

LIVING

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Towards 2000

A week of debate
24-30 July 1992

(see centre pages)

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**Europe's national
identity crisis**

**Aids establishment
in disarray**

**Olympic war
games**

**Coalisland: behind
the Paras' riot**

The Serbs

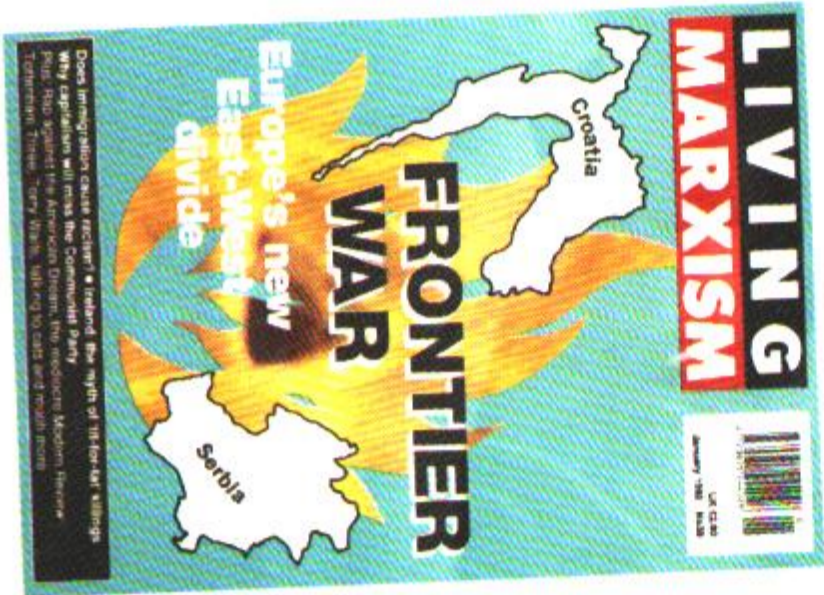
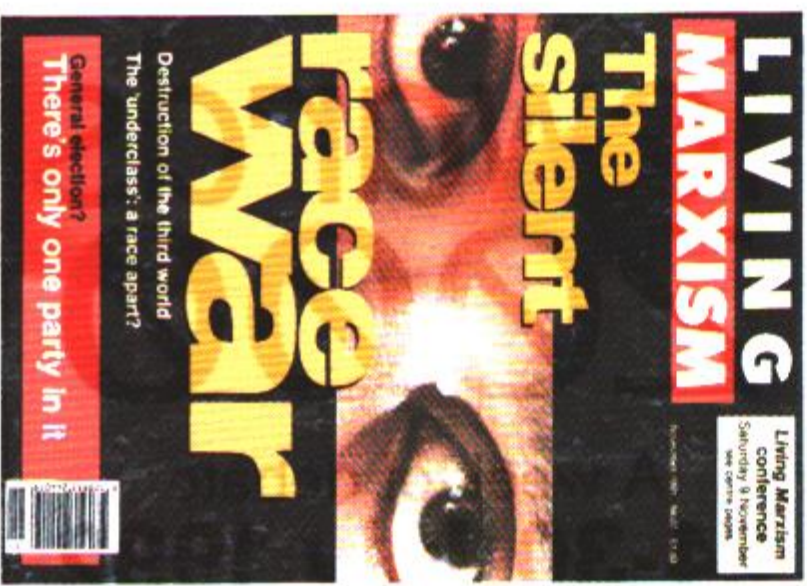
'WHITE NIGGERS'



of the New World Order



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COVER PHOTO: Michael Kramer



Support the Bomber Harris protesters

'The strain of facing the protest could leave the Queen Mum feeling ill for days.' So worried the *Sun* after demonstrators disrupted the unveiling of a statue of Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, the butcher of Dresden, in the Strand on Sunday 31 May. Harris, chief of Bomber Command, gave German civilians rather more than a few days of feeling ill. His carpet-bombing firestorm tactics killed more than 100 000 in Dresden alone.

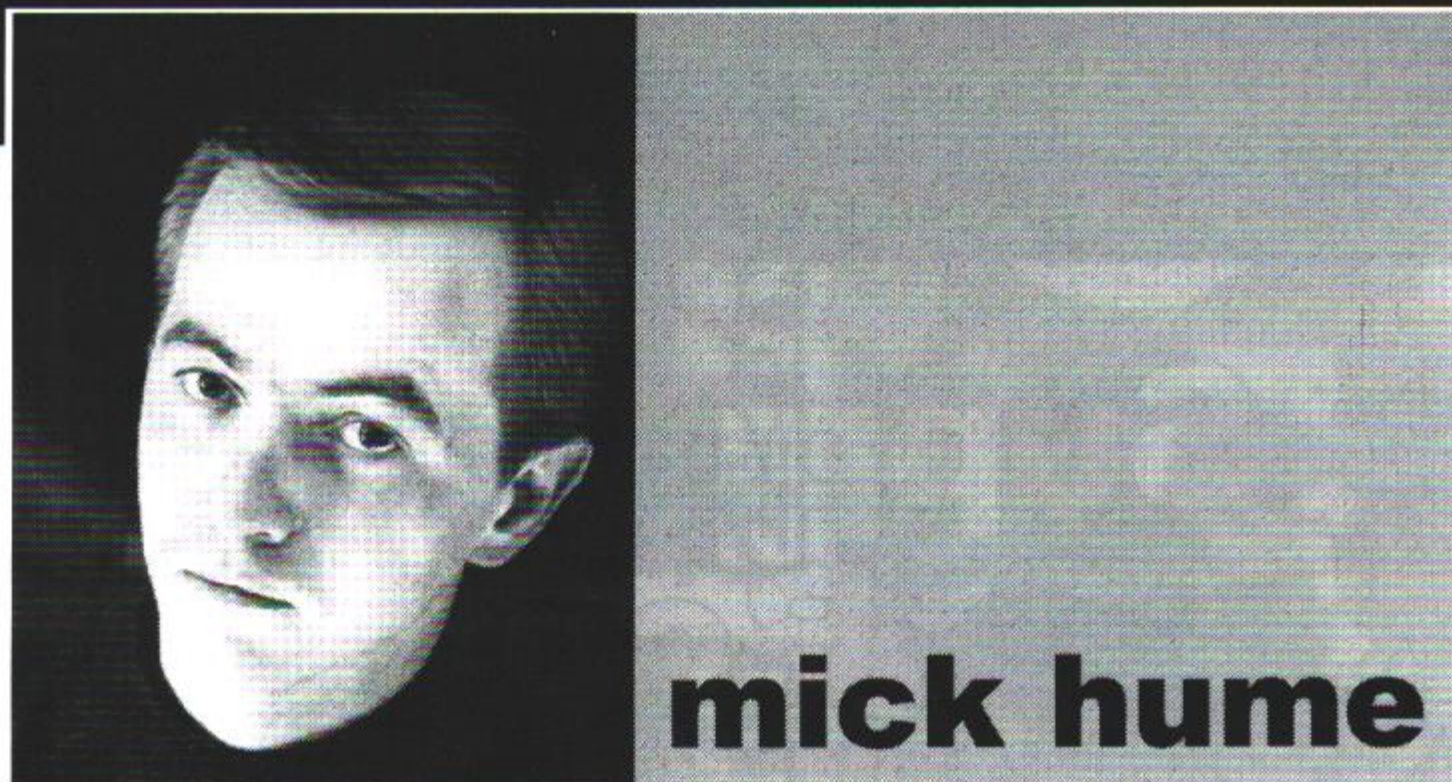
Eight supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party were among the 10 people arrested during the protest. They have been charged with causing criminal damage and with public order offences. A defence group has been set up for those arrested, and one of its priorities is to raise money to cover legal costs. Please make donations to the Strand Defence Fund, c/o BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.

Editor: **Mick Hume** ● Assistant Editor: **Joan Phillips**
Editorial Assistant: **Tessa Myer** ● International Editor: **Daniel Nassim**
News: **Andrew Calcutt** ● Living section: **John Fitzpatrick**
Design: **Richard Stead, Charles Longford**
Production: **Michael Kramer, Peter Ray**
Managing Editor: **Phil Murphy** ● Advertising Manager: **Manda Kent**

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mick hume

Perot, the Danes and the 'end of politics'

'Is this the end of politics?', asked novelist Anthony Burgess, surveying the American opinion polls which put Ross Perot ahead of both major party candidates in the presidential race, and the results of the Danish referendum which rejected the Maastricht treaty.

Not exactly the end of politics, no. But these are the latest signs of the end of politics as it has been known since the Second World War. And the sooner we face up to that, the better our chances of creating a new alternative.

Take Ross Perot, the Texan with plenty of dollars but without a party, who has overtaken both Republican president George Bush and Democratic Party hopeful Bill Clinton in the early stages of the race for the White House. What is that all about?

Perot is a presidential candidate without any publicly declared policies, a man who appears to stand for nothing, except perhaps the right to make and keep your own money. Declaring that you have no interest in politics might once have been considered something of a disadvantage for somebody running for high political office. But not today. In fact, that is Ross Perot's selling point.

The Texan billionaire has come to prominence by riding a populist wave

of anti-Washington, anti-politician, anti-politics feeling. In America he has been dubbed the 'kick the bastards out candidate'. As an individual Perot is pretty irrelevant, and could disappear as suddenly as he emerged. But for the moment he symbolises the cynical mood among many American voters.

The logic of Perot's supporters is simple enough. They know that all politicians lie and break their pledges; so why not have a president who makes no promises in the first place? They can see that no politician sticks to his avowed principles: they conclude that it makes most sense to support the man who has none to betray. If politics is all about scandal, graft and governmental incompetence, they say, we would be better off without it.

One Perot campaign worker was at pains to explain to the *Sunday Times* that his team 'aren't lobotomised fanatics for Perot', and don't think the little man from Texas is 'the messiah'. Instead, they were supporting Perot to show their disgust with corrupt US politicians who are 'getting so *blatant* and *arrogant* about it', and their contempt for a president 'who thinks you can revive an economy by buying 15 pairs of gym socks' (24 May 1992). A *Newsweek* poll has shown that 52 per cent of Americans who claim to support

Perot do so because they 'dislike other candidates'; only 12 per cent of them said they backed his 'stands on issues' (15 June).

Of course, there is nothing new about corrupt, lying or incompetent American presidents. Every incumbent of the White House would fall easily enough into at least one of those categories. For the past half a century, however, they have usually been able to get away with it, thanks to the combined power of Cold War politics and a booming economy.

The anti-communist ethos of postwar American politics overshadowed all else. Just about the only qualification needed to enter government was to be a staunch and vigilant opponent of the Soviet Union and the Red Menace. A politician did not have to stand *for* anything much, so long as he was firmly against 'un-American activities'. And while the US economy was literally delivering the goods, it was easier still for the Washington elite.

Now that the Cold War and the postwar boom are both gone forever, US statesmen stand exposed to critical scrutiny. Instead of railing against the evil 'un-Americanism' of others, the politicians have had to show the public what their 'Americanism' stands for. So far, they have shown that it stands for economic slump and political scandals; for presidents who

say 'watch my lips, no new taxes' and then raise them anyway, or who secretly back an Iraqi dictator one week and publicly brand him 'the new Hitler' the next. The result of this process is the widespread rejection of politics, and the rise of Ross Perot.

There may not yet be a direct equivalent of Perot outside of the USA. But the same trends are evident throughout the West. Everywhere, the end of the Cold War and the onset of recession has produced circumstances in which the post-1945 order is unravelling and conventional politics is in disgrace. The Danish referendum vote to reject the Maastricht proposals on European integration was a graphic example.

Many commentators have tried to present that Danish referendum result as a conscious rejection of the provisions of the Maastricht treaty by a growing political movement opposed to European unity. This is rewriting history. A look at why Danes voted 'no' reveals that it had nothing to do with any politically conscious movement, and not all that much to do with the issue of Europe. It was largely a consequence of an anti-politics mood already obvious in the decline of support for the old Danish parties of right and left alike.

The Danish 'no' vote was a gesture by people who are increasingly alienated from the established parties and political system, which they feel has left them without representation or influence. It was a case of disillusioned and embittered voters lashing out in 'up yours' fashion; against the Danish political establishment, against the Euro-bureaucracy, against the Germans, against politics. Maastricht just happened to come along at the right time to catch the backlash.

The factors which produced the Danish referendum result are also at work in other European countries. As we examine in full in a special feature in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the whole continent is experiencing governmental breakdowns and national identity crises. The role of Ross Perot is being played in Europe by emergent parties and splinter groups espousing various strains of regionalism and right-wing populism, all of which are opposed to the established political order.

Even apparently stable old Britain is not immune. The general election may have

resulted in another Tory victory, but beneath the surface, the cynical drift of opinion is clear. Like Perot's supporters in America, the majority of people polled in Britain said that they were voting negatively, against the other candidates, rather than positively for the party of their choice. Here too, politics is increasingly seen as an irrelevant charade that does not touch upon the reality of people's lives and problems.

None of this really means the end of politics. Rather, it represents the triumph, at least temporarily, of the politics of low expectations. Supporting Perot or lashing out against Maastricht is a way of saying that you expect nothing worthwhile from

It is time we accepted that there is nothing positive which we can relate to in public affairs today. The parties of the postwar left are now exhausted. And two-fingered gestures like those which the Perot campaign or the Danes have given to the political establishment do not represent a genuine alternative, but a narrow, blind reaction against the discredited old order.

The consequence of accepting this fact is that we will have to start from scratch in creating a new kind of politics. This is the project which *Living Marxism* is here to help advance. Our aim is to promote a fresh, critical approach to the problems of capitalist society, which can demonstrate the need for fundamental change.

It represents the triumph, at least temporarily, of the politics of low expectations

the politicians, but neither do you really believe that there is any alternative which would change things for the better.

This mood poses problems for those of us concerned to build support for such an alternative. So what can be done about it?

We could try to find something positive to latch on to in current trends, by courting public cynicism and encouraging more bitter gestures. That is the approach adopted by much of the old left in Europe. In Denmark, the left ran what amounted to a joint campaign with the far right for a 'no' vote in the Maastricht referendum. And in Britain, left-wing Labour MPs like Dennis Skinner have joined the Tory right in championing a backlash against Europe.

This might help the left to create the illusion of success by appearing to promote a popular cause. But by abandoning any pretence of standing for something different, and lining up with reactionaries, the old left is only strengthening public cynicism about politics and compounding people's low expectations.

Furthering that critique of capitalism will be a key theme of Towards 2000, the week of discussion which *Living Marxism* is sponsoring in London from 24 to 30 July (see centre pages).

Tackling the mood of cynicism and low expectations is a must. But giving people a positive belief in politics cannot be done simply by changing the candidates for US president, or by altering the arrangements among the governments of Europe. It will depend upon convincing people of their own capacity to improve things, by getting organised behind the politics of anti-capitalism.

Such a revolutionary perspective has often been dismissed as unrealistic. But what other option is there today? All of the more 'realistic' options we were offered have failed, and we are left with an unappealing choice between the parties of the past and a Perot. Those who want to do something about 'kicking the bastards out' for good will need something better than that.

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, write to Penny Robson, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP London WC1N 3XX, or phone (071) 375 1702

Blame 'Essex Man', not Scots

Your articles on Scotland have confused two issues: straightforward Scottish nationalism and the debate on Scotland's constitutional position within the Union. The former has always existed but the latter has arisen after the Scottish people rejected the Tories for the fourth successive election although Scotland remains governed by the Tories.

It seems that *Living Marxism's* articles on Scottish current affairs are deliberately distorted in order to apologise for your beloved 'Essex Man', to excuse his reactionary tendencies to vote Tory. As usual, Scotland is used as a whipping boy and scapegoat for the sins of others.

Strangely, *Living Marxism* is in favour of a united Ireland. The Irish Republic is one of the most conservative countries in Europe. You favour this and yet reject the idea of an independent Scotland which would certainly be strongly socialist. Just remember the next time you speak disparagingly of Scottish politicians talking of 'living a little dangerously', Mrs Thatcher's downfall began, I am proud to say, with the highly organised and motivated Scottish anti-poll tax, non-payment campaign.
Joe M Kane Glasgow

Dons hons for Derrida

Whoops. Dr Willy Maley (letters, June) thinks that reviewer James Heartfield should not join in the attack on deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida since 'he has recently been denied an honorary degree at Cambridge'. Now that Cambridge has in fact decided to honour Derrida, it's worth asking whether the difference between deconstruction and the 'true blue guardians of English intellectual culture' is as great as it appears.

When Derrida was first proposed the dons promised a sterling defence of reason against his Continental mumbo jumbo. But none such was forthcoming. In fact, it is Cambridge and the Anglo-Saxon tradition of analytical philosophy that led the way in the dissolution of reason. It was in England that Russell, Moore, Wittgenstein and Ayer denounced the possibility of universal reasoning as 'metaphysics', castles in the air. Now Derrida attacks the same metaphysics, he is denounced as an enemy of reason.

Both the dominant English analytical school and Continental deconstruction share the same prejudice, that investigation is a process of dissection, reducing a thing into its ever more elemental parts. They forget that the truth is whole and the articulation of its elements is the real object of investigation.

Shocked to find Derrida saying out loud what they have suspected for ages, that it is not

possible to sustain a universal outlook from the standpoint of the paid ideologues of a sectional interest, the dons panicked. 'Shush', they hissed, 'don't let everyone know that we don't know what we're talking about—what about our security of tenure?' Welcome to Cambridge, Jacques Derrida, a place untroubled by any commitment to reason, where appearance is everything—you should like it there.

Hamish McHugh Edinburgh

A two-way race?

It is undoubtedly true that all pro-capitalist political parties from Conservatives to ex-'Communists' will play the race card when it suits them. But I think Sharon Clarke rather overstated the anti-black vote in the general election ('Race to victory', May).

Race certainly played its ugly part in constituencies like Basildon and Cheltenham. As for some of the other examples given, I very much doubt it. Though the small swing against the Asian official Labour candidate in Southall may have contrasted with the pro-Labour swing in other Ealing constituencies, there was more to it than this. Firstly, Southall is a predominantly Asian constituency anyway. Secondly, the Labour vote was split between the official Labour candidate and the deselected former MP and ex-Trotskyist Syd Bidwell. The total Labour vote reveals that there was an overall swing to Labour in Southall of four per cent—twice the national average.

If the race factor was quite as uniform (or for that matter one-way) as Sharon Clarke seems to imply, can she explain why Bernie Grant, Keith Vaz and Diane Abbott all achieved much larger swings than their neighbouring white Labour colleagues? Or why Niranjana Deva, successful Asian Tory in Brentford and Isleworth, did better than most other Tory candidates in West London, including, curiously enough, notorious anti-immigration MP Terry Dicks?

Dave Perrin Clwyd

Science: prophet and scapegoat

Science and scientists appear to be both prophets and scapegoats in the world today. John Gibson and Manjit Singh ('God and the Big Bang', June) link 'a revival of faith in a negative sense' to a 'disenchantment with science'. We can clearly see disenchantment where science is blamed for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ozone depletion and third world famine. Yet other aspects of science are becoming more and more fashionable. Witness the glut of 'layman's' books on quantum physics and cosmology. I would suggest that the two sides of science are different aspects of the same

problem—that of a materially and ideologically stagnant society.

The rise of the 'science book' reflects a view of the world in which humans have no part except by accident or design. Science books are well suited to this role. They discuss what appear to be highly important questions related to the cosmos or the universe but, as many top scientists admit, most 'science books' are unintelligible and all have crude theological overtones. The aim is to show that science proves the existence of God, the supremacy of Bhuddism or some other mysticism. (Paul Davies' latest work is entitled *The Mind of God*). The 'science book' fad gives a pseudo-scientific veneer to irrationalism. In being turned into a justification for religion, 'science' itself has become a new form of religion—a philosophy to be in awe of.

Ideas which mystify rather than clarify are less than useless. This indicates the need to bring science back to earth into the realm of reason. God and science don't mix. Humans and science do.

Lucas Liverpool

The Aids-HIV link

Lee Osborn (letters, June) seems to confuse Aids—the disease—and the Aids issue which has inspired debate about morality. Osborn points to the longstanding argument put forward by professor Peter Duesberg that HIV does not cause Aids. He says we should expose how the government has used the idea that HIV=Aids=death in its moral campaigns, and expose how capitalism causes Aids.

However the question, 'what causes Aids?', is a medical question of finding a cure through scientific research as quickly as possible. Capitalism is not the primary cause of Aids. This simply obscures what is going on. There is a difference between finding a cure for a disease, and showing how present society limits finding a medical cure and alleviating disease and poverty.

It is true to say the government has used the 'HIV = Aids = death' link in their moral campaigns. In fact the main thrust of the government's moral campaign is to use Aids as a way of reinforcing conservative moral values. This is why the government is interested in promoting certain scientific facts, to help promote their moral and political outlook, not just to obscure facts for the sake of it.

The government has said that it will fund research into other causes of Aids apart from HIV. According to Osborn's argument, the fact that the government has used the HIV=Aids=death would imply that they are lessening their moral campaign if they are willing to question the HIV=Aids link. In fact, the moral climate in which the issue of Aids is

discussed is being further reinforced, whatever new scientific discovery is made. We are now witnessing a moral backlash against gays and it is this moralism and repression that we must concentrate on and expose.

Angela Hauldren *Manchester*

Abolish the capitalists

Mick Hume's article seems to say that a campaign against the parasitical and undemocratic institution of the monarchy will serve to expose the wider problems of British capitalism ('Abolish the Monarchy', June). The monarchy is seen by many as an anachronism—as a bit of a joke. It is also true that many young people would see the Windsors as 'spongers.' However when it comes to ripping off working class people, privilege is as rife in Canary Wharf as in Buckingham Palace. The abolition of royal privilege would do nothing to expose the more fundamental basis of privilege in our society. One need only look to Germany or the USA to see how the lack of a monarch does not necessarily lead to the clarification of class divisions.

It is incorrect to lay the blame for British decay at the feet of 'the culture of deference'. Falling rates of profit and the moribund nature of British capitalism cannot be explained by the prevalence of bowing and scraping. The 'culture of deference' is based on our lack of real social power and not just on bizarre traditions (which exist all over the world).

Who is going to lead a campaign against the monarchy? Certainly not the spineless wonders of Charter '88 with their 'don't mention the Irish' school of 'democratic politics'. As for a new oppositional movement based on ordinary people, as Frank Richards says in the same issue of *Living Marxism*, 'people will only move if there is something big to fight for'. They will not be inspired unless we can build a campaign to kick out the parasites in pinstripes and not just the ones with crowns.

Ben Brack and Nick Underwood *Camden*

Bacon: not all in the mind

Whether an artist is a good artist cannot be decided on the basis of what he thinks about his work or by reference to his private life.

If Francis Bacon is a good or bad painter is ultimately to be judged on the basis of the product, whatever his motives and stated aims. Alan Harding's psychologistic response to Bacon's art ('Life and death', June) misses one important point: by painting nudes in the unflattering light cast by an electric light bulb, Bacon captures alienating social conditions.

Unlike Otto Dix, Bacon's art does not promote a false reconciliation with history by inscribing human sorrow in nature and presenting it as an unavoidable aspect of the human condition. His 'ugly' pictures really inform us about our ugly (social) world. In the way in which painting war cripples does not make Otto Dix into a 'political' painter, the absence of explicitly political themes does not make Francis Bacon into a sheer existentialist (whatever he may have thought about it).

Josie Essex

Political Dix

Craig Barton's review of Otto Dix ('Loss of faith', April) missed the point. Dix's work *is* political. The image which illustrated Barton's article only preserves the popular idea of Dix as a portrait artist of dead/mutilated Germans. The politics of Dix's work lies in the associations conjured up by the images. The Dix show remains anti-war, yet fixes war in Germany for the English audience. For the German government, it associates war with the degeneration of the twenties. It is political, although not anti-capitalist.

Michael Searle *Twickenham*

Does Ann Bradley run ICI?

I have just started reading your magazine for the first time, I thought it made a welcome change from the 'where have we gone wrong?' cries of the Labour Party. Until I read Ann Bradley's article about animal experiments (May).

I had to make a big effort not to vomit. If I had not known from which magazine the article came from, I could have sworn it had been written by the chairman of some big pharmaceutical company. She seems to ignore that a viable and more reliable alternative, in great need of funding, is provided by the use of human tissue. It's strange how the most

stubborn defenders of cruelty to animals are (in the West) Catholics and paleo-communists. They seem to be on guard in case someone challenges man's superiority over nature.

S Podesta *Sussex*

Ann Bradley's article fails to address the real issues involving animal experimentation. The vast majority of drugs are developed in response to patent laws, not for medical need. The World Health Organisation lists around 200 drugs as being essential, yet greedy capitalist drug companies continue developing new formulations to add to Britain's 18 000 licensed medicines. Inadequate clinical trials have caused many deaths not predicted by animal tests. If penicillin had been tested on guinea pigs it would have been predicted to have been highly toxic to man. Most diseases are preventable but will only be eradicated with improvements in living standards. We do not face the stark emotive choice Ann Bradley presents: choosing human suffering over animal suffering. The real choice is a system that cares about people and animals.

Mary Lawson *Manchester*

Surely, Ann Bradley, you should not be alienating a whole section of activists that are potentially your allies? Many animal welfare campaigners are well aware of the injustice of a society that condones monarchs and rich landowners to shoot foxes for sport. Give these people a chance and credit them with the ability to make the links between the abuse of animals and people alike, and the capitalist system that carries out that abuse. Maybe we could learn from each other.

Elly Tams *Birmingham*

Living cert

Congratulations on your newly-discovered ability as tipsters. I refer to April's issue in which you remind us of your prediction last October concerning Labour's inability to win any imminent election. As this was proven to be correct, can you please furnish me with the results of next year's Grand National, Cheltenham Gold Cup and 2000 Guineas, as I am planning an audacious treble at the expense of Ladbrokes.

Martin Callaghan *West Yorkshire*

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, or fax them on (071) 377 0346

Eddie Veale on how and why America, Britain and Germany have constructed the Serbian demon

After the Iraqis, the Serbs; after Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic. In the eyes of the West, it seems that Serbia has become the latest big threat to world peace. As bloody civil strife in Croatia and then Bosnia has torn the old Yugoslavia apart, Milosevic's Belgrade regime and the 'irregular' Serbian forces have been turned into the pariahs of international politics.

American secretary of state James Baker has denounced the Serbs in Bosnia as 'completely outside the bounds of civilised behaviour'. Britain's John Major has backed Baker up. The new German foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel, has said bluntly that 'the Serbians are responsible' for the bloodshed. The European Community and the United Nations have each imposed sanctions on Belgrade, and Nato leaders have agreed that the military alliance has the right to intervene in a European conflict like the Yugoslav civil war.

'Murdering grannies'

Leading conservative intellectuals have dropped the old diplomatic language and let rip at the Serbs in tabloid style. So Norman Stone, Oxford professor of history, wants the West to arm the Croats and support the Bosnian Muslims, on the grounds that Milosevic is 'gangster-boss' of a 'communisto-fascist crusade', whose Yugoslav army is 'bullying and murdering grannies—on behalf of Serbian nationalism'.

Why are the Serbs being singled out in this way? Are they really such a special case of barbarism?

Milosevic is certainly a brutal, self-serving politician and the Serbian forces have certainly been responsible for many civilian deaths in Bosnia. But they do not hold a monopoly on 'bullying and murdering grannies' in the Yugoslav civil war. All of the various armies and factions have been responsible for atrocities. The Croatian leadership has been complicit with Serbia in the attempt to partition Bosnia. Yet only the Serbs have been subject to the wrath of the Western powers.

Western bias

Look beyond the borders of Bosnia and Croatia, and the frantic concern to condemn Serbia seems even more one-sided. While the Yugoslav conflict has grabbed all the headlines, the Armenians have been rampaging through Azerbaijan. Yet the Western governments and experts who are so keen to lecture the Serbs about violence have seemed far less concerned about the violent clashes further east.

At the same time as the British and Western media were full of terrible images of civilians being shelled by Serbs in Sarajevo, the Israelis were launching their worst bombing raids on the villages of southern Lebanon since they invaded that country in 1982. But there were no UN sanctions against Tel Aviv, and no Oxford history professors demanding that the West arm the Palestinians or the Shiite Muslims against Israel.

And in any case, who are James Baker and John Major to criticise anybody else for going 'completely outside the bounds of civilised behaviour'? These American and British statesmen presided over the Gulf War last year. During that conflict, the 'civilised behaviour' of the Allied forces ranged from the precision bombing of air-raid shelters to burying conscripts alive in the desert with bulldozers. Up to half a million Iraqis were killed in a war fought behind the banners of the United Nations.

New bogey

The image of Serbia as the new villain of world affairs has been artificially constructed by the Western powers for their own purposes. The Serbs, and the other peoples of the old Yugoslavia, have got caught up in the crossfire of the struggle for influence in the post-Cold War world.

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet bloc removed the old communist bogey, the Western elites have been trying to set up surrogate enemies, against which they can demonstrate their power and fulfil their



'White niggers' of the new world order

self-appointed role as the champions of right. The Serbs are the latest people to be demonised for this purpose.

It is the latest round of Great Power politics, rather than the internal affairs of the former Yugoslav republics, which explains why Serbia has been singled out. The Serbs have been deliberately set up as the 'white niggers' of the new world order, and subjected to the sort of propaganda treatment which Western imperialists have usually reserved for Arabs or blacks—or, in the British case, for the Irish.

Bonn started it

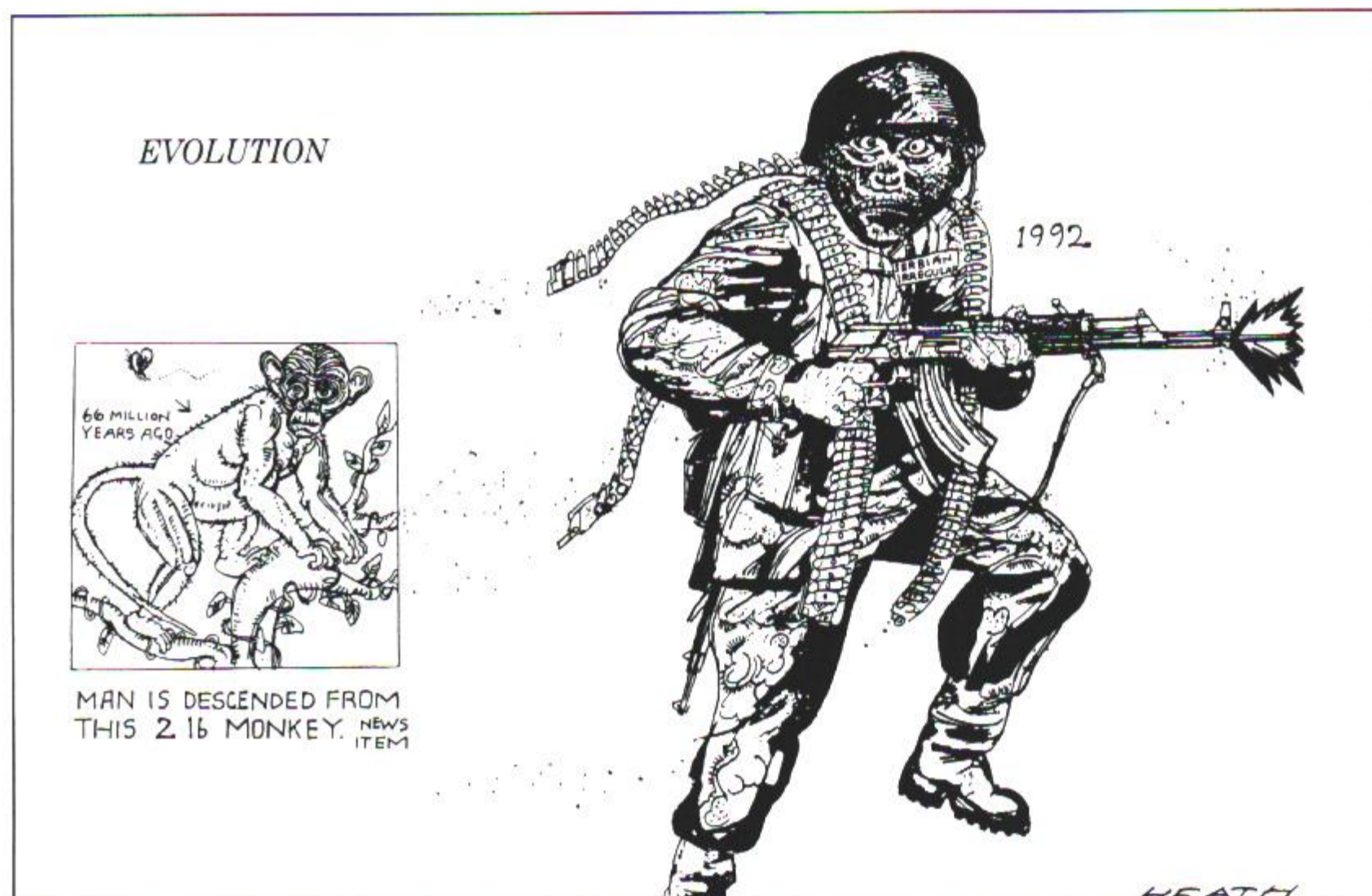
The campaign to criminalise the Serbs began last year as a German initiative. The German government escalated the conflict in Yugoslavia by coming out in support of 'civilised' Croatia against 'barbaric' Serbia, and forcing the rest of the EC states to follow its lead. Germany used its intervention against the Serbs as a way of stamping its authority on the whole of Europe, and demonstrating that it was no longer prepared to act as a tame sidekick of the USA in international affairs (see R Knight, 'Croatia: Germany's Gulf War?', *Living Marxism*, December 1991).

This year, however, as the focus of the fighting has shifted from Croatia to Bosnia, the American authorities have taken over the leading role in the anti-Serb crusade. President George Bush, backed by Major, has pushed the UN into imposing sanctions on Belgrade and got Nato to fire warning shots at Serbia, in a bid to re-establish the waning authority of the USA within the Western Alliance.

Great Power rivals

The timing of the moves in May's diplomatic offensive against Serbia reveals the real motives behind American policy. On Friday 22 May, chancellor Kohl of Germany and president Mitterrand of France announced their intention to push ahead with the proposal for a 35 000-strong joint Franco-German army corps. Such a force would be an obvious rival to the US-led Nato alliance.

On the evening of that very same day, and after consulting with Major,



Serbs as seen by the *Independent*, 29 May 1992

US secretary of state Baker called upon 'the civilised world' to impose political and economic sanctions against Serbia. And if those sanctions eventually failed to have the desired effect, 'it would be my view to take a look at questions involving military matters'. Days later, the Nato governments agreed, under American pressure, to the principle of intervening militarily in future European conflicts. Not to be outdone, the German foreign ministry raised the stakes again by declaring that it had not yet ruled out an armed intervention in Bosnia.

Nato rules

The US administration had wanted no part of the campaign against Serbia when the Germans were leading the charge. Now, however, it has become a handy excuse for Washington (and London) to play up the importance of their military alliance, Nato, as against the emerging Euro-army run from Bonn and Paris. That is the main reason why Serbs have suddenly appeared all over our newspapers depicted as monkeys and mass murderers.

Perhaps the worst aspect of this whole affair has been the way that the old left has gone along with, and indeed tried to lead, the demonisation of the Serbs. Such left-wing Labour MPs as Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn have previously attacked Western

governments for failing to impose sanctions on Serbia. As long as six months ago, the radical journal *New Statesman and Society* published an article calling for Britain to 'bomb Serbia'. And the editorial and letters pages of supposedly liberal papers like the *Guardian* and *Independent* now carry almost-daily attacks on the Serbs. This support from the left has helped to lend moral authority to the Western powers' self-serving crusade.

Where next?

Living Marxism has seen the unfolding conflict somewhat differently. An editorial back in the December 1991 edition noted the early attempts by Germany and the European right to scapegoat the Serbs, and concluded that 'if the West's latest propaganda campaign is pursued to its ultimate conclusion, Serbia may well suffer Iraq's fate of being blown off the map'. That fate has been brought a step closer by the latest round of Western power politics being played out primarily at the Serbs' expense.

We were promised that a peaceful 'new world order', would follow the end of the Cold War. That new era began with the destruction of Iraq, and has now moved on to an attempt to crush Serbia. Where will the West's 'peace dividend' strike next? ●

The Labour Party has lost four elections in a row. Yet many of its leading supporters still say that, with just 'one more push', Labour can make it back to the top of British politics. Pat Roberts sees a rather bleaker future for a party trapped in the past

Political parties somehow manage to survive long after they cease to have any relevance to society. On the Continent there is a peculiar mixture of royalist and fascist formations run by very old men, which keep going of their own accord. In Britain, despite the 'strange death of liberalism' earlier this century, the Liberals have managed to preserve an organisational presence in mainstream politics.

It is one thing to survive, but quite another to represent something in society. This is the problem now facing the Labour Party. To be sure, Labour has a significant presence in mainstream politics in terms of MPs and percentage points in opinion polls. Yet it is now a party that cannot attract any new support. Despite all of the talk of 'modernisation', Labour is rooted in the past. It has no organic relationship with any of the key forces at work in contemporary society.

A century ago, the Liberals were the party of industry and commerce. Today they represent nothing. More recently Labour has undergone a similar conversion. Having once been a party which represented the interests of

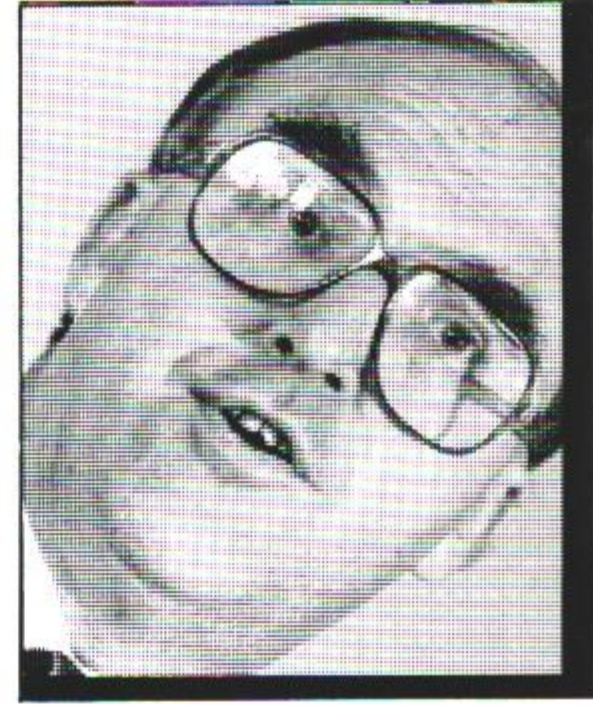
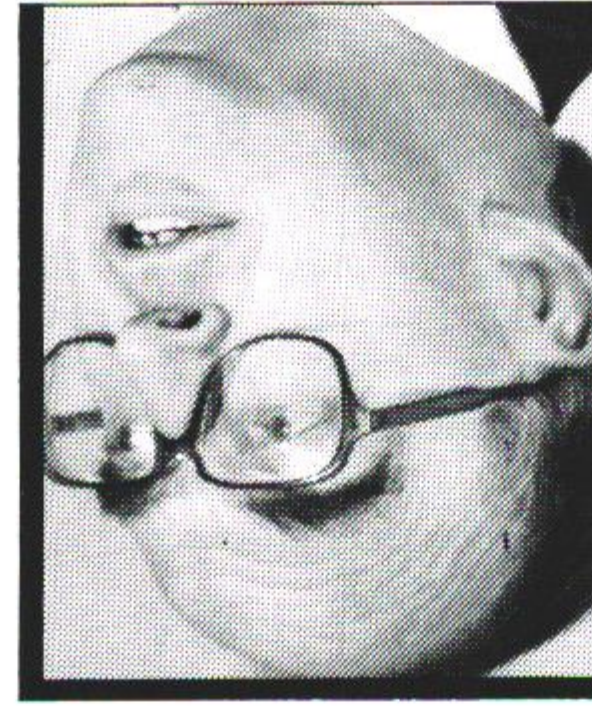
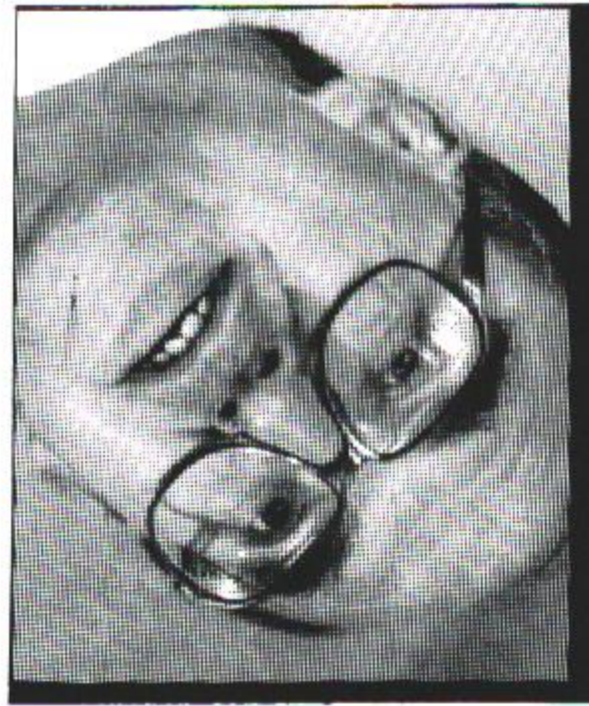
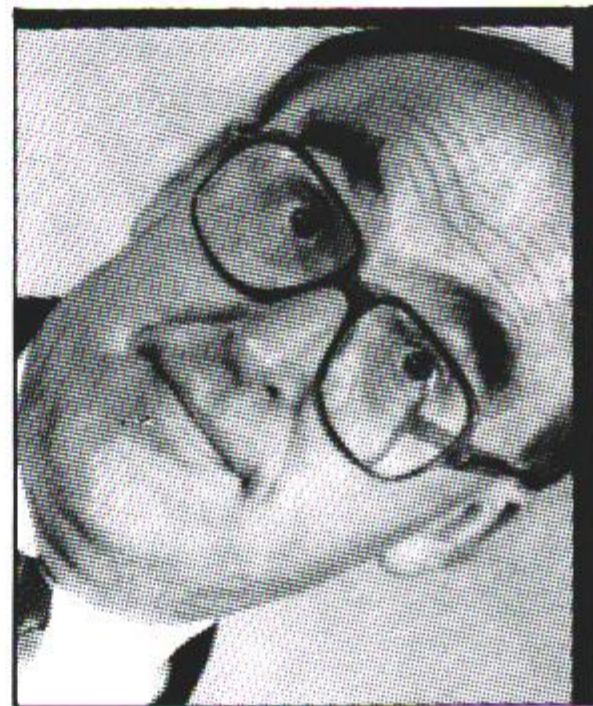
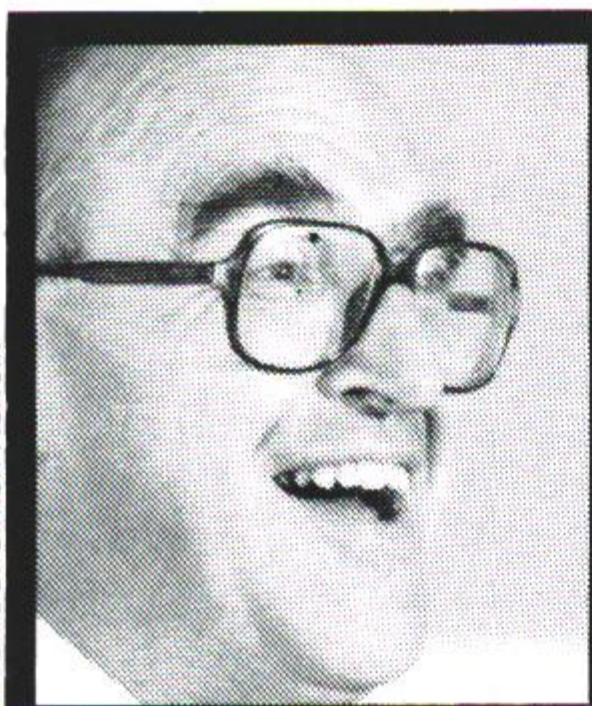
a distinct and important layer in society, the Labour Party has now become an empty electoral machine like any other.

The contest for Labour leader and deputy leader, which ends with the elections in July, has clearly indicated the present trends and problems. In the wake of their fourth consecutive electoral defeat, most members of the Labour Party establishment have been concerned to use the leadership campaign to emphasise that their organisation is no longer the Labour Party of old. This sentiment has been best expressed through the widespread criticisms and even denunciations of the party's connections with the trade unions.

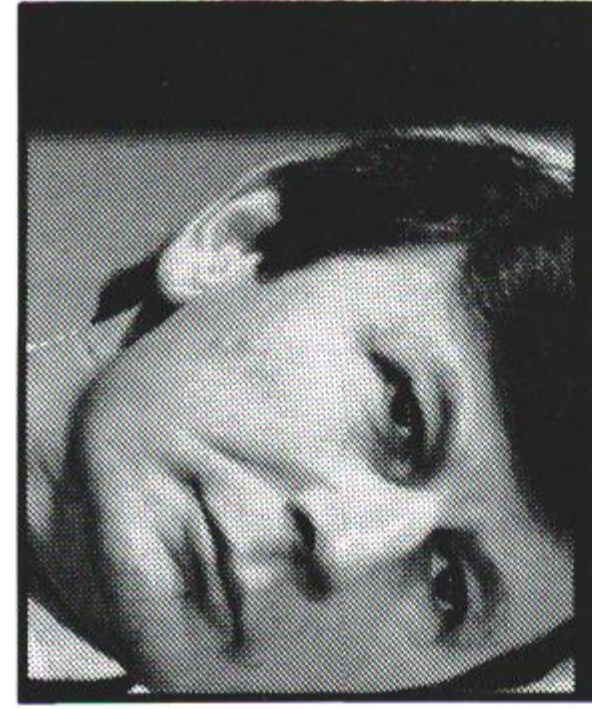
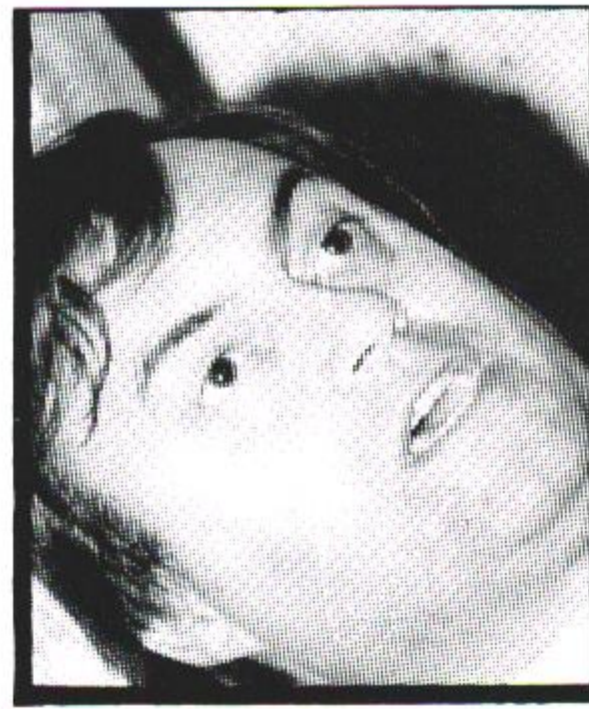
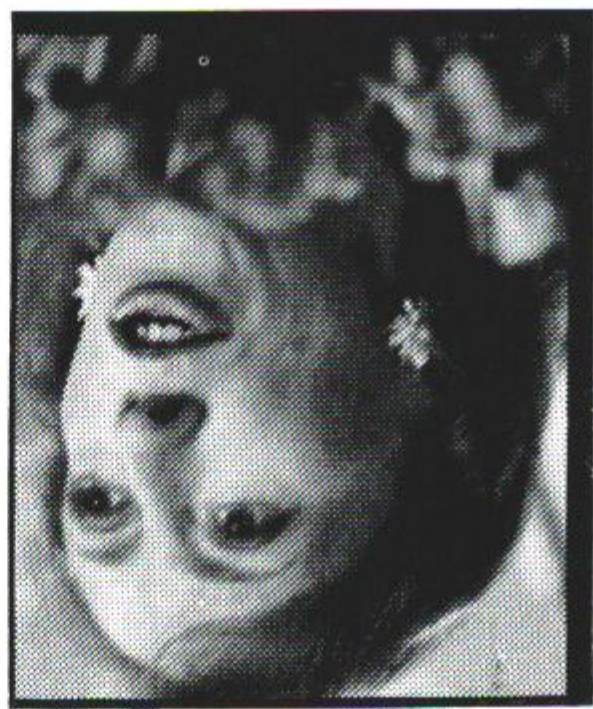
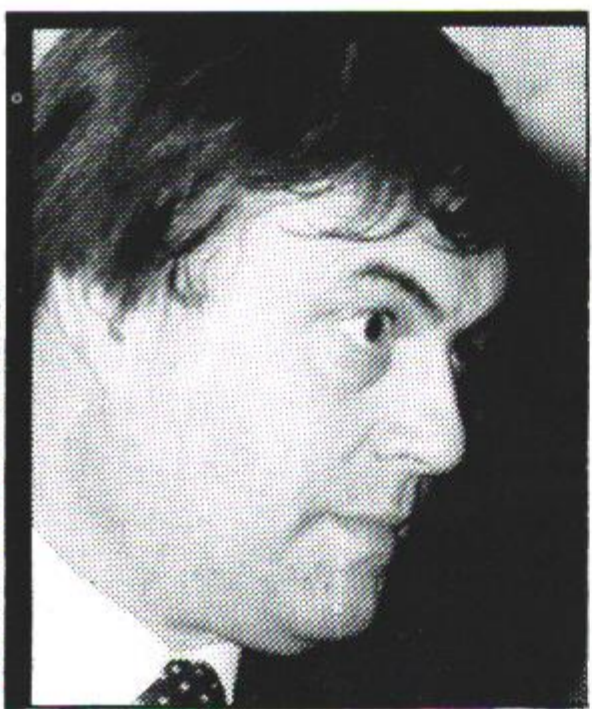
The almost casual fashion in which Labour's historic links with the unions have been attacked by leadership candidates, other MPs and even top trade union officials, indicates that these links must have little practical relevance for the life of the party. Yet in the first half of the twentieth century, the trade union connection was the key to Labour's emergence as a party of national standing and influence. If something as fundamental to the Labour Party's

A party without

PHOTOS: Simon Norfolk



PHOTOS: Pandora Anderson



traditional identity as its links with the unions is now negotiable, then everything must be up for grabs.

It is relatively easy to bury old traditions. It is much more difficult to forge new links with society. If the Labour Party is no longer the party of labour, then which forces in British society should it or could it represent?

In the past, Labour was a movement. A movement is a social force, an integral part of everyday life. The elementary aspirations of working class people, as expressed through trade unionism, provided the Labour Party with a dynamic that could not be ignored. This assured Labour of a permanent base of support, a supply of steady recruits and a cause which had mass backing.

Good old days

The real existence of this movement meant that Labour had to be taken seriously a long time before it became a major parliamentary party. Because it was representative of a movement, Labour often possessed a greater sensitivity to developments in society than either the Tories or the Liberals. Consequently, it often seemed to be

more in tune with popular aspirations than the other parties.

These attributes allowed Labour to become a viable political alternative. It became a major force in mainstream British politics. The first minority Labour government was elected in 1924. The first majority Labour regime took office in 1945. From the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, when Harold Wilson won four out of five general elections, Labour even appeared to have a legitimate claim to be 'the natural party of government'.

The wider labour movement, especially the trade unions, also became an important social institution in its own right. The bureaucracy which ran the labour movement was able to command significant support in society, and nothing important could be done without its agreement. In exchange for their cooperation in the running of British capitalism, the trade unions were cultivated and integrated into the management of the state.

As long as the Labour Party could mobilise and deliver the support of millions, it remained an indispensable part of the team which managed Britain. Whatever its electoral

fortunes—whether it won or lost—Labour continued to speak for a key section of society. Because of this, the officials at the top of the labour movement were powerful individuals, received with respect everywhere from Downing Street to Buckingham Palace. Whatever their personal shortcomings, they symbolised a movement in the ascendant. The feeling that they were moving forward at the head of something powerful provided these individuals with confidence and a sense of certainty about what they stood for.

Labour lightweights

Labour today is no longer a movement. A comparison of Labour leaders past and present helps to illustrate the difference between a real movement and an electoral organisation. Compare the Neil Kinnocks, Bryan Goulds and John Smiths of this world to the Ernest Bevens, Aneurin Bevens or even the Denis Healeys of the past. The present generation look like lightweight student union politicians when placed alongside the heavyweight sluggers of the old labour movement.

Today's Labour leaders are not only short on substance. They clearly lack any firm relationship to society. Where did Gould or Smith come from? Just to ask the question invites the answer. These are an arbitrary group of individuals. They may possess some talent and ambition, but are still just *individuals* without any connection to a broader movement or a class or anything significant in society.

The career pattern of current leading Labour politicians reveals the isolation of this group. Many of them are ►

a cause





indeed former student politicians and bureaucrats. In fact, the bureaucracy of the National Union of Students appears to have become the most important breeding ground for future Labour politicians. Alternatively, employment in a charity or a polytechnic seems to

Labour has become a competitor of the Liberal Democrats rather than a contender for government

be a desirable background for those aspiring to become a future Labour member of parliament.

The Labour Party used to represent a movement but is now run by a collection of individuals. In this sense at least, it is very similar to the Liberal Democrats. Since Labour has not been able to evolve a relationship with any significant section of contemporary society, it lacks social roots and political stability. Its political complexion depends on the subjective inclinations of individuals, who make up policies as they go along—as they demonstrated when adapting to pressure from the media during this year's general election campaign.

Of course, electoral calculations have always played a key role in politics. But a party that is driven entirely by such calculations is an inherently unstable formation. That is why a formally left-wing party like Labour could often end up appearing to be on the right of the Liberal Democrats during the general election.

The tradition of Labour probably still motivates a section of the older generation of working class people. But the political habits of older generations cannot sustain Labour indefinitely. Moreover, the explicit rejection of Labour's tradition by the party's own leadership ensures that it has nothing distinctive to offer to the electorate. As a result of these trends, Labour has become a competitor of the Liberal Democrats rather than a contender for government.

It is difficult to be certain whether or not Labour's trajectory into obscurity is irreversible. However,

it seems highly unlikely that Labour possesses the capacity to adapt to new circumstances and to reconstitute itself as a dynamic party. Aside from its loss of identity, it is too isolated to be sensitive to emerging trends in the outside world. Unable to relate to the contemporary concerns of working class people, Labour politicians' rhetoric of concern sounds like so many platitudes. Inevitably it fails to find any widespread resonance.

In May, the candidates for the Labour leadership and deputy leadership all turned up to address the annual conference of the Manufacturing, Science, and Finance union (MSF). An interesting encounter took place there. Of all the candidates, John Prescott seemed to receive the greatest applause from the union delegates. 'It is a sad reflection of the political climate in Britain today that it is necessary for me to say that I am proud to be a trade unionist', Prescott told the gathering. The MSF delegates loved it and gave Prescott a strong ovation.

Not trade unions

This exchange well illustrates the state of affairs inside the labour 'movement'. As Prescott implied, for most politicians trade unions are now an embarrassment. The union activists at the conference, who have been insulted and ignored so often in recent years, knew exactly what Prescott meant, which is why they embraced him with such affection. What they didn't seem to realise was that it didn't really matter what anybody said or did at the MSF conference. For the reason why Labour politicians can so easily ignore the wishes of organisations like the MSF is that the trade unions too have become institutions with little relevance.

On paper, as those delegates would no doubt be quick to point out, the British trade unions still have millions of members, constituting a far bigger section of the workforce than unions in other Western countries. But the large formal membership of British unions only obscures the real decline of this movement.

However many members they might have on their books, the fact is that the old trade unions no longer influence

people's lives. They certainly no longer inspire people or engage the interests of workers. This is why the once-mighty unions have been incapable of reproducing themselves in new industries or in the new towns in the south. They have a more active relationship with employers than with their own members.

The devastating truth is that what they call trade unions today are not trade unions at all, in the traditional sense of the term. They are organisational relics—or, in the case of the public sector, an administrative convenience for management.

Living in the past

The so-called trade unions don't mobilise or organise anybody. They certainly do not actively recruit. These days if you join the MSF, you will eventually receive a variety of leaflets from the union offering different personal and financial services. One of these leaflets offers you insurance against redundancy. The idea that the *union* itself ought to be the insurance against unemployment is obviously never entertained by the leadership of the MSF. But then what they administer is not really a trade union, not really a collective organisation for the defence of its members.

Like the Labour Party, the trade unions have become isolated from developments in modern British society. Led by industrial relations graduates, these institutions survive through living off the legacy of the past. Their only role today is to discredit further the meaning of working class action.

Many on the left look upon the decline of the Labour Party and the trade unions as a disaster. In the short term, the demise of the labour movement has certainly strengthened conservative prejudices in British politics. Yet those who want to challenge the way in which society is run surely have no reason to mourn the death of Labourism.

Get lost

The old labour movement didn't just represent the concerns of working class people; it acted to contain those concerns within the limits of what was acceptable to capitalism. One way or another, the removal of that restraint was always going to be necessary before anybody could start to create a new anti-capitalist movement.

The Labour Party has lost its identity, lost its way, lost its hold on a movement in society. It is imprisoned in the past and has nothing to offer for the future. The biggest contribution it could now make to the creation of an effective opposition would be to lose itself altogether. ●



Mind your language

You may well have missed an intriguing debate about definitions in Mind's in-house journal, *Mencap News*. At issue is the question of what you should call people who used to be described as 'having a mental handicap'. This term is apparently no longer acceptable as it has negative connotations, and the revisionists want *Mencap News* to change its name in line with the new thinking. This is easier said than done, since nobody seems able to agree on what would be an acceptable new label.

The term 'people with learning disabilities' now replaces 'mentally handicapped' in most official literature, including that of the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority. It's favoured by the radicals because it emphasises that there's a real person with real needs, not just a handicap. But the *really* radical people don't like the word 'disability', because it is 'value-loaded' and has negative connotations. Really radical people go for the term 'people with learning difficulties', which they see as altogether more positive as it implies that the problem can be overcome.

The Mind old guard have pointed out that 'people with learning difficulties' trivialises the problems faced by the mentally handicapped, because it implies that they are no different from kids who can't spell. Despite this objection, the *really, really* radical people have gone one step further along the road to obscurity by arguing for the term 'intellectually challenged'. This, they believe, has the virtue of 'not being negative at all'.

And they're right. The problem is that 'intellectually challenged' doesn't accurately or effectively describe the negative problems faced by someone with a mental handicap. I feel 'intellectually challenged' by *Living Marxism*—if it wasn't intellectually challenging I wouldn't read it. But that intellectual challenge has nothing in common with the problems of those whose mental handicap makes them incapable of understanding the magazine.

The whole point of this bizarre debate is to find some way of describing a problem without stigmatising it. It seems a rather pointless task. There is nothing inherent in a word like 'handicap' that gives it abusive connotations. Public attitudes to terms, words and phrases simply reflect the way that society views what they describe.

Most people view mental handicap as a condition they don't want to have, or to know much about. The condition is already stigmatised, and no amount of verbal wrangling will change that. The discussion around terms can only be a distraction from calling for the necessary facilities for those who suffer from (or care for someone who suffers from) the condition in question. But then, battles over terms are less bloody than battles for resources.

If these sorts of discussions were confined to matters such as the

name of the Mind journal it wouldn't be much of a problem. But definitional anguish is already a strong current in politics. At one excruciatingly tedious conference that I recently attended, the participants erupted into life at only two moments.

The first occasion was when a hapless woman referred to the 'underdeveloped world' instead of calling it 'the South'. 'Underdevelopment' is out of vogue because it apparently under-values 'the specific form of development pursued by indigenous populations of Southern countries'. This is at best ridiculous and at worst reactionary. The inferior living standards in the underdeveloped world will not improve because London conference-goers pretend to value them more highly. I say 'pretend' because, in all honesty, nobody can really think that the quality of life of a starving Ethiopian peasant is equal to that of a middle class Brixtonian.

The second *frisson* of rage was provoked when I referred to the need to campaign for women's right to abortion. The others weren't against abortion, but (as I was sharply informed) 'we don't talk about the right to abortion any more—we campaign for choice'. Choice is felt to be a better word because it avoids alienating the anti-abortion lobby, and supposedly better reflects the aims of 'our' side in so far as we all recognise the undesirability of abortion in an ideal world.

I resent this sort of verbal posturing. While it can be an expression of naivety and foolishness, it's usually a cynical attempt to avoid tackling a real social problem—such as what the West has done to what used to be called the third world. The concept of underdevelopment assumes that these economically backward countries have been prevented from developing. Consequently it begs the question as to who is responsible for holding them

back. The concept of 'the South', on the other hand, implies nothing more than a geographical location. We can pretend that we're all the same, just living a little differently in different places.

Likewise the rejection of the phrase 'right to abortion' in favour of 'right to choice' sidesteps the issue. Who could argue against 'choice'? It is such an inoffensive expression. But it is inoffensive because it's ambiguous. If we mean we think that women should be able to have abortion—let's say it. If people disagree, let's have the argument out and put our case convincingly.

I think there is a strong case for straight talking—for going against the current fashions, telling it like it is, and facing up to objections. It may seem a bit crude and unsophisticated to those who like to play with words, but that's their problem. At least people will understand what we're talking about. ●

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The Parachute Regiment's May riot through Coalisland in County Tyrone was no isolated incident. Fiona Foster reports

Fergal O'Donnell remembers the day his brother Kevin Barry came home early from a date and went straight to bed. Fergal wondered if he'd been stood up. The next morning he discovered why his brother had never made the date. 'I caught sight of his back as he came out of the shower. It was covered with round black and purple bruises. There wasn't an inch of white skin. Apparently it was a UDR patrol who'd used a rifle butt to beat him.'

Kevin Barry O'Donnell's beating at the hands of the Ulster Defence Regiment never made the news. Neither did the ordeal of their sister Roisin, assaulted by the RUC after a night out in Cookstown a while later. In May it was Fergal's turn to get a beating from the British security forces in his home town of Coalisland, County Tyrone. This time it made headlines.

Eight stitches

Fergal was beaten across the face by British paratroopers who had been stationed in Coalisland since before Easter. He needed eight stitches to a cut below his eye. In hospital with him were three friends suffering from gunshot wounds, after the Paras fired into the crowd which came to Fergal's defence. It was one of a series of controversial clashes between British soldiers and Irish civilians in Coalisland in May, which began with the Parachute Regiment rampaging through local bars and ended with the removal of the brigadier commanding the British Army in the region.

The unusual degree of media interest in the behaviour of one British regiment in Northern Ireland came in the wake of protests about the Paras' behaviour from the Catholic church, nationalist politicians, and even from local Unionist MP, Ken Maginnis. He is better known for publicly crowing about the SAS ambush in Coalisland earlier this year in which four IRA members, including Fergal's brother, Kevin Barry O'Donnell, were killed. When even Maginnis was moved to complain in parliament about the 'lack of courtesy' shown by Paras smashing up bars in Coalisland, it was guaranteed to force the story into the national news.

Fergal is cynical about the sudden interest in the problems of a small nationalist community that has been living with British Army violence since he was born, 23 years ago. 'Francie

Molloy, our Sinn Fein councillor, has been making protests about this same kind of stuff for years but no-one's ever taken any notice before.'

Fergal believes that a recent incident in Tyrone, where Ken Maginnis' nephew was allegedly mistaken for a Catholic and pushed around by the Paras, explains the MP's uncharacteristic protests. The Paras were also indiscriminate in their choice of targets, wrecking Coalisland's 'yuppie' bar and one used by the local pigeon club. 'If they'd kept to wrecking McGirrs bar where myself and all the young people drink it would never have hit the headlines', says Fergal. 'The only difference with the Paras is that, unlike the RUC and the UDR, they haven't a clue who's who.'

The media's attempt to explain the clashes in Coalisland as an isolated incident in which one regiment lost control fits into a familiar pattern of cover-ups. It's always the 'rogue' cop who lost his head and gunned down three men in a Belfast Sinn Fein office, or the few corrupt constables, insensitive judges and cheating scientists who jailed the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and Judith Ward. Now it seems the Paras are yet another exception to the rule of British fair play.

In reality, systematic repression is a fact of everyday life for many nationalists living under British Army occupation in Northern Ireland. In Coalisland it was not the Paras' behaviour but the outcry it provoked that shocked local people.

War zone

I visited Coalisland earlier this year, after the funerals of the four local IRA volunteers shot dead by the SAS as they made their escape from an attack on the imposing police and Army fortress that dominates the town. Before May, the town was best known in Britain as the starting place for the very first civil rights march back in 1968.

Many of the people I met in Coalisland were not even born when that civil rights march left their home town. Their whole lives have been lived in a war zone. According to Tony, now 21, 'if it's not the RUC, it's the UDR. If it's not the UDR, it's the squaddies. Just when you think things are getting a bit better they come at you with a vengeance.' Tony's brother was shot by British soldiers outside a youth club back in 1973. He was 17. In the

cul de sac where he lives four out of the five houses have lost a family member in this war. One, Tony Doris, was 21 when he was killed in another SAS shoot-to-kill operation last year. His body was so badly burned he could only be identified by his dental records.

Almost everybody has at least one tale of harassment. Gerard's was only two weeks old and he still had the scars to prove it. His sister's car had been stopped by a joint police/Army patrol. 'At first it was just the usual abuse, they were calling my sister a Fenian whore and a cunt and they made her open the boot. I stayed in the car until I saw them pushing her about then jumped out to tell them to wise up.' They ended up in the local barracks where Gerard's sister had to watch as five soldiers gave him a kicking. The police have since charged her with assaulting five soldiers.

Karl told me how his best mate had finally decided to leave for America after spending 32 days out of six weeks in the barracks. 'They're allowed to hold you for seven days with no charges or evidence, but they rearrested him at the gate and held him for another seven days. They never even gave him a change of clothes, he was sat for two weeks in this old boiler-suit.'

Is this normal?

Last year things got so bad that a group of women, all aged over 60, formed a committee to oppose the harassment of the town's youth. Tipped off that the police and soldiers were stopping people, the women would surround them and take down their numbers. 'It was great while it lasted', said Gerard, 'and things did improve for a wee bit, but they're back to normal now'.

For the young people of Coalisland, 'normal' means trying to go for an evening out in nearby Dungannon, and spending the night in the search centre at Aughnacloy after being detained at a checkpoint. Kieran described the routine. 'They put a Brit or a policeman in the car with you in case you decide to speed off, and then have a jeep in front and behind, a kind of convoy. The worst of it is they deliberately take a route through a few Loyalist towns, identifying you and your car to any paramilitaries.' At the centre your car may well be taken apart. 'No-one bothers getting a nice car because they know it'll be wrecked.'

'At Christmas', recalled Sean, 'I got tarded up five times and never made Dungannon once. I spent two nights in Aughnacloy search centre. I suppose the Brits resent being away from home at Christmas. Jesus, I'd love them to stay home all year round.'

The Dublin government, the Catholic church and the Social Democratic and Labour Party

all expressed concern about the 'counter-productive' effect of the Paras' action in Coalisland. One local priest spelled out the worry that young people would be driven into the arms of the IRA if the security forces were not brought under control. On one level this fear seems well-founded. Francie Molloy, speaking about Sean O'Farrell, one of the young IRA volunteers killed alongside Kevin Barry O'Donnell, described how the security forces had picked on Sean: 'They never seemed to realise that each beating made him hate them more and instilled in him a stronger determination to get them out of his country.'

But Molloy rejects the idea that the British government could somehow moderate the behaviour of the security forces. 'The harassment is part and parcel of British strategy. Whether it's here in Coalisland or West Belfast or any area where people vote republican, the British know that these people will settle for nothing short of an end to British rule. As such they have nothing to lose by sticking the boot in and I suppose ultimately they hope that ever more repression will break the will of the people.'

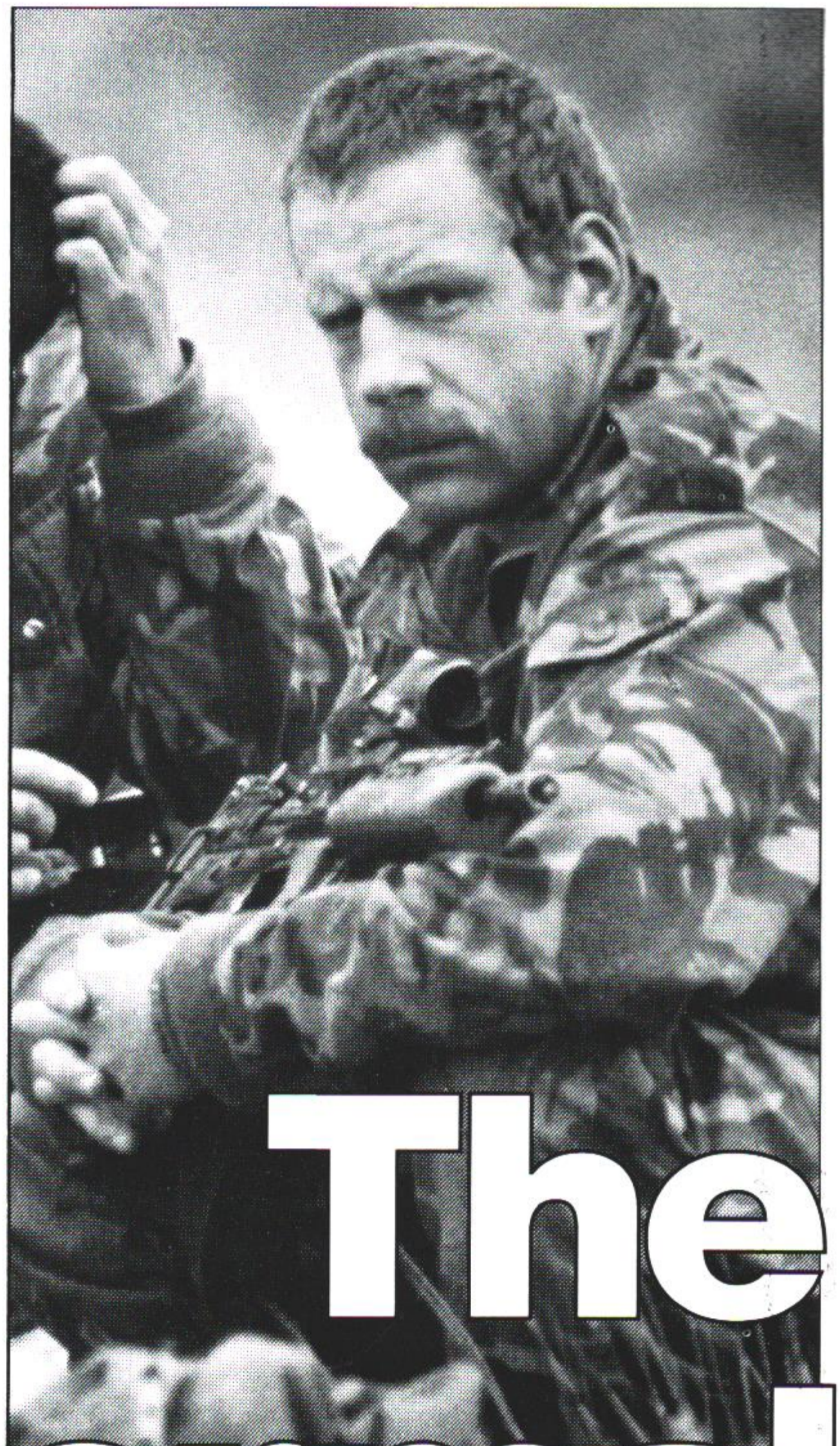
British strategy today seeks to pressurise and isolate further the core of republican supporters. When John Major met representatives of all the parties in Northern Ireland except Sinn Fein for crisis talks earlier this year, Unionist MPs jubilantly announced

that Major had promised a new crackdown on the IRA. Within a week four young Coalisland men had been shot dead by the SAS.

The general election defeat of Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams in West Belfast, and the overall drop in the Sinn Fein vote, has encouraged the authorities to hope that an increase in harassment will further demoralise the war-weary republican communities. The paratroopers who ran riot in County Tyrone seem to have got the message about the government's strategy, even if they got a little mixed up about exactly who they were supposed to harass.

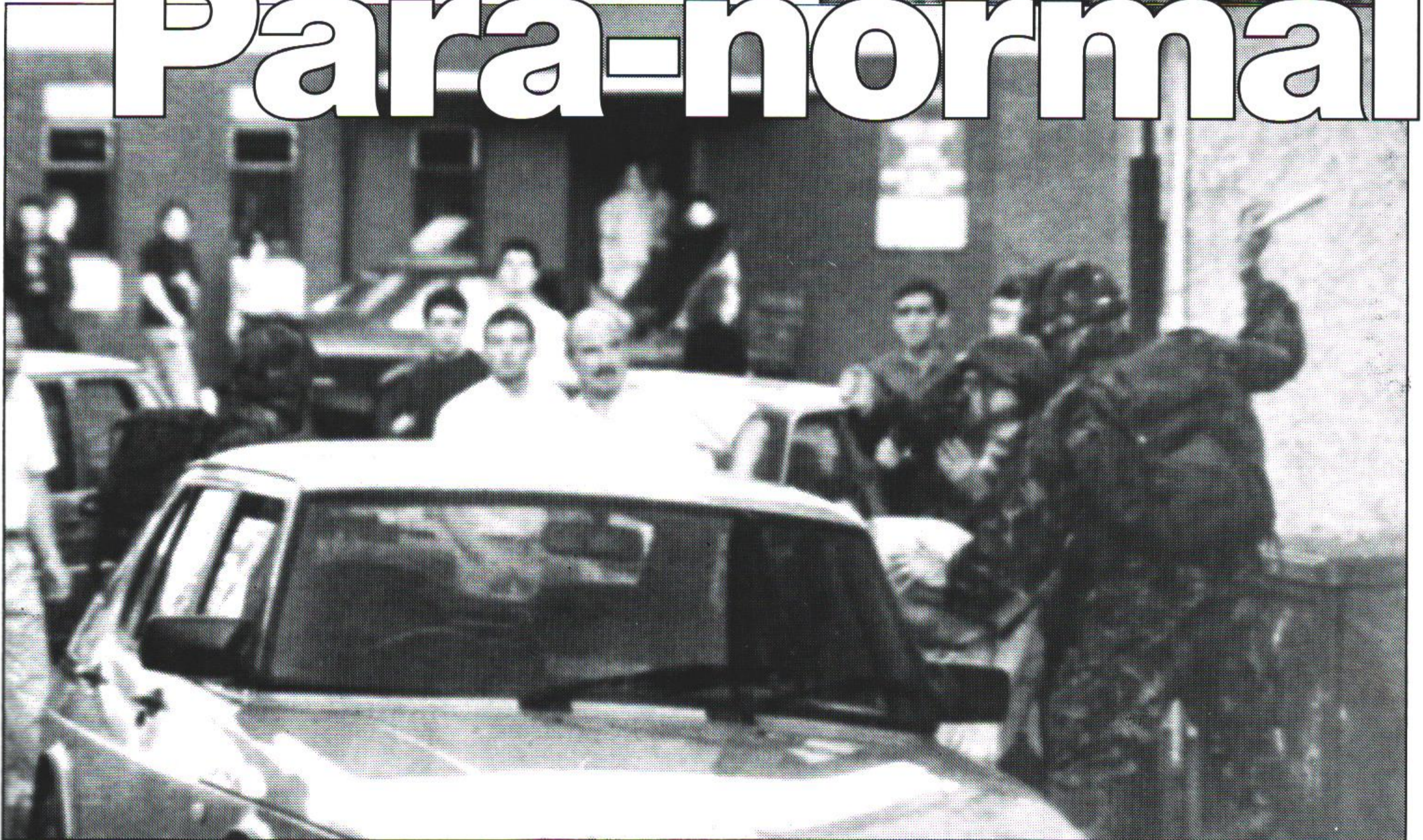
Carry on

The republican core might be more isolated today. But, as the youth of Coalisland demonstrated by standing up to the Paras, that core remains a pretty hard one. One young Coalisland man caught the mood of those determined to carry on the fight against British rule. 'Obviously when we see our friends being killed we have to ask ourselves whether it's worth it. We have to ask whether if we stop now can we expect the British to say, right, they've stopped, let's give them what they want, their freedom with justice; or can we expect them to say, right, we've beaten them, now let's stick the boot in even harder? All the evidence proves they'd do the latter, so we have no choice but to carry on.'



The

Para-normal



The American way of life

As the supreme court prepares to endorse new restrictions on abortion, Ann Bradley looks at the issue of the unborn in the USA

In 1980, Ronald Reagan made a presidential pledge that he would appoint to the US supreme court justices who would 'respect the right to all life in their decisions'—in other words anti-abortionists. Twelve years later America is suffering the consequences. The supreme court is now packed with self-confessed reactionaries who claim to respect the life of the unborn child, and oppose women's right to abortion. Out of nine justices only two, John Paul Stevens and Harry Blackmun, have a record of supporting liberal abortion laws.

Women's rights campaigners are worried that the supreme court is determined to over rule the constitutional right of a woman to abortion in the early months of her pregnancy. And they fear that the impending judgement on Pennsylvania law may provide it with the chance it has been waiting for.

Please Mom, may I have...?

In July, the supreme court will deliver the verdict on a battle between Planned Parenthood of South East Pennsylvania and governor Robert Casey. Nobody doubts that the ruling will effect current interpretations of abortion law throughout the USA, and nobody seriously doubts that the result will be to impose some further restrictions on access to abortion. The question is, how extreme will the change be?

The new law backed by governor Casey does not seek to ban abortion outright, but it does make it far harder for a woman to get one. The law insists on a mandatory waiting period before the operation is performed, and demands that the doctor instruct his pregnant patient on the stage of development of her fetus. Unmarried teenage girls will be unable to get an abortion without the consent of at least one parent or a judge. A married woman must provide her doctor with a sworn statement that her husband has been informed of her decision to abort 'his' child.

It is obvious that this Pennsylvania state law contradicts the supreme court decision of 1973, on which existing federal abortion law is based. In a case that became known as *Roe v Wade*, the supreme court ruled that the 'right to privacy...is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy. The detriment that the state would impose by denying a woman this choice is apparent'. Too true.

However, the court also ruled that this right to privacy was not absolute and had to be balanced against the state's 'important interests in

safeguarding health, in maintaining medical standards, and in protecting potential life'. It resolved this problem by curtailing a woman's right to abortion as her pregnancy progressed. For the first three months of the pregnancy her right to privacy was understood to be paramount, by the final trimester the right to life of the fetus took precedence.

US abortion law has been celebrated, especially by abortion rights campaigners in Britain, as a model of good practice. In fact, it is nothing of the kind. Women may have the right in law to abort an early pregnancy, but rights mean little if you are unable to exercise them, and the last decade has brought the systematic dismantling of state-funded abortion services in America.

Sometimes the rundown of abortion services has been accompanied by legal challenges. In 1989, a review of the Missouri state law ruled that states can impose restrictions on abortion as long as they are not 'an undue burden'. Just what constituted 'an undue burden' the supreme court declined to define, but it allowed Missouri to restrict the use of public money, medical personnel and facilities for abortion. More often, cuts in abortion facilities have passed almost unnoticed. It was not considered an issue for the supreme court when Reagan insisted that funding designated for Medicaid—the American version of a public health service—could not be used for abortion purposes.

Aborting 'the underclass'

It is unlikely that the supreme court will do as the 'pro-choice' activists fear and use the Pennsylvania case to overturn *Roe v Wade*. It is far more likely that the Pennsylvania case will be used to shore up the Missouri decision, allowing states to hinder women from getting abortion on request while leaving intact some, increasingly limited, abortion provision.

If *Roe v Wade* is overturned, individual states would have the right to ban abortion altogether. Despite the pro-life rhetoric of the supreme court, this is not what the American establishment wants. A constitutional endorsement of

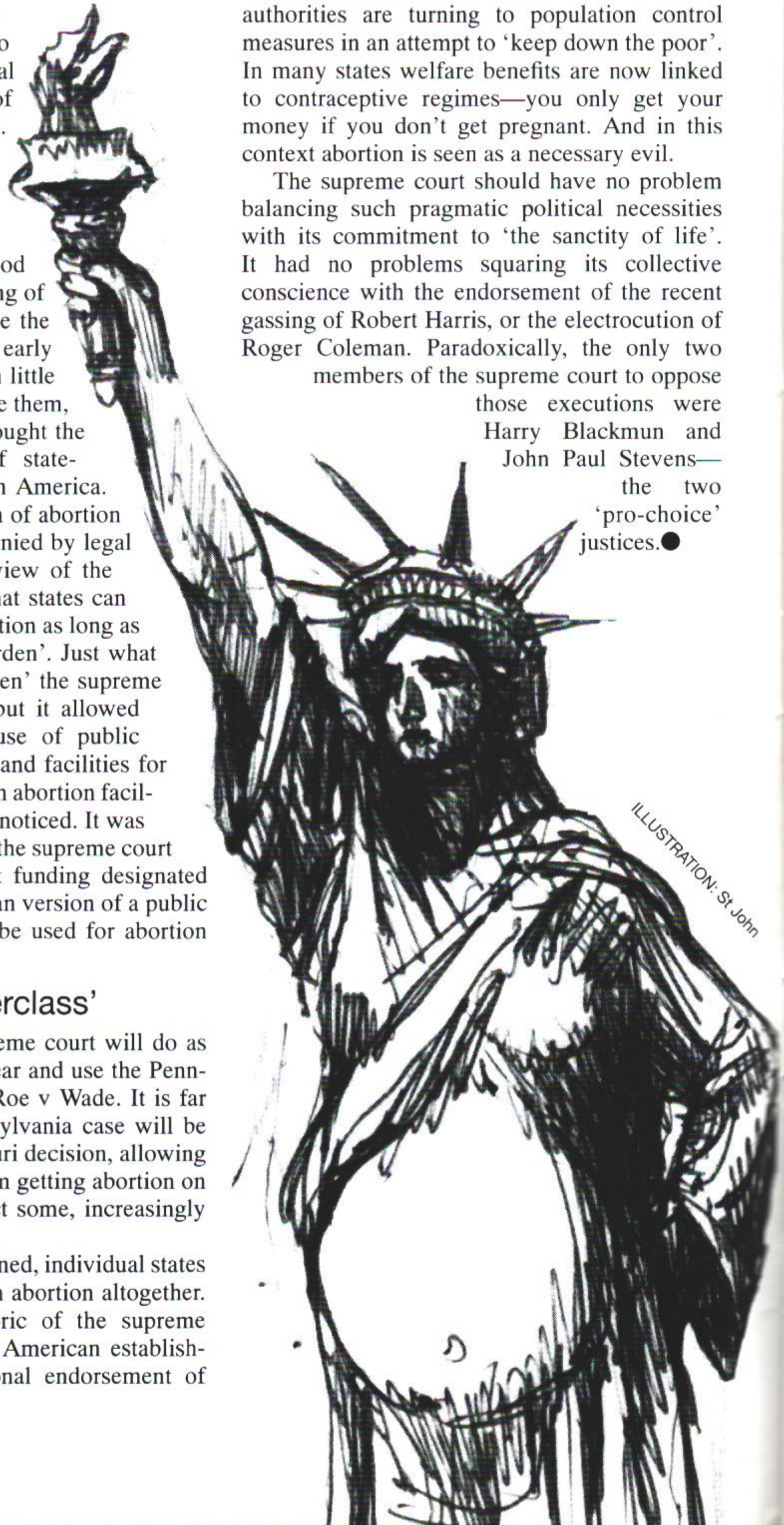
bans on abortion has the potential to whip up considerable public anger with possible destabilising consequences.

The majority of Americans are opposed to state bans on abortion. In April in Washington, a million people demonstrated against the Pennsylvania restrictions. The Democratic Party has picked up on this mood. All of the leading candidates for the Democrats' presidential nomination claim to be 'pro-choice', and the party has pledged to go into the election campaign with a commitment to *Row v Wade* on its platform. A Republican-dominated supreme court is unlikely to want to stir up the issue any more than necessary—at least until the presidential election is over.

Furthermore, even some of those who claim to be pro-life are uncertain about restricting abortion. Their horror at the rising number of abortions in the USA is balanced by a concern about the growing number of blacks, Hispanics and poor whites on welfare—those whom the authorities label 'the underclass'. The American authorities are turning to population control measures in an attempt to 'keep down the poor'. In many states welfare benefits are now linked to contraceptive regimes—you only get your money if you don't get pregnant. And in this context abortion is seen as a necessary evil.

The supreme court should have no problem balancing such pragmatic political necessities with its commitment to 'the sanctity of life'. It had no problems squaring its collective conscience with the endorsement of the recent gassing of Robert Harris, or the electrocution of Roger Coleman. Paradoxically, the only two

members of the supreme court to oppose those executions were Harry Blackmun and John Paul Stevens—the two 'pro-choice' justices. ●





Aids panic in disarray

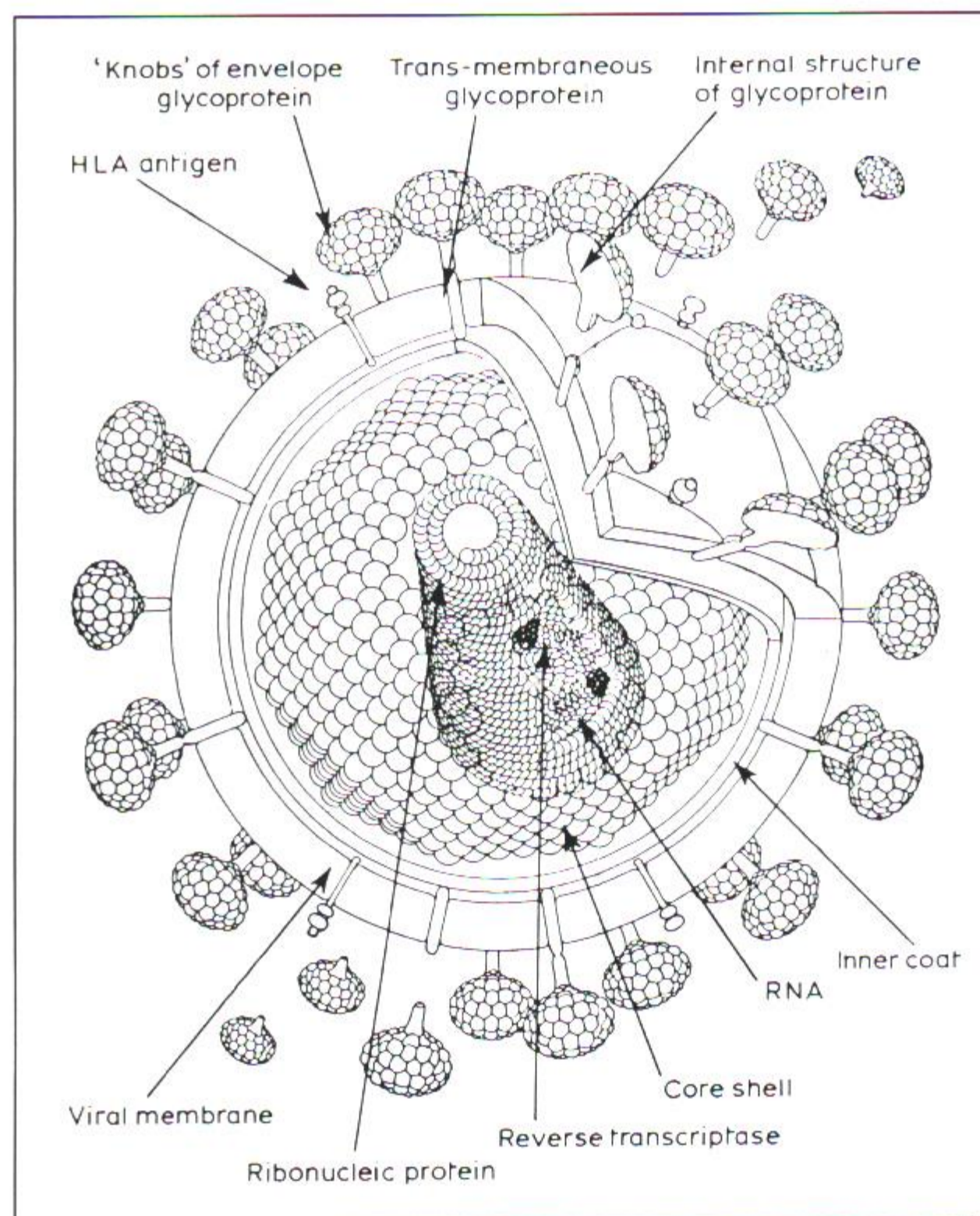
For five years the fear of an Aids epidemic among heterosexuals in Britain has gripped the nation. But now figures showing the slow rate of spread of HIV over a decade, and reports of experts questioning the link between HIV and Aids, are creating growing scepticism about the Aids panic.

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick is co-author of *The Truth about the Aids Panic*, which first exposed the irrationality of the official campaign as far back as 1987. Here he surveys the new challenges to the Aids orthodoxy and the official response

The danger of an imminent and large-scale heterosexual epidemic of Aids in Britain has been the central theme of the vast wave of Aids propaganda that has engulfed British society since 1986. Despite the fact that more than 80 per cent of Aids cases have been among gay men, the concern to focus attention on the supposed threat to heterosexuals has united the government, the medical profession, the burgeoning Aids establishment, and even the gay lobby and the left. Yet, after 10 years of Aids in Britain, the figures confirm that the heterosexual explosion has not taken place and is not likely to happen.

Reports published by the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) show that, of around 5000 cases of Aids notified in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between 1982 and 1991, some 400 were thought

to have acquired HIV infection through heterosexual contact. However, 80 per cent of these were infected abroad, largely in countries in Africa where heterosexual transmission is the most common mode of infection. Some 10 per cent (designated as 'first generation' cases) became infected from contact with recognised high-risk partners, mainly intravenous drug



abusers and recipients of infected blood products. The remaining 10 per cent ('second generation'), a total of 47 cases, were infected by heterosexual partners outside recognised high-risk categories in Britain.

The incidence of heterosexual Aids outside high-risk categories is running at a rate of a handful a year. The parallel figures from the CDSC for individuals who are HIV positive by 'second generation' contact are 131 out of a total of 15 000. It is worth noting that though there has been a slow but steady increase in 'second generation' heterosexual Aids cases, reports of parallel HIV positive cases declined between 1990 and 1991. The results of anonymised surveys conducted at antenatal and sexually transmitted disease clinics confirm the low prevalence of HIV outside known high-risk groups and people who have been sexually active in Africa.

A number of important points follow. First, the Aids epidemic in Britain is not following the African pattern of rapid heterosexual spread, facilitated by other sexually transmitted diseases and prostitution. Second, the much-vaunted 'bridges', provided by bisexual men and drug abusers, between currently infected

communities and the heterosexual world are carrying very little traffic in Britain. Indeed, the prevalence of HIV among British drug abusers remains low. The CDSC's April Communicable Disease Report concludes that 'current evidence does not suggest that the American pattern is occurring here'.

Whatever is happening in Africa, south-east Asia, the USA, or even in southern Europe, in Britain Aids remains an uncommon disease. At the end of its first decade it is still remarkably closely confined to recognised high-risk categories. Despite all the scares, among British heterosexuals who do not conduct their sexual relations in sub-Saharan Africa, Aids is very rare. For the vast majority of British people the risk of HIV infection is roughly on a par with that of being struck by lightning.

Moral crusade

Why has the British government chosen to launch the biggest and most costly public health campaign in history to alert the nation to what is, for most of the population, a non-existent threat? We gave our answer in *The Truth about the Aids Panic*, when the government campaign was launched, and reiterated it in a recent article in the *Guardian*:

'The government's Aids panic is not a public health campaign at all, but a moral crusade. It is a means of promoting sexual and moral conformity by manipulating public fears about a rare but fatal disease. At a time of economic recession and social crisis, conventional morality and traditional family values provide a much-needed source of cohesion and stability. Aids has provided the most effective vehicle for the drive to restore Victorian values in the Britain of Mrs Thatcher and her successors. The breadth and depth of the consensus around 'safe sex', even when its irrationality has been exposed, is a testimony to the fact that for the government the Aids panic is worth every penny spent on it.' (10 April 1992)

While in 1987 the consensus around the Aids panic held firm, today experts in the Aids field are openly critical of the government's 'safe sex' campaign. Dr Caroline Bradbeer, genito-urinary consultant physician at St Thomas' hospital says that 'the idea that everybody is equally at risk is nonsense—and it is a waste of money telling people that' (quoted in the *Sunday Times*, 1 March 1992). The more the true pattern of the spread of HIV/Aids in Britain becomes apparent, despite all the attempts to obscure it and the numerous statistical scams used to exaggerate the scale of second generation heterosexual spread, the more people come to question

the official campaign—and the more, too, the establishment's ulterior moral purpose is exposed.

Rearguard action

The exposure of the myth of the imminent explosion of heterosexual Aids in Britain has provoked a defensive response from the Aids establishment. Dr Anne Johnson, first lieutenant to professor Michael Adler, commander-in-chief of the British Aids panic, devoted a lengthy editorial in a recent issue of the *British Medical Journal* to a rearguard action:

'Preoccupation with second generation transmission reflects concern about the possible size of a purely heterosexual epidemic in the British population who do not inject drugs. But getting caught up with this issue gets us nowhere. We cannot regard the heterosexual British population as isolated from the drug-injecting population or people from other countries.' ('Home grown heterosexually acquired HIV infection', *BMJ*, 2 May 1992).

But we are preoccupied and caught up with the issue of second generation heterosexual spread because, for five years, the government, backed all the way by doctors like Adler and Johnson, has bombarded the public with propaganda emphasising this very issue.

New metaphysics

Now that the figures confirm the absurdity of this preoccupation, those who promoted it seek to direct attention elsewhere. While many Aids commentators try to keep alive the heterosexual scare by raising the spectre of Bangkok, Mombasa or New York, Johnson prefers an obscure parallel with the spread of syphilis in fifteenth-century Europe. Her assertion of intimacy between heterosexuals and members of high-risk groups has the metaphysical quality of Donne's 'no man is an island'. The epidemiological evidence of a decade confirms that, apart from a few unfortunate cases, the heterosexual British population is indeed isolated from HIV-infected drug abusers and foreigners.

A key distinction affecting the pattern of HIV spread is that between 'random' and 'assortative' sexual contact, as examined by RM Anderson and RM May in a recent article ('Understanding the Aids pandemic', *Scientific American*, May 1992). In demonstrating the role of mathematical models in grasping the spread of HIV, the authors emphasise the different pattern that results if it is assumed that members of a particular society engage in sexual contact in a random manner (anybody

may have sex with anybody else) or in an assortative manner (people have sex only within closely circumscribed social groups). The projected epidemic is much worse with random mixing as the infection spreads through the whole population.

Though Anderson and May are largely concerned with Africa, it is striking that the 'everyone is at risk'

heterosexual spread. It is no doubt true that in the small print of official reports lower as well as higher estimates can be found. But what is striking is the consistency with which the media and the politicians extracted the higher figures and broadcast the bleakest doomsday scenario for general public consumption. We cannot recall angry letters to editors from Johnson

were, however, united in condemning the transformation of the HIV/Aids hypothesis into a dogma, the censorship and distortion of alternative theories and the suppression of funding for research into such alternatives. Whatever the scientific merits of Duesberg's case, which are certainly debatable, there can be no doubt that he has exposed the climate of irrationality that surrounds the whole issue.

Shaken up

The Duesberg challenge, partly supported by Luc Montagnier, the French discoverer of HIV, and by a number of other distinguished scientists, has shaken the Aids establishment. He has been denounced by the secretary of the Medical Research Council for 'irresponsibility bordering on the criminal' for dismissing the contribution of safe sex to the prevention of Aids. The government's chief medical officer Kenneth Calman could only bluster that Duesberg's thesis had been 'extensively discussed and refuted in both the scientific and lay press' without seriously engaging the argument himself (*Sunday Times*, 24 May 1992).

Though Duesberg and the rest are a destabilising element in the Aids world, their emphasis on drugs, homosexuality and other 'deviant' behaviours means that this position on Aids can be contained within the wider moral panic. In the short term, however, the Amsterdam conference has contributed to the wider climate of questioning of the Aids panic, and to the growing backlash against the Aids establishment.

Forward ever

In conclusion, it is important to emphasise that, although the Aids panic has lost momentum and its promulgators are currently in disarray, it is likely to persist at a lower level of intensity. The government and many other backers of the Aids establishment have invested too much in the Aids scare to allow it to collapse. When David Frost confronted Virginia Bottomley, the newly appointed health secretary, with the passage from the article in the *Guardian* quoted above on the moralistic character of the government campaign, she made clear that the government intended to continue promoting the panic despite diverse public expressions of scepticism. Facts alone will not stop the panic, but they are a start in mobilising resistance against the atomising and demoralising impact of the fears and insecurities generated by the Aids panic.

Elderly married couples in Hull do not commonly engage in partner-swapping weekends with inner-London heroin addicts

notion promoted by the government in Britain encourages the prejudice that rapid random spread is the likely course of the epidemic. In reality, of course, British society is characterised by a highly assortative mode of sexual interaction. Elderly married couples in Hull do not commonly engage in partner-swapping weekends with inner-London heroin addicts. Young people in Ipswich are not likely to have dates with HIV-positive Ugandan refugees; even in London, the legendary inhospitality of British society ensures that most foreigners keep to themselves. Nor are straight East End teenagers inclined to mix much with the West End gay scene.

Like partners

Anderson and May draw out the prospects for HIV in a society in which most people have sex with people like themselves:

'If mixing patterns are highly assortative, an approach aimed at high-risk groups is particularly worthwhile. It may even turn out that the rates of sexual partner change in the general heterosexual population are insufficient to maintain the transmission of HIV.'

A rational assessment of the likely pattern of HIV spread in Britain suggests a much less gloomy scenario than that universally painted by the panic promoters. It also suggests an approach to containing the spread diametrically opposite to that followed by the government and its medical advisers—targeting high-risk groups rather than trying to terrify the entire population.

Dr Anne Johnson now pleads that earlier official forecasts emphasised *uncertainty* rather than indiscriminate

and her colleagues demanding more balanced reporting. Indeed Adler, in particular, was always ready with a quote hyping up the heterosexual threat, with never a hint of uncertainty in his voice.

Saved by syphilis?

Now the figures are out, all is uncertain, it is much too early to tell: 'it is as erroneous to arrive at conclusions in the early 1990s about the eventual prevalence of HIV as it would have been to expect fifteenth-century epidemiologists in the decade after the introduction of syphilis to predict its devastating impact throughout Europe in subsequent centuries.' Once again, syphilis to the rescue! Here its role is to enable Johnson to move the goalposts: we never really suggested apocalypse today or even tomorrow, but perhaps in the next century, or in Johnson's epochal perspective, 'the next millennium'. The Aids panic is now sustained by the argument that 'we don't know what might happen in the future, but we can't be too careful'. According to this logic, everybody should stay at home in case they get run over by a bus, or perhaps, you never know, hit by a meteor.

Aids and Amsterdam

Another challenge to the prevailing Aids orthodoxy comes from professor Peter Duesberg and other scientists who assembled for an 'alternative' Aids conference in Amsterdam last month. Duesberg refutes the view that HIV is the cause of Aids, emphasising the role of recreational drugs such as poppers and crack. Others at Amsterdam accepted that HIV plays some role in the genesis of Aids, but only in association with 'cofactors' such as other infections. They

The Aids establishment

Though Aids remains an uncommon disease in Britain, the government's promotion of the Aids panic has spawned a sizeable bureaucracy. Tessa Myer investigates the Aids establishment



There are about 2000 people with Aids living in Britain. Though current treatment regimes have prolonged life expectancy from 12 to 18 months on average, more than 500 people are dying every year from Aids. This is a tragic loss of life, especially as it largely affects young people. Yet it is important to see the disease in perspective: 10 times as many people, also often young, die every year in car accidents. Workplace accidents and occupational diseases kill three times as many people as Aids each year. More than 2000 people die every year from other infectious diseases.

Family values

But Aids is not just a disease. It is also the focus of a moral panic, the vehicle for the government's crusade for a return to traditional family values. One result of the special status of Aids is that people with the disease tend to be treated in special units and hospices. They are patronised by film stars, pop singers and royalty and receive the attentions of an army of professional and volunteer Aids workers. It seems that for every person with Aids there is now at least two Aids professionals. However, the majority of professional Aids workers are not engaged in caring, but in what is called prevention, which means in practice promoting the government-sponsored panic.

Aids is a fashionable charitable cause. Just as in the past middle class do-gooders tried to save the London poor or the starving of Africa, they now turn the same combination of guilt, voyeurism and sanctimoniousness to the issue of Aids. The rapid expansion of government spending on Aids, together with the ready availability of charitable donations raised through showbiz events or discreet approaches to big companies and prosperous individuals, has turned the safe sex bandwagon into

a gravy train. The Aids establishment provides opportunities for self-advancement to numerous individuals from doctors to erstwhile gay radicals. The result has been the emergence of a parasitic bureaucracy that feeds off the fear and suffering caused by Aids. It devotes its energies to promoting the government's campaign as a condition for its self-perpetuation and advancement.

Aids quangos, or 'service organisations' have proliferated to such an extent that there are now meta-quangos, such as the National Aids Trust, which are largely concerned with coordinating other Aids organisations. Though the panic is less than a decade old, there is already a generously endowed 'Aids Social History Programme' based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. In her recent account of 'The early years of Aids in the UK', the programme's deputy director, Victoria Berridge, traces the convergence of doctors, politicians, civil servants and the gay lobby in a 'policy community' at the Department of Health in the early 1980s (see T Ranger and P Slack, *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*). These diverse forces were united in their commitment to 'a clear policy line—the danger of a heterosexual epidemic'. When, in 1986, the government declared the equivalent of a 'wartime emergency' on the Aids issue, transforming it from a departmental concern into a focus of national mobilisation, they sought to consolidate their position in the emerging Aids machine.

Career move

Berridge indicates how doctors working in the 'Cinderella speciality' of genito-urinary medicine seized the opportunity to 'come in from the cold' and make their field a 'primary career option'. The future of epidemiologists at the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre, which had been uncertain, was secured by the need for close surveillance of the spread of HIV and Aids. While the debate over the possible closure of one of the central London teaching hospitals continued, the Middlesex, Westminster and St Mary's built up specialist Aids units to provide a new source of prestige and a means of attracting funds. On the other hand, though the Terrence Higgins Trust had participated in the early private discussions of the 'policy community', by 1986/87 it was already being pushed to the sidelines because of the government's desire to avoid too close a public association with the gay scene.

Five years later, though the number of cases remains small, Aids has

become a new medical speciality, offering promising careers to newly qualifying doctors. According to Department of Health figures, 1500 medical and nursing staff are now engaged full-time in caring for Aids patients. Unlike most other areas of medicine, the Aids sector is flush with funds for clinical and laboratory research. There are now several specialist Aids journals, the number of published medical articles on Aids is approaching 50 000 and visitors to the medical department of Dillons bookshop in central London can browse among 250 titles in the Aids section.

Foot soldiers

While doctors and others involved in caring for people with Aids may be legitimately accused of empire-building, of exaggerating the scale of the epidemic and 'shroud-waving' to attract funds, at least they are providing a useful service. It is doubtful whether the same can be said for the much larger body of people involved in promoting 'HIV awareness'. These workers, the foot-soldiers in the Aids crusade, are employed in a network of teams and committees sponsored by health authorities, local councils and voluntary organisations. Their work involves disseminating Aids publicity and propaganda, counselling and training, running courses in workplaces and schools. They organise periodic conferences and events to mark 'World Aids Day' on 1 December. The London Borough of Hackney's Action on Aids team celebrated this occasion in 1990 by appearing outside the town hall 'dressed in costumes ranging from a 10-foot condom to a multi-ethnic penis' (Health in Hackney, *Annual Report*, 1990).

Publicity shy

It is striking that, though Aids professionals are adept at manipulating the media, they are themselves publicity shy. Despite the plethora of Aids literature and handbooks there is no centralised data on the numbers involved in this wing of the Aids establishment. However, by studying the unpublished reports on Aids services submitted by district health authorities to the Department of Health under the terms of the Aids (Control) Act 1987, it is possible to piece together the national picture. Surveying in detail the Aids network in two city areas—Hackney and Manchester—gives some insight into the roles of different agencies.

In February 1989 the Department of Health asked every health authority to appoint an HIV prevention coordinator, and 70 per cent of authorities have complied with

this request. The coordinators are responsible for developing a local Aids prevention strategy, for supervising its implementation and for liaising with local authorities, voluntary groups and other bodies. Though health authority reports record separately staff engaged in medical/nursing care and those engaged in prevention/promotion, in fact there is a considerable overlap. Many doctors and nurses share in Aids propaganda work by giving lectures and courses; some Aids prevention workers are also involved in providing practical support to people with HIV and Aids. However, our global estimate of the numbers involved in prevention treats these as two distinct categories. This gives a total for Aids prevention workers employed within the UK health service of 1739.

Urban profile

The tables on Manchester and Hackney (overleaf) provide a profile of the Aids prevention establishment in two urban areas, where the total numbers

of full-time workers are at least 24 and 12 respectively. In addition to the health authority teams, the local councils also employ a substantial number of Aids prevention workers. At the council level, Manchester maintains a top-level group of information officers and administrators and a centralised Aids unit. Hackney organises its Aids prevention work through its 'central training section' and its 'health promotion unit'. Both councils also employ Aids prevention workers in their social services and education departments. Inner London is better resourced by voluntary organisations. Aids workers in the council and voluntary sectors can be divided between those engaged in community care functions in relation to people with HIV or Aids and those engaged in prevention, though as with health authority workers there is often a considerable overlap. Our survey suggests that there are on average three prevention workers for every two community care workers. ►



Fashionable morality: David Bowie performs The Lord's Prayer at the Freddie Mercury concert

MANCHESTER

Health Authorities

- 1 Regional Aids coordinator
- 1 HIV prevention officer
- 1 Assistant
- 3 HIV prevention coordinators
- 2 HIV trainers and 6 part-time trainers
- 2 Health promotion HIV/Aids workers
- 1 Administrator
- 2 Assistants
- 3 Part-time workers

Council

- 1 HIV coordinator
- 2 Public education officers
- 1 Education administrator
- 2 Administrative workers
- 1 Information officer

Aids Unit:

- 1 Aids unit coordinator
- 1 Environmental health officer

Education:

- 1 HIV/Aids worker

Social services:

- 1 Training officer

Total on prevention work:

24 full-time and 9 part-time.

Voluntary organisations

20 including Manchester Aids and Education Group, Body Positive and Manchester Aidsline.

On the basis of the Manchester and Hackney surveys, we have made a conservative estimate that the total number of Aids prevention professionals employed by councils in Britain is around 270, concentrated in London and the metropolitan councils

Aids volunteers

There are some 300 voluntary organisations involved in Aids in Britain. These range from prestigious national institutions like the Terrence Higgins Trust, which now has a paid staff of 50, divided evenly between those engaged in caring and those in 'information and education', to groups like the Christians in Hackney Aids Initiative, which has no paid staff and relies on volunteers. Another big Aids organisation is Aids Care Education and Training (ACET), a Christian body which runs a homecare network and a major programme for schools. It has 40 full-time staff and many volunteers. The London Aids hospices—the Mildmay Mission Hospital and the London Lighthouse—offer training, education and consultancy services as well as providing residential, home care and day care. According to one survey, around a third of Aids voluntary

organisations have no full-time staff. Most groups, however, operate out of a small office with one or two paid staff. Our conservative estimate of the total number of full-time workers in the voluntary sector engaged largely in preventive work is 560.

Zero groups

Most Aids organisations are concerned either with raising the HIV awareness of a particular section of society— young people, drug users, prisoners, ethnic minorities—or with providing support for a particular group of people with HIV/Aids. One illustration of the irrationality of much of the work of Aids prevention is the preoccupation of some Aids professionals with targeting groups in which the prevalence of HIV is low, if not zero. The Black HIV/Aids Network has produced an information video in Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu, Cantonese and Swahili. The Hackney Action on Aids team organised a conference last year for the local Turkish/Kurdish community, many of whom are recent immigrants and refugees at little risk of Aids, but in constant distress as a result of poverty, poor housing, racism and threats of deportation. Other groups have set about making Aids propaganda available to people who are blind or deaf or mentally handicapped. It seems that in the view of the Aids professionals missing out on the safe sex message must be considered the gravest discrimination.

Pulling together the numbers of Aids prevention workers employed by health authorities, local councils and voluntary organisations, we estimate that there are at least 2500 people engaged full-time in this sphere. It is important to emphasise that this is merely the hard core, the regular army of the Aids crusade. Much of the work of these Aids professionals is devoted to recruiting a wider network of informal and irregular forces who can disseminate the safe sex orthodoxy much more effectively. The more astute Aids activists have targeted their efforts at professionals like doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers who are in positions to influence others. The result is that the official line on Aids is relayed to the public via the Aids establishment and its periphery in such a way as to promote a powerful consensus on the issue.

From the top

So far we have concentrated on the rank and file of the Aids establishment. But to get a fuller picture we need to take in the forces coordinating the Aids panic at a national level. When the government decided to throw its full weight behind the Aids scare in 1986, the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, set up a cabinet committee to

oversee the campaign. This committee has continued to coordinate the efforts of other government departments through the 'inter-departmental group on Aids'. The Department of Health is advised by its 'expert advisory group on Aids', which now supervises a range of subcommittees on different aspects of the epidemic. The department's 'Aids Unit' monitors prevention and funding. The 'all-parliamentary group on Aids' keeps MPs informed of developments. Top level think-tanks focusing on education, local authorities, prevention, etc, produce regular reports proposing strategies for dealing with the epidemic.

Aids elite

A number of other national bodies play an important role in shaping official policy on Aids and in directing the work of the Aids establishment. At an early stage in the epidemic the British Medical Association launched its Aids Foundation, sponsored by Wellcome, manufacturer of AZT the drug widely used to delay the progress of HIV infection. The Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives have set up a joint Aids Nursing Forum. Even the TUC has set up a special committee to coordinate trade union initiatives on Aids. The Church of England's Board of Social Responsibility has taken a close interest in the Aids campaign, as have the other major churches. The National Aids Trust—patron the Princess of Wales, director Margaret Jay, chairman professor Michael Adler, trustee Robert Maxwell (oops!)—is the directors' box of the Aids voluntary organisations. To the myriad little groups it offers resources and guidance, management advice and a fund-raising consultancy. To the elite of the Aids establishment it offers access to the corridors of power and, no doubt equally important to them, the chance to meet Princess Di and the showbiz stars.

TV transmission

One of the most powerful organisations in the Aids field is the Health Education Authority (HEA), which now employs 15 full-time workers on its 'Aids and sexual health' programme. In its 1991 annual report the HEA claimed a major breakthrough:

'We at last succeeded in overcoming a most persistent obstacle: the disbelief in the significance of heterosexual transmission of HIV, which had been sustained for many years by a small but vocal group of influential people.'

This achievement against vocal but unnamed opponents was attributed to the impact of the HEA's television advertising campaign—'TV campaign

of the year'—featuring personal testimonies of heterosexuals with HIV.

The media has played such a key role in promoting the Aids panic that journalists must be considered an important component of the Aids establishment. From the icebergs and tombstones adverts to the Freddie Mercury concert, television has popularised the official line. In the press, journalists have built careers relaying the quarterly press releases from the Department of Health and instant quotes from the senior figures in the Aids establishment.

Self-delusion

One of the ironies of the Aids establishment is that many of its members believe that, far from preaching a repressive moral line, they can use the safe sex campaign to promote a more imaginative approach to sex and sexuality. This view is popular on the radical wing of the Aids establishment, among gay activists and veterans of the left.

But it is a self-delusion arising from an inability to perceive the true balance of forces between conservative and radical influences both in the Aids establishment and in society at large. At a time when broad social and political trends have created a climate of insecurity, the Aids panic has encouraged a wave of irrational fears. The result is a deepening sense of atomisation in society, a general strengthening of reaction and a retreat of the left.

Banana condoms

In this climate it is not necessary for the government or the key figures in the Aids establishment to beat the drum about family values. They can afford to take a relaxed view, let the Aids activists distribute condoms and the Terrence Higgins Trust display its erotic posters and even allow a free vote in parliament on reducing the age of consent for homosexual acts. They are happy for the gay movement and the left to talk to one another in London pubs and clubs. Meanwhile, in schools throughout the country, ACET, the government's favourite Aids organisation, takes the lead. According to its latest annual review, parents and governors who may not favour official videos and literature about Aids, 'very often...are pleased to invite ACET in as a church-based agency'. Last year 24 000 'pupils' got the safe-sex line from this church-based agency. We can safely assume that they heard more about chastity, monogamy and fidelity than they did about the joys of banana-flavoured condoms and non-penetrative sex.

Loss of confidence

Despite the triumphant claims of the HEA, over the past year the growing evidence of the slow rate of heterosexual spread in Britain has provoked questioning of the usefulness of much HIV/Aids prevention work both from outside and within the Aids establishment. There have been revelations of large-scale underspending of moneys allocated for HIV/Aids services and the redirection of funds to other areas of the health service. These shortfalls reflected the inability of Aids workers to cope with the rapid expansion of funding in the late 1980s. The redirection of funds results from the fact that, because of the slow spread of HIV in Britain, demand is less than supply in the Aids field. The opposite is the case in the rest of the health service.

Unpublished health authority reports to the Department of Health reveal the widespread perception of a tension between the emphasis on the danger of imminent heterosexual spread and the reality of a low incidence of HIV cases. Trent, Oxford, North West Thames and

West Midlands authorities expressed concern at the credibility gap arising for HIV prevention work:

'It is already proving difficult to sustain interest in districts of low prevalence, even amongst NHS staff let alone the general public.' ('Aids Control Act report', Trent RHA, 1991)

A certain loss of confidence within the Aids establishment has led to internal conflicts, exacerbated in the voluntary sector by the pressures of being in continual competition for funds. There has been mounting criticism of the affluent image projected by much of the Aids scene. Aids professionals are generally well-paid and cultivate a well-dressed, well-groomed look. Aids organisations outdo one another in producing elegantly designed and lavishly produced leaflets, posters and brochures. They have comfortable offices, tastefully furnished and decorated. For leading activists there is the special treat of the annual world Aids conference, held in places like Florence, San Francisco or Amsterdam and described by the *Financial Times* as 'a cross between a US political convention and a soap company's sales trip' (31 August 1991).

One expression of the crisis in the voluntary sector has been the shift of prominent gay activists, such as Edward King of the Terrence Higgins Trust, away from the consensus that the Aids establishment should emphasise the risk of heterosexual spread and play down the reality that more than 80 per cent of cases are among gay men. This was always a cynical and opportunist strategy that risked intensifying the anti-gay backlash. Now that this is beginning to happen and gay organisations are being squeezed in the quest for funds, they are hoping to win support by campaigning openly on behalf of the groups most affected by Aids in Britain. A new organisation—Gay Men Fighting Aids—has been set up. It seems likely to prove too little, too late.

After a decade of subordinating the cause of gay rights to the safe sex campaign, some activists are calling for the 're-gaying' of Aids. In fact what is required is the depoliticisation of Aids, by separating an infectious disease, requiring care and treatment (and research), from a moralistic campaign. The fight against Aids would however be greatly advanced by re-politicising gay oppression, separating the struggle for equal rights for lesbians and gay men from the issue of Aids. The disappearance of the Aids establishment would mark an advance towards both a rational response to Aids the disease and the ending of gay oppression. ●

HACKNEY

Health Authorities

1 HIV/Aids coordinator

Action on Aids Team:

1 Coordinator HIV education
1 Administrator
4 Health promotion workers

Mildmay Mission Hospital:

1 Head of education
1 Publicity manager

Council

Central Training Section:

13 Part-time trainers on HIV prevention

Health Promotion Unit:

1 Group environmental health manager part-time
1 Administrative officer part-time
1 HIV/Aids health promotion coordinator part-time
1 HIV/Aids health adviser part-time

Social Services HIV support team:

1 Team leader
1 Administrative worker

Women's Unit:

1 Part-time job

Press, Publicity and Information Unit:

1 Part-time job

Black HIV/Aids Network:

1 Development worker

Total on prevention work:

12 full-time and 19 part-time jobs

Voluntary organisations

14 including Body Positive Women's Group, Christians in Hackney Aids Initiative, Positively Children

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sponsored by

Towards 2000

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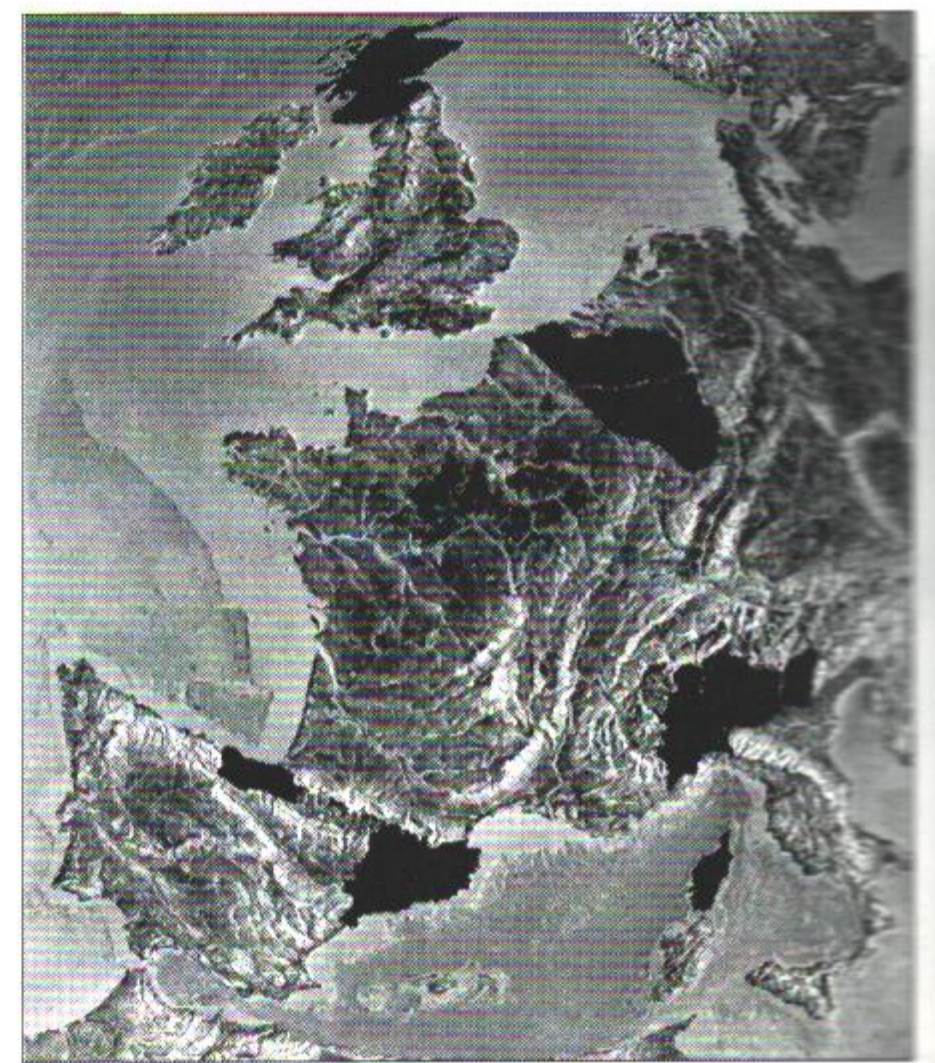
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No sooner has the West celebrated 'the death of communism', than it discovers that there is another spectre haunting Europe. From Italy and Spain to Belgium and even Britain, the legitimacy of established nation states is now being called into question. Adam Eastman explores the causes of this crisis of national identities



Europe is suffering a national identity crisis. While nobody is quite sure what is causing this disorder, the symptoms are there for all to see.

The most striking manifestation of this crisis is the proliferation of separatist movements across the continent. In Belgium, the integrity of the nation state is threatened by the demands of the self-governing regions of Flemish-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia. In Italy, where the nation state has always stood on shaky foundations (see page 30), the northern regional leagues are becoming a force in the land. In Spain, the assertiveness of the regional nationalist parties in Catalonia and the Basque country is helping to undermine the authority of Madrid. Even in Britain, the most stable of nation states, the mood of Scottish nationalism reflects the waning legitimacy of Westminster.

Political fringe

Another symptom of Europe's identity crisis is the spectacular collapse of the old political order. The parties which ruled Europe in the postwar years are in turmoil. In Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and elsewhere, the electorate has rejected both government and opposition parties and embraced minor parties from the political fringe. The far right—from the Freedom Party in Austria to the Front National in France—has benefited most from this rejection of the mainstream parties. Parties championing regional autonomy or independence have also picked up support.

The fact that these difficulties are afflicting all countries at the same time suggests that there is some problem common to all the states of Europe.

Furthermore, it seems clear that these are not temporary difficulties: the ruling elites of Europe are suffering a fundamental crisis of purpose and direction. Europe's national identity crisis suggests that the established political order is close to exhaustion. But why?

Past and present

It has already become something of a platitude to say that the root cause of all these problems is the rebirth of a strong sense of national pride. 'What we are witnessing', declared the leading British foreign policy journal, *International Affairs*, 'is no more than the latest of the periodic waves of ethnic nationalism that have swept different parts of the world since the early nineteenth century' (HD Smith, 'National identity and the idea of European unity', January 1992).

The dominant motif in this discussion is the return of the past to haunt the present. Commentators in the West are casting worried looks over their shoulders, at the ethnic conflicts which are now fragmenting the states of Eastern Europe. They claim that these are the result of age-old nationalisms which have been unleashed by the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and warn that similar tensions are re-emerging from history in the nations of Western Europe.

What nationalism?

This view may now have acquired the status of common sense, but it is simply not true that traditional nationalism is on the increase, or that the patterns of the past are being repeated. Many of the new parties of the European right are at least as chauvinist, exclusivist and anti-foreign as the old nationalist

parties—but unlike them they are characterised by a rejection of the nation states created in the past and their representatives.

The Northern League is a model in this respect. There is a good reason why it is not called the 'Italian League'. Its defining feature is its hostility towards other Italians, specifically southern Italians. In similar fashion, the Flemish Bloc is not so much a group of Belgian nationalists as a coalition of people united by their dislike of the French-speaking Walloons.

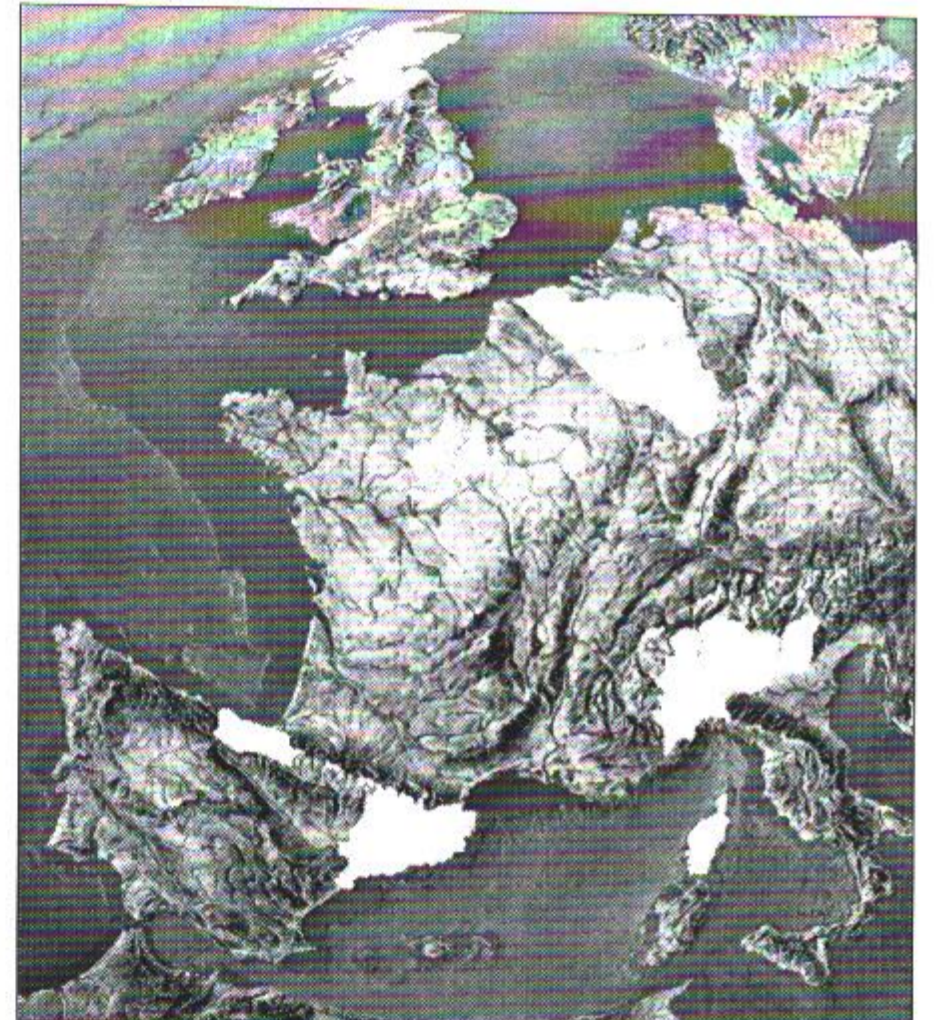
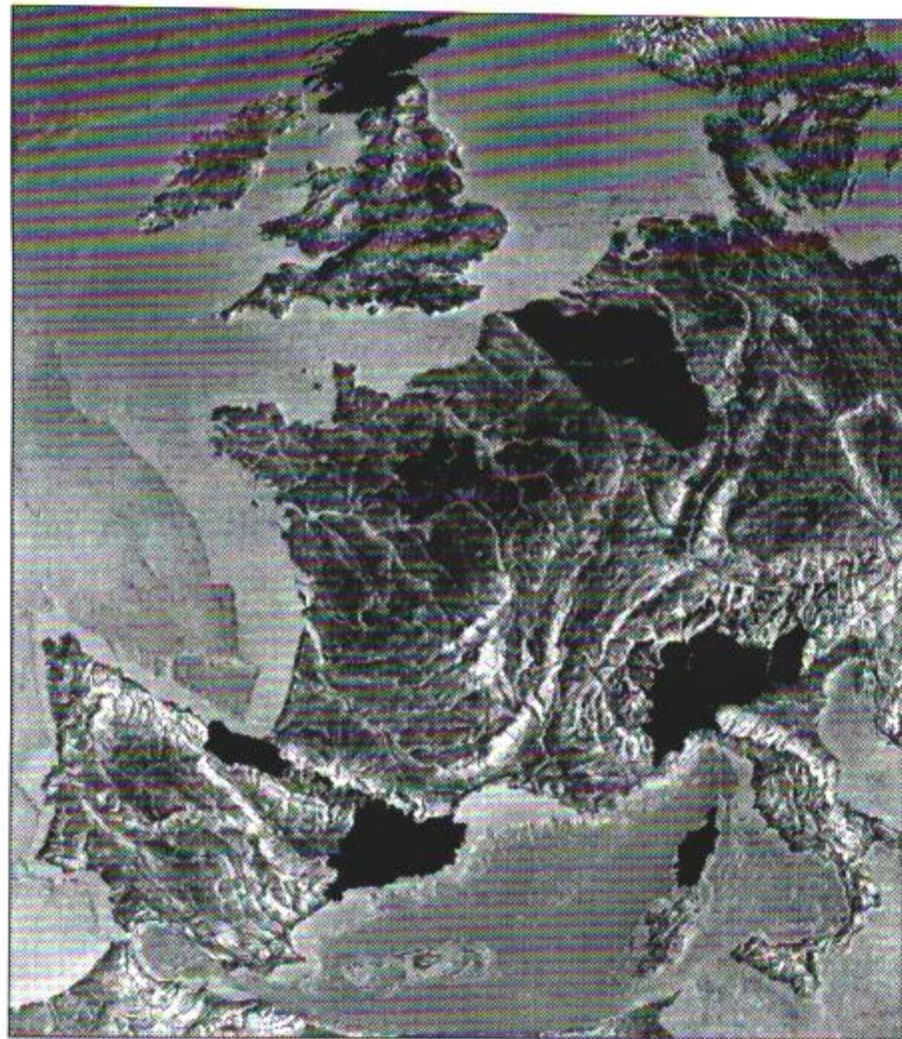
Rather than a resurgence of nationalism, Europe is witnessing a reaction against the particular nation states and national identities which were once seen as viable. The old nation states no longer command the same authority or legitimacy, and many people no longer feel that they owe them the same allegiance.

Italian, me?

Contemporary developments suggest that traditional national identities were never very strong in the first place. The ease with which people in the Tyrol have stopped thinking of themselves as Italian, and started thinking of themselves as Austrian, shows that the old national identities never meant all that much. Increasingly, they are being replaced by a new identification with a particular region or locality.

The trend towards regionalism across Europe represents a search for a new identity that means something to people. It contains no positive dynamic in any direction: it expresses neither a love of one's neighbours nor a hatred of one's nation. On the contrary, it is a negative reaction against a status quo which seems to have little to offer.

These developments are something ►



Europe's national identity crisis



new, not simply a repetition of what happened in the past. After all, people don't usually get on with their neighbours, let alone form a party with them. Living next door to somebody or speaking the same dialect as them have not been the traditional criteria for determining people's political allegiances. Yet today this is how more and more people in Europe are expressing their identities.

In the recent past, the strength of nationalism has been sufficient to check more parochial tendencies. Now, however, an identification with the nation state does not appear to have much going for it. What has changed? It is not people themselves who have

The trouble is that Western 'democracy' no longer looks so democratic without Soviet 'totalitarianism'

changed. It is not the case that nation states across the continent have suddenly had to cope with the unleashing of an inclination towards petty parochialism among their populations. What has changed is that the old nation states are less capable of commanding the allegiance of their peoples.

The whole of Europe seems to be asking itself the question, 'what do we really represent?'. And an increasingly common answer seems to be 'not a lot'. For some, such national identities as 'Britishness', 'Frenchness' or 'Italianness' no longer mean very much, in circumstances where the economies, institutions and cultures of these societies have less appeal than they once did.

Not natural

National identities are supposed to be natural, or so we have always been told. Yet now it is clear that there is nothing natural or permanent about an identification with a particular nationalism or nation state.

Fundamental questions are being asked about whether there is any meaning to the idea of being British rather than Scottish, or an Italian rather than a Lombard.

The fact is that traditional national identities can be called into question in this way because they are artificial constructions, created by capitalism as a way of binding people together under the authority of a national elite. The problem facing the rulers of Europe today is the absence of any systematic means through which

a wider coherence can be imposed upon society.

The question is why has this happened now? More particularly, why has it happened just when the West is meant to be celebrating its triumph over communism?

Pyrrhic victory

Ironically, winning the Cold War has turned out to be something of a Pyrrhic victory. During the Cold War era, all of the difficult questions about European societies and what they stood for were suspended. The Western authorities were able to insist that the battle against communism came before all other issues. With the end of the Cold War, and the removal of the Soviet bogey as a focus for Western politics, the capitalist societies of Europe have been forced to look in on themselves. Many have concluded that it is not a pretty sight.

The Cold War served as an antidote to the discrediting of capitalist nation states at the end of the Second World War. After the bitter experience of depression, fascism and war, many had concluded that there was nothing noble or positive about nation states and nationalism, which they identified with the chaos and destruction which engulfed the continent and culminated in the horrors of the Holocaust.

In effect, through the anti-communist crusade of the Cold War years, capitalism created a new identity for itself. Western societies had little to commend them, but the elites were able to cohere a sense of purpose using the cement of anti-communism. As long as the Soviet Union stood as the epitome of all that was bad, the West could look good by comparison.

Out in the open

It was inevitable that the end of the Cold War would cause major problems for the European elites. Because of the removal of the Soviet threat, problems which could once be hidden are now exposed for all to see. Now, instead of pointing the finger at the negative example of the Soviet Union, capitalist society is having to stand on its own merits—at a moment when it is experiencing the worst economic slump since the thirties.

Recent elections in the nations of Europe have not focused on the old issues of the Cold War and the 'red menace', but have been much more a self-examination of the system itself. Hence devolution not defence became the big issue in the British general election in April.

The trouble is that Western 'democracy' no longer looks so democratic without Soviet 'totalitarianism'. This is illustrated by the crisis now facing the Christian Democrats in Italy, the leading party in

Italian politics throughout the Cold War era. A party whose appeal rested on its claim to be the embodiment of Catholic anti-communism has fallen apart since being deprived of its *raison d'être*. Without anti-communism, the Christian Democratic Party is more easily seen for what it is: a highly corrupt patronage machine which has ruled by buying votes and intimidating opponents—neither very Christian nor democratic.

No big ideas

Even at the best of times, capitalist society has experienced a problem of social cohesion, whether it is expressed in class conflicts or in anti-social behaviour such as delinquency and dropping out. But when the ruling elite is unsure of itself, and has lost its bearings as badly as it has today, the problem of social cohesion is magnified. That is why there is a greater sensitivity on the part of Europe's intellectual and political elites today to the absence of any great principles or big ideas which can galvanise society.

However, the identity crisis now gripping Europe is more serious than a lack of big ideas in high places. The combination of the end of Cold War politics and the arrival of economic slump means that governments now lack anything with which to pull people behind parties, churches and other stabilising national institutions.

In such a situation, politics becomes a far more arbitrary affair. This explains why small parties can suddenly come from nowhere to pose a challenge to established institutions; or why local movements which were a minor irritant in the past can no longer be ignored by the powers that be.

Home or away?

The Olympic Games in Barcelona provides a good illustration of the point. Out of the blue, the Olympics have become a problematic issue within the host nation itself. This is ironic given that the Games have traditionally provided a focus for national rivalries between outside states. In Barcelona, however, the Games have also become the focus for Catalan nationalists to advance their claims to a separate national identity.

They have threatened to disrupt the Games unless their demands—that the Catalan anthem be played during the opening ceremony and that the Catalan flag should be raised whenever a Catalan competitor wins a medal—are met. Once, such agitation would not have been a problem. But those who could previously be brushed aside as petty grumblers can no longer be ignored. The question being posed in Barcelona is 'will Spain be playing at home or away?'. ●



Vichy or not Vichy?

Richard Christiansen reports from Paris on a war crimes trial that raises controversial questions about France's past and future

This decision ends up rehabilitating the Vichy regime in brushing aside the fact that the French Milice was the twin brother of the German Gestapo.' That was how one lawyer greeted a French court's April decision not to prosecute Paul Touvier, the former head of the Lyons Milice brigade, for 'crimes against humanity' committed during the Second World War. The case has fuelled the current French controversy over the role of the puppet Vichy regime, which governed wartime France under German military occupation. It is a controversy with serious implications for deciding what modern France stands for and against.

Touvier was first officially reprieved by the French authorities in 1971, as a gesture to the Germans who did not want the embarrassment of another war crimes trial. He was arrested again in 1989, barely 18 months after the trial of Klaus Barbie, on similar charges, had become the focus for renewed anti-German hysteria in France. It seemed that dragging Touvier out of the history books once more for his collaboration with the 'Bosch' was another attempt by the French authorities to alert public opinion to the dangers of resurgent German power in Europe today.

Hidden history

From the start, however, Touvier was bound to be a problem. Unlike the Gestapo-chief Barbie, Touvier was a Frenchman. His Gestapo-style organisation was set up by French police chiefs and judges, many of whom are still alive, and some of whom are still serving. And he had been hidden for 45 years by the Catholic church. Putting Touvier on trial seemed sure to highlight the hidden story of how various arms of the French establishment had collaborated with the Nazis.

The Touvier controversy has come to symbolise the contradictory pressures on the French establishment as it seeks to define its national identity today.

The French right needs to rehabilitate the Vichy regime somehow. The discredit which it acquired through its wartime collaboration with the Nazis has been largely responsible for the weak and divided state of the right in France over much of the postwar period. Settling scores over Vichy is vital if the French right is to rise to power again.

At the same time, however, the right and the wider French establishment are also under pressure to keep their anti-German credentials intact. Hostility to Germany has been a major component of French nationalism for well over a century, and remains a powerful banner behind

which the authorities can rally support. From this perspective, the traditional view of the Vichy collaborators as traitors to France remains important.

The Touvier case was to be a calculated gamble to establish how far the authorities can afford to go in rewriting wartime history.

French Gestapo boss Paul Touvier with masked minders



A recent report commissioned by the Church, and widely welcomed by the media as a sign of a 'new openness', indicated how far the boundaries could be pushed back.

One passage, quoted in the final judicial report, stated that 'certain members of the Milice, in the name of the Milice and the secretary of state for law and order, colonised...the Vichy state apparatus'. In this schema, the Vichy regime itself was not pro-Nazi, but was manipulated by a kind of pro-Nazi 'lobby' in the form of 'certain members of the Milice'. This has long been a key proposition of the revisionist right in France. They argue that the vast majority of Vichy officials were not French Nazis, but were 'pragmatic' collaborators who saved Jews from a worse fate and were at heart anti-German.

Charges dropped

The revisionist interpretation was effectively endorsed by the judges who finally decided not to prosecute Touvier. Six charges were originally brought against Touvier, including one for the execution of seven men as 'revenge' for the killing of Philippe Henriot, a Vichy. All seven were Jewish. Five of the six charges were thrown out because the witnesses' testimonies were 'foggy'. The lawyer who unsuccessfully defended Klaus Barbie against similar charges declared that 'France has become France again. We cannot believe witnesses 50 years on. This decision appears to signal an end to the trials of this period'.

The sixth charge, that of the execution of seven Jews, stirred up the hornet's nest. One man

testified that he had been spared from the firing squad explicitly because he was not Jewish. Yet the court ruled that the decision to execute was not part of a 'systematic project of extermination', since the victims were chosen at random 'in the heat of the moment'.

Besides, the court decided, Vichy could not do such things 'systematically' because, unlike in Nazi Germany, the Jew was never declared an enemy of the state. The judges ruled that the law which barred Jews from all positions of authority, and the decision to put them all under house arrest (both passed in October 1940) were examples of an 'improvised policy' to win concessions from Germany, not of anti-semitism. Any excesses on the part of

Vichy could be put down to an excess of zeal among those for whom 'the struggle against Communist ideology' was 'primary'.

The court's decision was a victory for the revisionist right, but was condemned by many conservative commentators and politicians because it was not seen to be anti-German enough.

Normalising Vichy

'The truth is', announced two judges critical of the outcome, 'that the decision on Touvier undermines the social cohesion at the centre of which is the judiciary' (*Liberation*, 24 April). Since the forties, the often fragile 'social cohesion' of France and the slim authority of the state has been partly based upon the accepted history of the war: that Vichy was just an unfortunate 'parenthesis' (to quote De Gaulle) in a long, glorious Republican tradition, and that France's ills were all down to the 'shame' of its collaboration with the Nazis. That history is now in danger of coming apart under the pressures of post-Cold war change.

No doubt the right would like to accelerate the revision of history, so that its past of anti-semitism and fascism will no longer be so embarrassing. At present, the official French history remains a source of stability as a focus for anti-German sentiment. But as racism and chauvinism become increasingly mainstream in modern French politics, so Vichy can be made to look more and more 'normal'. Perhaps the judiciary's mistake in the Touvier case was simply that it jumped too far, too fast. ●



Viva Italia

Italy is the West European state closest to coming apart at the seams. Alan Harding looks at why Italy's national instability has taken a new turn for the worse

Last February I took the Naples-Milan express to Florence. The other occupants of my carriage were going all the way north. All of them were southern women living and working in the north—a primary school teacher, a cleaner and a medical student—and all had tales of the humiliation of being a poor southerner in the rich cities of Lombardy and Piedmont. They all wished they could stay at home. They all knew they had to leave to make a living.

When I arrived in Milan a few days later, I too found a different world. In the slums of Naples the walls thank God for Maradona and Careca. In Milan the walls are covered with posters for Umberto Bossi's separatist movement, the Northern League. Last year Bossi and the League could be dismissed as a passing irritant.

Now, after the 5 April general election, the League is the largest party in Milan, the second largest in the north and the fourth largest in all Italy.

The Northern League was the only party to have a successful election. The two most important parties in postwar Italian politics have been the right-wing Christian Democrats and the Communist Party (PCI). Both were humiliated at the polls this time around.

Left and right lose

The PCI was once the largest communist party in Western Europe. In the fall-out from the collapse of the Stalinist bloc, it first liquidated itself, then split into two. In April, under its new name of the Democratic Left, the former PCI saw its share of the vote collapse from 27 to 16 per cent. The Christian Democracy has been the leading party in Italy for almost half

a century. In April it polled its lowest vote since the Second World War, and was reduced to being a party of the south, where it can still use its control of the government patronage machine to buy votes and influence.

Empty centre

The Socialist Party (PSI) entered the April elections as a member of the governing coalition with a power base centred on Milan, the dynamic northern heartland of Italian capitalism. It emerged from the election as just another declining party confined to the poor south. A succession of fraud and corruption scandals have engulfed the highest echelons of the Milan PSI, including Bobbo Craxi, the son of former prime minister Bettino. With leading party members having gone either to jail or to ground, the Socialist headquarters in Milan, once the hub of a sophisticated operation, is now eerily deserted. It is as if the Tory Party had done a moonlight flit from its Smith Square HQ. It is the perfect symbol of the emptiness at the heart of politics in Italy today.

The impotence of the established parties was fully exposed after the elections, when their repeated failure to appoint a new president or a prime minister made them appear entirely incapable of running the country. Only the wave of public outrage with



The old order passes: the dignitaries of the Milan establishment have been badly discredited by scandal

the authorities which followed the Mafia killing of another Sicilian judge forced the parties finally to agree on a compromise appointee to the presidency.

The near-collapse of the national parties has opened the way for the regionalism of the Northern League, which advocates the dissolution of the Italian nation state. Success has come with a simple programme—anti-Rome, anti-southerner, anti-immigrant. ‘We pay! Rome collects! The south wastes!’; the slogan sums up the narrow chauvinism of the small businessmen, artisans and disenchanted northern workers who make up the League’s constituency.

Southern scapegoat

As Bossi argues, the north is nearer to Europe than to Rome. He means that the industrially developed and dynamic economies of Milan, Turin and the northern plains have more in common with Frankfurt and Lyons than with the backward southern villages on the slopes of Mount Etna. At a time when the Italian economic miracle has lost its sheen, the south is the obvious scapegoat.

During the election campaign, a finance minister complained that Italians do not pay their taxes. Bossi responded by reminding him that northerners were paying taxes to keep

five million ‘invalids’. These ‘invalids’ are in reality as fit as fiddles. The pensions they receive from the authorities are stipends granted in return for their votes and their allegiance to the status quo. Tens of thousands of civil servants and other state and provincial functionaries receive similar hand-outs. This *Lottizzazione* (allotment of favours according to party size) exists everywhere in Italy, but is concentrated in the south.

On the payroll

They say that a letter from Milan to Turin (about the same distance as from London to Birmingham) has to go via the national sorting office in Sicily (as far away as John O’ Groats), in order to justify keeping southern functionaries on the state payroll. In the northern industrial town of Udine, 15 men are employed to shunt goods in the railway yard. In Reggio Calabria, in the southern toe of Italy, 15 000 are on the books supposedly to do the same work.

The ruling coalition has never had the enthusiastic support of Italians. Nor, despite the postwar economic success of the north, did it have the resources to develop the south. Instead it has used northern wealth to buy power with southern votes. Now the corrupt fabric of the Italian body

politic is in danger of coming apart under the pressures of the post-Cold War changes in Europe.

Italy has never been a truly united nation. Indeed the experience of Italy has long provided a powerful riposte to the claim that independent nation states are the natural order of things. It demonstrates how, even in Western Europe, the weakness of capitalism has made it hard for the ruling classes to cohere stable nation states.

Harder than ever

The few postwar years of relative stability and a semblance of national unity have been the exceptions in twentieth-century Italian life. Now that the economy is in tatters and the postwar political order has disintegrated, the Italian ruling class is again confronted with the historic problem of national unity, but in new circumstances which make it far harder to resolve.

Discussion of the absence of national cohesion and identity in Italy focuses on the southern question—the backwardness of the south. In fact, the real issue is the miserably low and uneven level of economic development which capitalism has achieved in Italy. The south is the scapegoat for this failure.

From the foundation of the Italian state in the late nineteenth century, ►



exasperated northern intellectuals defined the southern peasant as a retard who must be weeded from society if Italy was to make it in the modern world. Impoverished and parochial the southern peasants may have been, but they were not so retarded as to believe that they owed taxes and allegiance to a far-off Italian government that gave out only one service—repression. The peasantry gave its allegiance to anarcho-syndicalism, the mafia or the American Dream (through emigration).

Following the First World War, the weakness of Italian capitalism and of the nation state it was based upon was exposed by a revolutionary upheaval among the working classes. When fascist leader Benito Mussolini marched on Rome in 1922, the landowners, the Catholic church, the majority of intellectuals and the

The two major factors which held post war Italy together have both evaporated

northern industrialists proved willing to forgo democracy in order to crush the workers' movement.

Far from being an isolated gang of reactionaries, the fascist regime of the interwar years was the only practical solution which Italy's ruling class had to the problem of capitalist weakness and national disunity. The fascists subdued the working class, but even they could not produce a dynamic economy or a legitimate Italian state. The trains ran on time, but Mussolini's pretensions to make Italy a leading world power were dashed in the debacle of the Second World War, and his attempt to lend legitimacy to the Italian state by associating it with the Roman Empire impressed few outside the fascist cadre.

In 1943 Italy was on the verge of collapse. After Mussolini was deposed in a coup and the Italian army surrendered to the Allies, the country did disintegrate. In the south, the rump of the old regime held sway. In the north and centre, the National Committee for the Liberation of Upper Italy, largely led by communists, was the only force recognised by Italians.

The Italian ruling class came out of the war discredited by its association with fascism, and seemingly incapable of re-establishing any sort of stable capitalist state. It was saved by the Communist Party. The PCI's leading role in the anti-fascist resistance had given it great popular authority among the insurgent working classes. Instead

of using that strength to take over, the Stalinists of the PCI handed power back to the old elite on a plate. On 22 April 1944, the PCI entered Marshal Pietro Badoglio's puppet government and swore allegiance to the king. PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti became a minister. The PCI was part of the government until May 1947, by which time internal stabilisation and the onset of the Cold War enabled the ruling class to exclude it.

Alongside the PCI, the other key organisation for the postwar survival of the Italian capitalist nation state was the Christian Democratic Party, founded in 1942 and led by Alcide De Gasperi.

Patriotic PCI

Support from the Vatican and an emphasis on the family gave De Gasperi's party mass Catholic support. A strong anti-communist streak held the middle classes. A corporatist approach to state control and economic development brought together a wide network of bureaucrats who owed their careers to the party leadership. That leadership has had a remarkable continuity. Giulio Andreotti, who was prime minister (for the seventh time) until the April election, was an intimate of De Gasperi.

The Christian Democracy could never have succeeded in achieving a degree of social stability without the PCI. The contempt in which millions of Italians held their illegitimate state was restrained only by the PCI's insistence on demonstrating its patriotic loyalty to those same governmental institutions.

Even so, throughout the postwar period, Italy was unstable by the standards of most advanced capitalist countries. That instability was expressed in various ways: a succession of coup attempts by the right; the combativity of the most militant working class in Europe; the terrorism of the Red Brigades; the endemic corruption; the role of the mafia; and a revolving door system of coalition governments which, from the end of the war to the start of the nineties, achieved an average of slightly more than one change of government each year.

At an end

It is now clear that even the shaky national peace of the postwar era in Italy is at an end. The two major factors which held the country together for the past 40-odd years were relative economic prosperity and the frozen political relations created by the Cold War. Both have now evaporated.

In the 1980s the PCI began to wilt under the stress of trying to keep disaffected Italians loyal to the unpopular state. The party's working class base became more and more disenchanted with the policies of

economic austerity and political submission. The position of the PCI finally became irretrievable after the fall of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe.

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the PCI in turn removed the anti-communist *raison d'être* of the Christian Democrats. The relative cohesion of the postwar Italian state was founded on the orchestration of Cold War politics by the Christian Democrats with the acquiescence of the Communists. Now that this symbiotic relationship no longer exists, the legitimacy of a state founded on corruption is at issue.

It would be wrong to see current trends as a simple return to the past. The national incoherence which has often characterised Italian life is taking new and unpredictable forms in this unstable era. The rise of the Northern League, or the brief fame enjoyed by the Party of Love and its porn-star MP shows what most Italians think of the old traditional process. Italians are divided on many things but united on two: support for I Azzurri (the Italian football team) and contempt for the Italian nation state.

No new answers

The ruling class has not yet abandoned the idea of an Italian nation state. The populist rantings of Bossi appeal to many small businessmen, but not to big business leaders like media mogul Silvio Berlusconi or Mr Fiat, Gianni Agnelli. Neither is the fascist MSI seriously considered as an option by the Italian elite. Alessandra Mussolini may be an adequate replacement for La Cicciolina, but a handful of teenage skinheads and crotchety old men, and a crude appeal to traditional values, do not provide the basis for national regeneration in the nineties.

But while they may balk at restaging Mussolini's March on Rome, far-sighted representatives of the Italian ruling class are aware that things have to change. They are trying to dissociate themselves from the Christian Democrats. This explains Giorgio La Malfa's move to take the Republican Party out of the coalition government.

The establishment of 'La Rete' (the Network)—an all-party alliance against the mafia—shows the trend towards far-reaching realignments. So far, however, all it means is politicians making a token stand against the systemic corruption of which they themselves are still an integral part. They have no new answers to the Italian state's crisis of legitimacy. The fact that one bomb under a Sicilian judge in May could plunge the entire country into a fresh political crisis was less a sign of the mafia's strength than of the weakness of the national authorities.

Eta is not Spain's IRA

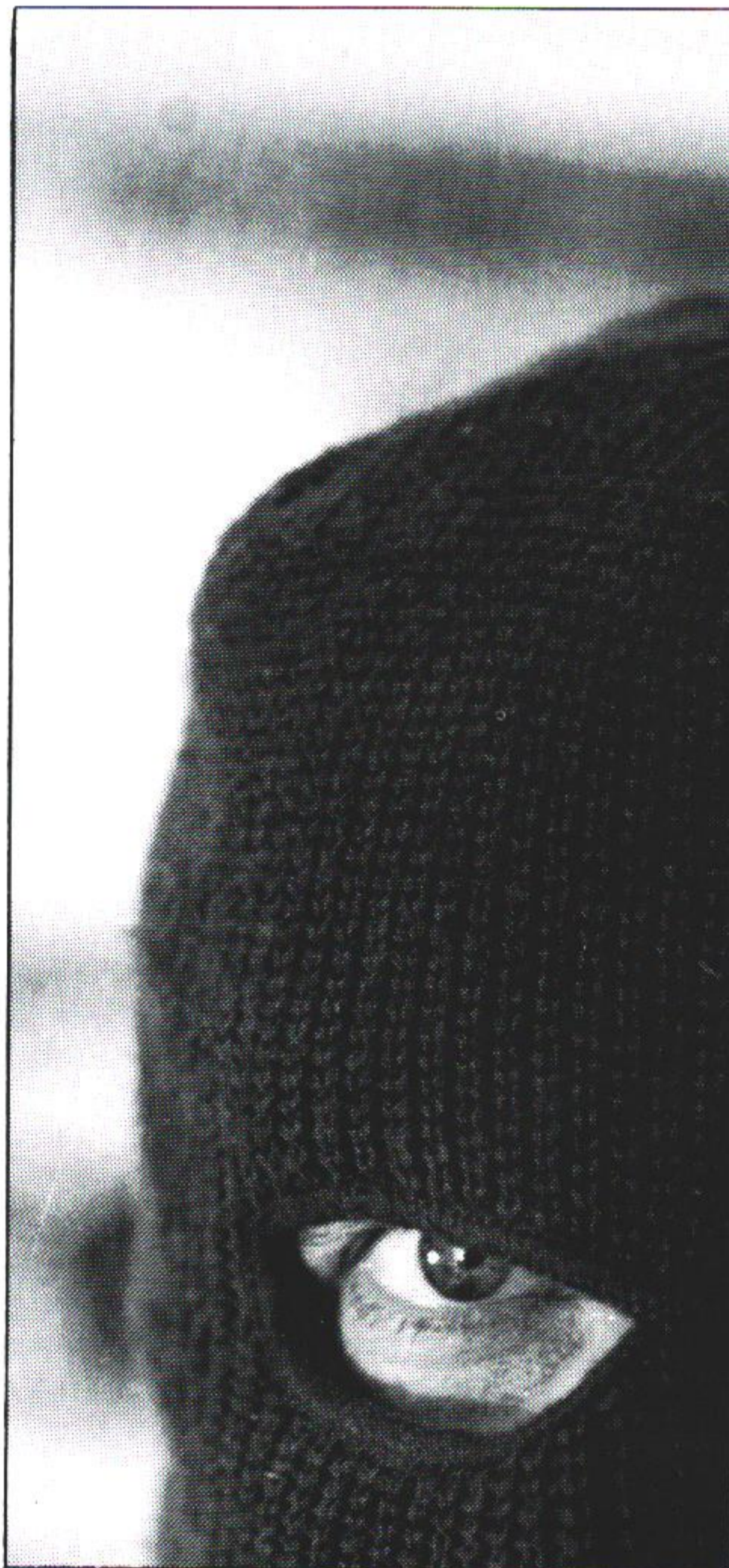
Basque nationalism is an invention, argues Andy Clarkson

The fastest growing industry in Europe, East and West, is the creation of mythical national histories. But there's nothing mythical about Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Liberty), better known as Eta. It killed 43 people last year, and this year had despatched 17 by the start of June. In April, the organisation declared war on the Expo '92 fair in Seville, which marks the five hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus. The Spanish authorities believe that Eta also poses a threat to the Olympic Games in Barcelona, as well as the Madrid 'European City of Culture' festival. The Basque terrorist organisation is certain to try to ruin Spanish hopes that 1992 will be another *annus mirabilis* just as 1492 was.

Anti-Franco

Eta was formed by a group of Basque students in 1959 to liberate the Basque country from a Spain presided over by the dictator, Francisco Franco. It did not become a military organisation until the mid-sixties, when it held up some banks. Eta killed its first Guardia Civil policeman in August 1968. In the absence of any other form of militant resistance to the tyranny of Franco—the Spanish Communist Party, for example, banked on the succession of a liberal monarchy—the Basque struggle and Eta won wide popularity among the Basque people and support from other Spanish workers.

When Franco died in 1975, support for Eta outside the Basque region ebbed away as more democratic institutions were introduced. Yet it was during the six years after Franco's death that Eta enjoyed widest support in Basque society. However, once the Basque regional assembly was established in Vitoria in 1981, the Basque



business elite washed its hands of Eta. The organisation was reduced to its hardcore supporters, who nevertheless regularly give its political wing—Herri Batasuna (Popular Unity)—16 per cent of the vote in regional elections.

Madrid has capitalised on Eta's marginalisation in the eighties by deploying death squads and signing cross-border agreements with France to crush the remaining bands of *Etarras*. In September last year, the authorities had their most significant success when an Eta volunteer was shot dead in the Basque capital of Bilbao by the Ertzantza, the regional Basque police force.

During the sixties and seventies, Eta presented itself as a left-wing, even Marxist,

organisation and looked to the political tradition set by Che Guevara. Nowadays it has dropped most of that rhetoric and has gone back to its roots. Eta has, however, maintained its links with the Irish republican movement.

Although there are superficial similarities between Eta and the IRA, the two movements have nothing fundamental in common. The IRA, like the PLO and the Tamil Tigers, represent oppressed peoples fighting back against the oppressor. Eta has more in common with Croatian nationalists, who have opted for political separation as a means of maintaining a privileged economic position.

Mythical past

The Basque people are not oppressed by Spain, and never have been. In fact, the Basque country is one of the wealthiest parts of Spain. Even under Franco, the Basques were not treated differently from other sections of Spanish society (though he did remove their economic privileges). Because Eta cannot justify its existence by claiming a history of oppression, it has invented a mythical national past—just like a number of nationalist groups which have sprung up all over Europe, from Scotland to the Ukraine.

Like most nationalist groups, Eta claims that the Basque people have a long history. In reality, Basque nationalism was invented in 1882 by Sabino de Arana. It was Arana who first coined the name 'Euskadi' for the Basque country, designed the *Ikurriña* (the distinctive red and green Basque flag based on the Union Jack), and compiled the first dictionary for the Basque language, which he called 'Euskera'. Arana founded the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) in 1885 to campaign for independence from Spain. By 1902, however, Arana reduced the PNV's main objective to ensuring 'the well-being of the Basque country under the Spanish state without infringing established legality' (quoted in SG Payne, *Basque Nationalism*, p79).

Give us more

Arana's PNV became the main party of the Basque business class in the years after the First World War—and has remained so ever since. In its ranks, the PNV united wealthy Basque burghers and poor Basque peasants against the thousands of Spanish workers flooding into the region to work in its iron mines and shipyards. With Basque independence severely deprioritised, the PNV became a priest-ridden, strike-breaking conservative force specifically directed at keeping 'immigrant' workers in their place.

In recent years, youthful proteges of the PNV, Eta and its political wing Herri Batasuna have also given up the idea of struggling for complete Basque independence. Herri Batasuna leader Jose Maria Sasiain has admitted that Eta could not win an independence referendum in the Basque country. They have fought on against the Socialist regime of Felipe Gonzalez only to gain more privileges for Basques within Spain—just as Arana did before them.

If a Basque nation were to be born, it would only be by default. It would be a result of the post-Cold War unravelling of European nation states like Spain, not of a 'national liberation struggle' among the non-oppressed peoples of the Basque country. ●

They blamed the Danes.
But behind the row about
that referendum, says
Helen Simons, there is
something rotten in all
the other states of Europe



The rejection of the Maastricht treaty in a Danish referendum in May seemed to plunge the whole of the European Community into a state of chaos. The treaty, signed by all the EC governments in December, was supposed to pave the way towards European political and monetary union. At that time it was acclaimed as the way forward into the next century. Almost overnight, the refusal of the Danes to ratify the treaty seemed to throw the entire project of closer European integration into doubt.

Only 50 000

How could this have come about? It is hard to believe that the actions of a small nation like Denmark alone could wreak political havoc across the continent—and harder still when you realise that voters in the Danish referendum rejected Maastricht by a slim majority of around 50 000. Ordinarily, the opinions of 50 000 Danes would not be sufficient to cause such political ructions in Bonn, Paris, London and the other capitals of the EC nations. There was clearly something more involved.

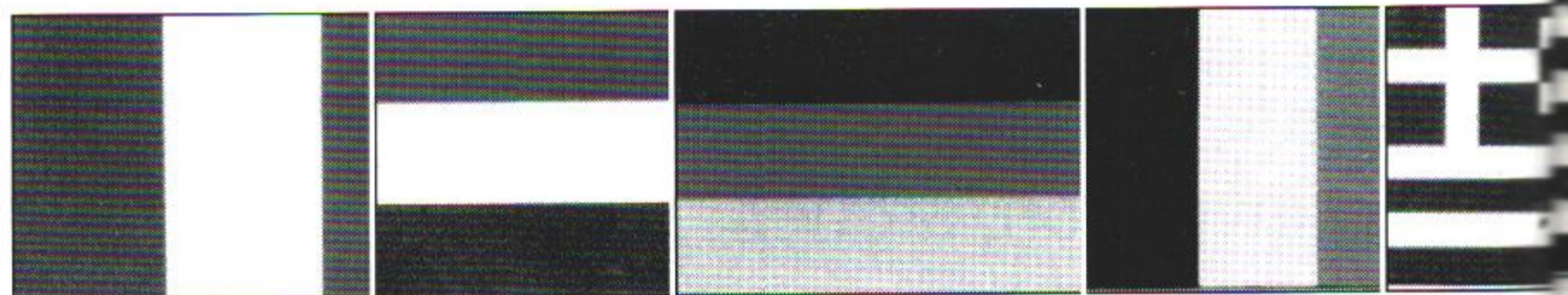
The Danish referendum result was not the cause of the crisis, but the catalyst, bringing to the surface many of the underlying tensions in European society today.

At Maastricht, John Major's British government stood out as the lone critical voice of opposition in the treaty negotiations. Today, other European states have come out as sceptics. The voices of doubt and dissent can now be heard in the once unswervingly pro-European capitals of Dublin, Rome, Paris and Bonn.

After Maastricht

In all of these countries, the debate about Europe has turned into a convenient focus for other national controversies. Hostility to closer EC integration has become entangled with the wider political and economic crises of Europe.

In a sense, it is naive even to ask the question as to how the air of triumph which surrounded the Maastricht deal



could have disappeared so quickly. Readers of *Living Marxism* will know that the euphoria about Maastricht was always pretty shallow. The notion of a smooth and harmonious passage towards unity was never a plausible vision of Europe's future.

The drive towards closer European integration has been spurred by two main economic impulses: the fear of competitive pressure from outside Europe, and the belief in the capacity of Germany to act as a powerhouse pulling Europe along. But there have also been strong impulses acting against European integration.

Friends or foes?

Britain, France, Italy, Germany and the rest are not only European partners. They are also rival capitalist nations, which must compete with one another in the world marketplace. However craftily it is put together, an agreement such as Maastricht on European integration cannot remove the tensions between the capitalist elites of the different European powers. For example, while the other EC members have been happy to hitch a ride with the dynamic German economy, there has also been a sense that closer European integration will mean greater German domination of Europe—a fear expressed in the continuing rows about high German interest rates.

Ambiguity about Euro-unity has long been a feature of the politics of EC member states. As new concerns have entered into the calculation, closer integration now seems a less attractive option to many. Three factors in particular have come together to

expose the idea of genuine European unity as a remote dream.

First, the economic slump has undermined talk of European unity by highlighting the divergent interests of different capitalist nations. One of the early signs of the retreat from the Maastricht summit came when European Commission president Jacques Delors put a price tag on the agreement. Delors demanded an increase in budgetary contributions of 31 per cent—a figure which would turn a country like Italy from a net recipient of EC funds to a net contributor. Even the German government responded with Margaret Thatcher-style protests, and the EC finance ministers threw out the proposals.

ERM...

The recession has not only made governments less willing to pay the price of new Euro-measures, it has also upset existing economic arrangements. The European Monetary System (EMS), and particularly the Exchange Rate Mechanism within it, has come under considerable strain in recent months. While fear of inflation has led the Bundesbank to raise German interest rates, the rest of recession-hit Europe is crying out for rates to be cut. Since no European nation can buck the German trend within the EMS, talk of abandoning the system has become more widespread.

The second factor acting against integration this year has been the crisis of legitimacy facing the major parties and national institutions across Europe, as discussed elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*. The fracturing of traditional allegiances, and the

Disunity



emergence of new parties and right-wing splinter groups, has done much to derail the 'European express' which six months ago was said to be unstoppable. The Danish referendum result was a prime example of how opposing further European integration has become a focus for general dissatisfaction with the existing political set-up. Similar trends are at work elsewhere in Europe.

Now the French

In France, the right has sought to use the Euro-debate as a means of mobilising support, by playing up fears of German domination and tapping anti-foreign feeling (for example by protesting that the EC could give other Europeans the right to vote in France). The right's attempt to use the European issue to exploit the crisis facing the Socialist government has helped to turn Europe into an issue of French domestic politics. The day after the Danish polls closed, president Mitterrand conceded to pressure for a French referendum on Maastricht.

In Italy, the rise of regionalist sentiments and the crisis of the national political system has served to undermine the integrationist spirit. And in Ireland, the ratification of the Maastricht treaty became a major issue when it got caught up in the renewed controversy about the state's constitution. Many of those urging a 'no' vote in Ireland's June referendum on Maastricht were not talking about Europe at all. Their case was that the treaty's stipulations on the free movement of EC citizens would undermine the Republic's constitutional ban on abortion, by making it easier for

Irish women to travel to Britain to terminate a pregnancy.

The final factor which has recently tipped the balance against wholehearted support for integration is the role of the new Germany in Europe. Other EC members have long liked to think of Germany as a slumbering giant which would pick up the tab but not cause trouble for its neighbours. This year, however, Germany's European partners have been shocked to find that the giant has awoken. Right at the start of the year, Germany went out on a limb in recognising Croatian independence, and forced the EC to follow its lead. Such boldness was a clear statement of German intent to be the senior partner in European political affairs. As Germany's assertiveness increases, so does anti-German sentiment elsewhere.

As time has elapsed since Maastricht, it has also become evident that Germany will no longer pick up the tab for the EC. The cost of German reunification and the creation of a new sphere of influence in Eastern Europe have made German politicians more circumspect about the benefits of West European union, as one Christian Democrat official explained:

'For decades we saw the EC as a solution to our troubles. Now with everyone in Eastern Europe hanging around our necks there is a tendency to see the community as adding to our problems—another burden.'
(*Independent on Sunday*, 23 February 1992)

According to recent polls, only 10 per cent of Germans say they

want European integration accelerated. And there are growing complaints about the wisdom of a planned monetary union which would hitch the powerful Deutschmark to weak European currencies.

Despite the panic which followed the Danish result, the recent trends working against European integration are not decisive. The EC is not about to break up, and closer economic cooperation remains a pressing necessity for all member states. The most hardened Euro-sceptic in the Tory Party long ago abandoned any serious idea that Britain could 'go it alone'.

Pipe-dreamers

However, after the catalytic effect of the Danish referendum in bringing divisions to the fore, the European pipe-dreamers have also had to sober up. It is now clear that there can be no peaceful road to the Euro-unity of rival capitalist states. And there is no popular enthusiasm for any deal done among the discredited governments of Europe. The irony of it all is that, after the excesses of the Maastricht party in December, it is party pooper John Major who, as the new president of the European Community, is responsible for sorting out the mess. ●

The schizophrenic superpower

Germany is the strongman of Europe; yet at home it appears weak and divided. Rob Knight reports from Frankfurt on Germany's split personality

Germany's international image has become strangely unstable over recent months, particularly as seen through the eyes of British commentators.

One week, they warn us that Germany is well on the way to dominating Europe. So Robert Harris, author of the bestselling *Fatherland* (a novel about how a victorious Hitler would have run Europe which has been described in the German press as pornography for the British upper classes), points to 'the similarity between what the Nazis planned for western Europe and what, in economic terms, has come to pass' (*Sunday Times*, 10 May). But the next week, British commentators will be crowing that a strike-ridden Germany is becoming the new 'sick man of Europe'.

Kohl falters

Within Germany, too, there has been a change in the political climate, reflected most obviously in the declining public status of chancellor Helmut Kohl and his government. After German reunification in 1990, Kohl appeared strong, confident and politically unassailable. Now, he is increasingly unpopular and there is talk of his government not lasting the full term, despite the fact that it commands a big parliamentary majority.

The reputation of the Kohl administration at home and abroad has been damaged by a series of resignations of top ministers, especially that of foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher; by a string of bad election results; by allegations that the costs of reunification have spiralled out

of control; and by a humiliating climbdown in the public sector strike.

So which is the real Germany? Is it the new European superpower? Or is it now so beset by internal problems that it will be unable to assert itself abroad? What is the truth about the problems and the opportunities facing the German authorities today?

Germany's different

The first thing to be clear about is that, despite the recent attempts by British economists to claim that Germany has sunk to 'our' level of recession, the German economy has not yet been seriously affected by the world economic downturn. The extra demand created by reunification has helped German capitalism to avoid the slump which has afflicted much of the rest of Europe. The German economy certainly has more problems today than it had a few years ago. But compared with just about anywhere else in Europe, Germany remains a remarkably stable and prosperous country. Even the big strikes of recent months were conducted in a low-key atmosphere and settled through the traditional methods of compromise.

Politics not economics

The air of crisis that hangs over Germany today is first and foremost political. The German government has been shown to be weak and indecisive over a range of issues. As a result, and despite the country's relative prosperity, the Kohl administration has little political authority left.

The German government's problems have far deeper causes than a few unpopular policy decisions or

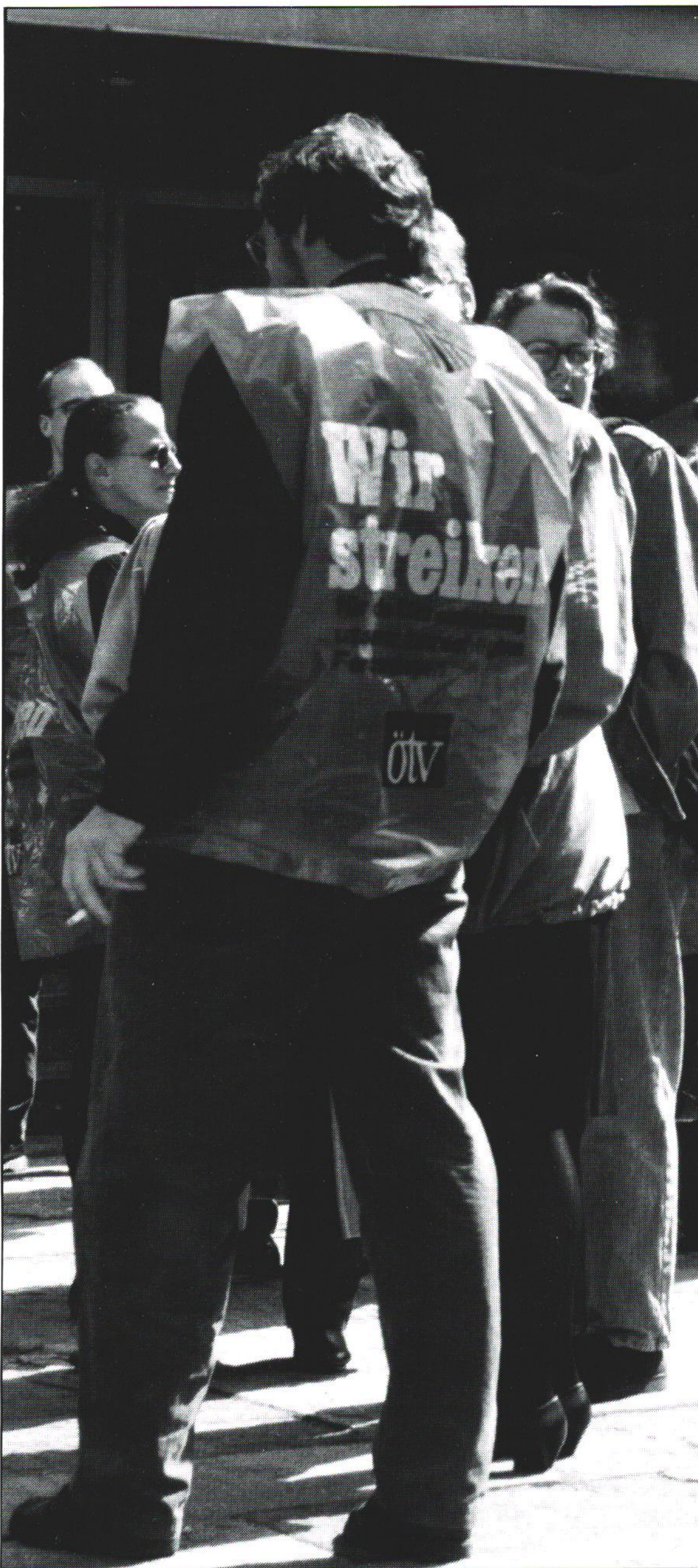


PHOTO: Andreas Nickol

**STRIKING
BACK:**
German
public sector
workers,
May 1992

ministerial character defects. After all, other European governments have less support inside and outside parliament (Francois Mitterrand's French Socialists were down to 18 per cent in the latest local elections), yet they do not seem to be in quite the same state of permanent crisis and indecisiveness. Nor does the resignation of a government minister cause such ructions elsewhere as it does in Germany.

1945 and all that

The particular instability in Germany has its roots in the German authorities' lack of historical legitimacy, and the crisis of confidence which results. To understand this lack of legitimacy, it is worth looking briefly at the way in which the ruling elite of modern Germany emerged from the Second World War.

By the time the Nazi era came to an end in 1945, the German elite had been utterly discredited through its collaboration with Hitler. After the war, a power vacuum existed in German society. The American military filled it temporarily. But in order to re-establish durable stability for German capitalism, something more was required. Germany urgently needed a new social order, with a new ideology that could cohere society.

The division of the German nation between East and West, and the advent of the Cold War, provided a kind of solution. The politics of the Cold War ensured that modern West Germany was created as a state which defined itself through its opposition to the Soviet bloc. Anti-communism became the official state ideology, the unifying cement of West German society.

A new ID

To win its citizens over to the new order, the West German state introduced a comprehensive social security system. To ensure a degree of social peace, the new state installed a complex system of arbitration and conciliation in labour relations. The West German authorities succeeded in cementing their society together because, with the aid of massive US investment, the economy grew rapidly in the fifties and sixties. The combination of material success, the social system and anti-communism gave the new state a degree of public legitimacy and established a consensus. West Germany was increasingly seen as the mirror image of East Germany, prosperous where the other was poor, democratic where the other was repressive.

The main penalty that the German ruling class paid for these postwar arrangements was that its ability to play any kind of role internationally was severely constrained. The division ►

of Germany, the Cold War and the US occupation made Germany largely subservient to American foreign policy.

Against this background, it is possible to see why the collapse of the Soviet Union and reunification of Germany has created both opportunities and problems for the Kohl regime. The plus side of reunification is that it enabled Germany to emerge as the undisputed leader of Europe. Germany moved rapidly from being a divided country on the edge of Europe to a united power at its centre.

Germany's backyard

In addition, Germany now has to its east a group of client states which provide it with markets, cheap labour and diplomatic support on international policy bodies. Creating such a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe was a traditional foreign policy goal for generations of German statesmen before Hitler. The fact that Germany now wields neo-colonial influence in the east could have far-reaching consequences for the global balance of power.

The downside of reunification for the authorities is the way that it has upset the pattern of internal German politics. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideological cement which bound West Germany together has gone. Anti-communism can no longer play the same role in cohering German society that it did in the past. As a consequence, the ruling elite is now experiencing a loss of direction and a crisis of authority. Robbed of the certainties of the Cold War era, Germany's rulers no longer feel secure.

The Kohl government has tried to regain its grip by asserting the importance of the basic values of capitalism and nationalism. This explains the administration's attempted offensive against immigrants and the trade unions, and its attempts to reform the social state.

Panic stations

The problem for the German authorities is that a more robust assertion of capitalist values means breaking with the dominant liberal and corporatist consensus. Such a shift to the right will tend to polarise society, with potentially destabilising consequences. It is here that the insecurity of the authorities becomes an important factor. As soon as it looks as if things are polarising and the cracks in society are widening, the government starts to panic and tries to revert to the traditions of consensus. The only effect is to create the appearance of weakness and indecisiveness, further undermining the government's authority.

A good example of how this works is the current discussions over Germany's asylum laws for refugees.

The government deliberately started a debate about tightening up these laws, as a way of raising the nationalist stakes. This provoked a wave of violence against foreigners and increased support for far-right parties in elections. Instead of then raising the racist stakes again to head off the far right, as for example Margaret Thatcher did in Britain to marginalise the National Front in the seventies, the Kohl government panicked, backtracked, and called for an all-party alliance against the far right.

Faced with the choice of breaking with the past or withdrawing into the familiar politics of consensus, the German government took the soft option. As a result, it has been left with

Robbed of the certainties of the Cold War era, Germany's rulers no longer feel secure

the worst of all worlds. It has damaged the social consensus by raising the temperature on the race issue, and then allowed the far right to reap the electoral benefits.

A similar process could be seen at work during the recent major strikes. First the Kohl government challenged the trade unions and tried to act tough, then as soon as there was a confrontation it backed down. This time it was the union leaders who were made to look good, although in reality they were even less keen to fight it out than the government.

Reunification has not only robbed the German authorities of the ideological coherence provided by anti-communism. It has also brought a further problem for them to grapple with: how to incorporate East Germany into the new nation.

East Germans have less attachment to the German state than the people in the west. The 'Ossies' supported unification with the West for one reason above all else: prosperity. After decades of misery under Stalinism, East Germans were desperate for a share of the hi-tech consumer culture they saw in the West. Two years after reunification, the vast majority of them are still waiting for their share. The failure of the West to bring them

prosperity means that there is little to attach most easterners to the German state—especially as many of those running the 'new' Germany in the east are the same people who ran the old Stalinist regime.

Eastern support for the traditional political parties is tenuous. The Social Democratic Party, for example, has 930 000 members in the west but only 30 000 in the east. Politics in eastern Germany seems likely to follow the unstable pattern of Eastern Europe, with voters switching from one party to another and supporting minor and fringe groups. All of this means that the German government's problems of legitimacy have been compounded by the inclusion of East Germany.

End of an era

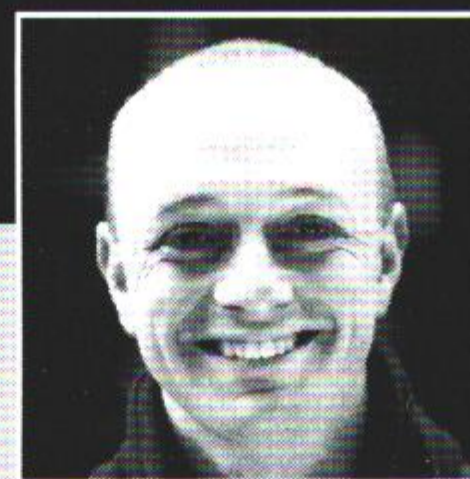
The crisis of legitimacy in German politics is having a corrosive effect on the old political structures. Conflicts within the ruling coalition have become more open. The drifting apart of the coalition partners further reduces the authority of central government. The government is now so insecure that some of its own members have been calling for a grand coalition of Kohl's Christian Democrats with the opposition Social Democrats, to deal with the current political crisis.

It is also possible to discern within Germany a trend towards regionalisation, similar to that which is growing across Europe. The regional councils, or *Länder*, are pressing for more power and control over the terms and implementation of the Maastricht treaty, and Kohl has had to make significant concessions on this. Recent local elections in west Germany brought setbacks for both the CDU and the SPD, and the growth of fringe parties reflecting regional and parochial concerns. With the ideological glue provided by anti-communism removed, German society is becoming unstuck in a variety of ways.

The insecurity of the ruling elite means that in the short term, at least, Germany is likely to present something of an anomaly. Externally, its superior economic strength enables it to be the dominant power in European affairs. Yet, at the same time, internally it is set to stumble from one political crisis to the next, while the authorities seek desperately to establish a new legitimacy among their own people.

Minority rule

The situation in Germany bears powerful testimony to the post-Cold War political crisis facing the rulers of the Western world. It shows that, even in the most dynamic European economy, modern capitalism is haunted by the problem of how to hold a society together under the control of a minority ruling class. ●



Death to the dribbling classes

Remember the days when you could go to a football match without a bunch of them spouting obnoxious opinions at the tops of their voices and ruining everybody's enjoyment with their moronic antics? Remember when the TV cameras used to ignore them, rightly regarding them as a tiny minority who had no place in football, despised by real fans and of no interest to the viewers at home?

Sadly it seems those days are gone. Open a 'quality' newspaper or a glossy magazine and there will be an article about them. TV coverage of a big match is now considered incomplete without one of their self-appointed 'leaders' giving his inane views and insisting that he is a 'real fan'.

Anyone unfortunate enough to have encountered them abroad will know the shame and embarrassment of being associated with them in the foreign mind, as they push the locals about and arrogantly parade their tasteless holiday outfits. They have made Britain the most hated nation on Earth, they are a problem created by our sick society, and now these sad, inadequate creatures have latched on to football, hoping it will give them the acceptance and popularity they crave. The media attention only serves to encourage their delusions.

For the disturbing truth is that the middle classes are openly attending football matches in growing numbers, protected by police officers who hover around, arresting anyone who displeases them.

Having failed to convert the masses to the respectable pleasures of rugby and American football, they are now trying to clean up the national game and turn it into safe 'classless' family entertainment. David Mellor's appearance during the Cup Final build-up, following John Major's regular spot on *The Match*, has given the green light to thousands of everyday attacks on this bastion of the British working class. Watching Mellor's goofy grin, as his revolting young sons squeaked away like a couple of recorders being blown too hard, was the last straw.

So what's new? You could argue that the authorities have always tried to control football and use it for their own ends—attacking or supporting it to suit their purposes at different times. But they always kept it at arm's length: everyone agreed it was the working man's game, and this in itself was enough to make the middle classes uneasy. Large crowds of this sort automatically generate an atmosphere of disrespect for authority at the very least, and often open hostility. Those few middle class followers of football have by and large stayed in the expensive seats and kept quiet. Their friends would think them mad for going at all.

It's worth recalling that only a few years ago football was described as a 'slum sport watched by slum people', and the much-missed sports minister Colin Moynihan didn't try to conceal his contempt for the whole thing. During the last European Championships in 1988 there were calls to withdraw the England team and ban the fans. How times change: this time the team was sent off to Sweden like a task force blessed by the great and the good.

What's behind it all? Hillsborough undoubtedly forced a change of tactic, when attempts to blame it on 'the hooligans' provoked widespread anger. But the authorities could hardly admit that they'd hyped up the whole hooligan panic as an excuse for the policing methods which caused that disaster. So, instead, they argued that 'the tragedy had made people see sense', and football 'deserved a second chance'.

When England began Italia '90 in the usual dismal fashion, they showed no interest in the team (as opposed to the fans who were 'under scrutiny', 'on trial', etc). But by the time of the semi-final it was too good to resist, and out came the Jubilee bunting and the Second World War rhetoric. All kinds of public school idiots suddenly sported England 'soccer' shirts and adopted Gary Lineker as a new Seb Coe figure—an honorary 'one of us'. Literary parties were deserted as the 'chattering classes' crowded round their screens. Pavarotti's World Cup hit prompted wistful talk of the well-heeled clientele at the San Siro stadium in Milan, and the fat man's own Juventus. Now the posh papers are preparing for one last heave. They've even coined a phrase for the new bourgeois aficionados—'the dribbling classes'.

Just in case anyone thinks there might be grounds for optimism in all this—a new spirit of tolerance and understanding, or something—

here's a message from a prominent member of this new class. I can only assume that Martin Amis has undergone a dramatic change of heart since last year, when he dribbled these brotherly words:

'I noticed that all the fans had the complexion and body-scent of a cheese-and-onion crisp, and the eyes of pit bulls.

But what I felt most conclusively, above and below and on every side was ugliness—and a love of ugliness. This was in the *stands*, and at QPR!' (*Independent on Sunday*, 27 October 1991)

When faced with such outrageous crap, there is an understandable tendency for people to respond indignantly: 'We're not like that!' And indeed we are not. Yet far too many of the 'representatives' of the fans (supporters' associations, fanzines, etc) go too far along the road of self-righteousness, and end up trying to prove their respectability. Why should we want to win the approval of the 'dribbling classes' anyway? How much better to simply say: 'If you don't like it, Amis, fuck off back to Hampstead and watch it on the telly.'

Of course, this is exactly what Martin Amis expects—no, *wants*—to hear. His novels are celebrations of such ugliness—the fouler, the better. This is his ugly cheese-and-onion fantasy of the great unwashed, and he makes a healthy living from it. Behind all his smirking and sneering, though, lies a real fear, one which he can't laugh off. This is the intimidating hostility of 'the mob'. There are plenty of ugly things in football (not least the grounds themselves), but in these stiflingly deferential days, the intimidation of people like Martin Amis has to count as one of the beauties of the game.

Let's confirm these people's worst suspicions—they're too cocky by half nowadays. Next time you're stuck next to them at a game, let them know they're not welcome. And if all else fails, hit 'em. It's the only language they understand. ●

Why should football fans want to win the approval of Martin Amis anyway?

When I heard that Barcelona, Brisbane and Birmingham had all bid for the 1992 Olympics there wasn't much doubt in my mind where it should be. Somebody I know came up with a catchy slogan for the Birmingham campaign which summed up its chances cruelly: 'Birmingham—it's not Dudley!' I haven't got that much against Brisbane, it's just that with Barcelona I won't have to put my body through all-night torture in order to watch the events live.

My only reservation about Barcelona has come with the fashion for classical music themes for major sporting events. 'Nessun Dorma' for the 1990 World Cup was fine. I also enjoyed the Intermezzo from 'Cavalliero Rusticano' (*Raging Bull* theme) which introduced Sampdoria in the recent European Cup Final. But what about Barcelona 1992? Sarah Brightman? Even Freddie Mercury singing 'Barcelona' with Montserrat Caballe would have been better than that.

Still, at the opening of the games I, like many millions of others, will be watching the electronic screen flash out the message: 'The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part. The essential thing is not conquering but fighting well.' Believe that and you'll believe anything.

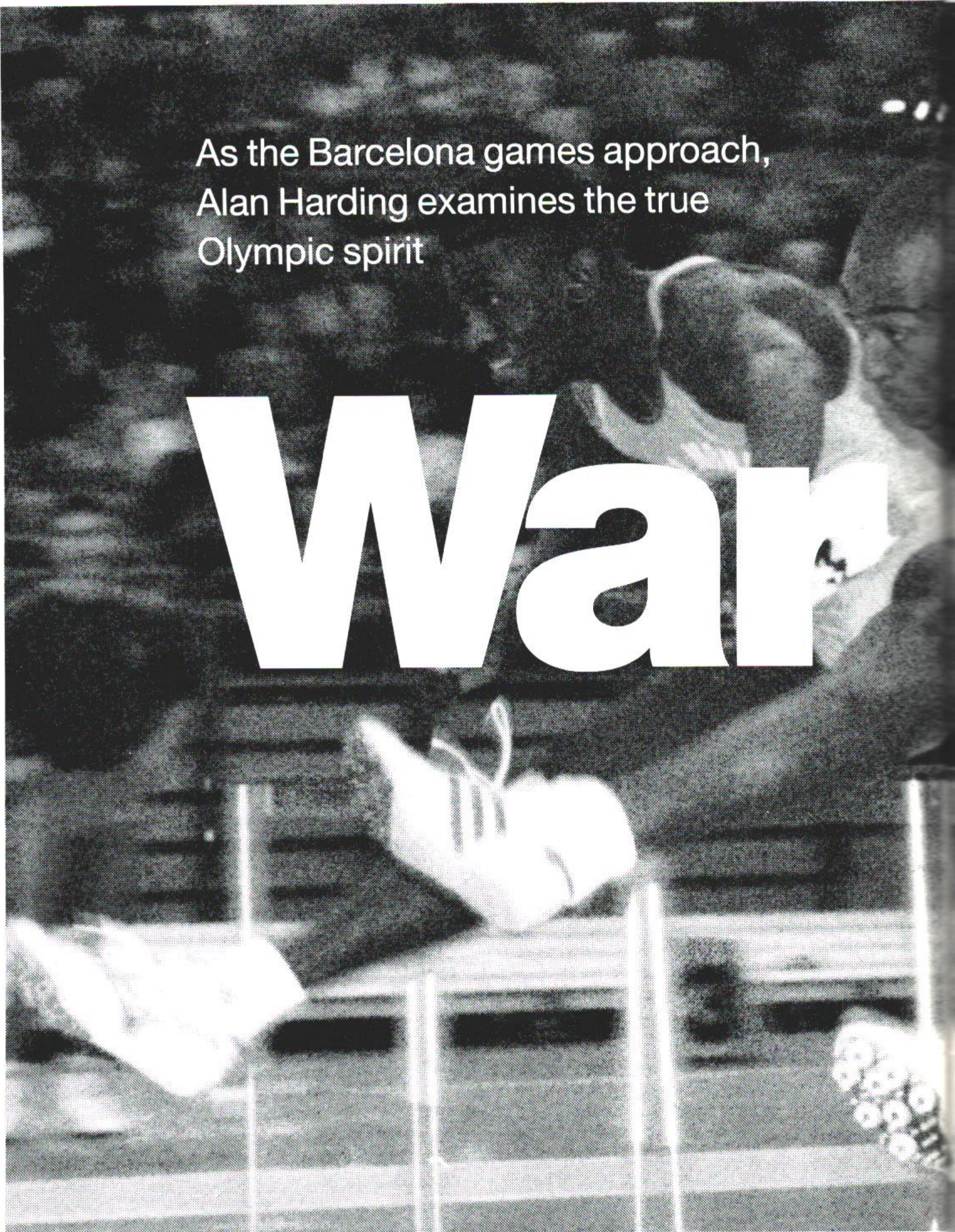
The Olympics are about national superiority and the hypocrisy of pretending that they are not. The rebirth of the Olympics in 1896 coincided with the opening of the epoch of imperialism, when the great capitalist powers began scrambling to divide the world among them. The Games were quickly caught up in the politics of national rivalries, colonialism and war and have been ever since.

A good example is how Western commentators have leapt to explain away the decades of superiority of Eastern bloc athletes. Apparently it can now be revealed that they were automatons drugged to the eyeballs and hounded by heartless coaches to a disabled middle age. This commendable concern for integrity hasn't stopped the German athletic authorities trying to slip ex-Eastern automaton and recent drug-test failure Katrin Krabbe in through the back door. And anyway what's the difference between the old Eastern European system of using the army as a front for training professional athletes, and the US university system which uses scholarships in the same way? Did the muscles of American shot putters come from a healthy diet of chocolate milkshakes?

The contemporary concern about drug use in sport has nothing to do with concern for the health of the athlete and the spirit of fair play, and everything to do with the wider use of drug panics in international politics. Indeed there is nothing

As the Barcelona games approach, Alan Harding examines the true Olympic spirit

War



new about taking drugs to help you win Olympic events. As far back as the 1904 St Louis Games, America's Thomas Hicks won the marathon on a lethal mixture of sulphate of strychnine and cognac. Winning and establishing national superiority at all costs are the true ingredients of the 'Olympic spirit'.

The founder of the modern Olympic movement exemplifies this tradition. Baron de Coubertin was a French aristocrat who grew up in the shadow of the crushing French defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1870. He felt the national shame deeply and was influenced by contemporary theories of national degeneration. He wanted to reinvigorate the French national elite through physical prowess and mental self-discipline.

De Coubertin never saw the Olympics as a focus for mass participation or entertainment, but as an expression of physical fitness, sound competition, and a spirit of fair play among the social elite which could regenerate France at home and abroad. 'Inequality is more than a law, it is a fact', he said, 'and patronage is more than a virtue, it is a duty'.

'The greatest show on earth' has always been a political football. The often awe-inspiring talent of individuals is put at the service of petty national pride and advantage. The grace and strength, the endeavour and pursuit of excellence are woven into a harsh backdrop of political reality that neither we nor the athlete can escape. It is this mixture of passion, struggle and identification with the

PHOTO: Press Association



Games

athletes which makes the Games so compelling.

How else can we understand the legend of Jesse Owens? For all his wonderful athleticism and four gold medals, Owens is remembered as the black man who spoiled Hitler's 1936 Berlin Olympics. Yet, away from the political stage of the Olympic arena, the American authorities who would use him as a propaganda weapon showed Owens precious little 'Olympic spirit'. He stayed in an Olympic village where the US team was racially segregated. Medals won, he went home to a USA where blacks lived in the shadow of the lynching tree. Just two weeks after his triumph, Owens was expelled from the US athletics association for daring to quit

a European tour organised to raise money for his white masters.

Everyone has an Olympics from which the memories are more vivid and richer. Mine is Mexico City 1968: when it looked like Bob Beamon would never come back to Earth; when Tommie Smith mounted the victory rostrum after breaking the 200 metres world record and to the strains of the 'Star Spangled Banner' gave the black power salute, his head bowed not in submission but to disown the anthem.

But the memories of all the Olympics merge and give urgency to the possibilities and fantasies of Barcelona 1992. Will Merlene Ottey at last take the sprinting golds which are her due? Is there any chance that Michael Johnson will defy

the race timetable to win both 200 and 400 metres? Or will we see the like of Nadia Comaneci again, who achieved the first perfect score in Olympic gymnastics in Montreal, 1976?

Come to think of it, I'm even prepared to sit through Sarah Brightman to avoid missing anything like the sight of a bare-foot Ethiopian, Abebe Bikila, running only his second marathon in Rome, 1960. Bikila's father had fought Mussolini's planes and poison gas in the thirties. Twenty-five years later, the world watched him run the cobbles of an Appian Way lit by torches to become the first black African to win a gold medal, beneath the Arch of Constantine. The whole world waits with bated breath for Barcelona. ●

It's Labour wot lost it

Forget the *Sun*, says Toby Banks,
Labour lost the general election all by itself

In the early eighties *Private Eye* ran a cover photo of Tony Benn balancing a pen between his nose and upturned lip, eyes bulging madly, spectacles askew. The speech bubble said: 'I blame the media.' Three election defeats later, Labour is still saying 'it's not our fault'.

One *Guardian* reader declared the 'tabloid intimidation' to be 'tantamount to placing bully boys armed with truncheons at every polling station in the country'. Neil Kinnock cited the cheeky 'It's the *Sun* wot won it!' headline and Lord McAlpine's remarks about how the newspaper editors were the real heroes of the Tory victory. But McAlpine's comments were more a criticism of the shambolic Tory election campaign than a serious assessment of the power of the press; *Sun* editor Kelvin MacKenzie laughed at the thought of Kinnock taking his tongue-in-cheek claims so seriously.

If the tabloids are so outrageous in their lies and smears, it begs the question of why anyone should fall for it. The first conclusion drawn is always that it is not just 'anyone' who believes them. A letter to the *Guardian* argued that 'the readers of those [Tory tabloid] newspapers are not particularly interested in politics, yet a part of them believes what they read'. In case you missed the point, another reader helpfully spelled it out: 'Many working class readers believed what their paper told them about tax—as for most other issues.' And yet another: 'Most people are not interested in articles that argue cogently.' So where is the evidence to support these ideas?

The theory of tabloid power does not stand up to even a cursory inspection. Before the election, with Labour buoyant, the party's media campaign strategist, Peter Mandelson, was credited with cracking its image problem through his painstaking market research. Yet Mandelson's research convinced him that newspapers were of marginal significance, compared to the all-important TV. Breakdowns of this year's TV election coverage show that, if anything, it slightly favoured Labour; but a scapegoat must be found, so all the market research goes out of the window. In its place, back comes the tabloid villain, bigger and badder than ever.

This time, the argument goes, the Tory tabloids were so bad that they really did have an effect. But even if you accept that this year's campaign was dirtier than



usual, where is the evidence that it had a decisive influence? The *Daily Mirror* ran an anti-Tory campaign every bit as vindictive as the *Sun*'s anti-Labour one, yet there was a swing to the Conservatives among *Mirror* readers. On the other hand, half of the *Sun*'s readers showed superhuman resistance to its extraordinary powers and didn't vote Tory.

In fact, the whole discussion is just a way to avoid confronting the failings of the Labour Party itself. A crusade against tabloid misconduct is a convenient cover for the anti-working class prejudice at the heart of the liberal and Labourist tradition. In the memorable words of Labour Euro-MP Anita Pollock: 'I do not like to sit next to a *Sun* reader on the tube.' The decline in Labour's fortunes has merely brought this contempt to the surface.

Now that their unquestioning loyalty can no longer be counted on, the despised masses are blamed for their selfishness and stupidity. Another *Guardian* reader spoke of the 'unpalatable truth': *Sun*-reading Basildon electors are 'unfit holders of the franchise'. He explained that this was not because they were too stupid, but because 'if your chief source of information is one of smear and downright lies, day after day, week after week, how can you possibly form a reasonable idea of what you are voting for?'. Which sounds like a mealy-mouthed way of saying 'working class people believe anything they read'.

If anything, it is these snobs who are guilty of believing too much of what they read in the *Sun*—particularly the paper's claims about its own importance. A vox pop in Basildon (where the *Sun* boasted that locals had displayed its election day cover in car windows) revealed pragmatic support for the Tories among both *Mirror* and *Sun* readers, and general amusement at the *Sun*'s anti-Kinnock jibes; but nothing to suggest mass brainwashing. An unemployed carpenter summed up the feeling: 'I vote Conservative because I want the best for my family. I want a job, and at the end of the day I think they've got the best chance of improving things. Whatever the papers say, nobody would vote for Labour while Kinnock was in power because they don't like him.' (*Sunday Times*, 12 April 1992).

The *Sun* has consistently reflected

this basic philosophy. It prides itself on being a working class paper for people who are ambitious and want the best for themselves and their families. It also claims to have more 'A, B and C1' readers than the *Times* and the *Guardian* combined, and so to be the most influential paper in Britain. It is required reading for MPs, and ex-editor Larry Lamb observed that every important person claims to read their chauffeur's copy.

The *Sun*'s rise (documented in three recent books on the subject*) began when it ditched Labour and hitched itself to Thatcher's bandwagon in the seventies, consciously appealing to disillusioned Labour voters. Thatcher won in 1979 and even then the *Sun* (rather than Labour's debacle) was widely credited with her success. The declining left press watched in horrified fascination as Murdoch and Maggie went from strength to strength, and began to ascribe magical powers to them both. Yet the mighty *Sun* could do nothing to save the Iron Lady once she had lost her political grip. I suggest the Labour Party starts looking for a new scapegoat.

* *Shock! Horror!*, SJ Taylor, Bantam Press, £14.99

* *Sun-sation*, Roslyn Grose, Angus & Robertson, £4.99

* *The Good, the Bad and the Unacceptable*, Raymond Snoddy, Faber & Faber £14.99

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Alka Singh on the Magritte exhibition at the Hayward

Do we see what we think or think what we see? This is the central preoccupation of René Magritte's paintings. He suggests that the two things are not entirely separate: that neither the world of physical objects nor our subjective perception of reality are discrete, self-contained affairs. His investigation of the relationship between them is often very indiscreet. Magritte finds the commonsense order and associations of the everyday world an unreliable guide, and casts them to the wind—not in the shrieking, anarchic way of your average Dadaist, but in an altogether cooler, more ruthless manner.

The current exhibition at the Hayward Gallery provides a great opportunity to see a wide range of Magritte's work, starting from the early 1920s when he was experimenting with various avant-garde styles. Landscape and Military Tattoo of 1920 are brightly coloured Futuristic works. His Baigneuses of 1921 gives more than a passing nod to Picasso and Leger. By 1925, although he was still experimenting with Cubism and Futurism, Magritte had produced his



The Spirit of Geometry, 1937

What you see is

first two Surrealist paintings, The Two Sisters and Nocturne. The influence of De Chirico's poetic images painted in a representational style clearly helped him to find his own artistic voice.

Visual puns such as the shape of a bird filled in with sky; everyday objects juxtaposed in a way which seems random but isn't, as in Elective Affinities; text used to undermine what we think we see, as in the famous Ceci N'est pas une Pipe—these are the things we associate with Magritte. We are reminded here that they were never cheap tricks. It is the painter who forces together incongruous images, but the shock derives from the viewer's own uneasy perception that behind such images lie continuities of meaning which are all too often embarrassing or disturbing. In The Rape, for example, we see in a woman's face a pair of breasts for eyes and a tuft of pubic hair instead of a mouth. Most of the problems we have with that image we supply ourselves.

Violence, humour and eroticism were used by the other Surrealists too, but not in the same way. Magritte rarely painted the liberal nightmare images of Dali; nor did he delve deep into experimental

automatism as both Ernst and Miro did. Although technically, Magritte is more pedestrian than many of them, he more than matches them in his power to assault not so much our senses, as our sensibility. Consider for example The Murderous Sky (1927) with its gory, bleeding birds, or An Act of Violence (1932) which is a perfect example of how his work slowly, quietly does violence to the way we usually see the world around us.

In The Spirit of Geometry (1937) a robust figure cradles an infant, but their heads are reversed. A grotesquely small and naive baby face stares out from the shoulders of a nursing mother, while the little bundle of joy looks up with the pensive profile of a weary parent. An everyday relation is exploded, the symbol of love and care is transformed. In the reversal of roles the domination of the parent is obvious to us because it appals to see an adult in a child's arms. Even the innocent face of a child can assume a sinister connotation, hinting at the authority a child exercises over its mother by the sheer force of its own vulnerability. Magritte makes us

what?

think and re-think in order to find, or to acknowledge new connections and new meanings.

He was to this extent a typical Surrealist, even though he spent only three years in Paris (1927-30), where he contributed to André Breton's review *La Revolution Surrealiste*. The experience of the First World War and the ensuing social conflict across Europe led sections of the intelligentsia to question the values of civilization. For the Surrealists, the old social and moral certainties were anathema. Traditional society was found guilty of mass carnage and judged incapable of fulfilling people's desires.

The traditional role for art as depicting reality seemed redundant—the Surrealists believed the aim was to change society, and that artists had a key role in this through exploring the subconscious world of dreams. Science and reason were suspect by association with moribund society. The Surrealists saw their task as freeing creativity from such constrictions, and so achieving a fuller understanding of the world. The artistic and political contradictions of their ideas remained unresolved, and took many of them into a troubled relationship with the French Communist Party. Yet in the process of experimenting they produced not only some bad art, but also, at times, some very good art indeed.

To subsidise his work Magritte worked in commercial graphics designing wall-paper, shop signs and advertising. It rubbed off. He also raided the imagery of the cinema and the yellow press, stimulated by the accidental juxtaposition of pictures on a newsstand or hoarding. Classical rules of proportion or composition break down in the cacophony and contrast of modern marketing visuals. On the magazine rack men tower over tower blocks, while being dwarfed by household products. In the clash of the unlike, fresh significance emerges as ordinary symbols bounce off one another.

Perhaps more than any other Surrealist, Magritte's best works hint at the rational basis of their irrationalism. In the famous bland, bowler-hatted figure we can see that the absent, distorted and fragmented features are a conscious expression of the uncertainty and alienation beleaguering the individual in a world where all that was once solid has long ago melted into air. In the 1930s such perceptions were mainly confined to sections of the intelligentsia. Today they are much more widespread. It is not at all surprising that the ad-men have had a field day with Magritte, but if you visit this exhibition, you'll find there's more to him than flogging cigarettes and televisions.

Magritte at the Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London; 21 May—2 August 1992.

Wayne's World

Seriously soggy

John Fitzpatrick found the laugh began to stick in his throat

I found it difficult not to laugh at *Wayne's World*. In fact, it was as easy as I had expected. The sight of four hard rock fans headbanging away to 'Bohemian Rhapsody' on the car stereo simply triggers off in me a lot of positive feelings about the silly, merry abandon that can convulse any group of friends (without a poker up their collective sphincter). Even in the ritualised forms dear to bonding males this sort of communal foolishness is the sort of activity which the cliché 'harmless fun' was coined to describe.

Similarly the slang of any set, clique or gang is often very clever and funny as well as more than a little ridiculous. Here it is as ironic and exclusive as you can get, mobilising all those in-crowd feelings, especially the mocking of outsiders. My favourite is their belated but emphatic use of the word 'not' after some positive endorsement such as 'excellent', all with perfect timing of course, and with Wayne's (Mike Myers) superb smile.

I also found it difficult not to chuckle at the many deft touches of Penelope Spheeris' direction—the camera wandering off to get the life story of the pathologically morbid proprietor of the diner, or ducking under the table to hear Garth's (Dana Carvey) misgivings about a deal over lunch, or lingering on the dozen or so used cars stacked on a spike (only in America) outside the diner, a pomo totem pole. And speaking of native Americans, the film is probably worth seeing alone for Wayne and Garth's backstage encounter with Alice Cooper, who is sincerely into the Algonquin etymology of Milwaukee.

Yes, it's an amusing film in parts but I expect you can probably feel a 'but' coming on, or even a 'not'. It wasn't just that the laughs were much sparser than you'd expect from a sharp comedy outfit, but more that the whole film was seriously soggy at its centre about its subject matter. Spheeris, who made the excellent *Suburbia*, probably thought it would be a good idea to bring into view and maybe ridicule another grisly slice of the American way. At the risk of sounding



like a party on! pooper she has ended up colluding with the nerds.

Long before half way it had dawned on me that the whole thing was actually a *celebration* of arrested adolescence. The goofy good nature of our heroes is thrust down our throats at every opportunity, underlined by a genuinely bogus (if you get my meaning) counterposition of their creativity and integrity to the traditional nastiness of a corporate smoothy in a suit (Rob Lowe).

The alternative endings, and the pre-emptive deconstructive postscript, can't offset the thoroughly warm esteem in which we have been led to regard the nerds, and aren't intended to. They are intended to impress the odd *Guardian* journalist, so that they will gush praise on the film's 'play with linguistic registers...troping on tropes'. Not. Compared to *Wayne's World*, *This is Spinal Tap* was a ruthless and certainly relentless assault on the pretensions and many other shortcomings of its target.

In fact the true antecedent for Wayne and Garth is Arthur Fonzarelli, the Fonz of *Happy Days* fame. He had the same sort of mannerisms, catchphrases and the self-contained subculture (again featuring the diner). Most of all he posed the same sort of rather endearing 'threat' to the adult mainstream against which he defined himself. All that *Wayne's World* is missing was a Mom and Dad to feed up the boys, but don't worry they do live at home.

The success of *Wayne's World* can hardly be about satire or send up or observation or even straightforward humour. I don't want to get into a debate about Bernard Manning here, but I did find it both unfunny and obnoxious that the women of whom Wayne and Garth approved were called 'babelicious', and those of whom they disapproved were called 'mental'.

It sounds obvious but I suspect it's probably true; its success is all about regression and nostalgia. We have been here before not just with the Fonz, but with real poignancy and perception in *American Graffiti* and *The Last Picture Show*. This time around it's not even good farce. No doubt the film hit number one at the US box office (taking \$110m) and is raking it in over here (£1.75m in three days) because it feels good about itself, about its vacuous, inane, harmless, gormless world without responsibility or consequences. Party on Wayne, as no doubt somebody said on the Titanic. ●



The police as performance artists

TV loves the cops. The cops love TV. And just like lovers, TV and the cops imitate each other. *Z Cars* was based on the memoirs of Bill 'City Cop' Prendegast, but Prendegast had already based himself on Phillip Marlowe. The police trust TV. Researching a documentary on 'the handless corpse'—a late seventies' drug-related murder—I had a thousand doors slammed in my face but not by the cops. They took their phones off the hook, ordered tea and got out their photo albums. In the seventies, I saw a panda car in pursuit of a youth who had run out of Wimpy's without paying. The panda ploughed through a pile of cardboard boxes, just as they always did on *Starsky and Hutch*. I swear the driver was wearing a chunky cardigan and singing 'Don't Give Up on Us Baby'.

● *Crimewatch UK* is the latest convulsion in this twisted branch of hyper-reality. *Crimewatch* is the cops' *South Bank Show*—inspectors talk like serious playwrights about their latest works, their conversation punctuated by little reconstructions of important scenes. Meanwhile in the background, lesser cops man the phones and swing on their chairs with elaborate preoccupation, trying to angle themselves into shot, desperate, like extras in the Rover's.

Crimewatch UK gets 12m-13m viewers. Who are they? Clearly a good proportion are the spouses of cops and criminals (there is a massive increase of both categories). Presumably, the criminal classes watch in the hope of glimpsing themselves on those clips from the building society security cameras. There is always a selection of these, uncannily reminiscent of the 'new chart entries' section of *Top of the Pops* ('and bubbling under as public enemy number 33 is a brand new entry—the masked gunman from the Bradford & Bingley'). But what do the general viewers get out of it?

● Do they sit there with their notebooks taking down registration numbers and birthmarks in the hope of spotting a real robber? Do they expect to stumble into serious crime on the way to the off-licence? If they do, it's because that's the expectation which *Crimewatch* sets out to nurture. The programme is designed to increase our fear of crime and our sense of its proximity. The battery of phones in the background, the subtitles flashing by, the mantra-like incantation of the phone numbers, and the late evening 'Crimewatch Update' all conspire to give the programme the pounding urgency of an Election Special or CNN war coverage.

The presenters—Nick Ross and Sue Cook—do not sit down like current affairs reporters but prowl restlessly round the studio as though they might be called out or shot down any minute. Ross—a man who takes his style cue from *Top Shop's* Stepford branch—signs off like a camp Hannibal Lecter with the line, 'don't have a nightmare'. It's not surprising that the recent report from the University of Sterling—*Women Viewing Violence*—found that 67 per cent of women questioned thought *Crimewatch* was one of the most disturbing things on TV.

● In fact, there is nothing truly urgent about *Crimewatch*. There is so little serious crime that it takes a month to fill the slot and even then you spend half the time looking at stolen t-shirts and listening to repeats of the phone number. The police themselves are notoriously unacquainted with the very concept of urgency. For instance, when they managed to tape the ransom demands of Stephanie Slater's kidnapper, they did not

release the tapes to the *News* but held on to them for almost a fortnight so that they could be on *Crimewatch* (presumably so that they could be on telly themselves). Last month's show was instrumental in effecting four arrests. Four expressed as a percentage of 13m is 0.00003 of one per cent. Small.

● *Crimewatch UK* serves the same function as policing in general. The police are in fact, pretty crap at catching criminals. In this country, you can easily get away with murder, and crime certainly does pay. Those that are caught tend to be innocent. Take the handless corpse about which the police were so keen to talk. The murderers were so incompetent that they dumped the body in a lake used by a police diving school. They left a car full of blood, hair and fingerprints in a station car park. The killers could not have been more helpful, but the cops did not catch up with them; their girlfriends grassed them up.

The reason the glitzy theatricality of *Crimewatch* appeals so strongly to the police is that modern policing is glitzy theatrical. As I write the Merseyside police helicopter is buzzing our street and probing my garret with its searchlight. It cost the city £1m and has been instrumental in arresting a neighbour for possession of stolen t-shirts (the very t-shirts that appeared on *Crimewatch*). Its main function is not to catch anyone but to create the impression that Liverpool is a war zone and therefore to reinforce the notion that the police are necessary and effective.

● This particular brand of street theatre was pioneered by the Los Angeles Police Department. Being Los Angeles most of the cops are resting actors and they love dressing up and posing around. They have done such a good job of convincing their citizens that they are living out *Blade Runner* that now when they see real footage of real cops beating up real people, many citizens appear not to believe their own eyes. But if the police are really performance artists, why don't they have to queue up for Arts Council grants like the rest of us?

Of course, police performance is a lot more commercial than most forms of street theatre. The *Crimewatch* inserts have spawned a whole brood of true-crime dramas. Michael Winner's *True Crimes* concentrates on police successes (it's a short series). And in the autumn, LWT are to put out a series of plays which will be in effect full-length reconstructions of famous crimes. The BBC have recently cottoned on to the negative image of society which *Crimewatch* encourages, and have come up with a balancing programme called *Crime File* which sets out to portray the 'good side of human nature'. The night I watched it, Sue Cook was being shown the latest forensic techniques by an insanely chummy boffin with an air hostess smile.

● Even as he spoke, across the airwaves on *C4 News*, Dr Frank Skuse was using the same air hostess smile and boffiny manner to explain why he had spent an entire decade casually perjuring himself and putting innocent people in jail. It turned out he was trying to make a statement. Judith Ward and the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four were actually a series of installations, attempts to say something about Law and Order as the Human Condition. The reason Skuse didn't have to get a grant to make these was that his Art had won, the state had chosen his illusion as the one it wanted to believe in. Law and order is another modern superstition. Property is its sacrament, policing is its priesthood, and Nick Ross its rosy little altar boy.

Rising Sun: Michael Crichton, Century, £14.99 hbk

Fear and loathing in LA

Few books capture the current mood of 'America first' better than Michael Crichton's thriller, *Rising Sun*, which hit the bookstands last month. At first sight this seems a little odd. After all, the plot is routine, the characterisation thin, the tone positively hysterical. Yet *Rising Sun* has got under America's skin. With an initial print-run of 225 000, it has topped the American best-seller lists and is about to be turned into a blockbuster movie.

Rising Sun is a very strange book. It is a whodunit with a bibliography; a cross between Starsky and Hutch and a party political broadcast.

The action revolves around an investigation into the death of a beautiful (white) woman in the Nakamoto building in Los Angeles. At every stage of the murder

out of the mouth of Adolf Hitler. Sometimes the people didn't even know it. But they did it. That's how it is in war man.'

Rising Sun's real hero is Captain Connor. In contrast to Graham, he is exceedingly well informed about Japan. We know that because he speaks the language fluently and likes eating in sushi bars. Yet in many ways his views are indistinguishable from Graham's. The main difference is that Connor believes you have to know about the Japanese before you can beat them.

Like most people who have lived in Japan, Connor says he has mixed feelings about the country. In one of his most generous statements, he says that 'in many ways, the Japanese are wonderful people. They're hardworking, intelligent and humorous. They have real integrity'. But he believes that 'they are also the most racist people on the planet'. He says that he left Japan because he 'got tired of being a nigger'.

This theme of Japanese racism recurs several times in *Rising Sun*. It is an accusation often levelled against Japan by prominent Americans in real life. Recently America's attention was focused on the predicament of Konishiki, the Hawaiian sumo wrestler, who despite an excellent fighting record has failed to reach the rank of *yokozuna* (grand champion). In a trans-Pacific bout of mammoth proportions, president George Bush and 'the American people' backed Konishiki, while Kiichi Miyazawa, the Japanese prime minister, denied allegations of racism.

Coming from somebody who won the 1988 presidential election by whipping up fears of black criminality, this is a bit rich. The Bush campaign's notorious television commercial featured Willie Horton, a black man who raped a white woman while on weekend parole from prison. Horton had been released on a reform programme backed by Bush's Democratic opponent in the presidential race.

As for the LAPD, anybody who had any illusions in its anti-racist credentials must surely have abandoned them after recent events in the city. The publication of Crichton's book in Britain coincides with the explosion of black anger in the Los Angeles riots, after an all-white jury found four white LAPD officers not guilty of assault with a deadly weapon or using unnecessary force, after they were filmed systematically beating an unarmed black motorist with metal truncheons in 1991. In the wake of the LA riots, Crichton's attempt to use an LAPD officer as a mouthpiece to condemn Japanese racism comes across as a grotesque paradox.

In a way, *Rising Sun* is not about Japan at all. Like many of the revisionist writers on Japan cited in his bibliography, Crichton is more concerned with America. The book is a call for America to get off its knees and establish its leading position in the world.

Yet this is easier said than done. A basic assumption of American national identity is that the USA's greatness was largely achieved through its role as the pre-eminent representative of the free market. Today, however, Japan is either catching or overtaking America in most economic sectors. The conclusion drawn by many Americans is that the Japanese must be breaking the rules—since the American system is naturally superior to the Japanese one.

The intense US hostility towards the Japanese cannot be explained simply as a consequence of economic decline. There has long been an important racial element in the relationship between the two sides. The USA has always found it difficult to accept the fact that a non-white nation could make it as a world power. Ever since Japan beat Russia in the 1904-5 war, the USA and the European powers have felt uneasy about its might.

For their part, the Japanese have long been acutely aware that being Asian meant that they could never be fully accepted into the Western club. Measures such as the 1924 Oriental Exclusion Act, which banned all Asian (including Japanese) immigration into the USA until 1952, were a constant source of annoyance to Japan. Such laws served to underline the fact that the Japanese were different, not really part of the elite white man's club.

Although it never disappeared, racial hostility was held in check by the Cold War. In the postwar years the concept of the 'West' was used to denote all the major capitalist nations, and the notion of the 'East' described the Soviet bloc. The US-run Western Alliance united North America, Western Europe and Japan against the supposed red threat. Today the 'West' is in trouble and divided, the Soviet Union has gone, and in many American eyes the 'East' has become, once again, the 'Yellow Peril'.

Crichton has tapped this mood of fear and loathing. He knows that when Americans talk of Japanese racism their real concern is somewhat different: at the back of their minds is the fear that the notion of white superiority is being called into question. As one of the few 'good' experts in *Rising Sun* puts it, 'Japanese corporations in America feel the way we would feel about doing business in Nigeria: they think they're surrounded by savages'.

The last time anti-Japanese chauvinism took off in America was during the Second World War. In those ugly days, the press routinely referred to the Japanese as 'mad dogs' and 'yellow vermin'. Cartoons portrayed the Japanese as sub-human. The occasion for this eruption of anti-Japanese fever was the attack on Pearl Harbour. But the ideological ground had been prepared long before. The prevailing belief that Americans were a superior race naturally led people to believe that non-Americans, particularly non-whites, were inferior. The danger of racial thought getting a stronger grip on society today is becoming clearer all the time.

Daniel Nassim

The theme of Japanese racism recurs in *Rising Sun*

hunt the two central characters, Detective Peter J Smith and Captain John Connor of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), find their inquiry hampered. They are offered enormous bribes and threatened by an elaborate blackmail.

In its paranoia, *Rising Sun* is a sort of West Coast Protocols of the Elders of Zion for the nineties. Only this time the international conspiracy is Japanese rather than Jewish. The immensely powerful but largely hidden Japanese are revealed to dominate American society. Politicians, the courts, academia and the media are all shown to be 'Chrysanthemum Kissers'. It is an America where you order a Budweiser in a bar and get offered an Asahi beer instead. Detective Smith's concluding plea is for America to start fighting back: 'It's time for us to take control of our country again. It's time for us to start paying our way.'

Smith is the novel's narrator and supposedly the chief protagonist. As a lieutenant in the special services division of the LAPD, his job is to liaise with the Asian community. The story starts with Smith trying to learn basic Japanese from a language cassette. But only through the course of the investigation does Smith learn what the Japanese are really like.

Despite his central role, Smith is in many ways a foil for other characters and their views. There is the crass Tom Graham of the LAPD, whose hatred of Japan is crude and uninformed:

'This country is in a war and some people understand it, and some other people are siding with the enemy. Just like in World War Two, some people were paid by Germany to promote Nazi propaganda. New York newspapers published editorials right

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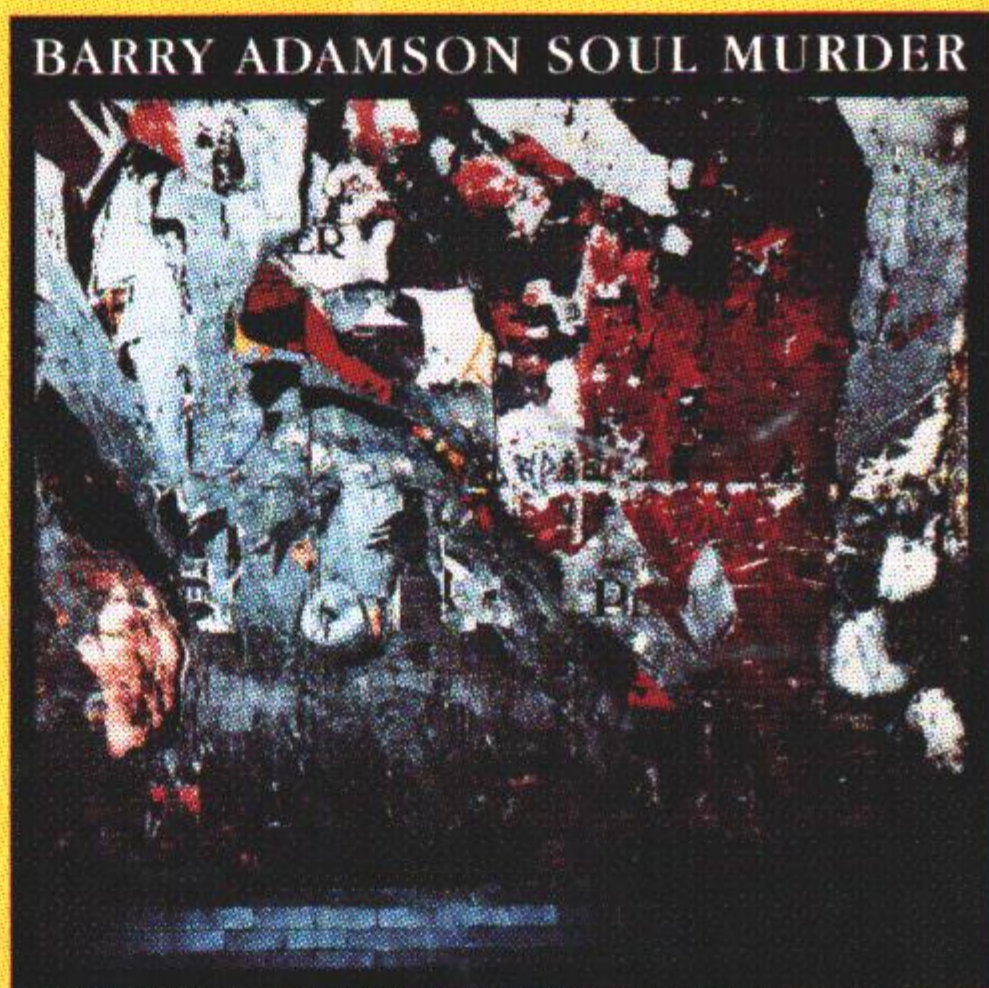
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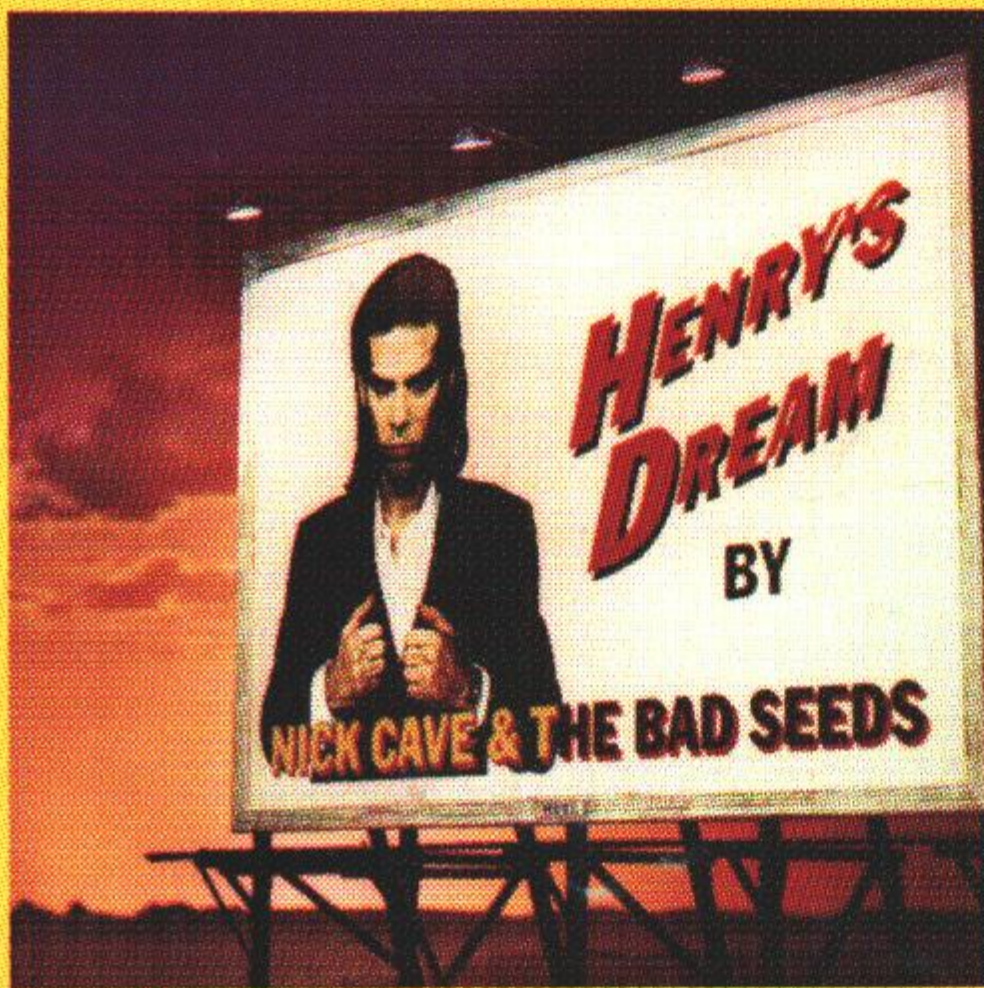
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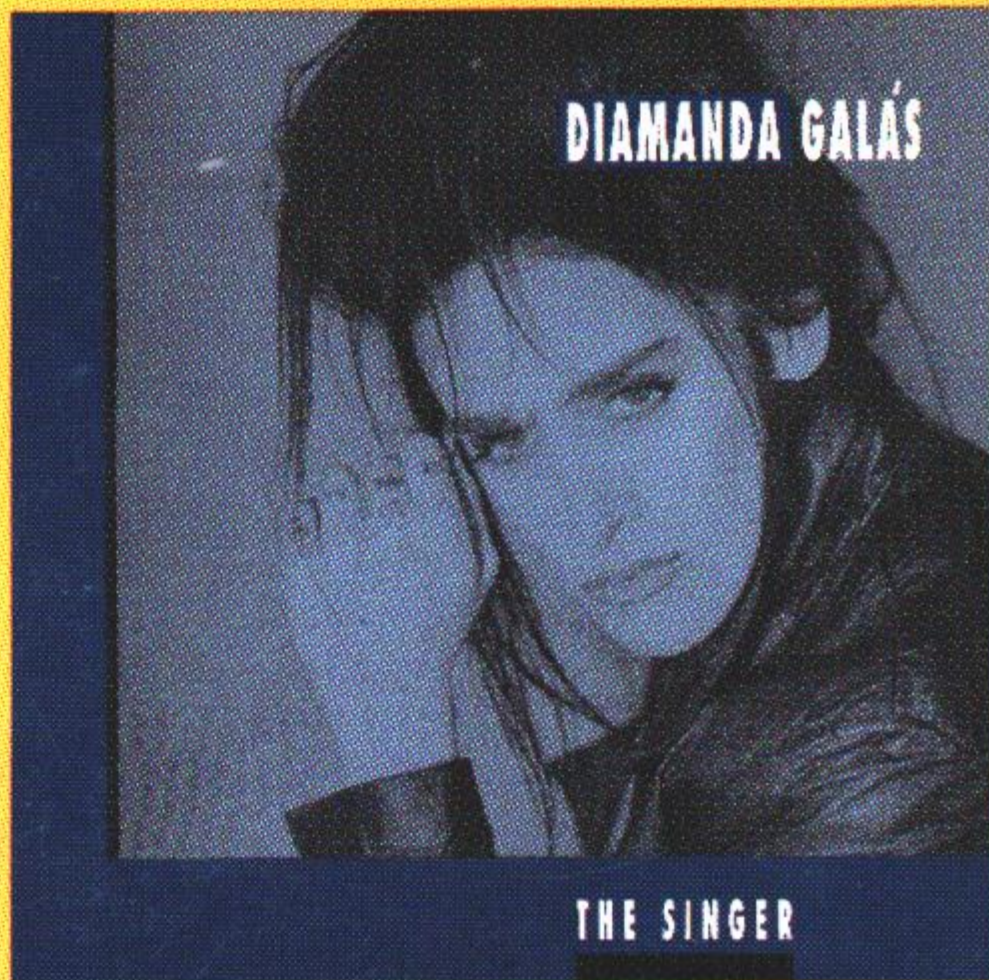
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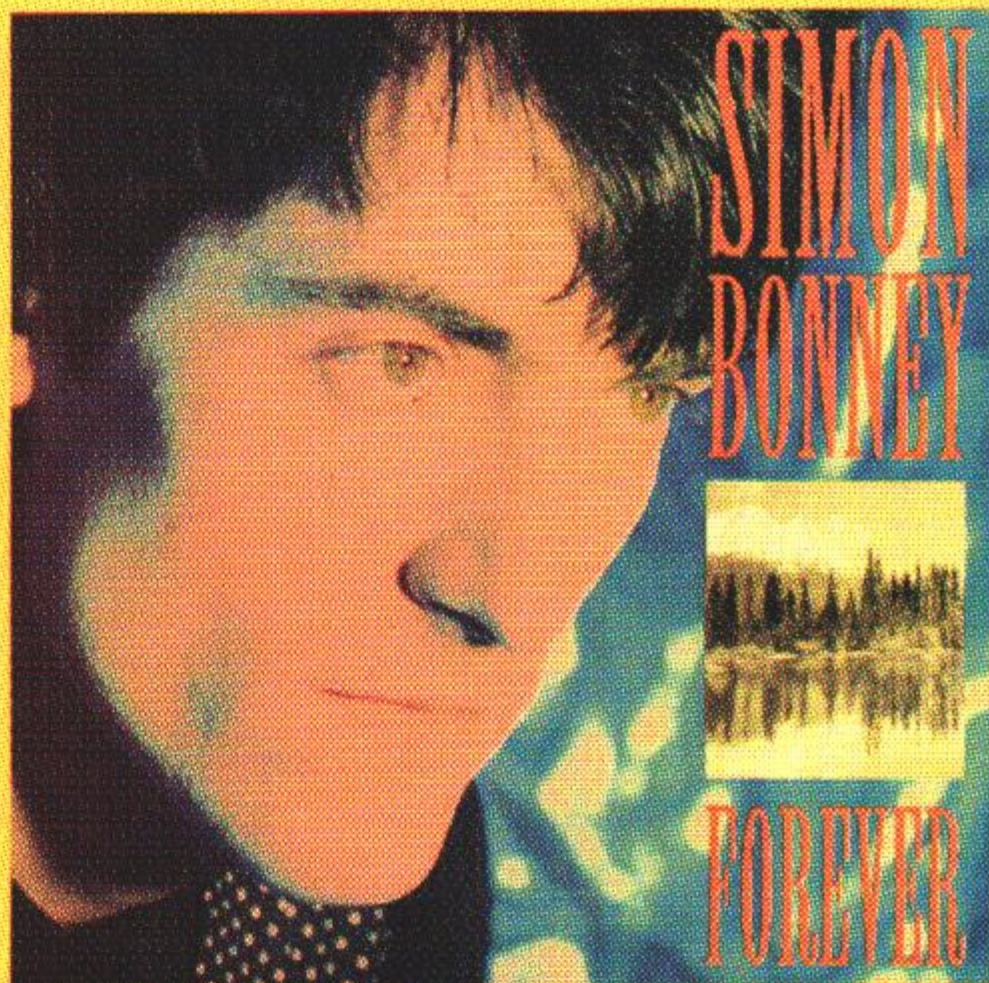
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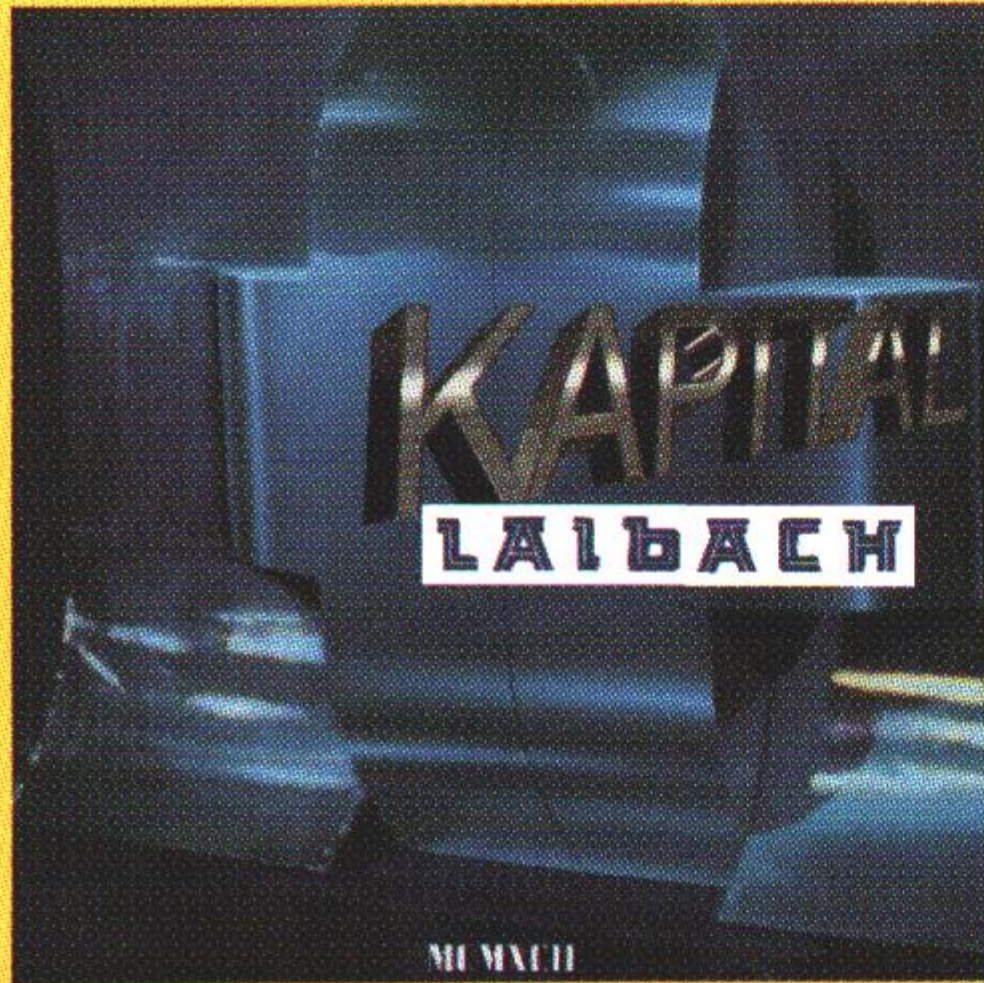
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