the fucking pigs', as the prosecution alleged. One solicitor reports that unemployed youngsters have been told to pay a £50 fine in five days or face jail. Meanwhile third-year law student Andrew Cartwright was bound over for a year after pleading guilty to 'trying to pull free an arrested man'. Olive O'Brien, a 57-year old housewife, was fined £15 for breaking a ministry of defence window in Whitehall.

Bail applications have met with similar bias. An 18-year old defendant with a punkish haircut spent seven days in custody and looked likely to go back to jail until her lawyer pointed out that her father is an Oxford don; then she was granted bail. Solicitors report that the CPS has opposed bail applications on behalf of squatters on the grounds that they are more likely to abscond. Some defendants are being held in custody accused of minor charges such as obstruction of police and theft of a policeman's helmet. Others have been bailed on strict conditions: barred from central London, banned from demonstrations of any kind, required to sleep each night at a given address and report thrice weekly to the same police station. Defendants who have reported to the police as required have been accused of failing to do so.

Guilty of juggling

Stipendiary magistrates put more trust in police evidence than juries do. Several defendants have had charges of violent disorder scaled down to threatening behaviour so that their cases can be heard in magistrates courts rather than crown (jury) courts. With the cooperation of magistrates, the CPS is aiming to get convictions for the following 'offences': juggling (obstruction); gesticulating from a bus (threatening behaviour); sitting on top of a phone box (threatening behaviour); protesting when a woman was hit with a riot shield; protesting when a woman was hit by four or five police officers; protesting when police snatched a photographer's camera (assault on police); waiting to enter Trafalgar Square when the police charged (threatening behaviour); waiting for a friend; failing to get out of the way of police charges in Whitehall and Northumberland Avenue; going home (obstruction of police). According to the police and CPS, being in or around Trafalgar Square on the evening of 31 March was sufficient to make you a criminal 'kindred spirit'.

After months of coordinated preparation, and extensive use of video material, the CPS is increasingly confident. Defendants have arrived in court to find they face new charges. One was in the dock in Horseferry Road before he learned that the single charge of threatening behaviour against him had mysteriously multiplied into three charges. Two others discovered that their alleged offences had been upped from threatening behaviour to affray and two assaults on police.

Unlike their prosecutors, some defendants are woefully unprepared. One man came to Bow Street court from his home in Dorset without any legal representation. He was under the impression that he had to plead guilty to assaulting a police officer simply because the said officer had, somehow or other, sustained minor injuries on 31 March. The magistrate advised the defendant to see the duty solicitor, and afterwards he changed his plea to not guilty. If the prosecution witnesses had been ready and waiting in court, he might not have had the chance.

Press officers

The Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign (TSDC) has been set up to provide support for all defendants. Solicitors associated with the campaign, who are calling for all defendants to have free access to video 'evidence', will act on behalf of those who are dissatisfied with their current legal representation (see below for details).

The TSDC itself has been subject to close scrutiny. Someone describing himself as 'an agency journalist' tried to infiltrate a campaign meeting. A police officer telephoned the manager of Conway Hall in central London, where TSDC meetings have been held, and announced that those entering the hall would be photographed. When the TSDC organised a picket of the Mirror building, to protest against the 'rogues gallery' of alleged rioters published in Robert Maxwell's papers, participants were videoed by a camera crew who avoided identifying themselves.

The most innovative aspect of the post-riot crackdown has been the close coordination between the police, the television broadcasters and the newspapers. The media have always been broadly sympathetic to the forces of law and order. Things have now gone further, with Fortress Wapping, Broadcasting House and the rest effectively being turned into extensions of Scotland Yard.

After the riot, the media showed little interest in reporting the widespread police violence against anti-poll tax demonstrators. They have since shown none at all in investigating what has happened to marchers like Mickey, a young Liverpudlian whom friends have not heard from since his arrest. The national press has devoted itself to criminalising those who confronted the riot police on 31 March, and hunting down alleged rioters.

The police and the media first set out to create a climate conducive to a law and order drive. Typical of the coverage were the widespread reports of sergeant Paul Irvine describing the crowd as 'a baying screaming yelling spitting swearing mob'. With the loud assistance of Labour and Tory MPs, the police and the press accused left-wing and anarchist groups of orchestrating the violence. They even dreamt up a terrorist connection between 'underclass' rioters and Animal Liberation Front 'bombers' (a story which sat uneasily with their reports of how rioters injured 22 police horses).

In the weeks which followed the revolt in Trafalgar Square, the media were close accomplices in the police campaign of entrapment. The tabloids acted as bulletin boards for the Metropolitan Police, printing whatever 'wanted' pictures and press releases they were handed and appealing for their readers to shop such public enemies as 'the Mohican hair girl', 'the biker' and 'the earrings man'. When Janet Kelly phoned in from the Isle of Wight to say that her daughter Lorraine Vivian was the 'crazed blonde' pictured in the Sunday papers of 13 May, a posse of police and journalists carried out an unsuccessful raid on Lorraine's 'filthy squat' (*Daily Star*, 17 May) in Hackney, east London. She was eventually arrested in early June and charged with violent disorder and attempted grievous bodily harm.

The case of the Trafalgar Square riot demonstrates how the state has tamed the media. In 1987, when the courts subpoenaed press photos and TV film of a crowd attacking two British Army corporals in West Belfast, many journalists and broadcasters protested against what they saw as an encroachment on their independence. Three years later, the same news organisations handed over miles of tape and thousands of photographs of the fighting in Trafalgar Square with hardly a murmur.

• Names of defendants awaiting trial have been withheld.
Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign, c/o Haldane Society of Lawyers, Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X OAP; (071) 833 8958

for progress

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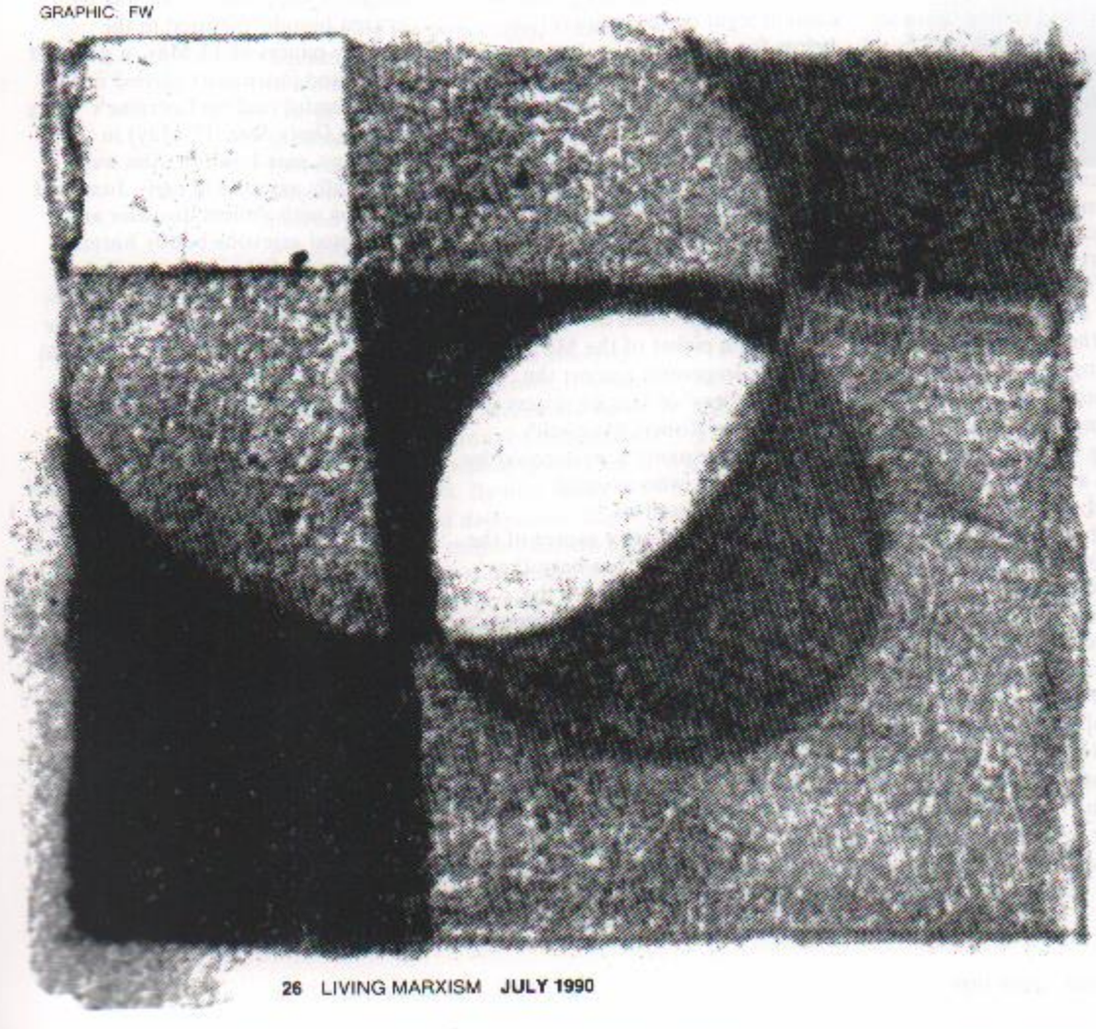

It is very difficult to find enthusiastic defenders of contemporary society. Hardline businessmen and Tory backwoodsmen may resolutely defend the principles of the capitalist system, but they will be less than happy with the practical realities of society in its present form. Although they always sing the praises of capitalism, all the indulgent self-flattery is directed towards the good old days. An advertisement published in a high-Tory magazine for *The Romantic* expresses this sentiment in its most decadent form:

'If...you find the modern world dreary, vulgar and worthless—if you are looking for a new world that is elegant, charming, intelligent and utterly reactionary, then *The Romantic* may be what you have been looking for all your life.' (*The Salisbury Review*, March 1990)

LIVING MARXISM

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This is the first issue I have read ☐ Up to 3 months ☐ Up to 6 months ☐ Up to 1 year ☐ Over 1 year ☐

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From a newsagent ☐
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LIVING MARXISM

Q8 Indicate whether you would like more or less coverage of the following
(options are: 1 more, 2 about the same, 3 less, 4 none)

International politics	1	2	3	4	Interviews	1	2	3	4
British politics	1	2	3	4	Book reviews	1	2	3	4
Irish politics	1	2	3	4	Film reviews	1	2	3	4
Eastern Europe	1	2	3	4	Other arts related articles	1	2	3	4
Third world	1	2	3	4	Readers' letters	1	2	3	4

Q9 Are you
Male ☐ Female ☐

Q10 Are you
Single ☐ Living with partner ☐ Married ☐

Q11 Employment
Full-time paid ☐ Part-time paid ☐ Self-employed ☐ Full-time education ☐ Other unwaged ☐

Q12 What type of job
Private industry ☐ Private service ☐ Public industry ☐ Public sector—health ☐
Public sector—education ☐ Other public sector ☐ Other ☐

Q13 Are you in a trade union?
Yes ☐ No ☐

Q14 Pre-tax income
Up to 6000 ☐ 6001—8000 ☐ 8001—10 000 ☐ 10 001—12 000 ☐ 12 001—15 000 ☐
15 001—20 000 ☐ 20 001—25 000 ☐ Over 25 000 ☐

Q15 Is your job
Clerical ☐ Manual ☐ Management ☐

Q16 What is your highest educational qualification?
CSEs ☐ O-level ☐ A-level ☐ Diploma ☐ First degree ☐ Higher degree ☐ Other ☐ None ☐

Q17 Do you
Own your own home ☐ Rent from council ☐ Rent privately ☐ Other ☐

Q18 Age
Under 16 ☐ 16-18 ☐ 19-21 ☐ 22-25 ☐ 26-29 ☐ 30-34 ☐ 35-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50 or more ☐

Q19 How often in an average month do you attend
(Options: A Once, B twice, C 3-4, D 5-6, E 7-8, F 9-10, G 11 plus)

Cinema	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Theatre	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Live music	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Exhibitions	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Other music clubs	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Restaurants	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Pubs	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Evening classes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G

Q20 Have you been on holiday abroad over the last 12 months?
No ☐ Once ☐ Twice or more times ☐

Q21 How much do you spend in an average month on
(Options: A under £10, B £10-20, C £21-40, D £41-60, E £61-80, F over £80)

Books	A	B	C	D	E	F
Clothes	A	B	C	D	E	F
Records/tapes/CDs	A	B	C	D	E	F
Alcohol	A	B	C	D	E	F
Videos	A	B	C	D	E	F
Tobacco	A	B	C	D	E	F

Q22 Do you have a

Car ☐ Motorbike ☐ Bicycle ☐ Hi-fi ☐ Video ☐ Personal stereo ☐ Computer ☐

Q23 Which of these papers do you read regularly?

Independent	☐	Local evening paper	☐
Guardian	☐	Observer	☐
Daily Telegraph	☐	Sunday Times	☐
Financial Times	☐	Sunday Telegraph	☐
The Times	☐	Independent on Sunday	☐
The Scotsman	☐	Sunday Correspondent	☐
Other Daily	☐	Other Sunday	☐

Q24 Which of these weeklies/magazines do you read regularly?

New Statesman and Society	☐	History Today	☐	Asian Times	☐
Spectator	☐	Irish Post	☐	The Voice	☐
Listener	☐	London Irish News	☐	Green magazine	☐
London Review of Books	☐	Republican News	☐	New Left Review	☐
Economist	☐	Spare Rib	☐	Marxism Today	☐
Newsweek	☐	Company	☐	Tribune	☐
Arena	☐	Marie Claire	☐	the next step	☐
Face	☐	Elle	☐	Outlook	☐
Blitz	☐	Everywoman	☐	New Internationalist	☐
Football fanzine	☐	Private Eye	☐	Socialist Worker	☐
Time Out	☐	Viz	☐	New Socialist	☐
City Limits	☐	New Scientist	☐	Sanity	☐
NME	☐	Pink Paper	☐		
Q	☐	Caribbean Times	☐		

Q25 If there were an election tomorrow which party would you vote for?

Labour ☐ SLD/SDP ☐ Conservative ☐ Green ☐ Revolutionary Communist Party ☐
Communist Party ☐ Other ☐ None ☐

Q26 Should the monarchy be abolished?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

Q27 Do you think nuclear power stations should be shut down?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

Q28 Do you think the age of consent for homosexuals should be lowered to 16?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

Q29 Do you think British troops should be withdrawn from Northern Ireland?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

Q30 In the light of the Rushdie affair, should the blasphemy laws be abolished?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

Q31 Should Hong Kong refugees be allowed to settle in Britain?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

Q32 Should women have the right to abortion on demand?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐

You can remain anonymous if you wish, but if you want to enter our prize draw, we need your name and address:

Name .....

Address .....

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..... **Postcode** .....

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FOLD 1

the dark, o the light

Frank Füredi puts the case for reason and progress against the romantics, postmodernists and other irrationalists of the Western intelligentsia

The mildly provocative manner of this promotion should not obscure its straightforward, pedestrian message: all that is good is associated with a past which has been corrupted by the cumulative effects of modernisation. This perspective is seldom presented in the pure form of *The Romantic*. Yet, modified and rendered 'sensible', it has become a theme which seems to dominate the media, higher education and the other cultural institutions of Western capitalism.

The recent revival of the cult of Nietzsche, who counselled his readers to 'write with blood and you will discover that blood is spirit', is symptomatic of the contemporary intellectual climate. Pessimism has always been an underlying motif in the twentieth-century writings of the Western intelligentsia. A recurring theme has been the disappointment of the individual with a society which imposes atomisation and a sense of isolation. Today, however, that which was a source of insecurity and self-conscious alienation has become a focus for celebration. In the past, atomisation or the fragmentation of individual experience was treated as a dehumanising side-effect of capitalism. Now it is upheld as a positive 'difference' and euphemistically characterised as a 'plurality' of experience.

None of the arguments of the Nietzsche cult, or of the wider spectrum of irrationalists who are often referred to as postmodernists, is particularly novel. Their intense dislike of the idea of progress, indeed of any idea that goes beyond the momentary fragment, their dismissal of science and rationality, their labelling of any vision of human liberation as a utopian fantasy and their profound sense of pessimism regarding the present and the future, are all clearly expressed in the academic and popular literature of the past century.

Events like the two world wars and in particular the experience of Nazi barbarism have tended to reinforce a vision of the world in which modernity, science and technology represent only further steps in the subjugation of humanity. Even at the best of times, for example during the relatively prosperous years of the late fifties and sixties, a sense of insecurity remained an important subplot of cultural and intellectual life. Today doubt has turned into cynicism. Pessimism is regarded as a hallmark of sensitivity and intelligence. And sadly, what until very recently was perceived to be a problem is now defended as valid and positive.

The very act of attempting to make sense of the human experience by relating it to the development of society is dismissed under the

for progress

fashionable label of a 'totalising discourse'. The attempt to represent meaning with universality is dismissed with the terms 'metalanguage', 'metanarratives', 'metatheory', words which today have the connotation of scorn. The perceptions of fragmented isolation are even treated as *the* intrinsically legitimate form of human insight. This ovation to subjectivity, justified on the grounds of acknowledging the 'multiple forms of otherness', calls into question scientific social theory. It is the annihilation of rational thought.

The contemporary fascination with subjectivity is paralleled by a renunciation of any attempt to associate human history with the theme of social progress. According to the new wisdom, just as life consists of multiple forms of individual experience, so history is nothing more than a series of arbitrary, unconnected events. Enlightenment rationality and the belief in historical progress are extremely unfashionable. The view of American historian Gertrude Himmelfarb would now find a positive resonance across the entire spectrum of the Western intelligentsia:

'The idea of progress—progress with a capital p—has been in disrepute for a long time now. And with good reason, we would think. The experience of this century hardly disposes us to any complacency about the present, still less about the future.' (*The New History and the Old*, p155)

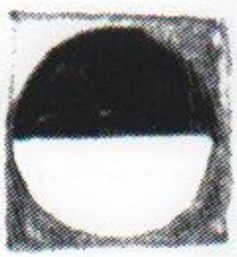
Himmelfarb's observation reflects above all an intellectual climate which is dismissive of experimentation and the aspiration to change society for positive ends.

The dismissal of the idea of progress is more than an intellectual revision of academic history. It is about the practical possibilities of the present; it rejects the project of trying to transform society. The procedure generally adopted is devastatingly simplistic. A shopping list of some of the terrible events of this century is produced. This list of tragic incidents is counterposed to the optimism of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century thinkers, and that optimism is declared, *ipso facto*, to be flawed. Such a literary assault on the term optimism is in fact a direct challenge to the project of social change; as conservative historian Harold James recently noted, 'socialist optimism thought it could overcome age-old religious, national and racial animosities—and failed' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 22 April 1990). According to this interpretation, the collapse of Stalinism confirms that the essential human condition cannot be changed by transforming society.

Critics of progress don't stop at dismissing the project of social change as an ineffectual hare-brained scheme. They even hold those involved in attempting to transform the world directly or indirectly responsible for the major disasters of this century. Himmelfarb puts the case:

'[A] pessimistic, even apocalyptic view comes more naturally to a generation which has learned at great pain that the most impressive scientific discoveries may be put to the most grotesque use; that material property sometimes has an inverse relationship to the "quality of life"; that a generous social policy may create as many problems as it solves....At every point we are confronted with shattered promises, blighted hopes, irreconcilable dilemmas, good intentions gone astray, a choice between evils, a world perched on the brink of disaster—all the familiar clichés, which are all too true and which seem to give the lie to the idea of progress.' (*The New History and the Old*, p155)

Critics of progress even hold those attempting to transform the world responsible for this century's disasters



From this standpoint, well-meaning schemes to abolish poverty through a welfare state create a culture of dependence—an underclass of feckless individuals and single mothers. The cure is far worse than the initial problem.

Meanwhile, one-time British Marxist historian Gareth Stedman Jones now seeks solace in spiritual faith:

'...the secular scientific enquiry into Man [has]...proved fragile and unreliable. Science has made little headway against Aids, and after events such as Chernobyl it confesses that it has little idea of how to dispose of the nuclear Frankensteins that it had so confidently multiplied.' (*Independent*, 28 April 1990)

Whereas for Himmelfarb social reform leads to the inner-city underclass, for Stedman Jones science leads to such dismal experiences as Chernobyl and Aids. If anything the equation of progress with a historical nightmare is far more palpable in Stedman Jones' version of events: 'From Passchendäle to Auschwitz, from the gulag to Hiroshima, and so on to the Killing Fields, the twentieth century has remorselessly torn away from us all remaining vestiges of a simple nineteenth-century faith in historical progress.'

It is the strength of the images—the Killing Fields, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, the gulag—which gives the arguments against progress such power. Their aspect as symbols rather than as historically understandable events gives coherence to the anti-progress critique. It is testimony to the strength of insecurity and irrationalism that such emotive manipulation of imagery can serve as a substitute for objective analysis. There is now a wide body of literature which adopts the same device of linking one sordid event with the project of social change in the past. The French Revolution thus anticipates the gas chambers at Treblinka and Marx is held up as the precursor of the gulag. The struggle to know, to understand and to gain conscious control over life is held responsible for the disasters of recent times. The real war criminal turns out to be the secular optimist.

This interpretation of events relies on the methodological device of the simpleton—*reading history backwards*. 'Chernobyl could not have happened without Einstein—therefore he is not entirely free of responsibility for this disaster.' 'Science has promised to eradicate disease yet we still suffer from Aids—therefore the claims of progress are suspect.' A more grotesque variant of this argument is to imply that science may have led to the emergence of a

new disease. Every failure in the present can be linked to an initiative designed to change the world in the past.

Predictably, the dismal catalogue of horrible events this century is seldom associated with *the attempt to prevent change and hold up progress.* Nor is it considered as *a price humanity pays for its failure to progress.* Instead of presenting history as a struggle between those who want to uphold the status quo and those who want to change it, the dominant narrative describes an aimless historical process violated time and again by secular utopians, with devastating effects. According to the postmodernists, these unnatural interventions are the cause of so many problems, since history exacts a terrible revenge against the crime of seeking rational control over the course of human destiny.

The deep pessimism of the Western intelligentsia is an understandable reaction to the realities of capitalist society. A permanent conflict between the promise of freedom and the reality of unfreedom is expressed in reactions ranging from unease to a deep malaise. A sense of isolation, enhanced by the intellectuals' individualised position, disposes them towards a perspective constructed around the passive, the isolated and the introspective. Intellectual elitism is a response which makes a virtue out of the necessity of this condition and scoffs at the 'naive optimists', 'mass culture and consumerism' and other such vulgarities. It finds its refuge in obscure language, equivocation and the celebration of the individual thinker.

The disposition towards the past, a romantic reworking of history, appears almost seductive to the intelligentsia. It allows the reality of the modern alienated individual to be contrasted to the apparent wholeness of an idealised organic society in the past. Even though this approach may be tempered by the realisation that there is no return to the past, the conclusion remains that the good old days had something very positive which modernity has destroyed. This romantic viewpoint contains a rational insight regarding the emptiness of capitalist life—hence its tremendous appeal. From the eccentric supporters of the Nietzsche cult to the proponents of Green politics there is a manifest desire to recapture that communal wholeness lost through modernity.

The romantic critique of capitalism represents a call for history to return to its original track. As such, it is at odds with mainstream bourgeois theory, which suggests not only that history is on the right track but that it has already arrived. The pessimistic romantic vision contrasts with the optimistic complacency of bourgeois ideology.

The view of the professional ideologue suggests that history has ended, having realised itself in a society of free market capitalism

The complacent apologetic view of history is the characteristic standpoint of the practising capitalist and the professional ideologue. This view declares the achievements of capitalist society to be the highpoint of human endeavour. It suggests that history has come to the end of the journey, having realised itself in a society of free-market capitalism. A contemporary illustration of this approach is provided by the American publicist Francis Fukuyama, who recently provoked a controversy with his essay 'The end of history'. Fukuyama is animated by the same formative experiences as the more pessimistic postmodernist—the practical discrediting of the project of socialism and the collapse of the Stalinist system. But whereas the postmodernists conclude that progress is not possible, Fukuyama draws the conclusion that it has already been achieved.

Both of these fashionable ideas are in fact old enough for Karl Marx to have polemicised against. Marx directly rejected the romantic vision of rediscovering the golden age, and Fukuyama's eternalisation of history. He noted that it is 'as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill' (*Grundrisse*, 1973 edition, p162). Both positions close off the future as a terrain for positive development and change. They deny the human agency a capacity to make history through social transformation.

The competing visions of the future offer either an attempt to recover the lifestyle of our ancestors, or to make the most of what capitalism offers. It is not an attractive choice, which is why these philosophies are seldom presented through straightforward assertions that 'the past is good' or 'history is finished'. Instead, there exists an unconvincing compromise between the romantic and the end-of-history viewpoints. After all, the idea that history has come to an end, that what you see is what you get, is too terrifying a prospect to behold, as is the rejection of the possibility of positive changes in the future. So a compromise is executed by shifting the focus from the history of human society to the plane of individual action. Freed from the constraints of history, the arbitrary individual subject is now susceptible to a multiplicity of possibilities. One of these possibilities is that through individual action improvement, change and even progress can be countenanced.

The subjective individual becomes the main protagonist in a drama which is almost religious in scope. This religion of subjectivity can of course exist in a secular form. Whereas some uphold individual enterprise as a route to a kind of salvation, others emphasise the role of the individual driven by moral conviction. This spectacle of individual progress, or progress in miniature, is the final prophecy of Stedman Jones:

'We are not obliged to believe that history of itself will deliver moral progress, but nor are we obliged to renounce all type of moral progress itself. Morality is not borne forward by nations, classes or the World Spirit, it is a project embarked upon by individuals in communities, inspired in their actions by the maxims of practical reason.' (*Independent*, 28 April 1990)

for progress

This provides a very neat resolution to the drama. History has been put in its place as a bit of background to the main action, where individuals hold forth centre-stage. While social change is dismissed as utopian, individual change is depicted as a very reasonable enterprise. In this way the pessimism of the postmodernist can coexist with the exaggerated importance which the intellectual attaches to his individual action. This kind of self-flattery thrives on repeatedly putting down history.

Progress should not be conceived of as a philosophical question of what meaning the future has in store. Nor does the concept provide an eternal guarantee that life will get better and better and still better. Progress in the first instance calls into question the durability of the status quo. It suggests that every social arrangement is historically transient and thus subject to change. Change, however, is not an objective process which improves the human condition automatically.

Like all experiments, revolutions can fail. But the failure to experiment is the biggest failure of all

What is significant about the potential for change is that it allows human beings some scope for intervention, to make their history in line with their desire to control their circumstances. The rejection of historical progress hence also implies a direct refutation of the idea that human beings can influence and shape their destiny. It either suggests that such change is illusory, or that human intervention only makes the situation worse, because some malevolent drive to dominate destabilises the natural course of events.

The first upholders of progress, the Enlightenment thinkers, were certainly naively optimistic about its prospects. They believed that rationality and science gave human reason the power to shape history. This perspective was a vital advance on pre-Enlightenment thought. But it failed to comprehend that history consists of conflict and tension. It is not the product of rational individuals purposefully pursuing their logical ideas. History is made through the struggle between social classes and not the working out of reason.

Marxists do not believe that the history of conflicting class interests can be equated with a chronology of human reason. Most of the time history consists of the unintended consequences of human action. Once in a while human intervention in history becomes truly inspired, through the convergence of that unconscious action and a conscious insight into what can be achieved. Otherwise humanity has only a limited perception of the forces which shape society.

History contains tendencies which are *progressive*, but also those which are *destructive*. Marx's critique of capitalist society rested on the insight that the progressive potential of capitalism was thwarted by the system's destructive side. So long as the fruits of progress are subject to private, sectional and class interests they need not be used to meet the needs of society as a whole. The anti-social use of certain technologies in contemporary capitalism underlines the dilemma. In this sense *capitalism progresses through destruction.*

Obviously with the development of technology the capacity to destroy also increases. This destruction is not the result of any mystical urge to dominate, as some irrational thinkers suggest. It is the by-product of a society in which the forces of production are not subject to the constraints of social control. The anarchy of the market aptly summarises the existing state of affairs. The market forces which operate behind the backs of men and women do not recognise the philosophy of rationality and reason. What represents a social tragedy may well be sensible from the point of view of the individual entrepreneur maximising profit.

Progress in its capitalist form throws up obstacles to further development. These obstacles even threaten to annul the achievements of human development so far. However, from an objective perspective, it is not change which is destructive. Regression and human catastrophe is the penalty society pays for not changing. When such an impasse is reached the potential for progress is cancelled and society may well implode.

The potential for progress is realised through the action of the human agency. Human action helps to eliminate the social obstacles to progress. Human action in history has been a sort of experiment through which new perceptions and insights are gained about life. The most experimental of these acts is social revolution, an act which promises to open all the doors to progress. As with all human experiments, revolutions can fail. But it is the failure to experiment that is the biggest failure of all. With a failed revolution there is at least something to be learned—with the failure to experiment, nothing at all.

Most postmodernists blame experimentation for the present state of humanity. We would argue that, on the contrary, it is the failure to experiment, to question and try out new ideas and possibilities which constitutes the real problem. It is precisely the need to prevent new gas chambers and gulags that gives urgency to the call for change. Contrary to the widely held prejudice, these horrors are not arguments against change but a warning against human complacency.

Progress is never guaranteed, but it is no less possible now than it was in the nineteenth century. However, it requires human agents who are prepared to act *progressively*. This much overused word has a simple connotation—it implies a critical perspective of enquiry which holds that nothing is self-evident. Acting in accordance with this perspective leads to probing the status quo at every juncture, with a view to executing its transformation. A critical enquiry oriented towards transformative action is the intellectual precondition for removing the obstacles to progress. This intellectual riposte is necessitated by the general evacuation of the terrain of social enquiry by an increasingly irrational intelligentsia. The new holy trinity of the Western intelligentsia—passivity, irrationalism and introspection—represents a sort of privatisation of science and social thought. It needs to be vigorously contested by an agenda which upholds the active, the scientific and the collective.

The readiness with which the contemporary intelligentsia is prepared to abandon social experimentation is a monument to the triumph of conservatism. Fortunately there is no solace to be found through nostalgia. Victorian values and romantic visions of pastoral societies are unlikely to find much of a purchase in late capitalist society. It is only a matter of time before the present complacent attacks on 'metanarratives' give way to a full-blown intellectual crisis. Such a crisis can be resolved only by those who are already engaged in reworking a critical history of society and a practice appropriate to it.

●

Let's conquer tomorrow's world

Science and society

John Gibson and Manjit Singh go against the Green grain and speak up for the unlimited growth of science and technology

Is science the liberator of humanity, or the tool of despots? Is the attempt to control the laws of nature the handmaiden of progress, or the suicidal act of ignorant fools? These are the kind of issues being raised today, as the world's pressing demographic and environmental problems make more people ask whether progress is such a good thing. What answers can we come up with?

Marxists support the unlimited growth of scientific knowledge and capacity. The dangers posed by the application of modern science arise from the nature of the societies in which it takes place, not from the science itself. The two systems which dominate the globe—capitalism and what remains of Stalinism—are at best stagnant and at worst collapsing. Without the constraints which these systems impose, the potential exists for fundamental scientific advances to be made and used for the good of us all.

In opposition to the Marxist view, there is a growing belief among radical thinkers that humanity is inevitably threatened by technological and scientific advance. This view has been put clearly by the modern Green movement. Discussing the environmental problems of today, Fritjof Capra has argued that these 'manifold health hazards are not just incidental by-products of technological progress; they are integral features of an economic system obsessed with growth and expansion, continuing to intensify its high technology in an attempt to increase productivity'.

The Green view of science and technology as inherently dangerous makes sense to many people. Mention biotechnology, for example, and images of man-made mutants are more likely to come to mind than thoughts of a cure for genetic disorders. Such a reaction is understandable, given the misuse of scientific research today. If Capra and his colleagues only wanted to expose the abuse of science by the capitalist system, we could have no objection. However, they go much further, asserting that 'technological

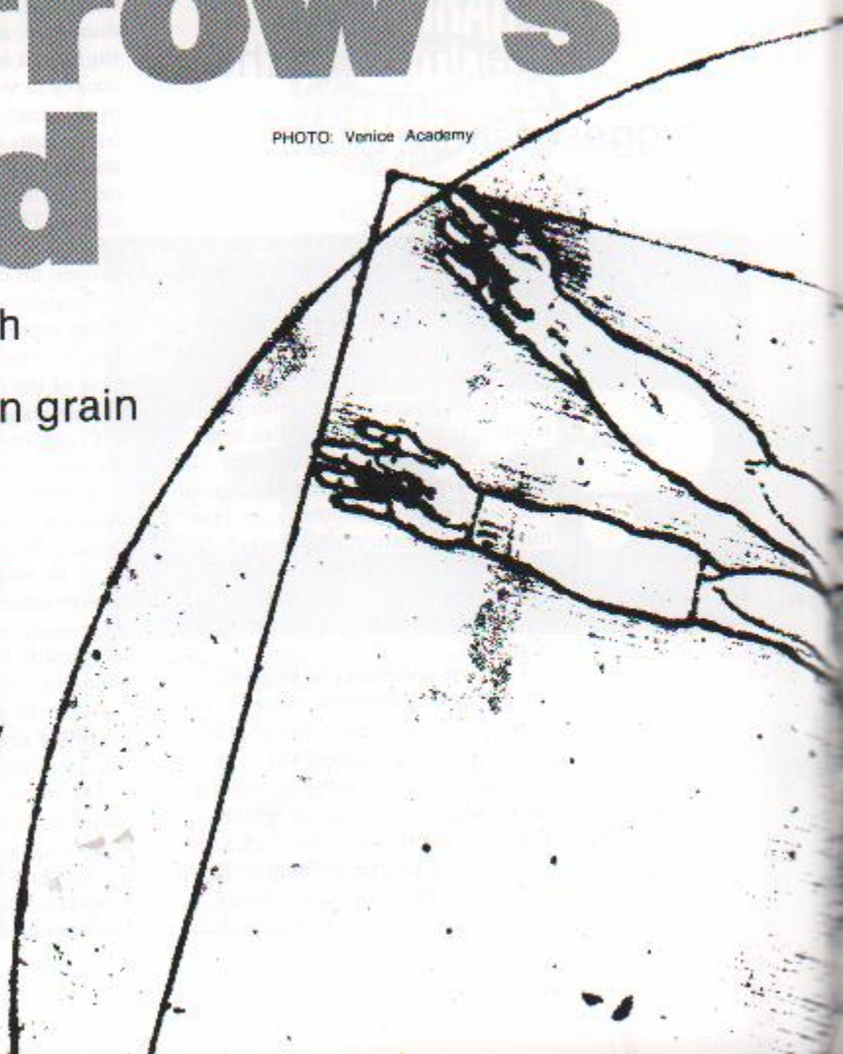


PHOTO: Venice Academy

progress...growth and expansion' as such are the problem. This simply will not stand up to scrutiny.

In a country like Britain, technological growth and scientific progress have vastly improved the state of human existence through the ages. A glance at life expectancy figures demonstrates the advances which society has made compared to the past. What's more, we would argue, popular fears about science and the real dangers it can pose are not primarily the product of 'growth and expansion'. Instead these fears have been far more prevalent when the capitalist system is in one of its many cycles of decline and retrenchment. We can illustrate this point through a brief look at the modern history of science in the Western world.

The wonder years

As Europe emerged from the Dark Ages with the development of trade and commerce at the end of the fifteenth century, a new optimism began to spread about the possibilities for material advance. Science, or 'man's way with nature', as one observer put it, was seen as part of this new expansion. Indeed it was seen as 'hardly less wonderful than nature itself'.

An optimistic vision spread and intensified as the rising capitalist system spread across Europe and later the globe, revolutionising science and technology in the process.

By the end of the sixteenth century Francis Bacon was arguing for the domination of nature by man through science. At the close of the seventeenth century, Newtonian science pointed to this as a real possibility, and a century later it was widely perceived that there were no obstacles to man's ability to control nature through science, thus improving the human condition. The optimism of the age was summed up by M de Condorcet, mathematician and secretary to the Paris academy of sciences, in 1794:

'Nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties, the perfectibility of man is truly infinite, and...the progress of this perfectibility, from now on independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.'

This period was the culmination of the Enlightenment, representing a truly enlightened view of the possibilities for progress. The developments of the nineteenth century seemed to justify the optimism: mechanics, heat, waves, sound, light, magnetism, electricity all fell to the advance of science. And, perhaps most dramatically of all, Charles Darwin presented his theory of evolution.

The period in which optimism about scientific progress was strongest, from Bacon to Darwin, was characterised by the expansion of the capitalist system. Occasional economic crises still occurred, and technology was still used for such ends as fighting reactionary wars, but in an overall context of social advance which encouraged enthusiasm for science. The twentieth century, by contrast, has been characterised by more profound depression and stagnation, world wars, the Holocaust and serious global problems. This has encouraged the modern questioning of Enlightenment attitudes towards progress, particularly scientific progress.

Within the twentieth century, the short periods when people seemed more optimistic about scientific advance have generally coincided with economic expansion. In the post-war boom years from 1950-70 the American space programme captured the imagination. Last year, by contrast, who took seriously George Bush's declaration that America, now the biggest debtor on Earth, would send a manned trip to Mars? Indeed who can remember him saying it?

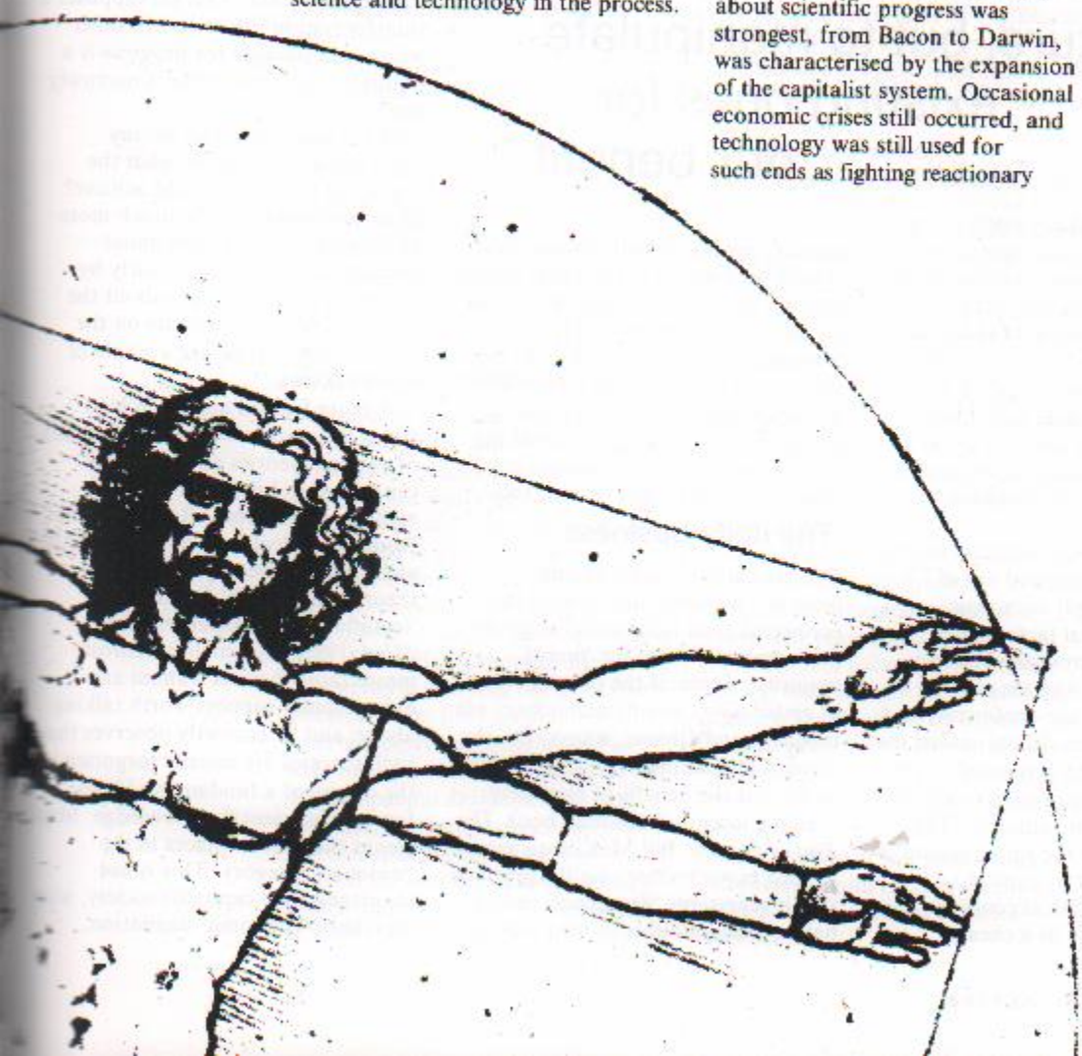
In today's harsher economic conditions scientific advance continues, but it is more episodic. And, despite Western celebrations of the end of the Cold War, the lion's share of research funds goes to the military—a telling example of how science is warped to fit the needs of capitalist society.

Underlying much of the West's modern scientific thinking is the belief that there are natural limits to the expansion of human knowledge and control of natural laws. So far as we are concerned, this opinion is the product of the prevailing pessimism in capitalist society; it has no basis in scientific fact.

Take the highly fashionable ideas of Chaos theory, which we looked at in detail in a previous issue of *Living Marxism* ('The science of despair', December 1989). Chaos theorists argue that many or all physical systems can be modelled using non-linear mathematical equations. From this some generalise that nature is inherently unpredictable and therefore is neither controllable nor even susceptible to an analysis based on cause and effect.

There is no positive evidence that Chaos captures the essence of more than a few simple systems. Yet can we be surprised that such a theory is gaining support today, when humanity's present capacity to control nature is so clearly limited? Blaming this limit on nature itself rather than on the problems of a social system is obviously an easier explanation for some.

Another example of how social conditions influence scientific views is the recent revival of interest in the theory of population put forward by Thomas Malthus in 1798. Malthus argued that poverty is caused by an



excess of people, rather than a shortage of food, because the growth in population has a natural tendency to outstrip the capacity to feed it. His views were well received by the ruling classes, since they provided a convenient explanation for the crushing poverty and unemployment brought on by the early stages of capitalist industrialisation. Indeed, Malthus' ideas were an open apology for the class system. He made very little effort to 'prove' his theory, but insisted that even levying taxes on behalf of the poor was harmful, since it would only encourage procreation, thus making the problem worse.

Feed the world

Today, the world's agricultural system is visibly failing to feed its 5.3 billion population, and it has been predicted that there will be six billion people by the year 2000 and more than nine billion by 2050. This has set the alarm bells ringing, and led to renewed interest in half-baked Malthusian theories of over-population. Yet, as the food mountains and wasted agricultural resources of the West indicate, there is no natural reason why the Earth couldn't support such numbers. Poverty and starvation are social problems. It is striking that support for Malthusianism has risen with each major economic recession since 1873. The argument that these recessions were caused by too many people soon looked ridiculous when economic expansion restarted and the population rose as well. Once more, blaming the limits to growth on nature rather than society seems to be a convenient explanation for some.

The barrier which capitalist society poses to the advance and use of science is not simply economic. Political and moral factors also intrude today. Across the Western world, the authorities are now seeking to encourage conformity and conservative values. In particular, the family unit is being promoted as the only acceptable institution in which to live and bring up children. The moral crusade by the ruling classes is mainly motivated by cynical economic and political concerns—they see the family as a cheap alternative to welfare provision and an important source of social stability. But it also has a knock-on effect for science.

Embryo research, for example, is under pressure from the promotion of family values in the West. Through in-vitro fertilisation child-bearing can be separated from sexual and family relations—a decided advantage for lesbian couples or any woman who wants to have children without men. The unease which the prospect of undermining the conventional family causes among the powers that be probably explains why, despite the importance of embryo research, nobody has been awarded a Nobel prize for work in this field. The USA has banned state funding for IVF research for the past 10 years. The treatment remains badly underdeveloped. And embryo research that could help in the elimination of cancerous cells, or the diagnosis of disabilities during pregnancy, is either on hold or severely underfunded.

The renewed arguments against research or, as with Britain's new Embryology Bill, in favour of limiting it, are often couched in ethical or religious terms. But this is misleading. Religious arguments against 'tampering with nature' have always been around. The point is that they are flourishing today because of the more fundamental earthly considerations involved. We can be sure that if the authorities considered it in their interests to encourage lesbian motherhood, they would dig up (or make up) some obscure religious quote to justify that, too.

> The purpose of science is not to create new laws of nature, but to manipulate existing ones for our benefit

'The deity business'

The ethical arguments against progress in embryology and in the connected field of biotechnology do not come only from the 'moral majority'. Some of the fiercest critics of embryology and biotechnology are feminists and Greens, who attack the whole Enlightenment project of using nature for the benefit of humanity.

In his recently published book *The End of Nature*, Bill McKibben argues against biotechnology on the grounds that it represents 'the second end of nature' and amounts to men playing God: 'It is the simple act of creating new forms of life that changes the world—that puts us forever in the deity business.' This Green reverence for nature is entirely misplaced, and serves only to mystify the whole scientific project.

For our benefit

The purpose of science, and humanity's use of it, is not to create new laws of nature, but to manipulate existing ones for our benefit. Indeed, it is impossible to create 'new' laws of nature. As Marx put it, man 'opposes himself to nature as one of her own forces'. From the point of promoting scientific advance and control over nature, the tragedy today is that supporters of the capitalist system can appear positively progressive compared to their critics like McKibben. These radicals are now rationalising many socially imposed limitations on science as natural ones, obscuring the fact that the major barriers to scientific and human progress lie in the capitalist and Stalinist systems.

Our goal should be to encourage a newly enlightened attitude to scientific and social advance. But for now such a mood of intellectual optimism is likely to be restricted to a minority. It will only be properly popularised when science and society really do advance, and people practically experience the benefits on a systematic basis. This presupposes a transformation of society. In other words, the struggle for progress is a political issue rather than a narrowly scientific one.

In the meantime, can we say anything sensible about what the science of the future could achieve? Most predictions reveal much more about society today than about science tomorrow, particularly by magnifying current fears about the misuse of science. Variants on the Frankenstein theme are a staple of science fiction.

A more fruitful approach is to assess future possibilities on the basis of current theories and technical capacities. In his recent book on artificial intelligence, Roger Penrose, Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, categorises theories as 'superb', 'useful', and 'tentative' (*The Emperor's New Mind*, 1989). By tentative Penrose means those theories without any experimental support worth talking about, and he correctly observes that such theories are usually forgotten in the course of a fundamental leap forward in scientific knowledge. Most recent theories he places in the 'tentative' category. This is not surprising; late capitalist society, with its relative economic stagnation,

provides limited opportunities for significant empirical verification. But does this imply that it would be useless to try to assess future scientific possibilities? Not quite.

Projections based on current technical knowledge and known technical possibilities provide the surest footing from which to glimpse the future. Consider an historical comparison. In the fifteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci made many mechanical constructions, real or imagined, and drew up bold plans for the future. Those he based entirely on speculative (or 'tentative') scientific theories were proved wrong in time. But those which he based in some way on existing technical knowledge proved in many cases to be useful—even if, as with the use of ball-bearings in mechanical devices, it took 300 years for them to be realised.

For examples of what we might predict today, let us look at two areas: nanotechnology, and optical communication and computing technology. Both have provided fertile ground for speculative discussions about the possibility of artificial intelligence, which, following Penrose's argument, hasn't extended our knowledge of intelligence in any meaningful way. But both offer exciting possibilities about the future constructions we could build.

Nanotechnology deals with dimensions from 0.1 to 100 nanometres, where a nanometre is one billionth of a metre. This is around the dimension of individual atoms. The idea began with Nobel Laureate Richard Feynman, who in 1959 declared that 'there's plenty of room at the bottom'. He argued that the principles of physics did not preclude 'the possibility of manoeuvring things atom by atom...but in practice, it has not been done because we are too big'.

Atomic bombshells

Subsequent advances mean that, in a primitive way, there is already the capacity to effect change at the atomic level. Building on the invention of the scanning electron microscope in 1952, Gerd Binning and Heinrich Rohrer (Nobel prize, 1986) have developed the scanning tunnelling microscope. Using technology in this field, Colin Humphreys of Liverpool University is carrying out precision electron beam lithography. With this microscope Humphreys would be able to engrave all 28 volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on to a pinhead. Scanning tunnelling microscopes are being used by teams around the world to manipulate atoms and molecules. For example, at IBM in San José, not only have they successfully placed a molecule in a predetermined place, they have also severed portions of the molecule.

If society can significantly advance its capacity to develop and use these technologies, the potential is there to replicate the complexity of the human body, and build machines to repair the body at the atomic level. Eric Drexler, a leading enthusiast, points out that the first step is the construction of assemblers which would be able to carry out construction work at the atomic level. From that point rapid advance is possible:

'Because assemblers will let us place atoms in almost any reasonable arrangement...they will let us build almost anything that the laws of nature allow to exist. In particular they will let us build almost anything we can design—including more assemblers. The consequences of this will be profound, because our crude tools have let us explore only a small part of the range of possibilities that natural law permits. Assemblers will open a world of new technologies.'

To carry this through in practice will pose a major challenge to existing scientific theories and technological capacities and will no doubt require the development of new ones, especially in the field of quantum mechanics. But, as Drexler points out in response to those who dismiss the whole idea, such feats of engineering are already carried out within the human body. There is no reason why science cannot improve upon bodily functions.

Advances in optical communication and computing are no less exciting. 'Coherent optical communications' are moving towards the point where in principle it would be possible to have one half of the world's population speaking to the other half simultaneously through one optical fibre, opening up undreamed of possibilities for communications and data transfer on a massive scale.

Developments in optical computers are in turn providing the basis for much faster processing of information, by using the fastest thing there is, light (photons), as the basis of the computer instead of electricity (electrons). Scientists at AT&T's Bell Laboratories in New Jersey have already built what they claim is the world's first digital optical processor, which processes information using light rather than electricity. They estimate that within five years they will have an optical computer which can match today's machines. From there it's a slow march to the death of electrical computing.

But judging future possibilities is not a natural scientific question. History is littered with those who claimed to have solved the 'final' scientific problem, only to appear ridiculous a few years hence. The fact that we are well away from understanding the functioning of, for example, the human brain, let alone understanding sub-atomic phenomena, should be a warning against scientific arrogance.

In principle there are no limits to the possible expansion of scientific capacities. However, those who expect the development of nanotechnological assemblers in the next 20 years should take a look at the state of the Western economies. It is hard to imagine the capitalist system advancing rapidly in the field of natural science when it is grinding to a halt in every other department. Social change is the precondition for significant and prolonged scientific advance.

Science and society

Enthusiasts for optical computing and nanotechnology are rightly scathing of those who think science cannot help overcome current human problems. In *The Engines of Creation* (1986), Drexler savages leading neo-Malthusian Mihajlo D Mesarovic, co-author of *Mankind at the Turning Point:* 'When asked whether he or any of his colleagues had allowed for even one future breakthrough comparable to, say, the petroleum industry, aircraft, automobiles, electric power, or computers (perhaps self-replicating robotic systems or cheap space transportation?) [Mesarovic] answered directly: "No".'

However, despite advances in science and technology, the number of people in absolute poverty is increasing rapidly. The Malthusians are wrong to claim that this is caused by increasing human numbers; but we should not fall into the opposite trap of believing it is susceptible to scientific solutions pure and simple.

Under the capitalist system the most advanced technology in the world is considered useless unless its application is profitable. The transformation of society to create an economy which produces for need rather than profit is not only preferable, it is the only way that we can reap the benefits of current and future advances in science and technology. Progress in science is dependent upon progress in society; and a change in society is the key to using science to serve humanity and solve its problems.

(Additional information from Simon Faraday)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don milligan

Bovine spongiform on the brain

Four months ago my doctor convinced me that the cilia which were supposed to be waving about like seaweed on the surface of my lungs were all dead. So to give the little tendrils a chance at regeneration I quit smoking. Now my drive for personal well-being is centred on my mouth. I have discussions with friends about the respective merits of dental floss, waxed and unwaxed. We mull over the sophisticated pleasures of the toothpick. I'm having to deal with the bacteriophages that are threatening my gums with destruction. I'm tackling tartar and facing up to plaque. Just in the nick of time I've started being responsible.

Of course I don't expect miracles overnight, but I've made a start. It's like learning to cope with your very own eco-system. Soon I'm going to render down that surplus fat. I'm going to make sure that only the very best proteins, minerals, salts, vitamins and carbohydrates are admitted to my body. I'm not going to wait until I get ill. I'm going to cure myself first.

I know that personal obsessions can seem puny and narrow, but they do lie at the very heart of things. You can mutter 'moral panic' as much as you like, but salmonella in the eggs, listeria in the bean curd and poison in the whelks is enough to make anybody a little tense. Blue-green algae is making beaches unsafe, killing fish and even unwary dogs. Now the sheep have got scrapie, much-loved cats are becoming demented and starting to run round in circles. Something is gnawing sponge-like cavities in the brains of cattle and, perhaps, in the brains of people.

This is frightening. It threatens to undo all my attempts at self-preservation. If I got bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or anything like it, it would be an unmitigated disaster. Not because I'd be called a mad cow, but because I'd be so flummoxed that I'd throw away the dental floss and start smoking again. I'd feel that all my efforts at reformation and personal responsibility were worthless.

It's no good telling me that I'd have to eat my own weight in cow brains every day for a month before I had any danger of catching BSE. How do you know? Perhaps just a teeny morsel of a flame-grilled burger would do the trick. The fact that only five per cent of herds and only 0.01 per cent of cows are infected sounds great. But what if my burger comes from that particular cow? And I am not reassured to learn that the electric saws used in abattoirs send up a fine spray of brains and spinal cord every time the slaughterman cuts up a dead beast. Brain and spine mist could settle anywhere, and probably does.

I do know that the highest standards of hygiene are maintained in farming and food preparation. And I know that responsible British farmers have stopped feeding mashed-up diseased sheep ('commercial concentrate') to their beef and dairy cattle. But down on the farm the pigs and piglets are still happily gobbling up their sheep mash every day. For some reason, known only to John Selwyn Gummer, cows can get spongy brains from savaging a dead sheep, but pigs can't. This revelation has cast a dark shadow over the poor old black pudding.

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Some people I know have 'cut down' on meat. Those who haven't heard of scrapie or commercial concentrates are tucking into lamb chops or pork sausages and guaranteed salmonella-free free range eggs. The really well-informed have opted for vegetables. Lots of wholesome fresh vegetables. They've abandoned their freezers and their microwaves are gathering dust. Their kitchens are suddenly cluttered with pulses in soak and jars of sprouting beans. They've gone in for lots of herbs, stoneware pots, wooden spatulas: that solid farmhouse feel, the wholesome texture of days gone by.

This culinary survivalism has its drawbacks. Really progressive people have gone so far as to add Quorn to their diet. Quorn is the new fermented fungus protein product, Fusarium Graminearum. It feels a bit like toilet tissue concentrate. Pulp, marinated in boiled water, lightly salted, and flavoured to somebody's taste. More importantly, Quorn is 'grown' under the most controlled conditions, and is definitely not fed on dead sheep. Rank Hovis McDougall has developed a safe product. No alien or unwanted bugs are allowed to multiply in the simmering vats of gently heaving Fusarium Graminearum. Quorn is as safe as potatoes, carrots and cauliflower.

But how safe are they? The killer cauli can't be far off. But don't worry. As government adviser Professor Southwood recently put it, 'anxiety can be a good thing'. I know what he means. Worry makes us alert. It keeps us on our toes. That queasy feeling that every meal may be your last makes you grateful for the dawn. The wholemeal toast, the sugarless cornflakes and the low-fat milk strike you as a veritable feast.

One knows instinctively that a lot can be done to get us safely through another day. And you don't have to take things to extremes. You don't have to go and live in a teepee in Wales, eat macrobiotic or chant mantras. Any reasonable person can dedicate a couple of hours a day to keeping themselves and their families as safe as humanly possible from debilitating or lethal bacteria. If you think positive and eat a balanced, vegetable diet, do sufficient exercise, quit smoking, stop drinking coffee, alcohol, tap water, canned drinks and full-cream milk, you have made a positive start.

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Next, you must start thoroughly reading all the labels in the supermarket. It's no good being satisfied with 'no artificial colour'. You've got to find out what cocktail of pigments they've used. You must know precisely what xanthan gum is and exactly what acesultane potassium does to different bits of your body. As Ben Elton might say, 'If we treat this as some kind of media fashion, then we're in trouble, you know'. Of course, we've got to pursue the macro-Green solutions too. Politics have their place. But responsibility, like charity, must start with the individual.

We've got to face up to reality. Food scares are here to stay. Periodic alarm over corned beef is a thing of the past. The bacteria, toxins and deadly agents are ubiquitous. Not only are they everywhere, they're *inside* everything. Anxiety, like the revolution, has become permanent.

I'm terrified that I'll contract slowly fermenting paranoia. As I wander dazed, and in deep shock, through the supermarket I can actually feel my brain rotting. Things have got so bad that I've seriously considered ending it all with a dollop of brown sauce and a pork pie. It's only my sense of personal responsibility to myself that stands between me and that pulsating abyss.

'Getting BSE would be a disaster because I'd be so flummoxed I'd throw away the dental floss and start smoking again'

What sort of post-apartheid economy?

The great non-debate

Since the release of Nelson Mandela a debate has raged about the shape of post-apartheid South Africa. Charles Longford examines its consequences for the black masses

The Johannesburg *Weekly Mail* recently published a special supplement entitled 'Focus: the great economic debate', covering the issues of a post-apartheid economy. For the first time in decades, it was possible to read in the same publication views from leading economists from the left and right in South Africa.

Joe Slovo, general secretary of the South African Communist Party and member of the African National Congress executive, featured alongside Bobby Godsell, director of the Anglo-American Corporation. Leading representatives of the black trade union movement such as Alec Erwin, education officer for the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, debated capitalist economists like Brian Kantor of the University of Cape Town.

'The great debate', however, is not the argument about fundamentals which you might expect to arise between such participants. Alan Hirsch's introduction to the supplement sets the terms for the discussion:

'It has become trite to note that the answer to South Africa's economic problems is neither capitalist nor socialist. All commentators within the bounds of sensible debate accept that the question is rather: what should be the mix of public and private enterprise, and what the degree of state intervention in the distribution of income and wealth, and in markets.'

As Hirsch indicates, the debate is not about the market v state intervention, but only 'the mix of public and private enterprise' in the post-apartheid economy.

It is ironic that a debate about a mixed economy—as old as the nineteenth-century gold rush which opened South Africa to capitalist development—can be presented by the *Weekly Mail* as a 'rush of new ideas'. It is even more ironic that the most influential economic thinkers on the left share the same assumptions as their right-wing counterparts.

The 'great economic debate' demonstrates most forcefully how the leading players from left to right now accept that the post-apartheid economy will be capitalist. In so far as there is a debate, it is simply about the mix of public and private enterprise and the degree of state intervention in the market. Joe Slovo's contribution sets forth the terms of the debate for the left:

'If we have learnt anything from the economic ravages of capitalism and the economic failure of existing socialism it is surely that the "plan" and the "market", seen as exclusive categories, have fallen on evil days. The search for a mix between the two cannot be guided by abstract economic categories. The seminal question, where the two interrelate, centres on which of them is dominant.'

Slovo argues that a post-apartheid economy 'will be a blend of public and private sectors and some intermediate categories'. It will have to ensure that apartheid's imbalances are redressed through state intervention. He concludes that 'the balance between "market" and the "plan" must accord pride of place to the latter'.

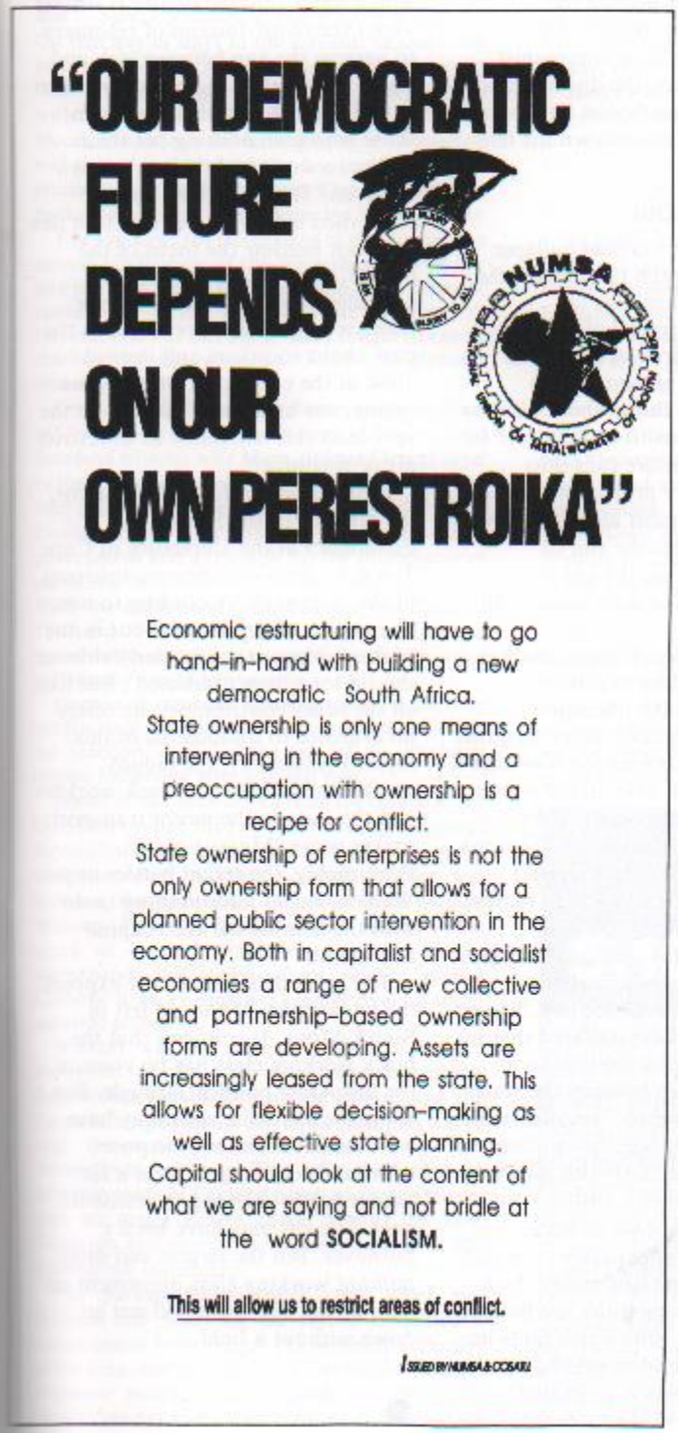
Bobby Godsell, director of the Anglo-American Corporation, agrees with Slovo that apartheid's inequalities will have to be addressed. However, he goes on to spell out the essential conditions for tackling inequality in a post-apartheid capitalist economy:

'Economic growth cannot be a national objective in itself. Growth is important to produce the resources needed to tackle poverty and underdevelopment...sustained growth requires the effective and competitive use of the factors of production.'

Godsell has no principled objection to state intervention to combat poverty and underdevelopment. But he is at pains to teach the left that this can only take place in an economy which has a competitive private sector.

Black trade union leaders now pay to advertise the fact that their socialist rhetoric is empty

Striking the right balance between state and private sector involvement in the economy is also the preoccupation of Alec Erwin of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa. He emphasises the need for a South African perestroika in order to 'restructure our economy so as to minimise unemployment and poverty and maximise the supply of social consumption infrastructure'. The fact that the real impact of Gorbachev's market-oriented perestroika reforms in the Soviet Union is to *maximise* unemployment and *minimise* 'social consumption' seems to have escaped Erwin.



'Recipe for conflict'

But then Erwin uses these terms only to ensure that the debate does not centre on ownership per se, since this is a 'recipe for conflict'. And the trade union leader does not want to encourage such a conflict over ownership between his members, who own nothing, and the employers, who own it all. Instead the debate must be about finding a correct balance between the private and public sectors: 'These issues are complex and the exact mix and form of ownership will evolve as we debate the strategies necessary for an effective restructuring of the economy.'

The above examples illustrate the extent to which the left has conceded ground to the capitalist class. Once it is accepted that a post-apartheid economy will be a capitalist economy, then a discussion about the balance between private and public capital can only amount to a quibble about which form of capitalist exploitation is to be preferred. The misnamed great debate confirms that there is no longer a debate of substance between left and right in South Africa. The right has won all the arguments because the left accepts that there is no alternative to capitalism.

The great debate is more than an expression of the theoretical bankruptcy of the left. It represents a major ideological defeat for the black working class. In the past, the liberation movement at least paid lip-service to the idea of anti-capitalist revolution. Although this was codified in the dogma of the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution (dealt with by Frank Richards and Barry Crawford in the May issue of *Living Marxism*), it at least acknowledged that political change alone was not enough to liberate the black masses. That would require the social transformation of South Africa.

The implication of the great debate is that there is no alternative but to accept the terms set by the capitalist class and to fight for a better deal within these terms. For the left to have lost the argument about the free market in South Africa of all places is truly staggering. Let's look at this in some detail.

In the great debate, the Chamber of Mines dismisses the exponents of nationalisation by asserting that 'their cherished theories have been discredited and that such views now appear to fly in the face of reason':

'The only way to improve the income and hence wealth of all South Africans is by economic growth. Ample evidence, both real and theoretical, now exists to show the best way—indeed the only way—to achieve this economic growth is through an open market-based economic system where resources are allocated, prices determined, information gathered and value judgements made by individuals. Governments must avoid temptation and keep well clear of the wealth-creating process.'

It is difficult to take any of this seriously. The Chamber of Mines is in a weak position to lecture anybody about the virtues of a free market.

The Chamber of Mines represents the very opposite of the free market. Almost from the start, the mining capitalists have maintained a total monopoly over the industry. The entire industry has been governed by a close-knit clique of capitalists and no major decisions are carried out by any mining company without reference to the rest.

At the turn of the century, the Chamber of Mines in cooperation with the state monopolised not only the ownership and distribution of the produce of the mines but also the supply of labour itself. They set up the Native Labour Bureaux and pressed blacks into the mines at gunpoint or left them to starve in the reserves created to supply cheap black labour. Blacks were denied democratic rights and dealt with ruthlessly if they organised opposition. This was the free market upon which South African capitalism developed.

One freedom

In South Africa, the free market guaranteed one freedom—the freedom of the capitalist class to make gigantic profits through the exploitation and violent oppression of the black majority. In fact, the history of the development of capitalism in South Africa has been about controlling the free market.

This fact was even treated as a virtue in the economic debates of the past. In the March 1960 edition of *Finance and Trade Review*, the chairman of the South African Board of Trade SP Du Toit Viljoen pointed out how the industrialisation of South Africa was based not on free enterprise, but on state control and repression:

'Where there is no consumers' sovereignty, no bargaining power in the hands of labour, and little concern for vested interests and individual rights and liberties, the government can maintain a stable or only gradually rising standard of living and can use the surplus for industrial development or military strength and strategy....It is also able to a very large extent to determine the direction of investment in human beings....This country achieved its development in an authoritarian political and social framework, and it would seem that...rapid development can be obtained by a country that starts from a low level more readily under an authoritarian form of government than under a democratic one.'

The 'authoritarian political and social framework' which Viljoen referred to is nothing more than apartheid oppression: the strictest regimentation of the supply of cheap black labour to all sections of the capitalist class. Viljoen's statement lets the cat out of the bag, highlighting the fact that capitalist development in South Africa occurred as a result of the 'state meddling' which the Chamber of Mines disavows in its contribution to the great debate.

'State meddling' was one of the conditions upon which South Africa industrialised in the fifties and sixties. And state intervention did not simply involve the political suppression of the black majority. The state has always played a major role in the economy. It created an Industrial Development Corporation to ensure the development of manufacturing. It poured billions of rand into projects like the Sasol oil-from-coal project to achieve self-sufficiency in energy. Through institutions like the Land Bank and Marketing Board it subsidised farmers and ensured the capitalisation of agriculture. State intervention and political oppression have been the key to the rapid economic growth of the capitalist system in South Africa.

Mixed apartheid

The apartheid economy has always been a mixed economy. By the early seventies, the state accounted for over half of all gross domestic fixed investment—a higher proportion than in almost every command economy in Eastern Europe. As for the private sector, there is hardly much to boast about here for the propagandists of the free market. According to a report in the *Weekly Mail*, the concentration of ownership is such that any talk of the operation of a free market must be treated as a sick joke: 'Four groups on the Johannesburg stock exchange control 80 per cent of market capitalisation.' (18-24 May 1990)

But the worst development of all is that the left should have lost the argument to the defenders of one of the most barbaric capitalist systems in the world. Whether they work for state enterprises or private enterprises, capitalist reality for the black masses is a totalitarian nightmare. However did the left end up conceding victory to the capitalist class in South Africa of all places?

Stalinism is to blame for the ideological crisis engulfing the left in South Africa. The South African Communist Party has been the dominant political influence on the ANC and other radical forces in South Africa. Throughout its history, it has faithfully espoused the bankrupt political theory and practice of the official communist movement. Today, the disintegration of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has thrown the left into disarray.

After Namibia

The effect of the Stalinist collapse in the East has been to discredit the only existing alternative to capitalism. The model of state socialism pioneered in the Soviet Union has been shown to be a disaster. For all those who looked to Stalinism as a positive alternative to capitalism, its failure calls into question the very project of social change. As capitalist ideologues in the West celebrate the end of socialism, many on the left are preparing to make their peace with capitalism.

In South Africa, this process has been accelerated by events in Namibia, where the liberation movement has quickly come to terms with capitalist domination now that it has been given a stake in the system. Like the ANC, the South West Africa People's Organisation (Swapo) in Namibia traditionally upheld nationalisation as a policy to redress the years of exploitation and oppression. Today, nationalisation is a dirty word. In his presidential address on independence day, Swapo leader Sam Nujomo declared that his country could look forward to a 'good partnership between the state and the private sector, because only through working together will our economy prosper' (*African Business*, May 1990).

Joe Slovo is not far behind Nujomo. According to this reformed Stalinist, the capitalist market 'is a place where commodities are bought and sold, where price value finds its economic level and where, hopefully, a capitalist surplus is generated'. Slovo has revised Marxism with one stroke of his pen. He has accepted that, under capitalism, a surplus is generated in the marketplace, rather than through the exploitation of the working class in the production process.

If this were the case, then the priority need not be to take control of production away from the capitalists, but simply to intervene in the market and use the state to seek a more equitable distribution of wealth. The logic of Slovo's argument is to accept that the aim of a post-apartheid economy should be limited to establishing a more humane and fairer form of capitalism—in a country where the market economy has always been synonymous with apartheid oppression.

Trade union leader Alec Erwin would agree that the debate is simply about the redistribution of resources to narrow the gap between rich and poor. The conflict is not one between exploiters and exploited, between those who own nothing but their ability to work and those who own factories. That's old hat. So concerned is Erwin to ensure that this does not become the focus of the debate, that he pleads with the capitalist class to forget whatever rhetoric might have been used in the past about socialism and instead to 'look at the content of what we are saying, not bridle at a slogan—at the very least this will allow us to restrict areas of conflict'.

It only remains for Brian Kantor, the director of the School of Economics at the University of Cape Town, to draw out the consequences of this approach. According to him, 'the notion of capital v labour is one of those Marxist myths that evidence should long have disabused'. But like all the other contributors, he offers no evidence to disabuse us of this myth. Presumably, the bloody confrontation between black workers and the state in the recent transport strikes was a 'Marxist myth'. Presumably, the recent battles in the Welkom mines have nothing to do with the conflict between capital and labour.

The great debate not only exposes the bankruptcy of the old left in South Africa. It confirms that the black working class has no voice in the unfolding political struggle. But while the capitalist class may have won the debate about the post-apartheid economy, it faces a far harder battle in trying to realise its goal. The left may have been a pushover. But the largest and most militant working class movement on the African continent will not go down without a fight.

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then and now

July 1690: Battle of the Boyne

King Billy wasn't a Paisleyite

The three hundredth anniversary of Protestant King William's victory over Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland will be marked by a bile-raising display of Orange bigotry. But, asks Alan Harding, whose side would we have been on in 1690?

In July Orange lodges will be celebrating the tricentenary of the Battle of the Boyne, not only in Belfast but from Scotland and the Simcoe peninsula to Nigeria and New Zealand. On this day of days in the Loyalist calendar the boozy cries of 'No Surrender' and denunciations of 'The Whore of Babylon' (aka the Pope) will vie with declarations of intent to wade in Fenian blood. The murals and iconography of Orangeism will appear in their brightest hue and in countless recreations of 1690 Protestant King Billy will ride to the Boyne again to put down the Papist hordes.

For Loyalists the celebration of the Boyne is an annual vindication of the 'Protestant way of life' and justification for the oppression of the Catholic community in the sectarian state of Northern Ireland. But was this battle really fought to ensure the rule of the shameless bigots on Belfast's Shankill Road?

On 1 July 1690 mercenary forces under William of Orange, who shared the thrones of England and Scotland with his wife Mary, defeated forces loyal to the Catholic James under Lord Tyrconnel. The rout ended the attempt to restore James II to the English throne—a crushing blow for absolutist government and a triumph for the sovereignty of parliament and a limited constitutional monarchy. With the exception of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745-46, the defeat of James in Ireland ended the 50-year struggle over whether the Crown or parliament was to be supreme.

Despite its symbolic meaning today, at the time the Battle of the Boyne did not represent a triumph for reaction; it sealed the fate of an absolutist regime hankering after a feudal past.

James II had been driven from the throne in the bloodless coup of 1688 now known as the 'Glorious Revolution'. The legality of the succession of his daughter Mary and her husband William was dubious. But parliament supported them because William, Prince of Orange (a tiny statelet in the south of France), was not only ruler of the Netherlands but leader of an alliance against Catholic France—England's major rival for international power.

William was far more a pragmatist than a Paisleyite. At times his coalition embraced the Pope (who backed him at the Boyne) and the Catholic king of Spain. His initial intention was to limit the expansion of the French state into Netherlands territory. This coincided with the strategic needs of England which wanted to ensure that no major power could control the Low Countries and thereby threaten its own naval and commercial supremacy.

The parliamentary-inspired coup which put William and Mary on the throne embodied a commitment both to limit the arbitrary authority of the king, and to support a Continental balance-of-power policy which emphasised commercial rather than dynastic considerations. Protestantism had been associated with the struggle against royal dictatorship, but religion was not the primary concern of the landed and commercial interests in parliament. They wanted Catholic James out because he was willing to subordinate England to France in the pursuit of absolute power.

James was hardly the popular champion of the oppressed Irish. He had only managed to get an army to Ireland at all thanks to the French navy. He was a tool of the French who saw the opportunity to attack England and William on a weak flank. The strategy collapsed at the Boyne.

So where did the Protestants and Catholics of Ireland fit into these power games? In the last third of the seventeenth century Ireland was not only England's first colony but also its principal one. Ireland's economic significance was far greater than a sugar plantation in the West Indies or an Indian trading station.

Ireland had been involved in the political and religious controversies which racked the English state throughout the second half of the sixteenth century and all the seventeenth. The Crown had sent Scottish Presbyterians to settle in Ulster, the northern province of Ireland, to remedy local hostility to London's authority. But these Presbyterians were themselves fleeing religious and political persecution, and were not tame stooges.

During the revolutionary period of the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century, both the Ulster dissenters and the Anglo-Irish lords rose in rebellion. But the Irish paid a heavy price for opposing parliament and Cromwell's army. Cromwell's grim dictum that all the rebellious Irish must go 'to hell or Connaught' (in the rugged far west) was to ensure that Ireland would be neither the seat of a royalist insurrection nor a stepping stone for a foreign invasion of England.

After Cromwell's death and the restoration of Charles II to the throne of his executed father, those who had been loyal to the Crown gained little redress. By now the Protestant minority held two thirds of Irish land. The forlorn attempt of James II to restore his power as an absolute monarch became the medium for the Catholic grandees and clan leaders of Ireland to restore their own position. Like the Scottish Highland clans, they took their last stand in defence of archaic social organisation behind a weak and mediocre member of the Stuart royal house—and they lost.

It was the Battle of the Boyne, and subsequent renunciation of the terms promised to the Catholic lords at the Treaty of Limerick in 1691, which initiated the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. It was not to the benefit of the Presbyterian farmers and linen workers in the north who, like the Catholics, were kept down. It was the ascendancy of an Anglo-Irish aristocracy of the Episcopalian establishment.

Loyalism comes later

The Battle of the Boyne is a significant building block in the establishment of Britain as the first modern capitalist state. The 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland took this one step further. Through the Union England and Scotland became one trading unit, a single British home market. Ireland was excluded from this arrangement under the Navigation Acts; its products were monopolised by the strengthened British state, and the colonial relationship with Britain was refined and reinforced.

This relationship was onerous for different sections of Irish society—Ulster Protestants, the Catholic peasantry, and even the Ascendancy. Indeed the most vigorous opposition to British domination in the next century came from the small and largely Protestant bourgeoisie in the north which, inspired by the French Revolution of 1789, sought an independent Irish nation.

The British state reacted decisively to the mortal threat which an independent and revolutionary Ireland would pose to its power. The French-backed United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798, led by the Protestant Theobald Wolfe Tone, was crushed and peasants were massacred in their tens of thousands. Then the British sought to stabilise their rule by incorporating Ireland into the 'United Kingdom' and dividing the Irish people. After the 1801 Act of Union, the Protestant manufacturers of the north were granted privileged access to the Empire markets. As capitalist industry developed in the north during the nineteenth century, Protestant workers were granted privileged status in the labour market in return for loyalty to the Crown. The Loyalist working class was created, and anti-Catholic sectarianism became a way of life.

The popular Protestant fervour for King Billy's success at the Boyne did not take off until more than a hundred years after the battle. The Orange Order, which claims to uphold the spirit of 1690, was created in response to the Irish rebellion of the 1790s.

The story of the Battle of the Boyne should remind us of the dangers of reading history backwards and imposing today's prejudices on the past. William's victory of 1690 was a triumph for capitalist progress against the remains of feudal reaction. It was only later, with the failure of the Irish bourgeoisie to create its own nation state, that the British could mould Loyalism into a mailed fist to hammer the Catholic Irish. In 1990, Loyalism is sustained not by the battles of yesteryear, but by the military force of the modern British state, which divides and oppresses the Irish nation.

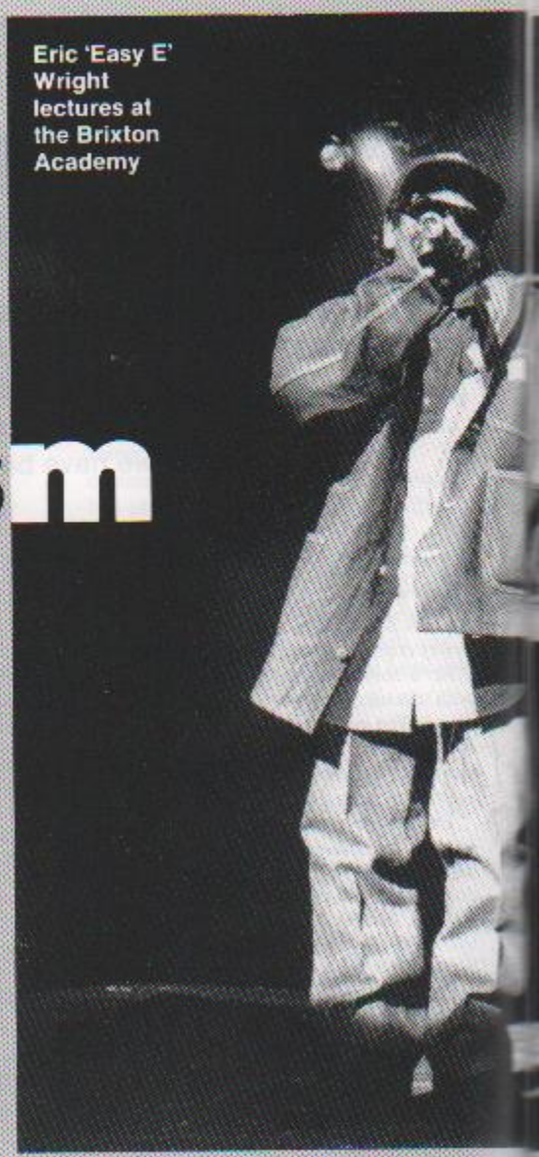
5,10,15,20...

July 1985	Live Aid
July 1975	26% inflation
July 1970	*Oh Calcutta* sex revue opens
July 1955	Disneyland opens
July 1945	First atomic bomb test, New Mexico
July 1920	Communist Party of Great Britain formed
July 1905	Einstein's theory of relativity proposed

Black music

Rap against racism

Emmanuel Oliver on black artists with attitudes



Eric 'Easy E' Wright lectures at the Brixton Academy

PHOTO: Simon Nordolk

Rap is big business. Bright young stars such as KRS-1 of Boogie-Down Productions, EPMD, and Big Daddy Kane have sold millions in recent years. Black rappers such as LL Cool J and Eric B flaunt their success in the form of gold, and lots of it. If you can build a musical bridge from rap to the pop-rock charts, like Run DMC with 'Walk this way' or more recently Tone Loc with 'Wild thing', records can go platinum and ensure wealth and fame.

The influence of the rap scene even stretches to the unconvincing New Kids on the Block, white American teen idols who have tried to escape the Bros bracket by dressing and dancing in a manner normally associated with black kids. While all this is going on, rap's young audience is getting on with the business of living in the real world.

'I don't really listen to rap but Niggers With Attitude and Public Enemy they talk the truth. I don't wanna hear about love and shit I want the truth.' (Marlon, black 16-year old)

Rap has been described as the most potent cultural form to emerge from urban America in the last 20 years. Hundreds of rappers have sprung up, performing in small halls or, in the case of Public Enemy, in some of America's hardest jails. The frank way that they deal with every aspect of the black working class experience has won them few friends in mainstream radio or television on either side of the Atlantic. Producers don't mind rap if it's John Barnes talking about football, but they are reluctant to give airplay to records about sweated work, sex, police racism, violence, and the scrabble for money and survival in the ghetto.

Many performers have lived the lives rapped about on their records. Ice T is a reformed gang member, the Samoan-Americans of the Boo-Yaa Tribe are heavyweights who spent 10 years in jail for a gang-related murder. Eric 'Easy E' Wright of NWA boasts about using the proceeds from his former career as a successful drug dealer to set up his record company, appropriately named Ruthless Records. This sort of bravado and the flashy displays of financial success have won cult status.

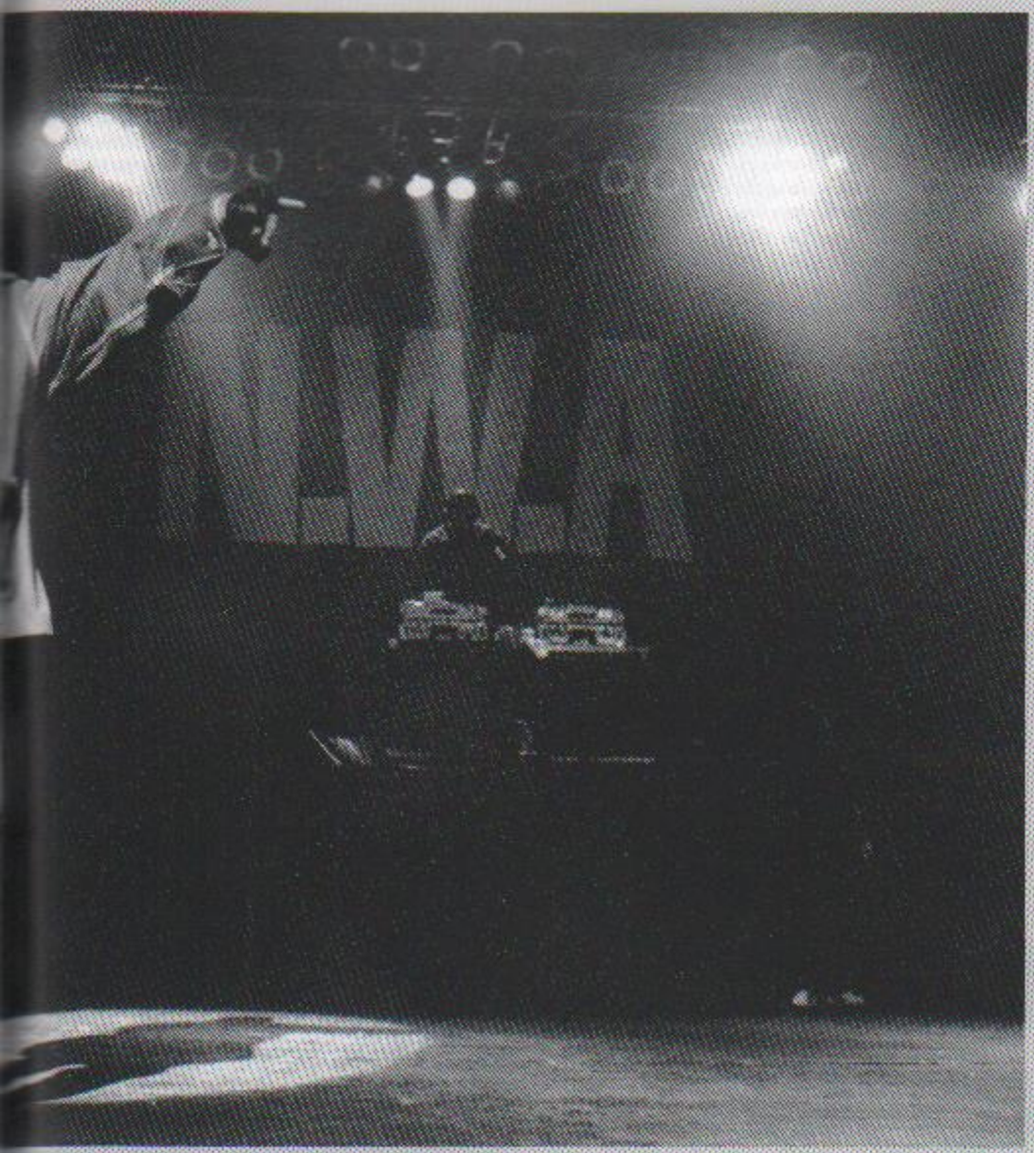
Not all rap artists are from the ghetto. Young MC is an economics graduate, LL Cool J (LL stands for ladies' love, but his grandmother calls him Todd) lives in a respectable black suburb of New York far from the streets on which KRS-1 hustled from the age of 13. Yet because they are all black their music has been shaped by the common experience of racist America today—a different experience from that which influenced earlier black artists.

Back in the sixties, after inner-city riots spread across America, the authorities tried to contain unrest and create a black middle class. They encouraged black business projects and promoted black political leaders. More black Americans became optimistic about the future. By the eighties, a combination of recession in the economy and Reaganites in government and in the supreme court had reversed most of the token gains.

In New York today gas explosions in the street are common, resources scarce and for the black community of the South Bronx and Long 'Strong' Island life expectancy is short—especially if you step into the wrong street. Segregation has intensified to the point where many black and white Americans hardly see each other, unless it is to drive a black out of a white neighbourhood. For some white Americans, the problems of their black neighbours are now as distant as starving Ethiopia. The black community faces the additional problem of rising police violence as part of a phoney war on drugs designed to criminalise its youth. This is the state of affairs which has given birth to rap.

Be it the deliberate politicking of Public Enemy or NWA's rejection of politics in favour of 'the street', the message of rap is essentially the same: everybody is singing about survival. Public Enemy's stage show features the Security of the First World touting model Uzi submachine guns (the First World being the third world). The passion which performers and audiences share for sports clothes and their obsession with health (many young blacks won't touch alcohol) is not just about looking smart. It's about being prepared for any eventuality and any favourable opportunity which might present itself, if only for a moment. It's also

living



about being able to defend yourself against the competition, whether it wears a police uniform or not; the point is to stay ahead.

The black youth who follow rap have no time for the 'cocooning' or finding oneself of the 'thirty-something' classes. This makes them a mystery to many of the thirtysomethings who write the music press. The music papers have taken a very superficial view of the rap scene, hammering it as fascistic and 'masculinist'. The rappers certainly do themselves no favours by echoing the most reactionary prejudices of the ghetto—anti-Semitism and homophobia from Public Enemy, chauvinism towards women from NWA and just about everybody else. But the media's general attacks on rap's aggressive style miss the point. For the majority of black Americans (and black Britons too, come to that) life is a struggle and they often require a ruthless streak to get by. Rap just sets that streak to music.

'Iron' Mike Tyson has been rap's sporting idol to whom all the performers pay homage (at least until his defeat). Tyson had to bash his way through life respecting few people and even fewer American institutions. He is a symbol of the eighties generation which the middle classes fear. They let out a sigh of relief when Tyson was knocked out in February, and would love to see the rap artists hit the canvas too.

Various rap artists have appropriated the symbols of sixties black radicalism, using images of Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and Africa. People like the Jungle Brothers pledge allegiance to black nationalism as a solution to the problem of racism. But the attitude of rap's young audience is probably better represented by NWA. 'We're not into politics', MC Ren of NWA told me, 'we leave all that to Public Enemy. It was alright 20 years ago but that was then, it doesn't mean much today, we are just commentating like reporters'. NWA have also refused to get involved in a 'Free South Africa' campaign, on the basis that nobody goes around demanding freedom for Compton (their home turf).

NWA might want to distance themselves from sixties-style politics. But whether they like it or not their response to the realities of life in America today inevitably has a political edge. Politics intrude throughout their album 'Straight outta Compton'. 'Fuck the police', which has become a bit of an anthem, was political enough to attract threatening letters from the FBI last summer. It is a song about revenge set against a background of police beatings and harassment. It also suggests a no-nonsense response: 'Young nigger on the warpath/and when I finish there's gonna be a bloodbath/of cops dying in LA.' The sentiments are a gut reaction to black deaths in police hands—the sort of angry reaction which is the key to rap's appeal.

Of course, neither NWA's commentary nor Public Enemy's posing with fake Uzis provides any solution to the problem of racism in the nineties. But the stroppy young rap artists who tell the police, the president and the music press to go fuck themselves are speaking for a generation.

Pure Genius

Corporate sponsorship is supposed to be the future for financing the arts. Pat Ford samples the hospitality that goes with a Guinness-funded exhibition at the Royal Academy

What do companies get out of sponsoring the arts, I asked myself, as I stood sipping the Moet et Chandon one evening recently in the middle of the Royal Academy of Arts in Piccadilly? I suppose I was being sponsored myself after a fashion—to drink generous amounts of different sorts of alcohol in the middle of a room full of paintings. I'm no oil painting, but there are some things I do rather artfully, and this was one of them.

I was the guest of Distillers, now known (since the bloody takeover battle) as 'the spirits company of Guinness PLC', at a private viewing of the Jacques and Natasha Gelman collection, Twentieth-Century Modern Masters, currently on show at the Royal Academy, 'brought to Britain by Guinness PLC'. I was wondering how this helped them to sell whisky and the black stuff when a lady with a tray offered me a quail's egg, and some celery salt to dip it in.

On arrival I had been met halfway up the grand staircase by Tony Greener, managing director of Distillers. To be more precise I had been met by a member of his staff who invited me to sign the visitors' book before passing me over to a PR officer who ushered me up the staircase towards Tony and his wife. They were dispensing a shrewd and friendly word to all comers, before sending us on our way into the galleries. My hopes that nobody would spot me gladhanding it with such a bigwig corporate smoothie were dashed when a photographer popped out of the shadows and flash! I was in the bag. I hurried upstairs bemoaning under my breath the continuing shortage of that most elusive commodity, the free lunch.

The exhibition is a treat: 81 paintings, drawings and bronzes by 30 artists—over a dozen works by Pablo Picasso, half a dozen by Henri Matisse, as well as Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Amedeo Modigliani, Giorgio de Chirico, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Fernand Léger, Joan Mirö, Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon and many others.

The Gelmans began collecting in 1941; Jacques Gelman was a successful film producer able to indulge their taste in Mexican and European art. This collection concentrates on the international group of painters active in Paris in the first few decades of the century. Apart from everything else, it is worth seeing for the glimpses it provides of different phases of Picasso's career. There is a 1901 work, Girl in Profile, and one from 1967, Cavalier and

the Seated Nude, painted when he was 86. In between there is a fascinating selection of cubist works. There is a similar variety from Matisse, with early portraits in the fauve style (The Young Sailor, 1906) and a late abstract paper cut-out (Snow Flowers, 1951).

It seemed like any other exhibition, only unusually good—and free. But there was something odd going on. All the men there wore suits, and they were passing by the paintings in an absent-minded rush as if they'd accidentally left their vodaphones in the cloakroom, and were desperate to get back in touch with the office. They paused occasionally, not to view the paintings, but to gather in little knots to introduce wives and friends to Nigel from the Birmingham office. I passed one group earnestly discussing the prospects for Distillers in Brazil, quite oblivious of Max Ernst's The Barbarians and Salvador Dali's The Accommodations of Desires looming over them.

Strictly business

Apart from the Distillers executives and their wives, all the other guests seemed to be executives and wives from other banks and businesses of a similar size and reputation. In case you're wondering, I knew somebody who knew somebody in one such firm, who knew I'd be interested in the exhibition. And indeed I was, and before long I found that we more or less had it to ourselves. Most of the other guests had zoomed through, gaining momentum as they neared the end.

It was only when I emerged from the deserted final gallery that I discovered what had drawn the guests so swiftly past the pics—a hospitality area with loads of food, and what Distillers do best, drink. The walls here were all but completely covered with the 1990 summer exhibition.

On one side of the doorway to this area a string quartet was tastefully wafting the stragglers through to the main purpose of the evening—some serious meeting and greeting. On the other side a table groaned under the weight of Distillers produce: an alcoholic's vision of a harvest festival. Dimple, Bells, Johnstown Walker, Gordons gin, Pimms, George Dickel (a Tennessee sourmash whisky), Cardhu, Tanqueray Sterling vodka, Moet-Hennessy this and Veuve Clicquot that, and many more from 'our brand portfolio'.

Pausing only to wash down a canapé (my favourite was the piece of gruyère covered in artichoke mousse topped with a slice of fresh strawberry) with a Pimms and lemonade, I tried to engage a few of the suits in conversation about the exhibition and corporate sponsorship of the arts. A man from Lloyds Bank told me rather sniffily that when they sponsored the Age of Chivalry in 1987 at the Royal Academy they had put on a sitdown meal. This was his first and last word on the subject, and he was a great deal more forthcoming than most of the others. They got particularly frosted when I suggested that the exhibition might be intended to give the corporation back a bit of shine after the revelations of the takeover chicanery.

The only person who spoke any sense, as well she might, was Distillers' sponsorship officer, Lesley Higgins. 'This isn't advertising', she said, 'there are no short-term gains from this sort of sponsorship. It's about the long-term image of the company'. The list of big league sponsors of previous exhibitions at the Royal Academy shows that those worrying about long-term image include Fiat, Pilkington, American Express, Trusthouse Forte, Bovis, Olivetti, Unilever, Esso, BP, Mercedes-Benz, most of the major banks and the 'quality' newspapers.

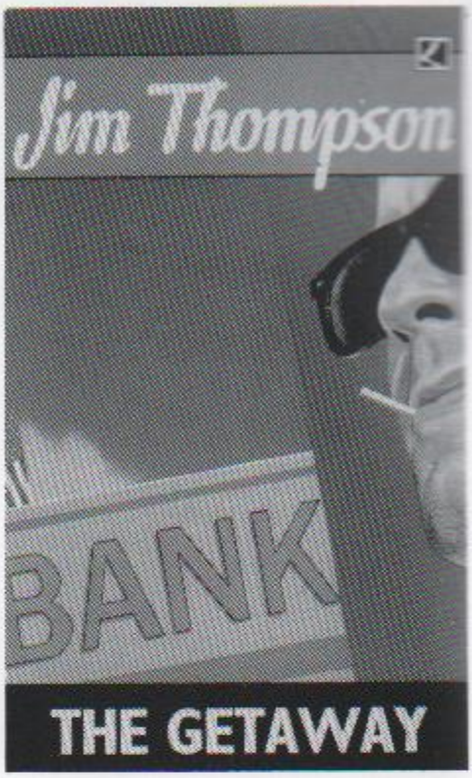
Sponsorship of the arts is one of the ways in which established companies establish they are established; it buys an aura of respectable stability. After all, worrying about a long-term image indicates you plan to be around long term. In 1988/89 business sponsorship of the arts was worth around £30m. Although the present climate has meant a tightening of the corporate purse, Royal Insurance recently announced the biggest arts sponsorship deal yet; £2m to the Royal Shakespeare Company over three years.

Down at the Royal Academy the Guinness and Distillers executives are gathering about themselves the mantle of cultural responsibility. Who cares about the gross philistinism which was also on display? Just feel the width of that portfolio, and remember who brought it to you. On the way out I was handed a copy of the 360-page, colour-plated catalogue. Free of charge. Or was it?

Jim Thompson

Political pulp writer

Fifties crime writer Jim Thompson has come into fashion with publishers and film-makers today. Jon E Lewis points out that they have largely ignored the political aspects of Thompson's work



None of the great thriller writers had much of a life. Raymond Chandler spent most of his in front of a bottle. Cornell Woolrich had his leg sawn off. Dashiell Hammett was tubercular (a condition not improved by the fact that he smoked like an East German factory) and had writer's block for 30 years.

But at least Chandler & Co achieved a measure of critical recognition whilst alive. Jim Thompson churned out 24 thrillers about which nobody, except a hardcore of fans, had anything polite to say. Eventually he was reduced to writing TV screenplays for *McKenzie's Raiders*. When he died none of his books were in print anywhere, apart from France, where they were staple sellers in Gallimard's *Série Noir*.

Nowadays...well, nowadays Jim Thompson is a very big deal indeed. Last year New York director Maggie Greenwald released a film version of his novel *The Kill-Off*. There are at least another four Thompson-inspired movies in production, including *The Grifters*, directed by Stephen Frears. Meanwhile, all Thompson's thrillers are being republished on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thompson's reputation among critics has now gone through the roof—justifiably so. It is surprising that in the past he received scant attention in Julian Symons' *Bloody Murder* and none at all in Ernest Mandel's *Delightful Murder*, two accounts of the genre which really should have celebrated him. Not only did he produce some of the century's greatest—and toughest—crime stories, he produced some of its most casually brilliant writing.

Even now, however, hardly a pundit has mentioned that Thompson was the most political of the pulp writers (so-called because of the cheap paper on which their books were printed) and a radical critic of American society. Yet as US crime historian Geoffrey O'Brien observed: 'Throughout Thompson's work a ferocious anger against exploiters and self-serving bureaucrats alternates with effortless compassion for the bums, the out-of-work, the rejects of capitalism.' Thompson took a literary razor to the throat of capitalist America.

Born in 1906 in Anadarko, Oklahoma, James Myers Thompson served a classic pulp writer's apprenticeship. His father was a sheriff who made and lost a fortune in oil. Thompson attended the University of Nebraska, and then spent 20 years in a succession of jobs—gambler, roustabout, bill collector, aircraft worker, journalist, steeplejack, etc. While Chandler wrote about mean streets, Thompson walked them.

During the Depression, he got a job as director of the Oklahoma branch of the Federal Writers Project. It is not certain how closely Thompson was hitched to the radicals, including the Communist Party, who dominated the FWP, but he certainly came to share most of their ideological assumptions. He also, at this stage, shared their literary preferences, and his first two books—*Now and on Earth* and *Heed the Thunder*, published in the forties—were typically proletarian novels of the type made famous by James T Farrell.

The books brought Thompson a couple of good

reviews, but no money. In 1949, at the age of 43, he turned to crime fiction as a way of making a dime, tossing off the James M Cain-influenced *Nothing More than Murder* in a couple of months. The bulk of the rest of his *oeuvre*, all published as gaudy paperback originals, came during the next decade, when he was writing up to five books a year.

His crime novels are basically of two sorts: straightforward 'capers' like *Recoil* and *The Getaway*, and stories featuring psychopaths. His posthumous reputation rests on the latter, especially *The Killer Inside Me, A Hell of a Woman, Pop. 1280* and *Savage Night*. These are the best examples of Thompson's psychopath-as-narrator technique, which allows him to take you on a stream-of-consciousness tour of the personality disorders of a killer.

It can be one hell of a ride (some will have to climb off halfway through), and it scares because it is completely believable. Thompson's protagonists are not embodiments of 'evil', as in most British crime fiction, but casualties of the society around them. They are monsters alright, but monsters made by Capitalist America Ltd. Frank Dillon, for example, the Pay-e-Zee salesman (and multiple murderer) in *A Hell of a Woman* is what he is because of consumerism: 'Making a guy want what he couldn't get...the swell cars and clothes and the places to live. Never letting him have anything, but always making him want.'

The world Thompson depicted is a place where violence and relentless existential despair are the norm. 'The day began well, so I should have known it would get worse', runs the first line of *The Criminal*. A world where everyone, in some way, is deformed. 'All of us started life with a crooked cue', as Lou Ford puts it in *The Killer Inside Me*.

His politics come through in other, more overt, ways. Few of his books are without passages of upfront social criticism, groin-kicks delivered *en passant*. His novels frequently explore social and political themes, for example alcoholism in *The Alcholics*, and political corruption in *Recoil*. Moreover, unlike virtually all his crime-writing peers, he was an ardent anti-racist, and racism gets a nice going over in *King Blood, Pop. 1280* and *The Criminal* (one of Thompson's most interesting and under-rated books). Nor was Thompson intimidated by McCarthyism: see the allegorical short story 'The flaw in the system' and *A Swell Looking Babe*. But, as the latter title suggests, he did follow the noir convention in which all women are femmes fatales.

Film-makers have shown an interest before. Stanley Kubrick was an early admirer, and got Thompson to co-write the screenplays of two of his early films, including the anti-war *Paths of Glory* (1957). The French director Alain Corneau filmed *A Hell of a Woman* as *Série Noir*, while Bertrand Tavernier transferred *Pop. 1280* to the screen as *Coup de Torchon/Clean Slate* (1981). In this Philippe Noiret plays the deranged deputy who commits a series of socially beneficial murders in the belief that he is Jesus Christ. It captures brilliantly Thompson's sense of outrageous, dark satire.

Thompson himself also briefly appeared in front of the camera. Look out for him as Judge Grayle in Dick Richard's 1977 version of *Farewell, My Lovely*. You won't miss him. He's the one who looks like he might be your personal guide to the nightmare behind the American dream.

• Jim Thompson's novels are currently being published in Britain by Corgi and Black Swan. His short story 'The flaw in the system' is published in *Red-Handed: An Anthology of Radical Crime Stories*, edited by Jon E Lewis, Allison & Busby, £11.95 hbk

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

A nation united behind the living room curtains

The best thing on television at the moment is *Mahabarat*, a 91-part retelling of the *Mahabarata*. Its doomy percussion and dodgy chromakey, not to mention its stormy stories, make it the most magical thing since *Tales from Europe*. When it went out in India, some Hindu viewers lit candles and made offerings to the TV set on the grounds that these electronic images were representations of the gods, and as such were just as good as the statues in their household shrines. I remember the story of when my dad first saw TV. It was the Coronation (of course) and half the street had been invited into the proud owner's house to watch. At the consecration, they all got off their chairs and knelt down. It was a live broadcast, so they were all I suppose in some sense present (mind you they were all Catholics so they were all in some sense committing idolatry too).

I suppose participating in a broadcast religious service is no wackier than cheering during *Match of the Day*. I was brought up on a big housing estate and on cup final afternoons, every front window had its curtains pulled to. They were semis, so you could hear next door cheering. At half time, you went into the kitchen to put the kettle on and you could see someone else putting the kettle on in every window for a mile or so. In fact, during the 1966 World Cup, the rush on kettles and toilets in those tense closing moments was so huge and so unanimous that power stations and main drains burst out and collapsed all over the country. That sense of being united, of being cut off in your own front room, behind your own curtains, and yet participating in some great moment, that sense of the whole nation sitting down but not together, is one of the most peculiar and powerful attributes of television.

Sporting events, royal weddings and the Apollo 13 mission are the obvious examples but it sometimes happens with drama too. I might be wrong but I seem to remember evening mass in our parish being rescheduled because there was no competing with the *Forsythe Saga*. There are stories of New York streets being empty during the first showing of *Roots*. On a smaller scale, everyone at school watched *Top of the Pops*. So when Bowie kissed Mick Ronson while they were singing 'Starman', you knew that the sexual lines were going to be drawn the next morning and you had to decide which side you were on before the bus came.

The last really big event of the Coronation sort was probably Live Aid, but there has been a number of occasions recently when television has tried to create a temporary community of attention. The release of Nelson Mandela was one. The BBC's One World week was another. The World Cup will be the next but I've got a feeling that it could be the last.

I've been watching a series called *The Television Village* on Channel Four, which deals with the little town of Waddington, near Warrington. Granada has wired up every set for satellite and cable so the viewers can zap around up to 40 channels. They are also running their own channel (Village TV). This increase of choice has altered the very nature of TV. The ability to create the sort of instant, temporary, but massive, community which I've been describing depends on one channel being able to wipe out its opposition. This could happen when there were only three or four channels and two of them were showing the World Cup anyway, so the others would give up and show *The Great Escape*. It won't happen when there are another 30-odd channels to fill up.

The electronically linked community always seemed to me a pretty sad reflection on British social life. The image of acres of people in semis not talking to their neighbours but watching pretend neighbours flickering on the screen, or worse, not laughing at each other but at Terry Scott, made Orwell's telescreen look attractive (at least the telescreen was paying attention, at least it was an audience). It was a kind of desolate version of cyberspace—a shared imaginative zone which anyone can enter as long as they enter alone. The Waddington experience makes those barren evenings look scintillatingly chummy. The small number of channels meant that each of them had to make some concession to everyone in the house. *Top of the Pops* grated on my dad's nerves but it was followed by the highly acceptable *Tomorrow's World*. *Match of the Day* bored my mother but it was only an hour and a half. And even within those slots, concessions were made. *Top of the Pops* was presented by men who weren't much younger than my Dad. It had Bing on it more often than it had men kissing each other.

The rise of cable and satellite will bring with it the age of the specialist viewer—the sports channel addict competing for sofa space with the telesales hacker and the MTV zombie. The couple of hours' self-indulgence with the *Big Match Special* and some cans was one thing; an Australian rules all-nighter will be different. In Waddington, even the figures on the screen looked lonely. The bustling soap set gave way to a lone commentator analysing the World Hurling Open; the matey family around the sitcom sofa lost out to a lone saleswoman extolling a carrot shredder; the chat show host and guests moved over for a single woman caressing her breasts and licking her lips, presumably for a single male somewhere out there.

Of course, I'm exaggerating. In fact I imagine most satellite TV will be watched in public places—in pubs and clubs with your mates. And the late-night suburban electronic isolation was always followed up by the post-match discussion at the bus stop in the morning. What the rise of satellite and cable means in practice is that television will have to drop its epic claim to be fully representative and integrated and allow itself to be seen as something fractured and partial. All good stuff. Especially if it breaks Murdoch on the way.

Anyway, what's the point in family viewing when so few people live in families these days? All the same I'll miss that feeling of delicious embarrassment you used to get on a Sunday evening in front of the adult serial with your mum, when it suddenly got that bit more steamy than usual but it was too late to send you off to bed.

marxist review of books

Alan Harding reviews

Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Penguin, £12.99 pbk

REVOLUTION AS SOAP OPERA

Simon Schama opens his best-selling history by quoting the famous remark attributed to Chinese revolutionary Zhou En-lai. Asked what he thought was the significance of the French Revolution, he replied: 'It's too soon to tell.' In a world in which the goals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' have yet to be realised, it was a fair enough comment. We still await the triumph of human emancipation which the great French Revolution placed on the historical agenda.

It is a good anecdote but it is an inappropriate opening for Schama's book. For Schama has no doubts about what the revolution achieved. He believes that it was both unnecessary and bad. This explains the huge success of *Citizens* on this side of the Channel. Schama's popular presentation of the old idea that no good can come of trying to change human society from below recently won him the biggest non-fiction prize in Britain.

There are two dominant themes in this book. The first is the argument that French society was getting on quite nicely in the pre-revolutionary period. There were no insoluble problems arising from institutional rigidity or social conflict. The ruling elite was enlightened and forward looking. This begs the question why the revolution happened at all.

This is answered by the second theme. According to Schama, a few errors of judgement and personality clashes in the political sphere unleashed a maelstrom of violence and barbarism from the mass of the urban population. Nothing could be more acceptable to an establishment which is today confronted by the crisis of its own system and which depends ultimately on its monopoly of legal violence to preserve the existing social order.

As an historian, Schama's claim is that he has cut through all the fashionable social and political explanations for the revolution 'as the crucible of modernity'. In their place he has presented us with the force of real events and living personalities. He has in fact reproduced the prejudices of a displaced aristocrat writing his memoirs in the 1820s.

The history of the revolution becomes in Schama's own words 'a thing of contingencies and unforeseen consequences'. For Schama this constitutes a withering assault on the idea that history is anything more than random events orchestrated around a chosen narrative. It is in fact an apt description of a big-budget, middlebrow soap series. As the press release puts it: 'Its romantic appeal is timeless and its heroes and heroines—caught up in hopes, dreams, blood and terror—are eternal.'

Schama has taken some familiar primary source material from well-known individuals such as the crafty and rakish career diplomat Talleyrand and the career soldier Lafayette and added a cast of minor characters like aristo Lucy de La Tour du Pin. He then introduces this material with an air of authenticity and detachment as part of a simple narrative: 'In the brilliant spring of 1778, Talleyrand went to pay his respects to Voltaire....The ink had hardly dried on his theology degree....Talleyrand was undoubtedly in search of a father figure.' And so it goes on.

There is no shortage of incident. It is 250 pages before we get to 1787, two years before the start of the revolution. But as the incident accumulates the exposition becomes more and more confused. The empirical material provides no surprises. Indeed Schama is either unfamiliar with or refuses to acknowledge far more coherent historians such as Doyle, whose analysis of the more dynamic elements of the nobility is assumed here (*Origins of the French Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1988), or Furet, whose attempted critique of Marx's exposition of the mediation between social forces and political relations repays close attention (*Marx and the French Revolution*, University of Chicago Press, 1988).

This criticism would be misplaced if Schama had presented a convincing argument. But his refusal to accept that there could be any explanation for events other than individual predilection leads him into the most obvious contradictions. Thus in discussing those sections of society which benefited from the revolutionary changes in land tenure between 1789 and 1791, he notes: 'It was those who had already been able to define their economic interests in terms of property and capital, rather than privilege, and the many more who became converted to that view, who found ample opportunity to prosper in the revolution.'

This meant that certain nobles and bourgeois supported the new regime because it consolidated and advanced their social position and economic power through the opening up of a market in land as a commodity. Church property was a major boost to this market. When the land of the Abbey of Saint-Martin 'came on the market it was Girardin's most aggressive tenant farmer, Thomassin, who could afford to snap up 55 hectares of the best land for the substantial sum of 69 500 livres'.

Thus Schama describes but refuses to acknowledge a qualitative shift in the social relations of production. This shift substituted the operation of the capitalist market for a parochial society based on hierarchy and arbitrary privilege. The consolidation of this new social order was not, however, a foregone conclusion. The ancien regime was not eliminated. It had the support of its class allies throughout Europe and it could depend on the disenchantment of many within France whose existence was endangered by the new capitalist social order.

In these circumstances the bourgeoisie was forced way beyond its own narrow programme into a life-or-death struggle for power. In this power struggle the urban masses played a decisive role for the first time in history. It is the role of this new social force which has prompted such fear and loathing among reactionaries for 200 years. Their response has been to point to the Terror and above all the September Massacres of 1792 and claim that civilisation ended here. Schama follows this approach to the letter.

There is no doubt that these years were brutal and bloody. Babeuf, himself a representative of the most leftist tendency in the revolution, described his horror at the revenge exacted by the Parisian masses. 'I understood that the common people were taking justice into their own hands. I approve that justice...but could it not be cruel? Punishments of all kinds, drawing and quartering, torture, the wheel, the rack, the whip, the stake, hangmen proliferating everywhere have done such damage to our morals! Our masters... will sow what they have reaped.' (Quoted in the *New York Review of Books*, 19 January 1989)

Even at the height of the republican dictatorship in 1793 the Convention introduced a more egalitarian constitution than had ever been seen in Europe. In September 1792, days after the killings in the Parisian prisons and hard after the declaration of the republic, the French army repelled and demoralised a much greater Prussian force. The poet Goethe who was accompanying the Prussian army explained the defeat to those who sought an answer: 'From this place and this time forth commences a new era in world history and you can say you were present at its birth.' Schama quotes Goethe, but he doesn't seem to like the punchline. But that's history for you.

John Gibson and Manjit Singh review

Mark Walker, *German National Socialism and the Quest for Nuclear Power 1939-1949*, Cambridge University Press, £27.50 hbk; Fred Alan Wolf, *Parallel Universes: The Search for Other Worlds*, Bodley Head, £14.95 hbk; Ivan Tolstoy, *The Knowledge and the Power: Reflections on the History of Science*, Cannongate, £15.95 hbk

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Discoveries in the realm of atomic physics in the first 40 years of this century continue to have a profound impact on all aspects of science. These three books draw together some different strands of modern thinking on the subject.

Mark Walker's account of the Nazi bomb project is well researched and challenges some myths about why the Germans failed to develop a bomb. There are three conventional explanations of their failure: Nazi opposition to the new physics due to its association with Jewish scientists such as Albert Einstein; the Allies' destruction of the Norwegian heavy water production plant in 1944, used by the Germans as a research facility; the passive resistance of the atomic scientists led by Werner Heisenberg.

Walker demolishes all three explanations. Once the explosive power of the new physics became plain, the Nazi state soon dropped any objections it had. Jewish scientists were expelled or locked up and then written out of the history of the science. In this, the Nazis were ably assisted by the likes of Heisenberg, who flatly stated that there was no such thing as 'Jewish physics'.

By 1944 when the Norwegian plant was destroyed, the Nazis had no chance of developing a bomb before the end of the war. The German state had certainly lavished research funds on Heisenberg; but it hadn't gone all-out to produce an atomic bomb, which didn't fit in with the Nazis' early strategy of a rapid victory.

As for Heisenberg, there seems little doubt that he started to distance himself from the Nazis only towards the end. Although he never joined the Nazi Party, he undertook a tour of 'Greater Germany' in 1942-44 during which he told Danish physicists that the German war effort was a 'biological necessity'. In 1938, he volunteered for military service just prior to the annexation of Czechoslovakia. As Walker observes, many German scientists were attracted to the Nazis' critique of the Weimar Republic.

American and émigré scientists working on the US bomb project were more liberally inclined. But, spurred on by their fear of the German bomb, they delivered the murderous weapon the US government wanted. After Hiroshima, many physicists felt alienated. They returned to pure research and increasingly to the philosophical implications of atomic physics based on quantum theory. Their approach was influenced by their retreat from the real world, as well as by the incomplete character of the physical theory. Much of the idealistic and even mystical character of modern physics originates in this discussion.

In the thirties, Heisenberg and the Dane Niels Bohr argued that quantum mechanics proved there was no reality independent of observation. Einstein disputed this, insisting on the reality of a universe independent of the observer. Fred Alan Wolf is suspicious of these interpretations. In his new book, *Parallel Universes*, he invokes the existence of an infinite number of parallel universes in an attempt to overcome the problems besetting modern theoretical physics. Before you dismiss this as science fiction nonsense, it should be said that Wolf is a respected scientist. 'Generally when a new theory comes out physicists may accept it', he told us on a recent promotion trip to London: 'But since they haven't been brought up on it, they haven't sunk their teeth into it, it seems bizarre to them.'

Parallel universes certainly isn't a new idea: it has been a fantasy of science fiction writers virtually since the genre began. Wolf believes that, 'using our present understanding of physics, we seem to be faced with the most outrageous science fiction. How does one arrive at a consistent view of the universe using the most sophisticated theories invented by the human mind?'. He says that the solution is the many worlds interpretation of quantum theory put forward by Hugh Everett III in 1957.

Here science fiction meets scientific theory, and the conclusions are not for the faint-hearted: 'Even though quantum physics is used every day in physics labs around the world, no one really understands it, particularly anyone who believes in an objective, causal, logical universe.' Wolf has a point.

Heisenberg and Bohr rejected causality because of their reading of the famous 'uncertainty principle'. Briefly, this states that it is impossible to know exactly both the position and the speed of a sub-atomic particle. For the mystics this was a feature of nature itself. This was too much of an idealist interpretation for the likes of Einstein. Erwin Schrödinger challenged it with the famous thought experiment known as 'Schrödinger's Cat'.

Take a cat and place it in a closed box, together with a glass bottle full of cyanide. Arrange it so that a hammer placed over the cyanide will smash the bottle when there occurs a single decay of a radioactive substance, which has also been placed inside the box. Schrödinger argued that the cat is either dead or alive at any particular instant, depending only on whether or not a radioactive decay has occurred.

The mystics would counter that only our act of observation decides whether or not there has been a decay, and therefore whether or not the cat is dead or alive. If we do not look inside the box, Schrödinger's cat exists in a kind of purgatory between life and death. This illustrates the partial, speculative and idealist character of quantum physics. It rejects the existence of an objective, independent reality and instead places the observer in the central position in any discussion of reality.

Wolf believes that parallel universes offer a new perspective: the cat is alive in one universe and dead in another. The uncertainty principle is also resolved according to Wolf, since all possibilities of momentum and position measurements exist in separate universes. But who knows if there are parallel universes? Guesswork does not provide a very good defence of reason.

Ivan Tolstoy regards Einstein as the greatest thinker of the modern age. Yet his survey of the history of science skips over Einstein's objection to Heisenberg's interpretation of quantum mechanics, which he presents as the final word on the matter. 'Quantum mechanics demolished some of the philosophical complacency of the nineteenth-century view of the world by destroying determinism', observes Tolstoy. He likes Heisenberg because his interpretation suggests that we cannot fully understand or control the workings of nature. Not surprisingly, Tolstoy is over the moon about Chaos. For Tolstoy, Chaos theory shows that no aspect of nature or society is wholly susceptible to rational understanding: 'It suggests explicitly that society must function in unstable, chaotic and intrinsically unpredictable ways.' In fact it shows no such thing since nobody has shown that the mathematics of Chaos have any relevance to the workings of society or nature.

According to Tolstoy, modern science proves that there are natural limits to man's capacities and that attempts to extend our knowledge and power can only end in tears: 'Two monstrous world wars, massive unemployment, third world poverty and starvation,

proliferating totalitarianism, have cruelly demonstrated that the nineteenth-century idols were flawed, its faith too simple.'

Tolstoy's work confirms that interpretations of Chaos theory are being used increasingly, alongside some interpretations of quantum mechanics, to back up anti-modernist philosophy. Of course, such notions have always been around. But today they are getting more of a hearing. The experience of the Second World War scared one generation of physicists into mysticism. The decay of modern society and the absence of a progressive alternative are reinforcing these trends. But knowledge is power for those who know how to use it. All attempts by philosophers of science to avoid this simple fact will lead nowhere.

Daniel Nassim reviews

Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel's Third Front*, Simon & Schuster, $22.95 hbk; Robert I Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane—From FBI Informant to Knesset Member*, Faber & Faber, £14.99 hbk

ISRAEL AND THE INTIFADA

Schiff and Ya'ari's book is certain to become the definitive work on the Palestinian uprising. The authors are well placed to dissect the *intifada*. Schiff is defence editor of *Ha'aretz*, Israel's most prestigious newspaper, and is renowned for his links with the intelligence community. Ya'ari is Middle East affairs correspondent for Israel television. Despite the wealth of detail, the book has no footnotes. The authors freely cite what are obviously the results of Shin Bet (security service) interrogations and tapped telephone conversations and fax messages.

Schiff and Ya'ari confirm that both the Israeli authorities and the PLO were surprised by the *intifada*. Israel's politicians did not expect it, the intelligence services did not anticipate it and the army was not trained to deal with it. Most of the PLO's contacts were not involved in organising the early demonstrations. Indeed they were astonished by the daring of the rioters.

The uprising which started in December 1987 was a spontaneous revolt: 'Crowds of refugees bonded by a solidarity of despair whipped themselves into raptures of release for their pent-up rage, tearing up paving stones, overturning garbage bins, and showering traffic with volleys of stones. Unfazed even by rifle fire, the men in the mobs tore open their shirts, thrust out their chests, and continued to push forward among a din of war cries and wails of mourning.'

The entire population of the West Bank and Gaza was involved in the unrest. Few of those arrested in the early demonstrations were active in any of the main Palestinian political movements. Hardly any of the detainees were familiar with the PLO's Palestine National Covenant or even knew of its existence.

The most serious error in the book is its downplaying of Palestinian oppression, hardly surprising given the authors' pedigree. They present the riots as a reaction against ghastly conditions which could equally afflict somewhere like the Philippines. The Gaza Strip is exceptionally squalid, but this is less than half the story. The *intifada* happened because the Palestinians are denied the right to national self-determination.

Intifada is important also for the solutions it offers. Schiff and Ya'ari argue for an 'administrative withdrawal' from the West Bank—in effect giving Palestinian leaders control over local government—and the transfer of the Gaza Strip to the PLO and a locally elected leadership. The explicit aim of this process would be to reconcile the Palestinians to Israel's existence.

Coming from the Israeli mainstream, such an argument would have been unthinkable a few years ago. That such a strategy is advocated so openly in *Intifada* suggests that the Israeli establishment is at least considering following the path of president FW De Klerk, who is trying to stabilise South Africa by reforming apartheid.

At first sight, it seems paradoxical that Israel has moved closer to negotiations with the PLO at the same time as the Zionist right has grown. Yet this is a reflection of the conflicting pressures on the state. On the one hand, Israel is under pressure to contain Palestinian resistance through involvement in the diplomatic process. Its Western backers are insistent that a deal should be done with the PLO to minimise unrest. On the other, the Israeli state knows that if it is to survive it needs to use repression against the Palestinians. The difference between Israel's right and left is mainly between the emphasis they give to repression or diplomacy.

Friedman's biography of maverick American-Israeli fascist politician Meir Kahane notes that as recently as the early seventies the mainstream Israeli right were considered pariahs. Yet today right-wing parties hold about half the seats in the Knesset.

The False Prophet demonstrates that Kahane owed much of his success to right-wing politicians such as Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon, who helped to legitimise Kahane's brand of extremism. Yet Friedman fails to appreciate that Kahane stole his most notorious ideas, such as the 'transfer' (expulsion) of the Palestinians, from the Israeli left. Back in 1948 David Ben-Gurion, the first Labour prime minister of Israel, said 'I am for compulsory transfer, I don't see anything immoral in it'. The Israeli left put this policy into action by expelling 750 000 Palestinians during the creation of the state in 1948. Kahane merely says out loud what most Israelis think.

Rob Knight reviews

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa and Alex Pravda (eds), *Perestroika: Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policies*, Sage, £27.50 hbk, £11.95 pbk; Robbin F Laird and Susan L Clark (eds), *The USSR and the Western Alliance*, Unwin Hyman, £35 hbk; George E Hudson, *Soviet National Security Policy Under Perestroika*, Unwin Hyman, £38 hbk, £14.95 pbk; Walter C Clemens Jr, *Can Russia Change? The USSR Confronts Global Interdependence*, Unwin Hyman, £38 hbk, £12.95 pbk; Padma Desai, *Perestroika in Perspective: The Design and Dilemmas of Soviet Reform*, IB Tauris, £12.95 hbk

WHAT KREMLIN-WATCHERS CAN'T SEE

Western observers have consistently overestimated the economic and military strength of the Soviet Union. This distorted viewpoint is the product of the Cold War, which depicted as equals the USA and the Soviet Union. Even now that the Cold War is over, it is hard for commentators to shrug off past prejudices. All these books try to reassess the role of the Soviet Union in the Gorbachev era, but each is handicapped by the old Cold War assumptions.

Central to Soviet new thinking has been the transformation of the Soviet Union's relationship with the West. In order to win Western support for the restructuring of the Soviet economy, Moscow has made concessions in every sphere. At the ideological level, it has rejected socialism and embraced the market; at the practical level, it has pursued arms reduction initiatives, withdrawn from Eastern Europe and abandoned third world liberation movements.

While Western commentators have welcomed these changes,

only recently have they begun to appreciate the profound difficulties facing Soviet leaders in pushing through their reforms. If there is one fault common to all these books, it is that none of them fully grasps the disintegrative tendencies unleashed by the reform process.

The book which comes closest to recognising the extent of the problem is *Perestroika: Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policies*. Each chapter elaborates skilfully the connectedness of Soviet domestic and foreign policy. The book has the virtue of recognising that perestroika has had unintended consequences, such as encouraging nationalism in the republics. It also notes that reform in the Soviet Union is more complex than in Eastern Europe, since 'the Soviet Union has several handicaps that Hungary, Poland and China do not: notably, a potentially severe nationalities problem and much longer habituation to a non-market system'.

It is also the only one of these books to raise a problem that is increasingly preoccupying the West—the harmful consequences for the world if perestroika runs out of control, coupled with the increasing likelihood of this happening. The other books all overestimate the resilience of the Soviet system and underestimate the fragmentation which is already well under way. In *Perestroika in Perspective*, Padma Desai even draws the conclusion that 'the overriding factor favouring Gorbachev's success is that the reforms he is proposing are feasible'.

All three books from the Unwin Hyman stable are written as if the Soviet Union remains a potential military rival to the USA. *Can Russia Change?* at least raises the possibility that the Soviet Union and the USA could form an alliance to combat new rivals. However, even this book is behind the times: the 15 dilemmas of Soviet domestic and foreign policy which it raises have already been resolved at the cost of intensifying Soviet weakness.

The Cold War myth that the Soviet Union and the USA were equal superpowers has now been discredited. After years of exaggeration, it is accepted that the Soviet economy is only 14 per cent the size of the US economy. The current economic dislocations will cause it to decline even further. Far from being a world power, the Soviet Union is in the process of disintegrating. It faces the prospect of being stripped of its national republics, starved of Western investment and squeezed between a new German empire in Europe and a new Japanese empire in Asia.

George E Hudson's conclusion to *Soviet National Security Policy Under Perestroika* has already been overtaken by events: 'The continuing existence of Nato as we enter the 1990s is not in doubt. US influence is unlikely to be diminished by much in the future.' The consequence of the rapid decline of the Soviet Union is that Nato has lost its *raison d'être*. This in turn has hastened the decline of US influence in Europe. It suits Washington to try to prolong the myth of joint US/Soviet leadership of the world for as long as possible.

The question of how far the USA should go in propping up the Soviet Union is considered in all of these books. It is now clear that with the best will in the world, the USA can do very little in practical terms. A country which is up to its eyeballs in debt to Japan is hardly in a position to bail out the Soviet Union. Yet without massive aid from the West the Soviet leadership will not be able to accomplish the transition to a successful market economy. An understanding of this central aspect of the process of transition is entirely absent from any of these studies.

Andrew Calcutt reviews

Paul Willis, *Common Culture*, Open University Press, £28.50 hbk, £7.99 pbk; Paul Willis, *Moving Culture: An Enquiry into the Cultural Activities of Young People*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, £4.50 pbk; Steve Redhead, *The End of the Century Party: Youth and Pop Towards 2000*, Manchester University Press, £29.95 hbk, £9.95 pbk; Robert G Hollands, *The Long Transition: Class, Culture and Youth Training*, Macmillan, £35 hbk, £9.99 pbk

YOUTH SAFARI

'A pop song is not a steel ingot.' Paul Willis' starting point is that culture is a malleable commodity which young people are constantly remoulding in their own image. Choosing the pictures on your bedroom wall, criticising a TV programme or taking up the hem on a skirt—these activities make every young person a 'cultural producer', creative consumer, and participant in what Willis calls 'the unexpected life and promise...[of] common culture'.

Youth is about creating havoc and consuming what you shouldn't. It also means finding out that society doesn't want to know about your creative abilities and aspirations. You may want to be a graphic designer or to try your hand in a recording studio, but buying a Madonna poster or reading an interview with Nile Rodgers is all that's allowed. Never having a chance is the 'common culture' of youth. I don't know what sort of binoculars Willis was looking through on his safari tours of youth culture (travel agent: Gulbenkian Foundation. Base camp: Wolverhampton Poly), but he concludes that teenage life is a carnival of creativity.

Now that central government is cutting back on arts funding, Willis has discovered 'post-institutionalism'. Having given up hope of advancing beyond a market-based society, he celebrates the creative complexities of capitalism. Following in the post-Fordist footsteps of Stuart Hall, Willis would like to see local government activating the creative powers of young consumers. He recounts how Wolverhampton council, after some assiduous lobbying by a group of rastafarians, stumped up some cash towards the Telford culture centre. The fact that this is one of a handful of examples used in both books suggests that it is a less than universal experience.

From his vantage point in Manchester Poly, Steve Redhead also sees youth culture as a whirl of creativity. He's close enough to it not to need binoculars, but he may well have been wearing a pair of kaleidoscope-glasses—the ones which turn drab everyday life into a constantly changing pattern of colourful fragments. He was certainly under the influence of Manchester's Hacienda.

Redhead engages the reader's attention with his unbridled enthusiasm. His argument is that youth music in the eighties progressed from style culture (looking good and feeling healthy), to political pop (Band Aid, Live Aid) to post-political pop (DJs' cut-ups of Western pop and world music). He ends on an up-beat: post-political pop is experimental, original and capable of carrying youth culture into a new millennium. But Redhead's scallydelic view of cultural dynamism doesn't square with the excess of revival and repackaging at the heart of 'new' youth music. The London dance scene—so my DJ friend at The Brain tells me—is already a rather desperate attempt to revive the summer of love (1988 version). Nostalgia is the keynote Redhead doesn't want to hear.

The vision of individual, creative young consumers does not sit easily with the commonplace youth experience of mind-dulling state employment schemes and repression. YTS is the aspect of common culture investigated by Robert G Hollands. Noting that 396 000 young people were on YTS in 1988, Hollands set out to describe the effects of bargain basement training schemes and analyse their role as the gateway to adulthood for a large section of working class youth. Hollands' descriptions of new archetypes among today's youth (vocationalists, enterprisers, 'the lads', survivalists, and politicos) are questionable. His insights into the estrangement between youth and mainstream politics are more interesting. He shows how young people respond to YTS in what is essentially a class-based manner, while remaining unresponsive to an unimaginative and outmoded labour movement.

The Labour Party has spent 10 years remodelling itself into the blandest, greyest, most middle-of-the-road organisation in Britain. Many young people already think of Labour as a sort of permanent YTS with a soundtrack from Rick Astley. What Labour needs to win them over, Hollands argues, is a genuine youth policy, more youth advisers and youth councils. I bet that will get them going in the Saturday night queue outside the Hacienda.

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