

# LIVING MARXISM

Special issue  
on the Perils  
of Political  
Correctness



US \$5 DM7 FF25  
UK £2 December 1993 No62

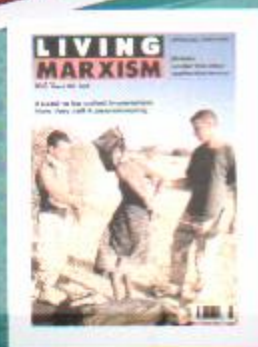


## They're all PC now

British withdrawal: the road to peace in Ireland that nobody's talking about

# 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* Subscriptions (62), BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX or phone (071) 278 7699



## Back issues

All issues £2.50 including p&p

- 55 **Ban nothing**; Who's making the news in Bosnia?; Where will the West strike next?; Crime panics; The framing of Moss Side; After Warrington;
- 56 **When peace means war**; Recession over—slump continues; Police torture in USA; Bosnia: a mess made in the West; *Romper Stomper*
- 57 **The new authoritarianism**; Why they love a good war crime; Recolonising Africa; The great royal non-debate
- 58 **Peacekeeping means imperialism**; Aids: the truth about the Day report; Why Clinton bombed Baghdad; Britain: a free country?
- 59 **Nasty little breeders?**: the state declares war on single mothers; Europe after the ERM; Bosnia: bloody liberals
- 60 **Children's rights? Wrong**; The real dangers of Jurassic Park; Illusory peace in the Middle East; Anti-racist police?
- 61 **You can't ban bad news**; Focus on Eastern Europe—what could be worse than capitalism; Peace in Ireland?; Why the BNP won; *Rising Sun*

## Binders

*Living Marxism* embossed binders.  
£7 plus 80p p&p

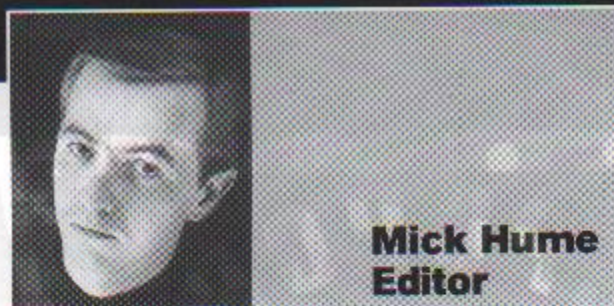
## Index

*Living Marxism* index. Issues 1-58;  
November 1988-August 1993. £2.50 plus 40p p&p



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





**Mick Hume**  
Editor

# Peace off Britain

**C**hange is afoot in Ireland, and there are even hopes that the 25-year cycle of violence in the North might be broken. The talk is of a military 'cessation' (not just a ceasefire) from the IRA, of the Dublin government ditching its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland, of the British government shifting its position, and of negotiations all round.

But it is clear that one thing is not going to change through this process. There will be no end to partition, no withdrawal by the British state. Which guarantees that, even if the IRA dumped arms and the British Army returned to barracks tomorrow, there could be no prospect of a just and lasting settlement. Irish freedom and unity remain the preconditions for genuine peace.

Another age of great change in Ireland opened some 80 years ago, when the whole of the country was still under colonial occupation, and partition was first mooted as a solution to the conflict between the British Empire and the Irish people. The Irish revolutionary James Connolly warned then of the consequences of allowing Britain to impose a settlement which left the Irish nation divided between North and South.

Partition, said Connolly, 'would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured'. His words should ring in the ears of anybody who believes that partition and peace in Ireland are compatible bedfellows today.

Connolly's 'carnival of reaction both North and South' came into being after partition was finally imposed by the force of British arms in 1921. The North, under direct British control, became a brutish, sectarian statelet—a Protestant state for a Protestant people' as its prime minister

called it—in which Catholics were treated as Fenian scum. The South, under indirect British supervision, became a backward, stunted state whose people suffered under the burdens of poverty and Catholic repression.

The Ireland of today is unrecognisable from the country of James Connolly. It has gone through major economic and social changes, and is now on the verge of another era of upheaval. Yet, in one form or another, the carnival of reaction has continued, and will do so for as long as the underlying conflict of interest between the British state and the Irish people remains unresolved.

British rule in Ireland, ratified by partition, has created an inherently unstable and violent state of affairs. It rests upon the classic colonial strategies of divide-and-rule and military occupation. It subordinates the rights of the Irish nation to the will of the British state. Any settlement which leaves the Union Jack flying over Belfast (even if the Irish tricolour or UN banner flies beside it) can only perpetuate division, oppression and sectarianism.

Media coverage of Northern Ireland always focuses on the 'tribal' violence of Irish republicans and Loyalist paramilitaries. Yet this violence is only the effect; the cause is the British presence in Ireland. Both the IRA and Loyalist gangs like the UFF have been created by British rule. The Loyalist groups exist to protect the Union with Britain by terrorising Catholics; the modern IRA was set up, after British troops arrived in 1969, to defend the nationalist community and fight for Irish freedom from Britain. Evidence of the support it still commands for that project was provided in October by the thousands who walked behind the coffin of the young IRA man killed planting a bomb beneath the UFF headquarters in the Shankill Road.

There are no 'tribes' in Ireland, just two sides in a war perpetuated by partition and the British occupation.

All of the talks and the talks about talks today do not even address these issues. There is talk of just about everything except a British withdrawal. Indeed the ultimate aim of the British government's negotiations for a settlement is to stabilise Northern Ireland under even closer control, by isolating and defeating its enemies in the Irish republican movement.

The true purpose of Britain's 'peace-seeking' diplomacy is to win the war against the IRA. Given the high levels of demoralisation and desire for an end to the conflict within the nationalist population, it is even possible that the British authorities might achieve some short-term success in putting a lid on the war.

But the cause of the conflict and trouble will still be there, the partition time-bomb will tick away, and the carnival of reaction will be back in full swing soon enough, albeit with some new sideshows. Indeed it is likely that things will get still worse, as even the most token change in a state like Northern Ireland can unleash all manner of unpredictable forces.

A British withdrawal is the path to peace in Ireland that nobody is talking about today. It is the one way to remove the root cause of the conflict, and to establish the basis for a just settlement by granting the right of self-determination to the Irish people as a whole. Whatever happens in the immediate future, there can be no chance of a sustainable peace without it. Any deal which fails to recognise that hard fact of life in Britain's oldest colony will be worse than useless to people on both sides of the Irish Sea.

James Connolly never lived to see the post-partition carnival of reaction which he had predicted. He led the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, which was betrayed and then blasted to defeat by heavy British artillery. Too badly hurt to stand up, Connolly was executed by the British sitting down. The image of a wounded man strapped into a chair with a gun at his head is a fair representation of the kind of peace and stability that Ireland can expect while partition and British domination still stand.

## They're all PC now

**Y**ou might not think it to look at them, but Britain today has a politically correct government, a PC judiciary, a PC police force, and even a congregation of PC archbishops and cardinals.

You might not think it because government ministers and other pillars of the establishment appear to be conducting a public crusade against political correctness in social policy.

Top Tories like John Major, Michael Portillo, Peter Lilley and Virginia Bottomley have variously denounced 'trendy' sociologists and social workers, 'progressive' teachers, and local authorities which allow 'ideology' to influence adoption cases. The government has pledged to stop *Guardian*-reading, professional do-gooders poking their PC noses into family life, and imposing their rules of right-on language and behaviour on ordinary people.

Of course, PC notions make an easy target. Many are outraged by cases where standards of political correctness are applied to prevent mixed-race couples adopting a black child, to accuse normal parents of child abuse, or to put hapless students on trial for rape. Knocking this kind of PC is one of the few tricks that Tories have left to score some cheap points.

The fact is, however, that the Tories and the rest of the establishment have a politically correct ideology of their own. And it is designed to dictate the way we live on a scale beyond the ambition of any social worker.

What John Major calls 'basic moral values' are the conservative version of PC. The traditional morality to which the Tories want society to return is an all-embracing code of conduct, laying down firm rules about what we should or should not do, say or think.

The conservative code of conduct intrudes into the same spheres of personal and sexual behaviour as the radical PC professionals do. The only real difference is that the conservatives want to shape our lifestyles in the name of religion or decency, rather than racial awareness training or condom counselling.

So, for instance, the government protests that ideology should have no role in decisions about adoption. Yet the Tories are not against political interference in family life in principle—just as long as they approve of the politics behind it. 'Trendy' ideologies about the adoption of black babies are frowned upon. But the traditional ideology of family values has been wheeled out to justify a furious government attack on the way single mothers arrange their domestic lives.

What the doctrines of 'conservative correctness' and political correctness have in common is a self-righteous determination to regulate the lives of ordinary people. From different perspectives, each is an attempt to establish a code of conduct that can control individual behaviour. In this, they are both symptoms of the same social malaise.

There is a widespread recognition in the nineties that things are out of control. The underlying cause of the crisis is the capitalist slump. When the chaos of the market economy means that nobody knows for sure whether their job, home or pension will still be there tomorrow, a sense that society is spinning out of orbit becomes all-pervasive.

The government cannot face up to the real issue, since it is clearly incapable of doing anything about the slump. So it redefines the problem; it ignores the cause of the crisis, the fact that capitalist society is out of control, and focuses instead on the consequences of it—uncontrolled personal behaviour.

Such was the background to November's reports that Major wants to switch the government's attention from economic issues to moral ones. The Tories have conceded that they have no solutions to the slump, and instead are trying to reassert their authority by cracking down on 'immoral' individuals, starting with juvenile delinquents and single mothers.

This is where the fears of the professional middle classes, which feel besieged by an out-of-control 'underclass', meet the insecurities of an establishment which needs to reimpose a sense of social order. Despite their bitter differences, the champions of political correctness and conservative correctness come together in a crusade to bring the rest of us under control.

Indeed, as examined elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, government ►

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, write to Helen Simons, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (071) 278 9908

◀ministers, judges and police chiefs are now prepared to tolerate and even to use liberal PC language if it suits their purpose of control. The trouble with their own, old-fashioned morality is that it's, well, old-fashioned. As such it has little appeal to large sections of our more sophisticated society. The modern morality of political correctness can sometimes act as a useful substitute.

This pragmatism was well expressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in November, in a speech against extra-marital sex. Echoing the hard line taken by the pope, Dr George Carey first told the Mother's Union that 'our society has got it all wrong, and Christians must insist that sexual activity is legitimate and good only when it is an expression of deep, long-term commitment'. But, he added, 'we shall not be heard if we are simply reactionary. "Back to the 1950s!" is not a message that will be listened to'.

What Carey and the conservatives need most is a morality that is reactionary, but in a 1990s kind of way. So, alongside the calls for a return to 'basic moral values', they are willing to let radical Aids activists preach the PC virtues of monogamy, or to use feminist attacks on politically incorrect, errant fathers to justify the intrusions of the Child Support Agency into people's personal lives and finances.

They are all PC now. And that is something we should all be worried about. Because whether the code of conduct they wish to ram down our throats talks about sinners going to hell, or about sexists getting the sack, the message is essentially the same. It is that we are incapable of thinking or acting for ourselves without guidance from above. And because we are incapable, our lives must be subject to the rules, counselling procedures and correction methods prescribed by our official or semi-official moral guardians in the government, the police force, the schools, the social work offices and the church pulpits.

They are all politically correct now. Which means that, when it comes to protecting our rights, they are all wrong.

### Anti-Nazi or not?

I would hereby like to cancel my subscription to *Living Marxism*. I have for a long time been concerned about your obsessive sectarianism, but was particularly incensed on the recent Anti-Nazi League march. Your 'line' on anti-Nazi activities was infantile in all senses of that word.

I am sure that most, if not all, of the political groups represented there would agree that anti-Nazi activity is not sufficient in itself. We are all engaged in anti-racist activity through our workplaces and elsewhere, and are, of course, aware that institutionalised racism is the main problem facing black people in this country. However, fascism is a specific and growing threat that requires a direct response from the left, and it forms a focus around which racism in all its forms can be actively challenged.

I am sure you agree with this. Therefore, I can only understand your attitude as stemming from sectarian rivalry.

**Ben Bruges London SW8**

Yes, I confess, when I was younger I too believed in evil monsters and wicked men. I joined the Anti-Nazi League and spent two years energetically chasing John Tyndall's foot-soldiers around Britain (then the National Front).

Maturity came when I got involved with Workers Against Racism in Manchester. It's therefore depressing that some people on the left still have a lot of growing up to do. The news of the BNP's victory in Millwall and the subsequent upsurge of ANL activity made me feel as if history had gone into a regressive time warp.

Shorn of ideas and enthusiasm, the left has been floundering around looking for something which 'grips the masses'. Enter, stage right, the BNP—horrid, nasty and of course thoroughly anti-democratic. It must have seemed like manna from heaven.

What's the betting that my old paper *Socialist Worker* has resurrected its anti-Nazi page with a spiel about 'there now exists a real possibility of the growth of a mass Nazi movement in Britain'. And pigs might fly!

While the left wastes its time chasing paper dragons, I'm glad that *Living Marxism* is able to provide a more sober analysis of what Derek Beackon's victory really means. Keep up the good work.

**Nick Gool Barcelona**

### Back to the USSR

When is a coup not a coup? In August 1991 a clique of 'communist hardliners' seized power

in Moscow threatening to declare six months of emergency rule, ban strikes and demonstrations, and impose a curfew. All this was justified in order to 'safeguard freedom' and avert the threat of anarchy. Result: outrage and indignation from Bush and Major—the communist beast that we all thought had been slain in 1989 had reared its ugly head again, threatening world peace and democracy.

October 1993: our man in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin, with almost identical threats and under an identical pretext, pulls off a major coup d'état. The difference is that the 1991 'coup' collapsed in just two days through lack of support in the army and security forces, whilst Yeltsin's real coup succeeded because he was able to carry out his threats, bringing in tanks to pummel away at the parliament building. Result: almost unqualified support from Major, Clinton and just about every other Western leader.

The rise of state authoritarianism in the East is mirrored by the apotheosis of the state as saviour in Western political thinking. According to the Tory cabinet we are facing a rising tide of 'wrongdoing' which demands that we 'understand a little less' and punish a little more. Labour seems to share this unbelievably trite view of a society split between 'wrongdoers' and law-abiding citizens. Even radicals view social ills like racism through the prism of law and order politics, celebrating the 'success' of having expanded public order legislation so that the police can arrest football fans for chanting racist slogans. Brilliant.

We're all Soviets now. Every segment of the political class locates the source of contemporary ills in the lack of powers given to state agencies to deal with them. We have a supplicative political culture, dead from the roots up, and infected with corrupt statist politics from the top down. Somebody needs to administer a strong dose of detergent.

**Gary Dale Edinburgh**

### Cash from cuts

Toby Banks ('Circumcision and other crimes', November) overlooks the real issues relating to circumcision. In 99 per cent of cases it serves absolutely no medical purpose whatsoever, and is therefore totally unnecessary.

Circumcision is a mutilation of the genitals (whether male or female), and every child has the right to be protected against this. No one in their right mind would allow their child to be tattooed, so why should the mutilation of a child's genitals be acceptable?

The religious argument for circumcision is null and void. We all know there is no god

that we need to make any kind of offering to. The medical argument, except in a very few cases, has been proved to be bogus. So why circumcise?

The reason why American hospitals routinely circumcise their newborn male infants is not because they are concerned about their genital hygiene, but because the operation makes money. Lots of routine circumcisions, which are totally unnecessary, make lots of money for the privately run health system.

Children have the right not to be mutilated or abused in any way, and have the right to be loved, cared for and protected from abuse. The reality of today's world dictates that the opposite is predominantly the case. But this does not mean that we have to subscribe to the same callous values that our oppressors endorse.

Kevin Reid Egham

### Children's rights and wrongs

Gail Bradbrook (letters, November) confuses children's rights with the protection of children. In the process she makes common ground with a wide range of sinister institutions.

For over two decades the literature of such bodies has been peppered with often utopian demands for resources to guarantee children's living standards. An example of this is the Report to the President (White House Conference on Children, 1970), which included some rhetoric about letting children develop their self-expression. But this is just window dressing for concluding sections which advocate 'the right to have societal mechanisms developed to make the foregoing rights effective'. As a result of these 'societal mechanisms', a woman in Sacramento recently lost custody of her daughter because she smokes.

Over two decades since the report, the same arguments are still widely rehearsed. Wayne State University recently hosted the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', with such sessions as 'Violence: the health epidemic of our time'. Defining rights so as to confuse them with welfare gets you state interference. I suggest that Bradbrook should

examine the record of some of her allies in the struggle against 'adulthood'.

Amy Rose Detroit, Michigan

### Di-spicable

So Di has been snapped lifting weights in a leotard. What's the problem, luvvie? It's not as if anything tremendously awful happened like her mascara was smudged or something.

These pictures are talked about as a personal tragedy and national scandal. Yet everybody seems to be doing rather well out of the 'despicable' photos. Whereas poor Fergie was pilloried for the photos of her toe-sucking scene, the princess gets to be both a front-page pin-up and a poor little victim, which seems like her idea of bliss.

The *Mirror* sold lotsa extra copies, which is what a paper with a falling circulation needs to do. Ex-*Mirror* columnists have had their chance to gripe about the current management of the paper. And the government and its hangers-on have seized the opportunity to promote the case for privacy laws—ie, more press censorship. By the time new legislation passes through parliament, no doubt Camille Paglia will have published a weighty tome on the iconisation of the princess-as-athlete.

One casualty is the *Sun*. Where once its editorials were brazen and sharp, now its writers have adopted a sanctimonious tone, describing the *Mirror* as 'the sick whore of Fleet Street'. But I thought Fleet Street was supposed to be the Street of Shame? Somebody should tell Kelvin MacKenzie that coming on like a missionary to fallen women does not suit him or his paper.

Carl Bromwich Coventry

### Postmodern picketing?

I would like to inform you of a way in which all socialists, active or inactive, can help strikers or harass non-unionised companies into recognising unions.

Many companies have a freepost or free-phone service, which they pay for themselves. Why not send them large numbers of anonymous

letters or even empty envelopes? Also they can be phoned and the phone left off the hook when they answer. These activities are not illegal but cost the companies a fortune, since they must pay the Post Office or BT for every freepost/freephone communication they receive.

Most union leaders do not have the guts to take necessary action if it is illegal under the Tories' anti-union laws. But if enough ordinary people take up this action we could cause major financial loss or even the destruction of these companies.

Buy 1000 envelopes. Cost to you, about £7. Send them first class freepost. Cost to the company, £240. If only 4000 people do this, each outlaying only £7, the cost to the company is about £1m.

David London

### Celibate your good luck

I feel I have to respond to 'Rampant Rick's' response (letters, October) to my letter.

The phrase 'celibate deviant' comes from my experience that expressing a lack of interest in sex is considered abnormal, another word for which is 'deviant'. Consider yourself lucky that you inhabit a part of the world where celibacy is accepted. Where I stay the people I interact with do actually consider celibacy as deviant behaviour. To quote one person, 'people think you are weird because you are not married, divorced, living with somebody or going out with a girl'. It is almost as though they are waiting for me to get caught molesting children or some such perversion.

Celibacy for me is not a pose I strike. I do not consider myself either ugly or inadequate. I find myself looking for a male-female bonding that works on a higher level, or, as Plato said, a situation where two spirits combine. If I ever reach such a plateau I will gladly venture once more into the physical arena.

I enjoyed Rick's letter and was amused by his compliments. However he displayed characteristics that typified what I said and besides I also hate people that try to patronise me.

Gary Clark Lanarkshire

## 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) 278 9844

It was no surprise when the Anti-Nazi League's 'Close down the BNP' demonstration on 16 October turned out to be the biggest protest march of the year. Just about everybody in Britain is an 'anti-Nazi'. But what does that really mean?

In Britain, the strength of anti-Nazi feeling has nothing to do with opposition to racism. Millions of people are against fascism; but there is no mass movement demanding racial equality. Instead, the everyday reality of discrimination against black people and immigrants goes unchallenged.

As we have argued before in *Living Marxism*, tiny fascist groups like the British National Party have played no part in the creation of Britain's culture of respectable racism. Racism has been institutionalised in British politics and society from the top down. And that culture of respectable racism sits quite comfortably alongside popular anti-Nazi sentiment.

### Superior Britain

Most people in this country are anti-Nazi because remembering the Second World War and hating the Germans are important parts of 'Britishness'. The war is a permanent news item in Britain, with every anniversary and event lovingly commemorated by the authorities and the media.

The British establishment hangs on to the memory of the war because the victory over Germany was its last big success on the world stage. The more Britain's global influence declines in the present, the more Britain's rulers want to remind us of the glorious past. Britain's rivalry with Germany is particularly important. British capitalists can no longer beat the Germans in the world markets of today. But, by banging on about yesterday's world war, the British can still try to strike a pose of moral superiority over the nation that gave birth to the Nazis.

The British authorities like

to emphasise what they claim is the resurgence of fascism in modern Germany. In reality, the British government treats immigrants just as badly as the Germans, and there are an estimated 70 000 incidents of racial violence or harassment a year in Britain. Yet while this everyday British racism has passed almost without comment for years, each racist attack in Germany has made headline news over here. Playing up the evils of fascism in Germany allows the authorities to look good, by contrasting British civilisation to the alleged Nazism of the Germans.

One of the top-selling novels in Britain last year was Robert Harris' *Fatherland*, an anti-fascist fantasy about what Britain and Europe would be like if Hitler had won. The German press described the book as 'pornography for the British upper classes'. That is a pretty accurate description of the British establishment's fascination with fascism. The establishment is repelled and titillated by fascism at the same time, like an old vicar who gets a cheap thrill out of talking about teenage sex as he denounces the lax morality of young women today. So the British authorities put on a high-profile peep-show about German-style Nazism (complete with naughty press photographs of tattooed skinheads stripped to the waist), while sermonising against it as fascist filth.

The tradition of anti-Nazism is not about defending immigrants against British racists or championing the cause of racial equality in this country. It is about protecting the British 'way of life' against alien threats, and celebrating Britain's national heritage. It is not about addressing the real problems of racial prejudice today, and pointing the finger at the authorities responsible for making racism respectable. It is about reviving the patriotic legends of the past, and pointing the finger at the Germans.

In short, anti-Nazism is a form of British nationalism. It feeds off and reinforces the notion that Britain is better than the rest. Right-wing

Anti-Nazi campaigns are no solution to British racism. In fact, says Eddie Veale, they can make matters worse

nationalism suggests that, whatever problems we might have in Britain, we can still look down on the foreigners and their 'alien culture'; anti-Nazi nationalism implies that, whatever problems we might have, we can still look down on the foreigners and their 'alien creed' of fascism.

According to the anti-Nazi view of the world, racism is not a product of the way British society works. Instead racism is depicted as a disease imported into Britain from abroad, like rabies. The problem is that British nationalism is the bedrock upon which respectable racism rests in our society.

### 'Reclaim the flag'

Celebrating a unique Britishness always implies that the non-British are inferior. It is a short step from there to outright hostility to foreigners. Anti-Nazism may appear to be a more right-on version of Britishness. But it shares the same national conceit which underpins chauvinist attitudes towards blacks, immigrants and aliens in Britain.

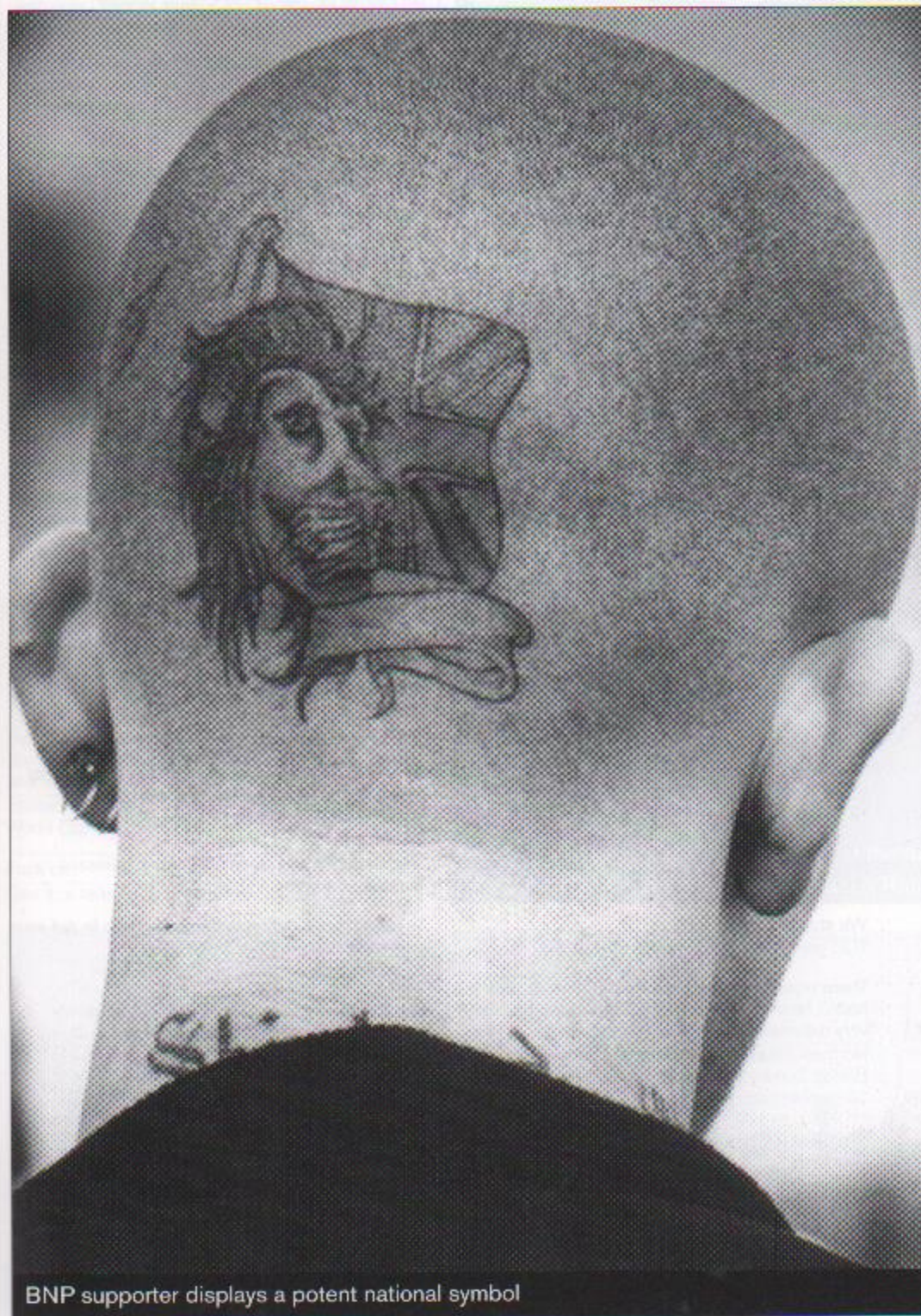
A week after the ANL march, Tory minister John Patten called upon decent British patriots to 'reclaim the flag that has been hijacked by extremists' and fly the Union Jack from every public building. The Union Jack, said Patten, had been 'a potent national symbol for 400 years. The last place we want to see it is wrapped round a shaven-headed British National Party stormtrooper'. Patten's speech was proof, if any was needed, that there is no contradiction between being an anti-Nazi and a Union Jack-waving British nationalist.

That is why anti-Nazism can never provide a solution to racism in Britain. Far from it; by giving a radical sheen to the dangerous doctrines of British nationalism, anti-Nazism makes things worse.

The Anti-Nazi League has connected with the national climate of patriotic anti-fascism. This explains why, at least before the 16 October march, the ANL was treated as



# Anti-fascism: pornography for the establishment



BNP supporter displays a potent national symbol

respectable by much of the media, despite its close links with the Socialist Workers Party. And why, even after violence flared on the 'Close down the BNP' march, many mainstream commentators were prepared to distinguish between the laudable aims of the ANL and the 'violent extremists' who fought the police.

The ANL's real success has been in pandering to the British fetish of anti-fascism. Look, for instance, at how its publications now refer to the British National Party as 'the British Nazi Party'. Substituting the word 'Nazi' for 'National' sums up the problem. It suggests that the BNP's racism has its roots in the evil doctrines of German fascists, rather than in good old British nationalism.

The anti-fascism of the ANL can only endorse the notion that racism is an alien creed. To the ANL, it seems, racists in this country are never plain British nationalists. They are always 'admirers of Hitler' or 'friends of Le Pen' (leader of the French National Front). In the British context, this message will be widely interpreted as proof that racism is something to do with foreigners, and usually Germans.

## German referee

At best, the anti-Nazi approach creates confusion about the cause of the problem and leaves the mainstream culture of racism in this country untouched. At worst, anti-fascism strengthens the anti-foreign feeling that makes British racism respectable.

The influence of British anti-Nazism is not restricted to those who marched against the BNP. It runs right through society. The day before that march, the *Sun* published the reaction of England's black striker, Ian Wright, to the World Cup defeat by Holland. Why had England lost? 'Because of a German referee', said Wright. 'The Germans have done it to us again. We stuck it to them in the war and they don't like it.' (15 October) Two days after the anti-Nazi march, the *Guardian* introduced a summary of Margaret Thatcher's book with her fears about the rise of Germany: 'The reunification of Germany, according to Lady Thatcher's memoirs, has revived neo-Nazi and xenophobic extremism.' (18 October 1993)

When such nationalist paranoia can unite everybody from a hero of black youth to a reactionary Tory baroness, and from Murdoch's *Sun* to the liberal *Guardian*, it is surely time to challenge anti-Nazism, not celebrate it, and start fighting homegrown British racism.

(An edited version of this article was published in *the next step*, 22 October 1993.)

The women and children were combatants...there are no sidelines...everyone on the ground at that point was a combatant as far as we were concerned.

UN spokesman Major David Stockwell explains why helicopter gunships had to kill 100 Somali civilians in Mogadishu

There are three things important to a Somali—his wife, his camel and his weapon.

US special envoy Robert Oakley shows off his knowledge of Somalia

I thought it would be great to get some insight into my heritage. But I feel really different, way different. They look at me like I'm on the other side.

Black US marine sergeant James Wilson in Somalia

I don't know why gays want to be in the armed forces.

Quentin Crisp

The intent was to cripple...to break his bones...so he would not be able to get up off the ground.

LAPD sergeant Stacey Koon explains why he beat up Rodney King

The government of Israel has decided to recognise the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.

Yitzhak Rabin

The PLO recognises the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security...renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence.

Yasser Arafat

We are not planning any Nuremberg trials, although they locked up our leaders, tried to eliminate so many of us in the cross-border operations. Look at comrade Slovo. He sits there talking to the men who killed his wife.

Chris Hani on the conciliatory approach of the ANC, shortly before he, too, was gunned down

Tanks shelling the White House is a much bigger argument than any other.

Top Russian economist outlines Boris Yeltsin's election manifesto

Russian politicians are not the slightest bit inferior to the various old bags who pay us visits.

Speaker of the Moscow parliament pays homage to Margaret Thatcher

We have a very small stick and no carrots.

Russian economics minister Boris Fyodorov

After almost a decade of rule, [the Conservative Party] had only 11 per cent support in the polls; 12 per cent of Canadians believe that Elvis is still alive.

The *Guardian's* Michael Coren on the Canadian election results

The government is not a spittoon.

Italian premier Giuliano Amato thanks the public for their support

I with myself saw what the soldiers in Bosnia were doing.

British defence secretary Malcolm Rifkind

Time for the stick.

The *New Statesman* calls for more military intervention in Yugoslavia

Reason or goodwill can never be a substitute for force.

Margaret Thatcher remembers sinking the *Belgrano*

He drifted with the tide.

Margaret Thatcher on John Major

I was in short trousers. We had ration cards. They were, I remember, happy days.

John Major

We should be proud of wanting to turn the clock back.

John Patten, education secretary

Would you like three more of the bastards out there?

Major salutes his cabinet colleagues

Mio bambino e in Italia—send child benefit to my family in Italy.

Social security minister Peter Lilley blames the public spending crisis on foreign 'scroungers'

How do we explain to the young couple who want to wait for a home before they start a family that they cannot be rehoused ahead of the unmarried teenager expecting her first, probably unplanned child?

Housing minister Sir George Young blames the housing shortage on single mothers

I don't want to get into the business of moral blackmail, but there is something valuable about the family.

Peter Lilley gets into the business of blackmailing single mothers

Impudent, disgusting, arrogant shitbag.

Norwegian minister Thorbjørn Bernster's diplomatic opinion of Tory environment secretary John Gummer

We haven't seen any sign of recovery yet.

IMF assessment of the British economy

What the hell is this government doing to our readers?

The *Sun*

Labour is the party of law and order in Britain today.

Shadow home secretary Tony Blair

Labour's Budget for Jobs document is sinking without trace—as virtually all Labour's economic policies sink without trace.

Labour MP Bryan Gould

I consider myself to be a personal and political failure.

Neil Kinnock

" "

John Smith

We stumble on.

TUC general secretary Norman Willis

There would have been no murder of anybody if it hadn't been for the bloody riot organised by those very nationalists.

Northern Ireland minister Michael Mates recalls Bloody Sunday 1972, when paratroopers killed 14 demonstrators in Derry

We killed one, we killed two, we killed 14 more than you.

Paratroopers remember Bloody Sunday

You can tell the difference between them. The Catholics are much dirtier and scruffier. Sometimes I wonder if they wash at all.

British squaddie's insight into the Irish question

You cannot expect people to sit down and talk with those who from time to time reinforce their arguments with bombs and bullets.

Northern Ireland minister Sir Patrick Mayhew

Reason or goodwill can never be a substitute for force.

Margaret Thatcher

It wouldn't be the first time in Commonwealth history that Whitehall held such talks.

Edward Heath advocating talks with Sinn Fein

Those who have power to resolve this conflict will find republicans are people they can do business with.

IRA spokesman

The Saddam Hussein of Ireland.

Ian Paisley on Twenty-Six County premier Albert Reynolds

Britain is a stable parliamentary democracy in a changing, uneasy world. It is an island nation, with secure borders and a superb police force.

Manchester's Olympic Bid committee

We welcomed the police action [in arresting British National Party supporters], but it should really have come sooner. We wanted them to stop the BNP selling their newspaper in the area long ago.

Anti-Nazi League spokesperson calls for more police censorship

It was obvious that an underlying level of racist banter was accepted; supervisors were unprepared to challenge or worse, were prepared to join in.

Report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

The fact that police officers give different evidence in court is not a sign of lying, it is a sign of honesty.

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon

Your ashtray is too full. You are contravening the 1988 Health and Safety Act.

Traffic cop cautions motorist

The equivalent of Marks & Spencer in the area of public services.

Retiring London police chief Sir Peter Imbert on the Met

There is work out there now, plenty of work. Try Marks & Spencer for a start. They need plenty of chaps for stacking shelves and work in the storerooms. And it pays well, too. I know that for a fact.

Magistrate Roger Davies counsels a jobless Somali refugee

To have a good prison system, you have to put your political leaders in jail at some stage.

Inspector of prisons Judge Stephen Tumin

Nanny came to Eton every week to change my sheets and bring me anything I needed.

Jacob Rees-Mogg

You are a silly rude bitch, and since you are a potential breeder God help the next generation.

Tory MP Nicholas Fairbairn to Edinburgh demonstrator

Apart from a few rudimentary cleaning jobs, there is almost no function in today's world for the urban prole...if this class did not exist nearly all the social problems facing this country would come to an end.

AN Wilson

The crucial thing is never to give up hope.  
Duke of Westminster to the unemployed

I have as my ideal the life of Jesus.  
Richard Nixon

Pure deferral and diffusion, a hollow void which offers nothing determinate to be known...he rejects the signifiers by which alone the self, as signified, comes into its determinacy.  
Professor Terry Eagleton on the RSC's *Hamlet*

I would suggest that the difference between Genet and pornography is that, in his case, it's the text rather than the reader who ejaculates.  
Jerking off with Gilbert Adair

The bus pulled up alongside a McDonald's and we were all served boxes of hamburgers in our seats, with only Coke to drink. Can you imagine?  
Sheer hell for Peregrine Worsthorne

I welcome this brilliant, imaginative and socially concerned initiative by the Queen.  
Lord St John of Fawley selling tickets for Buckingham Palace

Just my luck...to be chucked down a lavatory and go on and on forever swirling around on the top, never going down!  
Prince Charles as a tampon in the Camillagate tapes

It's always me who gets the blame.  
Fergie

Last week I was on the road with the New Age travellers, and I didn't dress like I normally do. I didn't want to look like an absolute prat. So I wore a linen suit.  
Joan Bakewell

Women prefer tabloids because their arms are shorter.  
New York publisher Mortimer Zuckerman

It just goes to show that you don't need an expensive education to make money on the stock market.  
Business analyst Kerstin Matz after a chimpanzee picked more profitable investments than top stockbrokers

Because of a German referee. The Germans have done it to us again. We stuck it to them in the war and they don't like it.  
Striker Ian Wright on why England went out of the World Cup

Fuck off  
Ode to a referee by poet-philosopher Eric Cantona



Belfast, October 1993: 10 000 march at the funeral of Thomas 'Bootsy' Begley, who died planting a bomb on the Shankill Road

# What they said in '93

Compiled by Andrew Calcutt

**A**n interesting little subplot has developed in the recent discussions of student date rape: the rise of the new morality. While the *Sun* sleazed about their reporters going underground to expose 'a world of wild sex parties' on college campuses, self-appointed student spokespersons went on the counter-attack to explain that their new sexual code is thoroughly responsible. It appears that 'going to bed' with each other is in, but 'going all the way' is out.

Apparently, those of us who have gaped with incredulity at some of the new rules thrown up in the date rape debate are seriously behind the times. In a *Guardian* open letter to 'sixties parents' 22-year old London University student, Emily Barr, insists that the new generation of students is different and has a different code of conduct. According to Emily Barr, penetrative sex, full sex, call it

kind of code that says he can slip into her because she slips between his sheets. As Kings College student Simon told a rather disbelieving reporter from the *Daily Mail*, 'even those men who pretend to be macho accept that going to bed with someone can be a pleasurable experience in itself and can be counted as a "score".'

The new morality is apparently motivated by respect for women and their right to say 'no'. For many of us, however, the discussion begs a rather different question: why is it assumed that women should always want to say 'no'?

What is all this business about women 'putting up' with penetration and winning the concession of 'the cosy thing'? We all know that clitoral stimulation isn't dependent upon penetration, but that doesn't mean penetrative sex is a concession to men. To read the comments of the new moralists, you'd think it was an

know, why stop? In the context of recreational rather than procreational sex (and the age of more available contraceptives), what makes penetration so different from intimate fondling?

The attitude of many young people and students at that time was characterised by a rebellion against the Victorian principle that sex was something which men 'did' to women, and women 'bore' under sufferance while thinking of England. Sex was celebrated as damn good fun—for both parties. Of course, the whole notion of sexual liberation was over-rated at the time. Some people thought they could change the world simply by changing their attitudes to sex and relationships. That kind of lifestyle politics was never going to work. But at least there was an aspiration to equality between men and women, and an attempt to throw off the puritanical attitudes that demanded the repression of sexual feeling. It was accepted that women too could want and like sex.

Far from bearing testimony to the success of feminism, today's new morality seems like a throwback to the pre-feminist past, a new puritanism that celebrates the chasteness of women and condemns the predatory character of men. Much of the recent discussion about date rape has assumed that sex is something which rampant men want and women resist.

The conservatives love all of this. The notion that there are innate differences between the psyche and the sexual needs of men and women is one which they have been asserting for many years. Man the hunter, woman the hunted; that, they say, is the very essence of human nature. When, in the past, liberals have protested that there is no natural reason why, all things being equal, women cannot cope with the trials and tribulations of everyday life as well as men, the conservatives insisted that women had special qualities which required that they be protected. Women, the traditionalists thought, responded differently to sex because of their maternal instincts. According to this view, nature dictates that men wanted to spread their sperm as widely as possible to ensure offspring, while women are nurturing and caring. Men want to roll over and sleep after sex, women want to be reassured. They want to shag, we want to cuddle. Until recently most students would have derided this attitude as abject nonsense.

It is true that, in reality, sexual relations between men and women are not equal and cannot be as long as women are denied equal rights in society. Women often find themselves ►

Ann Bradley sees a revival of fifties-style prudery in the recent discussions of date rape and protecting women students from sex

# What's wrong with going all the way?

what you will, is not the done thing for the students of the nineties:

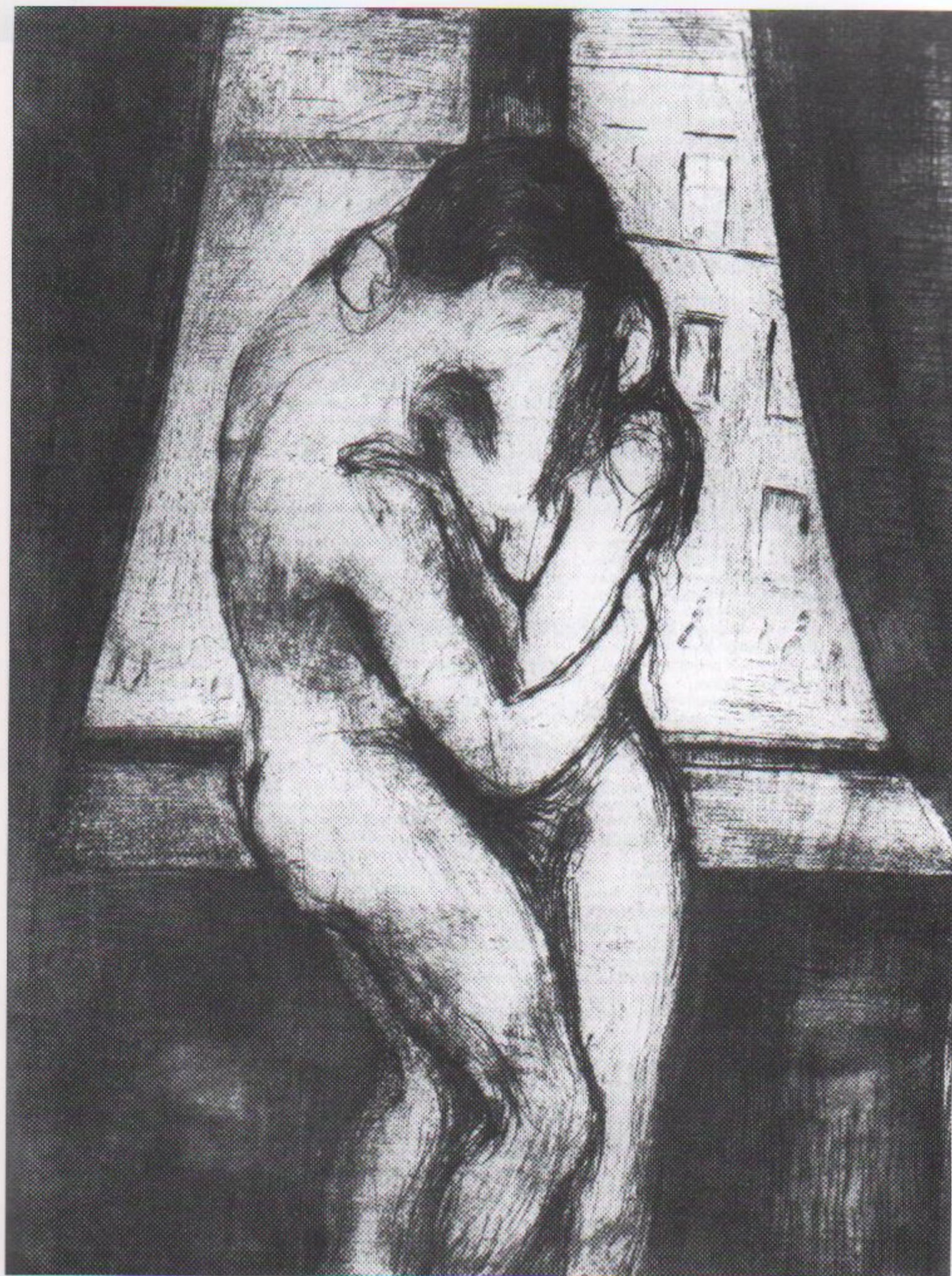
'Going to bed with a man no longer automatically means having full sex...quite often you know it isn't going to go beyond the cosy thing, the kissing and hugging, sleeping with someone literally because that is all you want. There are a lot more women here who want that than people realise. And, by and large men understand it.' (21 October 1993)

For Emily Barr, women's resistance to 'full sex' is an expression of their advance over the position of women in previous generations. 'Feminism has changed the game over the last 20 years or so', she says. Women are no longer expected to indulge the kind of sexual acts that please men. Women are no longer expected to conform to the

ordeal. For some women it might be, but rash generalisations are often wildly inaccurate.

At the very heart of feminist thought in the sixties and seventies was the notion that women could enjoy sex quite as easily as men. For a brief moment, admittedly among a relatively privileged section of society, it was readily accepted that sex was always OK if it made you feel good. It wasn't a particularly big deal, sometimes you did it, sometimes you didn't. Either way, there was nothing to feel guilty or have hang-ups about.

The feminism of the sixties and seventies embodied a strong reaction against the 'codes of conduct' that had straitjacketed previous generations of lovers—the hypocritical prudery which insisted 'petting' was OK but 'going all the way' was immoral. If you're enjoying it, these women wanted to



THE SIPH 1894 BY EDWARD MUNCH (OSLO KOMMUNES KUNSTSAMLINGER, MUNCH MUSEET, OSLO)



tied up in relationships with men for all kinds of reasons other than a desire to perpetuate a romance—usually reasons that hinge upon their lack of financial independence. Many women live for years with abusive or violent men because they have nowhere else to go and no other means to support themselves and their children.

## The image of virtuous womanhood adrift in a sea of predatory males has become all-pervasive

But this is a world apart from the situation between two students at university.

If people want to restrict their sexual activities to 'the cosy thing', that's fine. But it's a problem when young women such as Emily Barr dress this up as a victory for feminism and a progression from the sexual pragmatism of the sixties. It seems more like a retreat to the 'responsible attitudes' displayed by teen mag agony aunts, whose constant advice to 14-year olds dithering about whether to have sex is that 'there are lots of ways of having fun without "going all the way"'.

It is one thing to have this kind of advice dished out to third formers by Marge Proops & Co—it is another thing entirely to have it issued to young adults by student union bureaucrats. For pity's sake, most people starting at university have gone there desperate to break away from the 'keep your hand on you ha'penny' advice handed out by their granny.

In her controversial book *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (to be published here next year), American author Katie Roiphe points out the dangerous parallels between the old moral codes which decreed that decent girls should not drink or talk to strangers, and the new rules laid down by 'rape-crisis feminists'. 'We shouldn't need to be reminded', says Roiphe, 'that the rigidly conformist 1950s were not the heyday of women's power. Rape-crisis feminists threaten the progress that has been made. They are chasing the same stereotypes our mothers spent so much energy running away from.' The fact that Katie Roiphe's perfectly sensible views on sex should have caused such shock waves on American campuses is the truly shocking thing about today's debate.

The recent British discussions about student sex and the problem

of campus date rape have followed the pattern of the sexually correct posturing at American colleges, by stereotyping women as feeble victims of either their own frailty or indecision.

We might scoff at the code of conduct at Antioch College in Ohio, where students are told they must ask explicit permission for every stage of a sexual advance before proceeding. (What an insult to women's ability to engage in non-verbal communication.) We might deride the appointment of a female 'sober monitor' at the University of Michigan—a modern equivalent of the old-fashioned chaperon, designated to ask sorority women going upstairs with men at fraternity parties whether they know the man, whether they are drunk and whether they want to go home. But the basic message behind these measures has been echoed over here. It is that women need guidelines imposed by outside agencies to protect them from their own desires and the desires of others.

It is alarming how pervasive the image of virtuous womanhood adrift in a sea of predatory males has become. Not to be left behind by the Americans in this carnival of sexual prudery, British student unions have boasted of schemes to defend female first-year students from the advances of predatory males. Perhaps they will soon adopt the old convent school rule which said that a girl could sit on a boy's knee at a dance only if there was a nun present and a newspaper placed between his leg and her buttock.

### Donnellan case

The university authorities are also playing the game. The Association of University Teachers and student representatives have already drafted regulations to protect female students from lusty lecturers. Lecturers are supposed to declare an interest in students with whom they have had a personal relationship. Is this what female students want? It's hard to think of anything more nauseating than a bunch of lecturers sitting around as exam time approaches, swapping tales of who they have and haven't had sex with.

In response to objections, the cry goes up, 'how else are the girls to be protected?'. It is worth asking why there should suddenly be a need to protect female students at all. What's new about bored middle-aged academics trying to impress young women in bed as well as in the lecture theatre? Female students have negotiated the complexities of such relationships for years, and presumably will continue to do so, with or without guidelines issued by academic or student bodies. There is something particularly demeaning in

the current assumption that women need a third party, be it a 'sober monitor', student union or high court judge, to negotiate the propriety of a sexual relationship. Perhaps the most disturbing element of the new prudery has been displayed in the recent date rape trials: the parading of women as emotional rag-dolls, completely unable to cope with the sort of situations that anybody with self-respect ought to take in their stride. Emily Barr may think it a sign of the advance of feminism that a claim of rape should be taken seriously by college authorities, the police and the judiciary when the alleged victim claims not to remember whether she consented or not. But it is arguable that the Donnellan case became a showtrial, not of the behaviour of a male chauvinist, but of a rather pathetic young woman who couldn't handle herself, alcohol or the man she allowed into her bed.

### Learn to swim

If that image was a true reflection of young women today, then maybe observers would be justified in drawing the conclusion that women need chaperons to keep them out of trouble. The fact is, however, that most of the time most women can handle themselves, can handle life and can handle men. The implication that we are all victims does us no favours at all.

In those circumstances where women don't have any control of their lives, rules, regulations and codes of conduct are of no use at all. The husband who brutalises his wife is not going to entertain a discussion of whether she consented to mutual fondling but not 'full sex'. Rules and codes of conduct are not going to make it one jot easier for her to leave and find a life free of financial and legal constraints. The problems of employment or childcare which really do screw up the lives of many women are not susceptible to such bureaucratic solutions; and, in any case, they are the result of far bigger social problems than sexual etiquette.

The moral codes of the new politically correct puritanism are at best nothing more than hot air. At worst, they encourage abject social conservatism. Sex is like any other area of life—by taking a few chances you learn what you want. Even our grannies knew that. To quote the chapter on 'Courtship' from *Real Life Problems and their Solution*, an instructional book, popular in the 1930s: 'Those who want to swim well must first enter the water a number of times, and should never be afraid of swallowing a mouthful now and again.'



# Sweet deliverance?

**C**all me an old cynic but I can't join the chorus of enthusiasm about the review of Britain's maternity services. The Department of Health's justification for making maternity services more women-centred is very right on and seems sound enough. But I'm dubious of what it means when we know that the main motivation behind any changes in the health service is cost-cutting.

Of course, a pregnant woman is the focus of maternity provision and the service should be organised according to her needs. Women should not be expected to give birth in a manner convenient to an obstetrician or to hospital managers. The service should be organised around her. Nobody could possibly dispute this, and they don't—at least not publicly, although you rather suspect that those consultants nodding about the importance of women-centred services still try to arrange deliveries to fit in with their golf, dinner parties and operas, just as they always did.

But then, when you think about it, all other medical treatments should be patient-centred too, and there's no sign that the Department of Health is rushing to set up commissions to facilitate this.

Try to see your GP, and you will soon discover that patient-centred care is anathema to the modern NHS. Organisation on the principle of patient needs and patient choice is as much a reality as a fail-safe contraceptive or an instant slimming pill. You might 'choose' to see your doctor today, but chances are you won't get an appointment for three days. A former colleague of mine did not 'choose' to have his heart by-pass operation cancelled at two hours notice. My brother did not 'choose' to wait 10 months before seeing a specialist to confirm that he did not, after all, have MS. A friend with a broken ankle did not 'choose' to lie on a hospital trolley for three hours before being examined by a doctor. Patient choice within the NHS is non-existent.

Yet, suddenly, parliamentary secretary for health, Baroness Cumberlege, issues a press release headed 'WOMEN MUST BE FREE TO CHOOSE THEIR MATERNITY CARE' and launches forth a report motivating a reorganisation of maternity provision. What does this mean in practice? Not the additional resources that the NHS is crying out for, that's certain. The baroness wants to see midwives playing a far greater role in the management of pregnancy and the 'acknowledgement' of the role of partners. Women should not have to attend hospital so frequently for tests. It should be easier for women to have their children at home, and indeed if they are delivered in hospital to return home immediately after the birth.

All good touchy-feely stuff. Radical midwives have been demanding such moves for years. But, in practice, what the baroness describes as a 'charter for women' is nothing more than a charter for cost-cutters and one more step down the road to maternity care on the cheap.

No doubt pregnant women are irritated by the number of routine hospital appointments they have to make. They are after all not ill and most pregnancies are remarkably uncomplicated. But are we really to imagine that 'less' medical supervision is in the interest of the woman—or could it be that fewer appointments allow for fewer staff?

Greater continuity of care (so that women in labour are cared for by familiar staff) is obviously better. Of course women would prefer their babies to be delivered by a midwife whom they already know. It's bound to be preferable to progressing through labour in the company of strangers. But consider what this means for midwives.

Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital in West London is already providing a model of 'good practice'. Midwives now work at home (or 'in the community'), with mobile phones, on call 24 hours a day.

They visit pregnant women in their homes, book them in for scans, accompany them to the hospital and stay with them for the delivery. The midwifery manager at Queen Charlotte's told the *Sunday Times* that she believes that the midwives are happier, even though they will be working longer hours, because they will be fulfilling the role for which they were trained. I bet Queen Charlotte's administration are the happy ones, having turned health professionals into home workers on call day and night. And if the midwife delivers the baby herself so much the better—her

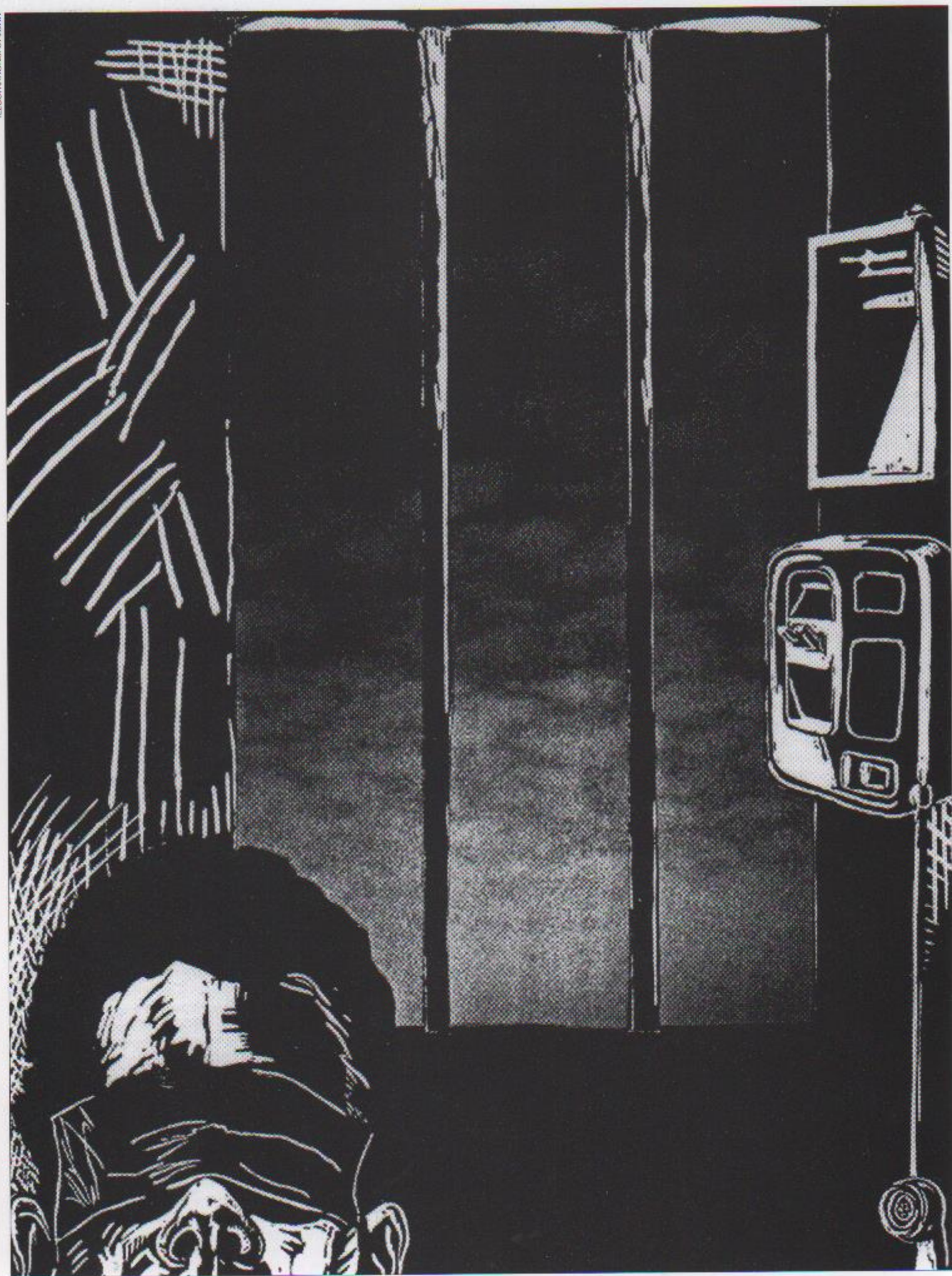
time costs a lot less than a consultant obstetrician's.

It is good news for the penny-pinchers, too, if women can be turfed out of hospital faster or if they decide to have the child at home. Reduced time on the ward increases the 'throughput' of beds. A home birth may require more support from community midwives in the short term but, to use NHS management jargon, the freed bed space 'sponsors' another admission.

Many women may be desperate to spend as little time in hospital as possible. Fair enough, although if more women received a better quality service in hospital they wouldn't be so eager to have a child at home. And while a home birth, or a fast return to the bosom of the existing family might seem a marvellous idea if you have a nice, clean home and supportive partner, a fast return to a grotty flat, with paper-thin walls and nobody to look after your kids is less enticing. Yet it is now accepted as good practice, in many hospitals, to discharge women 48 hours after delivery, despite the fact that many disadvantaged women may need (and relish) time away from home because as soon as they return they're under pressure to resume normal domestic duties.

We shouldn't let the government get away with claiming that its review of maternity services is about increasing the range of 'choices' for women. It's simply more rationalisation dressed up in the language of liberalism. ●

## The 'charter for women' is a charter for cost-cutters







An army of professionals is on hand to care for and counsel us as victims in today's politically correct culture. But ever-greater regulation and conformity are the costs of surrendering our autonomy, argues Frank Furedi

# PC—the philosophy of low expectations

**W**henever society is in trouble it begins to moralise. The more bleak the present appears, the more establishment spokesmen and the media hold forth about the crime-free good old days, when decency thrived and people knew the difference between right and wrong. There is nothing novel about the current pleas to uphold family values and defend civic virtues. But what is disturbingly new today is that professed conservatives are not the only ones indulging in public moralising. For the first time this century, moralism has become a prominent outlook across the entire political spectrum. It influences everyone from the hardline law and order fanatic to the sensitive touchy, therapist. The current controversy around so-called political correctness expresses these reactions well.

Of course nobody is really PC. The term probably originated as a light-hearted joke. Later conservatives transformed it into a term of abuse with which to caricature the actions and behaviour of American liberals and leftists. But the way in which this term took off on both sides of the Atlantic indicates that, as with all successful caricatures, it touches a raw nerve. That raw nerve is the widespread public resentment against attempts to regulate and restrict the autonomy of the individual.

## Kinship ties

All active moralists, whether they be priests or professional do-gooders, are in the business of regulating what people may or may not say and do. Which is why the debate about PC reveals that its adherents and its critics have more in common than they might suspect.

The relationship between the individual and society has undergone many changes down the centuries.

However, the fundamental transformation in this relationship came with the emergence of industrial capitalism in the early nineteenth century. The creation of the market, mass urbanisation and the systematic movement of people undermined existing family and kinship ties. The relationship between people and society, and the ideas they held about life, were changed forever.

## Bring back religion

Until the development of capitalist society, life for most people was governed by an intricate and long-standing system of rules. Law, tradition and custom dictated with whom you lived and married. Entry into trades was carefully controlled. Behaviour was determined by detailed codes. These societies didn't provide much scope for individual initiative. Very little was left to chance. Such a lifestyle had the merit of promoting certainty—but it was the conservative certainty that comes with the stifling of experimentation and of anything new.

The growth of industrial capitalism disrupted the traditional ways of regulating society. The explosion of market forces destroyed the old mechanisms which bound people together—the village, the clan, the guild, etc. Religion, family ties and tradition became less and less influential. This panicked nineteenth-century conservatives. And ever since, their successors have alternatively tried to revive the old moral codes of behaviour, or to find a modern equivalent with which to maintain social cohesion.

One of the few positive consequences of capitalism was the increased scope which the new society gave for the autonomy of the individual. This freedom is always more apparent than real, hemmed in as it is by the need to go to work for the employers, the rule of the state

and other social constraints. But, nevertheless, the limited autonomy available does give a glimmer of the human potential for making creative choices about life. Indeed it is the contradiction between the promise of individual choice and the reality of social constraints that has driven the creative impulse of people in modern times. The disintegration of the old system of regulation has made a degree of social experimentation possible from time to time.

Until recently the main opponents of social experimentation were right-wing moralists. 'Bring back religion' was their constant refrain. Their emphasis on traditional values reflected a fear of the individual who was no longer constrained by the minute detail of religious regulation. The conservatives understood that laws and policing alone were not sufficient to control the inner-life of human beings. They continually sought ways and means of capturing the hearts and minds of the population.

## New regulations

However, today the problem of control is not susceptible to traditional conservative solutions. Against the background of economic slump and the impotence of politicians, society itself appears more and more out of control. In today's crisis, the sort of Victorian morality espoused at the recent Tory Party conference seems woefully out of touch and inadequate. The sense of social disintegration has encouraged a search for some new way to regain control—and not only among conservatives. This same sense that things are disintegrating has motivated people not associated with traditional morality to look for different methods of social regulation. It is these non-traditional attempts to regulate human behaviour that are now dubbed PC and attacked by conservatives.

The past two decades have been marked by a relentless expansion of ►



new methods of social regulation. The new regulations seem very different to the old ways. Liberal, sometimes even left-wing, rhetoric is now used to justify the regulation of individual conduct. It is increasingly fashionable to dictate the most elementary aspects of lifestyle. Everything from cigarette smoking

## The PC celebration of identity means emphasising who you are, not what you could be

by pregnant mothers to how you conduct yourself in bed has become a matter of public interest.

Areas of life which were hitherto considered unproblematic have become subjects of detailed concern. There is a growing tendency to encroach upon the already limited space for individual autonomy. The trend towards rule-making and regulation is all-pervasive. The insidious character of this development is underlined by the blurring of the distinction between the private and public spheres.

### Bigots and feminists

It is now considered perfectly normal for politicians, judges, social workers and other officials to rule on the most personal details of people's lives. The family has become a key site for public intervention. Behind the masquerade of concern for children, people now face an intrusive barrage from professional moralists who are empowered by the state to intervene in family life. The relationship between parents and children is now subject to a range of new laws and informal regulations.

The authorities' appetite for intervention appears insatiable. It is not enough for them to control the relationship between parents and children, it is also necessary to keep an eye on that between children. So all of a sudden, the age-old reality of 'bullying' is elevated into a modern social problem.

The relations between the sexes provide the main terrain for moral policing. In the past, this was the area favoured by religious leaders. Now everyone from conservative bigots to feminists and public sector professionals agrees that things have gone 'too far'. Their common denunciation of the 'permissive sixties' shows how the new puritanism

influences the outlook of commentators who might seem to be on opposite sides of the fence.

Nineteenth-century conservative philosophers would have felt vindicated by the intricate rules of conduct on sexual relations that have emerged in right-on universities and workplaces. The intensity of discussion on such matters matches the obsession of Jesuit priests with the perils of masturbation more than a century ago. Victorian conservatives would also have liked the current obsession with language. They too chose their words carefully, in line with social status and expectation. Today's PC preoccupation with words is merely a modern attempt to assist the regulation of conduct.

### Rules of conduct

My criticism of PC interference in individual behaviour is not motivated by any delusion that relations between people are perfect. No doubt men degrade women and some parents perform the most malevolent acts on their children. School bullying is widespread and has a traumatic effect on many of its victims. Unfortunately, intervention at the level of individual conduct does not improve these matters. As long as society is out of control, so some individuals will remain out of control, and people will be driven to desperate acts in situations not always of their making.

The main problem with PC moralising is its conservative impact on individuals and society. At its worst, it argues that human beings need restraint and control. Most of the time, it suggests that people are too stupid to cope on their own. They need an army of professionals to tell them what to eat, how they should make love, how they should bring up their children and how they should react when somebody passes away. The social worker, the sex therapist and the bereavement counsellor have become part of the new extended family.

Contemporary moralism, including the PC variety, denigrates the human potential. At the rhetorical level it calls for a non-judgemental approach to values. The word *respect* is used *ad nauseam*. Ostensibly every culture, every experience is equally valid. So it is assumed that adults and children can both convey equally valid truths. This conflation of experienced, sometimes mature, reflection with the naive insights of a child expresses a deep-seated contempt for human achievement. It implies that there are no deeper truths to be gained through experience. Such attitudes also lower the horizons of every child. If rights and wisdom are something you automatically receive rather than something to be earned, what is there to achieve?

The PC celebration of 'identity'—as a child, or a black woman, or a gay man—means emphasising who you are rather than what you could be. Such relativism appears ever so enlightened. In fact it is profoundly anti-humanist. Identity politics suggests that we are what we are, full stop. The humanist sentiment that we can have some say in making and changing the world in which we live is entirely alien to this approach.

The anti-humanist climate of our times is continually affirmed by the prevailing contempt for people. Society expects very little of the individual. PC types respond to this sentiment by arguing for the careful monitoring of human conduct. It seems that people cannot be trusted to conduct their own affairs, so society must have a package of Rules of Conduct. The highly publicised code of conduct between men and women at Antioch College in Ohio is only one grotesque example of this passion to regulate.

The trend towards regulating conduct is supplemented by the new religion of 'support'. Have you noticed how the word support is now used to suggest that human beings cannot cope on their own? Every time anything untoward happens, there is a helpline on tap. On the news we are solemnly informed that the victims of this or that are going to get professional help. There are support groups for people who are fat and for people who are thin, support groups for victims of traffic accidents and for students who are distracted from their studies.

### Stress counsellors

It makes you wonder how people ever coped before. At present, for example, there are attempts to increase the resources devoted to the teaching of parenting. It appears that, after thousands of years, people have lost the capacity to bring up children. We now need advice on the most intimate aspects of life from professionals. What did people do in the past, without an army of professional counsellors, when they had a bad experience (which was more likely to be a war than a weight problem)? And how did children ever manage to grow up faced with such formidable obstacles as pregnant mothers who smoked, violent fathers who beat them up and callous bullies stalking the school grounds? And no sex education and no stress counsellors! In retrospect, it seems that human survival has been nothing short of a miracle.

The low expectations which society now has of its members reinforce the tendency towards increased regulation. The fact that people not associated with the right will accept such moralising

sentiments shows how widespread pessimism about society has become. To some extent this is a reaction to past disappointments with what has happened to the world. In this instance, however, disappointment has turned into an elitist contempt for human beings. So an army of competent professionals are summoned to defend

life often assumes 'helpful' and 'supportive' forms. When miners and other workers are made redundant, there are plenty of professionals available to advise them on how to cope with life on the dole. The state now employs large numbers of professionals to provide advice on a variety of issues. A cynic

a climate of passivity—and a passive public is a big plus for those who want to maintain the status quo in society.

Nor is this merely a voluntary matter. It begins with health campaigns, and before too long employers are actively looking into the personal habits of their employees. Drug and alcohol testing are becoming accepted practices within the workplace. There is less and less pretence of confidentiality regarding medical records. State benefits are at risk if you do not seek or accept the advice of the appointed professional, or if you decline to participate in a state system of support like Job Club.

### Words and gestures

Meanwhile, state and para-state intervention in the domain of personal life is expanding all the time. Parents can now expect to have to justify their actions to the know-it-all professional. Mothers who leave their children at home can now expect a visit from intrusive social workers, possibly accompanied by the police.

The concerned PC professional may not set out with the intention of intensifying repressive state policing of our lives. But there is a clear connection between a climate in which morality and human conduct are under continuous scrutiny, and the imperative towards state control. The PC emphasis on personal conduct and individual behaviour invites regulation. Campaigns which focus on what word or gesture you should or should not use, directly impinge upon individual conduct with the threat of punishment. The main beneficiaries are the moralist, the censor and the policeman. The immediate casualty is individual autonomy. Worse still, this process helps further to consolidate a stifling climate in which people become more afraid to try anything new or different.

### Live dangerously

Fortunately, most human beings still have some self-respect with which to stand up to the demands of the moralists. Precisely because they are young, young people will sometimes live dangerously. They will experiment and not follow the rules. And people in general still know that children are children and adults are adults. Most of the time they also have the capacity to survive and cope without helplines and counsellors. But these positive human instincts, especially the striving for individual freedom, require practical and intellectual support if they are not to be buried beneath the moral avalanche. Confronting the prevailing culture of low expectations is a critical challenge for those committed to the development of the human potential. ●



children from their parents, women from men, children from other children and, ultimately, humanity from itself.

In so far as political correctness has a real existence, it is part of the elitist impulse towards evolving new forms of control. The role of PC is to contribute to the provision of new ideas on regulation and a new vocabulary of domination. Words like empowering, enabling, supporting, respecting are invariably used in the argument for new ways of intervening in people's lives. PC provides a new language with which to express traditional moral themes to do with regulating conduct.

Public intervention in private

might argue that it is easier to give good advice than to provide the jobs and resources that people need. But there are even more insidious aspects to the helpful state.

A variety of devices, from health campaigns to counselling, have become part of the mechanism through which the state is recasting its ability to control society. The new mechanisms of 'support' are actually an encroachment on individual autonomy. In the first instance they represent a method of controlling people's lives. Encouraging people to look for professional advice instead of exercising initiative also helps to breed

If it goes on like this, the police will be wearing corduroys, says James Heartfield

# The victim support state

**T**he speaker attacks those judges who say that a rape victim's evidence should be taken with a pinch of salt, before turning to condemn the scourge of racist attacks. The hall erupts in applause. Is this a speaker at an Anti-Nazi League rally? Or Ken Livingstone talking to the feminist-socialist network? No, it's the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, addressing the most reactionary gathering of the year, the law and order debate at the Conservative Party conference.

Conservative politicians are better known for attacking political correctness, but in recent times the language of PC has been adopted by a variety of state institutions from the police and the Home Office to the Broadcasting Standards Council and the recently created Child Support Agency.

## The progressive tendency

Domestic violence, racial abuse, sexual harassment and queerbashing were once problems taken up by the left, while mainstream politicians at best ignored them or at worst encouraged the sentiments behind them. After all, the judges that so offended Howard with their indulgent attitudes towards sexual offenders are not wet liberals. Judge Ian Starforth-Hill, for example, who excused one assault on a nine-year old on the grounds that the victim was 'no angel', was equally well-known for his support for corporal punishment.

But in recent times the law and order lobby has been sounding decidedly namby-pamby—at least in its press conferences. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon has led the way in creating a PC image for the PCs. Condon's rise to power was accompanied by tales of how his 'progressive tendency' has been trying to clean up the Met's reputation for racism and sexism.

Condon's first speech as commissioner in February 1993, challenged that 'we must be totally intolerant of racially motivated attacks, intolerant of racial abuse...intolerant of

our own colleagues who fail to reach the required standards'. Where once the police force was criticised for ignoring racially motivated crimes, now it insists that they are an important priority.

The commissioner got his opportunity to demonstrate his PC credentials early on with the search for London's serial killer of gay men. Condon went public, courting, and getting, the support of the gay community in the manhunt.

## Business as usual

The courts, too, have been outspoken in condemning racial violence in recent months. The killers of taxi driver Fiaz Mirza were given exemplary sentences—equivalent to those given to terrorists, according to Detective Inspector Steve Hobbs—as a warning to anyone else contemplating racial attacks.

Much of the impetus behind the more liberal-sounding policing initiatives comes direct from the top. In March 1993 the parliamentary select committee for home affairs published a report on domestic violence. Launching the report, Tory MP Ivan Lawrence said that domestic violence would be 'central to police work' from now on. In particular, police 'domestic violence units'—where battered wives are counselled in sympathetic surroundings—were singled out for praise.

The PC language of the police, courts and Home Office has confounded many of the state's radical critics. After all, most of their key demands, whether for the monitoring of racial attacks or for sympathy for the victims of domestic violence, now appear to have been won. But whose success is it that the police and Home Office have adopted the liberal language and concerns of the politically correct?

The PC image sought out by Paul Condon, Michael Howard and Ivan Lawrence is a deliberate attempt to legitimise the granting of greater powers to the state. The police and the courts' new expressions of concern for the victims of racial violence are an

exercise in public relations. For those at the sharp end of policing, however, it's business as usual.

Over the past 25 years more than 80 black people have died in police or prison custody in Britain—and that count shows no sign of abating. For Joy Gardner, who died of asphyxiation following a raid by immigration police on her Crouch End flat in July of this year, the new politically correct policing was no different from the old racist brutality. The PC/PR side of policing only became evident after the killing, in Condon's media-oriented displays of concern over what his men had done to Joy Gardner.

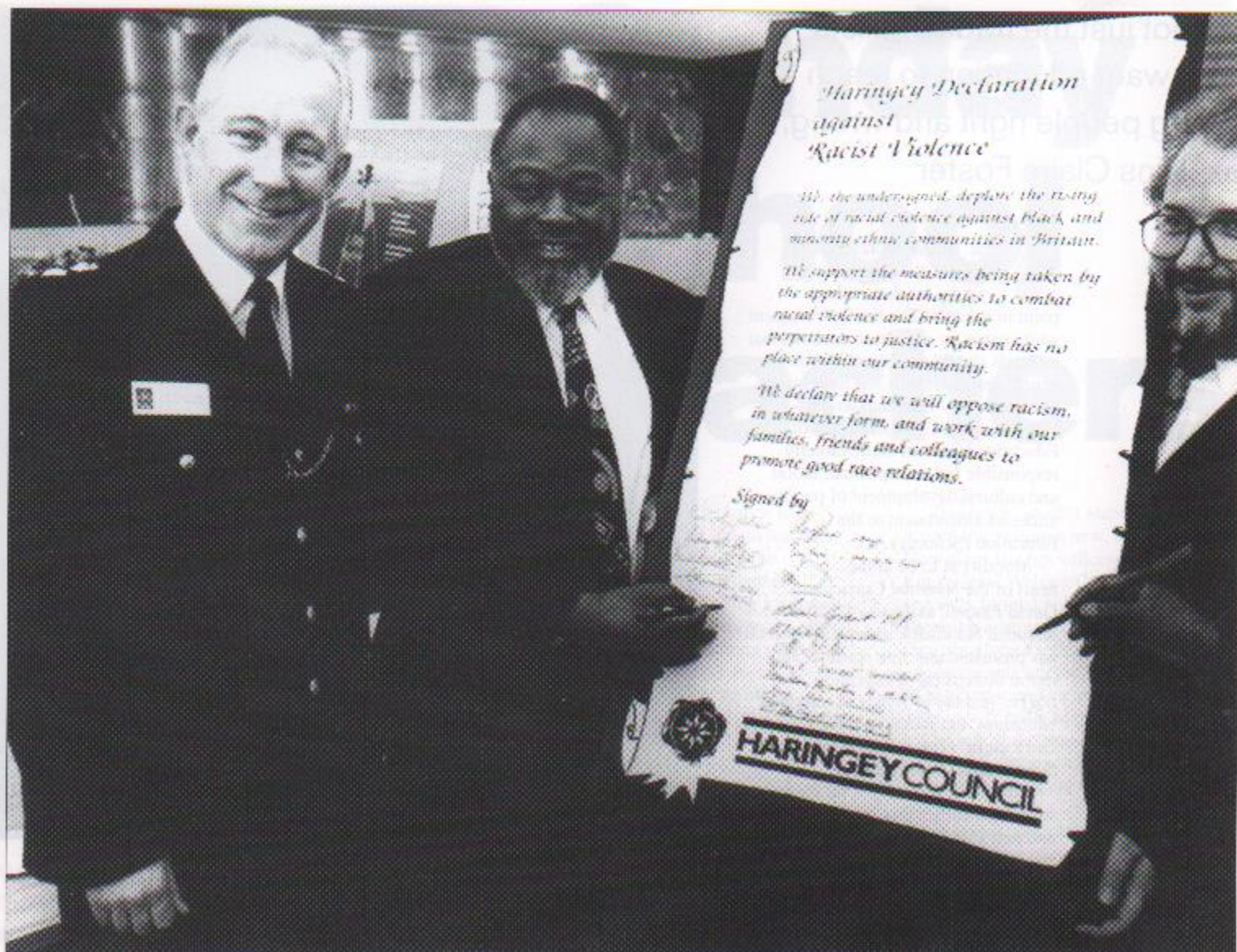
However, the PC image cultivated by the forces of law and order is more than just window dressing. The practical implication of the authorities' recent interest in issues such as racial and domestic violence is to extend state control over people's lives. While seeming to respond to the real problems we face, the authorities get to regulate more and more of the things we do.

## A police matter

For two decades the police have fostered fears of black crime to extend their power over society. Today the same strategy is at work, except that now, alongside the caricature of the black criminal, the stereotypes of the white bigot and the violent husband are being used as the excuse for greater state powers.

Police monitoring of racial violence in the East End of London has led not only to increased surveillance of white gangs in the area, but also of younger Asians. The police in Bethnal Green now register any violence between white and Asian youths as 'racially motivated' as a matter of course. They know that figures showing a rising curve of racial violence will excite more support for firm police action.

The authorities' new-found concern with domestic violence also puts them in a good light, and provides a right-on pretext for making people's



Bernie Grant signs up with the Hornsey police just three months after Joy Gardner was killed around the corner

personal lives police business. Where once the police would have ignored a 'domestic' as a private matter, now they can interfere while being seen to respond to a real need.

To many critics it might appear as if the government has been forced to take their views on board. However, the real reason that the authorities are talking PC is that they are under less pressure from their opponents, not more.

While in the past issues of racial violence or women's oppression invited some degree of independent initiative on the part of the victims, today it is commonplace to hand the initiative over to the state. The first reaction is to call upon the police or the authorities to resolve the problem.

Take the issue of domestic violence. In the seventies feminists organised women's refuges in safe houses, not trusting the police to do the right thing. But the refuge movement's criticisms of police insensitivity to domestic violence have turned into demands that the police do more. Today's police domestic violence unit is an official parody of the now-defunct women's refuge movement. You can't stay

there, but it has some very sympathetic sounding officers to talk you into letting them get involved with your problems.

Opposition to racial violence was once part and parcel of opposition to state attacks. When black groups organised resistance to racist attacks with the slogan 'Self-defence is no offence' it was at least as much a challenge to the racism of the police.

Today, 'self-defence' barely features in the protests against racial violence. Instead the immediate response is to demand to know why the police do not do more—whether to prosecute the attackers or to close down a British National Party centre.

But the police's recent interest in racial attacks does not mean that the problem of racism is addressed more widely. Instead racial violence is reduced to being one more petty crime that is best left to the police to handle—like burglaries or credit card fraud. The idea that there should be any public protests over racism becomes tantamount to interfering in police business.

Far from challenging state authority, political correctness invites the state to

assume responsibility for solving our problems. That is because the language of PC is the language of victims. Instead of making a virtue of organising to deal with problems, political correctness counsels that suffering has a virtue of its own. Under PC, the more oppressed you are the more weight your opinions carry.

The victim mentality celebrated by political correctness fits the growing demand for police action like a glove. If everybody is a victim then the case for more police protection is already made. Where your instinct might be to distrust the state's intrusions, PC makes the state look like one big Victim Support Unit.

The ideas of PC have grown in the absence of any movement through which people can themselves deal with the problems thrown up by society. The more cautious people are about dealing with their own problems, the more they leave them to the authorities to sort out. The PC victim mentality does nothing to challenge the real problems we face, and everything to ensure that the state will have more control over our everyday lives. ●

## It's not just the traditionalists who want education to teach young people right and wrong, explains Claire Foster

**T**he Tories' moral crusade against the rebellious young reaches its high point in schools. The new government white paper on education declares that 'schools should not be value-free zones' and must start teaching pupils two more Rs—right and wrong. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education has been made directly responsible for the 'spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils' under an amendment to the Education (Schools) Act.

Morality is to be at the heart of the National Curriculum. David Pascall, ex-chair of the now renamed National Curriculum Council has promised that 'the spiritual and moral dimension of education' will not be 'just the province of religious education' but must 'pervade the whole curriculum' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 29 May 1992).

Education secretary John Patten suggested earlier this year that heaven and hell should be reintroduced into the curriculum, because 'a dwindling belief in redemption and damnation has led to a loss of the fear of the eternal consequences of goodness and badness...the loss of that fear has meant a critical motive has been lost to young people whether to try to be good citizens or to be criminals' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 24 April 1993).

### DIY morality

One Labour peer, Lord Stallard, recommended the American A-Z of sex approach which includes a chastity pledge and a repeated rap-style mantra, called a sex-respect chant: 'Do the right thing, wait for the ring!' John Patten's latest plan to instil respect is to get the nation's schools to fly to the Union Jack.

Patten's hare-brained schemes might go down well at the Tory Party conference, but they are not practical proposals for educating a generation of Godless youth. Most teachers find the minister's enthusiasm for preaching distasteful, if not laughable.

Despite this, however, the educational establishment is successfully promoting its own stilling moral code in schools. An alliance of teaching professionals and the Department of Education and Science (DES) are concocting their own politically correct morality



with which teachers can more readily identify.

Since Patten's indiscreet reference to the hell fires of damnation, DES spokesmen have been keen to stress that they do not want to impose a rigidly Christian value system in schools; rather, any value system will do. David Pascall, the main architect of this new approach, laid down the broad boundaries, expecting schools 'to have and communicate a clear vision of the moral values which [they] and society hold to be important.'

Teachers have been given a free rein to find the most suitable ways of popularising a moral framework. The government has gone so far as to suggest that pupils should 'develop their own value system'—a sort of DIY morality. The emphasis is on encouraging young people to make responsible decisions and to distinguish between right and wrong—in practice, to obey the rules, avoid offending others, cooperate with those in authority, and conform.

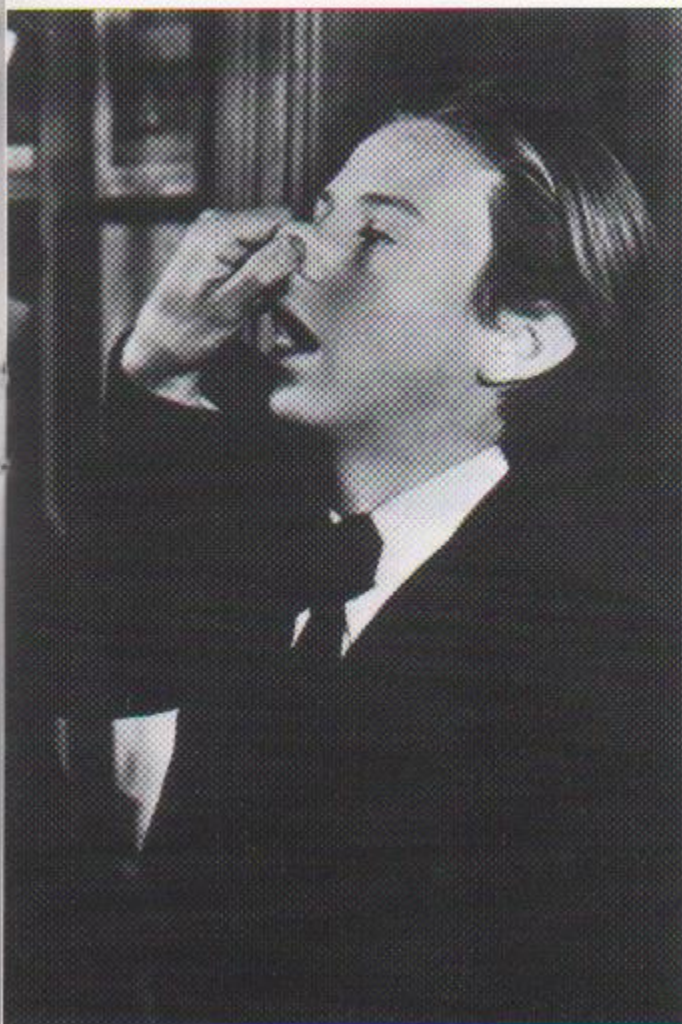
Whether the 10 school rules pinned on noticeboards declare that profane language is wrong because it is sexist, or because God declares it a sin, the effect is the same. DES suggested topics for discussion include fox-hunting, the rainforest and homelessness, issues not usually

associated with old-fashioned morality or for that matter Tory politicians. They are the terrain of trendy teachers. But that is the beauty of them for the authorities today.

'Kids who care' about the poor in cardboard city are being taught a sort of modern-day paternalism. While Christian kids of the past sent pennies over to Africa to save the souls of little black babies, today's teachers get their pupils to organise a benefit for Somalia as part of their non-Eurocentric geography lesson.

The educational establishment is stealing the language of political correctness to ensure that a firm moral code is established. Taking the rhetoric of the old Liberal Studies courses, the core curriculum in schools today includes Pastoral and Social Education. Whole lessons are dedicated to such themes as truthfulness, keeping promises and 'being fair'. Social problems are reduced to questions of individual moral conscience. Teachers are asked to pose life's problems as a series of moral conundrums.

Lessons often take on the tone of the game 'Consequences'. Students are encouraged to develop the right 'attitudes' in their 'Social and Life Skills' classes. 'Exploring ageism', replaces the old-fashioned instruction to respect your elders. Being taught to



# Sunday school teachers

Would Tom Brown's schooldays have been improved by a bullying therapist?

hold the door open for ladies might be old hat, but the new codes of politeness are equally restrictive. Teachers' checklists for class discussions include 'appropriate tone of voice' (don't shout) and 'suitable body language' (don't touch).

When John Patten and the DES first raised the question of teaching morals, many school staff insisted the new role of 'preacher not teacher' was unacceptable. The National Union of Teachers opposed using schools 'as a vehicle for re-establishing a nineteenth-century ideal of morality' (*Government White Paper, a Commentary by the NUT, September 1992*). But when values that are more liberal-sounding, though just as normative, were proposed, the teachers' opposition subsided.

Religious education is an example. John Patten's demand that Christianity be at the core of the syllabus had little impact on the classroom. More successful was a DES-endorsed series of radio programmes where worship is defined, not as a C of E service but 'an elemental experience, a growing sense of awe, a search for an understanding of ourselves and an interaction between ourselves and the world around us' (*TES Update, September 1992*). Instead of 'Let us pray' we have 'Now

a time for stillness, a chance to think a while'—and liberal teachers everywhere feel comfortable.

The teachers' endorsement of PC morality is allowing a more authoritarian atmosphere to develop by the back door. Teaching right and wrong the PC way is just as sanctimonious as the big stick approach. Take two old educational chestnuts, truancy and bullying. Repackaged in the language of empowerment they have both become accepted ways of educating children to live in the sort of repressive climate they will find outside school today.

There is a new obsession with bullying. This year's British Psychological Society Annual Conference was devoted to the topic and concluded that 'bullying is endemic...and leads to personality disorders and even suicide'. You would think that there had never been any bullying in schools before.

Children are no more or less horrid to each other than they used to be. But bullying is proving a useful issue through which to teach what's right and wrong, and all in the name of children's rights. Local education authorities argue that 'in order to tackle bullying, schools must empower pupils through assertiveness training and give them a "constitutional voice"' (*Education Guardian, 19 May 1992*).

Now the DES is encouraging schools everywhere to install bully therapists, and pupil-run 'bully-lines', like the Samaritans. School assemblies are used as 'anti-bullying workshops'. Bullying has even been categorised as a type of child abuse. Pupils are encouraged to name perpetrators in school councils, to identify 'the baddies', to develop school codes of practice. This is no more than training youngsters in the virtues of snitching. Young people are being enlisted to police their peers—and even to police themselves.

Truancy is another standard part of school life getting a new, PC treatment. Nowadays truancy officers are called Educational Welfare Officers, and specially trained police officers patrol shopping centres. If pupils are caught they are given a talk on the value of education and warned of the dangers of hanging round shopping centres. This user-friendly approach may sound innocuous enough, but it masks some more dangerous developments.

Schools are being used to get young people used to the ID card/surveillance camera/electronic tagging culture of nineties Britain. The recent introduction of electronic registration in some schools shows how. Pilot schemes for these new surveillance techniques are presented as being in young people's interests, persuading them to 'take responsibility and prepare for adult life by being in the right place at the right time'.

## Reform school

At a school in Southampton pupils pass swish plastic cards through electronic readers inside the classrooms, and within 30 seconds the doors are shut and the place is quiet. At 11am the receptionist presses a computer switchboard button and has an instant list of missing pupils. 'I know immediately anyone who hasn't swiped. They have to swipe seven times a day at the start of each lesson.' (*Times Educational Supplement, 5 February 1993*) Parents of missing boys are phoned before lunch.

Most teachers would recoil in horror from the image of the fuddy duddy RE teacher giving a sermon on the vices of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. But by buying into the PC morality now popular, they are helping to ensure that the dominant outlook in the modern classroom is as regimented and repressive as it was in old-fashioned reform schools.



Should we talk about 'disability' or 'mentally handicapped' or

Michael Fitzpatrick thinks that's the real meaning of oppression

# Harassment or oppression

**R**emember Tommy, 'the deaf, dumb and blind kid' who 'sure plays a mean pinball' in The Who's late sixties rock opera? In any 1990s revival Tommy would have to give way to Tom, 'a young person without hearing or speech, who is also visually impaired and exhibits challenging behaviour'.

From the perspective of the individualistic conception of disability which was dominant in the 1960s and retains considerable influence today, Tommy's disabilities were a personal tragedy. Multiple impairments of sensory perception imposed restrictions on the scope of his activities and participation in society, leaving him disadvantaged by comparison with able-bodied people. Though his exceptional talents in one sphere enabled him, like the disabled Cambridge physicist, Stephen Hawking, to transcend his handicaps to some degree, both remain largely prisoners of their anatomical, physiological and psychological impairments.

Strongly influenced by the radical critique of the 'individual' model of disability which emerged in the 1970s, Tom looks at things differently. From the perspective of the 'social' model of disability, he believes that the origin of the problem lies not in the dysfunction of the individual, but in a society that is not organised according to the needs of people with disabilities.

This is how the Union of the Physically Impaired against



abled people' or 'people with disabilities'? Is it correct to say  
 or 'people with learning difficulties'?

the whole discussion obscures both the problems facing the disabled,  
 oppression

# Handicapped Oppressed?

Segregation sought to redefine  
 the problem in 1976:

'Disability: the disadvantage  
 or restriction of activity caused  
 by a contemporary social organisation  
 which takes no or little account of  
 people who have physical impairments  
 and thus excludes them from  
 participation in the mainstream  
 of social activities. Physical disability  
 is therefore a particular form of  
 social oppression.'

Tom is an active member of one of  
 a number of organisations of people  
 with disabilities which federated to  
 the British Council of Organisations  
 of Disabled People (BCODP), launched  
 in 1981. Over the past decade these  
 groupings have become established  
 as a 'new social movement',  
 challenging the 'social oppression'  
 of disability through propaganda,  
 lobbying and direct action.

In addition to the traditional  
 demand of disability organisations  
 for more resources, the new movement  
 demands 'anti-discriminatory  
 legislation' to tackle their  
 'social oppression'. It also  
 emphasises the importance  
 of 'challenging the language'  
 used to refer to the disabled,  
 arguing that terms such as 'care',  
 'need' and 'protection' create  
 and increase dependency.

The controversy over  
 terms continues. In the seventies  
 and eighties, activists rejected the

practice of labelling people in terms  
 of their disabilities—as 'disabled',  
 'diabetic' or 'epileptic'—in favour  
 of less stigmatising terms such as  
 'people with disabilities, people with  
 diabetes, etc'. However, more radical  
 activists now favour the term  
 'disabled', in the sense of 'disabled  
 by society' rather than 'disabled by  
 some impairment'.

A striking feature of the  
 radical critique is the way in which  
 it has been taken up, first by academics  
 and social work authorities, and later by  
 the government itself. According to  
 Michael Oliver, Britain's first professor  
 of disability studies, the 'social model'  
 became increasingly influential during  
 the 1980s (M Oliver, 'The social  
 model of disability: current reflections',  
 in P Carter, T Jeffs and M Smith, *Social  
 Work and Social Welfare Year Book  
 1989*). In 1986 it was adopted by the  
 British Association of Social Workers,  
 following a joint study day with  
 BCODP. In 1988 it was endorsed  
 by a government report on  
 visual impairment.

As a response to the individualistic  
 focus of traditional perceptions of the  
 problems of disability, the 'social  
 model' offers some insights. Pointing  
 out that the level of handicap resulting  
 from particular physical impairments  
 differs in different historical  
 circumstances, it emphasises  
 the important role of social factors  
 in the construction of disability.  
 Disability activists and self-help  
 groups articulate the anger and

resentment of many disabled  
 people over the hostile or patronising  
 responses of the authorities and many  
 able-bodied people. Yet the redefinition  
 of disability as a problem of social  
 oppression, though an apparently  
 radical gesture, in fact creates  
 more problems than it resolves.

The first problem is that, by  
 emphasising the responsibility of  
 society as a whole for the problems  
 of the disabled, the social model plays  
 down the difficulties that arise from  
 specific forms of impairment.  
 Despite all modern advances in  
 scientific and medical technology,  
 and despite all conceivable  
 improvements in social provision  
 for people with disabilities, many  
 will remain incapable of participating  
 in society on anything approaching  
 equal terms with able-bodied people.

For example, somebody who lacks  
 the capacity to hear, speak and see  
 may derive considerable benefit from  
 various techniques for enhancing  
 sensory perception or compensating  
 for its lack. Yet anybody who retains  
 substantial deficits in these areas will  
 inevitably face serious handicaps in  
 comparison to people whose sensory  
 faculties are not impaired. In a society  
 in which mental labour and information  
 technology play an increasing role,  
 these difficulties are likely to be even  
 greater. What is required is appropriate  
 provision for the special needs of  
 individuals who suffer such  
 impairments, not anti-discriminatory  
 legislation. ►

(Left)  
 A wheelchair  
 protester is  
 arrested in  
 London's  
 Oxford Street



For another example, take the plight of the 500 000 or so people in Britain who use wheelchairs. For some disability activists the source of the problems of wheelchair users is the fact that society is not organised to allow access. No doubt much more could be done to open up public transport and public facilities

### Designating the disabled as 'oppressed' makes a parody of equality

to people in wheelchairs. But to expect any society to offer universal access to wheelchairs—in other words, to make its public arrangements on the presumption that everybody uses a wheelchair—is not just unrealistic, it is absurd.

In a society in which the vast majority enjoy the capacity to walk on two legs, the loss of that capacity must inevitably act as a constraint on activity and social experience. Measures can and should be taken to minimise this constraint, but some residual handicap—resulting not from social arrangement, but from the impairment itself—is inescapable.

#### 'Blame society'

The slogan 'society is to blame' has a radical ring, but in the case of disability it can have dangerous consequences. One is the trend for treating people with disabilities as though they do not have special needs, while promoting campaigns to change wider social attitudes and arrangements. This approach led some activists to reject the practice of teaching sign-language to children with impaired hearing and speech, on the grounds that it was stigmatising (a stand now largely abandoned). While the campaign for access for wheelchair users to London tube stations and buses attracts considerable public attention, the fact that many wheelchair users are confined to their homes because of the government's refusal to pay for outdoor electric wheelchairs does not (see Muscular Dystrophy Group, *Batteries not Included*, October 1993).

The tendency to downplay the significance of particular impairments is also evident in the shift of people with mental handicaps from institutions into 'the community'. The notion that such individuals have been

handicapped by society helps to justify moving them into hostels where they have to fend for themselves. They are freed from the coercive label of 'mental handicap' and the government is freed from the expense of caring for them. Under the progressive label of 'people with learning difficulties', many suffer greatly under the burden of responsibilities with which they cannot cope, often in impoverished circumstances.

#### Changing labels

Disability activists put great emphasis on changing the language with which society describes the disabled. Yet this preoccupation with language trivialises the problems facing people with disabilities. No doubt many of the terms used in relation to the disabled—'deaf', 'dumb', 'blind', 'spastic', 'cripple', 'mongol'—are widely used as pejorative figures of speech and have a stigmatising connotation. If such terms cause offence then it is fair enough to use others that are more acceptable. But it is a different matter when the formulation of obscure circumlocutions such as 'people with learning difficulties' (instead of the familiar and innocuous 'mentally handicapped') assumes the status of a major strategic intervention for the disability movement.

The implication behind such terminological controversies is that there is some advantage to the disabled in changing labels. In reality changing the labels changes nothing: it is of course easier and cheaper for the authorities than providing the disabled with the resources and facilities they need to improve the quality of their lives. It is to be suspected that these linguistic games enjoy more enthusiastic support among academics and social workers in the disability field than they do among the disabled themselves.

#### Democracy

The second, and even more serious, problem with the 'social model' of disability is the way in which it confuses and degrades the concept of oppression. Oppression means the denial of democratic rights to one section of society by another. It is usually instigated by the ruling class and enforced by the state, through which a particular set of prejudices acquires institutional form and often legal expression. For example, women, black and Irish people, and homosexuals all experience oppression in Britain today. The underlying assumption of this concept of oppression is the equality of all individuals in society. Equal rights are formally recognised, but deliberately denied to specific groups

by those with the power to oppress. Oppression in this sense could not exist in pre-capitalist societies based on slavery or feudalism, in which most people were neither free nor equal.

Designating the disabled as 'oppressed' makes a parody of equality. It implies, for example, that somebody who is mentally handicapped has an equal capacity to participate in the economic and political life of society as somebody who is able-bodied. Or, to put it another way, it means that the potential contribution to society of the conscious individual is no greater than that of somebody who is incapable of rational reflection and activity.

The rhetorical elevation of the disabled means the practical relegation of the able in mind and body to the role of passive bystanders incapable of conscious intervention in society. While patronising the disabled, it degrades the able. The democracy of the capable opens up the possibility of raising the awareness of society of the potential for its transformation through collective activity; the notion of the equality of the conscious and the incapable negates that possibility.

#### State control

Where and how can a line be drawn between those able to participate in a democracy and those not? This is a distinction that emerges in the course of political events; it cannot be made on sociological grounds. However, the difficulty of making a precise distinction in advance does not alter the fact that there are two more or less distinct categories—a large majority of able people, and a minority of the disabled. The very heterogeneity of this category, with level of impairment by far the most important variable, underlines the absurdity of the concept of social oppression for the disabled. The absence of any pervasive discrimination or prejudice in society also differentiates the disabled from politically oppressed groups.

In conclusion, it is well worth noting a third danger of the 'social model' of disability: while talking in terms of citizenship, empowerment and rights, in practice it invites a more authoritarian state to play a greater role in regulating the behaviour of the disabled and society in general. We have already noted the way in which the 'social model' of disability has been assimilated by social work authorities and government bodies. The government is happy to promote charters on anti-discriminatory practice and non-disablist language. This allows it to dodge responsibility for providing resources for the disabled—and to get away with treating everybody as though they were people with learning difficulties, or as we used to say, 'feeble-minded'.

# The illusion of empowerment

These days everybody is getting empowered. Commuters are empowered by British Rail's charter, the jobless are empowered by the Employment Service Charter and children are empowered by the Child Support Agency. When you come across a new term you try to find out what it means. At first I didn't have much luck with 'empowerment'. A basic reference system in the library gave me 57 citations and almost as many varieties of meaning.

American radical Seth Kreiberg says that empowerment is the 'processes through which people develop control over their lives and the skills and dispositions necessary to be critical and effective participants in our society'. In his book *Transforming Power Domination: Empowerment and Education*, he 'seeks to name and understand the power that empowers and thereby uncover the nature of "transforming power"' (pxxi).

Well, it is clear that he thinks 'empowerment' is a good thing. But so too does H Thomas Johnson. In his book *From Top-Down Control to Bottom-Up Empowerment*, Johnson explains that by empowering the workforce and giving employees more responsibility, the cutting edge business concern can best satisfy the specific customer needs of the postmodern nineties. If this isn't clear enough his sixth chapter is entitled 'Becoming flexible by empowering workers to remove constraints'.

You might suspect that an idea that encompasses personal development, industrial relations and marketing was so broad as to be meaningless. But the fact that 'empowerment' can mean all things to all men is the source of its appeal. It needs to be demystified. At least one thing is clear from the two citations above: the concepts of empowerment expressed are incompatible.

On the one hand, Kreiberg imagines a radical reorganisation of the school in favour of students. On the other hand, Johnson looks forward to the intensification of work in the interest of capitalist profit—the real meaning of 'flexibility' and 'removing constraints' in the workplace. Who has got it right?

In capitalist society the power of the ruling class over the working class derives from the ownership of the means of production as capital. In the sphere of politics, the rule of capital is upheld by the power of the state. Those of us—the majority—who do not own capital and do not have access to direct the coercive power of the state are powerless as individuals.

The rhetoric of empowerment—the notion that the granting of individual choice by the authorities can facilitate control over your life—only serves to obscure the powerlessness of the vast majority of individuals in capitalist society.

Worse than just covering up for our powerlessness under capitalism, the jargon of empowerment helps to legitimise the authority of those who are really in charge. The proponents of empowerment put in place a framework through which the exploited are invited to negotiate the terms of their powerlessness.

For example, empowerment is very fashionable in the policy departments of Labour councils. It is easy enough to see why. Local authorities are cutting services while pushing the workforce harder and holding down pay, but don't want to take the responsibility for this. 'Empowering' the worker and the consumer is in practice a way of making the workforce shoulder the burden and responsibility for cuts in the name of an illusory consumer choice.

Wendy Thomson describes the process of empowerment in Islington council's cleansing department:

'Within the parameters of legislation, council policy and finance, residents could express some choice. For example, they said they wanted the refuse collected from the front door rather than from the kerbside.' ('Realising rights through local service contracts', in A Coope (ed), *The Welfare of Citizens: Developing New Social Rights*, p135)

The newly empowered people of Islington have no control over the cuts in funding or 'legal parameters' (privatisation) that are degrading their services, but they do have a right to choose between the front door or the kerb. The real shift, however, is in the status of the binmen. Their service contract seems to make them equal partners in the venture. But what has changed is that it is now the binmen, not the council, who are responsible for the service. Now everything that goes wrong is their fault, and they can be held to account by irate, empowered householders.

Empowerment makes the failures in service delivery a stick with which to beat the workforce. The only people who are really empowered by the name-tags which council staff have to wear when they serve you on the counter are the employers. It is they who get away with blaming everything that goes wrong on the staff, and push them all the harder as a result.

The language of empowerment worked out in Labour's smoke-free committee rooms has been taken up by the government in its citizens' charters. The chairman of the Audit Commission, David Cooksey, who is responsible for providing performance indicators for the charters comments that 'once citizens have clear information about the quality and cost of each service, they will be able to judge whether the council is giving real value for money'. The government passes the responsibility for rundown services on to the council, the council in turn passes it on to the workforce—and all in the name of empowerment.

The idea of individual empowerment obscures the real relations of power between social classes under capitalism. There is a pressing need to overcome the designation of humanity as so many isolated consumers, whose sole power is the empty threat to take their custom elsewhere. Those who truly want to find the power to 'develop control over their lives' will need to find ways to unite in collective action to wrest the rights and resources they need from the powers that be.

I've not got the power,  
says Alan Harding



## Let's stand up for standard English, pronounces John Fitzpatrick

**M**arking an undergraduate's essay recently, I found myself, not unusually, struggling with the spelling mistakes. This time, I underlined each error as I went past, before addressing the main points of the work in a note at the end.

I handed the essay back to the student. 'What's this?', he said, peering suspiciously at the underlined words. 'Those are spelling mistakes', I ventured mildly. 'What's wrong with you?', he replied with an air of outraged incredulity. 'Are you some sort of spelling fascist?'

It is true, I have always had a thing about spelling and words. The first formal joke which I ever heard was 'Mississippi is a very long word, how do you spell it?'. There were a number of lessons there, not least how close attention to syntax can help you avoid appearing a complete berk.

### Macho trip

I learned that there were certain advantages in being able to rattle out 'Do you mean *M-i-double s-i-double s-i-double p-i* or *i-t*, you complete berk?', before even Paddy Clarke could have said 'Ha, Ha, Ha'. Later, I got further pleasure from pointing out the etymology of berk; it comes from the rhyming slang Berkeley Hunt.

Competence in the dominant or official language of your society is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition of your access to that society, including all the parts of it which you might want to reach. A conscious and precise grasp of how you use language is also an inextricable part of a conscious and precise grasp of the world in which you live.

And that is a handy thing to have, even in the minor matter of starting a sentence with a conjunction. You can relax in the knowledge that as you have just clearly connected with a thought from the preceding sentence, you can ignore the rule which normally precludes starting sentences with conjunctions.

Now, you do not have to be Jurgen Habermas to work all this out, so why is it necessary to restate it?

Because spelling correctness is not political correctness; because speaking up for standard English is now denounced as disingenuous those who can't or won't speak or write it.

Give me a break. Just because the Tories pompously lament the fact that enough people can't spell or write standard English, doesn't mean that we should rejoice in the fact. The Tories blame the sixties. We should blame the Tories and Labour. We certainly shouldn't be saying that it doesn't matter anyway.

There is more than one PC argument against the idea that there is a correct way of speaking and writing. First, they say that suggesting such a thing involves pointing out that others are doing it incorrectly. This is being judgemental, and that, apparently, is being arrogant. Secondly, they say that criticising poor English is a form of cultural imperialism because it marginalises and undervalues other accents, dialects, languages and cultures. All in all, standard English is a macho, racist and generally heavy trip to lay on somebody who simply wants to get on with their own equally valid thing.

Defending standard English is about defending the quality of the only common language that we have to hand. This language is most effective if its rules are mastered and observed. To risk ignoring being misunderstood. Language is conventional; the conventions must be observed for it to work. The only reason we know that mat refers to what you stand on, and hat to what you put on your head, is because we have agreed on the spelling. It follows that we must aspire to keep the rules and criticise those who break them.

Mis-spelling can be such a pain. It slows down and distracts the reader even when there is no real chance of

confusion. Just think of all those *Grauniad* readers who are diverted daily from the news. Some of the more common mis-spellings are very confusing; slips between disinterested/uninterested, advert/avert, accept/except, principal/principle, quiet/quite can cause a right mess (\* 'an intensifying word in derogatory and ironical contexts', *Oxford English Dictionary*, sense III, 17, e).

This does not mean that we have to defend all the fusty old formalisms and rules. Some are important, others are not. It is all about knowing what you are doing and how that relates to the established norms. Ignorance and laziness are the main enemies here.

### Bend the rules

So, if you want to shamelessly split your infinitive, I say go ahead; it is not a useful rule. On the other hand, using semi-colons only to separate two complete thoughts (or to separate items in a series) is useful, as it assists concentration on the separate matters. You can use either standard, colloquial or slang words as you think fit. One expert explains that 'standard man is colloquial *chap* and slang *bloke*'. That may not be very helpful, but bearing in mind the possibility of such gradations might help you to pick your words for the occasion.

You can indulge in poetic licence, or throw neologisms around, or experiment with the punctuation. If you are Roddy Doyle you can even fill your novels with lines like '--Me bollix, said Jimmy Sr. --How does he tell tha' they're messers?' Context, and control, is all. I suspect that the general rule is that the better you know the rules the better you can bend them.

There is no need to defend a narrow or prescriptive version of what constitutes standard English. One author distinguishes Pure or Received Standard or Public School English from Modified Standard, the 'vulgar English of the Towns'. We can take a broader view. We do, however, have to accept that the established language of our culture was established, like all the main features of the culture, by those who have had the power to do so. As you might expect, their prints are all over it.

# Spelling

We accept standard English because we want to use it; and we do use it. It was not, after all, those who established standard English who used it to say 'Working men of all countries, unite!'. The point is, of course, that in defending a common language we are indeed defending the possibility of uniting people. Our priority is bringing people together, not keeping them apart. A common language is essential for that purpose. (Incidentally, it took over two (wasted) years from its first publication for Marx's *Manifesto* to appear in (standard) English).

Why is there such reluctance to defend the established norms which enable us to communicate with each

other? This clearly derives in part from the relativist suspicion of objective or universal standards, and from an attachment to the importance and authenticity of difference. We're in the old postmodern soup here, and I don't think anybody wants any more of that.

I suspect it also derives partly from the associated idea that language is a power in its own right. They say chairman, that keeps men on top; I say chairperson, that helps knock them off. In this account, the unravelling of standard English would amount to the unravelling of the ruling elite.

My wordprocessing program's good writing guide (my PC pc) tells me that 'the word "frump" has no place in non-fiction writing'. If we stop using

it will men stop regarding some women as 'cross, old-fashioned and dowdily dressed'? I don't think so. If we fight to end the subordinate position of women in society, then they might. We can only conduct that fight by talking to each other not about how we talk to each other, but about what we should do.

There is another consideration. Those people in this country who are least literate in standard English, including the ill-educated and the immigrant, are likely to suffer directly on that account. It implies no disrespect to their ability or to their culture to encourage them to master standard English, as quickly as possible. To celebrate their difference in this context is to celebrate their vulnerability and their isolation.

Similar dangers exist in respect of the dialect or patois speech among young black people in Britain and parts of the United States. For the most part, its users are neither ill-educated nor immigrant, but they are under racist seige. They have adopted a distinctive vocabulary, pronunciation and phrasing which is often championed by woolly multiculturalists, impressed as they are with its use in reggae and ragga.

#### Parochial culture

It is easy to see the comfort and internal solidarity that such a dialect can offer, particularly to a constituency under such pressure. However, those who advocate the communal 'appropriacy' of such dialects ignore two problems. They could undermine the users' competence in standard English. And they could also promote a limited, parochial and introverted culture, compounding, rather than relieving, isolation.

The stronger regional dialects of Britain's urban and rural past were no doubt equally colourful. Should we promote their revival? Somebody probably has a grant right now from English Heritage. Isn't it obvious that we would be better off encouraging everybody to speak the same language, and to make that language as rich and accurate and revolutionary as possible? ●



# fashism

Privatisation is supposed to be about free enterprise and 'rolling back the state'. In fact, argues Phil Murphy, it is about the state bankrolling British capitalists

# Another government handout

**L**aunched in Britain under Thatcher, privatisation has been adopted by governments and international institutions around the world. It has now acquired the status of a magic word, widely promoted as the answer to everything from the Western recession to stagnation in the third world and chaos in Eastern Europe.

Although today's awkward proposals for privatising British Rail and the prisons are widely criticised, privatisation is still widely regarded as the success story of the Tories' free market crusade over the past 14 years. The image of the state being 'rolled back' so as to free the entrepreneurial spirit has made privatisation synonymous with the triumph of capitalism in the 1980s.

Yet the reality has been the reverse of the official story. Far from retreating, the state has extended its involvement in just about every sector of the economy. While the Tories and their think-tanks, like the Adam Smith Institute, have fired rhetorical broadsides against state intervention, in practice British capitalism has become ever more dependent on state support. This is the real dependency culture of the modern age.

## Not socialist

State intervention is not new; in Britain the state has become more and more important for sustaining economic activity over the past 100 years. The unrestricted free market system started to run out of steam around the middle of the last century. And where the private sector was failing, the public sector moved in. With the enormous resources of taxation and government borrowing capacity to back it up, the state could engage in, or promote, or subsidise

economic activity which the barrier of poor profitability made impossible for the private capitalist alone.

It was not socialist politics or Keynesian ideology which drove the growth of state intervention. The state expanded, not just in Britain, but across the capitalist world, under governments of all types of political complexion, for one common reason: the failings of the free market necessitated it.

The Tories could never turn back the clock of history. Despite what they say, it isn't state intervention which has stunted the free market. It is the failures of the market which have forced the state continually to extend its economic role.

Privatisation has led, not to freer competition, but to the creation of new forms of monopoly with different owners. Take British Airways: shortly after privatisation it gobbled up its only significant domestic competitor, British Caledonian. The token proposals for breaking up British Gas announced by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission confirm again that liberalisation isn't on for the ex-nationalised industries.

If state intervention is vital to the success of the most economically dynamic region of the world—east Asia—how much more necessary is it for decrepid old British industry in the depths of a depression? There is no alternative but for the state to play an ever-expanding role in economic life today.

What privatisation really represents is the new form of state support for capitalism. It is a reworking of the role previously played by its ideological opposite—nationalisation. In Britain, nationalisation was quite widely implemented. In other countries nationalisation is rare; but that

only means that the state has found other ways to intervene to sustain economic activity.

In America, home of the free market, the state has supported the economy via government regulation and the fixing of entry, price and profit requirements in particular sectors. In addition, for the past half century, the US government has continually handed industry huge hidden subsidies in the shape of lucrative defence contracts. In dynamic Japan, the state bureaucracy has intervened through the powerful Ministry of International Trade and Industry. MITI directs the operations of Japanese industry, determining which areas to restructure, which to allow to fall away and which to prioritise at any one time.

## Detailed scrutiny

Privatisation is not a reversal of British state intervention; it has simply altered the form of state assistance. Even in the boom times of 1953, when the Tories denationalised the steel industry, they couldn't really pull the state out of the sector. Recognising that the industry wouldn't survive if left to its own devices, the Tories had to set up the Iron and Steel Board to control investment and prices in the newly denationalised industry.

During the era of widespread nationalisation, from the forties to the eighties, there were frequent attempts to cut the state handouts to nationalised industries. Government white papers of 1961 (Tory), 1967 and 1978 (both Labour) all emphasised the need to give greater emphasis to commercial considerations and simulate market conditions in the public sector. But, as a classic study of privatisation was to note, contrary to the intentions of these white papers, 'detailed scrutiny by government of day-to-day activities of nationalised industries has tended to increase rather than diminish, and their autonomy in investment and planning decisions, and in industrial relations, has been steadily eroded' (J Kay and D Thompson, 'Privatisation: a policy in search of a rationalisation', in *Economic Journal*, No96 March 1986). Despite all attempts to set industry free, the trend has been towards greater state intervention and regulation.

This trend has continued even under the privatisation programme. Behind the motives advanced by the Tories for the policy, privatisation has throughout been a mechanism for extending state aid to industry by handing over valuable assets or ▶

(Right) When they got around to selling BR, privatisation had run out of steam





contracts to business at knockdown prices. Take the example of British Aerospace (BAe).

There is no doubt that BAe is a struggling British company. Earlier this year it announced Britain's largest ever corporate loss, at over £1.2 billion for the previous financial year. Tens of

British Aircraft Corporation, Hawker Siddeley Aviation and Scottish Aviation were brought together to form British Aerospace.

This was a classic instance of capitalist nationalisation; the state assuming financial responsibility for an industry which was seen as vital for Britain's productive and defence capabilities, but which could not survive in the private sector. Without this state-directed centralisation of the industry, few of those capabilities would have survived for long. Over the 16 years that followed, whether nationalised or privatised, more and more state money has been poured into the aerospace industry.

Soon after the Tories returned to office they passed the British Aerospace Act of 1980, paving the way for the company to be handed back to the private sector.

The precondition for this being possible, however, was not a change in the law. It was the changes which the state had imposed on the centralised industry during the years of public ownership. Under state guidance, British Aerospace had engaged in potentially lucrative collaborative ventures with other large European companies, in both the civil and military aerospace fields. Around £110m of state funds had been injected into the corporation; and, in addition, the government had taken

responsibility for writing off the launch costs of various new civil projects which would begin to come on stream in the 1980s—to the advantage of the new private sector owners.

To implement the privatisation plan, the government sold off around half of its BAe shares to private investors in early 1981. Two-thirds of the money raised—about £100m—was handed over to the management of the new private company. Four years later, the remaining government share-holding was sold off. During this initial phase of privatisation, private financiers profited from the changes which had been financed during state ownership.

But more government help was to come. For a start, the company continued to benefit from generous military contracts which made up about two-fifths of BAe's total sales at the start of the nineties. Export sales were also boosted both by state credit guarantees and by the direct promotional efforts of government ministers, especially in the Middle East. Over the past 14 years both Margaret Thatcher and John Major have personally acted as salesmen, knocking on palace doors in Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich states in an effort to secure billions of pounds worth of orders for BAe.

Other privatisation measures served to provide a sort of state slush fund for the owners of BAe. In 1986 the

## Whether nationalised or privatised, more and more state money has been poured in

thousands of jobs have gone in the past few years of cost-cutting. At present the company is desperate to clinch a joint venture with the Taiwanese, just to help balance the books at home. So BAe is hardly a success story. Yet without government support Britain's aerospace industry would have disappeared years ago. Both through the periods when the industry was nationalised and when it has been in the private sector, only state aid has kept it in the air.

The nationalisation period proper lasted only a few years. With the aerospace industry struggling to retain international competitiveness, especially against US giant Boeing, the Labour government nationalised it in 1977. Under state direction the

PHOTO: SIMON NOIRFOLK

# Why they privatise

**G**iven how closely privatisation is now associated with the Thatcherite 'new right' which rose to prominence from the late seventies, it seems strange to recall that the term wasn't even mentioned in the 1979 Tory manifesto, and that privatisation policies were not a major issue in the 1983 election either.

At its inception, privatisation was not a principle of Thatcherite philosophy, fought for as an article of free market faith. It was a pragmatic notion which the Tories stumbled across almost by accident when they were desperately short of ideas and policies.

Privatisation emerged gradually as a generic label to cover a variety of government practices, including council house sales, contracting out public services to the private sector, and selling off government assets and shares. It only became a major policy theme as late as the lead up to the 1987 general election. As a study of privatisation, commissioned by the financial consultants Price Waterhouse, commented, 'there was certainly no long-term master plan at the outset...it evolved haphazardly'.

The objectives claimed for privatisation have also changed a lot over the years, depending upon the Tories' particular problems. But none of the functions which privatisation has served has had anything to do with the real promotion of free competition.



government sold Royal Ordnance to BAe for £190m, giving BAe a host of government missile and munitions contracts as well as acres of valuable land at a knockdown price. As a result, BAe asset strippers made a huge killing from selling

## Privatisation could not revitalise the industrial heartlands of British capitalism

off land estimated to have a market price of over £500m.

The government's largesse didn't end there. A year later BAe was offered a further near-freebie with the sale of another government asset, the Rover Group of car plants. Not only did BAe get Rover at the bargain price of £150m, but it also benefited from a £547m government cash injection and a further £44m in secret sweeteners (which later had to be repaid as they fell foul of European rules). Even the semi-government body, the National Audit Commission, criticised the £150m price as 'substantially' too low. Given that the Rover deal included among the titbits an estimated £43m in property and a 40 per cent stake in the DAF lorry group (of which BAe

sold off half for £90m in 1989), this seems an understatement.

Despite all these government handouts, including yet more state subsidies for its part in the European Airbus project (about £700m in launch aid during the 1980s), BAe is still unable to stand on its own feet in world markets. At present it is having to reorganise its operations again, to protect its ability to pay its shareholders dividends which had been threatened by operating losses in several of its subsidiaries. The company's rationalisation measures have included cutting over a quarter of its workforce—45 000 redundancies—over the past three years; selling off its corporate jet section to the American company Raytheon for £250m; and setting up joint ventures abroad for some of its remaining divisions. There is now talk that BAe may merge with GEC as the next stage in its survival strategy.

The record of state aid to BAe is the real story of privatisation. Behind the talk of letting market forces rip, there stands an example of the contemporary form of state intervention. Subsidies, debt write-offs, guaranteed contracts, tax breaks, the transfer of undervalued assets—these are the means by which the state's vital support role for British industry is now carried out.

Not only is all this state support still necessary but, in the medium

term, it has done nothing to revitalise companies such as BAe. British capitalism cannot do without state backing, yet generous government aid is insufficient to turn around British industry in an era of decay. The Kay and Thompson study of the impact of privatisation concluded that it had failed to improve the country's economic performance. The riposte from *Financial Times* guru Samuel Brittan confirmed that this was never a real possibility.

Brittan argued that, in focusing on economic performance 'the authors have given the government a low grade, but in an examination which the government is not actually taking'. He explained that the Tories were pursuing other considerations than promoting competition and efficiency in pushing through privatisation. In other words, one of Britain's most respected free market commentators has been forced to concede that privatisation could not revitalise the industrial heartlands of British capitalism.

In the world of Tory rhetoric, privatisation has provided the key to the triumph of the free market. In the real world of hard-headed business, it is the new version of nationalisation. The final rub is that, even with these massive levels of government support, British capitalism still cannot prosper in the slump conditions of the 1990s.

Privatisation emerged in the early 1980s as one of the weapons in the Tories' war against the working class. The talk of opening up government operations and public corporations to market forces was a device for transforming industrial relations at the expense of the workforce. By privatising, or more often, threatening to privatise local authority, NHS and other services, the Tories attacked wages and working conditions in the public sector.

Privatisation didn't need to be implemented everywhere; all they needed were a few flagship councils like Wandsworth to put functions like street cleaning and refuse collection out to private tender. The message to public sector workers was clear: take the cuts or your job will be sold to the lowest bidder. Elsewhere, closures and redundancies were pushed through on the justification of having to prepare public corporations for surviving in the market place.

Privatisation measures also expanded as a series of pragmatic responses to the government's economic difficulties—especially the problem of balancing the books. Selling off over 1m council houses in the 1980s netted the government about £20 billion, with the further financial bonus of ending the state's responsibility for the upkeep of these properties. As a consequence, the government's housing budget fell in real terms by about two-thirds over the decade—a nice little saving for

a government pledged to cut back on state expenditure.

The sale of shares in corporations and other public assets—what Harold Macmillan derided as 'selling the family silver'—raised about £30 billion for the Treasury during the eighties. And there were other economic advantages besides simple fund-raising.

Through the accountancy fiddle of recording that £30 billion as 'negative state expenditure' rather than 'revenue', the government was able to give the impression that it was reining back current spending. In addition to securing one-off receipts from sales, privatisation also sought to remove future claims on Treasury coffers arising from annual deficits and new investment programmes in public corporations. The first really big sell-off—that of British Telecommunications at the end of 1984—was motivated primarily by the desire to off-load the substantial costs of the planned investment programme in electronic switching.

It was only after the success of these pragmatic steps that the Tories reinvented privatisation as the flagship free market policy of Thatcherism. When the government sold off some of its most lucrative holdings—Britoil, BP, British Airways and British Telecom—many people bought the under-priced shares (and immediately sold them again) as an easy way to make a few quid. The Tories seized upon

this development as 'proof' of the public's belief in free enterprise.

At a time when their policies were exhausted, and the economy remained bogged down, the government began trumpeting the new ideology of privatisation as a means of creating a 'popular capitalism'. As Samuel Brittan of the *Financial Times* wrote at the time, 'privatisation has emerged almost by default as the main theme of Conservative supply side or structural policy'. So it was during the 1987 election campaign that privatisation acquired the status of a capitalist crusade. It was heralded as the means to strengthen market forces, promote competition, and extend share ownership. But, in reality, privatisation was always more of a political slogan to celebrate the capitalist outlook than a meaningful economic programme.

Today, as the government runs out of fat BT-style corporations to sell off, and runs into deep trouble with its plans to privatise British Rail and prisons, the empty void behind the rhetoric has been exposed. Yet the government can see no alternative to ploughing on with its increasingly unpopular and irrational-looking privatisation plans. The Tories latched on to the privatisation crusade in the first place as a stop-gap solution to their lack of credible policies in the eighties. The fact that they cling to it still confirms that they have even less to offer in the slump of the nineties.

# Environmental

**W**hile green parties experience their ups and downs, green ideas have become part of the furniture of politics and life today. In Germany, Christian Democrat maverick Heiner Geissler has suggested that his conservative party should ally with the Greens to overcome their low standing in the polls. American vice-president Al Gore has written a book, *Earth in the Balance*, in which he declares that 'we must make the rescue of the environment the central organising principle for civilisation' (p269). Even the British government hosted a conference in Manchester in September—'Partnerships for Change'—for 350 environmental pressure groups that attended the huge Rio de Janeiro 'Earth Summit' in 1992. This is only one high-level spin-off from the Rio conference which raised global environmental issues near to the top of the United Nations' agenda.

## 'Reign of Terror'

The adoption of green rhetoric by the mainstream has created a backlash on the free market right, especially in the USA. One right-wing commentator believes that environmentalism has 'dramatically skewed public policy for the past two and a half decades, slowing economic growth and unnecessarily increasing human misery' (R Bailey, *Eco-Scam: The False Prophets of Ecological Apocalypse*, pxi). In his new book, Michael Fumento argues that America is 'clearly in the midst of an environmental revolution. This stage of the revolution, unfortunately, correlates with the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution' (*Science Under Siege: Balancing Technology and the Environment*, p367). Fumento claims that the USA spends \$100 billion a year on eco-legislation, knocking 2.6 per cent off GDP by 1990. At the international level, meanwhile, the right's fear is that environmental agreements provide a licence for third world nations to demand cash off the West.

These complaints from the disenchanted free market right help

to give green politics a radical image. They also help to obscure the real relationship between green politics and Western governments. The issue of the environment is, in fact, an example of how the establishment has taken up an apparently radical cause for its own benefit. As so often, this process is clearest in relation to the third world. Far from being a problem for the West, the rise of global environmentalism symbolised by the Rio summit has been another useful excuse for dictating orders to the third world.

## Summit up

The Earth Summit, or the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to give it its official title, held in Rio de Janeiro from 3-14 June 1992, was the largest inter-governmental conference ever. It was the culmination of 25 years of international gatherings on the environment.

Green pressure groups believe that public pressure has finally forced reluctant governments to take the issue of the environment more seriously. They point out how the then US president, George Bush, appeared to be forced against his will to attend Rio. The same pressure, they believe, is responsible for the UN decision to integrate independent environmental groups into the decision-making process. Rio was attended in a semi-official capacity by most of the world's environmental groups, such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and the Third World Network. Post Rio, the UN has involved all these Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in its Commission on Sustainable Development, which is drawing up a declaration for the fiftieth anniversary of the UN in 1995.

If they really believe Western governments are responding to their pressure, environmental groups are fooling themselves.

The first thing to note is that, during the 25 years when the greens' influence was supposed to be growing, the human and natural environment has deteriorated. The Western powers have continued to show particular contempt

for the environment in the third world, using it as a source of cheap resources and a toxic waste dump. Alongside the green rhetoric, it's business as usual.

For example, Principle 14 of the Rio Declaration states that nation states should not dump toxic waste on each other. Yet the UN has just downgraded its Centre on Transnational Corporations which is supposed to monitor dumping. The reality of US attitudes towards the environment was exposed by the leak in late 1992 of a memo sent by Bill Clinton's adviser, Lawrence Summers, to the World Bank. It begins 'shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the least developed countries?'. Summers argued that the third world should receive all the most toxic waste products from Western industry because a) the poor wouldn't live long enough to have to worry about it anyway, and b) the poorer the country the lower the value of life. That Summers went on without further ado to take up his post as Treasury Under-Secretary for International Affairs in the new Clinton administration gives the lie to the idea that Western governments are responding to public pressure on the green issue.

Summers' suggestions showed that, like all other issues in our society, the environment is subject to the laws of capitalist economics. There is no profit in treating toxic waste when it can be dumped out of sight in the third world; similarly, long-term management of forests goes against the grain for a system motivated by short-term cash returns.

The Western powers' lack of serious interest in environmental issues was reflected in the vapid content of the documents signed at Rio. A reading of the Earth Charter reveals it to be a banal collection of general statements, empty of any real meaning. This might suggest that the whole Rio process has been a waste of time for all concerned. And it would have been if the West's purpose was to protect the environment. But it is not.

The Western powers are using the environmental issue as a stick with which to beat the third world over a whole range of issues, and to assert ►

Green issues and organisations are being used as a stick with which the West can beat the third world, suggests John Gibson

# imperialism





their right to dictate global affairs—via the UN, which they control. This was the real issue behind the talk at Rio. As the Royal Institute of International Affairs put it, 'the Earth Charter slowly became a distillation of the political and conceptual

### The nations expected to be 'flexible' with their sovereignty will not include the Western allies

arguments dogging the North-South debate' (M Grubb *et al*, *The Earth Summit Agreements*, p85).

When George Bush and the rest of the Western posse rode into Rio, they made it clear who was calling the shots. The USA refused to sign the bio-diversity treaty, despite its anodyne character, just to make clear that third world states had no chance of getting any new bio-technologies which the Americans didn't want them to have. The official Rio agenda contained no criticism of Western governments, nor even of big corporations. Instead, the major industrial nations which have done most to damage the natural and human environment set themselves up as judge and jury, and pronounced verdicts on the rest of the world's behaviour.

#### Eco-nomics

A recent example of how the leaders of international capitalism use environmental issues for their own purposes came in a lecture given by the World Bank's vice-president for east Asia in October. He castigated east Asians for polluting their own environment, claimed that their car exhaust emissions were a threat to the world environment, and warned that they would have to temper their future economic growth with environment-friendly measures.

For an international financier to pose as a friend of the environment, and the spokesman of an American-based institution to lecture Asians about exhaust pollution, would be laughable if it wasn't serious. Barely a month before, the World Bank had published a report on the economic growth of east Asia's rising industrial nations, which noted the competitive threat it posed to the major powers. As they say, could these events be in any way related? Behind the green-speak, the World Bank's message to east Asia is clear: we deny you the right to develop your industry to the point where you threaten Western interests. All in

the best interests of the world environment, of course.

The Western powers are using concern for the environment to justify their own agenda of asserting global authority. For example, the Rio Declaration stresses the principle of national sovereignty. Yet, at every opportunity during the conference, the Western powers made plain that they were not going to respect the principle. The Royal Institute has noted that 'some greater flexibility with respect to sovereignty appears a necessity if the political dialogue on global sustainability is to advance much further' (p35).

The notion that national sovereignty should be subordinate to the interests of the international environment may sound fair enough to some. We do live in One World after all. But so long as that world is dominated by a handful of major powers, an environment-friendly call for 'greater flexibility with respect to sovereignty' will simply be another pretext for the West to bully the third world. One thing we can be sure of is that the nations expected to be 'flexible' with their sovereignty will not include the USA or any of its Western allies.

#### Green Somalia?

There is a parallel here with the use of famine and disaster relief by the Western powers. In 1991, the UN passed a resolution declaring that the agreement of national governments needn't be sought in order to provide food aid. And no, they didn't have in mind Saddam Hussein handing out food parcels in the Bronx. They were thinking about the kind of 'humanitarian' military intervention staged under UN banners in Somalia, without consulting the Somalis. At the end of 1992, under the pretext of responding to a famine (which was in fact abating at the time) the US authorities launched an invasion designed solely to bolster their own global prestige; to date it has led to the deaths of at least 1000 Somalis.

The use of the environmental issue by Western governments has yet to go that far. Instead they are using green rhetoric to reinforce their right to say what goes in the world, and to intervene if necessary. But how long until we witness the green equivalent of Somalia? How long before trade sanctions are imposed on third world nations on the pretext of environmental protection? How long before US marines (wearing green hats?) are taking hold of the rainforests?

This is not simply a question of Western elites manipulating a popular issue for their own benefit. The green issue is good for them because it is intrinsically conservative. Free-marketeters may take issue

with the emphasis on non-market mechanisms which accompany green initiatives; Ronald Bailey refers to one of the main Rio declarations as 'the mother of all five-year plans', for example. But the emphasis on conservation places environmentalism easily within a more traditional conservative framework, and means it certainly poses no threat to the status quo.

The conservative character of the issue is reflected in the ease with which the Western powers have got the 'independent' environmental groups and other NGOs on board, giving a radical gloss to their activities in the process. The so-called independent and alternative Global Forum, held by the NGOs in Rio at the same time as the main summit, was in fact funded by governments and major oil companies. A UN document made it clear how the West was using the NGOs. Their primary role was to 'serve as an important channel to disseminate [Rio's] results, as well as mobilise public support'. The Western governments write the lyrics, the environmental NGOs give them a folksy tune and sing them to the world.

NGOs are now happy to participate in the UN discussions on the environment, directed by Rio chairman Maurice Strong. Aside from his long-term involvement in the American oil industry, millionaire Strong's recent business ventures have included the building of a luxury 'ecotourism' hotel in Costa Rica.

#### The pay off

Of course there are tensions between greens and Western capitalists. British environment minister John Gummer's labelling of Earth First! activists as 'fascist' at the Manchester conference makes it clear that he wouldn't want them round for tea. But the British government is happy to encourage the activity of more mainstream groups like Friends of the Earth; it gives them £41 000 a year for a start.

At the international level, the USA was particularly keen to involve NGOs in the process after Rio. Washington puts up with NGO criticisms of its activities because the pay-off is that these 'independent' bodies can be used as a counterpoint to third world nations which obstruct American wishes. Indeed the NGOs can get away with denouncing the sovereignty of third world nations far more freely than can an imperial American president.

All in all, not a bad return for the Western elites from the modest sums invested in organising some conferences and the discomfort of talking to a few eco-activists.



# Year of the fish

**N**ineteen ninety-three was the year that animal abuse was at last confronted. 'Wet sabs' harassed anglers, but assured them that they 'don't regard them as maniacs' (I'm sure the feeling is mutual). 'Animal rights' lunatics threatened Telstar, the company responsible for the new Pinky and Perky record (which 'exploits farm animals'), and the director of Twycross Zoo withdrew his apes from the PG Tips commercials when she became 'uneasy about their wigs and violent clothing'.

The RSPCA cracked down hard on fish abusers, in particular the 'disco fish' craze (presumably they're the ones that swim in circles around a little plastic handbag). 'They suffer greatly for the sake of fashion', said RSPCA Wildlife Officer Tim Thomas. Of course, the owners are to blame, and RSPCA inspector Mark Turner has strong views on this kind of thing. It was he who exposed the 'home alone' fish scandal. Following a tip-off from an electricity meter reader, he stuck a piece of tape over David Sharod's door to check whether Mr Sharod returned home to feed his South American sucker fish. Finding the tape unbroken three days later, he entered the house, rescued the 'distressed' creatures, and (unsuccessfully) prosecuted Mr Sharod for fish abuse.

Similar community spirit was shown by the West Midlands police, who rushed to a Wolverhampton council estate to arrest a 17-year old for threatening behaviour—while alone in his mum's garden shed, wherein he had locked himself after a row about tidying his bedroom.

Plainclothes police at Labour conferences wear ID badges describing themselves as Labour staff, and one was caught out by his photo, which showed him in his helmet. The good news is that nobody in the Labour and Order Party would have minded if he'd worn his helmet. There would be no problems in the Democratic Left either: the former Communist Party's dull little paper was targeted by the Police Federation for an advertising campaign encouraging trade unionists to support the police against the Sheehy reforms. 'Police attitudes are changing as they face mounting political attack from the government', said the paper's editor: 'Some of us on the left are also changing and becoming more open and pluralistic. We welcome this opportunity to develop greater understanding.'

This softening-up of the force has been going on for quite a while: Alison Halford, the former Assistant Chief Constable who took the police to court over sex discrimination, revealed that 'I nearly didn't get into the force because of my green hair'. That's right—*nearly* didn't get in, I would be interested to hear of any other sightings of green-haired plods.

And speaking of colourful figures, John Major's swearing incident gave his beleaguered press office a ray of hope. The *Star* printed the year's most dismal publicity puff, claiming that 'overnight, he has become as colourful a figure as the language he uses in private'. Well, \*\*\*\* me, John.

The blurring of left and right continued. Tory plans to abolish the despised May Day holiday were scuppered by the CBI. And in a year of increasing industrial accidents, and particularly pit accidents, it was revealing to note how union officials scrupulously referred to the tragedies befalling their 'colleagues', while the Queen sent commiserations to the bereaved's relatives and 'comrades'. Meanwhile at Sandhurst there was concern that recruits no longer showed leadership qualities, and seemed unsure of their destinies: the general in charge of recruitment reported that many thought Winston Churchill 'too right-wing', although 50 per cent were of more moderate disposition, naming Hitler as a great leader—'although he didn't achieve all his objectives'.

Farewell then, June 22nd Group, founded to denounce Thatcherism five years ago. The group, which included Fay Weldon, Harold Pinter, Lady Antonia Fraser, Salman Rushdie, John Mortimer and decided to call it a day because of other commitments (like campaigning against McDonald's opening in Hampstead village). 'A lot of the energy has seeped into Charter '88', says Margaret Drabble; but where it seeped after that, nobody knows.

Those of you who haven't done your Christmas shopping yet should still find plenty of the following in the shops: A Year in Provence wine, personally signed by Peter Mayle; *Love Over Gold*, the novel of the Gold Blend ads; and last, but by no means least, Judge Pickles' debut novel, featuring the smutty adventures of 'private secretary Anona "No-Knickers" Chandelle-Sweet'.

Royal quotes of the year:

'No matter how poor you are, you can't let royalty down.' (Woman who gave up her holiday to buy a dress to wear when she met Princess Diana.)

'I'm afraid I haven't got a lot of money right now.' (Princess Diana, after being asked for £20 by a little black boy who thought she was a 'nice rich lady who'd be a soft touch'.)

'This chap can throw money about like confetti. It's obscene.' (Irate neighbour of Sheikh Zayad bin Sultan. Neighbour on the other side: Her Majesty the Queen, Windsor Castle.)

And finally, the man of the year and the thought of the year. The irrepressible Judge Pickles has been the subject of rumours in Hollywood, where a prominent actress claims to have taken his virginity; he has boasted of his speeding antics on dual carriageways; and he has still found time, when not writing racy blockbusters, to give us the benefit of his wisdom in the pages of the *Star*, a paper whose decision to ban 0898 numbers has freed up plenty of room for m'lud's dirty talk. Of the many helpful things he has said over the year, one stands out—a 'thought for the day', printed under the legend, 'My final sentence...' (and above the legend: 'Tomorrow: TV's sexiest barmaid'): 'I'm no fan of MP Winston Churchill, but he had the guts to say about black immigration what millions think but few dare express.'

Merry Christmas.

**I would be interested to hear of any other sightings of green-haired plods**

It's a great big shame, an' if she  
belonged ter me,  
I'd let her know who's who.  
Naggin' at a feller wot is six foot free  
And 'er not four foot two!  
Oh, they 'acn't been married not  
a month nor more  
When underneath her fumb goes Jim,  
Isn't it a pity as the likes ov 'er  
Should put upon the likes of him?

Thus Nellie the urchin (Kathy Burke of Waynetta Slob fame) opened Mike Leigh's new play *It's a Great Big Shame*, at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, with a solo performance of the Gus Elen music hall favourite. The effect is charming enough to take your mind off the slightly menacing undertones of the song on which the tale is based.

This cosy opening provides a striking contrast to the start of *Naked*, Leigh's new film. Johnny, a young jobless Mancunian, brilliantly played by David Thewlis, rapes a woman in an alley, and drives off to London. Here Johnny, part visionary seer, part social inadequate, gets caught up in a web of failed relationships and decaying lives.

*Naked* is a far cry from the domestic satires of Leigh's previous works. It is much darker and more despairing of the human condition. Those looking for a typical Mike Leigh comedy are likely to be disappointed. The comic effects are more chilling than funny.

Throughout *Naked*, every encounter between men and women is a loveless mess of physical pain and emotional suffering. The degradation of the female characters has led critics to accuse Leigh of misogyny. It is more like misanthropy run riot. 'Humanity is just a cracked egg', says Johnny, 'and the omelette stinks'.

Johnny spurns companionship as futile and emasculating. After falling out with his girlfriend Louise he takes up with her flatmate Sophie. But, when Sophie tells Johnny that she loves him, he beats her up and subjects her to ever more violent sex. Leaving both Louise and Sophie, Johnny journeys through the nightmare world of nineties lowlife London. Beaten and bleeding he eventually returns—to find that Sophie has been raped by Jeremy, a posh version of Johnny.

What drives *Naked* is Leigh's sense of the helplessness of individuals faced with a world in chaos. Unlike his previous films, *Naked* provides a picture of humanity with few redeeming features. Even Leigh himself seems unsure whether he has gone too far. 'My feelings about *Naked*', he has said, 'are as ambivalent as my feelings about our chaotic late twentieth-century world'.

*It's a Great Big Shame* seems to take a more reassuring approach. Indeed, as the play proceeds through a series of vignettes portraying the marriage of hulking drayman Jim to tiny, prissy,

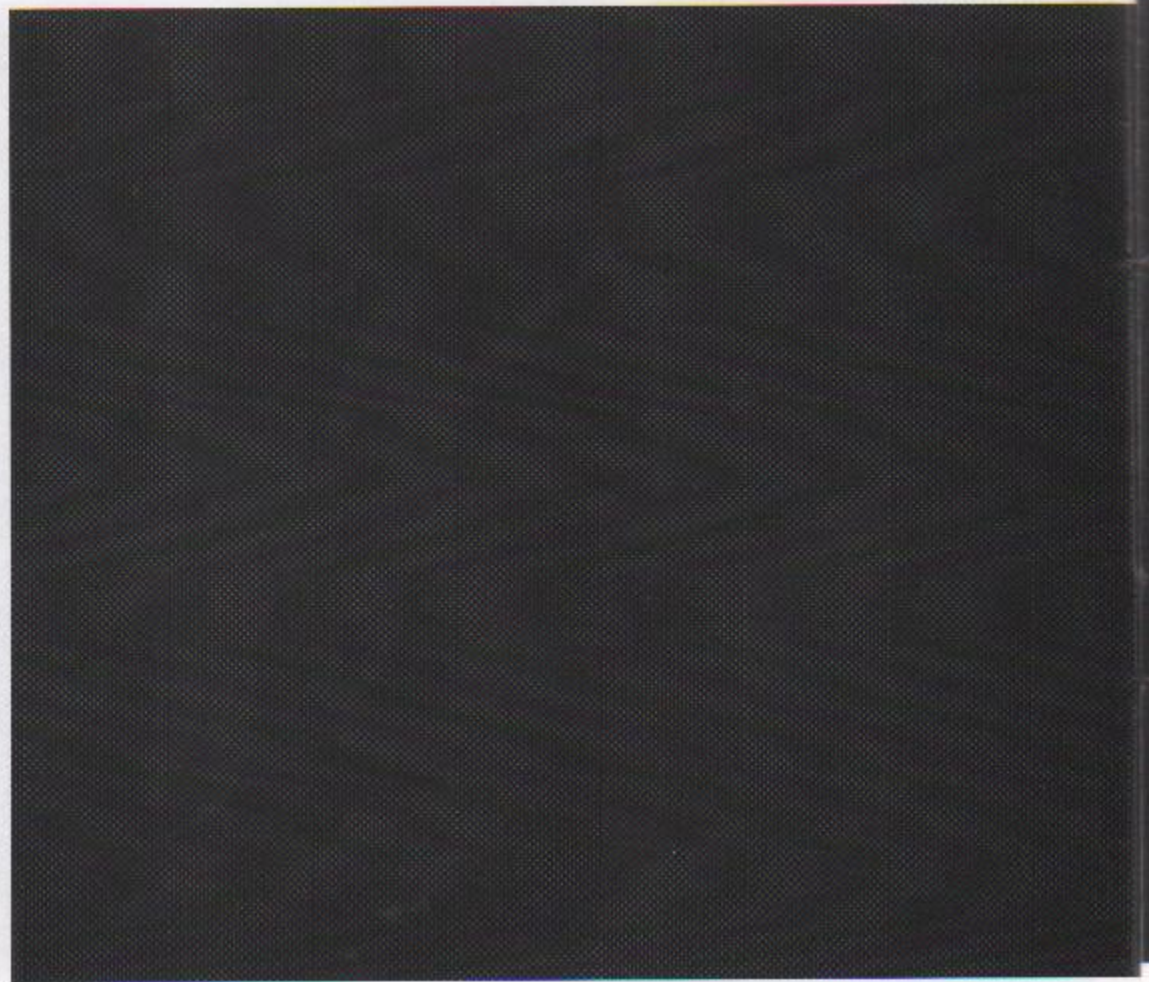
houseproud shop girl Ada Ricketts, things seem a bit too comfortable and safe—a good old slice of Cockney rough-and-tumble, with waifs, wide-boys and other assorted Dickensian riff-raff doing their party pieces for the gallery. Surely this cosy scene is just being set up to be knocked down, whereupon the misery of working class life will be thrust under our complacent noses? Yes and no, as it turns out.

Leigh has responded to the challenges of his first period drama with a shrewdness lacking in some of his recent work. We see with fresh eyes a world which music hall buffs and TV

dramas have rendered harmless in our imagination. This is no 'heritage experience': one moment the characters are singing together in the Cock and Bull, the next they are falling out over trivialities and taking advantage in various petty and unseemly ways. The chirpy landlady Fanny Clack, in the course of serving a West Indian seaman, announces matter-of-factly that blacks have brains the size of a pea, to general agreement. A mutton-chopped copper thrusts his truncheon in Jim's face and tells him he'll have his bollocks if he sees him around again. Nellie Bucket, the simple and loyal waf, whom we are led to assume is

Life is sweet? Not according to Mike Leigh's new film and play, writes Toby Banks

# A stinking omelette



like a daughter to Fanny, is casually thrown out for not having enough money for a drink.

The problem comes with the gruesome climax to the first act when Jim, after strangling the domineering Ada and then going slowly and quietly mad, is found in his front room, eating the brains of his nagging wife from her cooked head. Normally Leigh's denouements arise from the intricate web of tensions we have watched the characters construct: there is a horrible sense of inevitability, and the explosion comes as a relief rather than a shock. Here the effect is neither. The scene is comic,

without being particularly funny. It's rather dissatisfying, and a bit of a cop-out.

Of course domestic violence is banal, and murder can 'just happen'. However the play is not simply about nagging wives and hen-pecked husbands. It is about two things that don't go together like a horse and carriage—poverty and marriage, and the violence they do to the spirit as well as the body. As if to emphasise this, Leigh employs his usual heightened realism in Act Two, which is set in Jim and Ada's house, 100 years later. A black couple live here now: Joy, a big stroppy bank clerk, and her wimpy little husband Randall, a sales assistant in a shop. From the start we are plunged into typical Leigh territory as they argue about the price of Randall's £1.60 lunches.

Slowly but surely the tension rises as other characters are drawn into the row. We are seized by the panic which engulfs poor Randall as he becomes a target for the frustrations of not just his wife, but her obnoxious sister Faith and Barrington, a threateningly twitchy character from his football team. It's what the police call a typical 'domestic situation'—the kind that fills hospitals with heart attacks and broken noses on Sunday afternoons.

At his best, Leigh's characters are not black and white. Unlike in *Naked*, where Leigh chooses to pencil only the bleaker side of human nature, the characters

in *It's a Great Big Shame* are both admirable and despicable. The problem is that circumstances keep forcing them together, bringing out the worst in them. As Joy says in the end, after accidentally strangling Randall, she didn't love him and they never should have married.

Unfortunately, this final monologue is delivered to the ghost of Ada, which only serves to remind us of the fundamental flaw in the play. It is like watching two separate—though enjoyable—programmes in a BBC2 themed evening, rather than two halves of a whole piece. Instead of allowing us to appreciate his little insights and draw our own conclusions, Leigh's schematic structure inevitably draws us into a discussion of the 'point' of the play. Is he saying that nothing changes, with couples fighting like cats and dogs the world over? Or has it all changed, with women getting the upper hand? At times the audience clearly felt they were expected to 'react' to these issues, and there were some self-conscious attempts at *Oleanna*-style participation when Jim grabbed Ada by the neck and waltzed her around the room.

In the end what sticks in the mind is the random way in which people get into this kind of mess. Ada interprets a gift of a jar of pickles as an invitation to manage. Joy finds herself pushed to the altar by almost imperceptible forces. And everyone is destroyed long before the killing starts

Part visionary seer, part social inadequate: David Thewlis plays Johnny in Mike Leigh's *Naked*

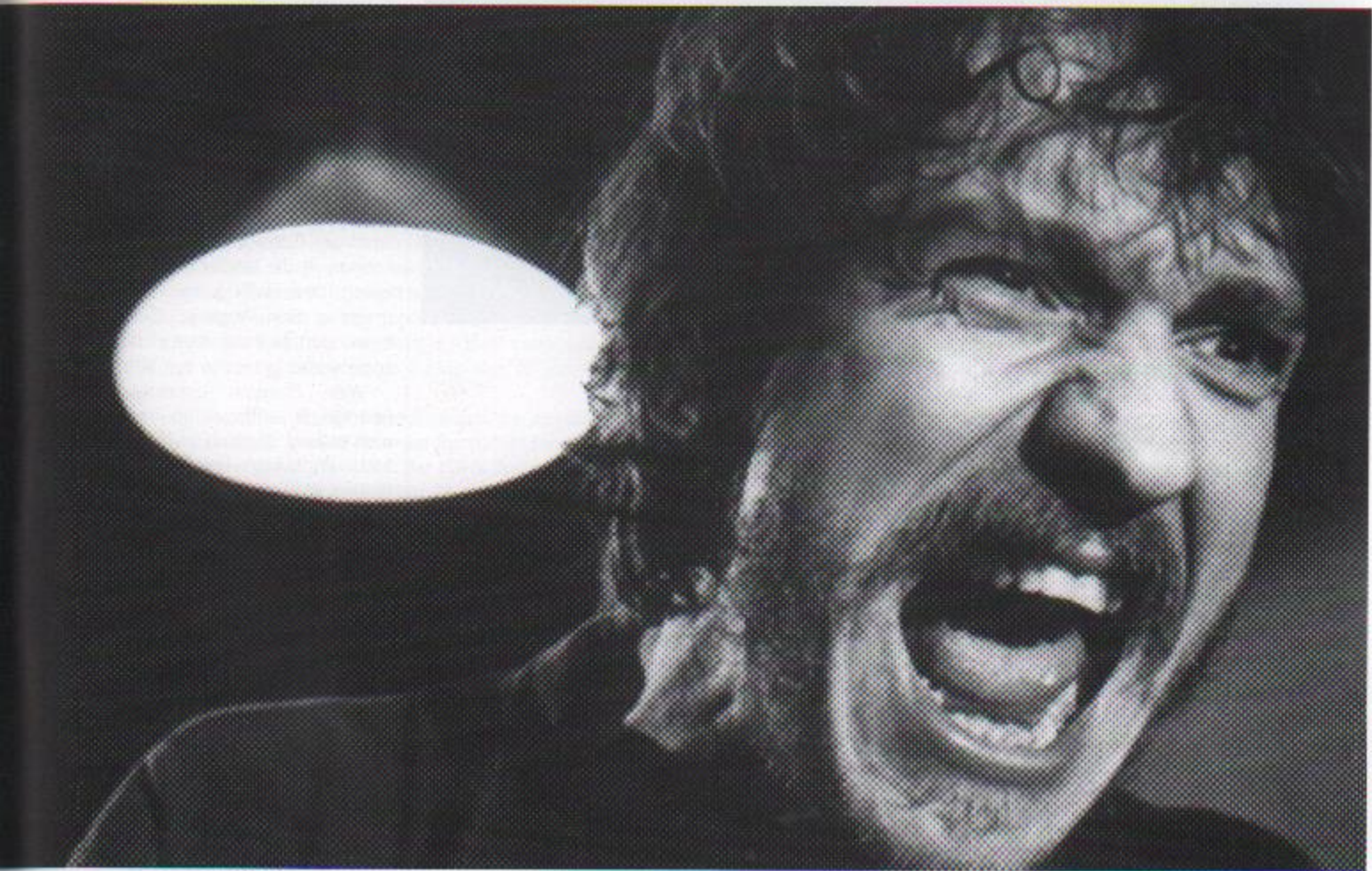
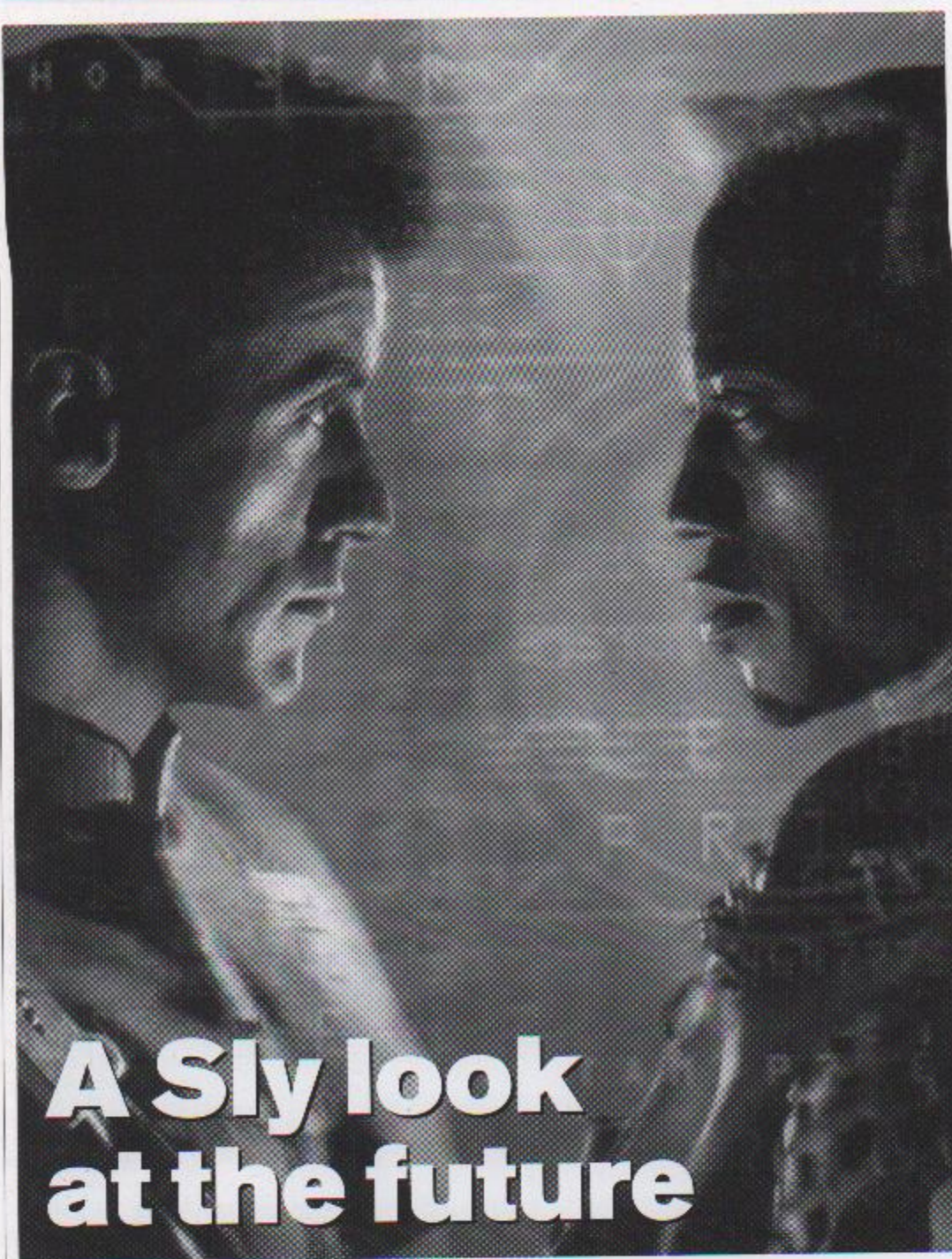


PHOTO: FIRST INDEPENDENT FILMS LIMITED



## A Sly look at the future

Janice Bryan reports from New York on Sylvester Stallone's new fantasy, which may not be so fantastic after all

The place is California, the year is 2036. John Spartan, an old-style police officer, whose body and attitudes have been deep-frozen since the late twentieth century, asks for a Marlboro. 'It's not good for you', explains the new-style 'peace officer', Lenina Huxley, with a smile on her face. 'Hence it is bad and therefore illegal.'

Sylvester Stallone's new film, *Demolition Man*, has attracted the wrath of liberals for its nightmare vision of a politically correct society 40 years on.

Like all Stallone films it is a defence of truth, freedom and the American way of life, and one that betrays middle class angst about inner-city crime. But it is also a wry, and often acute, parody of PC authoritarianism, wrapped up in a fast-moving thriller.

The movie opens in 1996. South Central LA has become a wasteland and the personal fiefdom of Simon Phoenix (Wesley Snipes), a criminal of comic book proportions. John Spartan (Stallone), the LAPD's answer to Rambo, whose spectacular style results in the

demolition of a building or two, is sent (alone, of course) to capture Phoenix. Little does he realise that Phoenix has set him up. Tried for killing 30 civilians while apprehending Phoenix, Spartan is condemned, along with Phoenix, to be cryogenically frozen for 70 years. (Here the film certainly does not ring true; in today's America, Spartan would most likely have been promoted).

Forty years on, LA has merged with the other urban centres of southern California to become San Angeles, run by benevolent dictator Dr Cocteau (Nigel Hawthorne). Under his guidance, San Angeles has become a serene and harmonious society—no crime, all mod cons, a penchant for traditional Japanese dress.

In return for this serenity, the citizens of San Angeles are no longer allowed to drink, smoke, swear, eat meat, butter or cheese, use salt or exchange bodily fluids. The eyes and ears of the state are everywhere. Even cursing under your breath will result in a nearby machine issuing you with a ticket. It calls you by name and, in a pleasant and soothing tone of voice, 'deducts one credit for morally reprehensible language'.

*Demolition Man* presents a wonderfully graphic view of the message of PC and the new authoritarianism. The state knows best and enforces healthy habits and polite discourse with fatherly ruthlessness. 'What's the loss of a little individuality compared to the urban wars of the last century?', they ask.

In the midst of all this serenity, Simon Phoenix escapes during a parole hearing and the mayhem begins with the first MDK (Murder-Death-Kill) of the new era. In fact Phoenix's escape was no accident. Cocteau has reprogrammed him with knowledge of the latest technology, martial arts and weaponry and engineered his escape so that he can terminate Edgar Friendly (Dennis Leary). Friendly is the leader of the cholesterol-loving, beer-swilling, sex-mad, 40-a-day druggs of San Angeles. Called Scraps these people have been banned from society and forced to live in the sewers.

With Phoenix creating mayhem, Spartan is unfrozen to recapture his arch-enemy. Stallone engineers a typical finish in which, after the obligatory killings, everyone regains the right to eat steak, read *Playboy* and get pissed on a Saturday night.

It may all seem a bit of a laugh. But be warned. Society may not yet be putting its unwanted citizens into a deep freeze to be reprogrammed, but here in New York, environmental enforcement cops now inspect the trash and fine those who haven't properly separated their recyclables. In Los Angeles the only building in which you can smoke is your own home—except if you have children in which case you can't smoke at all unless you want them taken away. 'Mellow greetings, be well.'





# Up with the Clarks

Is there any such thing as genius? How do you get to be one? What's the money like? These are the questions that Kenneth Clark set out to answer in his seminal TV series *Civilisation*, currently being repeated on BBC2 on Saturday afternoons. Kenneth Clark is, of course, the father of Thatcher groupie and quondam defence minister, Alan. The repeat was launched with a couple of documentaries, one about the father, the other about the son (*Love Tory*), in which the Clarks were presented as icons of a lost Toryism—swashbuckling, eccentric, cultivated, aristocratic and libidinous (both father and son were slags). The tone was elegiac, mourning the passing of the monied eccentric and implicitly bewailing the grey managerialism of Major's Britain.

*Civilisation* paints the history of Western art in the image of this genteel, landed eccentricity. I don't need to tell you that 'civilisation' does not include Islam, for instance, or Aztecs, or Chinese people. *Civilisation* was made by Dead White Males. The programme's achievement is to remind you that some Dead White Males were very impressive.

Clark's carefully casual and seductively lucid delivery is punctuated with flashes of insight, suddenly illuminating works which have been darkened by the patina of familiarity. Michelangelo, Raphael, Giotto, Leonardo and other Italians are born anew in your living room. He tells a heroic story—a chronicle of giant men fighting against mediocrity, illness, poverty or whatever to produce something astonishing. This makes good TV but it doesn't really do justice to the Dead White Males of the Renaissance.

The interesting thing about these works is that they were not individual in any way. They were not produced by individuals—they were made in studios like Hollywood movies. And, like Hollywood movies, they were made not to express the personality, but to perform a political function in public places. The high-points are not paintings, but statues and frescoes, things which cannot be moved, or sold. Things which you have to go a long way to see. Objects of pilgrimage.

The immobility of the Sistine Chapel asserts the centrality of the Sistine Chapel. It's in the tension between the public function and the private vision that the real interest lies. But Clark dodges this. He does not for instance raise the interesting question of how Michelangelo managed to plaster the most important church in Christendom with brilliant homoeroticism, so that even today the most conservative pope in history has to say mass under the ultimate gay icon. Or the story of how the Artist became so important that, in the end, the underpants which the Vatican later—quite correctly—painted over these figures had to be removed, as even here in the House of God, it was no longer allowed to compromise the Artist's Vision.

In Clark's version, the individual exists in a void. The world of politics and economics merely interrupts him. So Pope Julius commissioned the Sistine Chapel because he was a hero who recognised a fellow hero, not because he was a pope with unlimited financial resources who needed to find a way of displaying his temporal power in spiritual discourse. The result is an entertaining but impoverished view of art which is at its best dealing with the

impoverished art of later years—the Impressionists and so on, the painters of portable property, art for museums, art for sale, art about art.

Of course people like Van Gogh were 'individuals' in that nobody was much interested in them until they died. Their art did not come into its own until the age of mass reproduction. You have to go to Rome and more or less dislocate your neck to look at the Sistine ceiling, ie, you have to put yourself through some sort of agony to feel its ecstasy. The proper place for the Sunflowers, on the other hand, is on a poster in your bedsit where you as an individual can sit and contemplate the tragedy of the misunderstood individual to the soundtrack of Don Maclean. Art as therapy with the artists as subject is the logical conclusion of Clark's view.

Interestingly the same contradictions are there in the series itself. The epic title, *Civilisation*, is subtitled 'a personal view'.

The programme was not, however, Clark's personal idea. It was designed by David Attenborough, who was then controller of BBC2, as a way of showcasing colour TV (BBC2 was the first to go colour). What better way of showing off colour pictures than with a series of great paintings? It also helped the channel's pitch—upmarket but not arty, aimed at autodidacts and self-improvers. Clarke himself had already been used in much

the same way by ITV. He was appointed head of ATV in order to allay fears that the commercial channel would be hopelessly downmarket. In fact he did a few shows on aesthetics for ITV, the first of which 'Isn't he beautiful?' was about Alan's Great Dane.

The heroic individualism which Kenneth tried to retro-fit to the story of art found its protagonist in Maggie. What a shock it must have been to find that she did not create a cultivated city state, but a regime of unremitting mediocrity, meanness and philistinism. Even oppositional art from those years—David Hare, Hanif Kureishi, etc—is dull and infantile. Thatcher was no Borgia.

In *Love Tory*, in his memoirs and in the hype surrounding both, Alan Clark tries to come on as just the kind of heroic individual his father tried to paint in *Civilisation*. He fornicates; he comes to the House pissed; he wrecks his own career by refusing to indulge in ministerial doubletalk. He could afford to do this because he was rich and didn't need a career. Here you come to the patrician, feudal streak in all this. Nothing guarantees individuality like money does. The rich are incorruptible because you can't bribe them. These are the old arguments for feudalism and enlightened dictatorship.

If you watch *Love Tory*, however, you realise that the other thing about the rich is that they always think they are hard-up. Clark, with his innumerable homes and collection of vintage cars, is always short of cash. You could probably corrupt him pretty thoroughly for a fiver. And it is simply not true that he was an honest and outspoken maverick. He was just too spoiled and dim to be a good team player. He didn't throw away his career, he screwed it up. Obsessively sycophantic towards Thatcher and fixated on the idea that her power was individual and charismatic, he simply did not see the end coming. Like Satan and his angels, they forgot who made them and started to imagine that they had made themselves. The fact is, there is no such thing as an individual. ●

## Maggie did not create a cultivated city state

As far as the struggle in South Africa goes, it is an accident that I'm a musician. I've been asked many times what role culture has played in the political struggle in South Africa. But people don't ask sanitary workers what role sanitation can play in the political struggle. Sanitary workers do not hold conferences to work out the place of sanitation in the fight for liberation.'

Hugh Masekela is one of the giants of South African jazz. For nearly 40 years he has been at the forefront of both South African music and the anti-apartheid struggle. Yet he has a healthy scepticism about both his role and that of culture in the liberation movement. He is equally sceptical about where that

**South African jazz giant Hugh Masekela talked to Mary McCaughey about music and liberation**

## The rhythm of resistance

movement is heading, as Nelson Mandela reaches a settlement with the De Klerk government.

'The media is painting a picture that everything is fine', he says. 'But people in South Africa are going through the worst time of their lives.'

During the concerts on Masekela's 'Sound of Freedom' tour, there are collections for the African National Congress. But as the ANC prepares to stand in elections for the first time, Masekela's own view of the coming year is bleak. 'We are taking a big risk. I've got no particular political ideology but perhaps when all is over we will just be a bunch of voting slaves.'

He is cynical, too, about the flightiness of Western liberal support for the liberation movement. 'In 1987', he observes, 'a quarter of million people marched to Clapham Common in solidarity with the ANC, but today people think we do not need support any more. South Africa is no longer a cause that is in vogue in the media. The march to Clapham Common was an event—as many people went for the fun, the music or to sell t-shirts as for the political cause. Today only the political hard core are left in the solidarity movement.'

Masekela was born in Witbank, a coalmining community east of

Johannesburg. His musical interest was ignited by his parents' extensive record collection, which featured albums by all the jazz greats. Then one day, when he was playing truant from school, Masekela went to see the film *Young Man with a Horn*, a biography of American trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke starring Kirk Douglas. He says it hooked him on jazz.

By the age of 20 Masekela had managed to hustle Louis Armstrong's trumpet, and his career was in full swing. But he knocks any romantic notions of the township scene. 'African jazz', he says, 'was purely cheap labour'. Seeing no future in South Africa, Masekela left for London in 1960 to study at the Guildhall School of Music. By pestering people like Harry Belafonte and Louis Armstrong, Masekela got a grant to study at the Manhattan School of Music in New York.

Over the next three decades, Masekela and other artists in exile from South Africa became a focus for the growing anti-apartheid movements in the West. Jazz musicians, who were mainly from urban backgrounds, were

generally better educated and more politically conscious. As session players in white-run theatres, they came into contact with like-minded white liberals.

But while the anti-apartheid cause became increasingly popular during these years, the attitude of white liberals to South African music was very frustrating for musicians like Masekela. Liberals rejected Western music and embraced instead the rough-edged spontaneity of township jazz as a political stance against apartheid. This was the opposite direction to that which Masekela and his fellow musicians wanted to take. 'We wanted to present a modern sophisticated sound to the world, and yet found the world responding to music we found old-fashioned. Our music was seen to have "real experience and the rhythm of resistance" in the West, but in South African townships this "authenticity" counted for little.'

Even now, in his fifties, Masekela empathises with the mood of militant youth in the South African townships, where American soul, disco, rap and hip hop is much preferred to African music. It is a world in which tribal values and roots music have little relevance. It is ironic that while many radical blacks in America want to rediscover their African heritage, young South Africans aspire to match their image of the urban American black—suave, politically sophisticated, socially outspoken, economically independent and hip. ●



# MARXIST

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

Tony Kennedy explains why the Tories are still in Margaret Thatcher's shadow

### Thatcher nostalgia

*The Downing Street Years*, Margaret Thatcher, Harper Collins, £25 hbk

*The View From No11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical*, Nigel Lawson, Corgi Books, £9.99 pbk

*The Turbulent Years: My Life in Politics*, Kenneth Baker, Faber & Faber, £20 hbk

*The Bastards: Dirty Tricks and the Challenge to Europe*, Teresa Gorman, Pan Books, £5.99 pbk

The ghost of Margaret Thatcher haunts today's politicians with a vengeance. The Tory Party conference in October was dominated by the former prime minister, despite the fact that she said nothing and only once sat on the platform. Though silent, her record in office and her policies were praised to the skies as the conference was judged to have returned to the true Thatcherite faith. And then there were those memoirs.

Excerpts from *The Downing Street Years* were leaked throughout the Tory Party conference, to the dismay of her successor, John Major, condemned in the book for 'drifting with the tide'. Thatcher's reputation for confidence of purpose seemed in stark contrast to the dithering of the Major administration. Social services secretary Peter Lilley caught the conference mood with a classically Thatcherite attack on foreigners who scrounge off the dole.

It is not just the Tories who are overwhelmed by the Thatcher legacy. Since the publication of *The Downing Street Years* the media has been determined that everything should be seen in relation to the Thatcher premiership. Press and television alike have regaled us with retrospective features that make Thatcher into a sort of touchstone of political wisdom. Either the Thatcher years are seen as a golden era never to be recovered, or the moment when everything went wrong, when selfishness and greed destroyed what we have in common. Whatever the judgement, Margaret Thatcher's governments are seen as the watershed in British politics.

While the Thatcherite rhetoric worked well at the Tory Party conference, even the most supportive sections

of the media found it hard to swallow. Too many awkward questions sprang to mind. After all, what became of the celebrated free market revolution under Margaret Thatcher that was supposed to have brought about the victory of low-taxing, low-spending government and swept away the 'dependency culture'?

The cheap nature of the rhetoric in Blackpool, and the tired look about the Tories under John Major, is widely appreciated. Many recognised Major's conference 'shift to the right' as the desperate act of a hapless leader trying to shore up his own position by basking in the reflected glory of the past. Major succeeded in deflecting criticism from within the party, but few rate his chances of transforming the low public esteem for his government.

The disillusionment with Major has provoked fond recollections of the Thatcher era. The fact that recession was already under way well before Thatcher's political demise does not matter. The fact that the Thatcher government was ridiculed for its repeated insistence that the recession was only a blip is forgotten. The fact that by November 1990 there was widespread agreement inside the British establishment that she must go is not readily recalled. Even though the Thatcher regime had run out of steam, there were at least some good things to remember—the sense of purpose, and the atmosphere of boom and capitalist confidence that prevailed for a short period in the mid-to-late eighties.

Manifest failure in the nineties has tended to encourage extravagant recollections about the eighties in the Tory Party. Three years on from the demise of Thatcher, the Tory conviction that she oversaw ▶

a major transformation in the fortunes of British capitalism, which dramatically improved the nation's wealth-producing potential and international reputation, sometimes seems stronger than ever. So impressed are these nostalgic apologists that they have taken to speculating about how historians, generations from now, will reflect upon the momentous achievements of Margaret Thatcher.

Indeed it is not just *The Downing Street Years*, but a whole spate of memoirs recently published by Tory figures from the Thatcher era that have provided a focal point for the idealisation of the eighties. The long-awaited reminiscences of Thatcher herself have

front, against Thatcher's inclination to tread carefully when faced with the implications of tax reforms, higher interest rates and spending cuts.

Even the unctuous Kenneth Baker manages to remember his time as education secretary as an era when he sought to 'strike high and adventure dangerously'. Others might recall Baker bogged down in trying to harass the normally placid teachers' unions.

Despite the intense interest in the accounts of the Thatcher era, there have been few serious attempts to question the fundamental claim about the Tories' achievements put forward by these leading figures. There is general agreement with the claim that the Conservatives enjoyed great success in turning round the fortunes of British capitalism. The ideological rhetoric about 'defeating socialism' and 'rolling back the state' is taken at face value. As a result, coverage of the memoirs has largely focused on issues of secondary importance.

The issues of political intrigue, personality traits and styles dominate the commentaries. Thatcher's apparent pathological need to rubbish Howe in front of colleagues, or her habit of making decisions through committees rather than the full cabinet, have been discussed in fine detail. Lawson's intellectual arrogance, Heseltine's naked ambition and Douglas Hurd's genial aloofness have all been cited as key factors affecting the turn of events. Some speculate that the departure of Willie Whitelaw was the beginning of the end for Thatcher. Dramas such as the dispute between Thatcher and Michael Heseltine over the buyout of Westland Helicopters, Thatcher's arguments with Lawson and Howe over UK membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism and her eventual demise at the hands of unsupportive cabinet colleagues have all been discussed in terms of personality clashes.

Then there is the fascination with Thatcher's famous attention to detail and ability to master a variety of political briefs. Was it an attempt to make up for a relatively limited and unimaginative intellect by sheer hard work? Maybe it was her way of overcoming a nagging sense of inferiority with respect to more intellectual and cultured male colleagues?

It is interesting to see how the mechanics of political power operate, and personality differences can have an influence. Nevertheless, the key question is being ignored: did Thatcherite policies succeed in what they set out to do, fundamentally reversing the long-term decline of British capitalism? The fact that during the eighties major changes took place under the Conservatives is beyond dispute. The difficulty, however, is to identify the character of these changes and interpret their implications.

The economy is the key to assessing the success or failure of Tory policies. The case for the government is weak. Over the 'miraculous' eighties as a whole the economy performed no better than in the seventies—a decade of disaster according to the Tories. Furthermore, the economy is now proving less able to drag itself out of recession than ever before—hardly a testimony to any long-term dynamism acquired in the eighties.

The precise causes of the economic downturn form one of the key disagreements between Thatcher and Lawson. He puts it down to Britain's failure 'to join the

## Thatcher, Lawson and Baker all contend that it was a glorious decade for Britain, a period when the economy was liberated from the shackles of state control

prompted intense media interest. Reviewers have been poring over the accounts of Thatcher, Nigel Lawson and Kenneth Baker in search of differences. Lesser Tory figures Ian Gilmour and Alan Clark have also contributed to the growing literature on the Thatcher era. Media (if not reader) interest will, no doubt, be maintained by the impending publication of books from two other leading protagonists, Geoffrey Howe and Norman Lamont.

As key architects of government policy in the eighties, Thatcher, Lawson and Baker all contend that it was a glorious decade for Britain, a period when the economy was liberated from the shackles of state control and rediscovered the joys of the free market. Each is keen to detail their distinctive contribution to the apparent success.

Thatcher herself makes no bones about the nation's debt to her leadership. In *The Downing Street Years* it is only she who has the courage to lead the fight to re-establish British leadership in the world and to face down union power at home. Only she is prepared to sweep away the years of fudge and compromise that brought Britain to its knees. And if things went wrong towards the end, that is the fault of those who stood in her way: Michael Heseltine, whose ambition was without principle, the spiteful Geoffrey Howe, and Nigel Lawson, the chancellor whose fixation with the ERM led to rack and ruin.

Not surprisingly Nigel Lawson's *View from No 11* is rather different. Lawson highlights the decisive part that he played in the early months of the new administration of 1979 in urging a quick and complete abolition of exchange controls: 'the first significant increase of market liberalisation of the Thatcher government.' He stresses his efforts to force privatisation to the centre of the government's economic strategy and how he 'set the tone for the approach to privatisation'.

Indeed Lawson contends that he was largely responsible for sustaining the reforming zeal on the economic

ERM in the relative calm of the expansionary mid-1980s' and to the German government 'which so mishandled the economic consequences of unification'. Thatcher shared the loathing for the Germans, but saw the ERM itself as the root of the evil, because defending the currency required debilitating interest rates.

Scapegoating the Germans is a common Tory refrain; one which conveniently forgets that Britain entered recession well before German unification started to generate problems for the rest of Europe. Lawson argues that if Britain had entered the ERM earlier, it would have led to higher interest rates in the second half of the eighties because of the need to sustain the value of the pound. That, he says, would have cut the speculative froth off the boom without threatening recession, and hence produced more stable growth. This is doubtful. The strength of the increase in share and property prices internationally suggests that demand for credit would still have been very strong, as capitalists turned their investments away from stagnant industry and chased easy profits in the financial markets.

Thatcher, however, blames Lawson's high interest rates for the recession, insisting, remarkably, that she did not even know that her chancellor was shadowing the Deutschmark until she was challenged on the policy by journalists from the *Financial Times*.

Kenneth Baker has little of interest to say on where the government lost its way in economic matters, but does venture the view that Edwina Currie's comments about salmonella in eggs 'became a sort of turning point for the government, where everything that happened subsequently seemed to go wrong'.

The Tories' real record on the economy is perhaps best illustrated by the policy often hailed as proof of their success: privatisation. The story of privatisation betrays the Thatcherite myth of the return of the 'free market'. For a start, many of the most important privatised com-

European countries, where they are known not as champions of the free market, but as mixed economy undertakings.

To a large extent privatisation has simply involved a revision in the form of state influence in the private sector. It has spawned a new bureaucracy of regulators reliant on the grace and favour of the state for appointments. The hard fact is that, despite the free market rhetoric, British capitalism does not have the dynamism to survive without larger-than-ever doses of support from the state. This is the real 'dependency culture' which the Thatcher governments could do nothing to break. It explains why neither Thatcher nor Major has been able to fulfil their promise to slash public spending, despite doing their best to drive down public sector pay and welfare benefits.

Another Thatcherite myth rehearsed in *The Downing Street Years* is the idea that she transformed the social base of the Conservative Party. Thatcher is seen by supporters and critics alike as symptomatic of a shift in the power structure of the Tory Party, away from the older grandee figures with their patrician attitudes, towards a more middle class constituency symbolised by the estate agent. It is a reputation she revels in. Her confrontational public profile and early moves to remove the likes of Francis Pym and Jim Prior from the cabinet seem to confirm the impression.

Thatcher certainly galvanised a new layer of electoral support for the Tories. Yet the real significance of the Thatcher years was to give a more strident expression to the interests of the ruling class. The employers were smarting from the economic setbacks of the seventies and were increasingly intolerant of the prevailing arrangements for managing class relations. The highly institutionalised relations between employers and workers were seen as too inflexible and expensive in conditions of economic stagnation.

The importance of the Thatcherite approach was that it gave a popular edge to the more confrontational strategy of the ruling class. Under Thatcher, the Tory Party abandoned consensus and allowed its middle class base to give vent to its anti-working class, philistine and anti-intellectual instincts. In so doing, it provided the strategy of class confrontation with a certain legitimacy and respectability.

In the television retrospectives, original grandees Prior and Pym claimed that they represented a gentler tradition of one-nation conservatism that was foolishly swept aside by Thatcher. Prior and Pym miss the point. The 'Thatcher revolution' was not an act of personal spite, but the only way that the Tory Party could deal with the problems facing modern British capitalism. Indeed, from the point of view of the ruling class there was no alternative.

It would be wrong to assume that the Tory Party simply came to articulate the interests of this reactionary strata of the middle classes. The establishment remained firmly in control. Lawson captures the relationship very well when commenting on the Tory conference: 'Internal democracy within the Conservative Party has always, very sensibly, been of the guided variety.' In other words, the foot-soldiers are allowed to express their prejudices but are kept firmly away from the channels of power. ►

**The hard fact is that, despite the free market rhetoric, British capitalism does not have the dynamism to survive without larger-than-ever doses of support from the state**

panies still enjoy monopoly control over markets. In addition, their activities are regulated by bodies—Oftel, Ofgas, Ofwat, etc.—which, although ostensibly there to protect consumers, are in reality government-appointed bodies which maintain close state control over the corporations.

The boards of privatised companies invariably include a healthy contingent from the ranks of ex-ministers and civil service mandarins involved in the original privatisation. These links between the state and major monopolies make them comparable to hybrid forms of corporate organisation that prevail in other

Rupert Morris' book, *Tories* (Mainstream Publishing, 1991) provides an entertaining picture of various species of Tory and the deference that constituency members willingly express towards their leaders.

Equally, the belief in Thatcher's remarkable powers of leadership confuses her personality with the particular circumstances that informed her grip on power. As much as there was an intuitive clarity of purpose in Thatcher's stated goal of 'killing socialism', the strength of the Thatcher government arose principally out of the weakness of her opponents. The Labour Party and the trade unions responded to the attack on consensus politics by trying to cling on to the past. In parliament, Neil Kinnock's opposition was at least as hopeless as Thatcher claims, while the unions gave ground inch by inch. Thatcher was able to hand her supporters victory after victory.

More recently the relationship between Tory supporters and the leadership has broken down. The Major government's apparent shift to the right is less a result of conviction and more an attempt to cohere the party around the kind of reactionary sentiments they can understand. But the exhaustion of the Tories' political programme, already evident at the end of the Thatcher years and far more pronounced today, means that the party is falling apart. Splits and petty animosities could be submerged when the Thatcher government was striding forward, trailing clouds of glorious rhetoric about popular capitalism and the Falklands factor behind it. But the crisis of the Major regime means that these divisions are now the stuff of public debate. The focal point of conflict in British politics today is not between different parties, but among competing cliques of Tories. The overall effect is to create an impression of Tory cynicism and disintegration.

Teresa Gorman's *The Bastards* (an account of the parliamentary opposition to the Maastricht bill) typifies the kind of low-life bickering and posturing that increasingly passes for Tory politics. Gorman originates from the proudly philistine elements of the Tory Party. A leading lobbyist against Maastricht, she readily admits to not understanding what the treaty is about. She has also, incidentally, written the worst book I can remember reading. The account of Thatcher's resignation reads like a picture story in a teenage magazine:

'She's gone', he said, his plump face sad and droopy. 'I know, it's terrible. What are we going to do?'

David put his arms round me. That was too much. Suddenly I was sobbing uncontrollably.

'Margaret's supposed to support John Major but I hardly know him', I said, the tears still running down my face. No doubt my mascara was smudged. David produced a handkerchief and began to dab my cheeks.

A decade or more ago, the Thatcher government successfully took on and defeated the Argentinians, the miners and other 'enemies within'. Thatcher was the capitalists' best shot at trying to turn round their decline, and she failed. Today Major can barely organise his party to push through a few defence cuts or increase VAT. No wonder they are still in awe of Thatcher's legacy, and we still have to listen to her go on and on and on.

---

The Secret History, Donna Tartt, Picador, £5.99 pbk

The late professor Allan Bloom, an American classicist who despaired of the moral vacuum among American students, proposed a return to the values of the ancients in his highbrow blockbuster, *The Closing of the American Mind*. In her nicely polished first novel Donna Tartt (is that name for real?) has a coterie of rich, and not so rich students, under the tutelage of the reclusive elitist, Julian Morrow, form an intimate cabal dedicated to the study of the classics. Allan Bloom would have approved. Like so many woolly togas left over from an orgy, the novel is littered with references to ancient Greek poets and Roman historians. In times of stress, and stressful times there are, the group communicates in Latin or Greek, translating banal Americana into the most exquisite classical prose.

Far from becoming the model citizens of Bloom's dreams, however, the classics have a very bad effect on our heroes and they degenerate into a pack of drug-sodden paranoid lunatics who would care more for a Hermes Tie than Homer's Troy. Taking Dionysius too much to heart, the students restage a Greek orgy that ends with the death of a Vermont farmer—no matter, they say, he was 'not Voltaire'. So Tartt draws out the moral of her tale: America itself is morally bankrupt, and the upper class students of the classics are far more capable of pointless cruelty than the MTV generation bemoaned by Allan Bloom.

Russell Parker

---

The Penguin Dictionary of Politics  
David Robertson, £6.99 pbk

'Nothing so demonstrates the impermanence of political life as the history of the Cold War', writes David Robertson in opening a perceptive entry in the second edition of his *Dictionary of Politics*. Indeed, political life is so impermanent it should have warned him off attempting to write a dictionary of its concepts and institutions at all.

A period of rapid change like the present cannot fail to catch out anyone who hopes to be definitive. So here 'Political correctness' is confidently described as 'an issue only for the minority of the population in the universities' at precisely the moment when its themes are breaking out all over, while the dictionary explains 'Vanguard of the proletariat' in detail but neglects to mention underclass or communitarianism.

Robertson recognises his difficulty and tries to get around it, admitting in the preface that since the first edition was written in 1984 'my whole profession has been taught a much-needed lesson in humility', and pointing out that the new dictionary 'is much more tentative'. Unfortunately, the advantage of a dictionary is precisely that it is both comprehensive and definitive.

One thing that has not changed between the two editions is the caricature of Marxism, the one approach to politics capable of handling tentativeness and impermanence without humility.

Peter Ray



## **CAMPAIGN AGAINST MILITARISM T-SHIRTS**

Single size extra large £8  
plus 80p postage and packing

Available in burgundy and cream  
on grey t-shirt and marine blue and  
cream on white t-shirt. Please state  
preference when ordering.

Make cheques payable to  
Campaign Against Militarism.  
Send to CAM, PO Box 469,  
Sheffield S8 0QZ

# **Abolish the Monarchy t-shirts**

**Single size extra large  
t-shirt £8 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**



Sebastião Salgado, Operation Desert Heat. © Salgado/Magnum Photos Ltd

# WORKERS

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE INDUSTRIAL AGE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY SEBASTIÃO SALGADO

13 DECEMBER - 13 FEBRUARY 1994 • ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL GALLERIES • ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL • LONDON SE1  
OPEN 10.00AM - 10.30PM DAILY • ADMISSION FREE

Exhibition supported by Eastman Kodak Company, Professional Imaging Business Unit • The South Bank Centre is a registered charity

