

LIVING

MARXISM

SPECIAL FEATURE
*The dangers
of health
campaigns*
page 26

US \$5 DM7 FF25
UK £2 September 1992 No47

From the Gulf to Bosnia

NO

WESTERN

SOLUTION

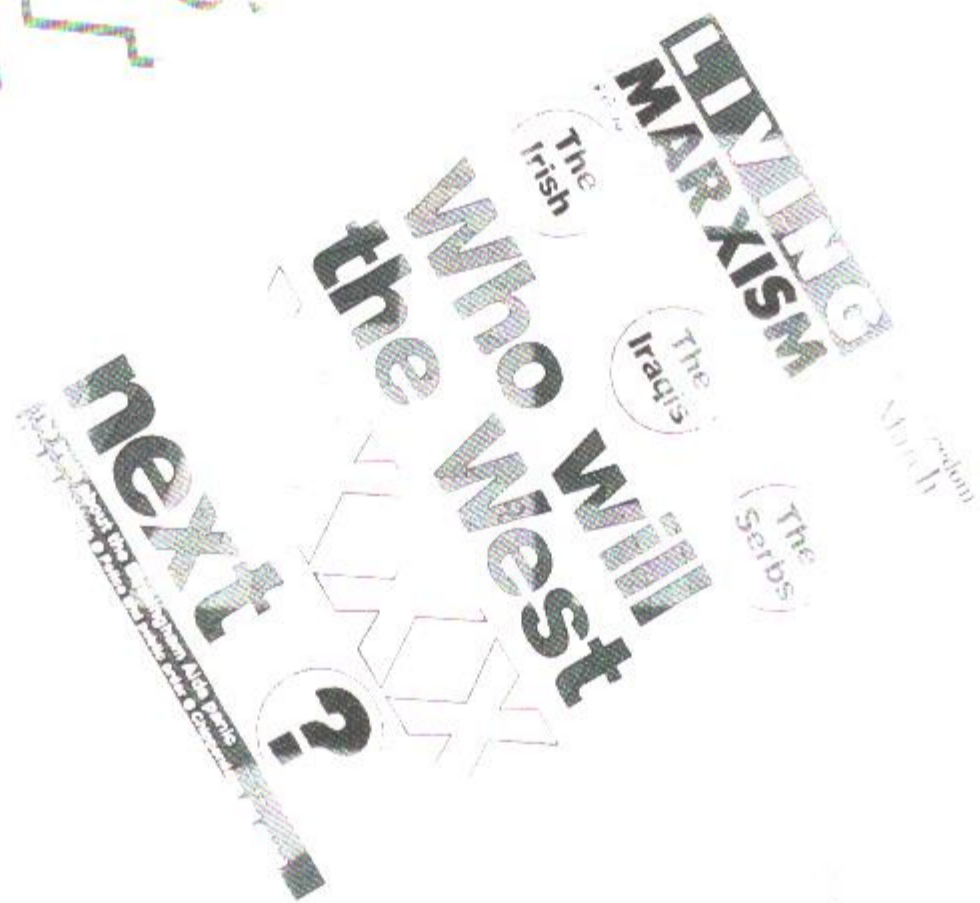
Conference

***Hot Wars and Holocausts:
understanding the New World Order***



see centre pages

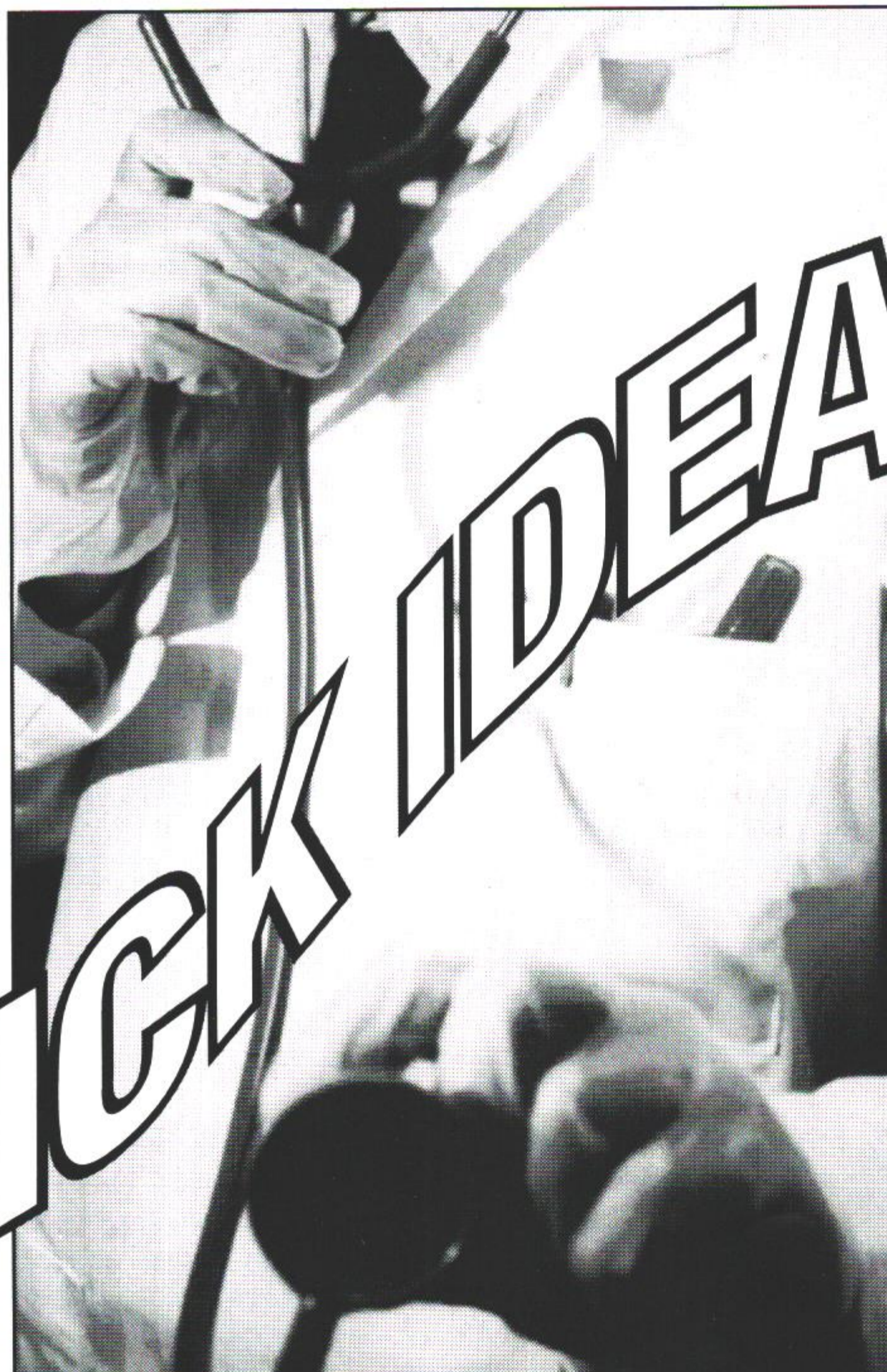
Subscribe



A subscription to *Living Marxism* is now better value than ever: at £19.50 for a year, it saves you almost 20 per cent on the cover price. Write to *Living Marxism* Subscription, 13 (4) 63 11 JF LTD, London WC1N 3XX or phone (071) 375 1485 (ansaphone)

contents

- 4 **Editorial:**
No Western solution
- 6 Letters
- 8 **Bosnia: the invention of
a Holocaust** *Joan Phillips*
- 12 Germany: another Nuremberg
trial *Rob Knight*
- 14 Playing the Holocaust card
Daniel Nassim
- 17 Ann Bradley
- 18 **Economy: do they have
an alternative?** *Phil Murphy*
- 21 Toby Banks
- 22 South Africa: problems and
solutions *Charles Longford*
- 24 **Conference:**
Hot Wars and Holocausts
- 26 The dangers of healthy living
Dr Michael Fitzpatrick
- 31 The abuse of alcohol concern
Karen Gold
- 32 **Teenage pregnancy and
the Tories** *Anne Burton*
- 35 Female condoms and scrotal
slings *Bernadette Whelan*
- 36 A democratic Africa?
Barry Crawford
- 37 Third world debt: the forgotten
disaster *Daniel Nassim*
- 38 **Living: The Alien within;**
The Mafia; Yardies;
Olympic drug-runners
- 43 Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV
- 44 **The Marxist Review of Books**



SICK IDEAS

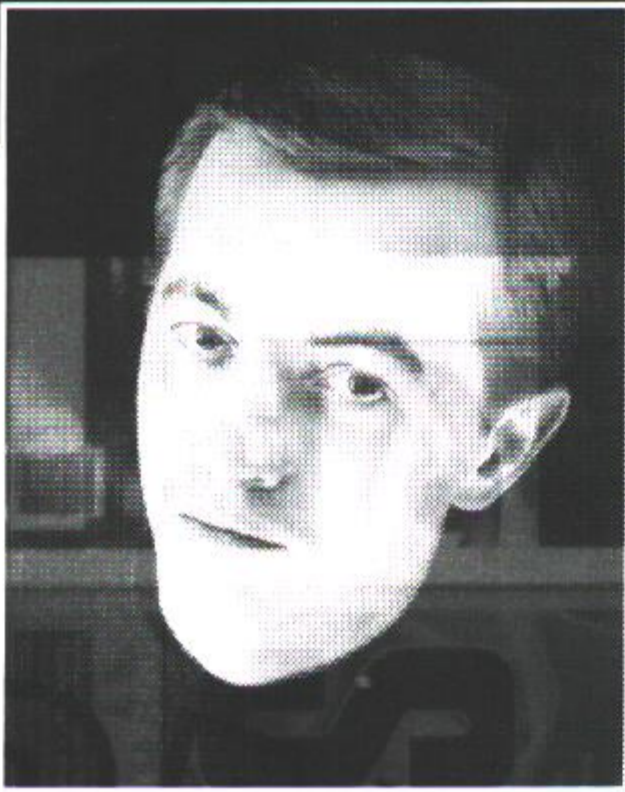
The health promotion campaigns of recent years have depicted disease as the wages of sin, and turned medicine into a quasi-religious moral crusade, argues Dr Michael Fitzpatrick
—page 26

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**

**LIVING
MARXISM**

Monthly review of the
Revolutionary Communist Party
Editorial: (071) 375 1702
Subscriptions: (071) 375 1485

Subscription rates: Britain and Northern Ireland £19.50 ● Europe (airmail) £27 ● Outside Europe (airmail) £37 ● Overseas (surface mail) £23 ● (Institutions add £7.50) ● Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX; Fax (071) 377 0346 ● Distributed in the UK by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE; Phone: West Drayton (0895) 444 055; Fax (0895) 445 255; Telex 881 3787 ● Distributed in the USA by Bernhard DeBoer Inc, 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA; Phone (201) 667 9300 ● Typeset by Junius Publications (TU) © copyright Revolutionary Communist Party
Printed by Russell Press (TU), Nottingham ● ISSN 0955-2448 September 1992. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed



mick hume

No Western solution

A land corridor through Bosnia or safe havens for refugees? Air-strikes against the Serbs or a 100 000-strong army of occupation? Defensive peace-keeping or offensive peace-making? At the time of writing, the debate continues about what scale of humanitarian Western intervention is required in Bosnia.

But there is another set of questions which nobody seems to be asking, about the credentials and motives of the would-be peace-keepers from the West.

George Bush, president of the USA, is responsible for killing a quarter of a million Iraqi Muslims. He bombed Panama City into rubble. He sent troops to occupy Los Angeles. Why should anybody think that he can become the saviour of Muslims and champion of free cities in Bosnia?

John Major was Bush's loyal lieutenant in the Gulf bloodbath. He has a loyal lieutenant of his own (Chris Patten) running squalid refugee camps and expelling Vietnamese boat people from Hong Kong. He is still waging a dirty war in Ireland. Why should we believe he can deliver peace and freedom to the ex-Yugoslav republics?

Francois Mitterrand was the minister responsible for France's war and torture campaign in Algeria in the fifties. As president he has fought a colonial war in New

Caledonia and a race war against immigrants at home. His agents even blew up a Greenpeace ship in New Zealand. What can we expect him to teach the peoples of Bosnia about humanitarianism?

Helmut Kohl is the German chancellor who has honoured the graves of SS men, and barred from German citizenship anybody whose forebears fought against the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe. He has set up a detention-camp-to-deportation conveyor belt for refugees. Why should he be the man to prevent pogroms in Bosnia?

Alongside the issue of whether it is sensible to expect Western statesmen to act as social workers, there are other unanswered questions of the kind raised by Joan Phillips (see p8): questions about why Western observers tried to invent a Holocaust in Bosnia, when such prison camps and refugee crises are commonplace around the world; or why they singled out the Serbs for attack, when all sides in the conflict have acted in a similar fashion.

None of this can make sense if you accept the West's image of itself as a benign force in the world. But get behind the mask of humane concern, and matters become much clearer.

As the record of their presidents and premiers suggests, the Western states are

not charitable institutions or friendly societies. They are the leading players in the cut-throat world of international business and diplomacy. To survive in that position, they have to compete for profits and struggle for power: against the rest of the world, and among each other. These are the motives which inform every move they make on the international stage.

The need to operate at all times as the guardians of capitalist wealth and influence makes the Western governments incapable of acting as humanitarians, even if they genuinely wanted to. John Major might well choke on his peas watching the TV pictures of suffering in Sarajevo. But when it comes to deciding on policy, his cabinet's sole concern will be how best to bolster the status of the British establishment against its rivals in the world's markets and power summits.

All the hyperbole about preventing a Holocaust and stopping 'ethnic cleansing' has acted as a cover for the West to pursue its own agenda in relation to the Yugoslav war. However it is justified, an intervention based upon the self-interest of the Western powers can do nothing for the well-being of the peoples of Bosnia. To see what happens when such concerned rhetoric is turned into action, look at the outcome of some of the West's other humanitarian campaigns of late.

A few years back saving Africa was all the rage. But charitable gestures did not alter the hard facts about how the Western-run world market operates. Today, while millions face starvation, Western financiers are still bleeding Africa of billions in debt repayments. Or what about Eastern Europe? After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the air was thick with Western promises of humanitarian aid and helpful investments. Today, as economies lie in ruins from Romania to Russia, Eastern Europe has joined the third world as a net *contributor* to the coffers of Western capitalism.

The Gulf War provides a stark example of what Western intervention can do for those on the receiving end. Bush and Major presented it as a mission to free Kuwait and save the Kurds from Saddam Hussein. But from a Western strategic perspective, freeing Kuwait meant putting the Emir back on the throne, and helping him pursue an 'ethnic cleansing'-style pogrom against the Palestinian community. And saving the Kurds from Saddam meant penning them into camps where they have been abandoned by the UN and bombed by Turkey, a Nato ally. Meanwhile Iraqi civilians still suffer the bitter effects of carpet bombing and sanctions. Such are the benefits of being liberated by the Americans and the British.

From the Gulf to the Balkans, the motivation for increased Western intervention today has nothing to do with a sudden outbreak of humanitarianism. The real cause is the power struggle which has broken out among the Western states since the end of the Cold War, as the old order unravels and America's leading role in the world is called increasingly into question. Behind the banners of humanitarian concern about Kuwait or Bosnia, the Western rivals are fighting out their own power battles knee-deep in other people's misery.

In the Gulf, America blew up a local dispute between two tinpot dictators into the biggest international conflict since the Second World War, in an attempt to pull the fragmenting Western Alliance together behind US military leadership. On that occasion it worked. But, as we pointed out at the time, the accelerating slippage in American authority meant that

Washington was unlikely to be able to pull it off again.

The response to the Yugoslav war shows that we have reached the next stage in the break-up of the Western Alliance. This time there is no one power calling the shots and pulling the others in behind it. Instead, all of them have become involved in a grotesque game of one-upmanship, trying to outdo their rivals in posing as the champions of right.

Germany went first last year, with its crusade for Croatian independence and its campaign to demonise the Serbs. The Americans have responded this year

be. Yet neither can any of them afford to hang back and get left too far behind their competitors. Things are slipping out of anybody's control and the confused intra-Western contest for influence over Bosnia has set the tone for the future of international affairs.

Whatever form Western intervention takes, and whichever foreign power finally benefits the most, the biggest and most immediate losers will be the peoples of the former Yugoslav republics themselves. At every stage of the crisis, the pattern has been the same: the more the West becomes involved, the worse things get.

The more the West becomes involved, the worse things get

by trying to seize the anti-Serbian mantle themselves over events in Bosnia. France has sought to put itself in the picture through maverick initiatives like Mitterrand's helicopter mission to Sarajevo, while Britain has hovered in the background promoting Lord Carrington's rather pathetic attempt at a peace mission.

Each time one Western statesman has urged the need for firm action in Bosnia, the others have felt obliged to show some bravado of their own, threatening the Serbs with air-strikes or war crimes trials, in order to keep up with the Bushs or the Kohls. The result of these military-diplomatic manoeuvres has been to create a downhill dynamic, pushing the West closer towards war.

The Western governments have tried to dig their toes in at the edge, staying out of military involvement in Bosnia for as long as possible. With the old world order falling apart and the new one little more than a slogan, none of them can be sure what the consequences of escalation will

It was the West's support for Croatian independence which exploded the conflict between Zagreb and Belgrade into all-out civil war. Each time the West has cranked up its campaign against Serbia, it has increased the tension. And the West's more aggressive interference in Bosnia threatens to escalate the war into an international conflict that could send shock waves across the Balkans.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, United Nations secretary-general, complained in August that the Western powers on the UN security council were only interested in the 'rich man's war' in Bosnia, but were doing next-to-nothing to save the countless thousands dying from starvation and civil strife in Somalia. He also said that Britain was treating him 'like a wog'. That seems like fair comment on the humanitarian pretensions of the West. Boutros-Ghali's mistake is to imagine that the Western powers really care any more about the welfare of 'white niggers' like the Serbs than they do about 'wogs' like the Somalis.

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

Bosnia: somebody has to go in

I am in broad agreement with the analysis developed by *Living Marxism* which stresses that Western powers have demonised Iraq and Serbia for their own purposes. But in the case of current conflicts in the former Yugoslav republics, there has to be a more sensitive response to the situation than the simple demand that the West should not intervene militarily.

The *Guardian* reports that Serbian forces have been 'cleansing' Muslim areas of Bosnia and transporting their inhabitants to 'concentration camps'. Even if accounts of children dying in cattle trucks and mass executions are exaggerated it is clear that Serbian and Croatian forces have been committing terrible violence and enforced clearance operations against minority communities.

Mick Hume (editorial, August) admits that 'nobody could object to the provision of humanitarian relief', but in the case of Muslim detainees, the Red Cross is allowed to visit only a few of the several camps. Relief work in war zones is being hampered precisely because racist and quasi-fascistic elements on all sides wish to exterminate or drive out certain groups. Thousands of non-combatants have been forced to flee their homes.

Joan Phillips (August) is right to see Western intervention as a primary cause of the war and it is true that 'competition for resources was turned into ethnic conflict by nationalist politicians'. But is it enough to say 'Hands off the Balkans' to the West while allowing the forces of nationalism and racism to succeed in demonising and destroying communities in Bosnia?

The West cannot and should not seek to impose its will through large-scale military operations against Serbia or Croatia, but somebody has to prevent the systematic 'cleansing' of defenceless ethnic groups and ensure their protection. This may require a more substantial military intervention than the existing UN presence.

The RCP risks the charge of cold theorising and hypocrisy if it pillories the West for intervention and demonising without having an active policy on how the violent subjugation of ethnic groups is to be combatted. We should be thinking of ways to protect and empower vulnerable peoples—ways which guarantee that they will not be exploited by Western politicians or nationalist aggressors.

Jonathan Hesk *King's College, Cambridge*

Aids: facts is facts

Stephanie Pride warns that citing the facts about the rarity of the disease Aids simply

'allows the moral campaigners to cite the containment of the spread as justification for the "success" of their campaigning' (letters, August).

Yet the fact that Aids is a rare disease is one powerful weapon in the face of the official government campaign and its presentation of the facts about Aids. The campaign over the last few years has been based on the assertion that Aids is an imminent threat to us all, accompanied with statistical models that predicted tens of thousands would have Aids by the 1990s. This was the justification for moral campaigning on Aids. The reality, far different from the nightmare scenario painted by the authorities, is a useful tool to counter the hype.

I agree with Stephanie Pride that simply citing the facts or exposing the 'lies' is not in itself sufficient to win the argument on Aids. What is needed is a political analysis of the Aids issue, not an analysis of whether to use facts or not.

It is strange that Ms Pride then suggests that *Living Marxism* has not taken up the moral and political agenda being pushed via the issue of Aids. I thought this was what the RCP is famous for! Where else can you read a condemnation of the moralism, irrationalism and conservatism being promoted through the Aids panic, and an exposé of the 'facts' promoted as a 'neutral' health campaign by the government?

Janet Copeland *Birmingham*

I read with interest Dr Fitzpatrick's two articles (July, August). I quite agree that the sort of 'moral correction' that he has described has nothing to do with counselling. However, I have never met anyone in Aids education in this part of the country who demonstrates the sort of aloof, middle class judgementalism that he lays out as the norm in his articles.

I do know many Aids and health educators who are most sensitive and responsive to the needs of people. Their work practices are grounded in the enabling, in their client base, of respect and trust. Through the development of self-respect and negotiating skills they enhance client empowerment such that people who are HIV positive, HIV negative and those whose status is unknown are then possessed of the ability to construct informed decisions on their lifestyle practices.

I know many who fight against the 'KEB Model' of health education which seems so popular among politicians. Thus, they clearly recognise that Knowledge may lead to Education but not necessarily to Behaviour changes that are involved in personal growth and the development of society.

Dr Fitzpatrick's remarks hinder the fine balancing act between the development of freedom and joy in sexual expression and

the excessive prurience and fear that can accompany the energetic predication of complete denial.

Martin Talbot *Sheffield*

The Basque questions

I find the thrust of Andy Clarkson's article 'Eta is not Spain's IRA' (July), that 'Basque nationalism is an invention', to be both deeply insensitive to many Basques and worthy of the most bone-headed advocate of the Spanish right.

It is an error to view Eta as too closely bound up with the anti-Francoist past. Clearly, Eta guaranteed the end of dictatorship in Spain with its 1973 assassination of the senile dictator's heir apparent, General Carrero Blanco. Nevertheless, with varying levels of Marxist rhetoric, Eta has always advocated Basque independence as its ultimate aim. Andy, like the ruling Spanish socialists, argues for the disarmament of Eta on the grounds that as an anti-dictatorial guerrilla organisation it has outlived its historical function.

The article curiously goes on to attempt to discredit Basque nationalism 'by association'. For instance, we are told that the Ikurrina, the Basque national flag designed by the local bourgeoisie, is styled on the Union Jack. So what? The Irish tricolour is based on the flags unfurled by the republican European bourgeoisie after the French Revolution.

In the 1930s Andreu Nin, Trotsky's former Catalan secretary, called for the separation of the prosperous Basque provinces from the archaic and militaristic Spanish state. Today it is of fundamental importance for Marxists to address the political issues stemming from nationalism. Although the political configurations in the Basque Country have changed since the 1930s, the right of the Basque people to shape their own future has not.

CM Ealham *Barcelona*

It would take a long article to correct the romantic nonsense in the letters complaining about Andy Clarkson's article on Eta. Nevertheless Clarkson is wrong to claim that there is little resemblance between Eta and the IRA.

It is true that the ethnically Basque section of the population, Eta's main support, is on average better off than the descendants of 'Spanish' immigrants, but Clarkson's account of Basque prosperity is rather dated. Basque GDP per head is now well below Madrid and Catalonia and is only 8 per cent above the average of Spain. Eta has some support from the children of immigrants in areas devastated by the current slump.

It is perfectly true that Francoist repression was no more intense in the Basque country than elsewhere in Spain, but it was more

widespread, as the nationalist middle class was also persecuted. Surely the prohibition of books and journals in Euskera does amount to persecution? While the Spanish police are no longer allowed to rampage like British Paras, torture was routine for many years after Franco's death. Until the mid-1980s the Spanish (Socialist) government was employing the GAL murder squads to attack Basque refugees in France.

Clarkson's analysis of Eta is basically sound. Where he goes wrong is in abandoning that method when he looks at the IRA. If he spoke to Herri Batasuna members he would recognise the same mixture of an ill-defined socialism with considerable chauvinism which you find in Sinn Fein supporters. Clarkson's critical approach should be applied when examining other ethnically based movements. *Living Marxism* has made a good start in breaking from the liberal consensus of demonising the Serbs.

John Sullivan Bristol

The Scottish duo Messrs Hunter and MacWilliam who objected to my article on Eta (letters, August) should have the courage of their convictions, stop hiding behind the Basques, come clean on their hidden agenda and argue on its own merits the case for Scottish separation that they obviously support.

As Spaniards, Basques were fully complicit in the Reconquista crusade against the Moors, the Counter-Reformation (the Jesuits were a Basque initiative), the Inquisition, the expulsion of the Jews, the construction of the Spanish empire in Latin America and elsewhere, and as the first *guerrillas* against Napoleon's occupation. Basques have usually lined up behind one faction or another of the Spanish establishment—notably the reactionary Carlists in the nineteenth century and the republican government during the Civil War. Apart from Arana between 1882 and 1902, and Eta today, they have never supported full independence but called for more regional autonomy. Basque 'national' history is mythical because it is really a form of Spanish regionalism.

MacWilliam doesn't believe it is possible to

understand the Basque question unless you go there. I wonder if he also feels that applies to South Africa and apartheid.

His contention that Basques have been oppressed by Madrid is weak since he relies on the argument that Franco suppressed Basque culture and the Basque language, Euskera. Virtually all Basques speak Spanish as their first tongue. Franco banned Euskera's use in public (where it is spoken mainly to make a political point) but not in private. While Franco opposed Basque political separatism, he had no designs against Basque culture as such. After all, the Navarrese Basques counted themselves among his strongest supporters and he let them retain their traditional privileges.

Today a minority of rural Basques speak Euskera as their first tongue, but most urban Basque political activists have to learn it as we would French. Herri Batasuna leader Jose Maria Sasiain has conceded that 'extraordinary' efforts are needed to prevent Euskera dying out.

Andy Clarkson London

Animals, humans and hierarchies

The letter from Mary Montgomery (June) protested against Ann Bradley's piece in the May issue supporting experimentation on animals. Ms Montgomery's letter annoyed us because it meekly objects to vivisection solely on the grounds that it is outmoded and unnecessary. This prompted us to look back at what Ann Bradley actually said. A short letter enables us to deal only with her advocacy of hierarchical grading to determine non-humans' (and consequently humans') importance and rights.

Every society in history that had a dominant minority had a hierarchical structure throughout. The dominant class in modern society impose a hierarchical structure on the class they dominate—the working class. There is a general ranking with white men at the top, followed by white women, boys, girls, the handicapped. Below them are blacks and at the bottom they put the non-human animals.

Once this is accepted it is a very short step for the dominant class to rationalise the oppression and exploitation of the class they dominate. Don't forget that the German fascists were able to convince many that Jews, Gypsies and the handicapped were inferior and could therefore justifiably be killed and/or experimented on.

We want to record the strongest objection to Bradley's doctrine. Anybody, any group, any party which honestly believes that revolution is essential to achieving working class freedom from oppression must totally oppose all kinds of hierarchical grading and organisation.

Violet, Pete, Mark, Karl, Framboise, Beryl, Andy Birmingham

'Troops Out': a travesty of Marxism

I wonder what the position of *Living Marxism* is on the problem of Ireland. From the August '92 issue it looks like pretty standard 'UK left'—call for 'Troops Out Now' or define yourself out of the left. Never mind small details such as a settlement, or the fact that a majority of people in the North of that island actually want UK rule—just 'strike a blow against imperialism' and pull out the troops.

Support for the IRA/Sinn Fein (often unconditional) is more of the same. Never mind what the IRA are; what their aims are; or the implications of their actions, such as blowing up Protestant building workers. 'Troops Out Now' implies a refusal or inability to look at reality and is a complete travesty of a genuine Marxist position. Why not open a debate in *LM* on this problem?

Steve Revins Stafford

Calling Tokyo

Living Marxism readers in Tokyo now meet regularly to discuss the magazine and exchange ideas. Any other readers who would like to join our group in Japan can contact us through *Living Marxism* in London, c/o BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Thanks.

Raif Collis Tokyo

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

Western journalists and politicians have been busy discovering a Holocaust in Bosnia. Joan Phillips suggests they are seeing what they want to see

Ethnic cleansing, cattle trains, concentration camps, shaved heads, rib-cages, torture, atrocities, genocide....

There hasn't been anything like it since...well, since the Gulf War in fact. That was the last time Western journalists and politicians discovered a new Hitler, and evils the like of which the world had not seen for half a century—such as the Kuwaiti babies snatched from incubators by Iraqi soldiers and left to die on a hospital floor.

Cynical? The Kuwaiti babies story turned out to be an invention by the Washington PR firm, Hill & Knowlton, employed by the Kuwaiti government, and fed its 'facts' by the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador in America who also happened to be a member of the ruling al-Sabah family.

Today the suffering of ordinary Serbs, Croats and Muslims caught up in the war in Yugoslavia is being cynically manipulated by Western journalists and politicians waging a propaganda war.

Livingstone & Littlejohn

Since the end of July all reporting on the Yugoslav war has been suffused with images of the Holocaust. You could not turn on your television set in August without being assailed by pictures of barbed wire compounds. You could not open a newspaper without reading another atrocity story. The entire vocabulary in which the conflict is now discussed evokes parallels with the wartime treatment of the Jews by the Nazis.

Both right and left have joined in the Serb-bashing. It has been impossible to distinguish between *Sun* doubleact Ken Livingstone and Richard Littlejohn, despite the fact that they are supposed to represent opposite ends of the political spectrum.

Livingstone repeated his demand of last year for an aerial bombardment of Serbia: 'As the Serbs slaughter their way across Bosnia, Europe is seeing the first real attempt at genocide since Hitler murdered six million Jews.' (5 August) Likewise, Littlejohn called for swift military action to stop 'this Nazi little war': 'We spent six years fighting the Second World War so that

the people of Europe would be free of fascism and Nazism. We spent 45 years fighting the Cold War so the people of Eastern Europe would be free of communism—fascism with a different flag. Free for what? To be slaughtered and driven out of their homes by the Nazis of the 1990s.' (3 August)

Unsurpassed in its propaganda hyperbole was the *Guardian*, the paper of the chattering classes and the keeper of the liberal conscience. Maggie O'Kane's emotive reports from Bosnia about Serbian jihads, ethnic cleansing, cattle trains, concentration camps and killings were pieces of creative writing, masquerading as investigative journalism, describing events torn from any economic, social or political context.

All this took the demonisation of the Serbs by the Western press and political establishment a big step forward. The point was to tell the world that the Serbs are even more savage than everybody had thought they were. They now stand accused of carrying out the biggest crime against humanity since the Second World War. They have been depicted as even more bestial than Hitler's SS death squads. The consensus is that they should be put on trial for war crimes just like the Nazis at Nuremberg.

Who knows?

Sensationalism is the name of the game in the media reporting of the war in Yugoslavia. As the normally sober *Economist* concluded: 'Terror reigns in Bosnia. Let no one claim he did not know.' But the point is that we don't know.

If there really were terrible atrocities taking place in Bosnia, I doubt that we would be reading about them every day in the newspapers. Whenever there have been major atrocities—in Malaya, Vietnam, Northern Ireland, El Salvador, etc—they have usually been kept quiet (in most cases because they have been carried out by the same states which are taking the moral high ground over Bosnia).

When there really was a Holocaust taking place in Europe, we heard nothing about it. When the Nazis started exterminating the Jews, the

Allies knew what was happening but they chose to keep quiet. They didn't say a word. They covered it up. They did nothing. Despite repeated requests from 1941 onwards, the British government refused to order the bombing of the railway lines leading to Auschwitz. In fact, the only thing they did do was turn away Jewish refugees fleeing from pogroms.

When slaughters happen we are the last to know; so when they are being stuffed down our throats it is wise to be at least a little sceptical. Why should we believe a word of what is being said by press and politicians about what is happening in Bosnia? They are not usually in the habit of telling the truth about what happens at home, never mind in foreign lands. So let's ask a few questions about what's really going on before we jump to conclusions.

Ethnic cleansing

Take the phrase on everybody's lips: ethnic cleansing. Where did it come from? Who started using this expression first? I doubt it was the Serbian forces who are fighting in Bosnia. It is more likely to have originated in the Croatian ministry of information in Zagreb or even in the offices of a Western communications firm.

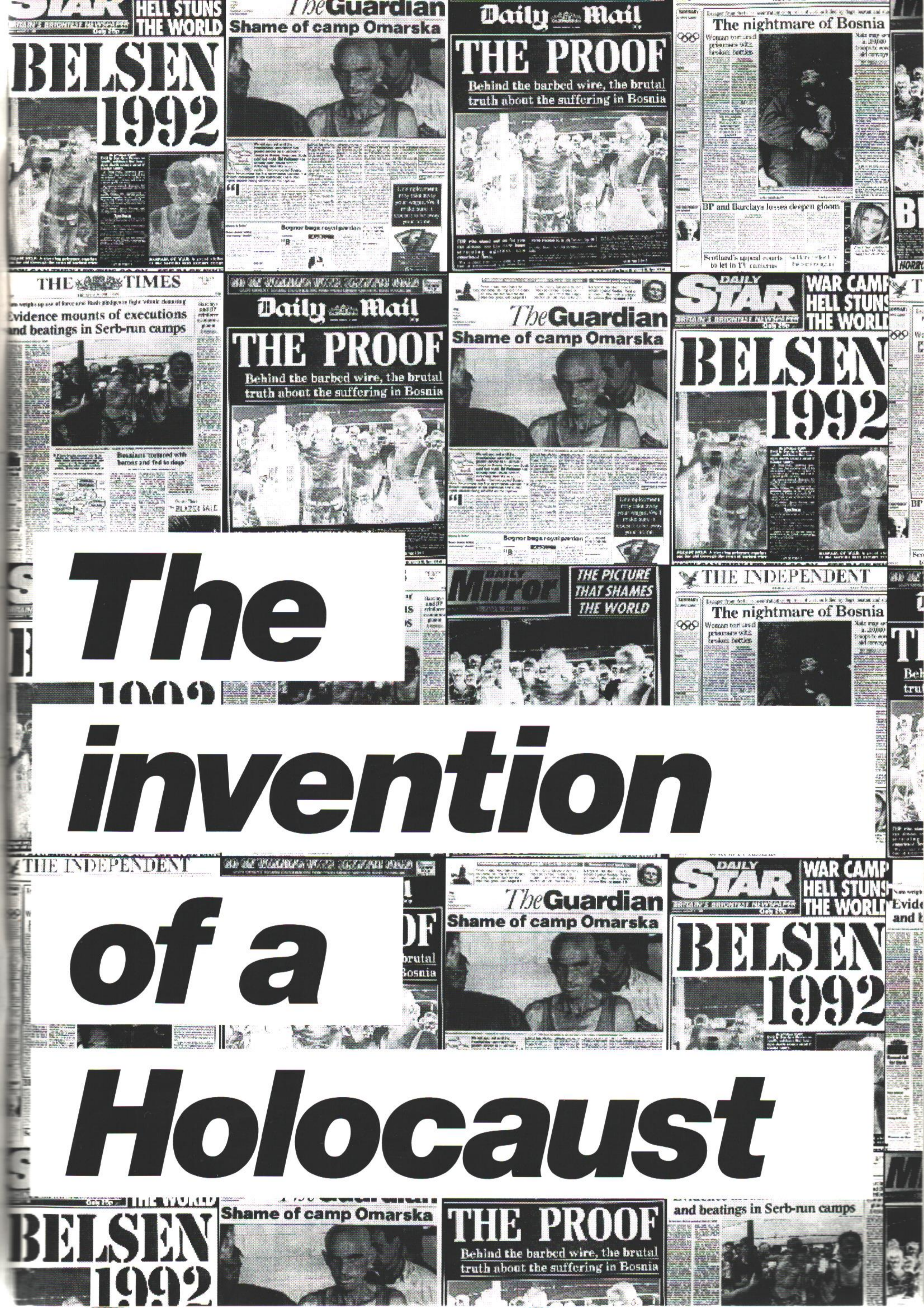
Whatever the origins of the expression, it has now entered into common parlance in Britain and other Western countries. It will probably be in the next edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*—'racial purification campaign particularly favoured by Serbs'. The phrase deliberately invites comparisons with the racial pogroms conducted by fascist regimes in the interwar and war years.

War is hell

Nobody has thought to question the use of ethnic cleansing as a description of what is happening in Bosnia. It is simply taken as given that the Serbian forces fighting there are engaged in a crusade to cleanse the region of Muslims. But you do not have to be a fan of Radovan Karadzic, the Serbian leader in Bosnia, who denies that ethnic cleansing is Serbian policy, to question the use of such a loaded term by Western journalists.

The term ethnic cleansing turns the exodus of people from Bosnia into a policy objective rather than a consequence of war. There can be no doubt that Muslims and Croats are being persecuted and forced to leave their homes by Serbian forces, just as Serbs are being persecuted and forced to leave their homes by Croatian and Muslim forces.

But the vast majority of refugees pouring out of Bosnia are fleeing ►

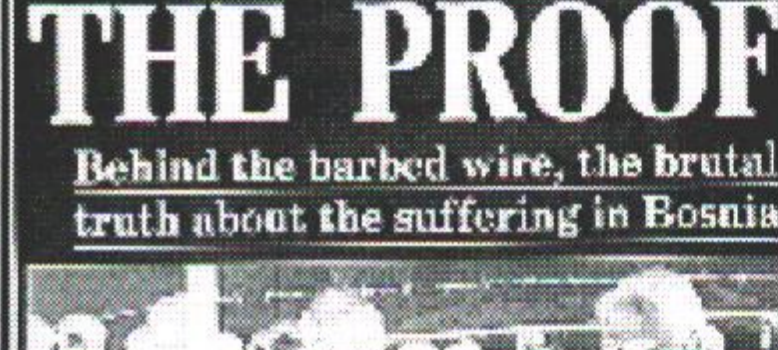


HELL STUNS THE WORLD
BELSEN 1992

The Guardian
Shame of camp Omarska

Daily Mail
THE PROOF

The Independent
The nightmare of Bosnia

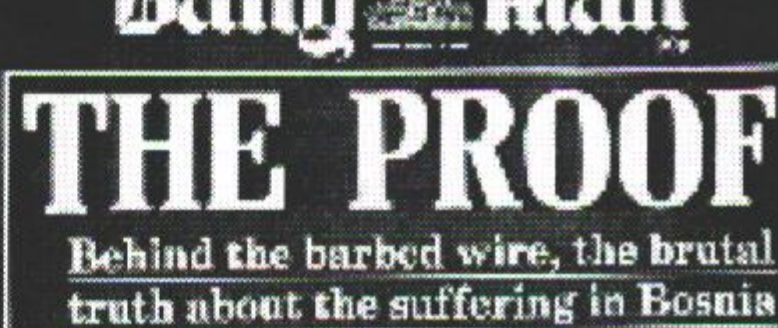
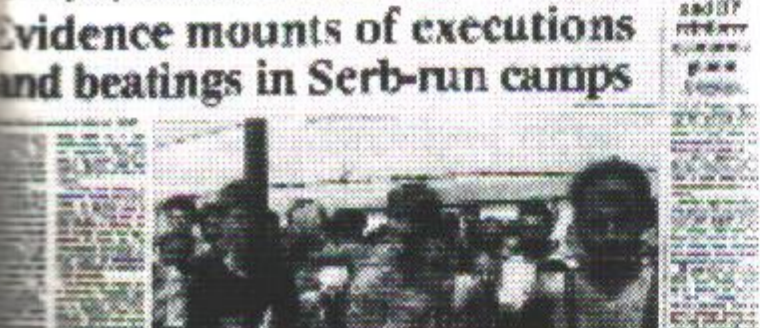


THE TIMES
Evidence mounts of executions and beatings in Serb-run camps

Daily Mail
THE PROOF

The Guardian
Shame of camp Omarska

DAILY STAR
WAR CAMP HELL STUNS THE WORLD



Bosnians tortured with barbed wire and fed to dogs

The

1992

invention

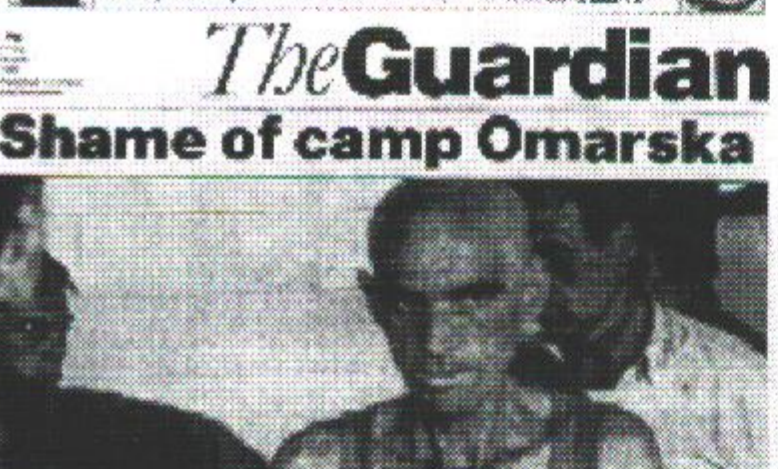
THE INDEPENDENT

The Guardian
Shame of camp Omarska

The Mirror
THE PICTURE THAT SHAMES THE WORLD

DAILY STAR
WAR CAMP HELL STUNS THE WORLD

of a



Holocaust

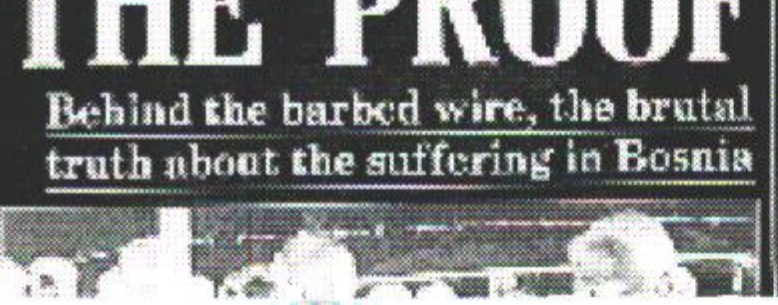
THE WORLD

Shame of camp Omarska

THE PROOF

and beatings in Serb-run camps

BELSEN 1992



before the advancing armies of all sides. Most people are not hanging around waiting for their towns and villages to be occupied or for their houses to be requisitioned before deciding to leave. In many cases, the Serbian, Croatian and Muslim militias are taking control of ghost towns.

You could say that this amounts to a policy of ethnic cleansing in effect if not in intent. But you could probably say the same thing about any war. It is in the nature of war that people are uprooted and turned into refugees. In the early years of the war in Northern Ireland, thousands of Catholics were driven out of their homes in Protestant areas, but Western journalists did not talk about the Loyalist paramilitaries or the British forces pursuing a policy of ethnic cleansing.

If by ethnic cleansing Western reporters mean that people are being

who are now berating the Serbs are not averse to a bit of ethnic cleansing themselves. The British, for example, are currently conducting their own ethnic cleansing campaign in Hong Kong, where they are kicking out thousands of Vietnamese boat people currently holed up in detention centres every bit as bad as those in Bosnia.

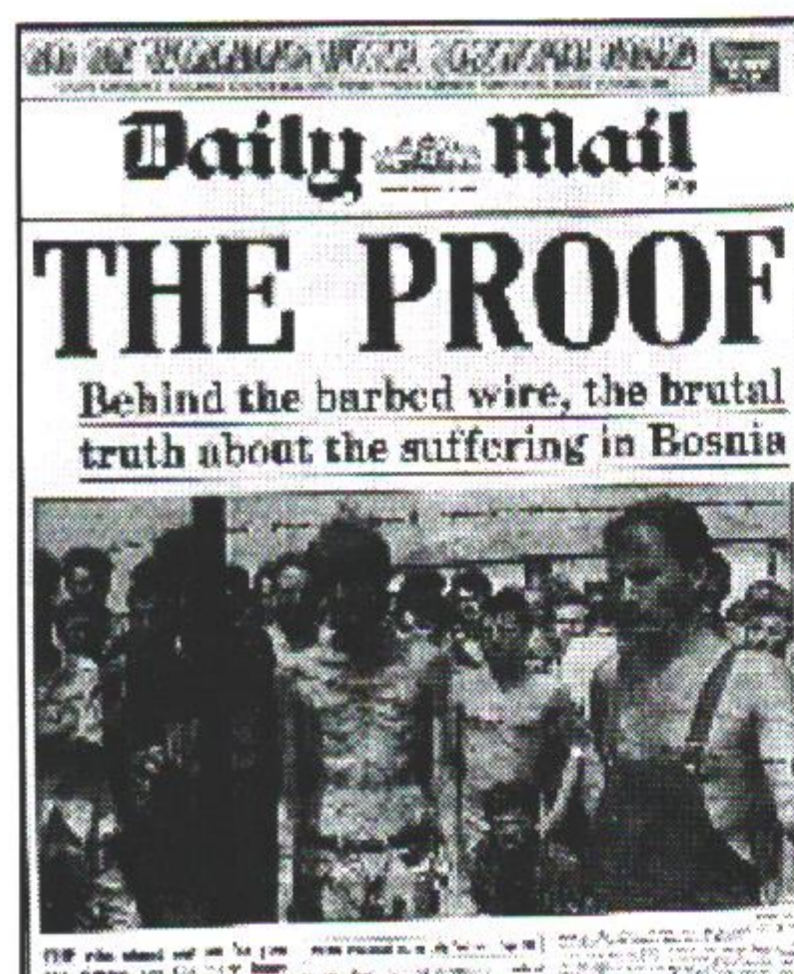
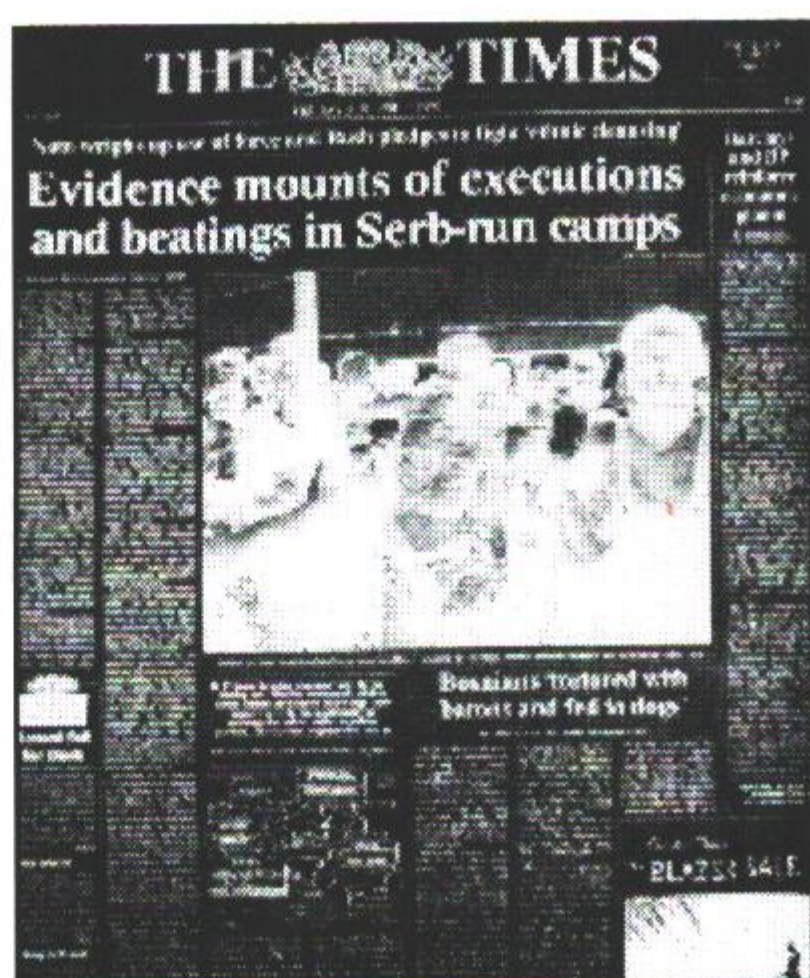
Death camps is another phrase that now rolls easily off the tongue of every Western journalist writing about Bosnia. According to the reports in our newspapers, thousands of Muslims and Croats are being killed in Serbian concentration camps and thousands more are being tortured. In the first weeks of August pressure mounted for the Serbian camps to be opened for inspection by international monitors and journalists.

The manipulative character of the death camps discussion was exposed by the way the issue was handled by the

camps were fabrications. Despite their best efforts, they could find no evidence to substantiate their claims of genocide. Nevertheless, the hacks made the most of the suffering they encountered. They might not have found mass graves, but they were pleased enough with the under-fed figures standing behind barbed wire fences.

Holding people in camps during a war is not an invention of the Serbs. Concentration camps have long been a feature of wars. The association of concentration camps with systematic killings derives from the Second World War, when the Nazis turned their camps into assembly lines for the disposal of the Jews. This is the association that has been made continually by Western journalists reporting on the war in Bosnia.

You don't have to condone the existence of concentration camps to question this sensational reporting and



persecuted because of their ethnicity then they should acknowledge that this is happening to Serbs as well as Muslims. In Sarajevo, where tens of thousands of Serbs still live, many have been asked to sign official documents saying that they are 'loyal citizens of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina'.

In Croatia too Serbs have been asked to sign loyalty oaths to the new state and face daunting procedures for acquiring citizenship. Most of the shrunken Serbian community (which numbered 600 000 or 12 per cent of the population of Croatia before the war) was disenfranchised in the recent elections, and a proposal for a Serbian assembly has been rejected out of hand.

There is much hypocrisy involved in the Western condemnations of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. If the Western powers dislike ethnic conflict so much, they should not have sponsored the disintegration of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines. It was their backing for Croatia which legitimised nationalism in that republic and ignited ethnic conflict throughout Yugoslavia.

As it happens, the Western powers

Americans. On Monday 3 August, the US state department said that it had its 'own reports' of abuses, torture and killings in 'Serbian concentration camps'. On Tuesday 4 August, it backtracked, saying it had 'no independent confirmation' of the reports. On Wednesday 5 August, the department went on the offensive again, calling for war crimes investigations (*Independent*, 6 August).

It is clear from this that the hysterical discussion of death camps was not based on any authentic documentary evidence. On the contrary, the extent to which the issue was played up or down depended entirely on the requirements of US international diplomacy. Every time it looked like Washington was being superseded by another Western power in its condemnations of Serbian barbarism, the state department would rush out another statement turning up the volume of its attacks.

Having prepared the public to expect the worst, when Western reporters finally visited these places, it became clear that their stories of death

the ends to which it is put. Conditions in camps throughout Bosnia are bad. People do not have enough to eat. People are being interrogated. People are being beaten. Unfortunately, these things happen all the time in war. As we know, the British tortured Irish prisoners in places like Castlereagh detention centre in Belfast. But people are not being killed systematically in the Bosnian camps; there is no policy of genocide.

All sides in the Yugoslav civil war have got camps. Yet Western journalists have not been rushing off to look inside those camps run by the Croats or the Muslims. If they had bothered to look, they would no doubt have found that Serbian prisoners are being held in much the same conditions. The double standards of people who can castigate the Serbs for starving their prisoners at the same time as imposing punitive sanctions against the Serbs is breathtaking.

Who are the leaders of the West to lecture Serbs about concentration camps anyway? As a matter of fact it was the British who invented

concentration camps, just as they pioneered most modern forms of barbarism. The British first used concentration camps in the Boer War at the turn of the century, and went on to use them to suppress anti-colonial struggles in Kenya and Malaya. Britain still runs a concentration camp in Ireland: it is called Her Majesty's Prison the Maze—the H-blocks.

Today, the world is full of concentration camps of one sort or another. Many of them are to be found in the 'civilised' nations of the West, where there are no wars being fought, except against foreign immigrants, while many more were built in the third world by the 'civilised' nations of the West, to contain the victims of wars which they were responsible for starting.

Why is it that when the British keep people with black skins behind bars at holding centres like Harmondsworth;

Day after day, newspapers such as the *Guardian* have reprinted verbatim testimonies from Muslims and Croats claiming to have evidence of the most appalling massacres. After splashing their gruesome accounts all over the page, the point is made at the bottom of the article that this particular individual did not witness the supposed atrocity himself, or that there is no independent evidence to back his claims.

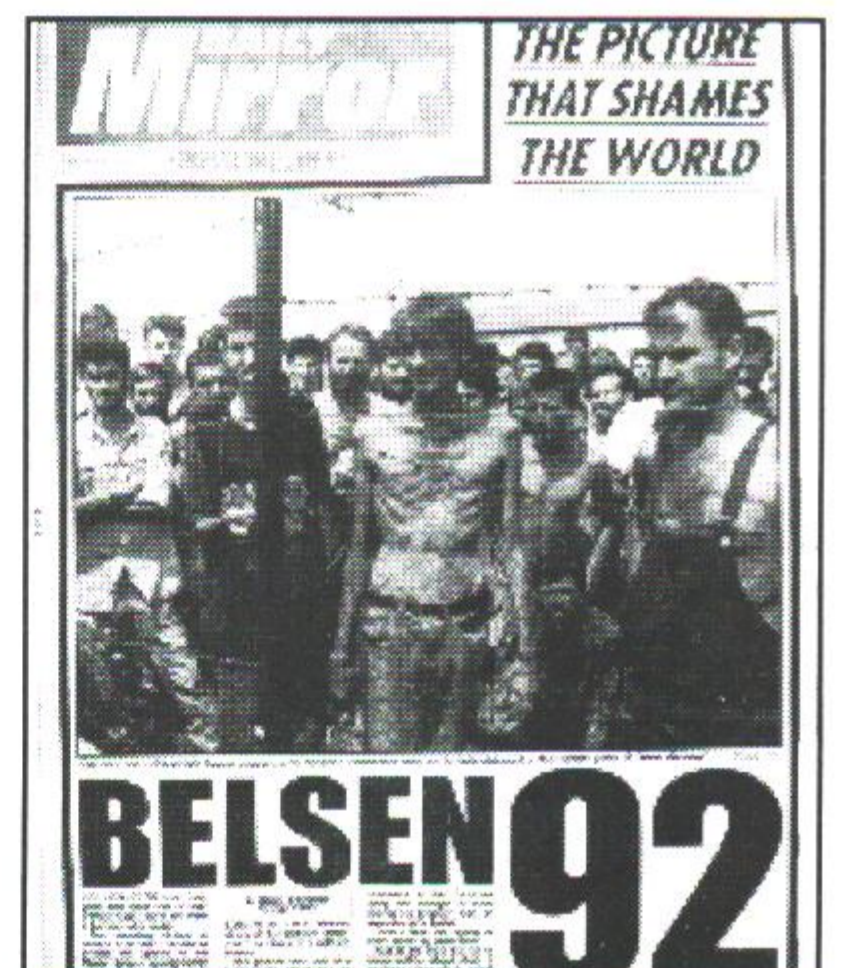
So why publish them? The effect can only be to create the impression that there are atrocities such as these taking place. It is understandable that in their desperation, people in Bosnia should be prey to the most hysterical rumours. But there is no excuse for Western journalists reprinting these rumours as if they are fact.

No doubt there are atrocities taking place. But if we believed the accounts being given in the British press there would be nobody left alive in Bosnia.

watch innocent civilians being killed in Bosnia. Yet just over a year ago he was happy to watch innocent civilians being killed by his own forces in Iraq. Apparently atrocities are alright if they are carried out by the West and its allies against the peoples of the third world (in Panama, Grenada, Nicaragua, Angola, the Philippines, etc).

Those who have invented a Holocaust in Bosnia have done so because it suits their purposes to depict the Serbs as genocidal maniacs. But from the point of view of the European right, there is another advantage to be gained from accusing the Serbs of genocide. By inventing a Holocaust in Bosnia, they are calling into question the whole meaning of the original Holocaust.

If a Holocaust can happen in Bosnia just like that, then it follows that the original Holocaust was nothing special. If the suffering of the Muslims in the



when the Americans shove Haitians into prison camps; when the Germans hold immigrants on boats; when the French herd Arabs into shanty towns; nobody ever accuses them of running concentration camps?

What is south central LA except one big concentration camp, where blacks are kept under curfew, stopped from leaving the area, kept under constant helicopter surveillance and beaten if they dare cross the police. What are the West Bank and Gaza Strip except one big prison for the Palestinians? They have lived for years in their slum huts, amid the stinking refuse, behind the barbed wire, under armed guard in concentration camps built by the Israeli state with US dollars and guns.

In Bosnia, atrocity stories are two-a-penny. From tales of Muslim babies being thrown into cement mixers to Muslim men having their genitals cut off, the atrocity industry is working overtime. The most outlandish stories have gained credence because they have been repeated so often by British journalists who are either just naive or plain malicious.

There is always a tendency to inflate casualty figures: it happened in Timisoara during the Romanian uprising in 1989 and it happened over Tiananmen Square when the Chinese regime crushed the student protests. It turned out that far fewer people had been killed than had been suggested. Every death in Bosnia is one death too many. But we can safely say that the running death toll is not as big as many have said.

People are killing and being killed on all sides in this war, as in all war. If atrocities are being committed, they are being committed by Serbs, Croats and Muslims. So why is it that Western propaganda has focused on the crimes of the Serbs?

Who are the Western powers to lecture the Serbs about atrocities anyway? The president of the United Nations security council is Li Daoyu of China: the Tiananmen Square massacre has been quietly forgotten by the Western powers who love to talk about human rights abuses in Bosnia.

George Bush has the temerity to say he cannot stand idly by and

Yugoslav civil war today amounts to a Holocaust, then it follows that the liquidation of European Jewry in the Second World War was not unique. In other words, the invention of a Holocaust in the present is a way of relativising the war crimes of the past.

It is not difficult to understand why the European right is so keen to relativise the Holocaust. After all, the death camps of the past helped to discredit right-wing ideas for the best part of half a century. The association of the Holocaust with the politics of the right has been a major embarrassment. By inventing a Holocaust in Bosnia, the right can begin to put the past behind it.

But why should liberal opinion go along with all this? The same people who have taken the revisionist historian David Irving to task for saying the Holocaust never happened are now caught up in the rewriting of history. By shouting genocide about what is happening in Bosnia, the left is not only complicit in setting up the Serbs for a military strike, it is also an unwitting accomplice in the campaign to relativise the Holocaust.

Another Nuremberg trial

PHOTO: Associated Press



Rob Knight sees another chapter of history rewritten, as ex-East German leader Erich Honecker is given the same treatment as the Nazis

German conservatives have been clamouring since reunification for Erich Honecker and other leaders of the old East German state (GDR) to be given a collective trial, as the Nazi leaders were at Nuremberg after the Second World War. Now, with Honecker's enforced return from Russia, it looks as if they are going to get their way. Honecker and other top leaders of the GDR are to be tried for the killing of those shot while trying to cross the Berlin Wall from East to West Germany.

Everything's relative

The comparison with the Nuremberg trials is an important one for the German right. It has long maintained that Germany should not be ashamed about its Nazi past. Its equation of Honecker and the other old Stalinists with the Nazi leaders sends a clear message to the world. The German right is saying that there was nothing unique about the Nazis, and that others—especially communists—are capable of equal, if not greater, barbarities. The conclusion of the right is that Germany should no longer be singled out as a nation with a uniquely barbarous past.

This is a notion which the German right has been peddling for years. Until recently it was a point of view that did not fit in with official acceptance of national guilt by the West German state. The evocation of the Nuremberg trials is particularly telling here, as it was at Nuremberg that the Nazi leaders were put on trial in front of the whole world, and where the Nazis' war guilt was settled.

Not Nuremberg

Since the reunification of Germany, however, the attitude of the establishment to the past has been changing rapidly. Chancellor Helmut Kohl and others have been making it

clear that they are no longer prepared to allow the past to weigh down so heavily on what they can do in the present.

Kohl's former foreign minister, Rupert Scholz, has gone so far as to claim that the Honecker trial would be more legitimate than Nuremberg.

'For the second time in German history we face the judgment and punishment of a totalitarian regime. But between the Nazi trials and today's there is a decisive difference. The Nuremberg trial was the exercise of their rights by the victors in the war. What we have today is not comparable, it is not a form of 'justice for the winners' even if some incorrigibles claim that it is.' (*Welt am Sonntag*, 3 August 1992)

Scholz went on to point out that the German courts must take the place of an international court of justice, which does not exist. So the message is not only that Nuremberg was not real justice, but also that Germany must take on the role of international arbiter in these matters.

Scholz and others like him are no longer isolated voices on the right. The rewriting of Nazi history has proceeded from the arcane journals of the far right into the fabric of German politics.

The conservatives have long argued that the war, and by implication Nazism, was a justified (or at worst, an understandable) struggle against the evils of eastern communism. This viewpoint has been strengthened by the bankruptcy and final collapse of the Soviet bloc. Today the right feels able to argue that Nazism was in fact better than Stalinism, because under Nazism the capitalist economy was not destroyed. The assumptions behind this argument are now so widely accepted that they have begun to be incorporated in the legal system—for example, in the new rules relating to ethnic Germans.

Who's German?

In an attempt to cut off the mass immigration of ethnic Germans from eastern Europe, the government has instituted strict rules to determine who is and who is not really German. One of these rules states that nobody can claim German citizenship if they or their ancestors fought against Germany during the Second World War. This means that those who fought in the anti-Nazi resistance, for example the free Polish Army, are automatically excluded from citizenship.

The redefinition of German citizenship effectively links the idea of being German to the Nazi regime, and turns the dominant assumptions of the postwar period on their head. Now it is not the Nazis, but those

who opposed them, who are considered guilty of an offence against Germany. This is just one of many ways in which the Nazi period is being normalised.

Why is it so important that Germany should be able to come to terms with the past? The negative images which are associated with the Nazis are a continuous burden for the modern German authorities. The need to cleanse the past is particularly important now that Germany is beginning to take its place as a great power in the world once more.

Tinpot dictators

At a time when the German authorities are trying to establish themselves as a major player on the world stage, it is galling for them continually to hear other Western powers compare tinpot dictators like Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic to Hitler, or warn of the imminent return of Nazism every time Germany does something they do not like (like putting up interest rates).

But the real problems lie in the sphere of domestic politics. The end of the Cold War and reunification means that the anti-communist politics which gave the German establishment its authority in the postwar years have come to the end of the road. Yet Kohl has no new programme with which to replace old-fashioned anti-communism. As a result, the state is suffering from a condition of political exhaustion, which means that it has no political vision to inspire and unify the German people. Despite Germany's emergence as a world power, the political elite has been losing its grip on society at home. The German authorities urgently need something with which to cohere a new base of support for themselves.

Two equals

The government's response has been to try to develop a new progressive nationalist image, in which the intervention in Yugoslavia, the rewriting of the past and vestigial anti-communism all play a role. The prospect of a Honecker trial is particularly suited to this project. By linking Stalinism and Nazism together in a new Nuremberg, it could enable the German authorities to kill two birds with one stone. They can attempt to milk remaining anti-communist sentiments, and at the same time play down the Nazi past by relativising it as a response to communism.

Despite these potential advantages, the German government seems uncertain about whether it has done the right thing in bringing Erich Honecker back to Germany to face trial. Chancellor Kohl expressed himself quietly satisfied with Honecker's arrival, but other leading government members have expressed

worries about the impact a trial could have. Why?

First, the government has good reason to fear that the revelations at the trial could embarrass it. It is only five years since Honecker, as head of the GDR, was welcomed with full state honours to West Germany by Kohl himself. It is an open secret that Kohl's government provided Honecker not only with diplomatic recognition, but with a complex web of financial arrangements. This was despite the fact that the Kohl government was supposedly committed to the destruction of the East German state.

High-risk trial

Second, there is a danger that the trial will backfire. In a situation in which the German government lacks public authority, there could be serious questioning of the legitimacy of its actions. One influential commentator, Rudolf Augstein in *Der Spiegel*, has already pointed out that legally the government is on shaky ground in putting the head of state of another country on trial. He argues that if Germany has the right to put Honecker on trial, it should also put the British government on trial for its shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland.

Many Germans both east and west are thoroughly disillusioned with the political elite. A recent poll showed that 65 per cent thought that all existing politicians were in the wrong job. In eastern Germany, where the economy has not recovered after the mass privatisation process, polls show that 30 per cent of people are willing to support a party which represents the interests of easterners alone, even if it is led by the old Stalinists from the GDR. This bore out the result of the May local elections in east Berlin, where the former Stalinists got over 30 per cent of the vote.

Improbable comeback?

In these circumstances, unlikely as it may seem, there is even a possibility that sections of German society may openly resent the circus of the Honecker trial. This would mark one of the most improbable 'comebacks' in modern political history. All of which goes to show that rewriting history cannot on its own solve the problems of the present.

The fact that the German authorities are so obsessed with the past is a clear indication that even the most prosperous capitalist elite in Europe has no faith in the future, and lacks anything with which to inspire or unite its people. It is a sign of the times that the German government which wants to promote itself as the new European superpower has to stage a show-trial for a doddering old Stalinist in order to bolster its authority at home. ●

PHOTO:
Honecker is
brought home
for trial, but
it's history
that's in the
dock

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



Playing the Holocaust card

Daniel Nassim on the cynical ways in which different Western powers are now manipulating the history of the Nazi Holocaust for their own ends

Britain is a country obsessed with the Second World War. It seems as if almost every week there is another anniversary celebrated, a rerun of yet another 'Boys Own' type war film, or a lurid documentary on German atrocities. Much contemporary political debate is framed in the language of the Second World War. For instance, Britain never 'appeases dictators': whether it's Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein or Jacques Delors. And much of the hysterical commentary on Bosnia of late has either implicitly or explicitly likened Serbia to Nazi Germany.

At the centre of these discussions of the war is the debate on the Holocaust. Even before the row about the *Sunday Times* publishing David Irving's translation of the Goebbels diaries, the 'Final Solution' was a frequent subject of discussion in the British media. The Holocaust has been framed as the defining point which retrospectively justifies Britain's role in the Second World War. The Nazi experience in general and the Holocaust in particular are being made compulsory history subjects on the national school curriculum.

Reference point

A similar trend is apparent in America. If anything, the USA is even more preoccupied with the history of the Holocaust than Britain. It is also a reference point for contemporary political discussion. Bill Clinton, for example, the Democratic candidate in the US presidential elections, used the Holocaust to urge president Bush to intervene against Serbia: 'If the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralysed in the face of genocide.' (*Independent*, 6 August 1992). Bush replied in similar language about the lessons of the Holocaust.

The debate in Germany, meanwhile, is entirely different. Where Britain and America want to play up the Holocaust, the Germans try to play it down. Recently, for example, the German foreign office withdrew the funding it had promised for a memorial to the philosopher Walter Benjamin, one of the most famous Jewish victims of the Nazis. Earlier this year, a German jury

assigned to nominate a German film for an Oscar refused to put forward the internationally acclaimed *Europa, Europa*, a film about a Jewish boy who escaped the Holocaust by pretending to be a loyal Nazi. One of the jurists was quoted by *Der Spiegel* as saying that 'we can't put that kind of junk before the Academy' (*Time*, 3 February 1992).

Political realities

There are obvious explanations for this difference in perceptions; unfortunately, they are wrong. It is not the case that the Holocaust is at the centre of debate in Britain simply because the event was so horrific. Nor does the mass of the German public feel guilty about the massacre of six million Jews during the Second World War.

The discussions of the Holocaust in both Germany and Britain are reflections of modern political realities. For the British establishment, the discussion of the Holocaust is a way of reminding Europe that, despite its decline, Britain is still morally superior to a resurgent Germany, and so better qualified to take a lead in international affairs.

For the German establishment the problem is different. It needs to 'master its past' if the unified German state is to have some legitimacy. At present German history is still tainted by the experience of fascism and defeat in the First and Second World Wars. By playing down the unsavoury aspects of Germany's past, its rulers hope to win a consensus of popular support in the present.

When and why

Let's look in more detail at the debate in Britain and America, first of all. The striking thing here is how recently the Holocaust has become a matter of concern. David Cesarani, a leading Anglo-Jewish authority on the Holocaust, is perplexed by this discovery:

'It may be a paradox which defies easy understanding, but in the 1990s awareness of the Holocaust is deeper and more pervasive than was the case immediately after it ended. The notion that the free world reeled before the revelations of what had occurred under the Nazis is myth. "The Holocaust" was

not an issue: in fact, it did not even exist as a historical or cultural concept.' (*Justice Delayed*, Heinemann 1992, p162-3)

Cesarani notes that 'during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s barely more than a dozen books were published in English which tackled the fate of the Jews' (p177). It is not really surprising that the British and Americans were reluctant to remind the world of the fate of the Jews in the postwar years, since both countries were implicated in the massacre in various ways.

Both Britain and the USA, for instance, imposed immigration controls which stopped Jews from escaping Nazi Germany before the war. During the war neither Britain nor America lifted a finger to save the Jews. Indeed anti-Semitism was rife among the Allies. President Roosevelt of America and prime minister Winston Churchill of Britain were each noted for anti-Semitic tirades which echoed Hitler's warnings on the dangers of 'Judeo-Bolshevism'. Churchill, in particular, was an ardent believer in British racial purity and an admirer of Mussolini and Franco. Back in 1920 he had warned of Leon Trotsky's, 'schemes of a world-wide communistic state under Jewish domination' (N Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah*, p96).

Eichmann trial

Most informed commentators concede that interest in the Holocaust did not really begin until the trial, in Jerusalem in 1961, of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi leader who had been kidnapped by the Israelis. But even this overstates the response. Hannah Arendt, who wrote the definitive study of the Eichmann trial, published in 1963, noted in the epilogue to a later edition 'the surprisingly small amount of post-trial literature' (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p353).

The US Library of Congress introduced a separate classification for the term Holocaust only in 1968 —23 years after the killing had ended (see G Korman, 'The Holocaust in American Historical Writing', *Societas II* (3), Summer 1972). Even then, however, the Holocaust was ►

Auschwitz
concentration
camp, Poland

only a matter of discussion among a relatively small number of academics. It was not until the late 1970s that the idea of the Holocaust was popularised.

A landmark was the American television mini-series *Holocaust*—a kind of ‘Holocaust goes to Hollywood’, broadcast in the USA

Neither side in the Holocaust debate—German or Anglo-American—is better than the other

in 1978, in Germany in 1979 and in many other countries. In the USA, the series was watched by 120m people—half the population—the second largest audience ever for entertainment programming (after *Roots*). The screening of the series was accompanied by a huge amount of publicity and a major public education programme in schools, colleges and churches. Since then the interest in the Holocaust has steadily intensified.

Won't wash

So why has the Holocaust become a subject of such public concern so recently? Some would try to put it down to the influence of the pro-Israeli ‘Jewish lobby’ in the USA. It might be possible to link the initial interest in the term Holocaust in the sixties with the consolidation of US support for Israel after the 1967 Six Day War. But that explanation will not wash today, when Anglo-American concern about the Holocaust seems to be increasing at a time when the West's relations with Israel are cooling.

Yet the emergence of the ‘Holocaust’ as a concept and as a preoccupation of the USA and Britain over the past 20 years does not really ‘defy easy understanding’. It is primarily the result of the re-emergence of Germany as an economic power in the world since the seventies, at a time when the USA and Britain have endured a relative decline. In these circumstances, Washington and Whitehall are keen to use every opportunity to demonstrate what they regard as their inherent superiority over the Germans. The Holocaust card is the ace in their hand.

The cynical manipulation of the Holocaust to demonstrate Britain's moral superiority over modern Germany seems set to go on as the rivalries among the Western powers intensify. One British journalist

captured the tone in a forthright defence of the recent erection of a statue to Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris in London. He attacked those Germans who equate Harris' murderous firebombing of Dresden, Cologne and Hamburg with the massacre of the Jews for their ‘Moral Equivalism’, and complained of ‘German schoolchildren being taken around Belsen wearing Sony Walkmans and playing with frisbees, oblivious of the great moral lesson being taught there.’ (A Roberts, ‘Why this man's statue should be erected all over Germany’, *Evening Standard*, 29 April 1992).

Once the Holocaust debate is cast in the light of current international developments, it also becomes clear that Germany's very different attitude to the issue is not shaped by guilt. It reflects the German state's need to renew its authority and reputation at home and abroad.

Historikerstreit

Mainstream German historians are not yet in a position where they can deny the Holocaust completely. The trend is much more towards *relativising* the Final Solution, by relating it to other crimes—especially those carried out by the Stalinists in the Soviet Union. This trend was already clear in 1986 in what became known as the ‘Historians' Quarrel’ in Germany.

Back then, Ernst Nolte, a right-wing German historian, caused uproar by arguing that the Nazi experience, and the Holocaust in particular, was simply a reaction to the Russian Revolution and communism. At the time, liberal academics rallied to defend the postwar consensus and the notion of ‘collective guilt’ against Nolte and his followers. Today, however, the climate in the new Germany is very different.

Two-sided

As Rob Knight notes in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the reunification of Germany has presented the authorities with both new problems and fresh opportunities. The discussion of German history and the Holocaust is one example of this two-sided process. The end of the Cold War era presents the political elite with the problem of developing a new national identity for Germany. But it also provides an opening to try to rehabilitate German nationalism, by using the Stalinist experience to justify Germany's own past.

The trend now is for more mainstream German commentators to shift the blame for the war, and therefore the Holocaust, on to the Soviet Union and ‘Eastern’ communism. If necessary, the blame can also be attached to others from the East. This scapegoating reached

an extreme level during the media's summer offensive against the Serbs in Bosnia. One conservative German magazine implied that, since the Serbs had sparked off the First World War by assassinating Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, and since the punitive measures imposed on Germany at the end of that conflict had made the next war inevitable, Serbia could be blamed for starting the Second World War! In the new climate of opinion, responsibility for the Holocaust can effectively be transferred from Berlin to Belgrade.

70s take-off

We can now see how the dominant views of the war in Britain, Germany and the USA have diverged sharply since the seventies. From the forties to the sixties, there was no concept of ‘Holocaust’ and little interest in the fate of the Jews. With the emergence of Germany as a world power, a difference of opinion became apparent. The concept of the Holocaust has been developed in the USA and Britain, while Germany heads towards a more thorough-going relativisation of the Final Solution.

This general pattern is complicated by the re-emergence of right-wing politics in a more open form than at any time since the war. The right and its ideas were discredited by the experience of fascism. Throughout the Cold War, the liberal agenda dominated most political debate. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the old order, the right is making a comeback.

Uses and abuses

Yet for many on the right, the Holocaust remains a problem. The experience is still too closely associated with nationalist and racial politics. Right-wing British politicians like Margaret Thatcher and historians such as Norman Stone are caught in a bind. On the one hand, they want to relativise the Holocaust almost as much as their German counterparts. So Thatcher can argue that Serbia's ‘ethnic cleansing’ policy ‘combines the barbarities of Hitler's and Stalin's policies towards other nations’ (*Guardian*, 7 August 1992). On the other hand, they are keen to use the history of the war to promote anti-German chauvinism. The result is often an incoherence and uncertainty in conservative views of the past.

What is certain is that neither side in the Holocaust debate—German or Anglo-American—is any better than the other. Both are attempting to use a nationalist crime from the past to justify their own nationalist actions today. The use and abuse of the Holocaust is a good example of what their New World Order means.



Clinton's cookies

I am the grandson of a working woman, the son of a single mother, the husband of a working wife who earns far more than I, and the father of a daughter who wants to build space stations in the sky....I have learned that building up women does not diminish men.' This was how presidential candidate Bill Clinton introduced himself to the women's caucus at the Democratic Party convention.

The New York convention was stage-managed to parade the six women candidates whom the Democrats are putting up for election to the Senate, and their 34 female candidates for the House of Representatives. It may not sound like many, but it was enough to inspire one leading Democratic feminist to declare that, 'we are on our way to the top and nobody can bring us down'.

The Democrats' emphasis on playing the 'gender card' this year has been portrayed as just another sign of the times, an indication that the old chauvinistic ways are gradually being replaced by windows of opportunity for women. American papers are fond of describing 1992 as the Year of the Woman. They claim that women's issues now dominate the political agenda and cite the Anita Hill sexual harassment case and the recent supreme court debate on abortion as key issues which pushed women's interests to the fore.

This is a curious observation since in neither case can women's interests be said to have prevailed. Clarence Thomas made it on to the supreme court despite allegations that he had sexually harassed women colleagues. He then participated in the supreme court decision to allow Pennsylvania state to restrict abortion—a decision which effectively drove a coach and horses through the constitutional right to end an unwanted pregnancy early.

In the light of all this, Clinton's feminist declarations will most likely be felt as a breath of fresh air. And one problem with fresh air is that if you're not used to it, it can go to your head. There's a danger that after the crusades by Reagan and Bush to elevate conservative values, the slightest hint of liberalism in Clinton's rhetoric will be seized upon as evidence that better times for women are around the corner. In fact, the way in which the Democrats are playing the gender card will be of far more benefit to Bill Clinton than to American women.

The Democrats are using women's issues to win votes and embarrass the Bush administration. Pushing women to the front of the convention stage was good for Clinton's image. Opinion polls show that US voters, especially women, are cynical about the traditional parties and want change. Clinton has no new policies, but he can at least give the party a new look. The women candidates and the quasi-feminist rhetoric are part of the image change.

This may win some votes from Republican women, but the main intention is to galvanise and inspire the Democrats' own party activists, and help create a sense of momentum behind the party.

Even Clinton's declarations that he is 'pro-choice on abortion' may

mean little more than an attempt to hit Bush where it hurts. During election time, it makes sense for Clinton to carry the pro-choice arrow in his quiver. Bush's well-known anti-abortion sentiments are an issue of grave concern to many Republicans. A survey earlier this year in the *Washington Post* found that more than half of registered Republicans support legal abortion. So Bush's stated intention to use his presidency to pack the supreme court with pro-life judges is not thought to be a vote winner.

Bush is caught in a political quandary. If he softens his stand on abortion, it will make him look even more indecisive and opportunist. But if he sticks to his guns and is re-elected, he will undoubtedly have the opportunity to carry out his threat. The prospect of a possible end to legal abortion is said to be making otherwise die-hard Republicans think about switching to Clinton.

Every time Clinton makes a pro-women speech or mentions abortion, he is rubbing salt into Bush's wounds. That is why he will play the gender card at every opportunity. But Clinton also understands that to be successful, he mustn't appear to undermine old-fashioned family values. The result is a curious paradox.

While Clinton pushes career women to the fore in one context, he stresses their importance in family life in another. Every concession he makes in favour of women's right to independence is underwritten with a promise not to undermine traditional family life. And while it is possible to be committed to both in the

sphere of rhetoric, it is impossible in practice. After all, traditional family responsibilities are precisely what women must be liberated from if they are to experience real equality.

An incongruity that has not escaped some Democrat supporters is that while women have been paraded on the political rostrum, Mrs Hillary Clinton has been wheeled out to provide the traditional role of all-American cookie-baker and home-maker.

Hillary dropped a clanger earlier this year when she tried to fight back against accusations that she was a careerist with the retort that she didn't want to waste her life baking cookies. When the Republicans picked on this as a slur against the nation's cookie-bakers, she responded by challenging Barbara Bush to a cookie-baking battle.

Women across the USA are now being invited to try out, and vote their preference for, the favoured cookie recipes of Hillary Clinton and Barbara Bush. The women's magazine which has organised the contest will announce the cookie war results to coincide with the presidential election results in November.

I suppose it could be argued that Bill Clinton is not responsible for his wife's antics (it seems much more likely that she tells him what to say). But the cookie carry-on should sound a warning bell for American women expecting some far-reaching change for the better. This may be the year of the woman candidate, but not much has changed for the male candidates' wives. ●

The women candidates and quasi-feminist rhetoric are just part of the image change

A decade ago Margaret Thatcher declared 'there is no alternative' and rejected calls for easier economic policies. She is long gone, yet John Major and chancellor Norman Lamont are now playing the same tune. And that, says Phil Murphy, is because they can do even less than their predecessor to revitalise British capitalism

More and more commentators are arguing that unless the government acts soon, the British recession will turn into a slump. They are wrong. Britain is already in a slump. The recession will end at some point and the economy will stop contracting, but there is no scope for a sustainable recovery. The British economy is likely to be bumping along at the bottom for some time to come.

Shrivalled bits

The fact that more experts are talking about a slump is, however, significant. It reflects the recent mood-change over Britain's economic prospects. A few months ago, politicians, economists and journalists believed their own predictions of a recovery. Now very few of them believe anything of the sort. The *Sunday Times*, for example, has abandoned its 'green shoots of economic recovery' column, probably reckoning that a 'brown shrivalled dead bits' column would better reveal the real state of the economy.

After almost 18 months of recession, it has started to dawn on them that this is no ordinary cyclical slowdown. Expectations are down, pessimism is up. The failure of the predicted post-general election recovery to get beyond anecdotes of the 'there were more people looking around my showroom' variety has been the last straw for many. Now economists talk of things not improving much until 1993, and some say not until the second half of the nineties.

Low expectations

When the heads of the Group of Seven top capitalist nations met in Munich in July for their annual economic summit it only made perceptions worse. So low were their expectations that they arrived at this economic summit willing to talk about anything *except* the world economy. Our always-on-the-ball John Major got himself scolded by the rest when he made the mistake of trying to raise trade policies and the lack of movement in the Gatt talks.

Some of the Western leaders openly asked whether there was any point getting together for such non-events in the future. After all, getting together in such high-profile fashion to do nothing only serves to highlight the seriousness of the crisis. Anybody watching the summit could well conclude that, if all of the world's leading economies are experiencing slow or nil growth and yet there are no solutions on offer, what hope is there for the smaller industrialised countries, never mind the second and third worlds?

But what?

In this mood of doom and gloom comparisons with the Depression of the 1930s are becoming more common. William Rees-Mogg, former editor of the *Times* and co-writer of the sombre *The Great Reckoning*, has drawn parallels between the Munich economic summit and the impotence of world leaders in the thirties, and warned the British government of the dangerous social and political implications of another Depression (*Independent*, 13 July 1992).

The mood of pessimism about Lamont's fabled recovery is breeding desperate calls for government action. The 'there is no alternative', 'steady as she goes', 'be patient', 'do nothing' approach from the Tory frontbench has been attacked from all sides. Tory back benchers, Labour front benchers, right-wing monetarists and liberal Keynesians all say something must be done. But what?

What's a £?

The most popular demand is for the government to stop propping up the pound within the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and so cut interest rates. Devaluation of the pound (or as they say in polite company, realignment downwards) is now backed by Neil Kinnock and Baroness Thatcher, leftish Keynesian economists like Cambridge's Wynne Godley, free market monetarists like

City economist Tim Congdon and Sir Alan Walters, as well as the new CBI chief, the chairmen of ICI and Tate & Lyle, and the chief executive of Midland Bank.

The significant thing here is not the diverse range of people backing devaluation, but how quickly the general mood has changed. Five months ago, at the time of the election, devaluation was a very dirty word in establishment circles and its proponents were regarded as little better than traitors. The sudden about turn is a sign of how desperate they have become about the economy.

Up the creek

So why is the government so intransigent in the face of these calls for action? It is doubtful that the cabinet itself remains confident of an early recovery. The increasingly tetchy performance of the chancellor in dismissing his critics as 'ridiculous', 'alarmist' and 'up the creek' belies the government's own fears. But even if Major were to admit that he did not believe in the fantasy world he has painted, of Britain and sterling replacing Germany and the mark as the economic centre of Europe, it would make little difference. There is nothing he can do to turn things around.

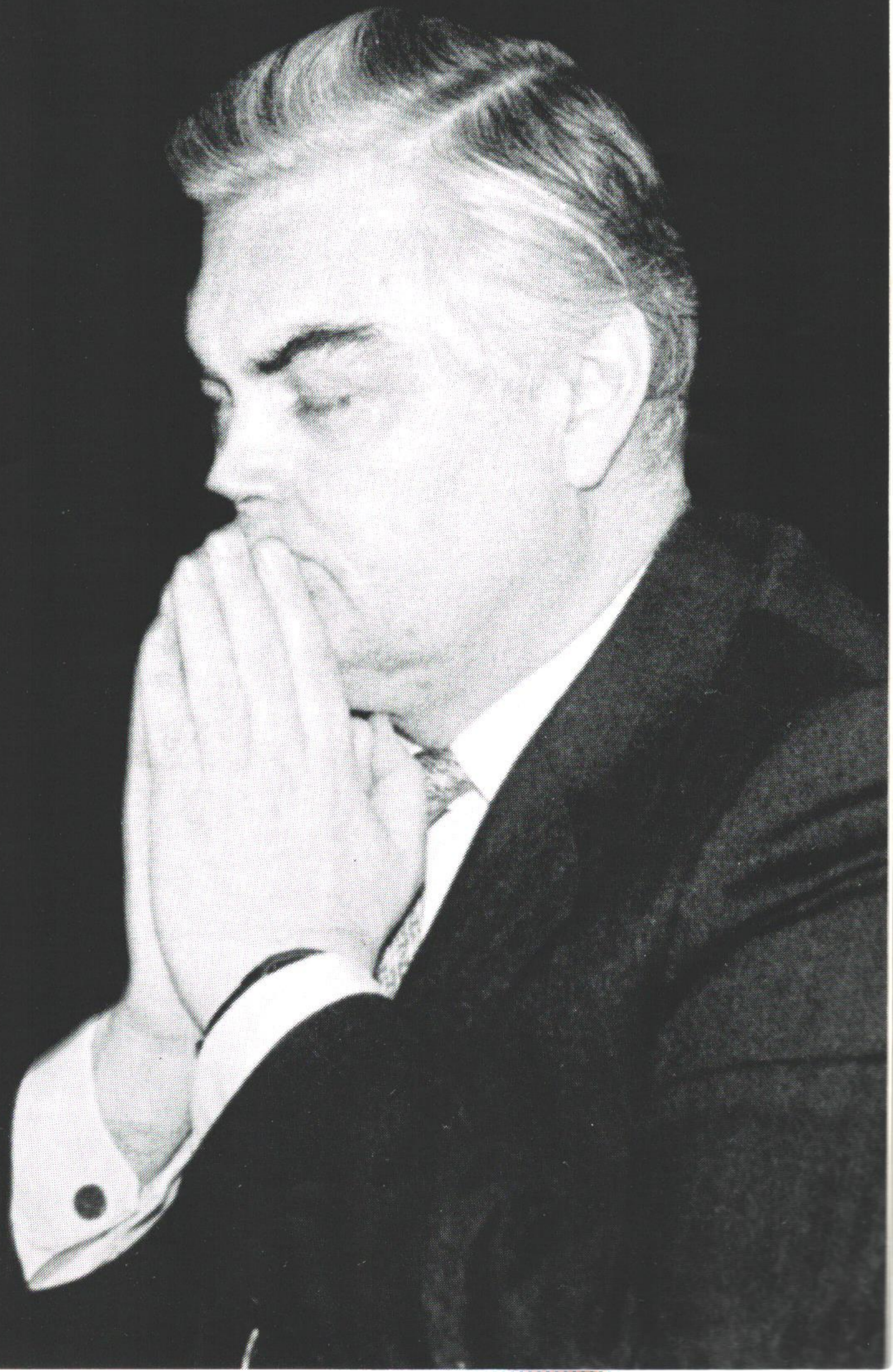
In its defensive reaction to criticism, the government betrays the recognition that it has little scope to make a difference to the economy. The Tories are acting out the brilliant discovery which the economics professionals made in recent years (before their current fit of panic): that government intervention in the economy can no longer galvanise capitalism. The old levers of fiscal and monetary policy just do not work any more.

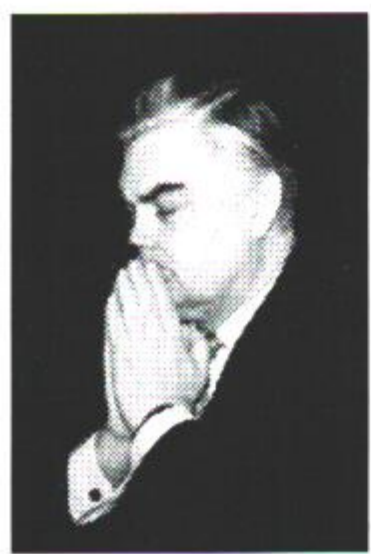
No more kick-starts

Before their fear got the better of them in the past few months, the same message had been coming through in economic think-tank reports, in bank and investment house surveys, and in the financial and business press. Each time, it has been introduced as a new discovery—'it's now realised that' or 'contrary to the conventional view'—but the message is the same: government action cannot have a dynamic economic effect.

Whatever governments do—lower interest rates, raise them, spend more, spend less—economies just seem to bump along at the bottom unaffected. As Major accurately said in July of the American experience of 18 cuts in short-term interest rates, 'it has not produced the kick-start to the economy that many anticipated'. Faced with the fact that it cannot kick-start the economy, the British treasury team has tried to make a virtue out of their ►

Do they have an alternative?





impotence by arguing that they're not going to be pushed into deviating from their long-term strategy of...doing nothing.

Norman Tebbit, in adding his voice to the 'cut interest rates' chorus, dubbed Lamont the 'no-club' chancellor, in contrast to 'one-club' chancellor Lawson who relied only on interest rate changes during the late eighties. In replying on BBC Radio's *World this Weekend*, Lamont insisted that the government's was 'the only policy that could be pursued'. What this show of strength really amounts

The key capitalist survival mechanisms of the 1970s and 1980s—state intervention and credit expansion—are now exhausted

to is abandoning any pretence of managing the economy, and just drifting along with events.

Lamont's predictions of a rosy future are too absurd to waste time on. But the view that there's very little governments can do to positive effect is well founded. It corresponds to the real decay in the Western economies which marks this recession out as the start of a full-scale slump, not just in Britain but worldwide. After 20 years of cyclical crises since the first major postwar recession of 1973, capitalist economies are becoming more and more immune to government intervention. They are becoming too far gone to be revived by the old medicinal methods.

Excuses, excuses

Both the British government and its critics try to blame past policy errors for the current mess, whether it be making credit too easy in the eighties or joining the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1990. But these are all just attempts to find scapegoats for a moribund economic system.

The different policies which are now being blamed were only pragmatic responses to an earlier stage

of the crisis. They are not the causes of the present economic difficulties. But the fact that they have failed to resolve things is testimony to the growing ineffectiveness of short-term techniques of crisis management. In so far as previous palliatives have worked at all, it is only at the expense of creating greater problems today. Yesterday's 'solutions' have become today's symptoms of a slump which is rooted, not in one or another policy, but in the inherently crisis-ridden character of the capitalist economy.

Out of control

The key capitalist survival mechanisms of the 1970s and 1980s—state intervention and credit expansion—are now relatively exhausted. The modern economy has become dependent on state support, whether administered through government contracts to the defence industry, pharmaceutical companies and building contractors, or through backhanders like selling nationalised assets to the private sector on the cheap and subsidising Canary Wharf. As a result, the capitalist economy has kept going longer than was justified by real levels of profitability. This is one reason why government budgets are now increasingly out of control.

Credit has been the other trick used to keep the wheels of the economy moving. Through borrowing it has been possible to extend production even when profitability has been poor. Hence the explosion first of third world debt, and then, during the 1980s, of government, corporate and personal debt in the West.

These measures of state spending and credit expansion are now widely blamed for creating debt-management problems. More importantly, however, they no longer operate as effective economic boosters. Look at how the limitations of effective state spending have been reached in Britain.

All spent

Back in the 1930s, state spending provided an extraordinary bonus to help stimulate the economy. Before the thirties, government spending was pretty insignificant, equivalent to about one tenth of the whole economy. When it doubled during that decade, it represented a substantial injection of aid for the other 90 per cent of the economy.

Today, by contrast, Britain goes into slump with an economy already largely based on state activity. Government expenditure represents well over 40 per cent of national output. Changing government spending by a couple of per cent of national output might make a big difference to the government borrowing requirement, but has far less positive impact on the

smaller productive base of the economy which remains. British capitalism has become so dependent on state spending that it has become almost immune to this wonder-drug of an earlier time.

Worse still, the climate of international economic cooperation which facilitated the anti-crisis policies of the recent past is also exhausted. Over the past 20 years, the short-term stimulus provided by state spending and the international expansion of credit was only made possible by the high level of international capital flows among cooperating powers. As the Munich summit revealed, this system of cooperation is becoming far less durable and solid.

The tendency towards the breakdown of international economic cooperation results from the demise of the relatively stable political order of the Cold War. Economic factors are compounding the new tensions. Cooperation relied on the relative prosperity of the stronger economies of Japan and Germany. They provided the funds to help out the others, so stimulating the world economy and benefiting themselves. Today the synchronised world recession makes it more difficult for Japan and Germany to play this locomotive role. They will look to managing their own economies first, and hold back on making concessions to help others.

Crisis to slump

On the one hand, the stagnation of economic life stimulates economic conflict and rivalry—look at tensions over interest rate levels, over the world trade talks, over Japanese investment in the USA. And on the other, this weakening of the framework of international cooperation makes it more difficult to limit the scope of the recession. These two interacting processes exacerbate one another.

The greater barriers to crisis management by governments today explain why this recession has been transformed into a slump. Of course, it is always possible that the panicky Messrs Major and Lamont will buckle under the pressure and try to do something, anything, to improve matters. The strength of their resolve cannot be assumed; but the desperate state of their economy can. That makes it certain that the government's action or inaction in the sphere of economic policy will have negligible impact.

Although they can do nothing to pull the economy out of slump, the one sphere in which government policy could have an impact is the living standards of the working class. Recent discussions about cutting welfare benefits and freezing public sector pay indicate the sort of 'positive action' we can expect to see more of. ●



Generation X

There are few more depressing sights than those horrible 'ironic' postcards that take up all the space in bookshops. Happy fifties families, dads with pipes and hats, and a desperately unfunny caption along the lines of 'Sod the washing up, darling. I'm off to see the Chippendales'. But there's a whole cottage industry producing these things, so someone must buy them. It was only a matter of time before these consumers were allocated an official lifestyle label: post-baby boom, post-yuppy, post-whatever. Now Douglas Coupland has done the honours, and being a serious guy, he has come up with *Generation X*, the title of his novel-cum-manifesto. Similar themes are pursued in films from France (*World Without Pity—Le Nul Generation*) and America (*Slackers*).

So who are Generation X? As far as I can gather, they are middle class, educated and feeling the pinch economically. They don't like capitalism, but they reject any collective alternative too. They don't believe they can make a difference, so they don't try. They have no 'material' aspirations, and subsist on the fringes, taking a succession of 'McJobs' ('low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future jobs in the service sector'). Well, that's the story. Not really a generation, but certainly a way of life in studenty circles over the past 10 years: frustrated would-be writers, film-makers and artists, all talking loud and saying nothing; desperate to make a statement, but without any ideas or convictions to declare.

The name Generation X comes ready-wrapped in several sets of invisible quotation marks, having been the title of a sixties vox pop of disaffected youth, then knowingly appropriated by a group of art school punks a decade later. Now a further generation's worth of irony has settled upon it like a layer of dust, burying any connotations of rebellion. Second time around it suggested a sneer, tops; today it's more like a raised eyebrow.

Coupland writes of America, but the same self-conscious *ennui* is obvious here, as the past is endlessly recycled. Nostalgia has now regressed to childhood, as *Watch with Mother*, *Thunderbirds* and the rest fill the video shops. (In the book, the narrator's happiest moment is when the friends get ready for bed and tell stories over mugs of Horlicks). Conversation revolves around trivia and kitsch. Alternative comedians get by on reminiscences about old TV ads. Enthusiasm is expressed only for the things that matter least. It is the right-on version of upper class insouciance, where minor inconveniences are exaggerated ('absolutely ghastly!') while disasters are understated ('a bit of a bore', 'not too funny').

Coupland's characters personify these traits. They are three platonic nineties friends living in self-imposed exile in a small town in the Californian desert. One is called Dag, which will amuse readers in Australia, where it is a term for the congealed matter that sticks to the back end of a sheep. They won't find much else to amuse them, though: this crowd's idea of a good time is sitting around telling morose stories, through which they share fears and try to find meaning in their aimless lives.

All they end up doing is trawling through the junk that clutters their

minds, with advertising and consumer products their only terms of reference. They are prone to making casual remarks like: 'Katie and I bought this tub of Multi-Whip instead of real whip cream because we thought petroleum distillate whip topping seemed like the sort of food that air force wives stationed in Pensacola back in the early sixties would feed their husbands to celebrate a career promotion.'

The narrator's friend Claire does amusing things like dressing up as 'a Reno housewife' for his appreciation. This sort of thing continues for page after page until you forget that these people are pushing 30. It's like reading a self-obsessed teenager's diary, in which no off-hand remark is too trivial to be talked up into a *bon mot* and lovingly recorded for posterity.

The minutiae of everyday life is reassembled on the page like a mosaic, as though by piecing together the entire surface of life, a profound underlying truth will be revealed. In fact the opposite happens: the more the friends wallow in their appreciation of tacky consumer products and trashy popular culture, the more they cut themselves off from society. Having gone to the desert to escape, they spend their time

obsessively discussing the people they pour scorn on. Their working class neighbours are described in a typically dismissive way: 'It is *their* oversized brandy snifter filled with matchbooks I think of when I make oversized-brandy-snifter-filled-with-matchbooks jokes.'

'Squirring' in X-speak is not what you do when people make 'brandy snifter jokes' (no, you had to be there, it was hilarious...). Here it means 'discomfort inflicted on young people by old people who see no irony in their

gestures'. This failure to appreciate their fine sensibilities can become exasperating: 'Our parents' generation seems neither able nor interested in understanding how markets exploit them. They take shopping at face value.' As opposed to seeing shopping as an ironic gesture, that is. One character is so upset by the thought that he has to pull over at the roadside to think about shopping malls.

Apart from giving you an insight into why your grandparents grumble about student layabouts and bringing back national service, the most striking thing about Generation X is how their arrogance is matched by stupidity. As they plod laboriously to their banal conclusions about life, they pat themselves on the back and bemoan the lack of intellectual equals. Coupland tries to distance himself from the characters by placing 'attitude road signs' in the margins, little asides to let us know that he's really an amusing guy who knows all about their problems. It really won't wash. Anyone who can offer earnest definitions of phrases like 'Emotional Ketchup Burst' and 'Clique Maintenance' is clearly suffering from a bad case of his own diagnosis (101-ism: 'the tendency to pick apart, often in minute detail, all aspects of life using half-understood pop-psychology as a tool').

However much you try to hide from life, you eventually come in for some hard knocks. Just as Douglas Coupland was languidly taking his place on the bookshop shelf, Joe Hawkins was putting the windows in: someone has decided it's time to reissue the old *Skinhead* books. Now what kind of example is that to set young people? ●

Frustrated would-be writers and artists, talking loud and saying nothing

The challenge of t



After the week of action called by the African National Congress, Charles Longford examines the problems facing both sides in South Africa's negotiation process

While the British media concentrated on the story of a neo-Nazi, a second-rate journalist, his bottom and her secret diary, the week of action inside South Africa almost passed it by. As alarming as Eugene Terre Blanche's buttocks might be, they pale into insignificance when compared to the source of real alarm for the white minority ruling class—the power of the black masses.

The week of mass action should have reminded those who have forgotten where the real power for change lies in South Africa. When four million black workers downed tools for two days, the economy came to a stop. When hundreds of thousands of blacks converged on Pretoria for a demonstration, they not only transformed this capital of the apartheid state into a black city, but they occupied the amphitheatre and besieged the Union Buildings of parliament—the citadel of white minority power. Lounging on the

impeccable lawns which for decades were maintained by starvation-waged black labourers, they listened to Nelson Mandela address them 30 years to the day since he had been first arrested and imprisoned.

Thing of the past

Although the week of action was very limited in its objectives, it was significant for two reasons. First, at a time when collective political action to change society is widely considered to be a thing of the past, the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people engaging in such action is a welcome one. Second, it placed the black masses at the centre of events in South Africa. It is now clear that the black masses and their aspirations are the major problem facing both the De Klerk regime and, ironically enough, the ANC itself.

In previous articles in *Living Marxism*, we have emphasised that the De Klerk regime initiated the present negotiations not out of

the black masses

a genuine concern for peace and democracy, but as the apartheid state's latest attempt to contain the militant black working class.

As the apartheid regime became economically dependent upon the black working class, the denial of democratic rights to the black majority became a key source of instability. From the seventies, white governments tried to mediate the conflict with black workers by creating a black middle class and introducing piecemeal reforms of apartheid. But the mediators became targets for black anger, and the minor reforms only added insult to injury. The effect was simply to fuel the demand for real freedom. At the end of the eighties, the apartheid regime was still relying upon repression to contain the black masses.

Reforming apartheid

The collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it Stalinism, gave the ruling class the break it desperately needed. Stalinism had been very influential within the anti-apartheid struggle, and the Soviet system had been widely perceived as the alternative to capitalism in South Africa. Once it had gone, South Africa's rulers felt for the first time that they could introduce political reform without threatening the capitalist system itself. Political reform, even the dismantling of formal apartheid, would give blacks the vote, but market forces would keep them in the factories, mines, farms and townships of apartheid capitalism.

President De Klerk's negotiations strategy is based upon these assumptions. He wants to secure a political deal where there is some black representation in parliament, maybe even a black president, but which will leave the socio-economic power of the white minority capitalist class intact.

Boipatong massacre

De Klerk can only achieve this end, however, if the gap between the sham democracy he offers and the aspirations of the black masses can be overcome. In July, De Klerk visited Boipatong township after the massacre of residents by suspected police agents. When the president of South Africa was forced to flee, ashen-faced and cowering as his Mercedes Benz dodged barricades and sped away from angry residents, it was clear how wide that gap remains. The way in which the police then opened

fire on unarmed demonstrators illustrated that the gun remains the state's ultimate mediating mechanism today, despite all the talk of a new South Africa.

But if Boipatong showed that the black masses remain the barrier to De Klerk's plans, it also demonstrated how they pose a problem for the ANC leadership. Just as vivid as De Klerk's ashen face was the spectacle of ANC president Nelson Mandela being barracked by township residents demanding guns to defend themselves. The pressure from the masses forced Mandela temporarily to pull out of the talks with the regime. It highlighted the gap between the masses and their own political representatives, and the extent to which the ANC had temporarily lost control of its own supporters.

This loss of control was not the result of bad organisation on the ground. It was a consequence of the contradiction which lies at the heart of the ANC's strategy today.

At odds

Although the ANC engaged in an armed struggle in the past, its goal has always been to establish black majority rule through parliamentary representation. The denial of access to parliamentary politics under apartheid forced the ANC to engage in armed struggle and other forms of mass resistance. But there was always a fundamental tension between the ANC's desire to become a respectable parliamentary party of government, and the mass movement it had to mobilise in order to achieve this end. Today that tension has come to the fore as the Pretoria regime has opened the door to black involvement in the political process.

Because both sides now accept that a revolutionary transformation of South Africa is out of the question, they are negotiating over the precise parliamentary arrangements under which capitalism will be run in a future South Africa. The power of the masses is the ANC's ticket to the negotiating table. It is only through protests such as the week of action that it can press De Klerk to make concessions. Once the ANC gets to the table, however, what is being negotiated is a settlement which will effectively deny the masses a say in how South Africa is run—apart from allowing them to vote every few years. In other words, the ANC has

to be able to wield the strength of the masses, yet at the same time marginalise them from real political power.

The march on Pretoria during the week of action provided a stark illustration of the problem. Hundreds of thousands of blacks marched up Kerk Street (the South African equivalent of Oxford Street), raised the ANC flag over Pretoria and chanted that Mandela should be president. If this wasn't remarkable enough, they then left Pretoria and went back to their townships.

In many ways it was symbolic of what the ANC leadership hope will happen in the future: the black masses will sweep them to parliamentary office, and then go back to the townships in an orderly fashion. But as the recent outbursts of black fury suggest, Mandela is some way from being able to deliver such a deal.

The way in which the anger of the people of Boipatong and other black townships almost destroyed the negotiations shows that the role of the masses remains crucial to any future developments. It also highlights how the tension between their aspirations and the strategy of the ANC looks set to continue.

Power glimpsed

At the same time, it is also clear that what presents itself as a problem for the ANC leadership and president De Klerk is, in fact, the potential solution to the situation. The power of the black working class, its ability to close down the economy, was only glimpsed during the week of action. Unleashed, that power could take control of the country and sweep away De Klerk and his ruling elite. In such circumstances there need be no worries about a stalemate in the negotiations process, since there would be no negotiations with the oppressors—and no need for any.

Today, however, that power to transform South Africa is being channelled into a strategy which can only marginalise it and demoralise people in the process. Behind the apparent success of the week of action, Mandela's approach is effectively reducing the black masses to the role of a passive stage army. If the ANC succeeds, it will solve De Klerk's problem for him—and deny the black majority the freedom which could be theirs.





A weekend of discussion sponsored by *Living Marxism*

Hot Wars and *understand*

Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 November 1992

When the Cold War ended, the triumphant leaders of the West promised us a New World Order. Today we can begin to see what that means.

We have already witnessed the Gulf War that killed a quarter of a million Iraqis. Now we face the threat of a new Western war effort in Bosnia, while US forces exercise again on the Kuwait/Iraq border.

At home, the Western states are waging a race war against immigrants from the third world and the East. And they are developing a new generation of hi-tech weapons of mass destruction.

While fighting the hot wars of today and making war plans for the future, the Western authorities are also rewriting the conflicts of the past. The renewed debates about the Second World War and the Holocaust are part of the process

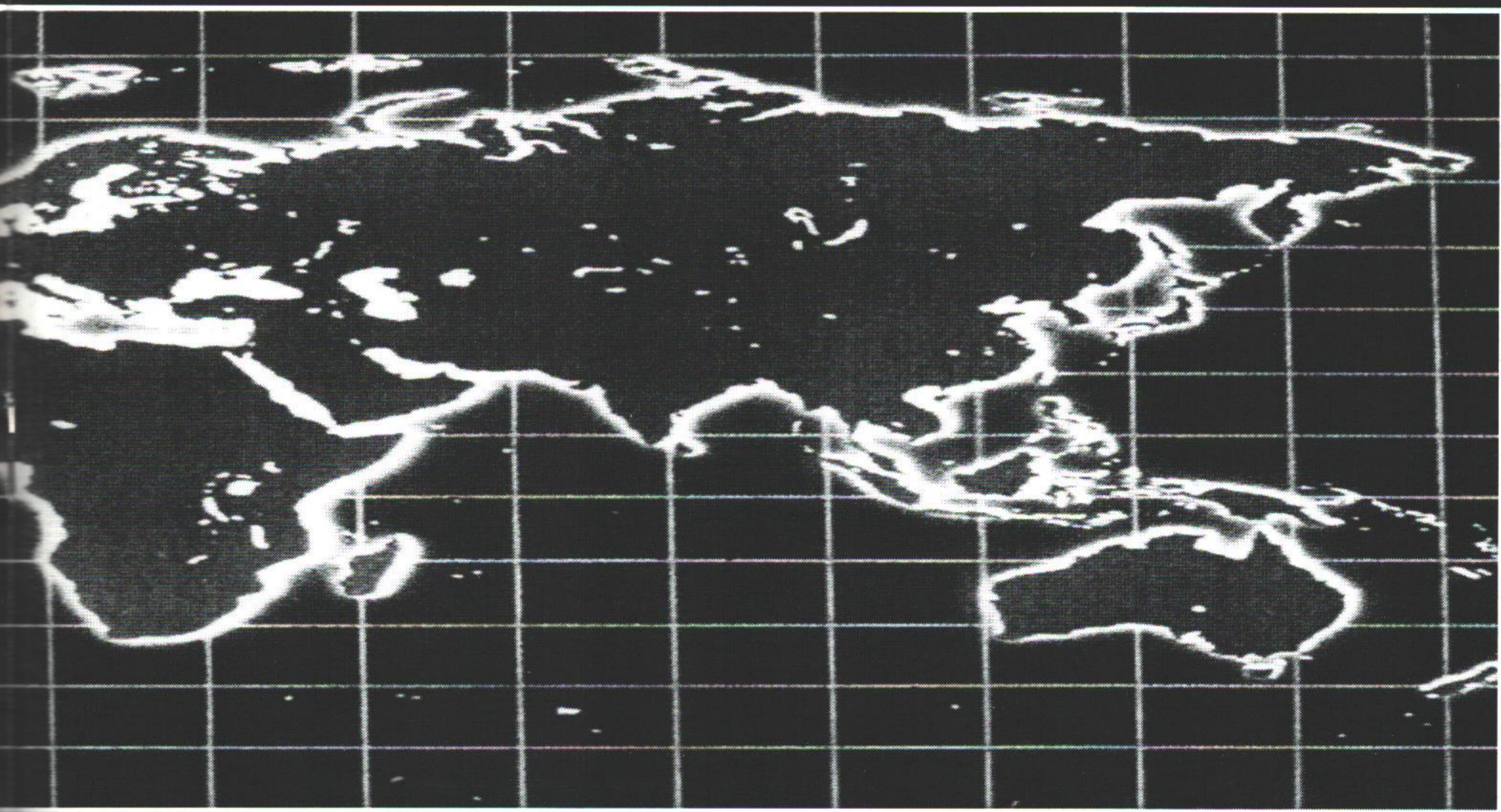
of rehabilitating more right-wing views. The ideas of national supremacy and racial inferiority look set to become the politics of the New World Order.

The irony is that, at a time when the Western powers are becoming more militaristic on every front, many who would once have criticised the USA and Britain for their aggressive foreign policies now look to further Western intervention as the solution to crises from the Gulf to the Balkans.

It is time that these confusions were cleared up, and that those who want peace and freedom got to grips with the true causes of conflict today.

Since *Living Marxism* was launched in November 1988, we have continually warned against the false promise of a stable new world.

We suggested that the post-Cold War 'peace dividend' was illusory, and that the real trend



Organised by the Revolutionary Communist Party at the LSE

World Holocausts and the New World Order

London School of Economics, London, WC2

being set by the Western powers was towards more militarised international relations.

We argued that the post-Cold War promise of 'One World', free from divisions, was turning the truth on its head; that the conflicts between the West and the rest of the world, and among the Great Powers themselves, would intensify as the old order unravelled.

We believe that *Living Marxism's* warnings have proved justified, and that grave dangers lie ahead. Now there is a need to go further in analysing how and why the world is being remade, if we are to equip ourselves to have more of a say in the outcome. That is why *Living Marxism* is sponsoring a weekend of discussion and debate on the New World Order in November.

The conference aims to bring together writers from *Living Marxism* with other leading experts

and authorities on international affairs, for a ground-breaking discussion of all the key new trends in current events:

- from the renewed debate about the Holocaust to the demonisation of Iraq and Serbia;
- from the destruction of the third world to the construction of Fortress Europe;
- from the revival of racial thinking to the outbreak of fresh power struggles among the USA, Europe, and Japan.

We invite you to join the discussion.

Ticket: £14 waged/£9 unwaged

For further details and tickets, contact Penny Robson on (071) 375 1702, or write to her at New World Order Weekend, c/o BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX (make cheques payable to RCP Association).



THE DANGERS OF

These days everything from our diet to our sunbathing habits seems to be the subject of an official health promotion campaign. But do these medical panics improve public health? Or are they more about shifting responsibility for social problems on to the backs of 'irresponsible' individuals?

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick argues that health promotion has depicted disease as the modern wages of sin—and has turned medicine itself into a quasi-religious moral crusade

We live in strange times. People in the West live longer and healthier lives than ever before. Yet people seem increasingly preoccupied by their health. There is a widespread conviction that the modern Western diet and lifestyle are uniquely unhealthy and are the main causes of the contemporary epidemics of cancer, heart disease and strokes. The fears provoked and sustained by an apparently incessant series of public health scares, backed up by government and medical 'health promotion' campaigns, encourage a sense of individual responsibility for disease. The recent government white paper, *The Health of the Nation*, seeks to place health and disease at the centre of a new morality of everyday life.

Are the health scares justified in medical terms? Take two recent examples—the cot death panic following the tragic death of television presenter Ann Diamond's baby son last year, and the more recent wave of concern about sunbathing causing skin cancer.

In January, after coming under sustained media pressure skilfully orchestrated by Ms Diamond, the Department of Health launched

a national campaign to advise parents of young babies to stop smoking, to avoid overheating them with blankets, and to put them to sleep lying on their backs. This advice followed surveys in New Zealand and Avon which reported fewer deaths from 'sudden infant death syndrome' after such guidelines were introduced.

British paediatric experts were openly sceptical about the cot death campaign (see editorial, *British Medical Journal*, 1 February 1992). They noted that initial cot death rates were abnormally high in both survey centres, wondering whether the apparent reduction in mortality would be transferable elsewhere. They noted too a dramatic decline in cot death rates in Scotland, where no such guidelines were promoted, over the same period. They were also concerned about the difficulty of distinguishing the effects of different 'risk factors'—sleeping position, temperature control, smoking and breast feeding. They also observed that the guidelines did not tackle a key risk factor in cot death and infant mortality from all causes—'socioeconomic deprivation'.

Though nobody knows what causes cot deaths, the government decided, on the basis of evidence drawn from



PHOTO: Michael Kramer

HEALTHY LIVING

less than 80 cases, most in a country on the other side of the world, to launch a major campaign to tell people in Britain what to do to prevent such deaths. The main effect of this, apart from changing babies' sleeping positions (until they roll over), was to make mothers who smoke and have experienced a cot death feel even more guilty and depressed, and those whose babies are still alive intensely anxious.

Malignant moles?

The sun had scarcely made its premature appearance in June than the newspapers were full of gloomy warnings about 'malignant melanoma'. The *Guardian's* account of 'Britain's fastest growing skin cancer' was a typical example ('Have a good time...but first look at the bad side', 19 June):

'Within two decades the number of cases reported each year has more than doubled to at least 3000. Small wonder that doctors are calling for the return of the parasol and the pith helmet.'

John Illman's 'good health guide to holidays', which would make any sensible person stay at home behind hermetically sealed doors,

included three columns on how to diagnose and prevent sun-related skin tumours.

Reviewing the sort of medical text ('disaster dermatology') that encourages such popular journalism, Newcastle dermatology professor Sam Shuster bemoans the way 'the poor British public is being terrified by descriptions of moles going malignant' ('Apocalypse now', *BMJ*, 18 July). He also notes the trend to reclassify benign disease as 'early malignancy...which has given us the spurious cures used to justify an incompetent and frightening screening programme'. No doubt this has also contributed to the dramatic increase in the incidence of melanomas. He condemns an 'ill-conceived propaganda exercise' which has flooded skin clinics with people with harmless moles, delaying the treatment of malignant lesions.

Drummed into them

Anxieties about cot death and melanoma, both relatively rare conditions, must now vie for attention with the established health panics of recent years. Everybody has already had it drummed into them that smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, eating rich

food and not taking enough exercise are at the root of the 'epidemics' of cancer and heart disease that are said to be the main causes of death in our society. The greatest panic of all, of course, surrounds Aids, widely regarded as the ultimate penalty for sexual licence or drug abuse.

Redefining disease

This *medicalisation* of life and its problems involves two inter-related processes. On the one hand, there is a tendency to expand the definition of disease to include a wide range of social and biological phenomena. Thus, for example, while the inclusion of crime within the medical framework remains controversial, the excessive consumption of alcohol or use of illicit drugs are widely accepted as medical problems. So too is obesity, a biological variant which is acknowledged as a disease state; by American National Institutes of Health criteria some two thirds of adult males are affected. According to some criteria around one third of the British population suffer from a raised cholesterol level. In a similar way, substantial proportions of the population are arbitrarily designated as having a high blood pressure. ►

On the other hand, people suffering from this expanded range of disease states are increasingly evaluated in psychological or moral terms. Now that the causes of the old infectious diseases have largely been discovered and effective treatments developed, they have lost their menace and their

It is faith, not science, that justifies exhortations to change public behaviour

mystery. By contrast, the causes of the modern epidemics remain obscure and effective cures elusive. Today there is a tendency to believe that people become ill because they want to (as for example in the view that cancer results from 'stress' or depression) or because they deserve to (because they smoke or drink too much).

While people who succumb to viruses or bacteria are generally regarded as unfortunate and worthy of sympathy, those who get cancer or heart disease are, at least to a degree, held up to blame for their unhealthy lifestyle. Because of its major modes of transmission in Britain—through sex, particularly gay sex, and drug abuse—HIV infection, though a virus, is ideally suited to the prevailing discourse of individual moral culpability.

Gluttony and sloth

If disease is the wages of sin in modern Britain, medicine has become a quasi-religious crusade against those old sins of the flesh—gluttony, sloth and concupiscence. The trend for religion to give way to science and for the scientist to take over the social role of the priest has been a feature of modern society since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The success of scientific medicine in the twentieth century has particularly enhanced the social prestige of the medical profession. Yet it seems that the final triumph of doctors as guardians of public morality comes at a time when they are generally incapable of explaining or curing the major contemporary causes of death and disease. Let's look more closely at the cult of health promotion.

Critics of health promotion have exposed a number of irrational

features common to many popular health campaigns. The first is what Petr Skrabanek and James McCormick call the 'fallacy of cheating death' (P Skrabanek and J McCormick, *Follies and Fallacies in Medicine*). Much of the difficulty in both understanding and treating most forms of cancer and heart disease is that they are closely related to the ageing process. In a society in which many more people escape an early death from infectious diseases, they finally die in old age from a tumour, a heart attack or a stroke. Though some younger people also suffer premature death from these causes, the notion of 'epidemics' of these diseases rests on the inclusion of the deaths of vast numbers of old people.

The grim reaper rules

Yet, given existing levels of scientific knowledge, there is still no escaping the grim reaper. The idea that preventing cancer and heart disease could usefully prolong life is based on the illusion of defying mortality. It has been estimated that the gain in average life span resulting from the elimination of cancer deaths between the ages of 15 and 65 would be seven months (*Follies and Fallacies in Medicine*, p89). Furthermore, given the expanding population suffering various forms of another untreatable condition associated with ageing—senile dementia—it is clear that the postponement of death does not necessarily mean the prolongation of a healthy life.

A second area of irrationality surrounds the role of 'risk factors' in the causation and prevention of modern epidemic diseases. The speciality of epidemiology, which arose as the study of the mode of spread of infectious diseases, has become concerned with identifying statistical associations between various factors and the incidence of cancer and heart disease. But, contrary to popular assumptions encouraged by the health promotion industry, an association is not the same as a cause, and modifying risk factors cannot be presumed to reduce the incidence of a related disease.

Passive smoking scare

Skrabanek has noted that some 246 risk factors have been identified in relation to coronary heart disease; he argues persuasively for the use of the term 'risk marker' rather than risk factor ('Risk factor epidemiology: science or non-science?', in *Health, Lifestyle and Environment: Countering the Panic*).

Health propagandists confuse relative risk, which measures the strength of the association between a particular exposure factor and a disease, and exposure or absolute risk, which measures the actual harmful

effect of a factor, the risk of dying from a disease solely because of exposure:

'A factor can be very strongly associated with a particular disease, so that almost all cases of the disease are due to the factor and the relative risk is very high, but still have only a small effect because the disease is rare even among those exposed to the factor.' (P Finch, 'Creative statistics', in *Health, Lifestyle and Environment*, p80.)

The classic example of this statistical scam is the scare about 'passive smoking'. Though it is often said that the relative risk of non-smoking wives of smokers getting lung cancer is 30 per cent increased, it is rarely stated that their exposure risk is one in 50 000.

A third problem follows from the identification of risk factors: the notion that screening for such risk factors in a healthy population helps to prevent disease and allow early diagnosis and treatment of pre-morbid or pre-malignant conditions. Skrabanek and McCormick argue that the old adage 'prevention is better than cure' is only true if the disease in question is common, serious and treatable. If it is relatively uncommon, such as for example, breast or cervical cancer, then even a good screening test will inevitably yield a high rate of 'false positives', people wrongly diagnosed as having the condition.

Smear stories

In fact, the available screening tests of mammograms and smears have a low predictive value. In the case of mammograms this leads to a high rate of overdiagnosis of tumours leading to unnecessary biopsies. Smears carry the additional defect of a high rate of false negatives—they miss women with malignant changes—as well as throwing up diverse 'abnormalities' of uncertain significance. These lead to numerous 'repeat smears', with follow-up colposcopy and cone biopsy in cases of continuing uncertainty.

It is likely that in 70 per cent of the 100 000 women diagnosed every year as having a seriously abnormal smear and treated accordingly, the abnormalities would regress spontaneously. 'Better safe than sorry' chorus the health promoters, but they do not generally have to endure procedures that are at best unpleasant and uncomfortable, involving time-consuming clinic appointments, with all the attendant anxieties of waits and delays; at worst they are invasive and traumatic.

Furthermore, there is little evidence to substantiate the widespread presumption that early diagnosis leads to a better prognosis. After years of experimentation with surgery,

radiotherapy and chemotherapy regimes in the treatment of breast cancer, there is little consensus that any substantially improves long-term outcome. The death rate from cervical cancer has remained constant over the past decade despite the fact that enough smears have been performed to screen the female population twice over.

The ultimate confirmation of the irrationality of health promotion is its immunity to refutation by facts.

The classic illustration of this is the persistence of the promotion of a 'healthy diet' on the grounds that it prevents coronary heart disease. The diet-heart disease thesis rests on the notion that, if a high-fat diet contributes to the build up of those fatty plaques inside the coronary and other arteries that lead to heart attacks and other manifestations of atherosclerosis, then a low-fat diet will reverse these pathological processes and reduce the resulting morbidity and mortality. This is a plausible thesis, but despite decades of intensive study, it lacks scientific verification.

Eat your heart out

Critical evaluation of large population surveys, and particularly controversial cross-cultural and migrant studies, reveals ambiguous results which fail to demonstrate that dietary modification can prevent coronary heart disease (see J Le Fanu, *Eat your Heart Out*, and TJ Moore, *Heart Failure*). Le Fanu alleges that 'those responsible for promoting the diet-heart disease theory seem to me to have deliberately edited or censored evidence to justify their case' ('A healthy diet—fact or fashion', in *Health, Lifestyle and Environment*, p102).

A recent sequence of events reveals a now familiar process. In February the *British Medical Journal* reported the results of a major trial on the prevention of coronary heart disease by reducing cholesterol levels (by advice about diet, smoking and exercise, and drug treatment for raised blood pressure and cholesterol) (*BMJ*, 15 February). The survey revealed that over the 10 years after the end of the trial, cardiac deaths and total mortality increased among those who received medical intervention compared with those who did not. Another report noted an increase in non-cardiac deaths related to drug treatment for raised cholesterol levels.

Spanner in the works

A lead editorial in the same issue conceded that these results had 'thrown a spanner in the works of those concerned with prevention' ('Doubts about preventing coronary heart disease: Multiple interventions in middle-aged men may do more harm than good'). It concluded that the results 'should make doctors, health educationalists, managers and politicians reconsider the value of current policies for the primary prevention of coronary heart disease'.

Six months later the government obstinately declared that 'plasma cholesterol is the most important risk factor for coronary heart disease' and claimed that 'a reduction of 10 per cent in the average plasma cholesterol level might result in a 20-30 per cent

sick ideas

reduction in CHD deaths' (*The Health of the Nation: A Summary*, p14). It proceeded to set 'targets' for reducing the proportion of fat in the national diet.

The conviction that reducing dietary fat prevents heart disease has all the strength of a prejudice which cannot be shaken by any number of contradictory scientific studies. Indeed the prejudice in favour of a low-fat, high-fibre diet today is no doubt as strong as the conviction a generation ago that dairy products and red meat were essential to a healthy diet.

Exercising faith

Two contributors to the *BMJ* debate on the initial *Health of the Nation* green paper, which was published in June 1991, reveal the anti-scientific mentality of the health promotion lobby. In their advocacy of 'the role of exercise', Henry Dargie and S Grant take on the sceptics:

'Some would argue that there is no conclusive evidence from controlled trials that regular exercise reduces the number of deaths from coronary heart disease or substantially prolongs life. To demand such proof is to miss the point about exercise, which is that it is valuable for numerous other health benefits it confers and as a catalyst in the adoption of a healthier lifestyle.' (*The Health of the Nation: The BMJ View*, p156)

Given that a major national effort is invested in promoting exercise on the grounds that it prevents heart disease, it seems fair enough to ask for some evidence to substantiate this claim. Yet our doughty exercise enthusiasts duck this demand, countering with an assurance that it confers numerous other health benefits. No doubt to request evidence for these benefits would also be to miss the point, which is that the health promoters firmly believe that exercise is conducive to a healthier lifestyle. It is faith not science that justifies exhortations to change public behaviour.

Evangelical zeal

It may seem churlish to criticise a campaign to encourage people to take more exercise—something that many would say is obviously beneficial. But the same cannot be said for many other health campaigns which are promoted with the same evangelical zeal and received with the same remarkable lack of public scepticism, as one American observer has noted:

'What I find very intriguing as a sociologist is that many people who would not believe a word said, for example, by the US Secretary of Defense, take as gospel truth what is



PHOTO: Michael Kramer

pronounced by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. This is not a rational response to a body of evidence. It is an act of faith.' (P Berger, 'Towards a religion of health activism', *Health, Lifestyle and Environment*, p27)

The cult of routine health checks is 'uncovering'—or creating—a wave

It is the totality of the experience of working class people in capitalist society that causes their ill-health

of newly labelled sufferers from high blood pressure, obesity and raised cholesterol levels; screening inflates the incidence of various forms of cancer. These campaigns, together with each new media health scare, create a climate of pathological preoccupation with health, making disease the focus of much anxiety and depression.

Libertarian backlash

It is striking that virtually all of the criticisms of health promotion come from the political right. Many of the authorities I have quoted above contributed to a symposium on the new public health held jointly by two right-wing think-tanks in the USA in 1991 (*Health, Lifestyle and Environment: Countering the Panic*, Social Affairs Unit/Manhattan Institute, 1991). The right-wing critics of health promotion represent a free-market, libertarian backlash against both Labourist and traditional conservative welfare paternalism—'nannyism'—in the health sphere. Occasionally intemperate in tone, they polemicise against enemies such as 'consumer socialism' and 'food Leninism'.

One common theme among contributors was the condemnation of health promotion as 'the new activism of the new class', a vaguely defined sociological category apparently made up of radical public sector professionals who have carried their anti-establishment and anti-scientific prejudices with them on the 'long march through the institutions' from the youth culture of the sixties. Though most contributors welcomed the tendency to blame individuals for disease, they emphasised what they considered the dominant tendency of blaming corporations, producers and advertisers,

for encouraging unhealthy behaviour and creating an unhealthy environment.

While it is no doubt true that many veterans of the sixties now play a prominent role in health promotion, it is the Conservative government, with the support of the medical profession, that has dictated the terms of official health promotion. Just as it seems unlikely that the direction of the Thatcher government's Aids campaign was decided by the Terrence Higgins Trust, so the preventive zeal of the Major government is unlikely to have been influenced by the radical doctors behind the Healthy Eastenders Project.

Fearful age

It is clear that the government itself has taken up the issue of health as a convenient vehicle for promoting its gospel of conventional morality and individual responsibility. This is a particularly useful project for the Tories at a time when deepening recession threatens to undermine social cohesion still further, and when the insecurity of everyday life makes many people vulnerable to panics about personal health. The *Health of the Nation* report, with its curious synthesis of old-fashioned state socialist paternalism, Stalinist planning 'targets' and Thatcherite moralistic finger-wagging, is a document designed to exploit the mood of our fearful age.

One of the few commentators on the moralising of disease from a liberal rationalist viewpoint is the American writer and critic Susan Sontag. In *Illness as Metaphor*, published in 1978 following her personal experience of cancer, she discusses the way in which the myth of individual responsibility has shifted in modern times from tuberculosis to cancer. In her 1989 sequel, *Aids and its Metaphors*, she notes that the main theme in the response to Aids in the USA is the backlash against the 'permissiveness' of the sixties: 'fear of sexuality is the new, disease-sponsored register of the universe of fear in which everyone now lives'. She regrets the impact of the Aids panic in reinforcing moralistic attitudes towards sex in America and the wider culture of individualism.

'Don't let yourself go'

Sontag looks further at the question of why the Aids panic has had such a resonance in modern America. She notes the popularity of apocalyptic scenarios such as nuclear holocaust and ecological catastrophe, reflecting a sense of cultural distress and of society reaching an end: 'There is a broad tendency in our culture, an end-of-an-era feeling, that Aids is reinforcing; an exhaustion for many of purely secular ideals.'

While people with Aids adopted programmes of self-management and

self-discipline, diet and exercise, Sontag saw the wider Aids panic connecting with a public mood of restraint, 'a positive desire for stricter limits on the conduct of personal life', encouraging attitudes such as 'watch your appetites, take care of yourself, don't let yourself go'. The prevailing climate of impending doom provides ideal conditions for health scares.

At a time when medical advice has become so confused with moral sermonising, and when social insecurities provide plenty of scope for scaremongering, what is the sensible approach to health promotion and disease prevention?

Social solutions

The most effective methods of prevention are those, such as improvements in sanitation, housing and living standards, which are undertaken collectively in society and do not require changes in individual behaviour. Some behaviour changes—such as wearing seat belts or crash helmets or getting babies immunised—rely upon social consensus. More deeply rooted patterns of behaviour, such as smoking, are unlikely to be changed by individual exhortation.

The excess morbidity and mortality of working class people cannot be understood as the result of a range of unhealthy behaviours requiring individual modification. It is the totality of the experience of the working class in capitalist society that causes its ill health—and this can only be tackled collectively, as part of the much wider problem of the way society is organised.

Stop preaching

The World Health Organisation's definition of health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being' is absurd: this is a utopian ideal not a practicable policy goal. While health is being expanded into the sphere of politics, medicine is being corrupted by morality. What is required is the redrawing of appropriate spheres of influence.

The problems of society require solutions at the political level which cannot be achieved by exhortations to change individual behaviour. Doctors should stop preaching and get back to treating patients suffering from diseases, recalling the wise words of HL Mencken:

'The aim of medicine is surely not to make men virtuous; it is to safeguard them and rescue them from the consequences of their vices. The true physician does not preach repentance; he offers absolution.' (Quoted in *Follies and Fallacies in Medicine*, p139)

It's the drink talking

Karen Gold worries about the current emphasis on alcohol concern

Guinness, it seems, is no longer good for you. We are surrounded by dire warnings about the dangers of drink. The government white paper, *The Health of the Nation*, gives tips about 'sensible drinking' and advises that: 'Too much alcohol can make you overweight, be bad for your circulation and your liver and cause problems at work and with family and friends.'

There is no doubt that chronic and severe alcohol abuse has long been connected with physical illnesses. Sclerosis of the liver, heart disease, chronic gastritis, anaemia, vitamin deficiencies, visual disorders and pancreatitis are all more prevalent in people prone to hit the bottle.

Women are thought to be more at risk from alcohol abuse than men. Since women have a lower percentage of body water, the alcohol they consume is less diluted. Evidence also suggests that women suffer more from the psychological effects of alcohol dependence, confusion, intellectual impairment and loss

a day will present 10 per cent of these problems, or indeed any problem at all.

Just about anything 'in excess' is harmful. Excessive exercise can cause all sorts of muscular and joint problems, even temporary infertility in women. Excessive dieting would lead to muscle wastage and starvation. Yet we are told that dieting and exercise in moderation are beneficial.

Curiously, a recent study at the Bristol Royal Infirmary concluded that moderate drinking can even reduce the risk of heart disease. It found that female moderate drinkers had lower levels of bad cholesterol and higher levels of 'good' cholesterol than non-drinkers.

There is a real danger that now that drinking alcohol has been identified and accepted as a dangerous practice it can become a scapegoat for all kinds of health and social problems.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a case in point. Pregnant women are now routinely warned to cut out drinking altogether to prevent

with other variables, it was concluded that the impact of maternal drinking on birth abnormalities was only very minor indeed. Maternal age, social class, previous obstetric history, tobacco, drug use and diet emerged as having a far greater influence. American studies support these conclusions. In the USA, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is found mainly in children born to women who are deprived in various ways, with particularly poor nutritional status.

Broader social conditions have a key role to play in relation to many medical conditions. If you live in a damp flat on £40 a week, living on peanut butter because it's all you can afford, you are more likely to develop frequent colds and chest infections than if you live in Hampstead and earn £500 a week. Yet in these circumstances you would expect the poverty and general living conditions to be blamed for your illness—not the peanut butter.

Nobody would argue that heavy drinking is to be recommended. But it's important to get the 'alcohol concern' issue into perspective. Most of



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

of control. It is also thought that alcohol stays longer in the body at certain stages of the menstrual cycle, with possible destructive consequences for the liver.

Men, we are told, can safely drink no more than 21 units a week, women are meant to stick to less than 14 units. One unit is equivalent to half a pint of lager, a small glass of wine or a single measure of spirits. Which means that a man who drinks a couple of pints a day is supposed to have an alcohol problem, as is a woman who regularly has two glasses of wine with her dinner.

But does the fact that alcohol in large quantities is bad for you really mean that it is also dangerous in moderation?

The logic behind the 'watch your units' theory goes as follows. If you drink 50 units of alcohol a week, you are at risk of liver problems; so if you drink half that quantity, you are half as likely to suffer the same problems. That seems a dubious proposition. Apply the same argument to smoking. If we smoke 40 cigarettes a day, it will affect our health, making us more breathless, more prone to lung problems and so on. Yet there is no statistical evidence that four cigarettes

the risks of alcohol damage to the developing fetus. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a complex of birth defects that occur in some babies born to women who are apparently heavy drinkers. It is said to be present when one feature from each of the following categories is present: pre-natal and post-natal growth retardation; central nervous system dysfunction and major organ system malformation, abnormal features of the face and head. The name was coined in the USA where one in a thousand babies are said to be affected.

FAS is now used to guilt-trip every mother who enjoys an occasional drink. One leading gynaecologist recently told a women's magazine that women had come to him seeking an abortion because they were so concerned that they had indulged in a drinking session early in their pregnancy. Yet symptoms which are said to constitute Fetal Alcohol Syndrome may not even be due to drinking.

A study of births to mothers in the south east of Scotland in the early eighties showed that 'moderate' weekly consumption of alcohol was not associated with 'obvious harm'. When the role of alcohol was examined in combination

us drink very little. The health editors of women's magazines can rest assured that their readers are not out getting legless and destroying their livers and lives. An estimated 93 per cent of women and 78 per cent of men drink less than the government's 'recommended sensible drinking' levels. Britain does not even rate in the top 20 of alcohol consuming nations.

The current round of alcohol concern is one more attempt to create an obsession with individual health. If you suffer liver problems—it's because you drink too much. If you have heart problems—it's because you eat the wrong food. If you get cervical cancer—it's because you slept around. If your baby has problems—it's because you took insufficient care when you were pregnant.

Gone are the days when you were considered plain unlucky if you 'came down with something'. These days it is the sins of gluttony, drunkenness, sloth and promiscuity coming back to haunt you. We live in a slump-ridden society that provides us with a steadily deteriorating standard of healthcare, and then tells us to blame ourselves when we fall ill. It's enough to drive anybody to drink. ●

Why teenage sex excites the Tories

Anne Burton sees a hidden agenda behind the concern about teenage pregnancies in the government's *Health of the Nation* report

Teenage pregnancy is a recurring concern of the authorities and the media. Barely a month goes by without some discussion of the problems of sex and teenagers, whether it's about the number of teenage births and abortions, or the influence of TV on young people's sexual appetites. Out of all the issues raised by the government white paper, *The Health of the Nation*, in July, the spotlight focused on teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy only took up a tiny part of the government report, but you could be forgiven for thinking otherwise by the deluge of items about it on the news and in the papers. The media are always keen to report on sex—it sells papers and attracts viewers. Any government initiative related to sex is an editor's dream. But to be fair, this time the press was not simply indulging its own taste for salacious reporting. It was pointed in that direction by the Department of Health itself.

Three days before the official launch of *The Health of the Nation* report, the Department of Health briefed the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Observer* to the effect that sexual

matters in general, and teenage pregnancy in particular, would be a key target in the drive to improve the health of the nation. The *Sunday Telegraph* dutifully ran a front-page feature declaring that 'the government is to declare war on teenage pregnancies...in an effort to counter the consequences of the permissive society'.

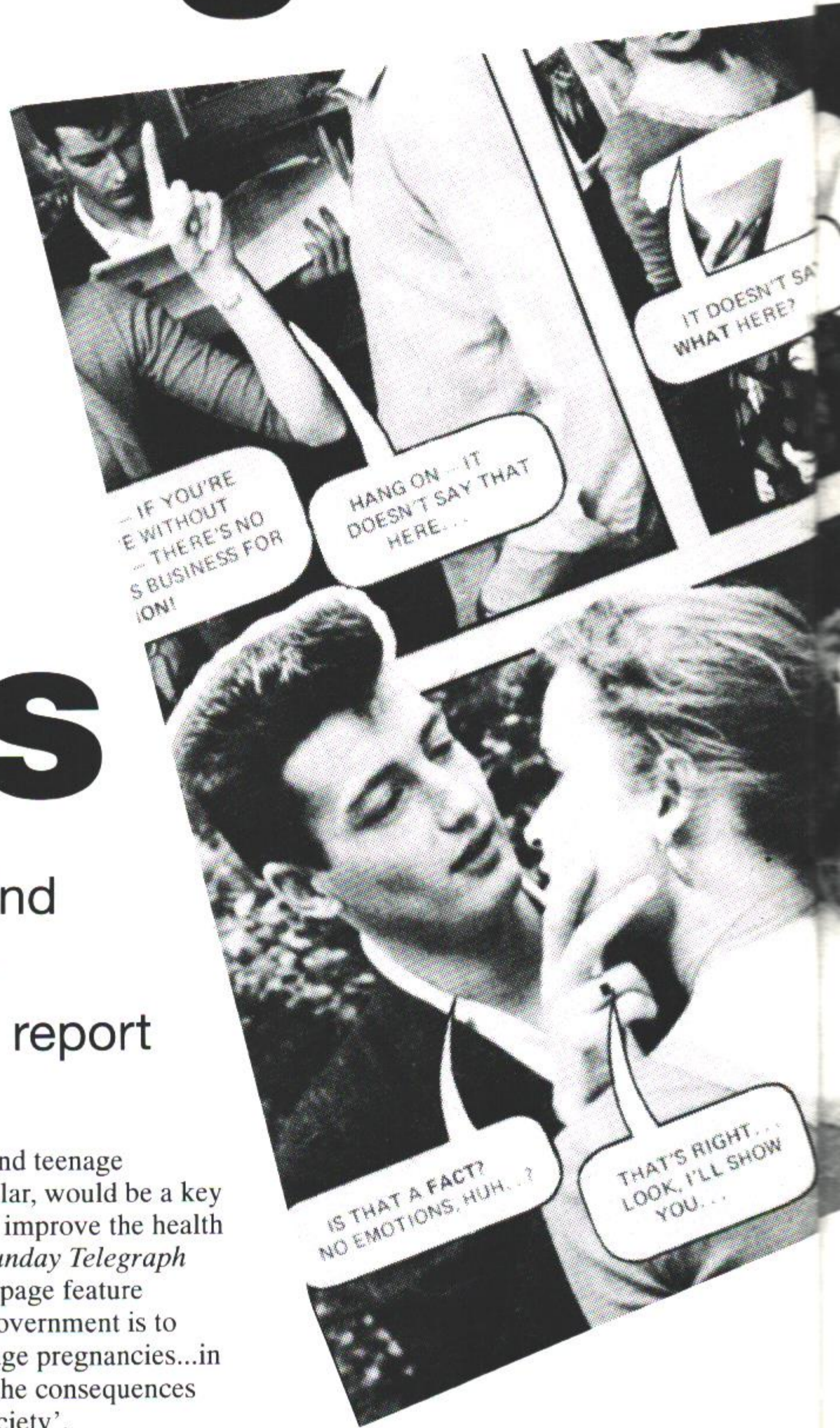
Why was the government at such pains to highlight the issue of teenage pregnancy in its health campaign publicity? After all, unlike other matters dealt with in *The Health of the Nation*, such as cancer and heart disease, teenage pregnancies do not constitute a major health problem. The mention of our old friend 'the permissive society' suggests that the Tories' concerns are more moral than medical.

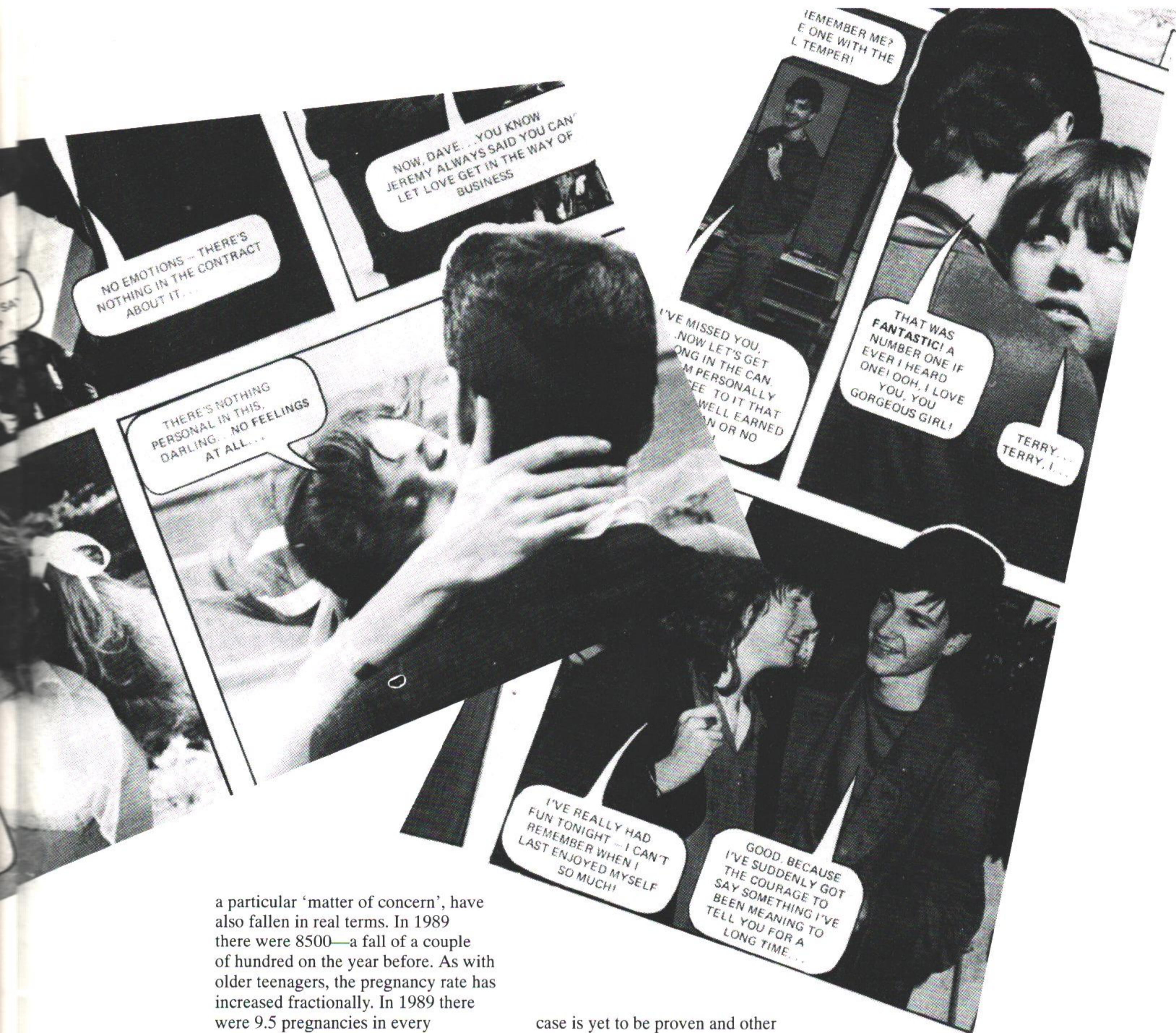
In terms of the issue itself, there is no rational basis for the government to turn its guns on teenage pregnancy. Despite what you read in the papers, official figures show that the number of gymslip mums is not growing at an alarming rate. Health secretary and former teenage mother Virginia Bottomley claims to be disturbed by surveys of social trends which show that over a third of children are born

out of wedlock, but that is a different issue altogether. The vast majority of these births are to women in their mid to late twenties, many of whom are in any case living with a partner.

In reality, the number of teenage mums has *fallen* in recent years. This is largely due to the fact that there are fewer teenagers around. The rate of teenage pregnancies (the number of pregnancies for every 1000 teenage girls in the population) is steadily increasing, but very, very slowly. For instance, in 1989 there were 117 499 teenage pregnancies, 67.6 for every thousand girls of that age. That was 3000 fewer than the year before, although the teenage pregnancy rate rose by one in a thousand.

Conceptions to the under-16s, which the white paper regards as





a particular 'matter of concern', have also fallen in real terms. In 1989 there were 8500—a fall of a couple of hundred on the year before. As with older teenagers, the pregnancy rate has increased fractionally. In 1989 there were 9.5 pregnancies in every thousand girls under 16—an increase from 9.4 the year before, and 9.3 the year before that.

The government justifies its concern by arguing that early pregnancies constitute a health risk to young girls. However, once the girl has passed her fourteenth birthday there are few medical risks associated with the physical condition of early pregnancy itself. On the contrary, some might argue that teenage mums are taking advantage of their peak fitness, as well as their peak fertility. In many underdeveloped societies the teens are peak child-bearing years. Abortions (which end more than half of the pregnancies to under-16s) carry no more risk to teenagers than to older women. And while some studies claim that early experience of penetrative sex is associated with cervical cancer, the

case is yet to be proven and other lifestyle factors may be equally significant.

The main argument employed by the Department of Health seems to be that if a girl is exposed to the risk of pregnancy, she is simultaneously exposed to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV. This does not necessarily follow. As we have pointed out many times in *Living Marxism*, the official line on HIV/Aids massively inflates the chances of contracting it through heterosexual contact in this country. And in any case, surveys into the sexual behaviour of young people show that teenage girls usually have sex with teenage boys with little, if any, sexual experience. Consequently these partners are highly unlikely to be carriers of anything other than sperm.

Teenage pregnancy may be

undesirable, but it is not a significant health risk to young girls. Indeed the serious problems which are faced by gymslip mums are almost entirely due to social rather than medical factors. Teenage mothers are stymied at every turn by the way that society treats them. Their education is disrupted (or abruptly ended) because the education system will not adapt to suit the needs of a youngster with other demands on her time. Their job prospects are severely restricted by the state's refusal to provide adequate childcare and other welfare facilities.

Teenage pregnancy is sometimes tragic and almost always undesirable, because early motherhood closes down all the options that would otherwise ►

be available to a girl as she matures into adulthood. But it is not a health risk in itself. This is extremely fortunate for young women because, despite the declaration of war, the government's white paper gives no indication that it is going to do anything practical to address the problem at all.

A war against teenage pregnancy is a useful excuse for ramming home old-fashioned family values

Compared to other medical conditions, the problem of teenage pregnancy should be easy to treat. Unlike a condition like cancer, we know what causes pregnancy (sex) and we know how to prevent it (contraception backed up by abortion). Consequently the means to meeting the *Health of the Nation* target—a 50 per cent reduction in unwanted pregnancies to the under-16s by the year 2000—would seem to be relatively easy to reach.

Not a clue

However, there is not one solitary suggestion in the white paper as to how reductions in teenage pregnancy will be achieved. There are no targets for family planning clinics aimed at teenagers, nor targets relating to the availability of abortion, nor even targets related to sex education. In fact, the white paper appeared against a background of family planning clinic closures, abortion facility cutbacks, and a lack of adequate sex education in many schools. All of which makes it a little difficult to take the government's concern at face value.

The summary of the white paper acknowledges that some basic measures are required to make the teenage pregnancy target realistic:

'Reductions in unwanted pregnancies will...be dependent upon information and education and the development of local services. Family planning services should be appropriate, accessible and comprehensive, to meet the needs of those who use or may wish to use them.'

That all sounds well and good, but the rhetoric doesn't quite match up with the reality of the serious cuts which the authorities are now inflicting upon family planning provision. Indeed in

the very week that the summary was mailed to every GP in the country, Kings Health Care Trust (formerly Kings College Hospital) in London had its family planning budget cut by £50 000, and lost a further £10 000 off its family planning training budget.

The Tories decided to include teenage pregnancy in the health white paper, and to highlight the fact that they had done so, for reasons that have far more to do with their own political concerns than with the problems of pregnant teenagers.

Decline personified

The issue is ideally suited to ramming home a moral message and promoting conventional values. By homing in on unsuitable mothers, the authorities can reinforce notions of what 'a proper family' should be. The pregnant teenager personifies what conservatives perceive as Britain's moral decline. She has acted in an 'improper manner'. Instead of doing homework, and helping around the house (as a nice girl should) she has been cavorting around with boys. This reflects as badly on her parents as it does on her. They should have supervised her more closely, imposed more discipline and provided a better model of a loving monogamous relationship for their daughter.

A war against teenage pregnancy is a useful excuse for ramming home old-fashioned family values.

Of course, raising moral problems can backfire if they subsequently appear irresolvable. The government is acutely aware that having wittered on about the problem of gymslip mums for years, they now have to be seen to do something. But doing something practical about teenage pregnancy is hard for the Tories. Not only does effective contraceptive provision for the young cost money—it also causes controversy. Whenever health regions try to improve young people's access to contraception, the Department of Health is accused of condoning under-age sex. What Virginia Bottomley and the DoH need is to be *seen* to do something, without actually doing anything. White papers are a very good means of creating the required optical illusion.

Self-help health

The real reason why the government appears so keen to raise the problem of teenage pregnancy becomes clearer when you look at the philosophy behind *The Health of the Nation* report as a whole.

In the document, the government sets health targets which it intimates could largely be met if we each took more personal responsibility for our well-being, by eating, drinking and behaving in a more careful and respectable fashion. In a nutshell

the principle is that people's chosen lifestyles, rather than social conditions, are largely to blame for bad health; so individuals need to assume responsibility for improving their own health, and to encourage their family and friends to do likewise.

A suitable case

Teenage pregnancy is a particularly suitable case for treatment because it's easy to present irresponsible individuals as the problem, and more personal responsibility as the solution. Health secretary Virginia Bottomley can sound convincing as she argues that contraceptives can be obtained by young people who require them, and that it's simply a matter of getting them to take advantage of what's on offer. Britain's youngest granny—a woman of 29, whose parents failed to educate her in the facts of sex, and who subsequently failed to pass on the information to her own 15-year old daughter who has just given birth—is wheeled on as a 'typical' example of what young women are like.

The underlying message is: the government is aware of the problem, but there is little we can do when you, the public, behave so irresponsibly. And that message can be transposed on to other health issues. The philosophy of personal responsibility, expounded so forcefully in relation to teenage pregnancy, underlines every target area identified in *The Health of the Nation*.

'Avoid accidents'

As Dr Michael Fitzpatrick examines elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, the report's strategies for key health problems are largely reducible to ways that we can supposedly decrease our risk of illness. Unbalanced diet, smoking, raised blood pressure, alcohol misuse and lack of physical activity are the factors identified in tackling heart disease. The section on cancer concentrates on the need to improve uptake on screening projects and reduce smoking and excessive exposure to sunlight. The report says that we can often avoid accidents (wise words) and that our sexual health can be improved if we engage in safer sex. Mental health is the one area which is not reducible to self help—so here the government report has no strategy at all.

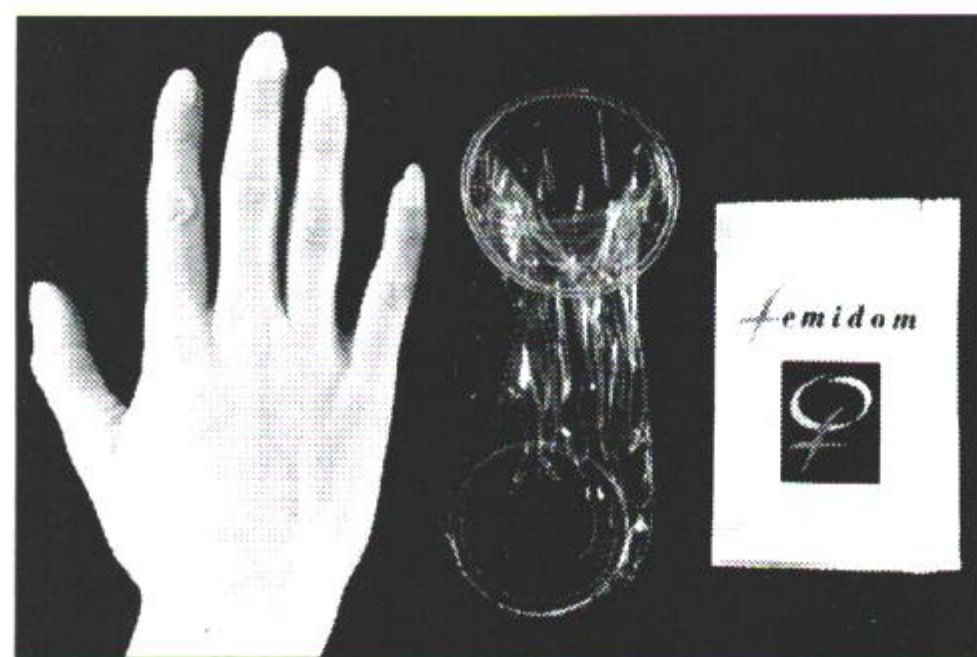
Because teenage pregnancy is not a major medical problem, the Department of Health's inability to provide a solution to it has few practical consequences for the nation's health. By contrast, cancers and heart disease are mortal threats to millions. And while the government uses health reviews to promote its own moral and individualist philosophies, rather than to develop the social healthcare we need, the bodies will continue to pile up.

Female condoms and scrotal slings

Bernadette Whelan takes a cool look at new contraceptives

It is remarkable that scientists are still incapable of providing foolproof ways to have sex without getting pregnant. It's possible for astronomers to measure echoes which trace the origins of the universe, for deserts to be made fertile, but it isn't possible to develop a fully effective way to stop a sperm fertilising an egg.

Contraceptive technology seems to have stood still. Hormone doses in the pill have got a little smaller, latex in condoms a fraction thinner, but the choices have basically remained the same. For most women, in spite of occasional cancer scares, the pill comes out as the most reliable and hassle-free method. But even the pill only clocks in an efficacy rate of between 93 and 99 per cent. That means that if 100 women use the pill for a year, we should expect between one and seven to get pregnant. The condom and the diaphragm are even worse,



offering 85 per cent protection against pregnancy and requiring a considerable measure of self-composure.

Under these circumstances it's hardly surprising that the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists estimates that one in three pregnancies are unplanned, or that 70 per cent of unplanned pregnancies are to women who claim to have used contraception at the time of conception.

In September, a new contraceptive hits the market—the female condom, known as Femidom. It sold out within a week in France, and manufacturers hope the same thing will happen here. Femidom is being marketed as the first barrier contraceptive under a woman's control that provides protection against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. You might think from looking at it that it will provide protection against sex itself. Most women, and men for that matter, like their contraceptive to be discreet and invisible. The female condom, however, is anything but.

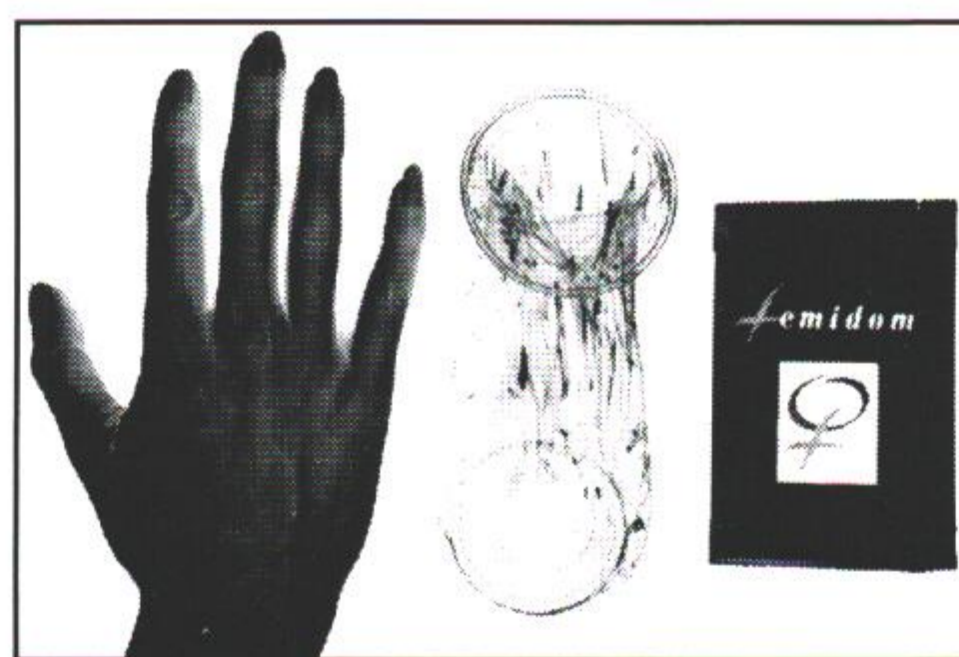
The female condom is basically a polyurethane sheath, a couple of inches longer than a male condom and about three times as wide. It works on much the same principle, but instead of fitting over a man's erect penis, it fits

into a woman's vagina. It looks like a stretched version of the male variety but with a ring at either end. One, at the closed end of the sheath is used to insert the condom—in much the same way that a tampon is inserted. The other, at the open end, hangs outside the vulva.

Femidom has been heralded as an adventurous stride into the future of contraception. In fact, it's more of a blast from the past. Female condoms were introduced by birth control pioneer Marie Stopes in the 1930s. Stopes' devices were marketed for 'women whose husbands do not want to use the sheath'. They didn't catch on in the thirties and it's unlikely that they will fare much better now. Family planning organisations bravely insist that the device 'widens the choice for couples using contraception', but even they don't sound convinced that there is a vast market for something that has been described as a plastic windsock, and a freezer bag.

The female condom sums up the primitive character of contraceptive technology. Other new methods in the pipeline are not much of an improvement. The two most likely to be launched in Britain are simply new ways to deliver the same hormones that are currently used in the pill. They may be more user-friendly to women who find it difficult to remember to take an oral contraceptive every day, but they won't benefit women who can't tolerate hormonal methods.

The 'intra-vaginal ring', dubbed the 'ring of confidence', is likely to be available late next



year. It was developed by the World Health Organisation but will be manufactured and marketed by Roussel UK, who also produce RU486, the abortion pill. The ring is made of firm, but flexible, polyurethane impregnated with the hormone on which the progestogen-only pill (mini-pill) is based. It's easy to insert and, as with the female condom, one size fits all. Britain will be the first country to use it.

The third expected new method, Norplant, is the nearest the contraceptive manufacturers have got to a form of reversible sterilisation. Six flexible rod-shaped capsules, each 1.3 inches long, are placed under the skin of the upper arm where they continually release hormones. The injection

takes about 10 minutes, and is carried out under local anaesthetic. Once the rods are in place they last for five years. If you decide you want to get pregnant, you simply have them removed. Biodegradable implants which do not require surgical removal are being investigated.

At least these seem to have more promise than the scrotal sling—a male-orientated method under investigation in India. Even if this one works, it's hard to imagine any man touching it with a barge-pole let alone his dick. It looks like a polyester jock-strap with the front missing, and works on the principle that to remain fertile a man's testes need to be cooler than his normal body temperature. That is why in normal circumstances a chap's balls hang away from his body. The scrotal sling employs this principle in reverse. After being strapped too close to the body, the increased temperature, combined with the effect of an electrostatic field created by

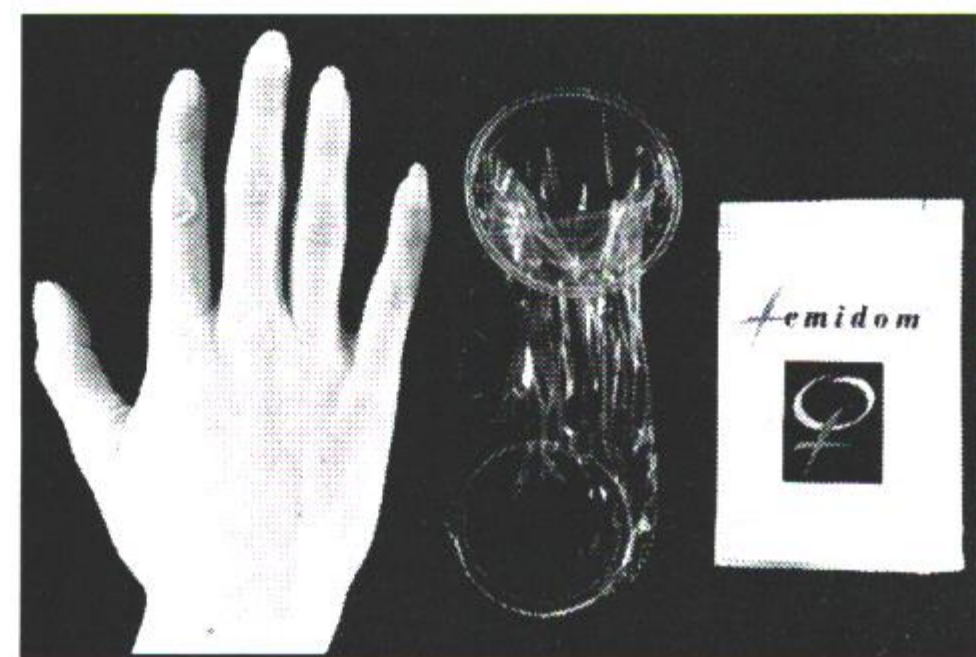


PHOTO: Michael Kramer

the polyester, brings down his sperm count. A research paper published in the journal *Contraception* claims that it is effective after three months of constant wear.

Some might say that it's about time men took the responsibility for contraception, and strapping a bloke's knackers to his belly is a small inconvenience compared to pregnancy. But do you know a man who'd wear the sling for three minutes, never mind months?

One little egg, once a month can hardly be the most difficult problem with which science has to grapple. Fifty years ago America brought the West's scientists together to create the nuclear bomb. The best technology and science, and half a million people, were employed because it was seen as an international priority.

By contrast, the authorities do not see developing contraception as a priority. Because women's primary role is still defined as that of wives and mothers, effective contraception is an optional extra rather than a basic need. No matter that for a woman, failed contraception can mean the total disruption of her life.

The British government has declared the intention to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies—a Manhattan project on contraception would be a good place to start. ●

Africa's sham democracy

Barry Crawford on how Africa is being recolonised and ruined under the banners of multi-party democracy

Over the past two years dictatorial presidents in more than 20 African states have been overthrown, voted out of power, or forced to agree to elections. The pace of change is unprecedented in the post-colonial era, and there seems to be no stopping the multi-party bandwagon. But this is not Africa's second liberation, nor is it real democratisation. In effect, Africa is being recolonised.

The West has initiated the reform process. The transition to multi-party politics is a top-down affair with the masses either indifferent or quietly applauding from the sidelines. For example, the celebrated electoral defeat of Zambia's president Kenneth Kaunda took place after the participation of only half the electorate. The same apathy was evident more recently in Alpha Oumar Konare's election as president of Mali. The new political agenda has been drafted in the West, adopted by a new African elite

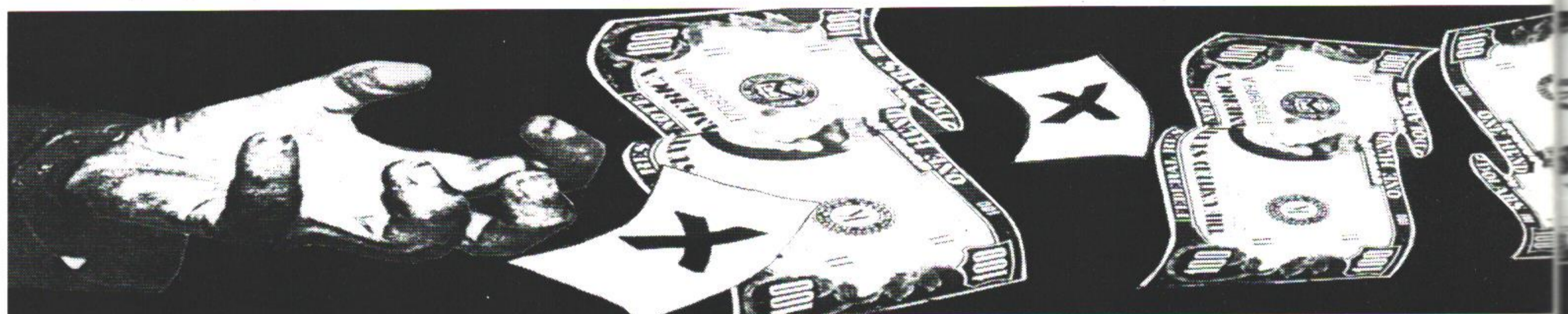
the West has become squeamish after decades of underwriting corrupt despots and sponsoring terrorist groups like Unita stretches all credibility. This new-found affection for human rights and democracy is a cover for an agenda which promotes neither. The old guard of Africa is being swept aside because its function was specific to the Cold War. The West no longer requires the corrupt old client regimes that it sponsored to contain Soviet influence and wage war against African liberation movements.

Instead, what is demanded today is the removal of all barriers to Western economic penetration. The Western bankers are imposing programmes of privatisation, currency devaluation and the abolition of state subsidies, supposedly to attract foreign investment and stimulate competition. But in the middle of a slump, Africa is just about the last place Western capitalists will invest in. All that these

ideological barriers to Western domination. Since a Western solution is now accepted on all sides, at least by default, so too is the idea of African blame. Instead of exposing Western responsibility for Africa's crisis, the democracy debate is putting Africa in the dock.

All kinds of theories are being advanced as to why democracy has had such a bad time in Africa. The *Economist* suggests that democracy is alien to African culture, arguing that there isn't 'any African language whose political lexicon includes the concept of a leader of the loyal opposition. Instead there is a clear concept of a political enemy' (22 February 1992). *Newsweek* asks whether democracy in Africa is 'just an alien spell that is bound to wear off?' and adds that 'making the leap from the palaver tree to multi-party politics is made harder by the often volatile ethnic mix of African states' (9 December 1991).

The Western-defined terms of the democracy debate have been accepted by the African intelligentsia. They promote the image of the 1990s as the era of Africa's second liberation. The argument is that Africa's marginalisation in the New World Order is indicative of a loosening of Western control, giving Africans the breathing space to build their own political and economic



schooled in the economics of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and presented to the masses for rubber stamping.

Notice of the West's new agenda for Africa was given last July by the World Bank's outgoing chairman, Barber Conable. He told the heads of state at the Organisation of African Unity summit in Nigeria that Western decisions about debt rescheduling and aid would now be based on the criteria of 'good governance' and 'transparency'. In other words, if you want Western support, open your country up to Western supervision.

The twin weapons of aid suspension and debt repayment have forced through reforms with remarkable ease. On 28 November last year the aid donors' meeting in Paris, chaired by the World Bank, suspended all new assistance to Kenya. It then took president Moi all of five days to lift the ban on opposition parties. This follows the precedent the West set in Zambia, and Moi seems destined to go the same way as Kaunda. So too are Malawi's president Banda and Congo's president Mobutu.

The Western financiers justify stopping aid by saying that they cannot stand by while African regimes abuse human rights. The idea that

'structural adjustment' programmes have produced is mass redundancies and immiseration. Eight years of structural adjustment have halved Ghana's gross domestic product. Nigeria's per capita income has fallen by two thirds over the past decade. The IMF now has similar agreements with 23 African governments. Not one has been carried through to completion and economic take-off.

This failure and the resulting human misery have not deterred the West. Instead, the programmes are moving into higher gear, using multi-party democracy to smooth the way. As the *Economist* cynically put it, 'people tend to accept painful policies more readily from elected governments than from dictators'. Zambia is a case in point. Violent food riots thwarted Kaunda's attempts to cut the maize subsidy in 1986 and 1990; the 100 per cent price hike following Chiluba's election produced no protests. The subsidy is now likely to be ended altogether.

By making a break with its old stooges and sponsoring the democracy debate, the West seeks to key into the popular revulsion against corruption and nepotism. The collapse of Stalinism has brought down with it all

institutions. This is turning reality on its head. Africa's lowly international status is the result of firmer Western domination in the post-Cold War world.

Instead of fantasising about liberation, the evidence of recolonisation needs to be honestly examined. Ghana has had World Bank officials sitting in on its cabinet meetings; an ex-World Bank technocrat is prime minister of Cameroon; Benin's IMF representative is now caretaker prime minister; Angola is looking into compensating Portuguese farmers for having seized land from them 17 years ago; Mozambique is inviting them back to their old sugar estates; South Africa controls the sales of Angolan and Botswanan diamonds. And so it goes on.

The current preoccupation with dictatorship and corruption is misplaced. African governments implementing Western strategies all have these attributes. The overriding issue in Africa today should be the obscenity of imposing austerity economics upon a starving continent. The democracy debate obscures this criminal process. Worse, it endows those who are responsible for it with legitimacy. Let us have no more of this sham debate about democracy. ●

Can't pay, must pay

Daniel Nassim examines the devastating impact of 10 years of the debt crisis in Africa and Latin America

Ten years ago, in August 1982, Mexico sparked the third world debt crisis when it announced that it could no longer repay its debt to the West. The debt crisis is little discussed today. Yet its impact on the third world has been far worse than that of the Western planes, tanks and missiles which destroyed Iraq.

Over the past decade, Western governments, banks and international institutions have imposed harsh terms on third world countries to ensure that they repay their debts. The peoples of Latin America and Africa have experienced a permanent regime of austerity, as a leading Western credit rating agency coyly describes:

'The key effect of the debt crisis has been a profound breakdown of routine economic norms in debtor countries. When a country must operate in circumstances equivalent to permanent bankruptcy reorganization, the economic

Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst affected. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 450m people is the same as that of Belgium (10m). Food shortages are widespread, clean water is scarce and infant mortality is high. Each year 150 000 African women die and a similar number suffer permanent disabilities as a result of problems in pregnancy and childbirth. An estimated 200m Africans have chronic malaria.

In some ways the situation of Latin America is even more shocking. During the seventies, the industrialising countries of Brazil, Mexico and Argentina were held up as models of capitalist development. But in the eighties GDP per person in the region fell by 11 per cent. During this period Chile—ruled by one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world—was regarded as the model debtor. The only country to record consistent positive growth was Colombia—thanks to the drug barons who run most of its economy.

world's top bankers so little discussed in the West today?

The fact is that Western banks and governments were only ever concerned about the third world debt crisis inasmuch as it was a problem for *them*; they were never much interested in the dire problems facing the impoverished masses of Africa or Latin America. Seen in this light, it becomes clearer why the third world debt crisis has dropped off of the West's economic agenda. First, the Western financiers have managed to limit the damage it does to their accounts; and second, they have become preoccupied with other debt problems much nearer to home.

The various Western 'plans' for third world debt have been designed to bail out the banks rather than third world countries. The basic strategy has been to shift as much of the problem as

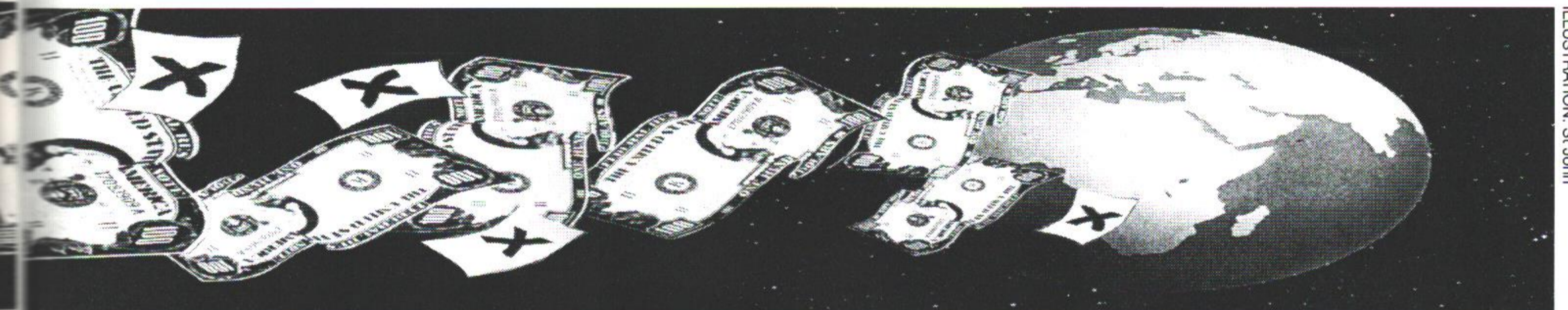


ILLUSTRATION: St. John

behaviour of its citizens is bound to shift. To satisfy creditors, wealth must be relinquished, perhaps for reasons perceived as illegitimate, and without the promise of reward for such sacrifice.'

In other words, the third world has to tighten its belt still further to pay money to Western bankers and governments. In effect, the poorest people on Earth are subsidising the life-styles and economies of the richest. The result has been a massive shift of resources from the third world to the West. According to the UN: 'In 1983-9, rich creditors received a staggering \$242 billion in net transfers on long-term lending from indebted developing countries.' (*Human Development Report 1992*)

Such figures are so large as to seem meaningless. Who can visualise the \$1.4 trillion dollars that is owed by third world countries to the West? Yet this burden has a very real human effect on the lives of billions in the third world. The UN estimates that 2.3 billion people lack access to sanitation, 1.3 billion people lack access to safe water, and 1.2 billion barely survive in absolute poverty. It is truly the arithmetic of death.

Despite the common perception in the West, such poverty does not spring from 'natural' causes. It is not caused by African culture, a poor climate or corruption. It is primarily a product of the way in which the West has bled the third world, particularly through the forced repayment of crippling debts.

The debt crisis has played a large part in the spread of disease in Africa and Latin America. One of the most common ways of raising funds to pay debt is by cutting public spending. This in turn leads to reductions in vaccination programmes and more polluted water supplies, which allow diseases to spread and breed much more easily. That is why there have recently been the first epidemics of typhoid in Latin America this century.

Indeed all of the 'solutions' to the debt crisis ultimately involve an attack on the living standards of the mass of people in the third world. Public spending cuts have meant mass redundancies and an end to subsidies on staple foods. Real wages have been eroded, falling behind hyper-inflation. Imported goods, paid for with scarce foreign exchange, are only for the rich.

If the impact of the debt crisis is so terrible, why is this issue which once preoccupied the

possible on to the peoples of the third world, by imposing harsh austerity programmes through the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The demise of the Soviet Union has given the West a freer hand to pursue this strategy in the third world than it would have had a decade ago. A couple of years ago, the *Financial Times* felt able confidently to note that the banking industry was 'past the worst of the third world debt crisis, which was itself the gravest danger facing it since the last war' (9 May 1990).

In the current slump, the attention of Western banks has also been diverted by a huge bad debt burden closer to home. Collapses such as those of the Maxwell empire, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, the Heron Corporation and Mountleigh have all left the banks saddled with bad debt. Olympia & York, the Canadian company that owns Canary Wharf, alone owes as much money as Peru and almost twice as much as Bangladesh.

While Western capitalists try to extract the maximum repayments from the poorest countries on Earth to help finance their domestic crises, every day the third world is witnessing the economic equivalent of the Western massacre of Iraqis on the road to Basra. ●

What makes the Alien so compelling? Andrew Tate gives his view of the meaning of Body Horror

The horror genre has always been prone to sequels, mainly because of the success of the monsters themselves. The monster of *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) is now making another appearance on the prison planet of Fiorina 161 at a cinema near you. But what makes the Alien so effective that it deserves a third outing?

Some have suggested that the Alien is so appealing because it could mean anything to anybody. Whatever the nature of your fears or anxieties, they could be embodied in the Alien. The Alien could be the underclass or it could be Reaganism, it could be communism or it could be reaction, it could be feminism or it could be the Moral Majority.

A common conjecture about recent horror films is that they are about Aids: the monster as disease. As evidence of this preoccupation, critics have pointed to the trend towards the flesh itself becoming the spectacle and site of horror: in *Alien³*, for example, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) demands an

The Alien within

autopsy for Newt (her adopted child from the second film) on the grounds of suspected cholera, while really believing that instead of cholera there might be a baby Alien hiding in the body.

No doubt the international obsession with Aids does find expression in horror movies. But Body Horror has been around a lot longer than Aids: David Cronenberg has been making Body Horror movies for years. In *Shivers* (1976), a turd-like parasite invades its victims' bodies and turns them into sex maniacs. It is both plague and monster.

Of course, horror books and movies have always reflected the fears and anxieties of the age. But horror also works in a deeper, more unconscious fashion than simply giving expression to the latest moral panics and social problems. The rise of Body Horror represents a more fundamental change.

For example, it used to be that horror film monsters lived in foreign parts—in Transylvania, in Mitteleuropa somewhere. But then they started coming closer to home—to the isolated haunted house, to the Bates Motel. After having arrived in suburbia—at the High School Prom (*Carrie*, 1976), at the shopping mall (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1979) or into suburban streets (*Halloween*, 1978, *Friday the Thirteenth*, 1980)—the horror has continued this journey inwards.

In suburban Elm Street (1984, 1985, etc) Freddy Krueger started to inhabit his victims' dreams and even their own flesh was not safe. Horror about flesh and the body's interior became one of the main themes of the genre, from *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) to the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The vampire's bite was replaced by the fully fledged flesh-eaters.

This horror is primarily about a crisis of self, an uncertainty and disquiet about the individual that appears as the body (and mind) betraying its victims, by being attacked and reduced to mere meat. The dehumanisation of the individual is a central preoccupation of Body Horror. And there is nothing more dehumanising than being eaten ('with Fava beans' as Hannibal 'the cannibal' Lecter added).

In *Alien*, the crew of the ship *Nostramo* are so dehumanised that they do not even notice an android among them, one who acts entirely as programmed by the other 'monster' of the film, The Company. In the Alien films, Ripley is always sandwiched between these two monsters, neither of which cares who must die. As Ripley exclaims to the 'company-man', Burke, in *Aliens*: 'I don't know which species [humans or Aliens] is worse. You don't see them fucking each other over for a percentage.'

In *Alien³*, the inmates of the prison have bar-codes tattooed to the back of their heads—a sell-by/eat-by date perhaps? Ripley's response to this dehumanisation is to demonstrate her human emotions. It is not just for a plot device that she rushes across monster-infested territory to 'save' the ship's cat in the first film, and to save the child Newt in the second.

The theme of dehumanisation is also expressed through the view of technology. The future of the Alien films is dystopian to an extreme. Nothing could be further from *Star Trek*, where technology is friendly and controllable, and where the object of machines is to make life easier, and give humans more control over their environment.

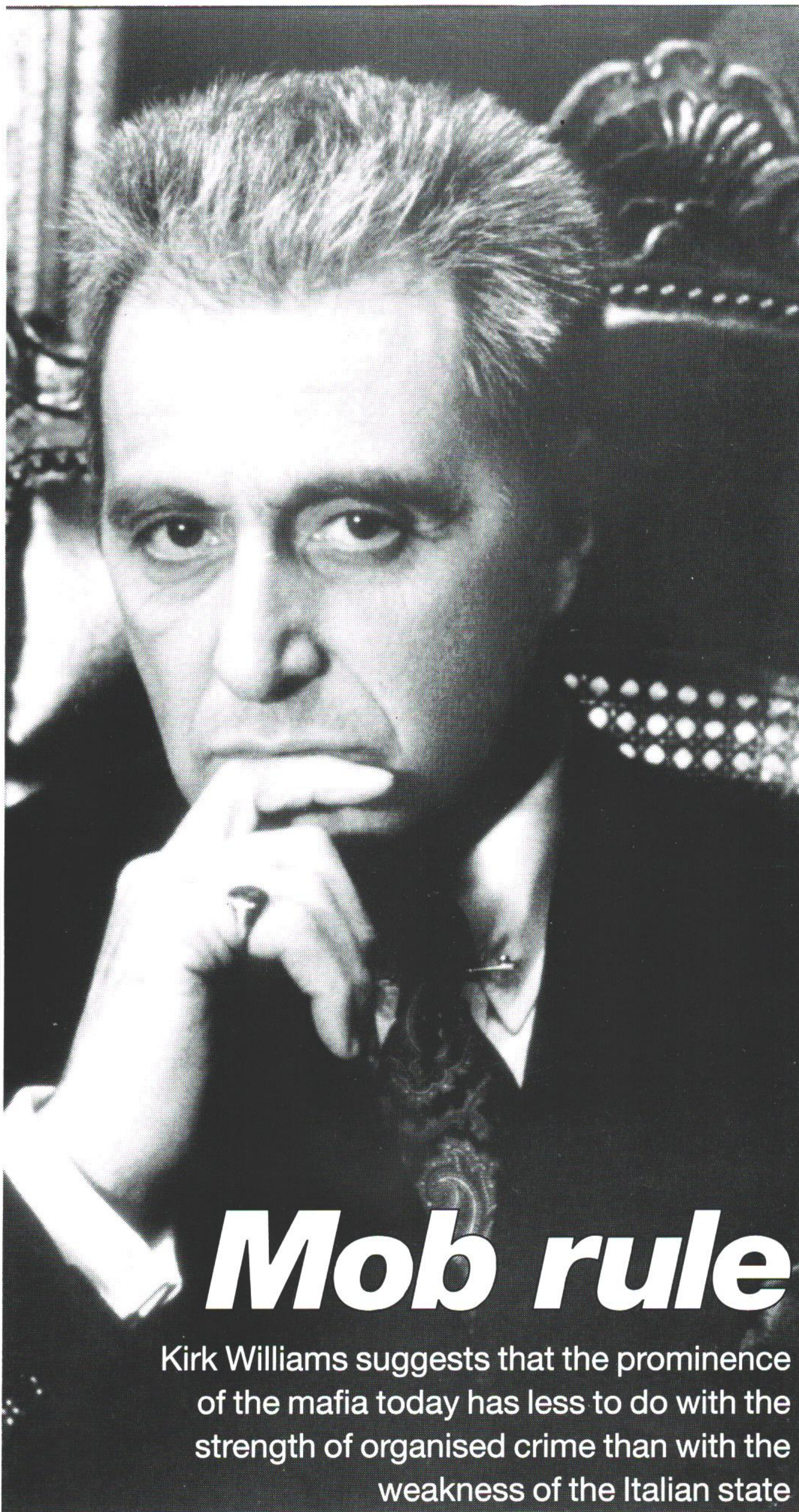
Instead, in *Alien* technology is in control of the humans, and some of it actively sets out to betray the humans;

particularly the android, Ash, and the ship's computer (which declares that the crew is 'expendable'). In *Alien³*, the technology is in an even more degraded state. So little of it works that the inhabitants of Fiorina 161 have to use candles. This is a future society that claims to have eradicated cholera 200 years previously, yet the inmates are infested with lice and have to shave their heads.

The central anxiety lies with the individual's identity in the face of his 'alienation' from society and technology. It is this anxiety on which the horror of the Alien films depends. This self-crisis can most easily manifest itself on a sexual level. The designers of the Alien devised it to be neither sex, but to represent both the male and female sexual parts. The ambiguity is rife throughout the films. The only time we can safely assume a gender is the alien 'queen' laying eggs in *Aliens*. Ripley calls it a 'bitch' in *Aliens*, and the lone monster in *Alien* a 'son of a bitch'. The alien has no trouble in reproducing itself from itself, which is why the lone alien in *Alien³* seems to act as both as father and mother.

The monster exhibits the only real sense of purpose in the film. It is certain about its fight for survival, and has no anxieties about itself. It is this purpose that galvanises the humans out of their rut into a fight to survive.

What is different about *Alien³* is that the humans and the place they inhabit are utterly dilapidated and without hope. The set exudes a sense of decay: the only decoration is what looks like 1930s stained glass windows. The inhabitants have no weapons with which to fight, and only Ripley and the 'priest' Dillon (Charles Dutton) show any real anger. We know that the majority will die. It is just a matter of when and how. ●



Mob rule

Kirk Williams suggests that the prominence of the mafia today has less to do with the strength of organised crime than with the weakness of the Italian state

The explosion that blew apart Giovanni Falcone, his wife and three bodyguards in Sicily in May was a body blow to the Italian state. The highly charged popular reaction to the killing of Falcone, Italy's top anti-mafia judge, was directed against the government as much as against the mafia. At the funeral in Palermo's Basilica of San Domenico, 10 000 Sicilians screamed abuse and spat at government ministers. The Italian president was lucky not to be lynched inside the church by the families of the dead bodyguards.

Assassinations of *'cadaveri eccellenti'* (illustrious corpses) are nothing new in Italy. What is new today is the damage they are doing to the fabric of the Italian state. In 1982, for example, the mafia murdered Carabinieri general Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, who had been despatched to Sicily to sort out the mafia, having just helped to defeat the Italian Red Brigades. His assassination was a severe embarrassment for the government. But it did not lead to a major political crisis on the scale which has followed the assassination of Falcone in 1992.

So what's changed? The difference today is that the crisis of legitimacy afflicting the Italian state seems to have reached a point of no return (see A Harding, 'Viva Italia?', *Living Marxism*, July 1992). When 40 000 young people demonstrated in Milan after the Falcone killing, they blasted a political system which allows the mafia to get away with murder day in day out, and accused the authorities of being a bunch of idiots, cowards and murderers.

What looks like mafia strength is really a reflection of the weakness of the Italian state. Most of the time, the secret of the mafia's success is mystified. Films such as *The Godfather* suggest that the mafia derives inner strength from its archaic code of honour or even from its extended family. In reality, of course, there is nothing unique to the mafia's form of organisation which would make it more powerful than any other crime syndicate.

The mafia could only become what it is today in a society whose state institutions were incredibly weak. Until the middle of the nineteenth century there was no such thing as Italy. A modern nation state was eventually created largely through foreign intervention. But the authority of the state was circumscribed by the limited and uneven development of Italian capitalism. The Italian elite never managed to gain the authority which accrued to, say, the British establishment as a result of the organic development of its social system and state institutions over centuries.

The Italian state's inability to consolidate its rule, is clearest in the case of

Sicily. Most Sicilians have never dropped their opposition to unification with the mainland. The experience of rule from Rome has engendered a profound mistrust of central authority. The state was never seen as a neutral body, but always as an instrument of Rome. This explains why the central legal system has never won support.

The mafia developed in this climate of mistrust of state authority. In the absence of a centralised legal system, justice came literally from the barrel of a gun. Groups of armed men could be hired by absentee landlords to deal with peasants demanding land reforms. The mafia was also used to deal with militant workers: in five years after the Second World War, more than 50 trade unionists were killed in Sicily. The town of Corleone, made famous in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* epic, was the scene of many brutal murders. In turn, many peasants and workers who felt let down by the state's inaction turned to the mafia rather than the police for revenge.

Unlike most other Western nations, the Italian state has never established a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. It was never able to create a consensus for its right to rule among all sections of the population. In many parts of Italy people have given their allegiance not to the institutions of the state, but to bodies of armed men who dispense justice outside the jurisdiction of the state.

Given the historic weakness of the Italian state it has always taken a pragmatic attitude towards the mafia. Governments have sometimes made an issue of organised crime, but they have never seriously set out to destroy the mafia. In effect, an unwritten compromise exists in parts of Italy, with the state turning a blind eye to the activities of the mob. Indeed, everybody knows that the mafia operates as an arm of the political establishment.

The modern mafia was born in the postwar reconstruction of Italy, when the close relationship between the mafia and the Christian Democratic Party was established. Throughout the postwar period the Christian Democrats ruled with the assistance of the criminal underworld. The mafia delivered votes in the elections in return for political patronage of its business interests.

In Sicily, three of the most famous Christian Democrat politicians came from the ranks of the mafia. One of the less publicised of the recent mafia murders was that of Salvatore Lima, killed in the run up to the recent parliamentary elections. Lima was a former mayor of Palermo, a Euro MP and a right-hand man of the prime minister Giulio Andreotti. He had also been cited no

fewer than 149 times in criminal cases. It had been like having one of the Kray twins in the Conservative cabinet.

Last year a government report admitted that the Italian state had never established its right to rule in the regions of Campania, Calabria and Sicily. This

year, the legitimacy of the Italian state is being questioned far more widely. Italy is suffering particularly acutely from the national identity crisis engulfing the whole of Europe after the end of the Cold War. The mafia may be a beneficiary of this crisis, but it is not its cause. ●

Yardie

Don't believe the hype

After the photofit...the novel. Emmanuel Oliver on the latest addition to the Yardie hype

I suppose it's about time that someone other than the police, government and gutter press cashed in on the Yardie (Jamaican gangsters) phenomenon. *Yardie*, the debut novel of Victor Headley, is the first attempt to make a legitimate buck from the anti-Jamaican hysteria whipped up by the establishment.

Over the past five years the Yardie threat has been built up to such an extent that it now rivals the mafia as a symbol of ruthlessness, violence and greed. According to the police establishment, they have become a crime syndicate which spans the Atlantic. From Kingston to Miami, from LA to New York, from Toronto to London and round again, Yardies are said to be making big bucks organising the trade in crack and cocaine.

Given that the Yardie tale has been told so often, it was always going to be a difficult novel to write. Headley's *Yardie* occupies the lower end of black British literature. It has more in common with Richard Allen's horrendous *Skinhead* books of the 1970s than with Caryl Phillips' novels.

Headley has a tendency to glorify the conservative side of survival. He gives a sort of 'man's gotta do what a man's gotta do' feel to the Yardies, turning desperation into a virtue. As well as removing any humour from his one-dimensional characters, Headley ends up broadcasting a profoundly pessimistic message. You have the choice of staying in Jamaica and dying poor or becoming a drug dealer and dying young. Not much of a choice.

What is striking about this first novel by a black British writer is his almost

complete lack of interest in Britain. He does not even deal in traditional images of Britain, never mind attempt to convey the black British experience in all its variety. Most of the action takes place around the dreary council estates of east and north-west London. For D, the main character, London is Britain with Hackney as its capital city.

The book itself has been given the seal of authenticity from a range of unlikely sources. Stories abound about how Headley is now in hiding from real Yardies who feel he has given far too much away. This is more likely to be hype than fact (I spotted Headley in Hackney recently, so he can't be that scared). In any case, if you have been following the lurid Yardie tales in the London *Evening Standard*, *The Voice* and the *Hackney Gazette* over the past few years you will know that Headley has given very little away, and that you could probably have written just as good an account.

Other Headley fans include the police, among them detective superintendent John Jones from Peckham, who has commended the novel for its supposed true-to-life content: 'The violence and the state of mind of the central characters tally exactly with how we see many of these people.' He might have added 'and every other black face in London'.

If you missed the Yardie scare in the pages of the gutter press, here's your chance to catch up with the story that has played a big part in criminalising London's black community. If you believe it, either Victor Headley or the Metropolitan Police will have done a good job. ●

● V Headley, *Yardie*, X Press, £5.95 pbk

After the Olympics

Jason Livingston

DRUG-RUNNERS



Why shouldn't athletes mix sport and drugs?
Alan Harding takes issue with the hypocrites

The Barcelona Olympics proved to be the most politicised games for years. The Serbian competitors were denied the right to participate in the opening ceremony. Meanwhile, the Croatian tennis player, Goran Ivanisevic, was feted as a national hero in the West. Even more so than usual, the competition between athletes in the Olympic stadium became a sporting parody of the competition between nations in the international arena.

And once again the drugs issue became the primary focus for the manipulation of sport for political ends. A young sprinter, Jason Livingston, had his career blighted because the British authorities were more confident about establishing their superiority through a holier-than-thou morality than through competitive excellence.

For anyone who doubted the hypocrisy that surrounds the drugs issue, compare the intense media focus on the banning of two British weightlifters for taking a substance not on the official banned list with the camera moving quickly away from a shot of a German lifter inhaling just prior to a lift that won a gold medal.

My sole concern about the use of drugs in sport is the health of the athlete. Will they pay the price of disability or death because failure is impossible to countenance?

I remember watching Tommy Simpson on a blazing July afternoon in 1967, as he rode higher and higher on the exposed, precipitous slope of Mont Ventoux in the Tour de France. His legs turned slower and slower. His bike swerved from side to side. His eyes glazed over. His mouth was open and gasping for oxygen. At a certain point his body gave out but his brain did not notice. So Simpson kept going and he died as a result. Perhaps it was the dope which killed him, along with his mental stamina and physical bravery, holding off the pain until it was too late.

The physical danger to the athlete makes the hypocrisy of the sporting authorities on the issue of drugs even more difficult to stomach. Athletes were expelled from the Barcelona Olympics as a moral face-saver for sporting and political bodies which themselves have created the conditions in which drug use is both necessary and illicit.

The competitive pressure to succeed, both for national prestige and for commercial success, ensures that most first rank athletes have no choice but to maximise their chances in any way possible. The dynamic for the medicalisation of sport does not come from the individual athlete, but from the association of sport with national superiority, and from the financial priorities which dictate schedules. In this scenario

the well-being of the athlete is a matter only of national pride and financial reward.

At the same time, the powers that be are obliged to step up a phoney drugs panic because of the importance of the issue in a broader social context. Drugs panics are used to divert public attention from pressing social problems, and to strengthen the repressive powers of the state.

In sport this leads to bizarre, arbitrary and invented distinctions in order to justify certain practices. The history of anabolic steroids serves to confirm this. Widely used by field athletes from the 1950s, they were banned by the Olympic authorities only in 1974, by which time they had been superseded, and the techniques for hiding drug use were more advanced.

What is the difference anyway between special dietary preparation to enhance muscle tone and a controlled muscle building programme that relies on new discoveries rather than traditional pasta? Why is it legitimate to use cortisone to compensate for a groin strain, but illegitimate to enhance your performance when you are fit? Performing while unfit is much more dangerous for the athlete.

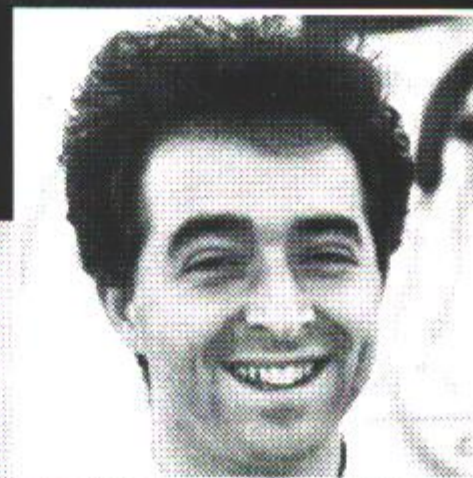
If we want to be pure about athletic performance, javelin throwers should be given pointed wooden sticks rather than the aero-dynamically honed items they throw such great distances today. And British competitors should be given steel boneshakers rather than the carbon fibre super bikes on which they won their gold medal.

Am I in favour of athletes popping pills left, right and centre? Wouldn't this make a mockery of that fine balance between physical and mental effort which makes the great achievements in sport so compelling? These questions assume a context which does not exist.

Sport is a social not a natural activity. The necessity to win is dictated by the demands of national prestige and not just by the desire to prove a mastery of mind and body. That intense social pressure explains why so many athletes take drugs.

At the same time as Ben Johnson was disqualified from the Seoul Olympics, over 100 top class athletes were asked to respond to the following scenario. You can have a new wonder drug. You will win for five years. Then you will probably die. Do you want the drug? Over half said yes!

What I do know for certain is that the athlete should not take the rap for conforming to the unwritten laws of modern competition. In an environment in which the athlete was the centre of concern, and in which greater human possibilities could be further extended, my answer would be yes to the pills and no you wouldn't lose the edge. ●



Whicker's lost world

The cheapest route to Ireland is also the most arduous. A couple of days a week, the Isle of Man steam packet out of Liverpool does not terminate at Douglas but butts on to Belfast through the bitter night. Young families huddle on the deck, their plastic shopping bags straining at the handles under the weight of sandwiches, nappies and World Wrestling Federation figurines. It takes 11 hours (the plane takes 40 minutes).

With eight hours to go there was nothing left to spy (with my little eye) and so I took the kids down to the TV lounge. A harassed mother with two toddlers on her knee and another sprawled beside her on the PVC couch sat blank and exhausted in front of Alan Whicker's documentary about the world's most expensive holiday—a package costing £27 000 per person. The group of 100 travellers has its own plane which speeds it from one World Wonder to the next; from Venice to the Valley of the Kings; from Machu Pichu to the terracotta warriors. For a series celebrating such opulence it looked pretty cheap. It could have been shot in a studio.

The long shots of people arriving at airports and the tight shots of champagne corks popping could all have been snipped from a mini-series. The effect was oddly appropriate. The Wonders of the World probably do feel like old film sets (they've been in lots of old films). It must be hard to see the pyramids with a fresh eye and Whicker was not the man to try. He stood in front of the camera and moaned about the Egyptian authorities while in the background his companions stood in front of each other's video cameras and moaned about the Egyptian authorities.

The gimmick of the series is that Whicker—who has been around the world more times than I have been round the deck of the *Manx Princess*—has never been on a package holiday before. How will he cope? Easy. He shoulders his companions (and the Wonders of the World) into the back of shot and he talks about himself.

In Cairo he recalled his days as a journo covering Suez. In Venice he whinged about his lost youth. The glories of civilisation were mere locations in the chronicle of Whicker. As Napoleon might have put it doing the section on the Sphinx, 'ten thousand episodes of *Whicker's World* look down at you from those stones'. In India there was a flashback to an old episode—as though India needed padding out. I've never seen *Whicker's World* before and I felt much as his companions did in the crumbling glory of Venice—it must have been OK once but now it stinks.

Whicker was not the only over-ripe member of the tour. Most of his companions were travelling on cashed-in policies, pension pay-offs and other compensations of approaching age. Asked how they could justify spending so much on themselves, all of them said, 'You can't take it with you'. They said it wistfully, wishing you could. 'I've worked hard all my life, and now I'm spending hard', said the woman with the yellow camcorder and skin like an unsaleable turkey. A sense of irreparable loss lay over it all.

These people had indeed worked hard all their lives and now had come in sight of the End and realised that somehow they had missed the point. Life had passed them by and now they were whizzing around the globe trying to catch up with it. It was like a grotesque, existential

version of *Treasure Hunt*: 'Hello, Annabel, I'm in the Parthenon now. I'm looking around but still no clue as to why I worked so hard all my life.'

Oddly their search seemed to centre on tombs. At Abu Simbel we learned that one member of the tour was in fact a funeral director. Taking a funeral director to Abu Simbel! Brilliant! Like taking a Mars bar maker to Mars or introducing Captain Mark Phillips to Caligula ('Yes, I'm keen on horses myself...'). He looked around then quipped, 'You can't take it with you'. Maybe so but the massive stone figures behind him testified to the fact that for thousands of years people have been having a damn good try. While the tourists snouted around among the sarcophagi and grave goods, Whicker added to the general atmosphere of degeneration by going on about how much younger he was when he was younger.

Tourism is the biggest employer in the world. It is also one of the worst. A hundred and fifty million people work in tourist-related industries, mostly getting paid in beads and shells. Once subject nations were forced to build monuments to their masters' magnificence. Now they are required to stand in front of those monuments and smile for their masters' cameras. What is this all about? Do these people watch the videos they make? Do they force other people to watch them?

The pleasure of a good holiday is as incommunicable as that of a happy dream or great sex, yet tourists spend most of their energy documenting themselves, compiling the evidence. It is partly, of course, ample acquisitiveness, 'capturing on film' the few ancient wonders that were not captured in crates and sent to the British Museum. Modern tourism—like the building of the pyramids—is essentially commemorative. The act of lifting the camera to the eyes is a ritual *momento mori*, a reminder that this must pass. But it is also an attempt to stop it passing, to 'capture the moment forever', to gain from Fast Foto what Cheops bought in stone. Look upon my snaps, ye mighty and despair.

The chain videoing of the Wonders of the World tourists is the ultimate expression of capitalism's fixation with the fear of death. They spend so much time capturing the moment that the moment itself does not take place. Like all death rituals, it pays little heed to the living. At the start of their journey the travellers were delayed because someone threw themselves under their train (the Orient Express, of course). They huffed and puffed about the delay and looked at their watches. I looked across at the young mother on the other bench. She was horrified.

But then she was not what Bord Fáilte would call a 'pure tourist'. She was, like me, 'VFR' (visiting friends and relatives), heading for a few weeks of manic gossip and wistful property speculation, of looking round at Man to see who else is 'home'. This is going 'home' even if you're a famine baby whose ancestors went 'beyond' to England in 1847. And while we're all 'home', we will talk as if we might never go away again or make plans to buy 'a little bit of land' for one day some day never. Because VFR is just as hopelessly hopeful as tourism, though it is cheaper and more relaxing.

At Douglas I had to go down to the hold and move my car out of the way of the returning holiday-makers. It was eerily deserted and then two men came carrying a coffin through to the baggage room. I suppose some of us do go home to that little bit of land in the end.

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

As the Middle East peace talks get under way again, Eve Anderson and Mark Al-Safar reveal how even radical critics of Western policy are looking to the West for a solution

Whose peace in the Middle East?

Books discussed in this article include:

Peace in the Middle East? The Oxford International Review, Vol III, No2, Spring 1992, £2.50

The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means, F Robert Hunter, I.B. Tauris, £24.50 hbk

Living the Intifada, Andrew Rigby, Zed Books, £32.95 hbk, £10.95 pbk

No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,

Sari Nusseibeh and Mark A Heller, IB Tauris, £14.95 hbk

Beyond the Gulf War: The Middle East and the New World Order, John Gittings (ed), Catholic Institute for International Relations in association with the Gulf Conference Committee, £5.99 pbk

The Gulf War and the New World Order,

Haim Bresheeth and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds), Zed Books, £32.95 hbk, £11.95 pbk

Desert Shield to Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War, Dilip Hiro, Paladin, £9.99 pbk

Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Assad Regime,

James A Paul, Middle East Watch, Yale University Press, £14.95 hbk

After months of deadlock, the Middle East peace process seems to have been given a new lease of life. The election of Yitzhak Rabin's Labour Party to government office in Israel has changed the political landscape and led to renewed optimism about the prospects for peace. Before the election, Rabin promised an immediate end to the building of Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as autonomy for the Palestinians within nine months.

In response, the frosty relations between the USA and Israel have thawed. After the election, US secretary of state James Baker immediately flew to Israel for talks with both sides, hinting that the \$10 billion aid package formerly withheld as punishment for Israeli truculence over the peace talks might soon be released.

Neither the election of a Labour government, whose anti-Palestinian credentials are at least the equal of Likud's, nor the resumption of American diplomacy, which has started more wars in the region than ceasefires, can advance the cause of the Palestinians or bring peace to the Middle East. Yet in the post-Cold War world, even radicals who are critical of Israeli and Western policy in the Middle East are now looking to the Israelis or the Americans to solve the problems of the region.

The contributions to the *Oxford International Review* typify this new faith in a benign imperialism bringing peace to the Middle East. The keynote introduction by Sir Anthony Parsons expresses the fear that the momentum of the peace talks might be lost, adding that 'much, if

not all, depends on Washington'. This confidence in the role of the USA is echoed in all the articles except that by the Israeli peace negotiating team, who express irritation at the way they have been treated by the Americans.

Israel's shock at being rebuffed by the Americans is understandable. After years of doting patronage from Washington, it is hard for the Israelis to accept that the Americans no longer require their services as policemen for imperialism in the region. In his essay 'When Bush comes to shove', Avi Shlaim observes that with 'the twin threats of communism and pan-Arab nationalism' over, 'what could Israel offer that could not be provided by their Arab friends...the USS Fahd offered a bigger flight deck than the USS Shamir' (p2).

Yet the Israelis have no choice but to accept that times have changed and renegotiate their relations with the Americans. The election of a Labour government signals a greater willingness to play ball with the USA. America too is keen to keep its options open and has softened its stance. But there is no going back to the old days. As we anticipated in *Living Marxism* at the time of the Gulf War, the special relationship is over. The end of the Cold War has put an end to Soviet influence in the region, removed the threat of Arab nationalism, and given the USA a free hand in the Middle East. Israel is no longer indispensable.

However, the end of the special relationship between the USA and Israel does not mean that the Palestinians now stand to gain what they want. It simply means that the Americans are exploring new ways to enforce their

domination of the region. That domination depends upon the continued subordination of the Palestinian people to the dictates of Western imperialism. The Western powers would never contemplate any settlement for the Palestinians which destabilised the region or threatened their interests there.

Unfortunately this is not the way things are seen by Palestinian leaders, most of whom go along with the view that America can play a progressive role in resolving the conflict with Israel. The idea that there is now a force within Israel that is sympathetic to the Palestinian cause has also taken hold since the election of Rabin's Labour Party. Most Palestinians see Labour as preferable to Likud, and privately rooted for it in the general election.

The fact that these illusions can have such a wide purchase is a grotesque testament to the defeats the Palestinians have suffered and to their political isolation within the Middle East. With no independent allies to back their cause, they are desperately seeking salvation from forces which have no interest in making any meaningful concessions to them.

Not all the Palestinians' leaders are so sanguine about the diplomatic games being played. The peace process has led to divisions in the Palestinian camp, divisions which are now being compounded by Rabin's overtures. There has been heavy fighting between Fatah, the moderate majority in the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and Hamas, the Islamic fundamentalists, in Khan Yunis and Rafah refugee camps. The roots of these divisions are examined in F Robert Hunter's *The Palestinian Uprising*, which is also an excellent introduction to the intifada.

The intifada revolt which began in 1987 is examined in the context of the oppression of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis and their Western backers. It becomes possible to understand the intifada, not as one big riot, as it has often been presented in the Western media, but as a response to the Israeli strategy of restructuring and containing Palestinian society in the occupied territories. Hunter takes the reader through the different stages of the intifada, as it gathered momentum and drew in more layers of the population, until it became a mass movement.

The Palestinian Uprising also deals with the political problems facing the intifada: the divisions between the secular and religious wings, the moderates and the radicals, the old and the young, the insiders and the 'diaspora' Palestinians. It is in the context of cumulative setbacks that the dynamic towards compromise in Fatah, the main block of the PLO controlled by Yasser Arafat, has come to the fore. In turn, Fatah's failure to win substantial concessions after decades of sacrifice, and its inability to push the intifada forward, has encouraged a cynical response among a new generation of militants. This has allowed Hamas, a Muslim grouping, to come into its own.

Fatah's enthusiasm for the US-led diplomatic process has added fresh grist to the fundamentalist mill. Hamas has condemned the talks as a trap to contain Palestinian anger, and insists that nothing positive can be gained by sitting round a table with the oppressors. The organisation points out that Rabin is already backtracking on his promise to stop the construction of new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

Yet the fundamentalists are in a minority. For most

Palestinians, as for most of the authors writing on the subject here, George Bush and Yitzhak Rabin offer the only hope of a way out of their desperate plight. Thus while F Robert Hunter salutes the Palestinians for their tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds, he suggests that a resolution of the Palestinian problem depends on the intervention of the USA, the very same power that helped to create and sustain the state of Israel by denying the Palestinians their rights.

Andrew Rigby, author of *Living the Intifada*, which covers much the same ground as Hunter's book but from a far less sympathetic standpoint, takes the same position as Hunter on the question of a US-imposed solution. The starting point for such a solution is of course an acceptance of the right of Israel to exist. Once this crucial point is conceded, some sort of two state solution is usually proposed: one for the Palestinians, one for the Israelis.

Unfortunately, life is not as simple as it appears to the advocates of a two state solution. Since Israel is an artificial state, built on Palestinian land through the denial of Palestine's national rights, there can be no question of self-determination for the Palestinians as long as Israel exists. Israel cannot give up any territory without calling into question the legitimacy of the state as a whole. Indeed, as history has shown, the dynamic is in the opposite direction, towards an expansion rather than contraction of the boundaries of the Israeli state.

The reality of what the two state idea would mean in practice is revealed in *No Trumpets, No Drums*, a blueprint for a two state solution co-authored by an Israeli and a Palestinian. The book is aptly titled, since there is nothing to celebrate about its proposals. While there is a lot of talk about encouraging respect between the two communities, what is outlined is Israeli military, economic and political domination of a cowed, subordinate Palestinian statelet.

The chapter on security arrangements, casually notes that there would of course be 'a prohibition on any weapons enabling a Palestinian army to participate in combined offensive operations—ie, tanks, artillery, and surface-to-surface missiles. But it would also imply a ban on equipment often classified as "defensive"—such as anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, and fortifications of any kind' (p67).

It is clear from this that the celebrated two state solution is not what its name suggests. A two state solution does not mean the coexistence of two states: the state of Israel and the state of Palestine. Indeed the coexistence of two such states is an impossibility given that the very existence of the Israeli state depends on the denial of the right to statehood of the Palestinians.

Instead of a state for the Palestinians, what is being offered here is a limited degree of autonomy on a shabby strip of land. Those who support the idea of a two state solution are asking the Palestinians to abandon their aspiration for self-determination and reconcile themselves to their oppression in return for a slightly bigger say over what happens in the occupied territories.

You might have thought that the image of a benign imperialism bringing peace to the Middle East would have been slightly tarnished by the Gulf War last year. Yet the response to the recent US sabre-rattling against Iraq suggests that the West's good name has not been sullied ►

in the eyes of the liberal intelligentsia.

Just over a year after the Gulf War, it looked for a while like George Bush was about to launch another military strike against Saddam Hussein. Incredibly, given the demolition job they did last time round, US officials began to speculate that Iraq's military strength was again approaching its pre-war level. They put about the rumour that Saddam was hiding evidence pertaining to weapons of mass destruction in the Iraqi agriculture ministry building of all places, the crafty devil. A stand-off ensued in the ministry car park between UN inspectors and Iraqi officials, with the world press camped close by.

The press were to be bitterly disappointed. While Bush promised a new military offensive, starting on 2 August, to frighten Saddam into submission, the only thing that happened in the car park was some pushing and shoving. It then turned out that there had been a 'misunderstanding'. The UN had no evidence of any secret military documents in the building. Indeed, it had not even realised the building was the agriculture ministry in the first place!

Yet even this rather embarrassing exposure of US warmongering against Iraq has not led anybody to question the trend towards Western intervention. Indeed, Martin Woollacott, a liberal *Guardian* journalist, summed up the prevailing consensus:

'The issue of whether or not Baghdad still has, hidden away somewhere, a serious nuclear, chemical, bacteriological, or ballistic capacity, on which it can now begin to build again, important though it is, is less important than the fact that Saddam has successfully defied Washington and New York. The weapons question is a red herring.' (*Guardian*, 29 July 1992)

So the weapons question was a red herring, but not to worry, there's always a good reason for having a go at Saddam. The assumption that the West has the moral authority to interfere in the affairs of Middle Eastern states is never questioned these days.

Indeed, it informs even the most radical books written about the Gulf War. *Beyond the Gulf War*, a collection of essays by radical writers and journalists, is a damning account of the barbarism visited upon the Middle East by the West. At times it is very critical of the Western powers and their role in the region. Yet the essayists accept the terms of debate put forward by Western warmongers. All agree that the West stands for democracy and civilisation and has a positive role to play in the Middle East.

The Gulf War and the New World Order suffers from the same surfeit of good faith in the beneficent intentions of the West. The collection contains some very well researched articles which accurately portray the political impact of the Gulf War in the Middle East. Some writers even suggest that the war was less to do with events in the Middle East and more to do with the changing balance of power in the West. Alan Freeman and Noam Chomsky argue that the war was a way for the USA to stave off its economic and political decline, by using its military force to rally the disintegrating Western Alliance behind its leadership.

On the other hand, there is complete confusion about what attitude to take to Saddam Hussein. Many

contributors denounce Saddam as a fascist. All agree that he is the person responsible for starting the war. Having accepted that Iraq is the problem, it follows that Western intervention of one sort or another is the solution. Most contributors favoured sanctions rather than military action to force Saddam to submit to Western dictates.

One time radical Fred Halliday accuses opponents of Western intervention of ignoring Iraq's crimes: 'The unique reliance on anti-imperialism as a criterion for political action...allots all the responsibility for oppression and domination...to the US and its allies.' (p275) Apparently this view is itself 'inverted imperialism'. What Halliday conveniently forgets is that Iraq, Kuwait, Saddam, the Emirs and all the other states and dictators of the Middle East are the products of intervention in the region by 'the US and its allies'. To claim that the Western powers which created the Middle East as a cockpit of international conflict could now provide a peaceful solution for the peoples of the region is truly a case of inverting the truth about imperialism.

Dilip Hiro's *Desert Shield to Desert Storm* clearly recounts every incident in the approach to war, from the 'supergun' affair to the execution of *Observer* journalist Farzad Bazoft. Yet in his conclusions, Hiro goes against the evidence of his own research and echoes the Western myths about the war.

He talks about the 'unprecedented armed might of Iraq in the late 1980s', an absurdity which he graphically refutes elsewhere in his description of the allied massacres of Iraqi soldiers on the Basra Highway (p428). Similarly, Hiro blames the war on Saddam, despite revealing how the Americans scuppered every peace proposal and every negotiated settlement.

As an antidote to the universal acceptance of the demonic character of Saddam Hussein, *Syria Unmasked* is a welcome if belated addition to the literature on the subject. The book's publication was delayed in September 1990, as the Western powers got into gear for war against Iraq. It is not hard to see why the book was suppressed, since the material it unmasks would have caused some red faces in Washington.

We should recall that president Hafez Assad of Syria was the key Arab partner in the US-led coalition against Iraq. At the time, Arab allies were needed to legitimise Western interference in the region. It would have been embarrassing if the world had been reminded that the members of the US coalition, far from being champions of freedom and democracy, were just as repressive and brutal as Saddam. Reading *Syria Unmasked* it is impossible to discern any qualitative difference between Saddam and Assad.

Also striking are the similarities in the evolution of Syria and Iraq under the domination of different Western powers. *Syria Unmasked* is a classic case study of how imperialism has screwed up a country. But having explained the role of the West in creating a nightmare regime, the book ends with a plea for Washington to use its influence to persuade Assad to clean up his act. Another case of the illusions Western radicals have in the healing powers of imperialism. These illusions have already allowed the West to get away with one war against Iraq, and are now leading the Palestinians to the negotiating table to be shafted.

**LIVING
MARXISM**

back issues

No45 ● July 1992

**The Serbs: 'White niggers'
of the new world order**

Europe's national identity crisis;
Aids establishment in disarray;
Olympic war games; Magritte

No46 ● August 1992

Who will the West XXXX next?

Yugoslavia: who's to blame?; The Irish War
in the New World Order; The truth about
the Birmingham Aids panic; Irving and
Goebbels; Chippendales

£2.50 includes postage and packing

binders

The best way to keep your magazines safe from
the perils of everyday life is to get into binding.

New, improved *Living Marxism* embossed binders
with optional yearly stickers are just £7 plus 80p
postage and packing, two for £14 post free.

Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd
and send to BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX

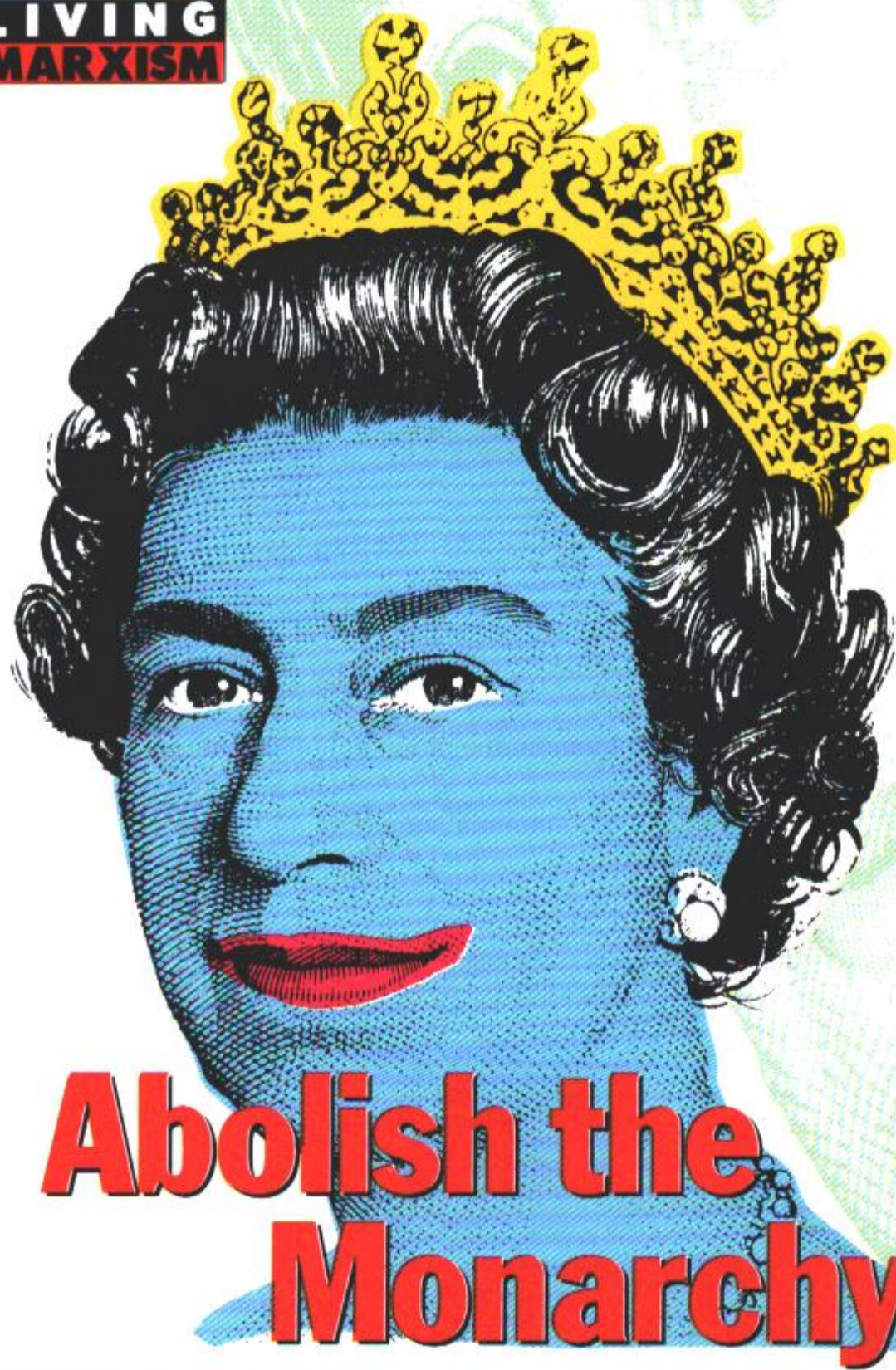
Abolish the Monarchy t-shirts

**Single size extra large
t-shirt £7 plus 80p
postage and packing**

Black, red, blue and yellow on white

**Make cheques payable to Junius
Publications Ltd, and send to
BCM, JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX**

**LIVING
MARXISM**



**Abolish the
Monarchy**

**LIVING
MARXISM**

**OUT
NOW!**

INDEX

Issues 1-44; November 1988-June 1992
£2 plus 40p p&p

Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX

S I G O U R N E Y W E A V E R



ALIEN³

IN 1979 IT CAME FROM WITHIN. IN 1986 IT WAS GONE FOREVER.
IN 1992 OUR WORST FEARS HAVE COME TRUE. IT'S BACK.



EVERYWHERE AUGUST 21st